

# Performing “le cheval sauvage” in *Crin Blanc*.

Dynamics of filmic representation  
between humanity and animality

BIANCA FRIEDMAN

**ABSTRACT:** Queer theories allow us to denaturalise the boundary between animals and humans by showing it to be a social construct. By applying them to cultural products, it becomes clear how the binary opposition “animality-humanity” actually depends on performativity. Among the many movies featuring animal characters, in this paper I analyse *Crin Blanc* by Albert Lamorisse (1953), by combining part of Harvey Sacks’ work on Membership Categorisation Analysis, of Carmen Dell’Aversano’s research on animal queer and of Frans de Waal’s studies. I will concentrate on the way in which the performance of animality in the representation of the character of Crin Blanc is handled, in the attempt to demonstrate that *Crin Blanc* actually strengthens the binary opposition of identity categories and anthropocentric hierarchies. Queer theory will allow us to understand how the repressive nature of the imposition of human categories can operate at different levels of the same human artistic product.

**KEYWORDS:** film studies; animal studies; Harvey Sacks; Frans de Waal; French cinema.

*To all the horses I met,  
to all my horse companions  
who have lit up my life with their love.  
And to Niveau,  
who still lights it up every single day  
after all these years together.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the history of cinema there have been thousands of films with animals in the role of main or supporting characters, as well as countless movies where horses play an important role, as is very much the case with western movies, for instance, in which horses are essential to the depiction of human characters. Beside this specific, very stylised genre, we can also find many stories, generally conceived for a young audience, with horses and young girls and/or boys interacting with each other. Among these films, one of the most famous and one of the most highly appreciated both by critics and audience is *Crin Blanc*, a French short film co-written by Albert

Lamorisse and Denys Colomb de Daunant and directed by Lamorisse himself. The short premiered at Cannes Film Festival in 1953, where it won the Grand Prix and the Prix Jean Vigo. It had been completely shot in Southern France, in a region around the delta of the Rhône river, the Camargue, where horse herds are still kept in the wild nowadays.

The film tells the story of the friendship between Folco, a very young fisherman who lives in the marshes of Camargue, and Crin Blanc, a wild stallion who does not want to be caught and tamed by the keepers/herdsmen.<sup>1</sup> Unlike them, Folco finds a way of establishing a friendly relationship with Crin Blanc and achieves the task of riding him. However, their friendship is not accepted by the adult keepers, who, in the end, chase them until they have no choice but to jump into the river where they are dragged away by the tide. It is useful to keep in mind that *Crin Blanc* presents two separate filmic elements which I want to discuss in this analysis: the images, the visual content of the reels shot in Camargue, which are documentary-like and realistic, and a voice-over, which becomes a narrative guide for the audience in a practically mute movie.

Since the film is a human artistic product, it is unavoidable that it should employ those categories which human individuals regularly use to construe their reality and to define their own identity. In which ways does humankind define its identity? To discuss this big issue, I will assume a queer approach, according to which any socially acknowledged identity does not correspond to an essence, but is the end product of a correct performance of a number of actions that define it. As a consequence, deconstructing those performances that are perceived as “natural”, like the speciesist binary opposition humanity-animality, can become very productive and interesting. Queer methodological approaches allow us to denaturalise and deontologise identity categories; this, as Dell’Aversano maintains (2018: 38), is the basic idea behind queer studies:

the most basic, and at the same the most abstract, idea in queer studies is the deontologization of categories, first of all of the categories towards which a given culture makes it compulsory to position oneself, those which define social identity.

<sup>1</sup> In the film, they are called both “manadier” and “gardians”. The term “manadier” specifically refers to the herdsman and breeders, of horses or cows, who live in the Camargue ([Larousse.fr](http://Larousse.fr)). The “manade”, in fact, is a herd of horses or cows who are bred and kept by the “manadiers” and left living most of the time in the wild. In this text, I too will use both terms, translating them with the English words “herdsman” and “keeper”.

In my analysis of *Crin Blanc*, the opposition that I will be discussing is the one between the categories of “humanity” and “animality”: how does humankind construe the difference between humans and animals? It is a crucial identity issue for the definition of human society: from a queer studies perspective, mankind has always tried to differentiate itself from animals by emphasising the difference between the performances of the two distinct categories (human and animal) and by considering the human one as unquestionably superior.<sup>2</sup> Since human culture has always been engaged in reiterating and naturalising this dichotomy, what role do filmic representations in which animals are important, if not main, characters assume? This paper will try to deal with this complex series of questions by presenting as a case study an internationally renowned short movie. Not only is *Crin Blanc* considered one of the most famous and beautiful movies in its genre, but it seems to have played an important role in the evolution of the very same relationship between human beings and horses. In a book which focuses on Denys Colomb de Daunant’s movies, life and complex personality,<sup>3</sup> Sylvie Brunel, co-editor of the volume, writer and professor at Paris-Sorbonne as well as a horse lover, says:

Crin Blanc préfigure ainsi le cheval ami, devenu aujourd’hui le pilier d’une nouvelle relation entre les hommes et ces animaux qui, de tout temps, les ont servis. Il s’inscrit à un moment essentiel dans l’histoire du cheval, celui qui le voit perdre ses fonctions utilitaires, dans l’agriculture, le transport, la guerre, pour devenir le compagnon et le partenaire de nouvelles activités douces, fondées sur la promenade, la découverte de la nature. (2016: 10)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See also: “This absolute mastery of humans over animals is based on the assumption that our species is incomparably superior to all the others, that we as humans are radically different from all sort of living beings. This conviction has been justified by the ancient idea, that used to be at the base of western philosophy and science, of the *scala naturae*, which means an organisation of natural world according to a precise hierarchy of values” (my translation. Original: “Questo dominio assoluto degli umani sugli animali si fonda sulla convinzione di una superiorità incommensurabile della nostra specie rispetto alle altre, di una distinzione radicale che separa noi umani dal resto degli esseri senzienti. Questa convinzione trova la sua giustificazione in un’idea molto antica che è stata a lungo alla base della filosofia e della scienza occidentali, quella della *scala naturae*, vale a dire dell’organizzazione del mondo naturale secondo una precisa gerarchia di valore”, DELL’AVERSANO 2015: 178).

<sup>3</sup> Not only did Denys Colomb de Daunant co-write *Crin Blanc* with Lamorisse, but he was also a “manadier” and founder and owner of Mas de Cacharel a Saints-Maries-de-la-Mer.

<sup>4</sup> “Crin Blanc, then, foreshadows the figure of the horse-friend, which has become the cornerstone of a new kind of relationship between human beings and their animals who have always served them. It occurs at a crucial moment in the history of horses, when people started not to

In this paper, I would like to shed a little light on the productivity of an interdisciplinary dialogue between animal studies, film studies and queer studies. My analysis questions the way in which the performance of animality in the representation of the character of *Crin Blanc* is handled. This study of a film as iconic as *Crin Blanc* rises from the urgent need to elaborate an hermeneutic proposal, in response to axiological and the ideological perplexities that emerged from the viewing of the movie.<sup>5</sup>

Raising this kind of question in relation to a cultural product in which we can see the representation of a non-human animal character allows us to understand how the repressive act of the imposition of human categories can operate on different levels of the same product. This is true even in a movie, however paradoxical it may seem, which offers a noticeable amount of narrative space to the story of a non-human animal, towards which the audience is led to feel great empathy. *Crin Blanc*, in fact, is particularly interesting because it *appears* to be sharing positive values and a revolutionary message on the relationship between humans and horses, by telling a story in which a horse is one of the two main characters. It is interesting precisely because the story itself is functionally created and re-semanticised in order to convey a more conservative and anthropocentric message. Though it is not my intention to reject the many positive critiques that *Crin Blanc* has received in the past,<sup>6</sup> I will discuss the fact

consider them just useful resources for agriculture, transports, war, but companions and partners in leisure activities, based on excursions and discovery of nature” (my translation).

<sup>5</sup> I personally thank Antonio Mercuri for inviting me to go deeper in questioning the perplexities that emerged during my viewing of the movie.

<sup>6</sup> First of all André Bazin’s very positive comment on *Crin Blanc*, which he will use as a central example for his essay about the “montage interdit”, should be mentioned. In *Cahiers du Cinéma*, that he also co-founded in 1952, he writes: “Many things have already been written regarding the extraordinary qualities of Albert Lamorisse’s film. This will allow us to not re-examine the most evident ones and to underline even more a particular aspect of the film, if not essential. [...] the fact that an adult can find enjoy it, and perhaps even more than a child, is a sign of the authenticity and of the value of the film. The artist who spontaneously works for childhood will certainly reach the universal” (my translation. Original: “Des exceptionnelles qualités du film de Albert Lamorisse, il a été déjà beaucoup écrit. Cela nous dispensera de revenir sur les plus évidentes d’entre elles pour souligner davantage un aspect particulier quoique essentiel de l’œuvre. [...] le fait que l’adulte y trouve aussi un plaisir, et peut-être plus complet que l’enfant, est un signe de l’authenticité et de la valeur de l’œuvre. L’artiste qui travaille spontanément pour l’enfance rejoint sûrement l’universel”) (1953: 52-53). Bernard Chardere’s critique published in *Positif*, where he was the editor in chief, should be mentioned: “Nothing to say on *Crin Blanc*, nothing but a splendid film. Masterpiece, if you want, since there is no lack of taste. The same for a Flaherty film, ‘nothing to say’. [...] Do you know many other movies 1/ that children like, 2/ that are so beautiful, 3/ that have a universal significance?” (my translation. Original: “Il n’y a rien à dire

that *Crin Blanc* shows that a sympathetic relationship between humans and horses is only possible in a fairy-tale-like, ideal, imaginary dimension, while in all other cases a speciesist distance between mankind and animals must be upheld and accepted. Therefore, I will attempt to demonstrate that not only does *Crin Blanc* illustrate the binary opposition of identity categories and anthropocentric hierarchies, but it also strengthens them.

The concept of “performance”, which I have already mentioned above, will be useful, indeed essential, to my analysis. It is a central point of many queer theories and it refers to the assumption that no identity is a fixed object: identities are rather the outcome of a repetition of the representation of a series of features that define the very same identity. There is no such thing as a monolithic “queer theory” and therefore it is better to speak of queer theories which share the common purpose of deconstructing those performances that are perceived and conceived as “natural” or “normal”. In particular, in my own analysis I will be referring to a part of Harvey Sack’s work, which is now known as the field of Membership Categorization Analysis. In Gail Jefferson’s edition in two volumes *Lectures on Conversation* (1992, 1995<sup>2</sup>), Sacks explains that not only do societies use categories for classifying and for endowing individuals with specific identities (DELL’AVERSANO 2018: 52), but that there are activities assigned to specific categories and acknowledged as distinctive of, and defining, those very same categories, the so-called “category-bound activities” (SACKS 1995: I, 179). If individuals do not perform the category-bound activities (CBAs) that define their categories, they are dismissed from the status of “members” and marginalised into “boundary categories”.<sup>7</sup> Sacks also points out that categories are “positioned”, organised into hierarchies:<sup>8</sup> therefore,

de *Crin Blanc*, rien d’autre que voilà un film splendide. Chef d’œuvre si l’on veut, puisqu’il n’y a pas une faute de goût. D’un film de Flaherty non plus, ‘il n’y a rien à dire’. [...] Connaissez-vous beaucoup de films qui 1/ plaisent aux enfants, 2/ sont véritablement bons pour eux, 3/ ont une portée universelle?” (1953: 6). Among the contemporary reviews, Terrence Rafferty’s for the *New York Times* is worthy of being mentioned (2007): “Albert Lamorisse’s *White Mane* (1953) and *The Red Balloon* (1956) are among the world’s most famous and most honoured films for children”.

<sup>7</sup> “Among these categories, the most important one is ‘member’ itself, which designates full-fledged members of a social group one of the most important rules of its functioning, which can be inferred by linking various statements in the Lectures, is that the category ‘member’ is defined by its opposition to a number of ‘boundary categories’ (SACKS 1992: I, 71), whose function is to limit and question the right of some individuals or groups to be considered full members of society” (DELL’AVERSANO 2018: 62-63).

<sup>8</sup> “[T]he term ‘baby’, it’s part of a set of what I’ll call ‘positioned categories’: ‘baby’... ‘adolescent’ ... ‘adult’. The dots mean that there are other categories in there, in various places. By ‘posi-

not only are the individuals belonging to boundary categories defined as incapable of performing full members' CBAs correctly, but, according to full members, they can also be incapable of performing the CBAs ascribed to their own boundary categories correctly. For instance, adults are full members compared to children, who therefore belong to a boundary category, and both have specific CBAs that define their belonging to one of the two categories. A child who is able to elaborate complex and sophisticated thoughts is a child who does not perform the CBA of naiveté that is "bound" to the category of 'children'. This child will not be considered just a clever child, but "very *mature* for his/her age": that is to say, the full members (adults) represent him/her as incapable of performing his boundary-category CBAs. The same holds for human full members in opposition to the 'animal' boundary category: how many pets are rejected by their families because they do not perform CBAs like a constant propensity for cuddles?

I will combine this methodology with antispeciesist approaches towards the issue of animality: part of Frans de Waal's work and Carmen Dell'Aversano's studies on animal queer. On the one hand, Dell'Aversano's concept of animal queer allows us to radically deconstruct the established and socially shared boundary between animals and humans and its oppressive power; on the other hand, de Waal's work is particularly useful in my analysis of the representation of Crin Blanc. In fact, an issue regarding the artistic representation of animals (in literature and in movies) emerges from a number of his anecdotes.<sup>9</sup> As obvious as it may be, it is important to stress how

tioned' I mean such a matter as, that 'B' could be said to be higher than 'A', and if 'B' is lower than 'C' then 'A' is lower than 'C', etc." (SACKS 1995: I, 585).

<sup>9</sup> What de Waal brilliantly points out is the fact that animal intelligence and cognition have often been misunderstood by humans, especially in experiments aiming at studying their abilities, because humans have not considered important features of the ways by which animals live, solve problems and construe their world. For instance, he underlines that humans' premises to experiments can be pretentious: "It seems highly unfair to ask if a squirrel can count to ten if counting is not really what a squirrel's life is about. The squirrel is very good at retrieving hidden nuts, though, and some birds are absolute experts. The Clark's nutcracker, in the fall, stores more than twenty thousand pine nuts, in hundreds of different locations distributed over many square miles; then in winter and spring it manages to recover the majority of them. That we can't compete with squirrels and nutcrackers on this task – even forget where I parked my car – is irrelevant, since our species does not need this kind of memory for survival the way forest animals braving a freezing winter do. [...] There are lots of wonderful cognitive adaptations out there that we don't have or need. This is why ranking cognition on a single dimension is a pointless exercise" (2016: 12). By mentioning the episode called "six blind men and the elephant", de Waal also claims that a poor performance in an experiment can depend on the way animals are tested and

we do not share with animals the same cognitive instruments and that we are therefore structurally unable to understand their vision of the world. Moreover, since the experience of the world undergone by animals and their own conscious perception of themselves in the world are immeasurably different from ours, we often fail to correctly interpret animal behaviour by erroneously applying human categories to non-human identities.

As one of the first scholars ever to have discussed this topic, Thomas Nagel has investigated the divergence between these two experiences in his important article “What is it like to be a bat?”. In his analysis of one’s own consciousness in a subjective experience and in his attempt to combine subjectivity with the point of view, he underlines the great difference of the cognitive apparatus of a bat.

I assume we all believe that bats have experience. After all, they are mammals, and there is no more doubt that they have experience than that mice or pigeons or whales have experience. I have chosen bats instead of wasps or flounders because if one travels too far down the phylogenetic tree, people gradually shed their faith that there is experience there at all. Bats, although more closely related to us than those other species, nevertheless present a range of activity and a sensory apparatus so different from ours that the problem I want to pose is exceptionally vivid (though it certainly could be raised with other species). Even without the benefit

on the lack of attention to features that are specific to an animal species. “For years, scientists believed them [the elephants, N.d.A] incapable of using tools. The pachyderms failed the same out-of-reach banana test, leaving the stick alone. Their failure could not be attributed to an inability to lift objects from a flat surface, because elephants are ground dwellers and pick up items all the time, sometimes tiny ones. Researchers concluded that they just didn’t get the problem. It occurred to no one that perhaps we, the investigators, didn’t get the elephant. Like the six blind men, we keep turning around and poking the big beast, but we need to remember that, as Werner Heisenberg put it, ‘what we observe is not nature in itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning’. Heisenberg, a German physicist, made this observation regarding quantum mechanics, but it holds equally true for explorations of the animal mind. In contrast to the primate’s hand, the elephant’s grasping organ is also its nose. Elephants use their trunks not only to reach food but also to sniff and touch it. With their unparalleled sense of smell, these animals know exactly what they are going for. But picking up a stick blocks their nasal passages. Even when they bring the stick close to the food, it impedes their feeling and smelling it. It is like sending a blindfolded child out on an Easter egg hunt” (15). Moreover, it seems that in several experiments scientists completely misunderstood the meaning of a specific behaviour. For instance, it is the case of Edward Thorndike’s cats, who “were considered to have proven the ‘law effect’. By rubbing against a latch inside a cage, a cat could open a door and escape, which would gain her a fish. Decades later, however, it was shown that the cats’ behavior had nothing to do with the prospect of reward. The animals escaped just as well without the fish. The presence of friendly people was all that was needed to elicit the flank rubbing that marks all feline greeting behavior. [...] Instead of a learning experiment, the classical study had been a greeting experiment!” (20-21).

of philosophical reflection, anyone who has spent some time in an enclosed space with an excited bat knows what it is to encounter a fundamentally *alien* form of life (NAGEL 1974: 438).

However, what Nagel points out is the actual impossibility of getting closer to a subjective experience of what it means to *be* a bat and, therefore, to be conscious of being a bat in the world as it is perceived by this kind of creature.

I have said that the essence of the belief that bats have experience is that there is something that it is like to be a bat. [...] But bat sonar, though clearly a form of perception, is not similar in its operation to any sense that we possess, and there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine. This appears to create difficulties for the notion of what it is like to be a bat. We must consider whether any method will permit us to extrapolate to the inner life of the bat from our own case, and if not, what alternative methods there may be for understanding the notion (*Ibidem*).<sup>10</sup>

Nagel's observations are especially meaningful when dealing with an artistic product, like a movie, that portrays animal characters, creates their personalities, describes their disposition and assumes their point of view. I am aware of the fact that, as pointed out by Nagel and also by de Waal, the only perspective we can have when studying animal behaviour is a human one. Even though we attempt to get closer to an animal's construction of the world and perception of him/herself in the world, we will never be able to understand them completely. Nevertheless, what we can do with artistic texts is to exploit theories of literature, cinema, discourse analysis, psychology and so on, in order to understand how the construction of an animal character is handled by human beings through human tools and strategies. From an inevitably human perspective then, I will try to explain how we can deal with an artistic production that implies impositions of categories and performances and potential discrepancies. The discrepancies, in the case of *Crin Blanc*, can occur: between what is shown and what is said by the voice-over; between what we are led to think about the animal and another possible interpretation excluded by the film itself. I will analyse both cases in detail later on, but it is worth mentioning the fact that the

<sup>10</sup> On a note to this passage, the author specifies that “[b]y ‘our own case’ I do not mean just ‘my own case’ but rather the mentalistic ideas that we apply unproblematically to ourselves and other human beings”.



discrepancies are potential because they emerge from the structure of the text itself. They are potential because the preconditions of the occurrence of the discrepancies lie in the structure of the representation in the text itself, since it is made of several layers of meaning. The discrepancies, as we will see, occur between these layers of meaning. In fact, the combination of at least two audio and/or visual elements, among all of those that constitute the structure and the essence of a movie, can potentially generate a discrepancy. This problem is pointed out by Silvio Alovio in his article regarding the filmic construction of the point of view of animals published in the catalogue of a temporary exposition about animals in the history of cinema, that took place in Turin between 2017 and 2018:

La questione cinematografica del punto di vista zoomorfo, allora, non si risolve con i pur numerosi tentativi di costruire tecnologicamente una modalità di visualizzazione dello sguardo radicalmente *altra*: tali operazioni, al di là degli ottimi esiti spettacolari, sono discutibili, anche perché una soggettiva, di qualsiasi natura essa sia, implica sempre una struttura formale profondamente antropomorfa, modellata sulla nostra esperienza visiva [...]. L'antropomorfismo condiziona naturalmente anche il punto di vista narrativo: quando l'animale [...] diventa il *foyer* di un racconto, è inevitabile che le sue azioni e le sue percezioni siano codificate all'interno di retoriche narrative che poco o nulla hanno da spartire con il comportamento animale (ALOVISIO 2017: 113).<sup>11</sup>

In this analysis, therefore, I will focus on three levels at which an imposition of performance of identity occurs, namely the story itself, the film techniques involved in the film and the voice-over.<sup>12</sup> I will first discuss the

<sup>11</sup> “The issue of the zoomorphic point of view in movies, then, is not resolved by the several attempts of constructing a radically *alien* way of visualisation through technology: these operations, beside the great and spectacular outcomes, are controversial, since a point of view shot of any kind implies a formal structure that is essentially anthropomorphic, namely modelled on our visual experience [...]. Anthropomorphism certainly influences the narrative point of view: when an animal [...] becomes the *foyer* of a story, it is unavoidable that his/her actions are codified through narrative rhetorics that have few things or even nothing in common with animal behaviour” (my translation).

<sup>12</sup> I am aware that the voice-over is usually included among the film techniques, as Casetti and Di Chio explain regarding the “linguistics” of the film. They speak of visual and sound signifiers and they identify five types of them: images, written records, voices, sounds and music (1990: 56-57). In particular, they classify the voice-over among sound codes (89-93). However, since I will also try to analyse the occurrence of discrepancies between the techniques themselves, I prefer to consider its layer of meaning distinguished from the other ones. This will help us understand that many discrepancies are often generated by a combination between the voice-over and other elements of the film.

contents of the story and then the technical means by which it is visually created. In both these two parts, I will include several considerations on the role played by the voice-over.

## 2. THE STORY OF A “CHEVAL SAUVAGE”

One of the fundamental premises of the affirmation of the binary opposition animality-humanity is that there can be no exception to the performance of the species identity. Otherwise, performances of non-human species cannot be naturalised as such and cannot be ontologically relevant to the construction of human identity. Since not respecting the CBAs of non-human species would directly undermine the naturalisation of humans’ superiority over nature, which is an inherent aspect of the construction of human identity, any animal’s act of rebellion or resistance must be anticipated, limited or repressed through different strategies, both practical and conceptual. For the sake of full members, using Sacks’ terms, the existence of non-members is as vital as the fact that boundary categories respect their “bound” CBAs. In the movie, the keepers’ relentlessness can be explained by the intention of preserving a speciesist distinction between animals and humans. More specifically, humans have a strong power over the horses that run freely across Camargue and the animals must satisfy the human will by being tamed.

### 2.1 IMPOSING PERFORMANCES

What is interesting, if not surprising, is that Crin Blanc’s very same performance as “cheval sauvage” is determined by a constant and brutal imposition made by the human characters throughout the short film. In other words, the more the keepers struggle to tame Crin Blanc, the more he is a “cheval sauvage” (a wild horse). The fact that Crin Blanc resists<sup>13</sup> the performance

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault analyses the concept of resistance, as a reaction to the process of subjectivation to which individuals are forced in order to be part of their society. Crin Blanc’s reactions, in this sense, can be seen as a Foucauldian resistance. As Foucault puts it: “These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances [...]. Resistances do not derive from a few heterogeneous principles [...]. They are the odd term in relations of power” (1976; Eng. tr. 95-96). See also: “I would like to suggest another way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of

of the identity “domesticated and submissive horse” generates a new type of performance, the “cheval sauvage”. By employing a series of strategies such as orientating our perception right from the subtitle (“le cheval sauvage”), the film constantly underlines the essential nature of *Crin Blanc*’s wild character, which instead is an aspect that depends exclusively on an anthropocentric interpretation of a series of equine behaviours. Two issues are at stake here. First of all, *Crin Blanc*’s behaviour is “wild” not because he *is* wild, but because humans *make* him so. He would not, for instance, run away from humans without a particular cause. This in the movie becomes particularly evident and it emerges from his different reactions to human individuals’ different behaviours: when he sees a group of herdsmen riding their horses against him, he tries to escape or to defend himself, while in front of a young boy walking gently towards him he stays still. The fact that *Crin Blanc* ends up being very gentle with humans that are not coercive with him allows us to claim that he is wild because someone makes him so. Moreover, *Crin Blanc*’s behaviours are normal equine behaviour which in the film are interpreted by humans as evidence of his being wild. Even though we see *Crin Blanc* stamping the ground, ramping and kicking other horses at the beginning of the movie, this behaviour is not specific to wild horses, as we are led to think by the first scene, but of horses in general. The first one, as I will discuss later, is not necessarily an aggressive movement; moreover, a perfectly tamed horse can ramp or kick another horse, just because of a lack of sympathy or because he does not have a quiet character. Therefore, human interpretation proves to be pretentious.

The “cheval sauvage” in the movie is defined through a performance of specific CBAs: aggressive and elusive. Nevertheless, it is curious to notice that the film effectively demonstrates that performances of identity are not natural. From what we see in the opening images (00:00-02:44) it is actually plausible that horses can exist without humans.

These images show horses in the wild, who, though as wild as *Crin Blanc*,<sup>14</sup> do not behave like “le cheval sauvage” *Crin Blanc*. They stay in

application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. For example, to find out what our society means by sanity, perhaps we should investigate what is happening in the field of insanity. And what we mean by legality in the field of illegality. And, in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations” (FOUCAULT 1982: 780).

<sup>14</sup> As we hear from the voice-over (00:00-02:44): “Au sud de la France, là où le Rhône se jette



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IMAGES 1, 2 – Shots from the opening scenes (00:00-02:44).

groups, care for their colts, graze the grass. Moreover, the film explores the actual possibility of a positive and not violently oppressive relationship between animals and humans. Children are the only ones who can establish this kind of relationship and they are immediately described as *naturally* able to interact peacefully with animals. This ability is so evident that they also appear to behave just like animals. When Folco comes back to his humble hut (08:43-09:43), he gives the little girl (probably his sister<sup>15</sup>) a turtle, that she gently caresses and with which she plays, walking on all fours.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Folco, who is always dressed in white like *Crin Blanc*’s fur, feeds a domesticated flamingo and eats with both his grandfather and his dog. This intimate relationship with animals is underlined in a manuscript version of the script from 1952, which is very similar to the final script:

Folco, le petit pêcheur, ami de tous les animaux, était comme eux, un vrai petit sauvage (BRUNEL *et al.* 2016: 96).<sup>17</sup>

dans la mer il existe un pays presque désertique appelé la Camargue, où vivent des troupeaux de chevaux sauvages” (“In Southern France, where the Rhône river flows into the sea, there is an almost desert place named Camargue, where herds of wild horses live” – my translation).

<sup>15</sup> We are never given (at least in the final cut) explicit information about whether the little girl in the movie who lives in the same hut as Folco is indeed his sister or the old man their grandfather. More information might be found in the final script, but as an audience, we are unable to verify this detail. Therefore, this assumption is similar to Sacks’s example: “The baby cried. The mommy picked it up” (SACKS 1995: I, 183).

<sup>16</sup> It should be reminded, by the way, that bipedism, which is considered one of the CBAs that allow us to be seen as different from animals, is not natural at all, but deeply conventional and functional to underline the socially constructed boundary between animals and humans. As Dell’Aversano points out: “An example that, however far-fetched it may appear, I personally find deeply intriguing is that of bipedism: feral children, who grow up outside human society, invariably evolve a form of locomotion which makes use of all four limbs (SINGH and ZINGG 1942) but which – despite being highly functional – is not paralleled in any human culture; I cannot help wondering whether one major reason behind the exclusive diffusion of bipedism in all human societies might not be the purely cultural need to stress and deepen the divide separating humans from animals. In his book *Children who Run on all Fours and Other Animal-Like Behaviors in the Human Child* (1931), physical anthropologist Ales Hrdlicka documents that this form of locomotion may be present in children reared in normal conditions, and persist – or even appear – after the children have learned to walk upright, and even in adult life; Hrdlicka believes that the phenomenon would be extremely common if parents did not systematically attempt to suppress it and to train the child in other forms of locomotion” (2010: 120). A curious parallel can be found in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. One of the scientist’s creatures, animals transformed into human beings, explains the “Law” that must be respected in order to belong to humankind. One of the main points is not walking on all fours: “Not to go on all-Fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men?” (WELLS 2009: 114). I thank Greta Colombani for her analysis of the book, thanks to which I could learn of the existence of this passage.

<sup>17</sup> “Folco, the little fisherman, friend of all animals, was like them, a real small wild boy” (my translation).



IMAGE 3 – The two children interacting with Crin Blanc (18:27-19:48).

Apparently, being “sauvage” is a quality which belongs not only to animals, but also to human beings and to children in particular. Both animals and children belong to boundary categories whose relationship is evident in different ways: by being able to feel empathy towards each other, by children’s disposition to behave in ways that are not conventional to humans (as we have seen, walking on all fours) and by not respecting the rules that adult human beings impose (Crin Blanc does not want to be tamed and Folco decides to break the rules by trying to tame Crin Blanc, an adults’ CBA which he should not perform). This close relationship can also be explained by the fact that children are seen as social subjects in progress, as “petits sauvages” who should be educated and civilised, just like animals should be subdued and domesticated. Moreover, once Folco has gained Crin Blanc’s trust after having been dragged across the

marshes of Camargue,<sup>18</sup> the two children interact with Crin Blanc. He is shown as very relaxed and consenting to being stroked and looked after by them (18:27-19:48; 23:50-26:03) in their small hut. As we have seen, animals and children are two boundary categories, if compared to human beings and adults respectively, who are full members. More specifically, in society they are two boundary categories that do not have any influence on judging someone else’s performance, unlike full members do. Their social mutism is adapted in *Crin Blanc* with an almost complete mutism in the actual story: Folco only has a few lines and, just like Crin Blanc, is mainly “spoken for” by the voice-over. But, on the other hand, it is through this silence that they establish their relationship, it is through a non-verbal language that they create their friendship.

The relationship between children and animals is therefore presented as “natural”, while it is quite evident that it is not innate or spontaneous, but determined by behavioural choices. To gain Crin Blanc’s trust, Folco assumes a passive and non-violent attitude. Unlike the brutal herdsman, we have seen that the two children stroke him, feed him (18:27-19:48) and look after him when he is wounded (23:50-26:03). In opposition to this, the keepers deliberately want to force Crin Blanc to perform specific CBAs, bound to the category of a tamed and obedient horse, and therefore decide to catch him, as we learn from the very beginning of the movie:

Mais un jour les hommes *décidèrent* de le capturer et, ce jour-là, l’histoire de Crin Blanc parmi les hommes commença (03:04).<sup>19</sup>

or when Crin Blanc escapes again:

Et les gardiens étaient *bien décidés* à retrouver Crin Blanc pour lui *montrer* que les hommes sont toujours les plus forts (24:26).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Folco, after a first unsuccessful attempt to approach Crin Blanc, finally gets closer to him and throws his handmade fishing net around Crin Blanc’s neck, who at that point starts galloping. Folco, who does not want to let Crin Blanc go, does not loosen his grip. However, since he is a child and he cannot compete against a horse’s strength, he immediately falls down. As a result, since he keeps holding the rope tight, he is dragged by Crin Blanc across all the habitats of Camargue, from the inner marshes to the beach.

<sup>19</sup> “But one day, the humans decided to catch him and in that precise moment the history of Crin Blanc began”. The emphases are mine.

<sup>20</sup> “And the keepers were very determined in finding Crin Blanc in order to show him that humans are always the strongest” (my translation).

From these examples, it is possible to understand how the basic ideas of speciesism are relational and, more specifically, asymmetrical. Humans, since they stand as full members on a higher level in the *scala naturae*, *can decide* what the boundary categories *are* and what kind of relationship of superiority should be established and *demonstrated* to them. In this sense, another binary opposition appears to be fundamental and strictly linked to the animality-humanity opposition, that is wild-civilised. This binary opposition is strongly criticised by Frans de Waal, who aims to deconstruct and re-evaluate our inferential and anthropocentric principles in studying and interpreting animal behaviour:

Traditionally, animals are depicted as slaves of their emotions. It goes back to the dichotomy of animals as ‘wild’ and human as ‘civilised’. Being wild implies being undisciplined, crazy even, without holding back. Being civilised, in contrast, refers to exercising the well-mannered restraint that humans are capable of under favorable circumstances. This dichotomy lurks behind almost every debate about what makes us human, so much so that whenever humans behave badly, we call them ‘animals’ (DE WAAL 2016: 222).

## 2.2 ON DOING BEING “SAUVAGE”: A PERFORMANCE TO BE CONTEXTUALISED

De Waal’s work allows us to analyse how the “cheval sauvage” is effectively represented. As we have already seen, the boundaries of animal performance are always established and described by human full members who arbitrarily decide who is behaving as a domesticated animal and who is not. Repetition is a fundamental concept in the performative nature of identity and it is particularly appropriate in our analysis of *Crin Blanc*. Sacks, in his definition of ordinariness, claims that “[i]t is not that somebody *is* ordinary; it is perhaps that that is what one’s business is, and it takes work, as any other business does” (SACKS 1984: 414): in order to perceive an identity as normal, its CBAs must be repeated all the time. We find the same concept of repetition in Butler’s study on gender:

As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation (BUTLER 2006: 190).



Crin Blanc is repeatedly labelled as “sauvage” and there are many scenes in which he is shown escaping from humans or attacking them. However, if we assume an approach similar to the one assumed by de Waal in his analyses of animal behaviour<sup>21</sup> and if we interpret the actions of the horse leading character in relation to their context, we can see that Crin Blanc’s reactions are due to the pressing obstinacy of the human characters. In other words, as we have discussed at the beginning of the paragraph, it is not because he is “sauvage” that he constantly escapes or that he attacks twice, but because humans repeatedly try to catch and tame him.



IMAGE 4 – The herdsmen decide to catch Crin Blanc (03:08-05:21).

<sup>21</sup> Reaffirming Darwin’s main ideas, Frans de Waal insists on considering animals’ intelligences not as something different from ours, but as a variation of the very same intelligence, since we are first of all animals: “We are not comparing two separate categories of intelligence, therefore, but rather considering variation within a single one. I look at human cognition as a variety of animal cognition”, (2016: 5). The problem is, as de Waal underlines, that humans reject the idea that animals have capabilities that they take for granted in humans. What de Waal proposes then is a series of anecdotes that can shed light on this issue and that can help to overcome that human resistance to the idea of a possible existence of an animal intelligence or that anthropocentric habit to “compare and contrast animal and human intelligence, taking ourselves as the touchstone” (*ibidem*).

In the first scenes, Crin Blanc is shown while he is running across fields, marshes and beaches and this happens after the narrator has informed the audience that the herdsman have decided to catch him (03:08-05:21). After the negative experience during which the herdsman had tried to tame him, Crin Blanc<sup>22</sup> runs away even in front of Folco (13:29).<sup>23</sup> Crin Blanc also runs away from the children in two other moments of the short (19:56 and 26:03). However, even though we are led to think that his escapes are due to other narrative elements, such as the passage of a herd of horses and Folco's attempt to climb on Crin Blanc's back, it should be noticed that both scenes show in cross cutting the arrival of the herdsman who had previously tried to brutally tame Crin Blanc. Therefore, the montage suggests that in front of the keepers Crin Blanc becomes nervous (and probably terrified) to the point that he escapes even from the children who cared for him. Moreover, the short insists on showing scenes in which the keepers chase him:<sup>24</sup> the fact that a horse is galloping away has nothing to do "naturally" with being "sauvage", but it is described as such. The problem is that the herdsman consider Crin Blanc as a potential domestic animal because he is a horse and the most important CBA of a domestic animal is submission. Since submission is conceived as "natural", it is a CBA of the domestic animal even before his/her actual taming and it represents a precondition of the very same acceptance of this process.

In addition, unlike what we are led to understand, both the occurrences in which Crin Blanc attacks the keepers are justified by the presence of humans, who insist on imposing a performance on the animal. In the first case this is less evident (02:44-03:08), because we are at the beginning of the movie and we do not have enough narrative material to contextualise the scene, it is nevertheless easy to imagine that Crin Blanc's reaction is due to an incursion of the herdsman inside his territory.

In the second case, (15:07) we see Crin Blanc turning against one of his chasers and unsaddling him. It is not a deliberately aggressive reaction to humans, as expected from the CBAs of a "sauvage" animal. Instead it has a rational explanation: Crin Blanc is trying to avoid all the suffering he

<sup>22</sup> After the keepers have tried to tame him violently, in a scene which resembles by all means to a long close combat (05:57-07:30), Crin Blanc manages to escape from the paddock (07:30), shirking a brutal treatment by the humans who want to force him to a specific performance of identity.

<sup>23</sup> Later Crin Blanc also tries to get away from him while he is clung to him (16:54-18:01).

<sup>24</sup> See the scenes: 03:08-05:21; 14:25-15:01; 26:07-27:11; 32:22-36:03.



*Performing “le cheval sauvage” in Crin Blanc*



IMAGE 5 – Crin Blanc turns against one of his chasers and unsaddles him (15:07).



IMAGE 6 – Folco gains Crin Blanc’s trust (18:36).

experienced when the herdsman were violently trying to tame him. However, Crin Blanc gives a defective performance of the domesticated horse: the problem is that with their mental conception of the world, the keepers (and not only them) cannot conceive the unwillingness to endure violence as something different from aggressiveness. This happens because volition is considered a human CBA, but it is not an animal's legitimate quality, and for this reason he must be punished for showing it.<sup>25</sup>

Another proof of the fact that these behaviours are not “naturally” bound to the performance of a “cheval sauvage” hostile against humans (“Il n’aimait pas les hommes”/ “He didn’t like humans” 02:32), but are rather caused by the aggressive attitude of human beings, is that a different approach in human behaviour is enough to achieve the final result: a domesticated horse. Folco in fact, though human, is not oppressive and violent in his attempt to make contact with Crin Blanc: quite passive at first (he is dragged by Crin Blanc and he never runs after him), then attentive (he looks after him) and only in the end active (he rides Crin Blanc in order to save him from a fire set by the keepers), he gains his trust and manages to ride him without any problems.

### 2.3 THE HERDSMEN’S REPRESSION AND VIOLENCE

However, when both the horse’s and the boy’s performances do not correspond to what is expected by the keepers – respectively, Crin Blanc should accept their power over him and Folco should not care about the horse – practical and verbal repression occurs. When the two protagonists resist the keepers’ impositions of categories, they undergo a strong verbal aggression. When, as we have already seen, Crin Blanc attacks

<sup>25</sup> I am thankful to Carmen Dell’Aversano for her contribution to this important insight. Dell’Aversano refers to the concept of “mastery” proposed by the ecofeminist Val Plumwood in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993): “Social categories (like all concepts) are only defined through opposition; this means that, at the most fundamental level, the human is, and can only be, known, experienced and performed in its ever-present, though often tacit, opposition to the nonhuman. Our relationship to non-human animals therefore plays a crucial role in the construction of the fundamental part of our identity, our ‘humanity’. Consequently, the activities through which our relationship to nonhuman animals is performed make up the core of the category-bound activities which define humanity. In all times and places, these activities entail, to a greater or lesser degree, the attitudes which ecofeminist theorist Val Plumwood subsumed under the seminal concept of ‘mastery’. Thus mastery, of the nonhuman in general and of animals in particular, turns out to be the activity bound to the category ‘human’ at the most general and most fundamental level; always, in all times and places, mastery defines the human through its opposition to the ‘animal’ and through the oppression of ‘animals’” (2014: 10-11).

and unsaddles one of his chasers, the latter reacts with a scornful and disparaging insult:

La sale bête! Celui qui la veut, je la lui donne! (15:22)<sup>26</sup>

The herdman’s fury is due to the fact that Crin Blanc does not respect or accept human superiority and, by not bowing to human will, does not perform the CBA that human beings want to impose. In the same way, Folco undergoes a verbal attack, because when he replies to the herdsmen by saying “même à moi?”, the man answers:

Oui, même à toi. Mais, quand tu l’aura rattrapé, tes poissons, et bien, ils auront les ailes!<sup>27</sup>

What happens is that the boy’s good intentions<sup>28</sup> are immediately denigrated with a joke that contains an implicit hostile meaning. These characters are in the typical dynamic of Freudian jokes, since there is someone who is mocking, someone else who is mocked and a third person who supports the joke, which, in this case, is the group of herdsmen:

Generally speaking, a tendentious joke calls for three people: in addition to the

<sup>26</sup> “That dirty beast! Whoever wants it, I’ll give it to him!” (my translation).

<sup>27</sup> “Yes, even to you. But you’ll catch him only when your fish will have wings!” (my translation).

<sup>28</sup> Alessandro Grilli in his study on misfits, that he defines as unable to distinguish positional from propositional level, namely what it is said from what it really means, a feature that implies a constant literalisation of anything they are told, he classifies children as a category of people who are entitled to do so. In particular, Grilli points out that “the relationship, and above all the conflict, between the propositional meaning of discourse and the positions which arise from the actions of the participants yield an important insight into the performance of normality, since they allow us to realize that *the social incompetence of misfits is mostly a consequence of their inability to manage interactions on two parallel levels*. Misfits tend to adhere to the propositional level of explicit discourse, which is to them the only relevant dimension, whereas the level of habit-ingrained action, which situational pragmatics points to only indirectly and implicitly, is more or less opaque to them” (2018: 115). Moreover, he includes children among the categories of people who are allowed to transgress ordinary discourse: “Specialization is a particular case of ‘proxy’. Proxy is the tolerance which the rules of ordinary interaction show towards some categories who, *as such*, are allowed to exceed the limits of ordinary discourse. Among these categories are not only poets and artists in general, public figures and stars, as Sacks himself points out (SACKS 1984: 419), but children, intellectuals, mystics and so on; the point is that the salience of a given behavior or discourse is normalized on the basis of the ‘special identity’ involved in it (one can think of the freedom of speech and action enjoyed by the fool at a king’s court)” (111-112).

one who makes joke, there must be a second who is taken as the object of the hostile or sexual aggressiveness, and a third in whom the joke's aim of producing pleasure is fulfilled (FREUD 1905; Eng. tr. 118).

The keeper's mocking reply hides an implicit, violent ideology: through the metaphor of flying fishes, not only is Folco's activity of fishing mocked, but he is also told that he will never catch Crin Blanc because he is not able or entitled to do so. Freud analyses verbal attacks in these terms:

Since we have been obliged to renounce the expression of hostility by deeds [...] we have, just as in the case of sexual aggressiveness, developed a new technique of invective, which aims at enlisting this third person against our enemy. By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him – to which the third person, who has made no efforts, bears witness by his laughter (Eng. tr. 122).

Moreover, Folco and Crin Blanc, who as we have seen belong to two boundary categories, share the traumatic experience of being victims not only of verbal attacks, but also of physical violence. Their experiences in fact appear to be very similar. If the individuals who belong to boundary categories are defined by Sacks by their inability to perform full members' ordinariness in socially acceptable ways, it is also true that, however, individuals belonging to boundary categories, just like full members, are defined through a set of CBAs that constitute correct performances. Therefore, it is possible to perform a boundary category in a way that can be considered inadequate, transgressive or punishable. As we have seen, Crin Blanc's performance of "cheval sauvage" is due to the stubbornness of the herdsmen, who lock him up in a fence at the beginning of the short (05:57-07:30) and then in a ring of fire in the middle of a field (27:35-29:32).

In addition, their obstinacy towards Folco and Crin Blanc is particularly evident in the final chase during which Folco, riding his new friend, tries to outrun the herdsmen who chase them (32:22-36:16). This is due to the fact that the boy, unlike the expert, adult riders, has managed to ride that wild horse they had struggled so much with. This is a CBA that questions the category of 'child': Folco, since he is not an adult, does not have the social right to perform that action, to which only adults are entitled. Since he illegally "steals" this CBA and since, most importantly, he performs it successfully, unlike the keepers who repeatedly fail, they try to catch Folco,



IMAGE 7 – The herdsmen trying to tame Crin Blanc in a fence (05:57-07:30).

probably in order to punish him. The problem is that the adults appear to not be able to perform a CBA that is bound to their category and that defines their social identity. For this reason, not only does Folco usurp an adult’s CBA, but he also shows the herdsmens’ inability to perform their own CBAs. In a hierarchical system like the one of social categories, when individuals belonging to a boundary category appear to be more capable of performing CBAs ascribed to the full members’ category better than the full members themselves, this is an ontological threat that must be limited and immediately repressed in an exemplary manner. It should also be noticed that Folco’s incorrect performance is generated once again, just like the case of Crin Blanc, by the the imposition of a performance that is considered correct by the keepers. As we have just seen from the dialogue mentioned above, it is the herdsman who says “Celui qui la veut, je la lui donne!” not even thinking about the possibility that also a young boy like Folco might feel the same desire to get closer to Crin Blanc, since in their conception of the world taming a horse is not a CBA belonging to children. The point is that he does not reply to Folco’s question (“Même à moi?”/“Even to me?”) with an explicit negation, but by saying “yes” (“Oui, même à toi”) followed

by a metaphor “Mais, quand tu l’aura rattrapé, tes poissons, et bien, ils auront les ailes!”. Since Folco cannot distinguish the literal from the actual meaning, he literalises the keeper’s words which effectively do not contain a proper negation (see note 28). The correct performance to which the keeper’s words implicitly refer is that children must not tame a horse. Folco cannot and must not perform this CBA, but the way in which the herdsman tries to impose this performance creates a misunderstanding, since he has previously said “Celui qui la veut, je la lui donne!”. It is in fact from this misunderstanding that Folco starts to think about the idea of catching Crin Blanc, which to that moment had only been a dream:<sup>29</sup>

Folco était très triste que le manadier se moquait de lui, mais au même temps il se disait en lui même: maintenant, si je l’attrape, Crin Blanc sera à moi (16:13).<sup>30</sup>

The problem is that the keepers’ stubbornness against boundary categories (‘animal’ and ‘child’) leads to a violent end. In fact, the keepers force the two protagonists outside the safe boundaries of social space with their repressive and cruel behaviour, by compelling them to jump into the river that drags them to the sea and probably to an unavoidable death. What we learn from these scenes is that there cannot be any social room for those individuals, humans or animals, who do not perform correctly their CBAs. The ontological meaning of the herdsmen’s extreme action consists in denying Folco and Crin Blanc a space of existence, and in leading them to death.

### 3. TECHNIQUES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE “CHEVAL SAUVAGE”

The story of *Crin Blanc* demonstrates that the performance of the “cheval sauvage” is due to a stubborn imposition of identity categories which leads to a violent end. However, it is also interesting to analyse how the relationship between humanity and animality is treated in the filmic representation. The film medium often implies the effect, the illusion of reality. Even though it is part of the filmic experience itself, we should make the effort

<sup>29</sup> See the scene of Folco’s dream (10:15-11:08), in which he imagines to walk by Crin Blanc on the beach, that is what he desires most, after having seen the horse.

<sup>30</sup> “Folco was very sad that the herdsman was mocking him, but at the same time he was saying to himself: now, if I catch him, Crin Blanc will belong to me” (my translation).



to remember that what we see is nothing but a series of framings created and chosen by a human individual with the aim to communicate the idea that the point of view of the animal main character is available. Since the illusion of reality includes the construction of the horse, to understand the repressive anthropocentric potential it is necessary to analyse the mechanisms of an artistic representation that might just be taken for granted. In other words, it is necessary to think about the animal main character as the result of a technical and stylistic set of choices that are inevitably anthropocentric. Here, I would like to point out that the filmic representation and the fairy-tale that is told by the voice-over appear to be functional strategies to the imposition of specific performances of species.

### 3.1 THE VOICE-OVER AS A DEVICE OF NARRATIVE COHERENCE

The use of a voice-over is a device particularly relevant for creating coherence in a short film that is almost mute. This coherence itself can be interpreted as an imposition of performance. A “cheval sauvage” has nothing special *a priori*, as we learn from the first images of the film, since he/she can live quietly in the wild without any problems. Sacks refers to the concept of storyability, which is the opposite of ordinariness:

Now it's also the case that there are people who are entitled to have their lives be an epic. We have assigned a series of storyable people, places, and objects, and they stand as something different from us. It may be that in pretty much every circle there's somebody who's the source and/or the subject of all neat observations, as there are for the society in general a collection of people about whom detailed reports are made; reports that would never, not merely be ventured about others, they'd never be *thought* of about others. The way in which Elizabeth Taylor turned around is something noticeable and reportable. The way in which your mother turned around is something unseeable, much less tellable (SACKS 1984: 419).

*Crin Blanc* is a narrative text and therefore must tell a story which is noticeable and worthy of being told: in Sacks' terms, storyable. In *Crin Blanc*, just like outside its fictional frame, there is a conventional path that leads the wild horse to become tamed through a process of domestication, the practices of which are normalised or not perceived as brutal. When, in this “natural” process, a hitch occurs, that hitch becomes storyable, worthy of being told. In this case, the storyability is due to a failure in the performance of

one of the CBAs that, according to humans, define animals, which is submission. The story begins with Crin Blanc's resistance to this CBA, which radically undermines the process of domestication. Crin Blanc's repeated opposition to the performance of species that the keepers want to impose becomes storyable, noticeable, and it is constantly underlined by the voice-over that explains most of his behaviours. Of course, Crin Blanc is not the only horse in Camargue and probably not the only horse ever to have reacted to the process of domestication. Crin Blanc reacts like other horses possibly would in the same situation, but in his case this becomes noticeable, since his being "sauvage" becomes a fundamental device for naturalising and ontologising a behaviour that is, otherwise, episodic and relational. Crin Blanc, as we have seen above, behaves differently with children, who behave kindly and carefully with him.

In a short movie (that normally lasts about 30-40 minutes), the frequent repetition of the term "sauvage" and other adjectives with a similar meaning becomes relevant. In the very first presentation of the character of Crin Blanc, the voice-over says "[...] Il était un cheval fier et redoutable [...]" ("He was a fierce and dreadful horse", 02:32); when they lock him up in the fence to tame him, again we hear "Crin Blanc était un vrai cheval sauvage et il se sentait pris au piège des hommes" ("Crin Blanc was a real wild horse and he felt trapped by the humans", 05:25); and when he runs away for the first time from Folco's hut, "Crin Blanc était un cheval sauvage [...]" (19:56). The repeated resistance of the animal protagonist against the human imposition of a specific performance becomes storyable and it is underlined by the voice-over's insistence in explaining most of his behaviours. And its strategic function is even more evident if we consider the context in which these words are spoken. In the first case, "fier et redoutable" is said while a horse (Crin Blanc, as we are told) is stamping the ground. The fact that a horse stamps the ground does not automatically make him neither "fier" or "redoutable", since this is an action that is not necessarily threatening, as the voice-over is trying to tell us. A horse, for instance, stamps the ground before rolling in the ground or to uncover the grass roots that he/she is going to eat. The same happens in all the scenes mentioned above that are edited in order to show Crin Blanc's attacks against the keepers: the point is not that Crin Blanc is "sauvage" (or whatever) as we are told, but that he has his own motivations to attack. In the second case ("Crin Blanc était un *vrai* cheval sauvage et il se sentait pris au piège des hommes"), I believe

that a horse does not have to be so wild to feel trapped, in a fence full of men who want to catch him violently, with a rope around his neck.

Therefore, *Crin Blanc* is regularly labelled as “sauvage”, which, like all the CBAs, is a device that is useful for giving information about an individual. As such, it justifies an event and it allows the audience not to look for further explanations that would immediately question our responsibility. In other words, “sauvage” is clear enough to motivate *Crin Blanc*’s escapes and attacks. For this reason, it becomes unnecessary to find other motivations for his behavior, or to consider the relational nature of his reactions.

### 3.2 BUILDING UP CRIN BLANC’S POINT OF VIEW

It is also important to mention another technique employed in the representation of the horse protagonist, which is a typical feature of filmic representations in general. We are misled into thinking that we know the subjective point of view of the horse. This belief is generated by the illusion that, for instance, the horse portrayed in the film is always the same one, when it can be quite easily verified, from a few details of their physical appearance (shape of bodies, height, balance, gestures, manes of different lengths...),<sup>31</sup> that several white horses have been employed in the movie. It should also be noted that *Crin Blanc* is often framed in very specific ways: we see him in a first close up when Folco tries to catch him with a rope and immediately afterwards we have a point of view shot of *Crin Blanc* watching Folco in the exact moment in which he throws the rope around his neck (16:51). Another close up occurs when *Crin Blanc* turns around and accepts Folco as a friend (18:03). We then have a reversed angle in which the two protagonists look at each other and realise the birth of their friendship.

This aspect becomes even more evident (and urgent) if we consider the fact that the voice-over often provides information about *Crin Blanc*’s mood and personality. The omniscient voice-over, however, interprets *Crin Blanc*’s behaviour and feelings through the use of human CBAs, one of the most misleading operations, according to Frans de Waal.<sup>32</sup> For the Dutch

<sup>31</sup> Sylvie Brunel, when speaking about Filou that was one of de Daunant’s wife’s horses, says: “[he] was one of *Crin Blanc*’s four doubles in the movie, by fixing a long, fake mane they made the different horses look almost identical”. Original: “[il] fut l’une des quatre doublures de *Crin Blanc* dans le film, la fixation d’une longue crinière postiche permettant de rendre presque identiques les différents chevaux utilisés” (BRUNEL *et al.* 2016: 12).

<sup>32</sup> We read in de Waal’s article (DE WAAL 1997): “That very resemblance, however, can allow us to make better use of anthropomorphism, but for this we must view it as a means rather than an

scholar, the construction of meaning and of reality varies from species to species according to their specific senses, and possibly from individual to individual. In fact, combining what de Waal says (see next quote) on animals and what Ulric Neisser (quoted by DE WAAL 2016: 238) claims on humans (“the world of experience is produced by the man who experiences it”), it is not implausible to assume that each animal has his/her own and individual construction of the world and of him/herself into the world, which radically differs from that adopted by human beings. The point is not to “attach less significance [...] simply because they are so alien”.

Reality is a mental construct. This is what makes the elephant, the bat, the dolphin, and the star-nosed mole so intriguing. They have senses that we either don't have, or that we have in a much less developed form, making the way they relate to the environment impossible for us to fathom. They construct their own realities. We may attach less significance to these, simply because they are so alien, but we are obviously all-important to these animals. Even when they process information familiar to us, they may do so quite differently, such as when elephants tell human languages apart (*Ibidem*).

De Waal's work is very interesting because an issue that is strictly connected to the question of representation of animals in artistic texts emerges from his anecdotes. Since we do not have access to the proper cognitive instruments to fully understand the vision of the world of animals, as human beings we often misunderstand their behaviours because we employ human categories with non-human identities who do not share the same categories. It is the case of the voice-over in *Crin Blanc*:<sup>33</sup>

*Crin Blanc était le chef de l'un de ces troupeaux. Il était un cheval fier et redoutable, à qui tous les autres chevaux obéissent. Il n'aimait pas les hommes et s'il le fallait, il savait leur faire face (02:32).*

*[...] il se sentait pris au piège des hommes (05:25).*

*Les gardiens étaient très contents d'avoir retrouvé Crin Blanc et Crin Blanc était*

end. It should not be our goal to find some quality in an animal that is precisely equivalent to an aspect of our own inner lives. Rather, we should use the fact that we are similar to animals to develop ideas we can test. [...] Naturally, we must be on guard. To avoid silly interpretations based on anthropomorphism, one must always interpret animal behavior in the wider context of a species' habits and natural history”.

<sup>33</sup> The emphases are mine.

*résolu* à ne pas se laisser reprendre (14:45).

[...] mais un autre cheval avait pris la place de Crin Blanc à la tête du troupeau et Crin Blanc *n’était pas content du tout* (21:20).

Crin Blanc était un cheval sauvage et *s’il aimait bien* le petit pêcheur *il aimait plus encore* aller galoper avec les autres chevaux (19:56).<sup>34</sup>

From these examples, it is clear that the voice-over is omniscient and that it can tell us about Crin Blanc’s social status (he is “chef”), what he likes or dislikes (“Il n’aimait pas”, “il aimait plus encore”) and his feelings (“il se sentait”, “était résolu”, “n’était pas content du tout”). Moreover, the voice-over says that Crin Blanc does not want to be caught because he is very “determined” and “recidivist”, while actually the herdsmen are obsessively determined to catch him. The narrator therefore verbally defines the nature of the performance of a horse that does not want to be tamed and who, in doing so, does not respect the performance of species that humans want to impose on him. On the other hand, he respects the CBAs of the “cheval sauvage” that is created by narrative needs: as we have seen, this is a storyable behaviour.

However, this operation – and this is one of the major points on which de Waal’s analysis focuses – is likely to generate misunderstandings that have a relevant ontological meaning. The last of the examples above mentioned (“Crin Blanc était un cheval sauvage et s’il aimait bien le petit pêcheur il aimait plus encore aller galoper avec les autres chevaux”) is useful to understand the main problem. The voice-over says these words when Crin Blanc runs away from Folco’s cares. Indeed, a group of horses is shot while passing not far from where Crin Blanc is, neighing at him. Even though it is perfectly logical that a horse would rather be with his co-specifics in the wild, the voice-over does not mention a fundamental detail: together with these horses, there are also the keepers, the very same keepers that had tried to tame Crin Blanc brutally. Then, in the next frame we see Crin Blanc getting more and more upset and

<sup>34</sup> “Crin Blanc was the chief of one of these herds. He was a fierce and dreadful horse, and all the others followed him. He didn’t like humans and if it was necessary, he knew how to face them”; “[...] he felt trapped by the humans”; “The keepers were very happy to have found Crin Blanc and Crin Blanc was very determined not to be caught”; “[...] but another horse had took Crin Blanc’s place as the chief of the herd and Crin Blanc was not so glad about it”; Crin Blanc was a wild horse and even though he loved the little fisherman, he loved even more galloping with the other horses” (my translation).

eventually running away after destroying both the fence and the rope. If we look closely enough to the way in which these images are edited we understand that Crin Blanc has got nervous and scared in front of those humans that he recognises as his abusers, even if the voice-over explains this reaction in a very different way (“il aimait plus encore aller galoper avec les autres chevaux”). As we have already said, Crin Blanc escapes once again from Folco’s hut (26:03) and both the reasons and the dynamics of the representation are the same as those of the previous scene. In front of the keepers, shown in cross cutting, he gets nervous and scared even before Folco is shown in the act of trying to climb on his back. It is not hard to imagine that Crin Blanc might think that Folco is trying to do the same brutal things that the keepers, who are also effectively shown in this scene, had previously done to him.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.3 BETWEEN IMAGES AND FAIRY-TALE: A PROBLEMATIC ENDING

The constant re-interpretation of the images and of Crin Blanc’s behaviour generates an evident discrepancy between what we see and what we are told. This is particularly noticeable in the final scene. It also leads us to consider, as a consequence, the voice-over’s features. As we have already seen, it is omniscient and repetitive, but there are more features that lead us to define it as fairy-tale-like:<sup>36</sup> it is a human voice, not surprisingly masculine, mature, clear and that uses slight variations of tone. It sounds like the voice of a father who is telling a story to his children. Since *Crin Blanc* is a film conceived for a very young audience, the genre of ‘fairy-tale’ appears to be pertinent. Moreover, the animal protagonist – as we can effectively read in fairy-tales – has some features that make him different from other individuals of the same species, that make him storyable.

As I was saying, the most evident and violent discrepancy created by the voice-over, which tells a more fictionalised and softer story than the one told through the images, occurs in the final scene.

After a long chase in which Folco and Crin Blanc try to escape from the keepers, the two jump into the river and are dragged by the tide,

<sup>35</sup> These examples make me think of associative learning, that is a process by which a person or an animal learns an association between two stimuli or events. The most famous and fundamental research in this field was undertaken by Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov, known for the studies of dogs’ behaviour and reactions to stimuli (PAVLOV 1927).

<sup>36</sup> I thank Alessandro Giardini for having invited me to consider the performance of the voice-over itself.



IMAGE 8 – Folco and Crin Blanc disappear in the waves (36:03-38:04).

disappearing in the waves. While we watch these sad images, we hear the voice-over saying (36:03-38:04):

mais le petit pêcheur n’écoula pas le manadier et les gardiens qui lui avaient déjà menti et avec Crin Blanc il disparut dans les vagues aux yeux des hommes. Ils nagèrent tout droit, tout droit, et Crin Blanc qui était doué d’une grande force remporta son ami qui avait eu confiance en lui jusqu’à un pays merveilleux où les chevaux et les hommes sont toujours des amis.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> “But the little fisherman didn’t listen to the herdsman and to the keepers who had already lied to him and with Crin Blanc he disappeared in the waves from the humans’ sight. They swam straight ahead, straight ahead, and Crin Blanc, who was very strong, carried his friend who had trusted him to a wonderful place where horses and humans are always fiends” (my translation). It is interesting to see that the image of a white horse jumping into the sea with a child on his back occurs in another movie, *Into the West* (Mike Newell, 1992). The film tells the story of a horse who appears out of the blue on an Irish beach and follows an old man towards Dublin. The man decides to give him to his grandsons (Tito and Ossie), who live with their father in the suburbs of the Irish capital. However, after some time, their father sells the horse to a rich man, who employs him for jumping shows. Nevertheless, the two boys decide to steal the horse and to ride towards Western Ireland, towards Connemara, following their dream of becoming cowboys. All the adults then, including their father, run after them and when they reach the beach and are about to catch the children, the horse jumps into the ocean, with Ossie on his back. The horse

This discrepancy between the documentary reality of the images and the fantasy imposed on the audience, according to the scholar and critic André Bazin, has an aesthetic value because the dialogue between these two poles is suggestive and fascinating. The role played by the montage is fundamental in order to replace imagination with reality:

Leur crédibilité<sup>38</sup> est certainement liée à leur valeur documentaire. Les événements qu'il présente sont partiellement vrais. Pour *Crin Blanc*, le paysage de Camargue, la vie des éleveurs et des pêcheurs, les mœurs des manades, constituent la base de la fable, le point d'appui solide et irréfutable du mythe. Mais sur cette réalité se fonde justement une dialectique de l'imaginaire dont le dédoublement de Crin Blanc est intéressant symbole. Ainsi Crin Blanc est-il tout à la fois le vrai cheval qui broute encore l'herbe salée de Camargue, et l'animal de rêve qui nage éternellement en compagnie du petit Folco. Sa réalité cinématographique ne pouvait se passer de la réalité documentaire, mais il fallait, pour que celle-ci devint vérité de notre imagination, qu'elle se détruise et renaisse dans la réalité elle-même (BAZIN 2008: 55).<sup>39</sup>

Bazin refers to a “dédoublement”, a divide between reality and imagination, which is considered to be an admirable feature of the short. Indeed, the film shares many features with the documentary genre, since it is entirely

disappears and Ossie almost drowns, but he is saved by the magical intervention of his mother's spirit, which was actually embodied in the horse itself. What emerges from a first comparison is that the dynamic of the two final scenes is remarkably similar. In particular, it is interesting to see that jumping into the sea is associated to death in both movies, more or less explicitly. Moreover, it seems that the name of the horse, Tír na nÓg, means “land of eternal youth” in Irish, an image that recalls, in a way, the land mentioned by the voice-over in *Crin Blanc*. A more detailed, historical and philological analysis should be developed in order to compare these two films and their eventual relationship with Irish legends and Celtic folklore properly. I am thankful to Giulia Bigongiari for having suggested I should verify the existence of images of horses jumping in the water with children in Northern mythology. I am also aware that a proper comparison requires a knowledge of Celts and Ireland that goes beyond the aims of this paper; however, I thought this could be at least a similarity worthy of being mentioned.

<sup>38</sup> The author refers to the movies by Albert Lamorisse.

<sup>39</sup> “Their credibility is certainly linked to their documentary value. The events that he shows are partially true. For *Crin Blanc*, the landscapes of Camargue, the lives of breeders and fishermen, the habits of herdsmen, are the basis of the fairy-tale, the solid and undeniable support of the myth. But a dialectic of imagery, of which the split of Crin Blanc becomes the interesting symbol, is based on this very same reality. Then, Crin Blanc is at the same time the real horse who grazes the salty grass in Camargue, and the dreamlike animal that will forever swim with Folco. His filmic reality could not forego the documentary reality, but it was necessary that, in order to become our imagination's reality, it should be destroyed and it should rise again in the very same reality” (my translation).



shot in Camargue, where groups of horses still live in the wild nowadays. The documentary descriptions as well as the initial shots that are provided allow us to access a natural region which was quite unknown in the ‘50s. The incipit also has an informative tone similar to the one employed in wildlife and nature documentaries (“Au sud de la France, là où le Rhône se jette dans la mer, il existe un pays presque désertique appelé la Camargue, où vivent des troupeaux de chevaux sauvages”/ “In Southern France, where the Rhône river flows into the sea, there is an almost desert place named Camargue, where herds of wild horses live” 00:00-02:44). This is enough to make *Crin Blanc*’s story plausible, since it is linked to a reality that can be verified even outside the fictional frame. However, as Bazin says, it is the starting point for replacing the plausible images (“le paysage de Camargue, la vie des éleveurs et des pêcheurs, les mœurs des manades”, and, I would add, the horses living there) with a fairy-tale-like imagery. However, Bazin does not consider the coercive consequences of this “split” and substitution, even though he accepts that reality should be dismantled in order to be recreated in our imagination. The split becomes more and more evident as the discrepancy between the images and the voice-over becomes more and more visible throughout the short itself: from the horse described as “fier et sauvage” while stamping the ground, to the simplification of the reasons that lead *Crin Blanc* to attack or to escape, to the astonishing contradiction between the images of the final scene and what is explicitly said by the voice-over. It becomes more and more evident that what happens is not that the documentary reality is put aside in order to be replaced by the “myth”, but that the fairy-tale represses and hides a history of violence against animals and children. The final scene in which Folco and *Crin Blanc* swim beyond the horizon does not leave any room to imagine something different from a terrible death by drowning. In order to sugarcoat this image, we are told a fairy-tale, which did not exactly begin with “Once upon a time...”, but with spatial information “Au sud de la France...” and which ends with an explicit warning that resembles a “cautionary tale” (“mais le petit pêcheur n’écouta pas...”).

I do believe that this operation appears to be very problematic. By conserving the anthropocentric narrative structures of the fairy-tale genre, not only does the film create a fictional and coercive performance of the “cheval sauvage”; not only does the voice-over support the application of a storyable identity’s CBAs and the creation of an evident discrepancy

between what is shown and what is said, but the narrator uses another, final imposition: the happy ending. The humans' insistence on repeating and reaffirming that Crin Blanc is a "cheval sauvage" becomes even unjustified and dispensable: the men both in front and behind the camera have already caught Crin Blanc with their imposition of categories. The keepers in the film, in fact, need the opposition to another identity in order to construct their own, and this identity is the "cheval sauvage" that must be domesticated. The intention of reaffirming their ontological power over the animals motivates their actions, but the relationship is basically asymmetrical. In a process of construction of identities, the horse has already been caught from the start, in a fence even more violent than the one we see in the movie, a fence made of human categories and CBAs. At the same time, the humans behind the camera behave similarly: by shooting the movie, choosing the right take and editing specific types frames and scenes one after another they are doing nothing but construing a specific message on the animal that is being represented. Therefore, they put together a story that has something storyable, a character with specifically chosen features and his own point of view, by imposing some specifically chosen CBAs.

In relation to the voice-over's comments, I think that Dell'Aversano's idea on the importance of language in the process of becoming aware of the performative nature of the animal-human boundary is significantly relevant.

Claiming that species identity is, like gender, the product of a performance is not enough: the manner and the mechanisms of the performance must be investigated. As in all queer analysis, in animal queer too one major issue is that of how language produces the basic fictitious constructions that bring into being and support regimes of power (DELL'AVERSANO 2010: 85).

The voice-over's power relies on the transmission of a specific message: a positive and empathetic relationship between an animal and a human being can only occur in a fairy-tale dimension, in a verbal and imaginary discourse, even though (and also because) what we see on the screen does not correspond at all to what we hear. Dell'Aversano (2010: 84-85) underlines the importance of the role played by social discourses in the construction of animal identities in opposition to the human one and in the definition of humankind itself. Everyone must always perform his/her own species and this must always be remembered through the use of language, which allows us to distinguish what belongs to "us" or to "them". Language, therefore,

is a device of power which appears to be extremely useful for reaffirming, identifying and naming anything that determines boundaries of the binary opposition animality-humanity. In addition to this, Dell’Aversano mentions an interesting passage from *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll that reminds me very much of the ending of *Crin Blanc*.<sup>40</sup> This passage clearly shows the human habit of using oppositions in their relationship with animals in order to define their own identity, and in particular their tendency on relying on the use of language:

“This must be the wood,” she said thoughtfully to herself. “where things have no names. I wonder what’ll become of *my* name when I go in?” (DELL’AVERSANO 2010: 85).

Carroll’s wood is a fictional image of an alternative way of living, of a place in which language is not a device used for controlling identities, which helps us to “investigate what things are like in the rest of the world, where things do have names. More specifically, it leads us to an analysis of the words ‘human’ and ‘animal’, of the way they work and of the harm they do” (DELL’AVERSANO 2010: 86). Unlike Carroll’s book, Lamorisse’s film does not show the idyllic place “où les chevaux et les hommes sont toujours des amis”, but just *Crin Blanc* and Folco dragged away by the tide. A place where “things have no names” is also a place where humans and animals can be friends because it is a place where language is not a device of power, where binary oppositions of identities do not exist and are never ontologically relevant. It is a place that could radically dismantle the human process of constructing identities (“I wonder what’ll become of *my* name when I go in?”). It is an imaginary place and must remain such.

The imaginary dimension also allows to remove the image of the two protagonists’ death. The images of an unavoidable drowning are not shown, while the voice-over tells a fairy-tale-like conclusion that creates a radical gap with the documentary reality of the images. Death represents an extreme and definitive exclusion from a social group and from the safe social space where the two characters had lived so far.

This analysis has mentioned many elements that are actually present in the film. Therefore, we can ask ourselves: how can we explain this massive

<sup>40</sup> I would like to thank Alice Grazzini for having reminded me of this passage from Dell’Aversano’s essay.

presence and repetition of proof that can be interpreted in a completely different way? Why did the implied author<sup>41</sup> put it in the film? A possible explanation can be elaborated by referring to the work of Michael Billig on Freudian repression.<sup>42</sup> Billig analyses a crucial aspect of Freud's theory, namely repression, which is the fundamental concept of psychoanalysis. In particular, Billig asks himself how an individual represses those contents that will eventually end up in the unconscious during his/her process of becoming a social subject (with a psyche composed by ego, id and super-ego as well as a conscious, a preconscious and an unconscious part). Billig underlines the importance of routines, especially linguistic ones, namely all the conversations that an individual has within him/herself or with someone else:

Routines may provide a means of pushing disturbing thoughts from the mind, and, as such, they may offer a clue to the skills required for repression. Routines often fall between wholly conscious and unconscious actions. When we act routinely, we might know we are performing the routine but we are unaware of all we do. Our mind might be on other things. As will be argued in subsequent chapters, the routines of language play a major part in repression. If language can be shown to be routinely expressive and repressive, then the central concept of psychoanalytic theory, may cease to appear so mysterious (BILLIG 2004: 37).

We have seen since the beginning of this analysis that *Crin Blanc* is a film conceived and made for children. In a Foucauldian view, it represents a device of power for teaching children how they have to behave in order to become social subjects, namely adults. Billig explains that we become social subjects not only by learning contents but also by learning how not to learn (that is, learning how to use repression). For instance, the violent ending of

<sup>41</sup> See: "In the nineteenth century, however, this perspective [i.e. "the fictitious reader", N.d.A.] underwent a subtle variation: the narrator himself became a character who could no longer be identified as the *implied author*; but undermined the other perspectives, without any guarantee of his authenticity. Booth calls this unreliable narrator. He is unreliable because his evaluations are no longer representative of those advanced by the implied author and are often quite contrary to those that are ultimately to constitute the 'meaning' of the work. [...] In *Ulysses* we still have the perspective of the *implied author*, for without it the novel could not exist. But the implied author traditionally supplied his reader – at least implicitly – with some form of orientation, and as this is missing from *Ulysses*, our frustrated expectation leads to the impression that the narrator has disappeared" (ISER 1976; Eng. tr. 204 and 207).

<sup>42</sup> I would like to thank Carmen Dell'Aversano for her precious observations: without them, this final part of my analysis would have never seen the light.

*The Yearling* (Clearance Brown, 1946) in which the young protagonist kills the baby deer that has become his friend shows, just as much as *Crin Blanc*, that the construction of animality as opposite to humanity relies on the fundamental and necessary assumption that if you want to be considered human you should not establish certain kinds of connections: you should not feel, think or ask yourself certain things. *Crin Blanc* presents enough material for elaborating a critical opinion about all the various, violent processes of imposition of categories, but all the parts of this fairy-tale-like movie, from the montage to the voice-over, are used to direct the audience’s distraction and repression. The discrepancy between the images and the voice-over works exactly as the “shifting of topic” described by Billig:

It can be presumed that thinkers can only accomplish shifts in their ‘inner speech’ because they have been speakers, successfully accomplishing topic-shifts in dialogue. On the other hand, the shifting of topic need not be confined to the words that one says to oneself. Actual conversations with other speakers can be brought into play, so that the repression, rather than being confined to the inner dialogues of the isolated individual, is part of outward social life. Two rhetorical elements are required for successful shifting - whether in external or internal dialogue. First there are the small words of the discontinuity markers, which indicate that such shifting is occurring. The second requirement is another topic to move towards. ‘Anyway’ should not be followed by silence. A replacement topic is needed, if attention is to be shifted (BILLIG 2004: 54).

Therefore, the two protagonists’ death is not shown, since it is an image that is too violent for an implied audience of children, and it is repressed and replaced with a fairy-tale ending. However, we *do* see the two protagonists swim away, and we know that the island mentioned by the voice-over does not exist; therefore an important thing that happens here is that the children, who are the implied audience<sup>43</sup> must learn *not* to trust what they see and know (Crin Blanc and Folco are going to drown) and to trust what the adults tell them (everything is going to be all right for Crin Blanc and Folco) even

<sup>43</sup> The term “implied reader” is used by Iser and in my opinion is suitable the concept “implied audience” as well: “If, then, we are to try and understand the effects caused and responses elicited by literary works, we must allow for the reader’s presence without in any way pretending his character or his historical situation. We may call him, for want of a better term, the implied reader. He embodies all the predispositions laid down, not by empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any reader” (ISER 1976; Eng. tr. 34).

though *the adults are evidently lying*. This indoctrination in the mindless subjugation to adult authority is an important part of the effect of the movie on its intended audience. In fact, since its intended audience is made of children or young adults, the message for them is to learn to unconditionally trust words of adults and not to question them. In their process of becoming adults and social subjects,<sup>44</sup> they must subjugate if they are told so, especially when learning how to behave in relationship with animals.

The repressive rhetoric is used throughout the whole movie and it is subtle and complex.

For instance, we are given enough material to understand that Crin Blanc runs away from Folco's hut because of the presence of the keepers, since in both the scenes they are shown in the exact same way before Crin Blanc starts getting nervous. In the first case (see Images 9 and 10), the voice-over says "Crin Blanc était un cheval sauvage et s'il aimait bien le petit pêcheur il aimait plus encore aller galopper avec les autres chevaux", while in the second case nothing is said, but we are led to think that Crin Blanc runs away because Folco tries to climb on his back. In this process of constant shiftings and of the creation of discrepancies, our ability to generate connections between the horse's behaviour and what happens to him and our ability to feel empathy towards his feelings are repressed. Whoever persists in behaving so, like Folco does, is destined to be excluded from his/her familiar social space. Whoever still believes in fairy-tales will accept the oral version of the story, with an idyllic place where humans and animals are friends. Whoever is not prepared to believe it will get an even more violent and subtle message: whoever treats animals with empathy and care is destined not to become a social subject at all, since he/she will not be given enough time to become an adult and, therefore, a full member<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Children's subjugation to adult authority lead us to what Foucault says about subject and power. In our case, it becomes clear that children are forced to stick to what an adult, male voice is telling them, no matter how false adults are, no matter what children see. They are being subjugated in order to become full members, who will one day subjugate other (young) people in return. As Foucault puts it: "There are two meanings of the word 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (1982: 781).

<sup>45</sup> An interesting critique has been made by the American journalist and writer [Philip Kennicott](#) (2007), who wrote an article for *The Washington Post* about *Crin Blanc* and *Le ballon rouge*, another film by Albert Lamorisse released in 1956: "In 'White Mane', the sacrifice is even more explicit. A boy and his horse are hunted down by adult ranchers -- while a narrator makes vague



*Performing “le cheval sauvage” in Crin Blanc*



IMAGES 9, 10 – A group of horses and the herdsmen pass close to Folco’s hut, just before Crin Blanc runs away (19:30-19:50).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have tried to discuss the ways in which the representation of the performance of animality in an artistic product like *Crin Blanc* is carried out. Even though it is quite short and considered one of the masterpieces in the international filmography for children, it can be full of points of reflection for a queer analysis that aims at deconstructing the performative nature of those identities that are otherwise perceived as “natural”. In my discussion I have tried to focus on how the concept of performance is useful for distinguishing and discussing all the levels and all the combined strategies through which anthropocentric ideas are conveyed. We have seen how narrative contents are supported by technical devices typical of movie production, in order to convey an ideology that turns out to be more conservative than we might have imagined.

In any form of artistic representation, all the technical aspects and the medium specific techniques play a major role, as we have seen in the second part of this analysis, in generating and naturalising performances of identity. Movies, as well as novels, convey specific set values, including the idea that there are correct performances that are supported by the text and with which the audience should sympathise, and incorrect performances that are problematised by the text and should be criticised by the audience. Species performances are not an exception. As we have seen so far, humanity is always the privileged pole in a binary opposition to animality, which allows humans – as full members – to have coercive and violent behaviours against those non-human animal individuals that do not respect human authority, in fiction as well as in non fiction realities. Since *Crin Blanc* does

promises of a better world to come. The beautiful imagery of both films is deployed in support of a moral system -- a blunt promise of rewards for good behavior -- not much more sophisticated than that of Santa and the Easter Bunny. Ah, the time-honored tradition of adults indoctrinating kids in a worldview that will lead only to bitter disappointment, unless the kids refuse to grow up. Which seems to be increasingly the case. If you're angry right now that the innocence of *Lamoris*'s message has been trampled beneath the boot of cynical criticism, good. That's the point. These are kiddie films, and adults shouldn't be there for the simple enjoyment of watching a story unfold. Perhaps the best adult response to these films would be critical detachment and a profound sense of relief: There they are, the old lies we tell kids, and thank goodness we don't believe them anymore. There are perfectly worthy reasons to keep these films in circulation. Visually, they are masterful. And it's fascinating to see children's films in which children are not running the show, and there's no subversively sly adult meta-level filled with knowing jokes that fly right over the heads of the little ones. But in their very purity, in their resolutely adult vision of a child's supposed moral universe, these two films are profoundly manipulative”.



not *show* or perform the “right” CBAs, first of all a disposition to submission, but shows some “wrong” ones, by attacking a human being for instance, he is judged as a “sale bête” by the keepers and as “sauvage” by the filmmakers. As we have seen above, language is crucial in creating an ideological, ontological as well as practical divide between “us” and “them”. As long as all animals will be considered incapable of feelings or complex thoughts, lacking any psychological structure or any volition, as long as they will not be included in that “us” and will not be considered full-fledged subjects, humans will feel allowed to treat them just like disposable objects. I think it is important to study the representation of animals in artistic products through the lenses offered by queer theory because we can shed some light on many social, practical and verbal habits that we might not even notice but that are perpetuated every day by humans and justify their violence towards animals. Through close analysis, I believe we can make them even more visible and turn the results in new social and political habits. Representing another identity with which we do share many features, but with whom we do not share so many others, implies the question of speaking for others: how do we speak for them? What does it imply? Is there a way to limit our anthropocentrism in books or movies? What techniques or narrative strategies shall we use? I do believe that these issues are worthy of being discussed in greater depth. As Alovisio points out:

Per provare a immaginare, se non a vivere, il punto di vista dell’animale, allora, non bisogna costruire soggettive tanto virtuose quanto improbabili ma occorre spostarsi dall’altra parte, non ‘guardare al posto di’ ma ‘essere guardati da’, disponendosi a incontrare il mistero di sguardi silenziosi che ci interrogano. Perché, come scrive Heidegger, ‘disporsi a entrare in rapporto con essi è un esercizio che consente di vedere non solo noi stessi ma anche il fuori, fuori dalla nostra visione del mondo’ (ALOVISIO 2017: 114).<sup>46</sup>

The importance of an interdisciplinary dialogue between queer studies and animal studies has been discussed by Carmen Dell’Aversano, whose

<sup>46</sup> “To try to imagine, if not to live, the point of view of animals, then, it is not necessary to build virtuous but improbable point of view shots, but it is necessary to move to the other side, not ‘watching for’ but ‘being watched by’, getting prepared to meet mysterious, silent and questioning gazes. Since, as Heidegger writes, ‘getting prepared to enter into a relationship with them is an exercise that allows to see not only ourselves but outside, outside our vision of the world’ (my translation).

fundamental research has created the basis for necessary and productive further research. With this work I have attempted to offer my personal contribution by expanding these methodologies to film studies, through an analysis of an example of a kind of cultural product (i.e. movies) that has become more and more relevant in cultural debates and in humanities in particular.

The huge impact that films can have on their audiences makes me think of their potentially great ideological influence. The specific case of *Crin Blanc* is interesting because it gives us the illusion of a positive and revolutionary message about the relationships between humans and animals. It is interesting especially because the story of the horse, the construction of his point of view and therefore our empathy are exploited to convey a very anthropocentric message. Animals and humans can be friends only in fairy-tales, in an imaginary world, but if in non-fictional reality we do not stick to the rules, first of all to the binary opposition animals-humans, we lose our right to be part of society, and, in the end, even to *live*. From a Foucauldian perspective, then, this operation becomes even more relevant since this is a movie that is conceived and created for children. It instills into their minds the principle that if they do not stick to adults' rules of a patriarchal and anthropocentric society, they can turn out badly.

This analysis does not aim at undermining completely the good intention of the filmmakers, if it consisted in telling the story of a transspecific friendship. I do not think that in a queer studies perspective we shall speak of a total failure. For instance, it is very interesting to see that the interaction between the two protagonists does not occur through the use of language and the movie shows the birth and the development of their friendship without any comment by the voice-over. This is an extremely interesting solution if we think of the issue of "speaking for" others, which regards the representations of animals. As the scholar Tyler T. Wuthman underlines:

One of the shared questions of inquiry between queer theories and animal studies is the problem of 'speaking for' the other. In queer theory, speaking for others can be considered a serious rhetorical violence against queer subjects. [...] The politics and ethics of 'speaking for', 'living with', and 'representing' nonhuman animals and others is a central concern for many different scholars writing from a wide spectrum of fields under the animal studies heading (WUTHMAN 2011: 93).

It is possible to say that *Crin Blanc* is not a complete failure in representing a transspecific friendship because even though the humans who make the movie speak a lot for the horses, they also give enough room for an alternative and effective form of communication. Folco and *Crin Blanc* become friends without the mediation of language and a lot of narrative space is offered to show their relationship. Beside the radical and anthropocentric ending, I think this choice can be seen as a way to acknowledge the existence of positive relationships that can be developed through non conventional ways. In other words, this short recognises not only the possibility, but the actual existence of a friendly empathy between animals and humans in front of which human rhetoric becomes useless. This might lead us to attempt to use “animal-attentive queer theories” more and more in the analysis of written or audio-visual texts.<sup>47</sup>

During my research and analysis I could not help thinking about Frans de Waal’s discussion of anthropomorphism and anthropodenial, a term that he introduced in 1997. De Waal questions the frequent application of the term “anthropomorphism” used for negating and judging several scholars’ attempts to acknowledge the many similarities between animals and humans in their studies. However, what he points out about many researchers, scientists and humans in general is an even more urgent problem:

Given these discoveries, we must be very careful not to exaggerate the uniqueness of our species. The ancients apparently never gave much thought to this

<sup>47</sup> I thank Nicoletta Tangaro for having told me about the work of Tyler T. Wuthman. He mentions several theories ascribable to the field of queer studies and he underlines the fact that they can and must be combined with animal studies and he points out the ontological, ethical and political potential that this interdisciplinarity is able to generate: “In what I term animal-attentive queer theories, I attempt to bring queer theories within a framework of feminist animal studies ethics of liberation to move beyond models of queer subjectivity and critique that rely upon sado-humanist logic. Remade to work outside of such a framework, animal-attentive queer theories take into account the many inhuman, human, and nonhuman that are brought to bear upon a queer world making. By stressing the connection, relations, and representations of others within such an ethic, we can begin to assess the many queer ways we become with human and animal others” (2011: 91). Another interesting aspect considered by Wuthmann is in fact the issues involved in the representation of animals: “Discussions of an ethics of representation within animal-attentive queer theories remain problematic in that humans will always be the ones representing animals to other humans (at least in a written context) in a sort of critical but inevitable anthropomorphism, but more importantly these discussions illuminate the ways in which such a radical shift in ontology can effect change within our political practices. Such engagements with animal others leads to both changes in the account or representation of that other and the ways in which we can communicate or at least relate to animal others in ethical and meaningful ways” (94).

practice, the opposite of anthropomorphism, and so we lack a word for it. I will call it anthropodenial: a blindness to the humanlike characteristics of other animals, or the animal-like characteristics of ourselves (DE WAAL 1997).

According to what de Waal says, the rejection of the idea that animals and humans share common features which, of course, make human beings similar to animals creates an immediate and severe contradiction with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution:

Those who are in anthropodenial try to build a brick wall to separate humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. They carry on the tradition of René Descartes, who declared that while humans possessed souls, animals were mere automatons. This produced a serious dilemma when Charles Darwin came along: If we descended from such automatons, were we not automatons ourselves? If not, how did we get to be so different? (*Ibidem*)

Anthropomorphism is an immediate consequence of this stance. Anthropomorphism refers to a specific way of observing and interpreting animal behaviour or activities and keeping humankind as the point of reference. Using Sack's terminology, anthropomorphism consists in considering some CBAs as exclusively human and, as a consequence, denies that they can belong to animals. When these CBAs are observed, and therefore ascribed, to animals, the observation is contested, and the ascription is sanctioned as a conceptual error, and the name of the error is "anthropomorphism". The underlying assumption is that there is only *one* way to perform those actions, the human one, and that therefore no animal can "actually" perform them. This is exactly what de Waal calls "anthropodenial": the denial that a number of CBAs are common to humans *and* other animals. Dell'Aversano (2015) shows in great depth that Sack's methodology is useful to demonstrate how anthropomorphism is a very repressive concept. To understand this point it is useful to refer to the concept of "imitation" proposed by Sacks. He claims that, if some CBAs are bound only to full members (in our case, humans), an individual belonging to a boundary category (in our case, animals) that shows that he/she is able to perform the very same CBAs even though he/she does not have any right to do so, he/she is defined as an imitator (and as a phoney).<sup>48</sup> As Dell'Aversano explains:

<sup>48</sup> See SACKS 1992: I, 70-71, in particular: "Imitation' seems to involve a way of characterizing some action which somebody does when they are unentitled to do that class of action" (71).

Per il nostro discorso è importante osservare come il rapporto tra noi umani e gli altri animali sia invariabilmente e necessariamente truccato sotto il profilo percettivo e cognitivo; «the society’s recognized values» sono *sempre* definiti in modo da escludere a priori la possibilità di estendere la definizione di ‘member’ a qualsiasi individuo appartenente alla categoria ‘animale’. Questo risultato viene ottenuto attraverso l’azione sinergica di due diverse strategie: anzitutto, viene negato qualsiasi valore a tutte le caratteristiche, non importa quanto vistose, peculiari e straordinarie, che rappresentano un appannaggio esclusivo di qualche specie ‘animale’; in secondo luogo, viene introdotta una distinzione speciosa e circolare tra le caratteristiche manifestate dagli umani e *le stesse* caratteristiche manifestate dagli ‘animali’, distinzione che ha la funzione di rendere la loro esclusione dalla categoria di ‘member’ ‘protetta contro l’induzione’. Secondo Sacks, quella di essere ‘protetta contro l’induzione’ è una caratteristica fondamentale della conoscenza sociale codificata e trasmessa per il tramite delle categorie (DELL’AVERSANO 2015: 184).<sup>49</sup>

What de Waal points out is that “the problem is, we do not always remember that, when used in this way, anthropomorphism can provide insight only into human affairs and not into the affairs of animals”. But he adds that anthropomorphism can be a useful tool for research, if used correctly, with awareness, knowledge and attention, and with the premise that we are animals (which, from Darwin onwards, should not be questioned):

That very resemblance, however, can allow us to make better use of anthropomorphism, but for this we must view it as a means rather than an end. It should not be our goal to find some quality in an animal that is precisely equivalent to an aspect of our own inner lives. Rather, we should use the fact that we are similar to animals to develop ideas we can test. [...] Naturally, we must always be on guard. To avoid making silly interpretations based on anthropomorphism, one must always interpret animal behavior in the wider context of a species’ habits and natural history. [...] A careful observer may thus arrive at an

<sup>49</sup> “To our discourse it is important to observe how the relationship between us human and animal others is invariably and necessarily rigged through perception and cognition; ‘the society’s recognized values’ are always defined in order to exclude *a priori* the possibility of extending the definition of ‘member’ to any individual belonging to the category of ‘animal’. This result is achieved through the synergy of two different strategies: first of all, no value is recognised to all the features, however showy, peculiar or extraordinary they may be, that represent an exclusive prerogative of a certain ‘animal’ species; moreover, a speciesist and circular distinction between the features showed by human beings and *the very same* features showed by ‘animals’ is introduced, which has the function of making their exclusion from the category of ‘member’ ‘protected against induction’. For Sacks, being ‘protected against induction’ is a fundamental feature of social knowledge, which is codified and conveyed through the categories” (my translation).

informed anthropomorphism that is at odds with extrapolations from human behavior (DE WAAL 1997).

I am therefore convinced that we should assume an epistemic humility, as proposed by David M. Peña-Guzmán:

‘Epistemic humility’ refers to an attitude of openness and modesty relative to one’s own beliefs. Especially under conditions of uncertainty, epistemic humility can be a scholarly virtue of sorts. [...] It means remaining open to possibilities that are consistent with the observational and theoretical scaffolding of a science even if they cut against the grain of received wisdom or personal conviction. To be epistemically humble is to be modest about strength and reach of our ways of seeing and interpreting the world (PEÑA-GUZMÁN 2017: 15).

De Waals proposes a form of epistemic humility too when, referring to Darwin’s work, he defines the new field of studies that he proposes “evolutionary cognition”, since he makes clear that “humans are not necessarily central to every comparison. [...] The agenda of this field is precisely what Griffin and Uexküll had in mind, in that it seeks to place the study of cognition on a less anthropocentric footing. Uexküll urged us to look at the world from the animal’s standpoint, saying that this is the only way to fully appreciate animal intelligence. A century later we are ready to listen” (2016: 28).

The question of animal suicide, discussed by David M. Peña-Guzmán and then mentioned by Ryan Hediger, is an issue that is sadly relevant in *Crin Blanc* too. What we see in the final scene and that can effectively be interpreted as a suicide is radically rejected by the anthropocentric system in which the movie is embodied. We have discussed in the second part of this analysis the mechanisms and the narrative needs of using a fairy-tale to literally tell another story. However, thinking of Peña-Guzmán’s discussion on animal suicide, we can imagine that other ideological issues are at stake. As Hediger in his comment of Peña-Guzmán’s article says:

Suicidal behaviors are often responses to unbearable social and personal conditions — conditions that intelligent humans have become all too good at creating. Peña-Guzmán’s argument that other animals can and sometimes may commit suicide raises further questions about why anyone commits suicide, and about whether or to what extent we should see suicide — in humans or in other animals — as natural. How often might suicide, whether by humans or by other

living organisms, result from excessive human intervention in and management of life itself? To what extent might suicide be anthropogenic? (HEDIGER 2018: 2).

The example of the ending of *Crin Blanc* illustrates that, due to narrative needs that however have ideological roots, humans often do not consider the complexity of animals’ context and inner life or their impact on animals’ sensibilities. In this case, for instance, what appears to be effectively a suicide is not even remotely considered as such. Similarly, human brutality and violence are not even vaguely considered the reasons of this extreme choice.

The purpose of queer studies is to deontologise those anthropocentric categories that human beings use and impose on fictional and non-fictional non-human animals. This, to recall the images of the movie, can help us to get very much closer to that safe shore of the “pays merveilleux où les chevaux et les hommes sont toujours des amis” that Folco and *Crin Blanc* – as well as many other rebels – do not reach. These methodologies can help us to reach a place where categories are not “natural” or ontologically fundamental to the construction of identities of both humans and animals, a place where language is not a device of power, a place similar to the “wood where things have no names”.<sup>50</sup>

Bianca Friedman

biancafriedman93@gmail.com

Independent researcher

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