

UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI

FACULTATEA DE LITERE

ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ DE STUDII LINGVISTICE ȘI LITERARE

TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

TESTIMONIAL KINSHIP: ANIMAL WITNESSING AND
THE NATURAL-HISTORICAL LITERARY
IMAGINATION OF THE LONG EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY

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2026

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SUMMARY

This thesis, *Testimonial Kinship: Animal Witnessing and the Natural-Historical Literary Imagination of the Long Eighteenth Century*, examines the ways in which long eighteenth-century writing teaches readers to attend to animal suffering and to receive that suffering as ethically binding. It begins from a question that remains active throughout the whole study: how does a text register suffering when the sufferer cannot speak in recognised human terms? The thesis answers that question through the concept of *testimonial kinship*. This concept names the relation that arises when animal exposure is received as meaningful and when that exposure is carried into judgement, care, or responsibility. The study argues that long eighteenth-century writing returns to this problem with remarkable persistence. It does so in natural history, in moral philosophy, in poetry, in juvenile animal narratives, and in the novel. Across this heterogeneous archive, texts repeatedly convert attention to animal life into claims of answerability, even when those claims remain under pressure from ridicule, from convenience, or from the institutional forms that organise human dominion.

The opening scene of the thesis comes from Sterne's dead ass episode in *Sentimental Journey*. That passage gives the thesis its first clear example of testimony without juridical speech. The animal body is silent, yet the ethical claim still reaches the witness. It reaches him through gesture, through visible grief, and through the ordinary objects that hold the scene in place. The bridle, the crust of bread, and the repeated act of handling these objects create a structure of attention in which loss becomes legible. From this point onward, the thesis follows a broader historical question. It asks how the eighteenth century learned to read bodily signs, how it made room for animal suffering within forms of knowledge that were often extractive, and how literature participated in that process. Testimonial kinship emerges here as a practice of reading and of response. It depends on affective responsiveness, on bodily evidence, and on the regimes of knowledge that shape what can be seen and what can be said about animal life.

The research is organised around five linked questions. The thesis first asks how testimonial kinship emerges from philosophical writing, from natural-historical writing, and from literary writing in the period. It then asks how Condillac, Hume, and Smith rethink sensation, sympathy, and moral obligation in ways that matter for cross-species ethics. A further question concerns form. The thesis studies the narrative strategies through which eighteenth-century texts represent animal experience, especially nonhuman focalisation,

animal autobiography, and dialogic pedagogy. Another chapter asks how juvenile animal narratives train their readers in habits of moral attention through scenes of vulnerability, displacement, and care. The final question turns to Margaret Cullen's *Mornton* and asks how that novel gathers earlier testimonial energies into a programme of civic reform. From these questions follow the wider aims of the project. The thesis proposes testimonial kinship as a critical concept for literary animal studies. It recovers a large corpus of neglected animal writing, with particular emphasis on juvenile animalographies and on Cullen's novel. It also offers a historical genealogy for present-day debates about obligation and cross-species relation.

The theoretical framework places the thesis at the intersection of literary animal studies, nonhuman narratology, and the intellectual history of the long eighteenth century. Its central premise is that animal vulnerability enters the archive as a problem of address. A text notices suffering, gives that suffering a readable shape, and directs it toward a human witness. Several bodies of scholarship help clarify this process. Work on sensibility by Ildiko Csengei and Paul Goring helps explain how bodily signs acquired moral force in the period. Jane Spencer's studies of animal subjectivity and children's writing are central for the archive of juvenile narratives and for the moral labour those texts perform. David Herman's work on nonhuman narratology supports the discussion of animal perspective and narrative address. Donna Haraway and Gary Steiner offer a present-day vocabulary for cross-species relation, while Michael Foucault, Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, and Dorinda Outram help frame the relation between classification, genre, empire, and forms of knowledge. The thesis draws on these critics while keeping its centre of gravity in the eighteenth century itself. Its concern is with the terms through which that period rendered animal lives visible and turned such visibility into moral pressure.

Methodologically, the thesis combines close reading, historical contextualisation, and conceptual analysis. Close reading allows the study to follow changes in narrative position, in tone, and in the management of evidentiary detail from one genre to another. Historical contextualisation places the archive within print culture, domestic pedagogy, colonial expansion, and the authority claimed by natural history and moral philosophy. Conceptual analysis remains active throughout, since testimonial kinship is refined gradually as the thesis moves through different bodies of writing. The corpus is deliberately broad. Natural history gives one kind of access to animal exposure. Moral philosophy gives another. Poetry and children's writing develop further forms of ethical address, while the novel tests whether that address can enter public life and social procedure. The range of the corpus therefore follows

the problem itself. Animal witness does not stay within one form, and the structure of the thesis respects that movement.

The state of the art chapter clarifies where the thesis enters current scholarship. Recent work in literary animal studies has shifted attention away from animals as mere figures and toward animals as beings whose representation raises questions of agency, of voice, and of historical violence. Lucinda Cole notes the richness and instability of the field's competing labels. Jane Spencer places animals and animality near the centre of the age of revolution and shows how late eighteenth-century writing developed a new literature of animal subjectivity. Susan McHugh stresses the importance of representation and agency. David Herman pushes narrative theory toward a fuller engagement with cross-species storytelling. Markman Ellis, Christopher Flint, and Rivka Swenson reconstruct the formal histories of it-narratives, animal autobiography, and the politics of circulation. Michael Richardson's recent work on witnessing helps extend the concept of testimony beyond authorised human speech. The thesis enters this conversation by reconstructing testimonial kinship as a historically specific procedure through which eighteenth-century texts make animal lives witnessable. Its claim is that a gap remains where natural history, sensibility, and animal-centred narration meet. The thesis addresses that gap by reading natural history and juvenile narrative together, and by showing how descriptive habits travel into literary form.

The thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part establishes the conceptual and philosophical frame. The second part turns toward literary form and toward the shaping of readers. This structure gives the study a clear progression. It first asks how animal suffering becomes readable within the culture of the period. It then asks how narrative form sustains that readability and gives it ethical weight. The movement from concept to form is therefore also a movement from the conditions of witnessing to the practice of witnessing.

Chapter 1, "Beyond the Animal-Machine: Margaret Cavendish at the Origin of the Animal Turn," functions as an opening frame for the whole thesis. Cavendish is placed at the threshold of the long eighteenth century and at the centre of a major philosophical debate about animal life. The chapter shows how she rejects the Cartesian claim that animals are mere machines and how she insists on the perceptive and rational capacities of nonhuman creatures. Her challenge to mechanism is set alongside the work of Descartes, of Hobbes, of Henry More, and of Van Helmont. Hobbes remains especially important here, since Cavendish inherits his materialism while also transforming it into a different account of matter and perception. The chapter also emphasises that her literary writing belongs fully to this philosophical argument. *The Blazing World*, *Poems and Fancies*, and *The Animal*

Parliament are read as texts that extend her inquiry into animal cognition, into species hierarchy, and into the limits of human knowledge. Cavendish also matters as a woman writer who claimed public intellectual authority in a culture that restricted women's access to formal learning. Her presence in the thesis is therefore foundational. She gives the thesis an early language for animal considerability, for self-moving matter, and for literary writing as inquiry.

Chapter 2, "Testimonial Kinship: Affective Witnessing and the Elegiac Poetics of Enlightenment Natural History," develops the thesis's governing concept in sustained detail. The chapter begins by situating the eighteenth century within processes of domestication, imperial expansion, and extraction. It then turns to natural history and rereads that archive as a testimonial archive of nonhuman precarity. Buffon receives close attention for the way his descriptions register extinction and unease. Smellie is read as a reluctant anatomist whose work carries a critical pressure against anthropocentrism. Gilbert White is studied for his seasonal attention to animal life and for the way loss enters his observational prose. From there the chapter turns to the moral archive. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson provide an earlier genealogy of moral sense. Primatt, Oswald, Dean, and Young each expand the ethical reach of the archive in distinct ways. Primatt argues for mercy as a duty grounded in sentience. Oswald gives that duty a sharper political and dietary edge. Dean extends the question into theology and future life. Young turns humane conduct into active moral practice. The chapter then moves to poetry through Thomson and Cowper, whose poems repeatedly return to caged birds, hunted animals, labouring creatures, and winter hardship. Across these readings the chapter shows how testimonial kinship takes shape within the culture of sensibility while remaining entangled with the institutions that manage and exploit animal life.

Chapter 3, "Philosophical Extensions of Testimonial Kinship," studies Condillac, Hume, and Smith as major thinkers of sensation, sympathy, and moral judgement. The section on Condillac concentrates on sensation, habit, natural signs, and animal expression. It shows how his empiricism helps explain continuity between human feeling and animal feeling, and how that continuity gives a philosophical basis to testimonial kinship. The section on Hume focuses on sympathy, on the passions, and on the moral status of cruelty. Hume helps the thesis explain how one creature's condition can be apprehended by another and why fellow feeling remains uneven in its reach. The section on Smith examines sympathy under the pressure of market society. Smith matters here because he places moral attention alongside commodity logic, habit, and distance. The chapter follows the tension between sympathy and commodification, and it treats that tension as central to eighteenth-

century thought about animal life. This chapter provides the philosophical centre of the thesis. It shows that the period offered strong resources for thinking about cross-species relation, while also revealing the limits that such thought had to confront.

Chapter 4, “Writing Animal Experience: Nonhuman Narratology and the Ethics of Witnessing,” provides the formal frame for the literary chapters that follow. It studies narrator types, nonhuman focalisation, children’s literature as an experimental ground, the politics of address, and questions of gendered authorship. The argument here is that animal witness in literature depends on form. A text decides who sees, who speaks, who remembers, and who receives the scene. These decisions shape the credibility and force of the narrative. The chapter therefore shows how literary technique enters the ethical argument. Animal-centred narration is never a neutral choice. It establishes relations between speaker and reader, and it determines how bodily signs are translated into meaning. This chapter prepares the shift into the archive of juvenile writing by showing how narrative can train attention rather than simply record it.

Chapter 5, “Animalographies: Juvenile Life-Writing, Animal Testimony, and the Pedagogy of Nature,” is the thesis’s longest chapter and the one that gives most space to close reading. It examines fourteen narratives written for children and arranges them into four bodies of material. The first body consists of sentimental memoirs. Here the chapter reads Mary Pilkington’s *Marvellous Adventures; or, the Vicissitudes of a Cat*, E. Smyth’s *History of Tabby, a Favourite Cat*, Eliza Fenwick’s *Life of the Famous Dog Carlo*, and the anonymous *Biography of a Spaniel*. The second body contains pedagogical experiments, among them *Cato; or, Interesting Adventures of a Dog of Sentiment*, *Memoirs of Dick the Little Poney*, and *The Dog of Knowledge; or, Memoirs of Bob the Spotted Terrier*. The third body turns to itinerant natural-history narratives through Dorothy Kilner and Elizabeth Sandham, with special attention to *The Life and Perambulations of a Mouse*, *The Adventures of Poor Puss*, and *Perambulations of a Bee and a Butterfly*. The final body studies conversational natural histories written for young readers. Across this large corpus, the chapter argues that juvenile animal narratives train children in moral attention. They do so through repeated scenes of fear, injury, hunger, labour, dependence, companionship, and care. These books are central to the thesis because they turn ethical response into habit and because they place interspecies relation within the ordinary practices of reading and instruction.

Chapter 6, “Evidence into Practice: Parishes, Households, and the Procedures of Compassion in Margaret Cullen’s *Mornton*,” brings the argument to the novel. It offers the

first sustained literary analysis of *Mornton* as an animal-ethics text and reads the novel as a Scottish enactment of testimonial kinship on a broader social scale. Sympathy in this chapter is tested in public and routed into procedure through households, through parishes, and through forms of sociable judgement. The chapter links domestic animal management to parliamentary reform by way of Erskine's bill. It also places the novel within abolitionist moral culture through the Clarkson dedication. The concept of more-than-animal kinship is developed here in order to describe the wider spread of obligation within the novel's world. In *Mornton*, care for animals belongs to household life, though it also enters civic conduct and public culture. The chapter therefore closes the thesis by showing how witness can move from intimate scene to social procedure.

The conclusion gathers the main findings of the thesis. The first concerns the concept itself. The thesis proposes testimonial kinship as a precise way of naming what long eighteenth-century animal writing repeatedly asks its readers to do. It asks them to recognise animal exposure, to keep the material conditions of that exposure in view, and to translate that recognition into ethical accountability. The second finding concerns the archive. The thesis recovers a substantial body of juvenile animal narratives and places that body of writing beside *Mornton* at the centre of the period's interspecies ethics. A third conclusion concerns genre. The thesis shows that moral philosophy, natural history, poetry, children's literature, and the novel share procedures for rendering animal life addressable and for making the human observer answerable. A further contribution concerns literary animal studies in the present. The thesis argues that current debates about sympathy, about witnessing, and about cross-species obligation have a distinct long eighteenth-century history. By reconstructing that history, the thesis places the period in a new relation to contemporary animal ethics and to the study of literature.

At its broadest level, then, the thesis argues that the long eighteenth century developed a sustained practice of attending to animal vulnerability and of turning that attention into ethical demand. That practice was never stable. It remained exposed to satire, to commerce, and to species hierarchy. Even so, it left behind a rich archive in which animal suffering is repeatedly made visible and where readers are repeatedly asked to answer what they have seen. Testimonial kinship is the term the thesis gives to that relation, and the whole thesis is an effort to trace its forms with historical precision.

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