

Exploring the Digital Representation of Animal Rights in the Movie the Shape of Water (2017)

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Abstract:

Animals possess a significant role in the shaping of Earth. In spite of this, they are misused for erroneous purposes like animal experimentation which is done in order to introduce new medicines for humans and animal diseases. Scrutinizing on such poor creatures depicts the callous nature of humans which are asymmetrical. Animal rights are not just an ideology-it is a movement for the sake of animals as to protect them for the sacrilegious looks of humans. The exploitation of animals would lead one to trouble due to existing animal rights which has the power to hold on to the centre of credibility. Guillermo del Toro's *The Shape of Water* throws light into this denigrate condition of animals which is rising day by day in the contemporary world. Thus, this research paper shakes hand with Toro's visual imagery of the experimentation in the Amphibian Man to the unethical happenings in the present world. It also answers to the rhetorical question of "Why animals?"

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I. INTRODUCTION

The universe is a marvel for which each person is in a rush to create an impression of themselves. Across the globe money, fame, power has bagged the first position and hunger, love, poverty are not of much concern. The homosapiens have contaminated the blue planet for the sake of nothingness. Earth is an amalgamation of living and non-living beings and their connection are elucidated impeccably in all pages of the ecosystem. The law of nature is equivalent to every life born on earth which gives them the absolute freedom to question their norms of existence. Humans and animals share a symbiotic relationship. They depend upon each other at various stages of life. Irrespective of all these, at times, humans expose their colossus nature by using these poor creatures in different aspects. To be precise, animals are seen in India as deities of God and these same animals will be dinner for the same people. The historical background of India unveils the royal families frolicking, hunting and subjugating animals.

In Kerala, elephants are seen as an epitome of good fortune and luck but at this same state, elephants are used for timber trade too. What a contrast it is. Another way of misusing these poor muted beings is by using them in laboratories for detrimental experiments. Every humanoid owes to protect these creatures but riposte is in contrast to real human nature. Animals are the representation of mankind just because they own the calm, cool and patient nature of humans and the wild and vigorous nature of animals are seen in living beings. The innocence of these poor creatures is an embodiment of their elegance and beauty which most people fail to recognize. Guillermo Del Toro's one of the most recognizable movie *The Shape of Water* (2017) is a sheer example for this, as it explains the adjoining negativities of animal experimentation through the love story of a bold, valiant, heroic, beautiful mute girl who falls in love with the Amphibian Man (the scientific specimen), an epitome of the distressed faunae. The movie received several awards and

nominations. Toro takes the readers deep into the very reality of how humans are brutal to those poor mute beings. Deep down, the movie compares the humanistic nature and animalistic nature of both humans and animals. Toro also notifies that the future of the world is hazardous as humans couldn't differentiate between good and evil. The bond between the girl and the amphibian man show-cases the transition from older days to the contemporary world where humane qualities have gone astray. The expression of reality is petrifying. Thus *The Shape of Water* is a riposte to all those conventional thoughts of animal experimentation is the key to scientific inventions. Also, C. Ray Greek's *SACRED COWS AND GOLDEN GEESE* (2000) foreword by Jane Goodall's, reveals these expressions of brutality based on C. Ray Greek and Jean Swingle Greek's *SPECIOUS SCIENCE* (2002). It describes so:

"All mammalian blood-animal and human-has components in common, so why not use human blood for totally accurate results? Moreover, when it came to present-day research-mostly involving microbiology on the complex levels-why scrutinize species whose physiologic response to disease, disease manifestation, and disease incidence so clearly deviates from human response? Logic, it seemed to us, even back then when we had few comparisons, was somehow amiss" (Greek 16).

The concluding data elucidates that as time passes the manifestation of human nature towards animals is deceptive, pointless, hazardous, or all three. The development of the world diminishes the humane qualities of the hominids which is a perfect example of the deterioration of empathy and sympathy humans possess towards these muted creatures as time pass. Strickland, one of the main characters of *The Shape of Water*, misuses his power as a scientist. He is an example of this serious issue and a reply to those who ask about the consequences of animal experimentation.

II. ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION

There are a set of animal rights comprised in the constitution of every country. Section 428 and 429 of the Indian Penal Code and the Cruelty to Animal Act, 1960, Rules 148-C and 135-B of Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 are set of rules which warn the people of India from tormenting the muted beings. The rising amount of questions by animal rights hastens the humans to dignify animals by their privileged positions. Animal rights encompass rules to protect animals from being hurt and provide them with their basic rights. The violation of these rights would lead the criminal to certain punishments and penalties but still, a large number of animals are maltreated day by day legally and illegally and animal experimentation is one among them. It as a biological process done in laboratories for the invention of drugs that is useful for humans. This sounds a bit sarcastic, for humans and animals are the two opposite sides of a coin. To acknowledge the very basis of the issue of animal experimentation, one should know who Galen was and how he became the "Father of Vivisection". To demonstrate broad theories of physiology, he combined his subtle investigation of humans to the physiologic data of animals. But his miserable fate ended his philosophies in short of precision. Even though it lacks accuracy, animal experimenters still use it for reference as his input to the world of vivisection is considered as a work of great prestige. American Medical Association (AMA), in the early 1990s, published a "White Paper", as a contribution to the historical representation of animal experimentation, which says

"...the Roman physician Galen used apes and pigs to prove theory that veins carry blood rather than air" (Greek 24).

This information was an absolute phoney because Galen never used animals for experimentation and it made the AMA and animal experimenters fail miserably in exerting Galen's innovations. Thus they

cast a mantle, like darkness over his medical progress and he became the “Father of Vivisection”. The life of a renowned personality like Galen is proof of how facts get warped in the radical world of science and it acts as a total camouflage to the outer world of realities. Common people consider the ethics of science as surreal but to be precise it is much harsher when compared to the real world negativities and the reasons for this are never mild. Elisa, the heroine of the movie, is a replica for the common people, who with glitters in her eyes observe the procedures in the scientific laboratory. The enhanced comprehension of the scenario is expressed by Toro through Elisa by her vibrant emotions of fear and excitement. The scientific laboratory is another world where people of science reveal their true selves and tries to gain the impossible. Strickland represents the scientific community that fails, the moment when they perceive the animals as an experimental specimen. The very thought of vivisectioning the creature is alarming because they are also a part of Mother Nature and harming them tantamount to harming ourselves. The failure of Amphibian Man to prove himself worthy is a sheer example for animals that are not strong models for human disease

“In medicine, strong models assume four factors: the same symptoms, the same postulated origin of disease, the same neurobiological mechanism, and the same treatment response. The truth is that though certain animals may consummate some of the criteria as humans in some incidences, no animal consistently fulfils all four. Thus animals are not strong models for human disease” (Greek 18).

Even after these many discoveries, one question remains the same that is why animal experimentation still exists? Justifications for this are many:

1. Animal experimentation is a source to earn a bag full of money.
2. It doesn't affect the retardation of the human race.

3. This experimentation industry spends millions annually to influence the public about the manufacture of medicines which are been made through a test conducted on animals.

The movie is also an answer to why this still prevails. It opens up with the domestic life of the main protagonist, Elisa Esposito. She was found derelict as a child by the sides of a river with wounds on her neck. As a cleaner at a secret government laboratory in Baltimore, Toro portrays Elisa as the only ray of hope for the imprisoned Amphibian Man. This is a way of enlightening the mob that helping hands always seek good deeds. The mysterious yet powerful man was apprehended by the banks of South America River by Colonel Richard Strickland. The main intention of Strickland and his men was the misuse of the Amphibian Man for an American advantage in the space race. Strickland is a perfect example for the contemporary world that is in a rush for wealth which is one of the main reasons why animal experimentation still exists. It is a field of endless capitalization. Our perceptions are the foundation of science and this ecosystem is its specimen. The concern is where the greenback reclines. Strickland tortures the specimen exactly like those punitive animal experimenters who neglects the feelings and emotions of those poor beings. The prying for such a colossal figure made her to meet him secretly and slowly she discovers it as a Humanoid Amphibian. Around this time, Strickland with his men decides to vivisection it and this conversation has been overheard by Elisa which made her unshackle him. Elisa is a perfect replica for certain organization like PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) that values the right to freedom of expression of living-non-living creatures. The negative tendency of misusing such an animal for a different purpose reveals the truth regarding animal experimentation in the scientific labs globally. As a consequence of these experiments, he turns harsh towards the ones who apprehended his freedom. The frustration and anger

expressed by him are Toro's silent messages, which animals want to apprise but are impossible as they are unable to utter. There is no use of piloting animal experimentation because they can't express pain, while they are inoculated by a drug. Their feelings are been exposed by the scientists who culminate the experimentation by looking at its computerized results. Any results are genuine until and unless one says how it feels to them after it is vaccinated. As animals are incapable of that, observations are all guesswork over the world for many years. It portrays the covetous and dominant nature of scientists who are perfunctory to their job and also it shows that the very existence of such animals is never been questioned by the authorities and not even by the government but here Elisa appears to be a savior for him as she protects him from Strickland and his co-workers, in her bathtub, intending to emancipate him to the nearby canal when it rains. For the time being, they both fall in love and get intimate with each other. The aspect of love embedded between them throws light into their room of hopelessness. Elisa's love for the specimen healed his injuries caused by Strickland. After a lot of struggle, he is been released to the canal. He also takes her with him to the realm of never-ending love. Toro delivers the cliché ending of every love story, where two lovers become together forever, to *The Shape of Water*. Toro, through such a vibrant topic, sketched the cup of love to convey that through thick and thin love is what could heal the pain and that pain is same for every living being.

III. ANIMALS AS MERE OBJECTS

As PETA founder Ingrid Newkirk has said, "When it comes to pain, love, joy, loneliness, and fear, a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy. Each one values his or her life and fights the knife."

The real-life scenario stays contradictory to the fictional world. A large number of animals are suffering from violence even under the name of the law, and like Elisa, there is no one to save these muted beings from danger. In the article, *Domesticating the "Other": an Analysis of the*

Appropriation of Non-Humans by Humanistic Discourse in Herge's The Adventures of Tintin, the author Dipayan Mukherjee writes: 'It hides a desire of controlling and domesticating the "Other".' Here the "Other" refers to the entire family of animals who are been subjugated by Homo sapiens. It leads to the question of objectification of the fidelity towards animals and also elucidates the desire of causing trauma. The decision made by Strickland and his men to vivisect the scientific specimen shows their lack of humanity. Toro's portrayal of the character Strickland is a symbol to all those who hurt animals and his death is also a caveat to them. The movie questions the very existence of such voiceless creatures. The vivid imagery is a sad reality of every animal like mice, monkeys, guinea pigs, apes and many more who are victims for such experimentations, which at times undergo a pathetic catastrophe. The monster-shaped Amphibian Man at first expresses a sense of fantasy into the viewers as it is quite a romantic sci-fi movie but as it moves profoundly, it reveals that Toro is one of those dissidents of animal experimentation. Strickland is a reflection of those scientists who seek permission from the government and harm these poor creatures to their zenith, in the laboratories. They are been tortured for days and deprived of food and water. Many animals used for this, such as birds, rats, and mice are not even protected by any Welfare. Those unlisted animals should also be considered as of experimenting on animals are cold and callous as they are subjected to force-feeding, force inhalation, food, and water deprivation, prolonged periods of physical restraint.

IV. ANIMALEXPERIMENTATION- HUMANS AS VICTIMS

As time flew it proved that many of the inventions were erroneous. 70% of the animal tested drugs in laboratories were harmful to humans but the truth was hidden behind those four walls because the world is in a rush for money. At times, animal experimentation is not only harmful to animals but

indirectly leads humans to death. In an article, *The Flaws and Human harms of Animal Experimentation*, the author Aysha Akhtar says: "Pharmaceutical company preclinical data are proprietary and thus publicly unavailable, it is difficult to know the number of missed opportunities due to misleading animal experiments." This proves that experimentation upon animals are deceitful and humans are victims for it. Even though it is a fact that humans are the descendants of animals, there are differences between these species in every aspect and the dissimilarity in diseases like HIV, heart attack; many types of cancer are testament to prove it. Nonhuman animals are mentally powerful as they have the thought of their survival at the very next moment. They are mentally capable of perceiving and responding to essentials like food, predators, and animals while humans are so profane. Humans are fascinated by materialism. Thus it is no wonder how several people die every year. People rely on the drugs that are sold out in the market which is the sole reason for the increasing number of the death rate. The experiment which went perfectly in an animal may not go well with human as there are differences. Drugs like Thalidomide, Diethylstilbestrol, Surgam, Birth control pills are all examples of this.

1. Thalidomide is a sedative drug given to the pregnant woman to relieve pregnancy queasiness, which is a component in cough syrup. Mothers who have taken this gave birth to babies with malformations. To be precise, these baby limbs were meager. The first reported case raising to the side effects of this drug came out in 1956 but besides this, it was released to the market in 1957. As its deformity increased, scientists reviewed its effects once more, in animals. They gave it to animals by keeping the fact in mind of what happened with humans-it vandalized unborn offspring. Their re-test didn't prove any such problem in the animal, thus its use persevered. After many years in 1962 scientists proved this drug to be harmful to humans and it was banned. By that time additional 10,000 children were born with a deformity.

2. Diethylstilbestrol (DES) is another murderous drug that led to the death of many pregnant women. Thalidomide was jeopardizing only the next generation but diethylstilbestrol affected many generations, like even the patient's granddaughters. Vaginal and cervical cancer was in a high possibility of occurring in the patients' daughter which transmitted gradually to their daughters. Clinical data in 1953 stated that it was harmful, but still, it remained in the market and finally, the FDA banned it in 1971.

3. Taking on account, Surgam is another such drug who led the mob to witness again a harsh disastrous reality. An anti-inflammatory drug that was made-up to prevent stomach ulcers ended up creating negative results. After its human trials, scientists stated that "...animal data could not safely be extrapolated to man." (Greek 64)

According to the "blessed" report of the analyst, the folks out there are the buffoon of all time. Even though these drugs turn out to be harmful, the analysts are never propelled from their position, rather they are been given more and more chances to experiment on animals, thus ending up killing innocent lives. As these medical experiments and researchers in laboratories were persistently moving forward, the father of scientific physiology, Claude Bernard, in the mid-nineteenth century entered into the scientific world to disturb the sturdy growth of medical divulgence. He believed that the genuinity of the medicines is proven after experiments done on animals with great accuracy. He succeeded in coaxing the communal of science that if malady could not be mimicked on animals in the laboratory, it simply did not exist.

V. CONCLUSION

It is the dawn of the 21st century and money is what matters the most. Animal experimentation is a solution to this. Scientists may claim that they have a love for science but the dollar comes first and publishing a paper based on animal experimentation is one of the best ways for it. It is so because some animals possess a very short life span and it is

enough for one to publish a paper. Strickland from *The Shape of Water* is one such character who enthrals evil thoughts in his minds during the abduction of the amphibian man. His overall indifferent nature in the movie is a mirror image for his hunger for fame and the amphibian man was the motive for his dreams. Many animal experimenters in this world today exist with the same mentality of Strickland. These are people who possess monster-like qualities. The amphibian man and Strickland are both monsters as of one in the façade and the other inside him. Thus the demise of Strickland as portrayed by Toro indirectly conveys the message of the brutal fate of such ruthless experimenters and animal experimentation. New ideas and new technologies like epidemiology, clinical observation and autopsy took baby steps into this rational world. These are possible ways of testing a drug-using human tissue, keeping aside the animal models. The 21st century plays a cyclic process of rejuvenating the deadly forms which matter to the existence of this ecosphere. *The Shape of Water* is a reply to the regretting society that faces the outcome of their negligence towards other living beings. As of all this explains “Animal models for human medicines are false” is a very crucial and valid statement (Greek 60).

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