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Bull Terrier – “Gladiator” Dog. Reflections on the Margins of Reading the Short Story *Snap* by Ernest Seton-Thompson

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to interpret the story *Snap. The Story of a Bull Terrier* by the Canadian writer Ernest Seton-Thompson from the perspective of the human-dog relationship within the context of a specific breed. I continue the previously explored topic of the bull terrier as an “other” Other and consider the problem of whether and how Seton-Thompson’s work shapes the young reader’s sensitivity towards this particular canine breed. I am trying to present the story *Snap* within a broader context, examining it against the background of the animal-themed works, predominantly aimed at children and teenagers, of this English-born prose writer. In essence, this article constitutes a contribution to the “second wave” of critical animal geographies, i.e. a certain type of cultural ecology.

Keywords: bull terrier, otherness, courage, Ernest Seton-Thompson, *Snap*.

*If you dream of a dog waiting at your every
beck, and of a blindly devoted slave, don't reach out
for a bull terrier, because he will bite your hands off.*

Tom Gannaway
(quoted after Janowski, 2018: 57)

*Exhibiting bull terriers has a lot in common
with the Roman circus: it's something between
a gladiator parade and a clown show*

Dieter Fleig
(quoted after Janowski, 2018: 123)

INTRODUCTION

It is not without fear that I begin to contemplate the issue outlined in the title. My scientific interests have been centered around animal subjectivity for over twenty years, more specifically, the phenomenon of animal subjectivity in

Polish literature (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2005: 151–167), and subsequently in Russian literature (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013). However, the topic chosen here still feels novel to me, despite my recent exploration of the “double” otherness of non-human entities, exemplified by the bull terrier in the article *The Bull Terrier as an Alien Other: Reflections on Jonathan Carroll’s ‘The Land of Laughs’*³ (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2021: 137–146). The selected work for discussion, *Snap: The Story of a Bull Terrier* (1915) by Ernest Seton-Thompson (1860–1943), a Canadian writer born in England, belongs to the literature of “my” epoch – the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, which is my area of specialization. However, it represents a distinctly different cultural and literary circle than the Russian Silver Age, situated within the realm of American-Canadian literature, where my engagement is less extensive. I am still at the beginning of my research journey devoted to tracing, analyzing, and interpreting representations of bull terriers in world literature. The initial reconnaissance I conducted confirmed my belief that the issue of the presence and simultaneous otherness of the bull terrier in culture and literature is novel and underexplored in *animal studies*. I have initially identified that, besides Seton-Thompson’s story *Snap* and several novels by Jonathan Carroll, such as *The Land of Laughs* (1980), dogs of this breed appear in the works of several other writers and artists: for instance, in Victor Pelevin’s story *Святочный киберпанк, или Рождественская Ночь-117.DIR* [*Xmas Cyberpunk, or Christmas Night-117.DIR*] (1996); Grzegorz Gortat’s youth story *Do pierwszej krwi* [*To First Blood*] (2006)⁴, honored by the jury of the IX Literary Competition of the Polish Society of Book Publishers (PTWK) in 2008; Waldemar Borzestowski’s social novel *Bulterier Samson i ja* [*Samson the Bull Terrier and I*] (2008), and Sławomir Wierchowski’s song *Bull Terrier* from the album *Ćwierć wieku z bluesem* [*A Quarter of a Century with Blues*].

There are certainly many more works where bull terriers appear, but I am still in the process of gathering and selecting literary materials. However, based on the selected texts from American, Polish and Russian literature that I have thus far analyzed, I can confidently assert that interpreting the literary images of these dogs, closely examining their distinctions through the lens of human-animal studies and the study of otherness, should yield intriguing research outcomes. From a human perspective, considering the bull terrier – dogs opposition, the bully stands out as different and alien among its canine counterparts. At the same time, humans perceive it as another “other”, when the

³ This article is a prolegomenon to the studies on the “double” otherness of non-human subjects on the example of the bull terrier. I am trying to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the bull terrier as an another “Other” based on an understanding of this breed, with reference to the novel *The Land of Laughs* by Jonathan Carroll – the bull terrier enthusiast.

⁴ This literary work features a pit bull, not a bull terrier.

talk is about the bull terrier – human opposition. *Per analogiam*, the bull terrier among other dogs can be likened, in some respects, to a human post-face transplant among humans. People’s typical fear of bull terriers is determined primarily by their different appearance⁵, and only then by myths, stereotypes, and prejudices against this particular breed. The otherness of the bully becomes apparent when comparing it with both purebred and mixed-breed dogs, taking into account: firstly, its appearance, (particularly its distinctive feature – the egg-shaped head with a downward sloping muzzle – downface)⁶; secondly, its highly specific and unusual behaviors, often manifesting in two extremes (such as “freezing” – the dog remaining motionless with its head down, almost in a stupor, or engaging in characteristic “spinning,” displaying exuberant joy, and other antics)⁷; and thirdly, the socially ambiguous perception of this breed, influenced by various cultural stereotypes and prejudices⁸. It is this additional layer of “otherness” inherent in the bull terrier that interests me the most. However, it is a topic for a separate interdisciplinary work, integral to the examination of antagonism towards both others and alien.

My concerns regarding approaching the topic of the article formulated in this way also stem from the extensive research that has already been conducted on Seton-Thompson’s work by experts in Canadian-American literature. However, initial exploration into works centered around bull terriers has convinced me that this is a novel area deserving closer attention. Finally, these concerns are compounded by the fact that my expertise does not lie in children’s and

⁵ An interesting sociological and psychological phenomenon, not necessarily resulting from a lack of knowledge about breeds or Polish law, is the reaction to a bull terrier seen walking without a muzzle. Despite not being on the list of dangerous breeds, it often arouses both respect and fear. Conversely, the Moscow watchdog, though potentially just as hazardous, may be perceived as harmless due to its “cute” or “teddy-like” appearance, especially when tied in front of a store. This observation is drawn from years of personal experience and careful observation.

⁶ The bull terrier was developed in 1862. However, during the 19th century, its head resembled that of other dogs. The characteristic head shape we now associate with the breed emerged as a result of breeding efforts in the 1950s. For more information about the history of the breed, refer to Janowski, 2018: 5–17. Compare Photo 1 and 2 with Photos 3, 4, and 5.

⁷ Owners of bull terriers often view this “hanging” behavior of the dog with a certain amount of humor. However, a dog expert and attentive observer knows that it is mostly related to the physiology of the bull terrier. Due to its inflexible body structure, the breed may struggle to meet its basic needs, including hygienic and emotional requirements. The explanation of this phenomenon extends beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, this unique behavior, often referred to as “spinning” or “goofing around,” can be observed in YouTube videos, commonly labeled as “pig hour”.

⁸ They are manifested both in the linguistic layer, such as the famous saying “Jacek Kurski jako bulterier braci Kaczyńskich [Jacek Kurski as the bull terrier of the Kaczyński brothers],” which has entered the language of politics, as noted by Magdalena Mateja (Mateja), or the term “Bądź jak bull terrier” [Be like a bull terrier], which has also entered everyday language and the language of advertising (Photo 6).

youth literature. This article is devoted to the short story *Snap*, which is part of the mainstream of children's and youth literature, yet, it does not intend to be strictly interpreted through the lens of animal studies. Nevertheless, it's worth noting here that literature aimed at young readers has been analyzed within this framework in Poland before (e.g., Mik, Pokora, Skowera, 2016; Rybak, 2023: 66–73). I have the impression that studies on children's and youth literature have long come out of the shadows in Poland, offering valuable insights, particularly within the realms of new posthumanist and ecocritical discourse. The portrayals of animals in Russian literature addressed to children, analyzed from the perspective of animal studies, are still awaiting their researcher, and little has changed in this respect since the publication of the monograph in which I cite the names of such writers as Konstantin Ushinsky, Vitaly Bianki, Yevgeny Permyak, Boris Zhitkov, and Vera Chaplina (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013: 341), who created images of animal protagonists that are worth rescuing from oblivion. The children's and youth prose of these and other Russian writers awaits a revitalization of its animalistic themes and motifs through the latest approaches and methodologies of biohumanities⁹ and posthumanism.

ERNEST SETON-THOMPSON AND THE ANIMALS

Seton-Thompson was an outstanding writer, illustrator¹⁰, and, at the same time, zoologist (specializing in mammalian anatomy), hunter, and co-founder of scouting. He was an undisputed expert and defender of wild nature. His first collection of animal stories, titled *Wild Animals I Have Known*, was published in 1898. In 1921, Kazimierz Świrtun-Rymkiewicz wrote the foreword to the book *Gawędy przyrodnicze [Nature Stories]*, which included Seton-Thompson's work *Łobo, król stepów i puszczy Korrompo. Historia gromady wilków*

⁹ On biohumanities, see: Domańska, 2021: 153–173.

¹⁰ In relation to Seton-Thompson's work, questions are currently being formulated from the perspective of modern knowledge, namely: Can animals think? Do they have feelings? Morality? Surprisingly, these questions, subjects of contemporary social debate, were already under scrutiny at the beginning of the 20th century. In the United States, they were brought to a wide audience by the immensely popular illustrator and writer Seton-Thompson, who, alongside Jack London, championed a new perception of the animal kingdom. French researcher Thierry Laugée has recently produced an innovative work on Seton-Thompson, a writer revered in the United States and admired by Leo Tolstoy and Walt Disney (Laugée, 2022). However, these questions were equally intriguing and the subject of serious inquiry among writers and publicists in Russia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2015: 222–245), and even earlier, in the second half of the 19th century. I delve into this topic in the second chapter of my book, titled „Zwierzę jako osoba/rzecz/gorszy byt w literaturze rosyjskiej drugiej połowy XIX wieku. Fiodor Dostojewski, Lew Tołstoj i inni. [The Animal as a Person/Thing/Inferior Being in Russian Literature of the Second Half of the 19th Century: Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Others]” (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013: 67–143).

[*Lobo, the King of Currumpaw. The Story of a Pack of Wolves*]. The Polish advocate for scouting and forest conservation, Świrtun-Rymkiewicz sought to highlight Seton-Thompson’s special love for Mother Nature, expressing great respect for the Canadian author.

Kipling and Seton don’t depict humans wearing animal skins, as is the case in Krasicki’s fairy tales, instead portraying animals as they are, thus revealing the innermost secrets of nature. [...] they introduce us to a realm of concepts and emotions – the wilderness. Here, the Law is individual freedom – on the one hand, with respect for the rights and instincts inherent in every creature – on the other. Each animal is free to do whatever it likes; the stronger one bites and even consumes the weaker, everyone saves themselves together and helps each other (Świrtun-Rymkiewicz, 1922: 6).

Furthermore, as rightly noted by Świrtun-Rymkiewicz, the aforementioned is “consistent with observation, because, in fact, during natural disasters such as floods, etc. animals forget about mutual antipathies and appetites, and only think about rescue. Then the Law of the Forest applies” (Świrtun-Rymkiewicz, 1922: 6). Therefore, the Darwinian metaphor of the “struggle for existence” was correctly interpreted then, which, according to Jan Wawrzyniak, is often falsely, since literally, understood as the ruthless “struggle of all against all in order to kill” (Wawrzyniak, 2000: 131). It is worth noting, that at the beginning of the 20th century, there was a focus on the issue of interdependence between organisms, in connection with the resurgence of organicism and evolutionism in the social sciences of Herbert Spencer, and revival of Peter Kropotkin’s theory of mutual help as a primary driver of evolution. Kropotkin, followed by many other 19th-century Russian evolutionists, emphasized the cooperation of living organisms for survival (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013: 148)¹¹.

Seton-Thompson’s animal stories have been translated into many languages, including not only Polish, but also Russian. They were published in Russia in 1979, in a highly regarded translation by Nikolai Chukovsky. Subsequently, in 1980, the works were republished (see Seton-Thompson, 1980) with a foreword by Russian writers and experts in children’s literature, Nikolai Sladkov and Vitaly Bianki (Bianki, Sladkov, 1980: 3–6). In their foreword, the authors underscore Seton-Thompson’s status as a pioneer in portraying real animals, noting that he was the first writer in the world to publish works whose characters were flesh-and-blood animals. They emphasized that Seton-Thompson’s nature writings initiated a new realistic direction in literature about animals.

¹¹ For a broader exploration, refer to the chapter „Wokół podmiotowości osobniczej i gatunkowej zwierząt. Moralny status zwierząt na tle rozwoju myśli ekofilozoficznej [Around the Individual and Species Subjectivity of Animals: The Moral Status of Animals in the Context of the Development of Eco-Philosophical Thought]” which encompasses discussions (not only in Russian) (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2013: 23–64).

In Seton-Thompson's nature stories, animals were meant to serve as models of behavior and virtues for young readers, particularly adolescent boys. It's worth noting the following in Świrtun-Rymkiewicz's thoughts from the early 20th century, which focused on the revival of scouting as a social and educational movement within the Scout movement, emphasizing respect for the forest and nature: A Polish co-founder of scouting, deeply captivated by Seton-Thompson's work, believed that the nature writings of authors such as the author of *Silver Fox*, Rudyard Kipling, and Adolf Dygasiński, which depicted the lives of animals, "represented a new and rich branch of literature" (Świrtun-Rymkiewicz, 1922: 8). These works served an emotional, cognitive, and pedagogical purpose. As Świrtun-Rymkiewicz observes, it teaches the boy to love nature, acquaints him with it, and offers him many subjects that speak to his feelings and thoughts. Moreover, in these very nature tales we encounter strong animal characters. These are animals that are brave, energetic, and persistent; animals that trust in their own strength, able to cope under any circumstances without relying on the help of others – a phenomenon not often found in the human world, for in the 'Kingdom of Nature there are no nannies (1922:7).

In the works of the Canadian author, animals are depicted as they are – without masks, free from human allegory or symbolism. Seton-Thompson avoids anthropomorphizing them entirely. Through various stories and biographies featuring rabbits, bears, foxes, wolves, deer, and other forest inhabitants, these animals often serve as examples for young readers, embodying bravery, courage, and consistency. Undoubtedly, the bull terrier from the story *Snap* stands out as a model of such exemplary, not to say moral, virtue under the sign of "boys don't cry" for adolescent boys. Seton-Thompson's clear sympathy and admiration for this breed radiate throughout the narrative.

The described history of the bull terrier, a dog of the breed developed in 1862¹² through a crossbreeding of the bulldog and the terrier (with subsequent infusion of Dalmatian and other bloodlines), presents a surprising contrast to Seton-Thompson's narratives primarily focused on wild animals. The bull terrier, as an "artificially" bred dog, bears little resemblance to its ancestor, the wolf and has nothing to do with wildness. Magdalena Dąbrowska, following Donna Haraway, states that purebred dogs are a perfect of "natureculture" example (Dąbrowska, 2014: 198) because they exist at the junction of nature and culture, they have been shaped by humans during long-term breeding, which produces a purebred dog as a "product". "No other species – as Michał Pręgoski rightly emphasizes – has been so radically formed and changed by humans through artificial selection" (Pręgoski, 2014: 47). A purebred dog becomes a product of both culture and nature. Breeding, which is the subject of exhibitions, is even compared to art, and the purebred dog itself to bio-art

¹² The first attempts to breed bulldogs with white English terriers took place at the beginning of the 19th century (Janowski, 2018: 8–11).

(Dąbrowska, 2012). These are post-humanist considerations. In Seton-Thompson’s time, purebred dogs were not perceived in this way, and the writer was greatly influenced and positively impressed by the bull terrier’s capabilities and physical and mental predispositions, which are exceptional. As I have already mentioned, the dog itself, in the story *Snap*, has little to do with wildness. However, what connects this animal hero with wildness is the life-and-death fight he fought: the dog quickly attacks the wolf, defeats it, but dies. And so, a gladiator dog (a “product” of nature and culture, a living “killing machine” perfected by human intervention) bravely fights a wolf, a representative of wild nature, which, having caused great havoc among the cattle, has offended the local farmers. Snap serves with commitment, devotion, and obedience to his guardian, helping people in eliminating the pack leader and doing a great favour to cattle ranchers. The opposition bull terrier – wild forest inhabitant (“bloodthirsty and treacherous wolf”) is very telling. In solving the human-wolf conflict¹³, which represents the unequal struggle between farmers and the predatory wolf, Snap – the strong, agile, energetic, and above all, brave bull terrier, plays a crucial role.

BULL TERRIER SNAP – “GLADIATOR” DOG

He has no parents. Taken from them when he was just a few weeks old. He forges the land he treads as his legacy, tethered more to a person than to a place, and subdues worlds with the depth of his soul. Deprived of the right to participate in divine power, he gains strength through his honesty. He possesses no riches; his sole wealth lies in humility. He doesn’t believe in magic, thus crafting his inner self to rely upon. Unperturbed by matters of life and death, he is immersed in eternity. His body embodies courage; the flash of light is his eyes, his hearing replaces reason, his limbs are filled with zeal.

He doesn’t adhere to conventional laws but instead forges his own rules for own protection. He doesn’t strategize before a fight; his entire strategy revolves around the freedom to choose between taking a life or sparing it. He harbors no specific intentions but seizes opportunities as they arise. He doesn’t rely on miracles or establish any rules but rather embraces the world as it is. He transforms the void into a tactical advantage, relying on quick thinking rather than innate talent. Distraction is his enemy, intellect is his ally. Kindness and justice serve as his armor. With an unwavering spirit, he positions himself where defeat is impossible and exploits any weakness in his opponent. He never engages in

¹³ We now know that wolves attacking domestic cattle can be dealt with in a humane manner. The “wolf whisperer” Shaun Ellis has written about this, but if not all farmers in Poland adhere to his advice today (see the chapter about Ellis’s experiences in Poland, Ellis, 2001: 213–222), and hunters are eagerly awaiting permission to shoot wolves, it is not surprising that a century ago the “wolf problem” was resolved through incitement hunting. While hunting was once a necessity, today it is often viewed as barbaric, particularly when done for sport (Wężowicz-Ziółkowska, 2018: 53–65).”

actions that might lead to self-doubt and accepts death as the inevitable conclusion of a warrior's journey.

Bull Terrier Code, text from 1889, England
(quoted after Borzestowski, 2008: 7)

The quoted passage, taken from the motto of Borzestowski's novel, vividly depicts the uniqueness of the bull terrier in an exaggerated, poetic, and even mystical manner. It portrays the bull terrier as possessing a "humanized" character and personality, presenting it as a courageous and honorable creature – a warrior dog, a gladiator. Without knowledge of the context or origin of this quote, a reader might easily mistake it for a description of a brave knight or samurai. This excerpt exemplifies the panache and aplomb, as well as admiration with which enthusiasts of this breed often speak, elevating the bull terrier's fight to the death and the life lived by a bull terrier into an advantage. While setting aside the ethical and moral implications of historical practices involving these animals – such as dog fights, bull fights, or rat-baiting, topics which I will not delve into here as they require separate examination – the quoted words stand as a beautiful literary description. Moreover, they echo with the apotheosis of the bull terrier depicted in the story *Snap*, confirming what has long been understood about these dogs: their intelligence, loyalty to their handlers, bravery in the face of the enemy, and innate fighting spirit (Nowicka, Boczula, 2001: 65).

The story unfolds in North Dakota, USA. It recounts the brief tale of a bull terrier named Snap. Despite his short life span of just one year under the care of the protagonist-narrator, an employee of a barbed wire trading company, Snap managed to accomplish an important deed. When a prowling wolf threatens the area and the pack has already killed several cows, Snap courageously eliminates the threat. This act not only helps the cattle farmers resolve "the Wolf question" without resorting to poison or snares but also initiates the practice of keeping of at least one bull terrier on farms as a defender. In the Wild West, bull dogs were indeed vital protectors of settlements and farms, confronting "various wild beasts as opponents" (Jendrasiak, 1996: 12–13). Bull terrier Snap is the main character of the story, a positive and tragic character at the same time. From the very beginning, Snap earns the admiration of his caretaker, and later, the respect of the Penroof brothers – cowboys initially skeptical of the dog's ability to hunt wolves. They didn't believe that such a small dog could defeat an animal larger than itself – the wolf (Gray robber). The quoted Bull Terrier Code closely mirrors Snap's portrayal in Seton-Thompson's story. It is not without reason, that early in the tale, the narrator, upon receiving a tiny white dog as a gift, recalls Jack's telegram describing the puppy as wonderful and unique ("Lest we forget. Am

sending you a remarkable pup. Be polite to him; it’s safer”¹⁴), emphasizing Snap’s otherness/distinctiveness (“He differed from all other Dogs I have ever known”. Seton, 1980: 214), a sentiment later affirmed by Gingersnap’s robust personality and unwavering mental fortitude, portrayed as fearless. The narrator emphasizes the dog’s courage, not to say bravery, many times, for example: “He seemed to be without fear... evidently fear had been left out of his makeup and its place supplied with an extra amount of ginger, which was the reason for his full name” (Seton-Thompson, 1980: 214). It is also worth quoting the following fragment of the story:

The Hounds were swift and strong, but a Gray-wolf seems to terrorize all Dogs. They have not the nerve to face him, and so, each time he gets away, and my thoughts flew back to the fearless little Dog [Snap – J.T.S.] that had shared my bed for the last year. How I wished he was out here, then these lubberly giants of Hounds would find a leader whose nerve would not fail at the moment of trial (Seton-Thompson, 1980: 216).

The aforementioned quote highlights that only the bull terrier is not a coward and has that “something” in him. This breed possesses what can be called as fighting spirit, often referred to by breed experts as “fire,” and a resolute determination. Known for their high pain threshold and reputed to have the strongest jaw grip among all dogs, bull terriers are the subject of legendary tales. Snap’s courage is exemplified by his confrontational stance towards other dogs and even his feistiness towards horses

We were off at dawn the next day-the same procession of fine Horses and superb riders; the big blue Dogs, the yellow Dogs, the spotted Dogs, as before; but there was a new feature, a little white Dog that stayed close by me, and not only any Dogs, but Horses that came too near were apt to get a surprise from his teeth. I think he quarrelled with every man, Horse, and Dog in the country, with the exception of a Bull terrier belonging to the Mendoza hotel man. She was the only one smaller than himself, and they seemed very good friends. (217)

and a brave attitude towards boys throwing stones at dogs. In such a dangerous situation, where other dogs acted cowardly and fled from hooligans, Snap taught them a good lesson. When a boy threw a stone at him, instead of retreating, the bull terrier charged towards the aggressor. If the tormentor persisted, Snap confronted them, earning their respect in the process. The narrator views this trait of the bull terrier as advantageous. In Seton-Thompson’s narrative, Snap is not portrayed as an idealized animal hero but rather as a dog of

¹⁴ This and all subsequent quotations from Seton-Thompson’s *Snap* are sourced from the text of the story available on the website (Thompson). However, for citation purposes, I provide the page numbers in brackets based on the Russian edition of the work, as it was the only paper version accessible to me (Seton, 1980: 212).

flesh and blood. His physical description aligns with the breed standard, and his behavior reflects the actual mental predispositions of bull terriers. This is a dog that – once it attacks an animal – nothing will stop it because it goes all out¹⁵: it is brave, unyielding, and at the same time has “good sides of character” (214–215).

It’s no wonder that the first wolf hunt without Snap’s participation ends in failure, just as his guardian had predicted. The narrator’s deep belief in Snap’s fighting spirit leads him to make him even bet Hilton Penroof, asserting that that the bull terrier will choose “death or glory” (218). The thought about the bet arises during the second wolf hunt in which Snap participates. Disappointed by Snap’s performance, Hilton – proud owner of Dander, the pack leader – expresses doubt about Snap’s potential to assume leadership. In a contemptuous tone, he queries the narrator, “Where’s that there unsurpassable, fearless, scaired-o’-nort TARRIER?” (218). The farmer doesn’t understand that the dog didn’t notice the wolf, and continues to ridicule the bull terrier at every opportunity, likening him to a rattlesnake (“I’ll let you handle your own rattlesnakes”).

As I have already mentioned, the hero foresaw that the hunt would fail without Snap: “I knew we should fail without my Dog, but I did not realize how bad a failure it was to be” (220). It is worth quoting the following fragment of the work:

The voice of Hilton, “Hu, hu,” announced that he had sighted a Wolf. Dander and Riley, his rival, both sprang to the point of observation, with the result that they collided and fell together, sprawling, in the sage. But Snap, gazing hard, had sighted the Wolf, not so very far off, and before I knew it, he leaped from the saddle and bounded zigzag, high, low, in and under the sage, straight for the enemy, leading the whole pack for a few minutes. Not far, of course. The great Greyhounds sighted the moving speck, and the usual procession strung out on the plain. It promised to be a fine hunt, for the Wolf had less than half a mile start and all the Dogs were fully interested (220).

So, the first wolf hunt, conducted without Snap’s participation, ends in failure. Subsequently, during the second hunt, in which Snap took part, the dogs mistakenly attacked the wrong wolf, not the one that the cowboys had been targeting for a long time. By accident, the young wolf perished after sustaining injuries from the bull terrier when the latter seized it by the nose while trying to lunge at its throat. Although this hunt also ended unsuccessfully, Snap

¹⁵ Several years ago in Spain, a bull terrier saved his owner who was attacked by a bull. The dog attacked the bull, distracting the animal from the lying man, and emerged victorious and unharmed. Remarkably, the bull was also not harmed during the incident. You can find journalistic coverage of this event in the film *Bull vs. dog*, retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFwkc2qE35s>. A comment under the video reads: “This is cruel, but you have to admire the English Bull Terrier’s courage”.

demonstrated his capabilities: thanks to him, the wolf was killed without the human intervention. However, a somber undertone colors the narrator’s recount, reflecting his disapproval of thoughtless killing of young animals¹⁶ and his sympathy for the dog that endured this unequal struggle.

Now it was my turn to crow, and I did not lose the chance. Snap had shown them how, and at last the Mendoza pack had killed a Gray-wolf without help from the men.

There were two things to mar the victory somewhat: first, it was a young Wolf, a mere Cub, hence his foolish choice of country; second, Snap was wounded—the Wolf had given him a bad cut in the shoulder (219).

Only the third hunt for “the ever wily and destructive Gray-wolf”, with the participation of the dogs that acknowledged the bull terrier as their leader, proved successful. The wolf was killed. This was attributed to the bull terrier’s dominant personality. Despite being the smallest and slowest among the pack, Snap assumed leadership, confirming the narrator’s reflections on the unique strengths of different breeds. While greyhounds excel in speed, hounds possess exceptional scenting abilities, and Great Danes exhibit tremendous strength, ONLY the bull terriers demonstrate unparalleled courage, bordering on a form of canine leadership known as “self-sacrifice”. The Penroof brothers trained various breeds of dogs to hunt wolves, primarily for practical purposes, but none of them was able to defeat the wolf due to a lack of appropriate jaw power and a strong, decisive grip – qualities possessed by the bull terrier. The strength of bull terrier’s jaws is directly related to their length. According to Adam Janowski, “for a dog to have a strong grip and high strength in the two-arm jaw lever, the arms of this lever must be as long as possible” (Janowski, 2018:30). It is worth adding as a side note, that Snap’s gripping ability is referenced not only by his name (“snap” means, among other things, snatching, grabbing) but also by the manner in which the narrator lifts the dog while mounted on horseback (“Here, Snap, take hold, “I said, and held my quirt to him. He seized it, and by that I lifted him to the front of my saddle and so carried him home. I cared for him as though he had been a baby” – 219). Here is another quote demonstrating the bull terrier’s courage and leadership predispositions:

And as the ten big Dogs were leaping round the silent Wolf at bay, there was a rustling in the sage at the far side of place; then a snow-white rubber ball, it seemed, came bounding, but grew into a little Bull terrier, and Snap, slowest

¹⁶ The narrator cannot be equated with the immanent author of a literary work, let alone with the writer himself, but here the voice of Seton-Thompson, who vehemently opposed the unnecessary and senseless killing of wild animals, is clearly heard. We are aware that the writer organized something like a “forest studies” league in Canada (see Bianki, Sladkov, 1980: 6).

of the pack, and last, came panting hard, so hard he seemed gasping. Over the level open he made, straight to the changing ring around the Cattle-killer whom none dared face. Did he hesitate? Not for an instant; through the ring of the yelping pack, straight for the old despot of range, right for his throat he sprang; and the Gray-wolf struck with his twenty scimitars. But the little one, if fooled at all, sprang again, and then what came I hardly knew. There was a whirling mass of Dogs. I thought I saw the little White One clinched on the Gray-wolf's nose. The pack was all around; we could not help them now. But they did not need us; **they had a leader of dauntless mettle**, and when in a little while the final scene was done, there on the ground lay the Gray-wolf, a giant of his kind, and clinched on his nose was the little white Dog (Seton-Tompson, 1980: 221).

However, the success of the final wolf hunt is only partial: while the farmers celebrate it as a victory, for the narrator, who has lost a faithful friend, it is a tragedy. The pain of parting with the dog is compounded by Snap's death in his arms. The scene of the animal's slow demise, as it stubbornly clings to the already deceased wolf with clenched jaws while simultaneously licking the hand of the man who inadvertently contributed to its demise, is deeply moving.

The Wolf was dead, and I halloosed to Snap, but he did not move. I bent over him. "Snap-Snap, it's all over; you've killed him. "But the Dog was very still, and now I saw two deep wounds in his body. I tried to lift him. "Let go, old fellow; it's all over." He growled feebly, and at last go of the Wolf. The rough cattle-men were kneeling around him now; [...] I lifted him in my arms, called to him and stroked his head. He snarled a little, a farewell as it proved, for he licked my hand as he did so, then never snarled again (222).

The story ends with the poignant words of Penroof, who mourns the dog's passing as an irreparable loss, greater than the loss of a hundred oxen. Penroof deeply valued Snap's hunting skills and courage, to the extent that his sentiments toward the deceased bull terrier serve not only as an expression of gratitude but also as a profound tribute to his selfless sacrifice. It is worth quoting the following passage, which illustrates how the remarkable display of the dying dog's refusal to release its prey's iron grip moves hardened farmers to kneel before the dead Snap, with Penroof himself paying homage to the bull terrier's fortitude, strength, and unwavering determination.

The rough cattle-men were kneeling around him now; old Penroof's voice was trembling as he muttered, "I wouldn't had him hurt for twenty steers." [...]. That was a sad ride home for me. There was the skin of a monstrous Wolf, but no other hint of triumph. We buried the fearless one on a butte back of the Ranch-house. Penroof, as he stood by, was heard to grumble: "By jingo, that was grit-cl'ar grit! Ye can't raise Cattle without grit" (221-222).

The narrator consistently emphasizes the unique attributes of the dog that prove its uniqueness. Snap ignored small dogs, but when confronted by larger, stronger and more worthy opponents, he assumed a combative stance: his tail stiffened like a string, his hind legs poised, looking anywhere but at the opponent, emitting menacing high-pitched sounds. If intimidation failed, the fight was starting. Seton-Thompson’s narrative compares the bull terrier to other dogs in terms of their experiences in establishing hierarchy, often involving skirmishes where dogs bit each other. The bull terrier most often won the fight¹⁷, but if he lost it, the defeat did not deter Snap as it might other dogs; instead, it spurred him to repeat the fight. With Snap, no new bitter experience was accompanied by greater caution. The narrator’s admiration for Snap’s physical attributes offers insight into the praises bestowed by renowned enthusiasts and distinguished bull terrier breeders, such as Eva Weatherill, who deemed the creation of the bull terrier inevitable to fulfill the world’s need for sporting beauty, and Francis J. Heaney, who lauded the deliberate construction of every aspect of the bull terrier for its specific function (Janowski, 2018: 5, 25).

The essence of the story *Snap*, a beautiful and touching tale about the difficult beginnings of a friendship between a grown man and a remarkable dog, finds resonance in the words of Dawid, the central character in Borzestowski’s novel, *Bull Terrier Samson i ja* [*Bull Terrier Samson and me*] Dawid, the owner of a splendid male bull terrier, underscores the breed’s ability to evoke ambivalent impressions in people: it worries some, attracts others, yet it arouses interest in everyone:

When [a bull – J.T-S.] displays its powerful neck and chest, stretches its muscular legs, and holds its tail horizontally, it commands respect and captures attention. It’s impossible to ignore it. Wherever it appears, the bull terrier is always in the center of events, quite naturally assuming that this is the place assigned only to it. It doesn’t need to prove anything in advance, because, like every warrior, it fulfills its destiny through action. How could I not feel proud to have such a wonderful and devoted friend?” (Borzestowski, 2008: 284)

The narrator of *Snap* shares a similar pride in having such a dog, among other reasons, because of the strong emotional bond and true friendship he shares with the bull terrier. The dog is deeply attached and accepts only him. The protagonist, a great lover of the bull terrier, is captivated by its independent character¹⁸ and the energy and power it exudes. Seton-Thompson’s work of the two

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Seton-Thompson does not write about dog fights organized by people, but about conflicts between dogs that lead to bites.

¹⁸ A bull terrier is a rebellious, stubborn and smart dog that needs a calm and restrained owner, especially if he wants to teach the dog something. The bull terrier often tests the patience of its owner and checks whether the prohibitions are still valid. Marek

extreme opinions held by bully owners – that a bull terrier is either a “great family dog” or “a one-master’s dog, forming a pact of male friendship with its owner and showing respect only to them and no one else” – confirms the former (Janowski, 2018: 50)¹⁹. The narrator openly admits that Snap hates the housewife, and this feeling is mutual. The woman’s relationship with the dog is built upon two emotional pillars: fear and contempt. The woman is fearful of the dog, while the dog constantly disregards her. According to all cynological sources known to me, the bull terrier is described as gentle towards children, loyal to its owner, but inherently distrustful of strangers (though this can vary depending on the dog’s upbringing), and “its reserved character makes it loyal only to its master” (Falappi, 2001: 109). Andrzej Jendrasiak points out that the bull terrier is a very emotional animal, a dog with a specific character. “The great – in the past – bravery they showed towards dogs went hand in hand with subordination to humans” (Jendrasiak, 1996: 77). The protagonist-narrator of the story *Snap*, an employee of a company trading in iron products, cherishes the friendship bestowed upon him by this “little despot.” The following words convey the respect and admiration he holds for his dog, highlighting the strength of their unique inter-species friendship and the profound trust bestowed upon a human by an initially aggressive puppy, which proved challenging to train but evolved into a loyal companion, so the hero would not give him up to anyone for anything in the world:

Only myself and the porter at the office seemed to realize his good points, and we only were admitted to the high honor of personal friendship, an honor which I appreciated more as months went on, and by midsummer not Carnegie, Vanderbilt, and Astor together could have raised money enough to buy a quarter of a share in my little Dog Snap (Seton-Tompson, 1980: 215)

CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Snap. The Story of a Bull Terrier* by Seton-Thompson yields several conclusions. Firstly, the story carries a clear didactic and moral-ethical message aimed at young readers, particularly boys. This message is all too eloquent, as evidenced by the words spoken by the old farmer at the very end of the story: “By jingo, that was grit-cl’ar grit! Ye can’t raise Cattle without grit” (221–222), delivering an impactful punchline. These sentiments can be generalized and extended beyond cattle breeding, applying to all human affairs which, devoid of courage, determination, and decisive action, lack purpose and are doomed for failure. The message conveyed to children and young people

Martyka, an experienced breeder of bull terriers from Opalplast FCI, compares raising a bull terrier to raising an autistic child.

¹⁹ Adam Janowski acknowledges that both opinions are correct and justifies his position (Janowski, 2018: 50).

is that even someone small and inconspicuous can possess great spirit and has a chance to defeat an opponent bigger than himself. It encourages you never to surrender, be always consistent, remain resolute in the path once chosen, and to wholeheartedly pursue important and decisive for our lives. You should be like a bull terrier, but in the sense of a consistent life attitude, so the bull terrier is a role model here, but the bull terrier as such is embodied (real). Through the story of Snap, young readers learn about friendship and courage, developing respect and empathy towards dogs of this breed. Secondly, the story of Snap remains timeless, retaining the same tone it did a hundred years ago, with one notable exception: responsible owners of bull terriers refrain from engaging them in fights (illegal dog fights still take place), they are less used for hunting, especially wolves, which are now protected. Instead, they raise the dogs under the principle that while bull terriers may possess physical and mental traits that could make them potentially dangerous, the dogs themselves need not be aware of this. Although times and circumstances have changed, from the perspective of our “here and now”, the story retains a universal dimension.

One could, of course, place the story in a broader context and interpret the attitudes of the wolf and the dog in terms of human attitudes, look for hidden meanings in them and assume that the characters of the wolf and the dog hide human characters. But why? And would it make any sense? Well, no. Seton-Thompson wrote about flesh-and-blood animals, so an anthropocentric analysis would inevitably lead to overinterpretation. In the story, we have two vivid animal oppositions: the wolf – the bull terrier (the former embodying negative traits, the latter positive) and Dander – Snap. The latter reflects the opposition between Hilton and the narrator, in the sense that each of them is on the side of their own dog, but not merely in the sense of the proverb “every wagtail praises its tail”. It’s about competition between people over whose dog will ultimately defeat the wolf: a greyhound or a bull terrier.

In the story, we are not dealing with a cultural representation of the bull terrier, but with an embodied animal, and as such this animal should be the subject of study from the perspective of animal studies. While including the bull terrier in the posthumanist context and the process of “creating animality” might seem anachronistic, it could also problematize the bull terrier itself (see Dąbrowska, 2018: 30), which could be the subject of a separate study. At first glance, it can be assumed that the above considerations are, to some extent, a component of the “second wave” of critical animal geographies, representing a certain type of cultural ecology. This is primarily because Seton’s narrative highlights the significance of animal domestication processes – such as those involving cattle, purebred dogs, and notably the bull terrier – as a newly bred breed for specific utilitarian and entertainment purposes, and their impact on human life and the environment. However, Seton-Thompson’s work could also be interpreted in a way that allows for partial its inclusion in the “third wave”

of animal geographies. In this context, the bull terrier Snap, although he does not yet have full subjective status and dimension, is perceived by the writer as an individual with his own history and experiences, albeit limited to social interaction with the narrator-hero. Consequently, the image of the dog does not deny the existence of a very significant difference between him and humans.

INSTEAD OF THE CONCLUSION

To put it very briefly, somewhat stereotypically, it can be said that Seton-Thompson's *Snap* can be described as a tale of a noble dog and a menacing wolf, and about the friendship between a man and a bull terrier who saved the livestock of farmers in the Wild West. Finally, it carries a didactic message, as previously mentioned, aimed at young readers, that one should never give up, that consistency and persistence in achieving a goal are important in life, and that a smaller opponent can defeat a bigger rival or persecutor thanks to appropriate tactics and cleverness; that what truly matters in life is not merely physical condition and appearance, but rather one's mental fortitude, self-improvement efforts, and belief in one's capabilities. Today, our reading of this story differs from the past, given the changes in time and place. However, its message still remains relevant. While an interpretation of *Snap* could be carried out through the lenses of animal studies and ecocriticism, this is a methodological task for a separate study. One aspect is worth emphasizing here: the Canadian writer challenges the myths, stereotypes, and prejudices surrounding the bull terrier, that have accumulated over two centuries. I believe this somewhat journalistic perspective is particularly needed here, especially amidst the ongoing campaign against dogs of this breed in Poland following the tragic event from several weeks ago²⁰. An important task is to raise awareness about the necessity of thorough research before acquiring/adopting/taking any purebred (or non-purebred) dog. Prospective owners should familiarize themselves with information about the specific breed or dogs in general, to know how to prepare the dog for the appearance of a child at home and learning to recognize the signals dogs communicate (Rugaas, 2005). I will summarize the whole thing in the words of an expert of this breed:

If a bull terrier bites a human, it should always be assumed that the human is to blame. If not the one who came into conflict with the dog, then the one who raised the dog and taught it to react in certain ways [and also the one who does not recognize the signals sent by the animal – J.T-S.]. Let's emphasize it again, the bull terrier was never bred to be aggressive towards humans.

²⁰ See for example, Zofia Brzezińska's interview with behaviorist Natalia Rostek published on January 5, 2024 in "Rzeczpospolita". (Brzezińska, 2024). Retrieved from: <https://kobieta.rp.pl/styl-zycia/art39661391-bulterier-zagryzl-dziecko-behawiorystka-rasanie-jest-najwazniejsza>.

Even two hundred years ago, when they were pitted against each other in arenas, they had to exhibit absolute obedience and gentleness towards people, especially their handlers and companions. Otherwise it would simply not exist (Janowski, 2018: 4).



Fot. 1. Photo 1. Mr Tom Gannaway with ‘Robert the Devil’ (English Bull Terrier).

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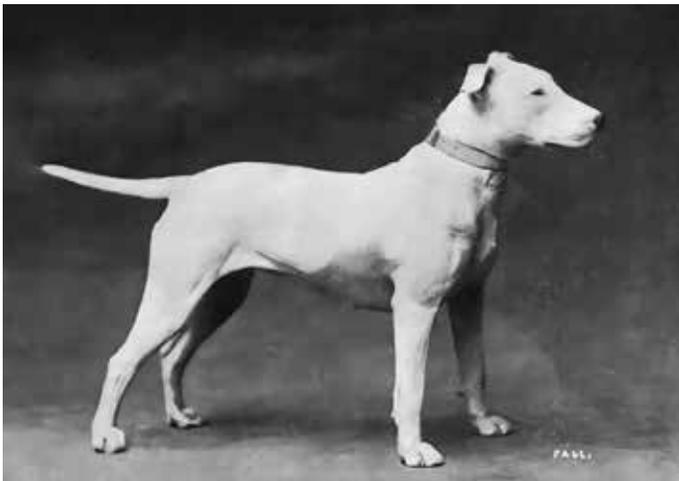


Photo 2. A bull terrier from 1915. Source as above.



Photo 3 and Photo 4. Modern standard bull terrier: from the left, female Saba (Bisurman Breeding) and male Harry (Opalplast FCI Breeding).
Photo by J. Tymieniecka-Suchanek. Photos from the home archive.



Photo 5. Modern miniature bull terrier: Babel (Fitbull FCI breeding).
Photo by Marcin Tarka. Photo from the home archives.



Photo 6. Cotton shopping bag. Photo by J. Tymieniecka-Suchanek.

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