



## **« What are Cows for ? » On Farm Animals in 19<sup>th</sup>-century French Media Fiction**

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## **« What are Cows for ? »**

### **On Farm Animals in 19th-century French Media Fiction**

In 2009, the European subsidiaries of McDonald's, the fast-food restaurant chain, turned green. The background color of the famous M-shaped logo literally turned green, a range of upscale sandwiches made of local products was launched, and commercials featuring hard-working farmers (carrying adorable calves in their strong arms) thrived throughout Europe. That McDonald's restaurant's production chain involves extremely violent and intensive animal husbandry practices with a significant climate impact is a well-known fact. How can it have been possible that a firm commonly associated with systematic mistreatment of nonhuman animals and poor meat quality was able to develop such a successful nature-loving, eco-responsible rhetoric ? The paradox that lays at the core of McDonald's greenwashing strategies in fact reflects an ever-present conflict in Western sensibilities. To satisfy our great appetite for meat, we need to murder living creatures— and the act of killing other animals has never been free of controversy. To overcome this moral struggle, we need to tell ourselves stories that justify and normalize the actions that might move beyond our moral spectrum. Although scientific research has now given clear evidence that meat is not a « natural, necessary, [or] normal<sup>1</sup> » element of the human diet, the cultural discourses that nurture this paradox keep on haunting our social imagination. Children's culture especially abounds with such discourses, starting with the enchanted world of the animal farm, which has generated various youth bestsellers since the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, youth fiction, whether it aims at educational purposes or mere entertainment, always crystallizes and makes visible cultural and societal ambiguities, thus providing an interesting overview of a temporary condition of a given collective unconscious. As urbanization and industrialization deeply unsettled the European demographic landscape, children's literature integrated and reflected changing attitudes towards nature and nonhuman animals, successively thematizing, rationalizing and erasing the violence they endured. 19<sup>th</sup>-century French children's media fiction – i.e. short stories and serialized novels published in the youth press – provides an interesting example of these evolutions. France responded to these shared conditions of modernity and the rise of capitalism, while the national public debate focused on the importance of conserving traditional agricultural and animal husbandry practices. As the meat industry started to gain importance, visions of the country and of farm animals were loaded with new meanings and offered a range of conflicting answers to an ongoing dilemma – what do we need coming generations to learn about the exploitation of nature ?

#### **Eating Animals, a Marker of Humankind**

Nonhuman animals have always played a preponderant role in youth culture. Drawing on young children's affinity to other living beings<sup>2</sup>, authors of children's literature have employed them as illustrative examples and counterexamples of a certain social order, as embodiments of a changing set of social norms in which children were to be integrated<sup>3</sup>. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the figure of the cruel child tormenting innocent birds and dogs has served as « a barometer for endemic cruelty throughout society<sup>4</sup> », setting a clear limit on what kind of violence and domination could count as a good example across generations. On the other hand, in 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois Western urban cultures, taking good care of a pet was perceived as a proper way to learn responsibility towards inferior human and nonhuman beings. Farm animals, however, raised an additional difficulty : since they were intended to be sent to the

slaughterhouse or at least exploited all their lives, how should they be taken care of, and how could this process be fictionalized in conformity to increasingly popular discourses on animal welfare ?

Farm animals used as food for human consumption (mostly cows, sheep, hens, pigs, ducks, geese and rabbits) gained popularity in children's productions during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After a few decades of stories where dogs, cats, birds and exotic animals were mostly featured in children's literature, youth media fiction began to include livestock, as rural novels were becoming increasingly appreciated. Rural fiction, as Rudolf Zellweger writes, first developed in France, Germany and Switzerland between 1836 and 1846, at a time when urbanization and industrialization started to be perceived as a growing threat to the traditional peasantry and to familiar agricultural landscapes. In France, the trend thrived after 1850, as the farmer « began to come closer to a city dweller, without having completely lost those habits and ancient lifestyle, that could make of him a poetic character<sup>5</sup> ». Children's press, mainly written for an urban audience, also reflected this feeling of loss and nostalgia, which translated into idealized representations of the country, where shepherds carefully looked after their goats in the French Alps and happy cows capered about over peaceful meadows and green forests, providing farmers and the local population with huge quantities of milk and fresh meat. This renewed taste for pastoralism, which stemmed from the reactivation of an arcadian imagination of pristine nature during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, resulted in bucolic visions of rural work, where healthy and beautiful animals were pictured alongside tables full of meat-based traditional dishes<sup>6</sup>.

However, the slaughter of animals was not absent from these stories. Their death fell within a natural and social order of things: it exemplified the legitimate domination of Western men over the rest of the natural world, while also inserting them into the evolutionary chain, where they could assume the top position. Depictions of the process of domestication and consumption of farm animals, like education in natural history, were meant to teach children about the place they were to occupy and defend in the world. These cultural practices resolved the tension between the idea of civilization, which postulated the successful domination of human beings over nature, and the concept of evolution, which integrated humans into a larger natural framework<sup>7</sup>. Stories about domesticating farm animals provided children with a clear idea of the limits set between nature and culture, between human and animal, between civilization and wilderness. In 1867, Jean Macé, co-founder of the popular *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation* (P-J. Hetzel, 1864-1906), wrote a natural history of the digestive system for children, where he mentioned the « frightening similarities » existing between human and nonhuman animals, before ensuring his young readers of the intellectual superiority of the human species. « Not all animals are created equals », he explains, since human-like mammals should be considered « better machines » than invertebrates. Livestock, described as the « nourishing father of humankind », receives consideration and compassion (« poor sheep ! »), but is still depicted as « having nothing else to do on earth » than being turned into meat and other by-products useful to human lifestyles<sup>8</sup>. The connection between the living animal, its death and its consumption by the reader was thus made very clear. Each earthly being played a well-defined role in a constellation governed and shaped by humans (understood essentially as male, white Europeans). The permanent framing of farm animals as useful resources legitimized the reality of the violence they endure, as they live and die, and dismissed meat consumption as a non-moral action, although animals were increasingly identified as sensitive and suffering beings. This process of framing nonhuman lives through their economic, political and nutritional value, as Randy Malamud has shown, has lasted and developed to the present day<sup>9</sup>. It is an integral part of a philosophy that constantly reduces the agency and power of animals and invisibilizes their suffering, an ideology that has been

described by Jim Mason as a « mysotheric » cultural heritage, which originates in the ambivalences of the human-animal relationship inherent to domestication<sup>10</sup>.

### Setting the Limits of Morality

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, meat consumption, even though it expressed the wealth, status and power of the consumer, was above all rooted in a strong scientific consensus presuming that animal flesh provided the best possible nutritional intake for humans. This belief supported the insertion of human beings in the evolution chain and brought justification to the morally questionable act of slaughtering. Still, the switch to an animal-centered diet that occurred after 1850 effected a change in human-animal relationships. Starting in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, as Adrian Franklin points out, the increasing uneasiness with animal slaughtering and the sight of dead animal bodies had led to a progressive removal of the institutions in charge of killing animals and processing carcasses out of the city<sup>11</sup>. As farm animals disappeared from the everyday life of urban-dwellers, meat became a centerpiece of bourgeois family meals and slaughterhouses progressively grew in importance and number. The first modern *abattoirs*, which gradually replaced the traditional *tueries* located in city centers, were opened in Paris under the French consulate. Later in the century, the slaughterhouse of La Villette (1867-1914) became the center of the national meat industry<sup>12</sup>. Not only was a larger amount of livestock slaughtered : the very status of farm animals was also revised, since they were not raised for farm work anymore, but with the only purpose of being murdered and eaten. This became even truer as, from the 1870s onwards, meat consumption rose again with the arrival of animal-based products imported from the United States, Argentina and Australia.

These fragmented, gradual upheavals also impacted the representations of farm animals in youth culture. During the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, crude visions of dying or dead animals were regularly featured in children's literature. During the 1830s, in *Le Musée des familles* (1833-1900), one of the first illustrated magazines targeting middle-class households, depictions of livestock slaughtered by butchers, calves left to die or cattle mistreated by farmers were frequent. In 1835, the magazine published the story of a young girl « shouting horribly » as the ducks she had raised were one after the other skewered by the farmer<sup>13</sup>. The popularization of ideal pastoral settings in youth fiction did not completely iron out these mentions of death and violence, but rather, from the 1850s onwards, also included an increasing number of scenes describing farm animals being rescued just in time from the horrors awaiting them at slaughterhouses. These narratives often adopted the point of view of the animal. In 1864, *Le Magasin d'éducation et de récréation* published a short story listing different types of animals wandering through Paris. Some of them are wild, some others, like dogs, have a privileged relationship to humankind. Farm animals, on the other hand, embody the misery of the animal condition. A beautiful white sheep which has just escaped from the slaughterhouse tells the narrator :

I am still shaking, poor sheep that I am, just arriving from Berry and so happy to see Paris ! You should think of these men in red jackets, with long, shiny knives, with their blood-stained arms; those huge dogs that make you tremble ; and those terrible iron hooks where murdered animals are hanged upside down<sup>14</sup>.

A few years later, a short anecdote could be found in the same magazine, telling the story of a butcher who lost his job when he decided to save a cute little lamb he had become attached to<sup>15</sup>. In *La Semaine des enfants*, a fairy tale published in 1858 recounts a heartbreaking passage where a young girl resolves to sell her sheep to the butcher, hoping to gather enough money to take care of her sick mother. The choice of the sheep as a pet, which embodies beauty, gentleness and submission in the biblical imagination, invites a more general moral reflection on the relationship with the other and self-sacrifice. However, the reflection on the life and

death of the individual animal, with which the girl has a strong bond, takes a dramatic turn: the emotional spring of the plot plays on the sense of injustice and horror that surrounds the slaughter of the animal. The sheep looks at her, cries and whines, unable to understand his tragic fate. She finally gets the animal back a second before it gets murdered : « She was struck by a terrifying vision : she saw, in the pallid light of the resin torches, among slain animals, the butcher holding Mimi-Bêlant between his legs, and, with a knife in his hand, looking for the right spot to slit his throat<sup>16</sup> ».

Until the turn of the century, these examples were not prevalent and coincided with other discourses normalizing the violent death of the animal for nutritional purposes. Still, in the latter part of the century, the tragic destiny of farm animals, whether occurring in the diegesis or not, became a matter of some debate in children's literature. In the context of stories with a strong educational value, where the value of things and beings had to be clearly conveyed to the young reader, human and nonhuman characters discussed the necessity, the modalities and the cruelty of the systematic murder of livestock. Already in 1857, in an episode called « The Swine » published in *La Semaine des Enfants* (Hachette, 1857-1876), children expressed their sadness at seeing animals taken away by the butcher to their grandfather, who answered that pigs are not worthy of life because they are neither beautiful nor good-natured. A serialized short novel published in the same magazine in 1864 starts with a scene where a farmer mourns her beloved cow, which she had had for ten years and had to slaughter before winter. « I do not know if I could ever eat this meat », she says to her husband, before asking him :

Do you think that beasts are endowed with intelligence? Animals suffer, so they must be intelligent. Do they consider men to be tyrants ?

Most certainly not, they do not think that far, but they take us for fools. [...] If the bull was aware of his strength...

He would not be a slave, my friend<sup>17</sup>.

Such conversations on the moral and intellectual capacities of animals and the legitimacy of their murder were sometimes coupled with more concrete remarks on the meat-production system itself. Another serialized story of *Le Magasin d'éducation et de récréation* released in 1875 tells the story of a young farmer having to take care of different animals. Although desperate when forced to send his very affectionate geese to their death, the young boy is happy to see his naughty turkeys turned into roasts filled with chestnuts. His pigs are described as smart and sensitive creatures which have been degraded by animal farming :

Animal husbandry, which should not be mistaken with education, has depraved and distorted pigs. [...] It has resulted in completely artificial pigs, especially in England. [...] This kind of pig is a monster of civilization. The repulsion it inspires, when not yet smoked, I can understand. [...] But who put him in that cob ? Do you think he enjoys being there ?<sup>18</sup>

In the course of the century, children's media fiction thus offered a space of discussion for setting the limits of morality. This phenomenon was enhanced with the invention of the child reader as a sensitive, innocent being that should be protected from violence. Within the dominant ideological framework of meat-eating, a growing unease towards the reality of meat production as well as a reflection on what animal welfare truly means emerged under the bucolic depictions of the charming countryside. Young readers had to be educated to numb their compassion for farm animals and to accept their slaughter. This discomfort soon translated into a gradual erasure of the representation of the suffering and death of farm animals.

## Not Just a Cow

The utilitarian perspective which dominated the 19<sup>th</sup> century allowed food habits to shift towards a meat-oriented diet at the same time as concern grew for animal welfare. Rooted in the belief that the mistreatment of animals mirrored a deviant personality, this perspective was best expressed in Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (« the question is not, Can they *reason* ? nor, Can they *talk* ? but, Can they *suffer*?<sup>19</sup> »), and is still widely held today. It assumes that animals, since they are not self-aware and have no interest in living, can be killed and eaten as long as they do not suffer too much. This view has also inspired most of the Western legislation on animal condition<sup>20</sup>. What suffering “too much” really means has been left open to discussion. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, youth fiction contributed to this debate by staging farm animals who take up human argumentation to proclaim that the best life they could ever live was a life dedicated to human needs. This animalization of children's stories (that is to say, anthropomorphized animals becoming the main characters of an animal-centered story), which did not solely involve farm animals, also reflected, as said earlier, a change in the perception of childhood, increasingly understood as a privileged moment of innocence still preserved from the disenchantment of the adult world<sup>21</sup>. In the case of animals for slaughter, animal-focused narratives resulted in the gradual obliteration of their actual living conditions. The brutality of animal husbandry was erased, and animal lives were depicted as imaginary and peaceful collectivities mirroring human's societal hierarchies.

Many stories relate, for instance, conflicts between young animals and their parents, especially when the youngsters fancy leaving the household (that is to say, the farm where the animal family is kept by humans) but soon come to the conclusion that the external world is a hostile, dangerous place that should rather be avoided. This pattern certainly mirrors the internal functioning of human families and demonstrates to the young reader the necessity of respecting parental authority, but it also implies that farm animals can best exist when put under human care and rule. In « Story of a young rabbit », published in 1882 in *Le Magasin d'éducation et de Récréation*, the main character, a cute, little rabbit born and raised in a hutch, escapes his mother's surveillance to wander around the farm and the fields. He is first horrified to discover bloody rabbits' skins hanging on the wall in the farmyard; but his adventure gets even more terrible when he finds himself constantly being attacked by cats, foxes and martens. He decides to come back to his mother, and the farm, although at first associated with death and horror, finally appears to him as a place of peace and tranquility. Being under human protection is not only preferable for the sake of a “safe” existence but is also frequently presented as the best possible moral choice. In « Moumou's first day trip » (*Mon Journal*, 1895), a cow explains to her calf, who dreams of roaming the fields all day long, that he should work to make hay for the winter, as the elder cattle do. « When somebody provides a service to you, it is not always possible to provide it back ; so one should try to help those who need them ; such people are always to be found<sup>22</sup> » These wise words, which also serve as a metaphorical justification of the exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie, seek to prove that the calf should be keen to share his milk with other calves instead of wanting to keep it all for himself. That livestock work and live to provide humans with milk, meat, leather and other products is represented as the legitimate compensation for their being provided with food and accommodation. On top of that, this exchange appears as a mutual agreement, which should fully convince the child reader that the violence endured by animals in farm work, as well as their final slaughter, is nothing but a secondary and unfortunate consequence of a profitable deal.

Besides the apparent willingness of animals to make themselves useful to humans, children were also told that the killing of living creatures, if cruel and regrettable, did not concern the

animals *they* actually loved and cared about. This “not-all-animals” rhetoric drew on the practice of pet-keeping and the attribution of personal names to farm animals. From the 1860s onwards, in the context of a growing distance between the reader and the reality of the natural world and the farm, cows featured in children’s narratives began to be called Bella or Marguerite, and they were pictured “differently” from the rest of the herd, an anonymous aggregate easily associated with inanimate flesh. In « Story of a brown cow and a little ginger dog » (*Le Magasin d’éducation et de récréation*, 1869), a farmer takes extra care of the cow whose milk saved his child’s life. The animal is described as « far superior to her stupid fellow heifers » and « deserving the distinctions she received<sup>23</sup> ». In 1881, in the same magazine, a child is said to spend hours drawing and petting his cow, noticing how « the way she placed her head revealed her individuality<sup>24</sup> » - after which he joyfully comes back to the farm to enjoy the piece of meat that his mum prepared for him. This narrative pattern became a variation on the same theme to justify the fact that, though certain animals must be eaten, those who deserve to live do, in fact, live. Death and violence almost turned out as a legitimate punishment for animals not smart enough to properly bond with human beings<sup>25</sup>.

These new fictional developments did not, however, mean that narratives of violence on animals were on the verge of disappearing from youth media fiction. First of all, the evolution of sensibilities is not a linear process; but beyond that fact, the degree of ferocity and cruelty which is tolerable mostly depends on the genres at hand and the age of the targeted audience. Here, again, boundaries were not strictly defined, since illustrated stories written for young children aged 3-6 could entail images of five-year-old hunters proudly shooting a good dozen ducks. These stories offered a softened version of the traditional adventure story. Indeed, when it comes to domestication and animal husbandry, one genre seemed to resist the general tendency to soften the depiction of the living and dying conditions of farm animals: adventure stories. Stories set in far-away lands, like those Jules Verne published (in serialized form) in *Le Magasin d’éducation et de récréation*, encompassed a large range of scenes picturing slaughter, hunting, dead animal bodies, meat cooking and devouring. Fictions of conquest, survival and the appropriation of land and nature were supposed to give a tangible and entertaining form to the European colonial project, in which animal lives were systematically classified, merchandised and disciplined in a broader attempt to put nature under control<sup>26</sup>. In these stories, the violent killing of animals played a decisive role in the symbolic act of meat consumption, which functioned as a rite of passage towards adulthood, a gate between an incomplete state of nature and the realm of civilization.

### **Welcome to the Enchanted Farm**

In the 1860s, P-J. Hetzel started to publish in *Le Magasin d’éducation et de récréation*, an innovative narrative form combining text and images that was addressed to a younger audience and is now considered the main forerunner of modern children’s books. The series, later reprinted in the *Bibliothèque de Mlle Lili et de son cousin Lucien*, told the quiet adventures of two young children in their households and gardens, as well as the stories of their holidays in the countryside. Illustrated by Lorentz Frœlich, it presented several tales of urban children discovering rural life and playing with farm animals. Once again, the urban child’s distance from the rural space played a crucial role: the images produced by media culture could become confused with the actual experience of animals. In *Mademoiselle Lili out in the country*, young Lili spends a few weeks on a farm, where she learns a lot about animals. « What are cows for ? », she asks her parents, who answer : « To give Mlle Lili the good milk she drinks everyday ». The child then admires what a good mother the hen is (a recurrent motive in children’s literature), and visits the sheep, the lambs and the pigs – which she finds ugly – before going to the river to help the farmer to fish a carp. When the farmer’s wife cooks

the carp, Lili refuses to eat it : « maybe she did not want to eat a fish that she had known<sup>27</sup> ». The fantastic world of the animal farm, that starts to become an autonomous, magical sphere in the landscape of youth culture, still presents some hitches. A similar concern about the death and consumption of animals can be found in *Mr. Jujules' first steps at school and in the fields*<sup>28</sup>, but put in a slightly different way. When Jujules cries because men have come to the farm to take half of the lambs with them, his sister explains that their family would be unable to take care of them at the farm and that they would starve to death if they would stay in the family barn. This reorchestration of the realities of animal exploitation, that pushes the readers into seeing the world more capitalistically than romantically, announced a new manner of describing rural life to young children : instead of presenting them with the moral difficulties of animal slaughtering, the narration now immersed them in an increasingly artificial, enchanted universe that eliminated the very possibility of the final killing and consumption of the animal.

In children's media fiction of the turn of the century, stories developing in rural settings had become more and more targeted towards very young audiences, under the age of 6. Farm animals, lovable, obedient and always available for cuddles and playing, were perceived as perfect companions for and natural peers of babies – a conception still widely present in contemporary children's culture<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, rurality, in opposition to the urban lifestyle, was still associated with a kind of natural moral purity from which young children were encouraged to learn. On the other hand, these fictions also adapted the marvelous bestiary of fable and tale to realistic narratives more in keeping with the fictional and moral norms of the positivist bourgeoisie of the time. Stacy Hoult-Haros stressed that the development of the imaginary farm in children's literature parallels that of the zoo, with both structures presenting humans with imaginary worlds where nature had been tamed, pacified and embellished, thanks to their benevolent care : « [...] children's texts attest to a collective need on the part of humans to believe that the mistreatment of animals for human sustenance, convenience and amusement is a thing of the past<sup>30</sup> ». At a time when the quantity of living livestock had never been so high, with French slaughterhouses slowly being modernized and rationalized to adopt Taylorist production principles first developed in the United States, fictions of the farm and the countryside provided adults and children with a form of enchantment that could exonerate their food consumption habits while fitting the idea of a controlled nature made fruitful and harmonious by the hand of man. With farm animals now having disappeared from the everyday life of an important part of the population, such stories offered a necessary, yet unrealistic perspective on the questions of nature, origin, and national identity.

Interestingly enough, already in the 1880s, as children's literature was slowly becoming more of an entertainment than a moral lesson, the farm started to be transposed into imaginary worlds of toys and miniatures to enter the enchanted world of mass consumption. In *Le Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, a story of an animated woody figurine published in 1880 ends up with the main character discovering an abandoned toy farm and reorganizing it to make it look like a perfect small world : « Such glowing horses, shining cows, fat turkeys, blooming chickens, such round bellies going the pathway had never been seen before [...]. Emerald trees, sheep with a silver fleece... They decided to stay there forever, to not upset the animals<sup>31</sup> ». This modern fantasy of the miniature farm, where everything is ordered and artificially harmonious, like an aquarium or a zoo, gains popularity at the end of the century. In 1900, the Parisian World Fair presented the *Village Suisse*, a human-scaled miniature recreating an ideal landscape with real cows and goats in the middle of the city. Meanwhile, imagery of bucolic Switzerland and Holland was nurturing the pages of children's magazines, completing a process of exoticizing the atavistic rural world initiated seven decades before<sup>32</sup>. In a serialized story published in 1898 in *Le Petit Français Illustré*, a young Parisian girl traveling to Fribourg spends a dreamy holiday in what she describes as a « veritable toy house », and convince her



parents to buy her a cow to send to the countryside in the suburbs of Paris. Strolling through a fair that looks like a department store, she is amazed to see the variety of different cows available to buy, and finally chooses one which is immediately sent to France and never mentioned again in the rest of the story. The turn of the century marks, in this way, the entrance of the rural world into a consumerist, ironic imagination in which nature can be experienced as a fantastic place and a medium of entertainment. The farm becomes a « fantasy realm » as Michael Saler defined it: a fictional world displaying its own artificiality, where illusion can be embraced in order to experience an alternative reality<sup>33</sup>.

The marchandisation and progressive derealization of the rural imaginary also resulted in a range of toys, games and coloring books featuring farm animals completely detached from their original rural contexts, while in early forms of albums, like Benjamin Rabier's productions, children were presented with funny stories of life at the farm. Moreover, children were confronted with the reality of meat consumption – or at least with the necessity of having to slaughter an animal to eat it – in more educational content, with boards displaying different types of animals or learning activities thematizing the transformation of animal flesh into a meal. At school, children were taught about the provenance of their food, but also worked with materials featuring an idealized vision of the country and of its human and nonhuman inhabitants. The veritable life and death of farm animals had been evacuated from youth culture, which would, in the coming century, almost exclusively tell children stories about friendly human-animal companionship and beautiful agricultural landscapes. Meanwhile, real farm animals were being kept in constantly worsening conditions and slaughtered in the most horrific ways, away from the eyes of their future consumers.

## Conclusion

The idea that children should not be confronted with the dying and living conditions of the animals they eat emerged from a gradual change in the perceptions of childhood, animals and nature, partly as a consequence of a deep transformation of the European demographic trend and of industrial and agricultural practices. Youth culture reflected the adults' growing need of shielding themselves from the concrete effects of their new dietary standards. The entrance of the animal farm in modern consumerist imaginations marked the beginning of a complete obliteration of the violent realities of animal husbandry, progressively replaced by homogeneous fictions about happy livestock wandering in enchanting rural landscapes, being taken care of by loving and dedicated humans. These fantasy realms still constitute an important part of our contemporary perception of rural areas. They are not only displayed in children's literature, but also in adult popular culture, in marketing, on social media. The constant superposition of conflicting discourses on animal husbandry and welfare, in which youth culture plays a central role, allows us to spare ourselves the necessity of rethinking our eating habits from a moral perspective. It allows us to almost believe that we support local farmers and sustainable practices, while still biting into a chopped steak at McDonald's. Perhaps more importantly, it allows us to permanently downplay the intensity of the violence farm animals and non-human participants in larger ecosystems suffer as a consequence of human diets.

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2 Children have been proved to heightened transpecies empathy. The predisposition to attune to animals and other living things would be part of the human evolutionary heritage, product of our coevolution as omnivores with the animals and plants on which our survival depends. See : Melson Gail, *Why the wild things are : animals in the lives of children*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 18.

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  - 15 Eugène Muller, « Le Boucher de Morges », *Le Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, 1872-1873, p. 103.
  - 16 Léon de Laujon, « Follette », *La Semaine des Enfants*, n°60, 20/02/1858, p. 66-70, p. 68.
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  - 25 This directly reproduces the capitalist rhetoric postulating that only the hard-working lower class deserves social recognition and rewards. See on that topic : Stacy Hoult-Saros, *The Mythology of the animal farm in children's literature : over the fence*, New York, London, Boulder, 2016, p. 8.
  - 26 Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Animals, museum culture and children's literature in nineteenth-century Britain : curious beasts*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p.8.
  - 27 J.-P. Stahl, « Mademoiselle Lili à la Campagne », Paris, Hetzel, Bibliothèque du *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, 1865.
  - 28 J.-P. Stahl, « Les premiers pas de M. Jujules aux champs et à l'école », Paris, Hetzel, Bibliothèque du *Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, 1865.
  - 29 Matthew Cole & Kate Stewart, *Our children and other animals : the cultural construction of human-animal relations in childhood*, Vermont, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014.
  - 30 Stacy Hoult-Haros, *The Mythology of the Animal Farm in Children's Literature : over the Fence*, op.cit., p.4.
  - 31 Camille Lemonnier, « L'Idylle d'un petit commissaire », *Le Magasin d'éducation et de récréation*, 1881, p. 331-343, p. 342.
  - 32 Paul Vernois, *Le Roman rustique de George Sand à Ramuz : ses tendances et son évolution (1860-1925)*, Paris, Nizet, 1962, p. 19.
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