

Małgorzata GÓRECKA-SMOLIŃSKA, Grzegorz A. KLEPARSKI

ON THE SYMBOLISM OF MAMMALS IN THE CULTURES OF THE WORLD – AN OUTLINE

Given the close proximity in which human beings and animals live, it is only natural that human languages abound in a rich variety of animal symbolism. However, before embarking on any analysis of such language, it is necessary to attempt a definition of the notion of symbol. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth: *OED*) – the term *symbol* which derives from the Greek word *symbolon* etymologically started to be used in the sense ‘a material object representing something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality or condition’ from the end of the 16th century. However, it also needs to be mentioned at the very outset that defining the term in question has always been somewhat problematic, since the term *symbol* has been linked to the idea of mystery and duality throughout the ages. Kopaliński (2006:5) – one of the most esteemed authorities on symbolism in the Polish academic world – refers to the development of the terminology used to explain the complexity of the term *symbol* in the following way:

Już w swym pierwotnym greckim znaczeniu symbolon zawierał tak charakterystyczną dla siebie do dziś dwoistość, zasadę dzielenia i łączenia, rozstawiania się i spotykania, zapominania i ponownego rozpoznawania. Te cechy znacznie się jeszcze wzbogaciły: wszystko, co symboliczne ma skłonność do wielowarstwowości, do stałości i zmienności, do wyrażania dobra i zła, życia i śmierci, rozkwitu i więdnienia, wznoszenia się i opadania, jest zarazem ezoteryczne i egzoteryczne, zasłania i odsłania. Właściwością symbolu jest niedookreśloność, mglistość; jest często płynny, migotliwy, pełen sprzeczności, nieraz dostępny tylko wtajemniczonym.¹

¹ Own translation: *Beginning with its original Greek meaning symbolon expressed – up to the present day – both the characteristic duality and the rule of separateness and combining, parting and meeting, forgetting and recognising. These characteristic features have recently been enriched: everything that is symbolic has a tendency to be of multidimensional character, constancy and changeability, express good and evil, life and death, the full bloom and wither,*

On the whole, although it is difficult to interpret univocally the phenomenon of *symbolism*, it is fairly obvious that its various representations and manifestations – those connected with the animal kingdom as well – have been omnipresent throughout the development of humanity. Thus, according to Wilson (1984:1, 74, 84) *Human beings live – literally live, if life is equated with the mind – by symbols, particularly words, because the brain is constructed to process information almost exclusively in their terms. Moreover, humankind is the poetic species, and the symbols of art, music and language freight power well beyond their outward and literal meanings. Hence, it is because life of any kind is infinitely more interesting than almost any conceivable variety of inanimate matter that people inevitably turn to the animal kingdom for symbolic expression.*²

Note that one can hardly disagree with the idea that – however tenuous – the mutual correspondence between the human world and the world of animals results not only in direct interactions between people and animals, but also in the process of employing animals to symbolise various walks of (human) life. The following generalisation may be drawn in saying that in the modern industrialised and globalised society it is frequently the general belief that determines the character of various interactions with a given species rather than the personal experience. Following Lawrence (1997:2):³

Interpretation of an animal's behaviour in metaphoric terms can result in the creature being classified in various ways, such as "good" or "evil", with effects upon its preservation or eventual extinction. The symbolizing process can enhance positive affiliation, resulting in the animal's survival, or it can cause alienation of that animal from the human sphere, with consequent persecution and/or destruction.

Furthermore, in the Preface to his *Dictionary of Symbolism* the author claims that one should necessarily consider two opposing yet somewhat complementary views when discussing symbolism by stating that:

When we talk about symbols and symbolism, we usually reveal one of the two very different attitudes towards them. To some the subject is utterly antiquated, the sort of thing to which no sensible person should give a second thought in this day and age. Others go to the opposite extreme: they believe that symbolism is the key to understanding the intellectual world. Symbols they claim enable people to bring the incomprehensible into the realm of the tangible, where they can deal with.

raising and falling; it is not only esoteric and exoteric but also covers and reveals. One of the properties of symbol is the indefinite character, haziness; frequently it is fluent, shifting and full of contradictions, many times accessible to the initiated only. The underlines have been added for emphatic purposes.

² Quoted from Lawrence (1997:2).

³ For a discussion on animal symbolism see Lawrence (1997).

In addition to this, it must be considered that certain symbolic features ascribed to a given species frequently vary both according to, and within, the cultural context. The general mechanism at work here is that when employing animal terms in figurative language we tend to recognise certain characteristic features of an animal (and thus foreground them), and – at the same time – exclude or place others in the background. Functionally speaking, through metaphoric expressions and symbols we have the chance and the tools not only to display a wide spectrum of human qualities that animals evince or vice versa, but also this process leads to the perseverance of the separateness that is visible between people and animals. Lawrence (1997:4) accounts for the importance and widespread occurrence of animal symbolism in the following manner:

The frequency with which animal symbolism is found throughout the world and has occurred over the centuries is testament to the profound significance of this phenomenon. It is intricately interwoven into the human condition because we are evolutionarily and physically, as well as aesthetically, spiritually, psychologically, and emotionally tied to our animal kin. Even though the old ways of perceiving the universe have become obliterated in their literal manifestations by the destruction of gods and spirits and the impact of science and technology, the concepts of animism and totemism still fill the world with animals to which we are mentally and spiritually linked.

The aim assigned to this paper is to propose a tentative outline of the symbolism associated with various species of the category **MAMMALS** and their names. However, we should not be misled by the idea that this particular class is the only representative group displaying certain symbolic associations since, from the outset, one gets the impression that all types of animals in various cultures and at various historical periods of cultural evolution have (or may have) acquired some kind of symbolic function.⁴ For our purposes, we shall focus on the category **MAMMALS**⁵ – the one that is obviously the closest to humans – in order to point to selected symbolic associations of the various representatives of the family. In particular, the discussion will focus on the symbolic values of representatives of the class **NON-DOMESTICATED MAMMALS** followed by an analysis of a group of representatives of **DOMESTICATED MAMMALS**.

First and foremost, let us concentrate on *bat* as these animals seem to be the both most numerous and symbolically most representative group among the

⁴ For the discussion on the symbolism of ‘primitive beings’, namely **MOLLUSCS**, **BIVALVES**, **CRUSTACEANS**, **AMPHIBIANS** and **REPTILES** see Górecka-Smolińska and Kleparski (2008).

⁵ For a discussion on **INSECTS** see Biedermann (1996:14, 34–36, 51–52, 68–69, 138, 211–212, 300, 301, 316–317). For more information on **FISH** see Biedermann (1996:131–132) and Kopaliński (2006:365–367). As far as the category **BIRDS** is concerned, refer to Biedermann (1996) and Kopaliński (2006).

category **MAMMALS**. According to Kopaliński (2006), among the 4000 living species of **MAMMALS** about 900 are bats. Moreover, as the *Dictionary of Symbolism* (henceforth: *DOS*) suggests the animal's dual nature, that is of a winged, somewhat birdlike mammal, has attracted attention in many cultures leading to the emergence of numerous well-defined symbols. To start with, in ancient Babylon bats were perceived as the embodiment of demons and spectres of the dead. Similarly, ancient Greeks and Romans referred to the animals as demons, able to get in touch with the kingdom of Hades. The same – according to *Słownik Symboli* (henceforth: *SS*) – could be said for medieval Europe where the bat was the token of magic, death and misfortune, as well as the night bird of the Satan.

However, as both the *DOS* and the *SS* mention, the animal did not fall into the sphere of negative symbology in all world cultures, hence, for example, in ancient China the bat was, and still remains the symbol of good fortune, it is most probably – according to Biedermann (1996:30) – the Chinese *fu* being the homonym of the words *bat* and *luck*. The positive symbolic tradition seems to hold true not only for China, but for Japan as well for in both of the cultures the bat brings the blessing of the heavens, longevity and happiness, and stands for immortality. The *DOS* discusses the symbolism of the *five bats* meaning five forms of earthly happiness: a long life, wealth, health, love of virtue and a natural death. Moreover, in African myths the bat, which never collided with anything in flight, was the symbol of intelligence.

On the whole in modern European culture the symbology of the bat seems to be neither negative nor neutral. Among other representations, the bat being visible only at dusk or dawn according to Kopaliński (2006) symbolises the avoidance of day light and consequently black magic, envy and melancholy. In modern English, according to the *DOS*, the creature appears in derogatory idiomatic expressions referring to the mentally ill, for example, *to have bats in one's belfry* and *to be batty*.⁶ Moreover, the English idiom *an old bat* symbolises an elderly woman for the fact that the bat is perceived as the symbol of a person's age, namely an eighty-year-old woman.

⁶ Consider the following *OED* quotations:

1901 They all thought a crazy man with bats in his belfry had got loose.

1907 He was especially charmed with the phrase 'bats in the belfry', and would indubitably substitute it for 'possessed of a devil', the Scriptural diagnosis of insanity.

1919 'Are you bats?' she said.

1927 'On this sort of expedition!' Phyllis Harmer exclaimed, looking at Strickland as if he was a natural. 'Dear man, you've got bats in the belfry.'

Have you taken the 'bats' or what?

1928 The sahib had bats in his belfry, and must be humoured.

1948 The Secret Life of Walter Mitty ... was written by James Thurber, whose bats viewpoint on life can be summed up by a story about him.

The Finnish folk believe – as Kopaliński (2006) reports – that the human soul during the sleep of a man becomes a bat and in the morning returns to the body, that is why bats are not visible during the day. On the other hand, in Czech folk the right eye of the bat makes the person invisible. Finally, in heraldry it symbolises cold blood in the face of danger and craftiness, whereas, in alchemy the bat is related to the dragon and hermaphrodite since it combines the features of a bird and a mammal.

The *elephant* is another important representative of the animal kingdom for the symbolic tradition. Although the elephant is the biggest land mammal, it is not at all aggressive, it can be tamed easily and along with the lion it was thought of as the king of animals. According to the *DOS*, the elephant has the greatest number of positive symbolic associations among all mammals. Firstly, as Kopaliński (2006) mentions, in Hinduism the whole world is supported by the elephant. Moreover, it is tamed to carry gods and kings, and the animal is valued for its intelligence. According to Biedermann (1996), the animal's intelligence made it a symbol of strength in ancient China, whilst in ancient Occident it was an attribute of the god Mercury. At present people refer to the elephant as the token of the rising sun; moreover, it is the emblem of longevity.

As far as the Christian tradition is concerned, Kopaliński (2006) mentions that the elephant is the symbol of the irredeemable sinner because of its thick skin. It was only during the Middle Ages that the animal was perceived as especially virtuous since – according to Aristotle – the elephant was supposed to observe sexual abstinence during the two-year-pregnancy of the female. Furthermore, Kopaliński (2006) and Biedermann (1996) mention that elephant's power of sex drive and – at the same time – frigidity were observed as early as Christian antiquity and medieval bestiaries. It was believed that a couple of elephants travelled towards the East in order to eat the mandrake root and only after that the elephants would procreate in a manner similar to that of Adam and Eve, who knew nothing of sexuality in Eden until they ate the apple – the fruit of the mandrake – then they came to know each other.

On the other hand, the elephant is also the symbol of purity because of the whiteness of its tusks. Along with the deer⁷ and the lion, the elephant was used to test a girl's virginity. To be more precise, if the animal did not attack the girl this meant she was a virgin. The elephant is also the emblem of prudence and tact since it does not attack smaller and weaker animals. However, it also stands for pride as it was believed that the elephant could not bend its knees and that is why it slept standing leaning on the tree. As noted somewhat jocularly by Kopaliński (2006), the elephant and the woman are said to be the most memorable animals in the animal kingdom, never forgetting the harm done. The

⁷ For a discussion on the symbolism of the *deer* see Biedermann (1996:92–93) and Kopaliński (2006:122–124).

term *elephant* is also used to describe an obvious, visible matter which cannot be easily ignored, whereas, in the expression *słoń w składzie porcelany* that may be rendered in English as *an elephant in the china shop* or metaphorically *a bull in a china shop*, the animal's name refers to an awkward and clumsy person.⁸ Moreover, the elephant's trunk is associated with rain and lightning as well as with the *phallus*.

It seems fairly obvious that no single analysis of the animal symbolism may be carried out without reference being made to the conventional king of the category **MAMMALS**; the *lion*. As Biedermann (1996) points out, the lion on earth, like the eagle in the sky, is an animal standing for dominion.⁹ According to Kopaliński (2006), the lion is the symbol of powerful strength, the king of all animals followed by the boar¹⁰ and the dragon. The lion is also the emblem of fertility, the earth and the underworld. In ancient Egypt the annual flood of the Nile was coincident with the process of the Sun entering the sign *Leo*. Hence we are presented with the positive symbology of the lion decorating the pools or fountains as the token of fertile rain, the protector of

⁸ Note also – according to the *OED* – the American slang expression *to see the elephant* used figuratively to refer to see life, the world, or the sights; to get experience of life, to gain knowledge by experience. The phrase is rendered in the following quotations.

1835 That's sufficient, as Tom Haynes said when he saw the elephant.

1844 There is a cant expression, 'I've seen the elephant' in very common use in Texas.

1847 I axed him if he'd ever seen the elephant.

1849 [I] went up town and saw the Elephant, and it almost baffles description.

If you think we have not shown you enough of the elephant please to mount him and take a view for yourself.

1857 The 'Fox and Crow' is one of the famous sights in New York. It is never missed by the countryman or the foreigner, who is searching after the 'elephant.'

1878 My friend Will Wylie, who had seen the elephant in its entirety, from trunk to tail.

1906 He makes his rounds every evening, while you and I see the elephant once a week.

1960 Saturdays some of the boys from the three big outfits come in to see the elephant.

⁹ The proverbs *a lion in the way*, *the lion's mouth* or *in the lion's paws* refer to the strength and ferocity of the animal. Note the *OED* quotations:

1641 They fear'd not the bug-bear danger nor the Lyon in the way that the sluggish and timorous Politician thinks he sees.

1868 You have always ... lions in the path.

1869 I have been the sluggard, and I ride apace, for now there is a lion in the way.

1225 Leose me lauerd ut of þe liunes muð.

1601 What doth hee else, but (as it were) put his finger into the Lions mouth.

1629 But Merham, the old fox, seeing himselfe in the lions pawes, sprung his loufe.

1726 He wou'd not lay down his Arms, saying it was better to die, than to run into the Lion's Mouth.

1856 In the power of saying rude truth, sometimes in the lion's mouth, no men surpass them.

¹⁰ For a discussion on the symbolism of the *boar*, see Biedermann (1996:45) and Kopaliński (2006:81–83).

water against being poisoned or stolen by enemies. The *DOS* also mentions that in East Asia lions that appear in artistic works have very little in common with the animal itself. Pairs of lions appear as doorkeepers guarding the entrances to sacred confines – of the two – the lion on the right is the male and holds a ball or pearl under one paw, whilst the lion on the left is the female holding a cub. In addition, men riding on lions were the symbol of divine power. As far as Japan is concerned, the situation is even more surprising as the lion is called *karashishi* or *dog of Buddha* (Biedermann 1996:210), having little resemblance to its natural appearance. In China, similarly, lions guard the entrances to temples and shrines.

Significantly, in the Judeo-Christian tradition the figure of the lion has opposing associations. Being frequently mentioned in the Bible, the animal is seen as the symbol that awakens admiration and fear, as Biedermann (1996:209) claims *it represents the strength of the tribe of Judah, but also the ravenous opponent against which only God can offer protection*. Kopaliński (2006) refers to the Bible showing God as the roaring lion over its prey, not threatened by the loud noises of the approaching shepherds. Both the *DOS* and the *SS* mention that in the Middle Ages the lion was the symbol of Christ's resurrection according to the general belief that lions are born dead and after three days *the male lion awakens the cub by blowing the breath of life into its nostrils* (Biedermann 1996:210) or by roaring loudly. We seem to be dealing here with an interesting duality because, along with other animals, the lion frequently stands for both Christ and the Satan at the same time.

Yet – at the same time – the *lion* is also the symbol of purity, in much the same way as the elephant, it was used in the trial of virginity. In European heraldry the lion gained popularity during the Middle Ages when it came to symbolise strength and military valour. The lion is perceived as the symbol of the sun because of its strength, the heat, the ability to see everything as it was believed that the lion sleeps with the eyes open or as Biedermann (1996) mentions like the eagle, the lion was supposed to be able to gaze directly at the sun without blinking. The hair of its mane is the symbol of the sun's rays. The expression *lwi pazur*, in English literally *lion's claw* is the talent visible even in the tinniest details of the work of art.¹¹

The panther is another big cat whose savagery and cunningness led to the rise of numerous symbolic associations. First and foremost, the panther is referred to as omniscient because of the spots on its fur resembling big eyes. The animal is the symbol of immutability of the features obtained from nature – the panther cannot change its spots. In ancient Egypt the panther was the embodiment of evil and the priests wore its skin during funerals in order to

¹¹ Consider the following *SS* quotation: *Lwa z pazura poznać* that in English may be translated *You get to know the lion by its claw*.

perform an exorcism against the evil powers surrounding the temple. In Mesopotamia the panther stood for the spring storm, and was the attribute of the god Ninurta – the god of thunderclap and heavy rain. In ancient Greece the panther was the attribute of Dionysus – the god of wine and thus symbolised drunkenness, rapacious savagery, strength and fertility.

According to the *DOS* and the *SS*, in early Christianity the panther symbolised resurrection since the bestiaries state that the panther sleeps for three days in the cave after each meal and only then does it come out and sends forth wonderful fragrance. Consequently, on the one hand the animal was the emblem of sensual pleasure because of the scent, and – on the other hand – the symbol of death and resurrection of Christ, the awakening after three days in a grave. In medieval Christianity it was perceived as an animal friendly to all the other species, except for the dragon, attracting the animals with its scent – its flavoured breath symbolised life, the Holy Ghost, and healing – as well as the Christ of all animals. However, the symbology took a different direction when it became clear that the animal is predatory and it became the symbol of evil, hypocrisy, and flattery. Moreover, the panther, with its hidden head between its forepaws, symbolises deception. Owing to the fact that the panther belonged to the pantheon of such noble animals as the lion, the horse, the boar, and the deer it is also a metaphor of the aristocracy.

The tiger, along with the lion and the lynx,¹² appears as an attribute of the wine god Dionysus, hence, symbolising drunkenness and frenzy. In ancient symbolism the tiger appears naturally only in Asian traditions, where its power inspired both fear and wonder. In Chinese tradition the white tiger, or albino, is the symbol of longevity, dignity, pugnacity, autumn, the earth; he is the king of animals. Moreover, Biedermann (1996) points to the fact that the tiger – because of its vitality and energy – is associated with *yin*.¹³ Furthermore, Chinese culture treats the tiger's claw as the amulet giving courage and overcoming fear. In Buddhist tradition the tiger stands for hospitality and piety. In Japan the tiger is one of the four good spirits. Similarly, in India the animal is the talisman against ghosts, enemies and wild animals.

As far as the Eastern culture is concerned, the animal is associated with immortality, the creative fire and light due to the wonderful colouring of its fur. The tiger's claws and whiskers are eastern love amulets. The tiger and the dragon symbolise the earth and heaven respectively. Moreover, the tiger's tooth is perceived as an amulet of luck especially in gambling.

¹² For a discussion on the symbolism of the lynx see Biedermann (1996:213).

¹³ According to Biedermann's *DOS* (1996:393), *yin* and *yang* are ancient Chinese representations of cosmic duality. *Yin* symbolises femininity, the north, cold, shadow, earth, the passive, and dampness; *yang*, masculinity, the south, warmth, light, the heavens, the active, dryness – and the emperor.

In turn, in Christian tradition the tiger is an attribute of Christ. The animal has many contrasting symbolic associations, on the one hand, it stands for deceit, cunningness, cruelty, brutality, revenge and envy, and – on the other hand – it is the emblem of beauty, elegance, good looks, fire and glamour. Likewise, the tiger is also associated with the negative attributive elements of savage bravery and rage;¹⁴ furthermore, it is seen as the dark and dangerous side of the human psyche expressed in fear, hatred, revenge and envy. The tiger in a cage symbolises violent but mastered desire. In dreams the animal, along with the panther, means ill omen.

As stated by Biedermann (1996) and confirmed by other sources, the dog is the first domesticated animal, which became a symbol of faithfulness very early in the development of human symbology. It was this feature that the man started to rely on in his relationship with the dog. Moreover, the dog symbolises the ability to settle down, leaving aside a nomadic way of life for the sake of the development of civilisation.

According to Kopaliński (2006), contemporary proverbs and fixed sayings seem to point unambiguously to the fact that people's attitude towards the dog is rather ambiguous, which – in turn – accounts for a wide range of symbolic associations of the animal being either the positive emblem of faithfulness, friendship, courage, protection, watchfulness, guardianship, attentiveness, faith, agility, fertility, intelligence, or the negative token of cunningness, curiosity, flattery, egoism, cynicism, envy, wickedness, greed, impurity, plunder, cruelty, rabies, war, devil, paganism.

In the history of mankind dogs were frequently the companions of gods, and – what is more – they were associated with the divinities of death and the underworld. Being guardians at the portals of the afterlife, or a sacrifice to the

¹⁴ Consider the following *OED* quotations where the term *tiger* is applied to people of great activity, strength and courage:

1500–1520 The auld kene tegir, with his teith on char, Quhilk in a wait hes lyne for ws so lang.

1581 Thou hes Blasphemit our prophet, Preist, and heid; O filthie tegre Babylonical!

1585 To save her [Queen Elizabeth] from the jaws of the cruel Tigers that then sought to suck her blood.

1649 Antiochus Epiphanes that cruellest Tyger and Persecutor of the Church.

1806 The blood-thirsty tygers of the French revolution.

1893 I who have lived in the Fens and among the tigers all my days.

1963 The term 'fen tiger'... Andrew explained it was the name given to a type of fen man, now almost extinct but not quite, for here and there a descendant of the type of man who had lived deep in the trackless, treacherous fenland, and who fought against the land being drained with cunning, craftiness, and even murder, was still to be found.

1971 A scattered crowd of rough 'Fen Tigers' in corduroy trousers.

1981 I was ... not accorded the welcome I would have expected to be given to a fen-tiger returning home from choice.

dead, they introduce them to the next world. In mythology, according to Kopaliński (2006), dogs apply to the dawn, as it is said that they dig out the ground thus helping in resurrection.

In the Middle Ages the dog usually appears as an image of feudal loyalty or martial fidelity, and this early picture is still mirrored in many languages of today, for example in such fixed sayings as the English simile *as faithful as a dog*, Polish *wierny jak pies*. A white dog frequently symbolises the faith and piety of the person at whose feet it lies down, whereas the dark dog represents paganism and heresy.

When we pursue other symbolic elements associated with dogs we see that the dog is also held to be the watchful guardian of man. Moreover, hunting and war dogs symbolise bravery and speed. Since war dogs frequently visited ancient towns at night to eat not only the food, but also the bodies of slaughtered enemies, the Bible displays dogs as both disrespected and much hated animals. What is more, the term *dog* is used as a type of insult in many natural languages. For example, in English *dog* appears in a plethora of compounds and expressions that are negatively loaded, such as, *dog-cheap* 'extremely cheap, suspiciously cheap', *dog-eared* 'pages crumpled and folded down', *Dog-Latin* 'pretended or mongrel Latin', *dogsbody* 'a drudge, one who is exploited', *dog-tired* 'extremely tired'. Nonetheless, in various non-European cultures the dog receives credit for many of the achievements of the human civilisations, taking into consideration its intelligence and ability to learn.

According to the *DOS*, the cat is an animal with a predominantly negative reputation in symbolic tradition. Kopaliński (2006) refers to it as the symbol of the Moon and the Sun as well as that of sin, magic powers, darkness and - worst of all – death. On the other hand, cats are frequently perceived as the symbols of purity, glamour and longevity. Cats' independence and reserve turned them into the symbols of insincerity and hypocrisy in medieval Europe. In the Middle Ages magicians willingly transformed into cats since the animals were believed to be the shelter of the devil; they also accompanied witches. The black cat symbolises darkness, danger and death, for example, in Polish culture *czarny kot*, English *black cat* is a symbol of ill luck, whereas, the white cat is a sign of luck, which is quite the opposite in England. In Muslim tradition the black cat has magic power, it has seven lives and sometimes it is worthy of respect.

It was not until the 20th century that the cat regained its respect, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries. As the *SS* states, the cat – as a token of cleverness and wisdom – appears in the fable *Kot w butach*, English *Puss In Boots* (1697) by Charles Perrault, as well as in Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann's novel *Kota Mruczysława poglądy na życie*, English *The Life And Opinions Of Tomcat Murr* (1821). The cat is also the embodiment of the lack of ability to memorise various facts. In Polish there is the saying *koci łeb* which may be rendered in English as *the cat's head* and refers to a person of low intellect. However, the cat is the symbol of

physical resistance as well as longevity. It is associated with the Moon and, being a somnambulistic animal, it has the ability to see at night and hunt silently – similarly to owls and bats. Biedermann (1996) refers to the fact that the eye of the cat, which appears to change as the light strikes it from different angles, was considered deceptive, and the animal's ability to hunt even in virtual darkness led to the belief that it was in league with the forces of darkness.

Kopaliński (2006) claims that females, like cats, are good-tempered, have sensuality, as well as the ability to perform mischievous acts. In many natural languages, the girl is frequently referred to as *kotka*, *kociak*, in English *kitten*, *chick* symbolising – according to the *OED* – a young girl, with an implication of playfulness or skittishness. *Cat*, as well as a number of *cat*-related words such as *puss*, *pussy* are the symbol of the vulva along with sexual urge and fertility. In a contrary fashion, the female cat symbolises affectionate and cheerful maternity.

Moreover, the fact that the cat sleeps long hours during the day after its night expeditions, or sleeps in the sun or by the fireplace makes it the symbol of both laziness and comfort. Since the cat spends a substantial amount of time engaged in the act of washing itself it is also the symbol of purity. The animal portrays elegance and glamour in almost every position it takes. In heraldic tradition cats frequently symbolise courage, freedom, individualism, vigilance, perseverance and craftiness. The cat is tireless and cunning when going after its prey, which may be said to be the virtues of a good soldier.

According to Kopaliński (2006:32), the bull is the male symbol of the Sun, as well as the male and the female symbol of the Moon. In the ancient tradition herds of cattle symbolised wealth, since the Latin word *pecus* – meaning herd – was derived from *pecunian* referring to money and wealth. Furthermore, the Greeks perceived herds of cattle as the clouds of the sun giving people refreshing milk; which can be understood as rain. Biedermann's *DOS* (1996:51) focuses on the particular importance of the bull in the history of religion since:

[...] bulls were worshiped in a variety of cultures, especially as symbols of potency and for their horns, which suggest the lunar crescent. On the other hand, there are numerous symbolic rites in which a bull is defeated or sacrificed.

In astrology the bull, *Taurus*, is the second sign of zodiac, an earth sign. Those born under this sign are believed to be clumsy, earthbound, tenacious and powerful. For the Sumerians the bull symbolised storm and gale as well as strength and fertility, and – therefore – they frequently used the following terms in reference to their gods: *jurny byk*, *groźny byk*, *dziki byk*, that in English may be translated as *lusting*, *dangerous*, *wild bull*.

The bull tied to a wild fig tree refers to the mastering of the sexual urge, the man cured from debauchery since the fig tree stands for marriage. The bull also refers to a mistake in the Polish saying *palnąć/strzelić byka*, which in English may be rendered as *to shoot* or *blurt the bull*, figuratively *to put one's foot in it*,

or American *to shoot the bull*. We frequently refer to a stupid person, or drunken man as *bydlę*, *bydlak*, literally in English *swine*. In heraldry the bull symbolises bravery, strength and service.

The gender equivalent to the bull, the cow, according both to the *DOS* and the *SS*, has a positive force in symbology; standing for the maternal, nurturing powers of the earth – *dojna krowa*, English *milk-cow*, as well as lunar attributes because of her horns and sex. In Indian tradition the *sacred cow*, being a nurture of prehistoric times, symbolises fertility and abundance. In dreams, the fat cow symbolises abundance, whilst the slim cow stands for hunger.

The ox – as Kopaliński (2006) reports – symbolises people who are both hardworking and patient *haruje, pracuje, orze, tyra jak wół*, literary translated into English *somebody slogs away, works, drudges like an ox*, metaphorically *to work like a horse*, however, it also stands for something huge, obvious, visible *coś stoi jak wół*, that in English may be translated as *something stands as an ox*, figuratively *to be written or stated as plainly as day* that means ‘it is clearly printed or written’. But – at the same time – the ox is used to refer to silence. Note that both the black ox and the black cow symbolise poverty, danger, old age and death. Consider the proverb *domyślisz się gdy czarny wół na nogę ci nastąpi, czarna krowa go przydeptała*, that in English may be rendered as *you’ll think things through when the black ox steps on your foot and the black cow stepped on him* - the person is either ill or dying. The ox is the symbol of short memory or dullness. Consider in this context the Polish proverbs *zapomniał wół jak cielęciem był* and *żal krowy po cielęciu krótko trwa*, in English translation *the ox forgot when it was a calf* and *cow’s grief over the calf does not last long*. Finally, the calf symbolises humbleness, cunning submissiveness *pokorne cielę dwie matki ssie*, which in English may be translated as *the humble calf suckles from two mothers*, metaphorically *the meek shall inherit the earth*, but also immaturity, innocence, cowardice – an animal to sacrifice. The calf is the symbol of absent-mindedness, mindlessness *patrzy jak cielę w malowane wrota*, that in English may be rendered *to gawp as the calf in painted gates*.

Kopaliński (2006) reports that the female and male goat are both symbols of sacrifice; lightning, thunderbolt oestrus, fertility, sin, sociability, agility, mobility, freedom, magic, stupidity, greed, poverty and winter. According to Kopaliński (2006), *cap*, the English equivalent billy-goat, is seen as the symbol of male potency, sexual urge, vitality, stubbornness, reproductive power of the sun, fire, Satan, humility and stench. Billy-goat is viewed as the animal of the sun especially in the Indian tradition where it symbolises the fire that creates the world and gives life to all that is new as well as the holy life. The animal is also the symbol of stench *śmierdzi jak cap*, English translation *to stink like a Billy-goat*.

According to the *DOS*, it is rather significant that although the male *goat* has a generally negative symbology associated with lust and vitality, the female is perceived as a nurturing figure, especially in Greek tradition. *Kozioł ofiarny*, in

English *scapegoat* is the metaphor for the person blamed for, accused of and condemned for somebody else's sins. In the ancient Middle East shepherds used to graze sheep together with goats, however, in the evenings the two flocks were separated. This act came to symbolise the division of good and evil that is the redeemed and condemned on the day of the Final Judgement. The proverb says *z kozła stał się owcą*, which in English may be rendered *he turned from a goat to a sheep* which means that the person turned from a good-for-nothing to a decent individual. On the other hand, the male goat symbolises sexual urge following the tradition of the orgies of the god Dionysus when Bacchantes tore apart live goats in order to put on their skin. The *goat* was ascribed to Aphrodite because of the fact of being fertile and fiery, and came to be perceived as the symbol of debauchery and lecherousness.

The male goat is the symbol of stubbornness, the proverb *upartý jak kozioł*, which in English corresponds to *as stubborn as the mule*, but also the symbol of voracity *zrobić kozła ogrodnikiem*, English *to transform a goat into a gardener* meaning to act foolishly. In heraldry the goat symbolises the knight that wins owing to persuasion and diplomacy rather than through combat. The female goat in Greek mythology was associated with lightning. The Skyros goat is seen as milky but stubborn, hence the metaphor of a skilful and hard-working person but hothead and quarrelsome at the same time. For the ancient Egyptians and Jews it was the symbol of good hearing. Furthermore, the *female goat* is also associated with stupidity. However, it needs to be mentioned that this association is used only in reference to a lowland goat because the chamois is perceived as the symbol of far-sightedness and a spectacular ability to jump. The female goat is also the symbol of poverty, as in Polish *koza to krowa biedaka*, English *the goat is the cow of the poor*, but also the embodiment of winter, the last month of the year – December. In dreams *black goat* stands for instability in love, and the white symbolises worry.

To sum up, this outline of the animal symbolism related to the representatives of various species of the category **MAMMALS** has made it possible to illustrate that a wide range of forms of animal kingdom tend to be strictly associated with the human world through a number of symbolic representations and manifestations. This seems to provide partial evidence that almost every category of animal shows strict, yet not always clearly pronounced and well-defined connections with the human species. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the majority of the symbolic associations discussed here exhibit a certain duality, because – on the one hand – most of the animals tend to have some positively loaded attributive symbolic references linked to them, and – at the same time – they tend to be associated with various specific manifestations of the broadly understood concept of evil (negatively loaded attributive symbolic reference), or with some kind of general opprobrium.

References

Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

- Benbow, T.J., J.A. Simpson, E.S.C. Weiner** (eds). 1984–1989. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2002 compact edition).
- Biedermann, H.** 1996. *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Symbolism*. New York: Facts on File.
- Doroszewski, W.** (ed.) 1958–1969. *Słownik języka polskiego PAN*. PAN: Warszawa.
- Kopaliński, W.** 2006. *Słownik symboli*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm.
- Linde-Usienkewicz, J., B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk** (eds) 2004. *Wielki słownik angielsko-polski PWN OXFORD*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN SA.
- Linde-Usienkewicz, J. and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, B.** (eds) 2006. *Wielki słownik polsko-angielski PWN OXFORD*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN SA.
- Longman Idioms Dictionary*. 1998. Spain: Pearson Education Limited.

Other works

- Lawrence, E.A.** 1997. *Hunting the Wren*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Górecka-Smolińska M., G.A. Kleparski.** 2008. “On the Non-primitive symbolism of Primitive Beings” [in:] G.A. Kleparski and A. Uberman (eds) *Galicja Studies in Language, Literature and Culture*. Chełm: Wydawnictwo TAWA, pp. 65–71.