



# “Challenging Cartesian Dualism through Anthropomorphism and the Emotional Representation of Marley in *Marley and Me*”

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## Abstract

This study examines the challenge posed to Cartesian dualism through anthropomorphism and emotional representation in John Grogan’s *Marley and Me*. Cartesian dualism, rooted in Descartes’ philosophy, emphasizes the dichotomy between mind and body, often elevating human rationality above animal existence. Grogan’s portrayal of Marley, an exuberant Labrador Retriever, blurs these distinctions by humanizing Marley through anthropomorphic descriptions and emotional narratives. The paper argues that Grogan imbues Marley with qualities such as loyalty, joy, and empathy, effectively bridging the human-animal divide and inviting readers to reconsider the binary hierarchy inherent in Cartesian thought. By attributing complex emotions and agency to Marley, the narrative positions him as a sentient capable of forming deep, reciprocal bonds with humans. Furthermore, the emotional representation of Marley’s life and eventual death challenges the perception of animals as mere physical entities devoid of inner experiences. Through analyzing Grogan’s narrative techniques, the paper demonstrates how Marley’s characterization fosters empathy and prompts readers to reimagine the relationship between humans and animals. Ultimately, the study highlights the significance of emotional storytelling in dismantling anthropocentric paradigms, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all sentient beings and the need for a more inclusive understanding of consciousness and existence.

Keywords: Cartesian Dualism, Anthropomorphism, Emotional Representation, Human-Animal Bond, Marley and Me

## Introduction

René Descartes' theory of Cartesian dualism, which asserts a clear division between mind and body, has long been a cornerstone of Western philosophical thought. By positioning rationality as a uniquely human trait, this dichotomy has historically placed humans above animals, viewing the latter as automata—beings devoid of reason, emotion, or self-awareness. However, in the modern era, literature and popular culture have increasingly challenged this anthropocentric worldview by portraying animals as sentient beings capable of emotional depth and complex relationships with humans. John Grogan's memoir *Marley and Me* serves as a poignant example of this shift, using anthropomorphism and emotional representation to question the hierarchical boundaries of Cartesian dualism.

*Marley and Me* chronicles the life of Marley, a Labrador Retriever, whose exuberant and unruly behavior becomes a source of joy, frustration, and ultimately, profound emotional connection for the Grogan family. Grogan's narrative does more than recount the escapades of a mischievous dog; it humanizes Marley, attributing to him traits such as loyalty, empathy, and individuality. Through these anthropomorphic descriptions, Marley is portrayed as a being whose experiences and emotions resonate deeply with human readers. This characterization not only fosters empathy but also challenges the Cartesian notion that animals are incapable of possessing an inner life akin to that of humans.

Central to this exploration is the way Grogan's narrative invites readers to engage with Marley emotionally. From his rambunctious puppy days to his heartbreaking final moments, Marley is depicted as more than a pet; he is a companion, a family member, and an emotional anchor. His interactions with the Grogan family highlight the deep bonds that can form between humans and animals, bonds that transcend the simplistic categorization of animals as mere bodies devoid of thought or feeling. By illustrating Marley's capacity to evoke love, comfort, and grief, Grogan dismantles the Cartesian framework, suggesting that emotional intelligence and relational depth are not the sole domain of humans.

Anthropomorphism plays a critical role in this reimagining of the human-animal relationship. By attributing human-like qualities to Marley, Grogan bridges the experiential gap between species, enabling readers to see

Marley not as an “other” but as a relatable and significant presence. While some critics argue that anthropomorphism risks misrepresenting animal behavior, it also serves as a powerful tool for fostering empathy and challenging entrenched biases. In *Marley and Me*, anthropomorphism becomes a narrative strategy that redefines the boundaries of sentience and challenges the moral and philosophical implications of Cartesian dualism.

This article explores how Grogan’s portrayal of Marley—through anthropomorphic descriptions and emotional storytelling—questions the Cartesian separation of mind and body, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive understanding of consciousness and relationality. By examining key moments in the text, this study highlights how emotional engagement with Marley invites readers to reconsider traditional hierarchies between humans and animals. Through this lens, *Marley and Me* emerges not merely as a memoir about a beloved pet but as a subtle critique of philosophical dualism and a celebration of the interconnectedness of all sentient beings.

### **Anthropomorphism as a Narrative Tool to Redefine Sentience**

John Grogan’s use of anthropomorphism in *Marley and Me* serves as a powerful narrative tool to redefine sentience and challenge Cartesian dualism. Anthropomorphism, or the attribution of human-like qualities to non-human entities, allows readers to connect with Marley on an emotional and intellectual level. By framing Marley as a sentient being with individuality, emotions, and agency, Grogan dismantles the Cartesian notion of animals as mere automata, devoid of consciousness or inner experiences.

Grogan’s portrayal of Marley’s emotions—his boundless joy, unwavering loyalty, and visible distress—invites readers to view him as more than a pet. Moments such as Marley’s ecstatic greetings, his protective instincts towards the family, and his sorrow during moments of separation evoke empathy and blur the boundaries between human and animal experiences. This anthropomorphic framing transforms Marley into a relatable figure, encouraging readers to see the interconnectedness of emotions across species. By humanizing Marley, Grogan not only fosters empathy but also questions the ethical implications of viewing animals as inferior beings.

Through Marley’s characterization, Grogan also attributes agency to the dog. Marley is not portrayed as a passive creature; he is an active participant in the family’s life, shaping their experiences and influencing their emotional well-being. His mischief and unpredictability, such as destroying furniture or bolting during

thunderstorms, highlight his individuality and unique personality. These traits, typically reserved for human characters, reinforce the idea that Marley possesses a distinct sense of self, further challenging the Cartesian divide between humans and animals.

Additionally, anthropomorphism in *Marley and Me* invites readers to reconsider the moral hierarchies that place humans above animals. By presenting Marley as a being capable of forming deep emotional connections and influencing the lives of those around him, Grogan disrupts anthropocentric worldviews. This narrative approach prompts readers to question the ethical treatment of animals and their roles within human society, suggesting that animals are deserving of respect and compassion as sentient beings.

Critics of anthropomorphism often argue that it risks imposing human attributes onto animals in ways that misrepresent their natural behaviors. However, Grogan's use of this technique transcends mere projection; it serves as a deliberate strategy to foster empathy and challenge entrenched biases. By bridging the experiential gap between humans and animals, anthropomorphism in *Marley and Me* becomes a narrative tool that redefines sentience, encouraging readers to acknowledge the shared emotional and relational capacities of all living beings. In doing so, Grogan's work underscores the need to move beyond Cartesian dualism towards a more inclusive understanding of consciousness and existence.

### **Emotional Representation and the Collapse of the Mind-Body Divide**

John Grogan's emotional depiction of Marley in *Marley and Me* serves as a narrative lens through which the Cartesian divide between mind and body is deconstructed. The memoir portrays Marley not merely as a physical entity but as an emotional being whose presence profoundly affects the lives of those around him. By emphasizing Marley's emotional intelligence and relational depth, Grogan collapses the dichotomy of mind and body, offering a more holistic understanding of sentience that transcends Cartesian dualism.

One of the most striking aspects of Grogan's narrative is Marley's role within the Grogan family. Marley is not depicted as a mere pet but as a central member of the household, participating in both their joys and sorrows. His ability to sense and respond to human emotions—such as comforting the family during difficult times—illustrates a level of emotional intelligence that challenges the Cartesian view of animals as unthinking, unfeeling beings. Marley's emotional connections with the family blur the boundaries between human and animal experiences, suggesting that the capacity for emotional depth is not limited to humans.

Grogan's portrayal of Marley's emotional life is particularly evident in moments of vulnerability, such as his fear during thunderstorms or his visible joy during family outings. These depictions highlight Marley's ability to experience a range of emotions, from happiness to fear, further dismantling the Cartesian notion that animals lack an inner life. By presenting Marley as an emotional being, Grogan invites readers to empathize with him, fostering a deeper understanding of the shared emotional capacities between humans and animals. The grief surrounding Marley's death serves as a poignant culmination of this emotional representation. The family's profound sense of loss underscores the depth of their bond with Marley, reinforcing the idea that their relationship transcended the traditional human-animal hierarchy. This shared grief challenges the Cartesian separation of mind and body, illustrating that the emotional impact of Marley's life was as significant as his physical presence.

Grogan's emotional representation of Marley also prompts readers to reconsider the philosophical distinction between humans and animals. By portraying Marley as a being capable of emotional connection, individuality, and agency, Grogan disrupts anthropocentric worldviews and advocates for a more inclusive understanding of sentience. This narrative approach not only challenges Cartesian dualism but also emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings, encouraging readers to rethink their ethical responsibilities toward animals. In *Marley and Me*, emotional representation becomes a powerful tool for collapsing the mind-body divide. By highlighting Marley's emotional depth and relational significance, Grogan redefines the boundaries of sentience and fosters a more compassionate perspective on the human-animal relationship. Through this lens, the memoir emerges as both a celebration of Marley's life and a critique of the philosophical hierarchies that have long separated humans from animals.

### **Summation**

The article explores how *Marley and Me* by John Grogan challenges Cartesian dualism through the narrative techniques of anthropomorphism and the emotional representation of Marley. Cartesian dualism, a philosophy introduced by René Descartes, posits a strict division between mind and body, relegating animals to the status of unthinking automatons. Grogan's portrayal of Marley dismantles this binary by attributing emotions, individuality, and relational depth to a non-human character, bridging the human-animal divide. The first section of the article focuses on anthropomorphism as a narrative tool to redefine sentience. Grogan humanizes Marley by ascribing him with distinct emotions, agency, and a personality that resonates with readers. Through this

anthropomorphic lens, Marley is not merely a pet but a family member with complexities akin to humans. By fostering empathy, the narrative invites readers to question traditional anthropocentric hierarchies and reevaluate the ethical implications of denying animals emotional and cognitive capacities. Marley's actions and interactions, far from being mere instinctive responses, are imbued with purpose and relational understanding, demonstrating that animals possess a depth of experience that challenges the Cartesian view of them as mechanistic beings.

The second section examines the emotional representation of Marley and its role in collapsing the Cartesian mind-body divide. Grogan emphasizes Marley's emotional intelligence, evident in his ability to form profound connections with his human family. The narrative highlights pivotal moments, such as Marley's comforting presence during family struggles, his playfulness, and the grief his death evokes. These instances not only underscore the interspecies bond but also dismantle the Cartesian claim that animals lack the dual capacities of mind and body. By portraying Marley as a being capable of joy, love, and sorrow, Grogan challenges the notion that emotional depth is an exclusively human trait.

Through Marley's story, Grogan also engages with broader philosophical and ethical questions, pushing readers to reconsider their perspectives on animals. The grief depicted in the aftermath of Marley's death mirrors the loss of a loved one, further narrowing the perceived gap between humans and animals. This emotional resonance forces readers to reflect on their relationships with animals and the validity of the Cartesian hierarchy, which places humans above other sentient beings.

At the outset, Grogan's narrative dismantles Cartesian dualism by presenting Marley as an emotionally complex and sentient being, redefining the boundaries between humans and animals. Through anthropomorphism and emotional representation, *Marley and Me* not only challenges the philosophical underpinnings of Descartes' views but also urges readers to cultivate empathy and rethink their relationships with non-human creatures. Grogan's work serves as a literary testament to the interconnectedness of all sentient beings, promoting a worldview that transcends traditional binaries and fosters a deeper understanding of animal sentience and agency.

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