

Article

The Unspoken Demands of Care in Samanta Schweblin's *Good and Evil and Other Stories*

Anne McConnell 

English Department, West Virginia State University, Institute, WV 25112-1000, USA; amcconnell@wvstateu.edu

Abstract

This article examines the ethics and affective complexities of care in Samanta Schweblin's *Good and Evil and Other Stories*, arguing that the collection foregrounds the imaginative, relational, and often troubling demands of caretaking within a more than human world. Drawing on feminist and posthuman care theory—particularly the work of María Puig de la Bellacasa, Joan Tronto, and Donna Haraway—the article analyzes how Schweblin's stories stage encounters in which care involves uncertainty, power asymmetry, and the necessity of imagining the needs of others who cannot fully articulate them. In the stories “Welcome to the Club,” “The Fabulous Animal,” “An Eye in the Throat,” and “Atlàntida,” specific relations of care reveal both the failures and transformative potential of caregiving practices. These narratives depict care as simultaneously sustaining and oppressive, exposing how guilt, substitution, and silence shape relationships among humans and nonhumans alike. Schweblin's fiction frames care as an embodied, relational practice that unsettles human exceptionalism and highlights the ethical importance—and limits—of attempting to perceive the world from marginalized perspectives.

Keywords: posthuman care theory; contemporary literature; Argentine literature; Samanta Schweblin; interspecies relations; animals in literature

In Samanta Schweblin's story “An Eye in the Throat,” a father's perception that he has failed as a caretaker leads to profound grief and regret, causing him to alienate himself from his son and to abandon his role as a father. In other words, the father responds to his failure to *care well* by not caring; he maintains distance and silence, as if only his absence and neglect will protect his son from further damage. To be clear, the father cares deeply, but he doesn't trust his ability to care for his son. We see two important meanings of the term “care” here, which Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, in her reading of Joan Tronto's work on the politics and ethics of care, distinguishes as “caring about” and “caring for” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 4). If the former points to one's general feelings of concern for someone or something, the latter suggests action. While neither Tronto nor Puig de la Bellacasa dismisses the importance of concern for or attentiveness to another's plight, “a politics of care engages much more than a moral stance; it involves affective, ethical, and hands-on agencies of practical and material consequence” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 4). Furthermore, as Puig de la Bellacasa points out, acts of care engage and exist within complex and sometimes problematic dynamics of power, voice, vulnerability, and need. Schweblin's short story collection, *Good and Evil and Other Stories*, explores such dynamics, as the characters face the challenges of caring for, or tending to, others whose needs often feel unknowable or impossible to meet. In an interview with her translator, Megan McDowell, Schweblin actually points the reader to this theme in the collection, adding that the characters' efforts to care tend to have undesired results: “[T]hose moments of



Academic Editors: Gillian Dooley and
Nicholas Birns

Received: 18 February 2026

Revised: 2 July 2026

Accepted: 8 July 2026

Published: 14 July 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the author.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

care, which could be seen as an urge to do something for the good, often turn out badly” (McDowell and Schweblin 2025). The stories describe predicaments of care that reveal the misunderstandings, aspirations, appropriations, failures, transformations, and impositions involved in caretaking—particularly in situations that require a person to imagine, without the benefit of verbal communication, what might make another, human or nonhuman, feel cared for.

1. Caring in a More than Human World

In *Matters of Care*, Puig de la Bellacasa makes an argument for a posthuman consideration of care—or one that ditches conventional, humanist notions of care in favor of a type of *thinking with* that accounts for and engages in the more than human world. She makes a case for the term “more than human” because it “speaks in one breath of nonhumans and other than humans such as things, objects, other animals, living beings, organisms, physical forces, spiritual entities, and humans” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 2). This description captures the mesh-like environment in much of Schweblin’s writing; her stories and novels frequently draw attention to human experiences in more than human worlds, disrupting notions of singularity and separateness that arise in the humanist tradition.¹ Cynthia Francica notes this quality in Schweblin’s earlier story collection, “A Mouthful of Birds,” and argues that it reflects a trend in recent Argentinian literature: a “radical questioning of the category of the ‘human’ and its semiotic, ethical, and ontological limits throughout the humanities” (Francica 2021, p. 129). While the stories of *Good and Evil* largely feature human relations of care, encounters with nonhuman animals—a rabbit, a horse, and a cat, specifically—shed light on the vulnerabilities of entanglement and interdependency and the complexities of relations of care. That said, interspecies encounters do not function as a symbol or analogy that serves to communicate something about humans’ experiences with one another; instead, they reveal that the challenges and aspirations of care do not pertain uniquely to humans, nor do human relations exist in a vacuum, separate from the lives and interests of nonhuman others. Therefore, in this paper, I will address human–animal and human–human relationships alongside one another, as I would argue that Schweblin’s stories suggest that the problematics of care, though specific to individual relationships and characters, take place in the more than human world and thus pertain to a variety of actors and relations. Relations involving nonhuman animals and nonverbal humans draw particular attention to the imaginative demands of caretaking, or the necessity of attempting to consider situations from the standpoint of a marginalized other. Schweblin’s stories in *Good and Evil* explore both the pitfalls and potential benefits of imagining the needs and perspectives of significant others who require care.

Puig de la Bellacasa’s understanding of the dynamics of care in a more than human world borrows from feminist care theorists, like Tronto, and also from Donna Haraway, whose work straddles multiple critical approaches, including feminist science studies and interspecies studies. Puig de la Bellacasa extends feminist formulations of standpoint theory to the rich multispecies worlds invoked in Haraway’s work—*When Species Meet*, in particular. Puig de la Bellacasa explains that standpoint theory “explored the possibility of a feminist epistemology and rooted the hopeful prospect of alternative ways of knowing in the materiality of women’s and other marginalized people’s everyday experiences” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 14). Attempting to push that general methodology beyond the human, she posits a posthumanist epistemology that draws attention to nonhuman materialities, experiences, and modes of knowing. Doing so “disrupt[s] the classic boundaries that feminist politics of care have mostly worked with in order to claim the significance of care for social worlds” (p. 13). She takes interest in Tronto’s work in particular because Tronto’s broad definition of care “includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, *all*

of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 3, quoting Tronto [1993] 2006, p. 103, emphasis added by Puig de la Bellacasa). Though still human-centered, Tronto's definition evokes more than human entanglements and signals her awareness that care involves complex relations that do not stop at some invisible boundary separating humans from everyone and everything else. Challenging such invisible boundaries resonates with Schweblin's work.

Puig de la Bellacasa's book does not focus on human–animal relations, instead employing and appropriating Bruno Latour's notion of "matters of concern" (Latour 2004, p. 231) as a means of developing a knowledge politics that emphasizes relations of care in a more than human world. With Latour, Puig de la Bellacasa insists on blurring lines that have conventionally sought to separate humans from both technoscience and the natural world. She specifically applies her thinking to the permaculture movement and human–soil relations in the third part of the book.² That said, Puig de la Bellacasa's reliance on Haraway's work points the reader in the direction of human–animal relations, and she also explicitly notes the applicability of her posthumanist, transdisciplinary thinking about care to animal studies (Displacing care). Haraway's discussion of interspecies relationality frames human experience as a continuous "becoming-with" countless "messmates," asserting that the "partners do not precede their relating" (Haraway 2007, pp. 15, 17). From this perspective, relations of care necessarily reflect *and* constitute complex naturecultures—the term she uses to indicate the collapse of the conventional boundaries between nature and culture, human and animal, organic and technical. In this way, Haraway's notion of companion species extends beyond individual dualistic relations between a human and an animal companion and points to complex knots involving myriad actors becoming with one another. Again, this feels particularly relevant for a reading of Schweblin's work, given the mesh-like environment of entangled humans and nonhumans.

When Species Meet highlights the particularities of human–dog training work as a means of investigating knowledge practices across species. When confronted with an animal other, Haraway advocates for curiosity, play, and mutual relation-building. She specifically presents this kind of caring engagement as an alternative to what she observes about Jacques Derrida's famous description of his encounter with his cat in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (Derrida 2008, p. 4), arguing that Derrida recognizes the regard of his cat—that she bears a gaze and directs it at him—but fails to take interest in "what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning" (Haraway 2007, p. 20). Haraway wants to examine the possibilities of such encounters, rather than falling silent in the face of absolute alterity. I would argue that Schweblin's stories share this interest, portraying characters who, like Derrida, are rendered silent and even paralyzed in the face of alterity and others who remain open to the transformative possibilities of nonmimetic relation.

For Haraway, the alternative to Derrida's silence exists in the "contact zone" between beings. She contends, "Accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility are not ethical abstractions; these mundane, prosaic things are the result of having truck with each other" (Haraway 2007, p. 36). In order to explore the dynamic relational practices of the contact zone, Haraway describes her work with her dog, Cayenne, and the world of agility competition training. The work she describes demonstrates how knowledge practices are caring practices: 'Caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning' (p. 36). These practices of care transform the participants, continually shaping the relationship; care becomes a means of establishing "attachment sites for world making" (p. 36). For Haraway and Puig de la Bellacasa, getting to know the needs and interests of a significant other is not simply a matter of distant scientific observation or abstract thought, but, rather,

arises out of “relational material circumstances” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 83). Conversing with Haraway’s text and applying it specifically to dynamics of care, Puig de la Bellacasa writes:

Care appears as a doing necessary for significant relating at the heart of the asymmetrical relationalities that traverse naturecultures and as an obligation created by “necessary joint futures.” Relations of “significant otherness” are more than about accommodating ‘difference,’ coexisting, or tolerating. Thinking with nonhumans should always be a living-with, aware of the troubling relations and seeking a significant otherness that transforms those involved in the relation and the worlds we live in. (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 83, quoting Haraway 2003, p. 7)

Puig de la Bellacasa insists that relational care *practices*—active, engaged living with others—compose the foundation for ethical thinking with others. Importantly, though, the “living with” and practices of care described by Puig de la Bellacasa can be messy, asymmetrical, and troubling; thinking with care does not presume the innocence of caretaking and entanglement.

In *Matters of Care*, Puig de la Bellacasa draws attention to the power imbalances involved in relations of care, whether considering the historical burden of care work on women and marginalized people, or the potential for abuses within specific care relationships—for example, when those receiving care have vulnerabilities, differences, or limitations that prevent them from asserting their own voice and will in a specific context. Feminist standpoint theory responds to these problems by emphasizing the value of marginalized perspectives and experiences, and their particular capacity to provide alternative narratives and epistemologies for addressing the inequalities posed by oppressive structures. Additionally, standpoint theory “advocate[s] thinking from marginalized experiences for those who do not necessarily belong to the ‘margins’ in which those experiences are lived” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 84). In other words, those who occupy a privileged position can learn to think from marginalized standpoints, even if such an effort requires a kind of imaginative (and imperfect) leap into the lived experience of others. For Puig de la Bellacasa, this applies to more than human relations of care as well, recognizing that nonhumans have interests and standpoints, despite the failure of anthropocentric norms to take them into consideration.

Haraway also notes the value of feminist standpoint theory in her work, while emphasizing that it “was not and is not about fixed positions and identities but about the relational work and play of intersectional feminist worlding” (p. 389, no. 12). In other words, thinking from marginalized standpoints does not assume the perspective of a unified human subject but, rather, arises from a multiple, perpetually becoming, meandering subjectivity who attempts to imagine relational knots from various standpoints. Needless to say, nonhuman animals generally occupy social, political, and linguistic structures that privilege and empower humans; interspecies caretaking takes place in material and relational circumstances that reflect those inequalities.³ The leap, in this case, must traverse a wider gap and likely takes a greater risk, given the added difficulty of trying to imagine the experience of another animal. Despite the gap, considering relations of care from the standpoint of a nonhuman animal ideally serves to identify oppressive practices of care—those that, Puig de la Bellacasa explains, “consume the cared for, leading to appropriating the recipients of ‘our’ care instead of relating to them” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 85).⁴ In the end, care can emerge as stifling and consuming, both for caretakers and recipients of care, which necessitates critical approaches that highlight marginal human and nonhuman experiences.

As noted above, Schweblin’s stories take particular interest in care relations that highlight the unspoken—sometimes in interspecies relations, and sometimes in human relations where verbal communication is compromised or limited in some way. In

“An Eye in the Throat,” the narrator literally cannot speak after an injury has resulted in a tracheotomy. In “Atlántida,” two girls appoint themselves caretakers of an alcoholic poet who barely speaks throughout the entire story. Caregivers in various stories fall silent, perhaps reflecting the weight of the roles they play in relations of care. In the stories that feature animals, despite the insistence of their respective gazes, these animals do not share a language with those in power over the structures that dictate their lives. When asked about the role of animals in her stories, Schweblin explains: “Nature, and the animal realm, that space we feel so distant from, beats every second without language, without *our* language. And there is so much outside language. I think these presences unsettle us because they come to remind us of that much larger world that contains us, which we insist on ignoring” (Spartz and Schweblin 2025, emphasis in original). From this perspective, the animals in the stories lay bare the “more than human” of the world, exceeding human language while persistently beating, speaking, feeling, needing, and asserting. While animals do tend to emerge in Schweblin’s work as figures of strangeness, adding to an often unsettling, eerie tone, I also would argue that they don’t *only* function in that way. Instead, the animals in the stories merit attention, as characters and in relation with others—since the dynamics of care in the text include both humans and animals, in ways that resonate with one another.⁵ In particular, many of the human characters’ lives, experiences, and needs tend to feel *extralinguistic* for one reason or another, complicating relations of care. The unspoken thus points to a barrier—one that reflects the impact of silencing and marginalizing forms of care, while also prompting practices that foster attentiveness to others’ experiences.⁶

2. Housebound: Stifling Care in “Welcome to the Club”

The first story in the collection, “Welcome to the Club,” opens on a woman trying to drown herself, having tied rocks around her waist and jumping into a lake. After filling her lungs with water and calmly observing “the liquid feeling where there was always oxygen before,” she decides to untie the weights and floats to the surface, returning to her life as a wife and mother (Schweblin 2025 p. 3).⁷ The woman’s narrative provides little detail about her life or what brought her to this moment of crisis, though brief comments about her marriage reveal tension with her husband and her sense of feeling trapped: “Once again, his car is parked diagonally in the driveway; it’s like a barricade [. . .] When he is home, ‘going out’ is like ‘overcoming,’ like ‘vanquishing’ the doorway; if I want to get through it I have to be really determined” (p. 8). Regardless, we know that she has arrived at a point where death feels like the only option, and she doesn’t know how to keep herself from going back to the lake. Perhaps even more tellingly, moments after plunging herself into the water, the narrator walks back to her house and makes her family lunch as if nothing happened. The juxtaposition of the recent drowning attempt and beating eggs for omelets disconcerts her: “*Everything is in order, I tell myself. Easy now*” (p. 7). It is precisely the demand to re-enter the everyday rhythms of her family, to remain silent about her pain and desire to end her life, that suggests the weight of caretaking—of tending to others’ needs to the point of voicelessness and erasure. As Tronto writes, “care is devalued and the people who do caring work are devalued” (Tronto [1993] 2006, p. 14).⁸

The story also features a rabbit whom the narrator’s two daughters have brought home from school, apparently as part of a classroom project where students take turns as caretakers. Despite the father’s insistence on making sure the sliding door remains closed, the rabbit soon manages to escape the house. Though the family conducts a search of the neighborhood, no one comes across the rabbit, Blimp. The father’s patience eventually wanes, and he determines that the search has come to its end: “I know where we can get another rabbit” (Schweblin 2025, p. 11). The girls vehemently protest the father’s logic, rejecting the notion that one rabbit may simply be replaced by another—understanding

Blimp as one in a series of endlessly reproducible, disposable, and indistinguishable objects. Of course, the practice of passing the rabbit from home to home raises some concerns, even beyond the general challenges of providing an environment for a domesticated rabbit to flourish.⁹ The fact that Blimp *escapes* suggests that his status as a “class pet” and object of communal care does not meet, nor likely take into consideration, his needs and interests. Bioethicist and author Jessica Pierce writes about the impacts of captivity on pets, particularly those who spend the majority of their time caged: “These animals have no meaningful interactions with their own kind, have minimal physical activity, have almost no mental stimulation, and experience a severe reduction in the kind and quality of environmental stimuli” (Pierce 2016, p. 102). While I don’t want to belabor the ethical problems of caring for pets in stressful, restrictive environments that don’t respond to their needs, Blimp’s situation draws attention to the complexities and vulnerabilities of care that arise in several stories in Schweblin’s collection. Blimp is rendered totally powerless and dependent, replaceable and at risk; he has no access to the outdoors and is shuffled from one human home and family to the next. Even seemingly innocent moments, when considered from the perspective of a scared rabbit in a strange environment, demonstrate the potential harms of caretaking and the motivation for escape: “The sliding glass door is closed now and the girls are playing, chasing after Blimp” (Schweblin 2025, p. 14). Puig de la Bellacasa’s application of standpoint theory to a more than human world would encourage us to imagine this interaction from Blimp’s marginal perspective.

Fortunately for the narrator’s girls, though maybe not for Blimp, a neighbor finds the escaped rabbit and returns him, carrying Blimp by his ears as he struggles and kicks his legs. The neighbor assures the girls that, despite what they see, he is carrying Blimp properly. The narrator’s description suggests otherwise: “But Blimp is too fat, and the man is close enough now that we can see the force in the tendons of that fist, the animal’s mouth stretched into a cruel smile, teeth sticking out, eyes narrowed and weepy” (p. 12). Even cursory research into rabbit care reveals that one should never carry a rabbit by the ears, as it causes pain and stress, and can result in injury.¹⁰ Failing to “read the room,” the man then jokes to the girls about preparing the rabbit for dinner, to the girls’ horror. Later in the story, the narrator returns to the man’s house, and he shows her how to skin a rabbit, encouraging her to try the same thing with Blimp. The neighbor reveals that he saw the narrator jump into the lake that morning and tells her that he understands the struggle of having to will oneself to live. As he skins a rabbit in a bucket, the man implies that killing and skinning animals pushes him to stay alive. According to the man, causing pain in a loved one will force the narrator to keep living: “That will fill you with guilt, and if the guilt is strong enough, you’ll need to stay to take care of them” (p. 20). According to Quimey Juliá, the man’s logic fits with the notion of “good evil” in the title of Schweblin’s story collection, as he proposes that the violent act of killing the rabbit will have a good result—in the sense that it will allow the narrator to continue staying alive and care for her daughters (Juliá 2025, p. 10). The rabbit would thus become a kind of sacrificial object.¹¹ The man’s logic seems questionable—as well as sadistic and harmful—but the narrator is desperate, knowing she is barely clinging to life and losing her grip: “I remember that before putting the girls to bed, I opened the sliding door again, and I held on to its frame so hard that I could feel my tendons stiffen. I felt my entire body wanting to let go and take off running again to the lake, and I was certain that, if I did let go, I wouldn’t be able to stop it” (p. 15). The same sliding door that must remain closed to keep Blimp inside the house becomes the only thing keeping the narrator from returning to the lake and ending her life. She clings to it, simultaneously wanting to escape and willing herself to stay—to fulfill the nightly caretaking ritual of putting her girls to bed.

Regardless of what one might conclude about the man's advice to the narrator, he does seem to perceive something about her struggle and her silence.¹² He tells her, "From now on you have to learn to hold yourself up" (p. 19). She will simply sink to the mucky bottom of the lake if she doesn't actively work to keep herself alive. According to the man, guilt will keep her afloat, and the narrator decides to give his advice a try. She captures the girls' rabbit and holds him in the sink, preparing to take his life; theoretically, killing the rabbit will upset her daughters and thus create a sense of guilt about harming her loved ones. "The rabbit waits, frozen, its red eye on me" (p. 21). The narrator mentions the eye of the rabbit, his gaze "on me," two times in this short scene, suggesting her growing awareness of the rabbit not as an object to be replaced, reproduced, or killed as a kind of sacrifice, but as a subjectivity capable of returning her gaze. Rather than killing Blimp, she sees him—and, perhaps just as importantly, sees him seeing her. The narrator releases Blimp and feels the pumping of her heart: "It's a beautiful beating" (p. 22). While the end of the story does not lead the reader to many clear conclusions, something about this exchange of glances seems to transform the narrator; seeing Blimp seeing her perhaps re-orientates the narrator in the mesh of relations that make up her life. His gaze seems to bring her out of the silence and erasure that characterizes her life as a caretaker. Furthermore, releasing Blimp, instead of taking his life, allows the narrator to feel life in her body. On the brink of killing herself or Blimp, she becomes able to breathe air instead of water, letting it come in through the sliding door and enter her lungs.

3. A Horse for a Boy: Substitutional Care in "The Fabulous Animal"

Considering other stories in the collection can provide interpretive avenues for reading opaque moments in individual narratives, including the end of "Welcome to the Club." In this way, the stories of *Good and Evil* feel interconnected and resonate with one another, even if they remain distinct in terms of specific narratives and characters. In "The Fabulous Animal," for example, we find another exchange of glances between a human and nonhuman animal that feels foundational to the story—in this case, between a woman and a horse. While the "class pet" situation of Blimp in "Welcome to the Club" remains understated as an example of oppressive caretaking of nonhuman animals, the horse in "The Fabulous Animal" makes the dangers of animal exploitation in supposed relations of care much more explicit. The horse drags "a cart piled high with mattresses" through the streets of Buenos Aires while a man whips him/her, urging the horse to keep walking (p. 25). The horse's swollen belly and disheveled appearance reflect abusive treatment and neglect, and thus a profound failure in care. As the narrator observes the horse, the animal looks back, "star[ing] straight at me with those big, dark eyes" (p. 25). The horse returns the narrator's gaze, and, as described in Derrida's reflections on his encounter with his cat, the narrator perceives "the naked truth of every gaze" that "allows me to see and be seen through the eyes of the other, in the *seeing* and not just *seen* eyes of the other" (Derrida 2008, p. 12, emphasis in original). The narrator becomes aware of the horse as a bearer of the gaze, rather than simply an object of abusive treatment and pity, which in turn impacts her understanding of her own subjectivity, as one who both sees and *is seen*. The exchange of glances resembles that in "Welcome to the Club," drawing each narrator's attention to the animal other's capacity to look back, and thus re-contextualizing their continual becoming in relation to others.

The narrator of "The Fabulous Animal" ultimately attempts to become the horse's permanent caretaker, paying veterinary bills and arranging accommodations that will extricate the horse from his abusive circumstances—implicitly as a means of compensating for separate, though related, failures in care that we learn about over the course of the story. Years ago, the narrator's friends' son fell to his death from a balcony immediately

following a “make-believe” game that the narrator and the boy were playing together. Not coincidentally, the game involved “becoming” a horse: “You practice being a horse by walking with one foot right in front of the other” (Schweblin 2025, p. 31). Presumably, the boy fell from the balcony while closing his eyes and balancing on the ledge while imagining himself as a horse. After realizing what happened, the narrator ran into the street and found the horse, “lying in the road as if fallen from above” (p. 34). Cradling the horse’s head in her arms, the narrator cared for the horse as her friends tended to the other fallen body, holding their lifeless son as they awaited the ambulance. The doubling of the horse and the boy draw attention to complicated, and problematic, operations of substitution. While the narrator’s choice to care for the horse responds to an abusive situation that seems to demand intervention, her telling of the story suggests that it stands in for a more direct reckoning with the tragedy for which she feels responsible. Not revealing the circumstances of her friends’ son’s death to them and not comforting them in their grief allows her to remain unseen—specifically, unseen as the one entrusted with the care of her friends’ son and implicated in his accidental death. The narrator chooses instead to be seen by the horse, whom, the narrator believes, looks to her for comfort and care: “Its big dark eyes were searching the night, and I felt certain they were searching for me. It raised its head to look straight at me” (p. 34). It would seem that the narrator prefers to *be seen* from the presumed perspective of the horse, configured by his gaze, rather than that of her friends. In the eyes of the horse, one might imagine, the narrator fulfills her duties as a caretaker.

The horse’s gaze does not seem to affect the narrator in exactly the same way that we see in “Welcome to the Club,” though I do think the horse’s exchange with the narrator points to the transformative potential of more than human relations. In “Welcome to the Club,” the narrator confronts Blimp’s gaze, as a particular rabbit in a particular sink, clearly fearful as the narrator pins him down. Seeing him seeing her, the narrator emerges from her depressive, liminal state. She seems to awaken to the cruelty of what the neighbor encourages her to do in order to save herself—to exercise power over vulnerable others in her care. The narrator releases Blimp and potentially becomes more able to assert herself—to hold herself up—in an environment that threatens to erase and silence her as a caregiver. After all, the narrator *is also* the vulnerable other, reduced to her invisible labor for others. In “The Fabulous Animal,” the horse’s gaze appears to allow the narrator of that story an alternative for seeing herself as one who cares well, particularly in light of how she might imagine her friends would see her. The horse eventually ends up back in the streets of Buenos Aires, though, as the previous owner manages to retrieve him. The narrator dreams about the horse, “asking for [the horse’s] forgiveness” (p. 36). Whether she dreams about her grieving friends or their dead son we don’t know; but Elena, the friend who calls to talk about her son, seems to infer that the horse has become a kind of substitute for her son and asks for information about the horse’s location. The narrator, attempting to understand the nature of the request, explains, “I search desperately among my memories of Argentina, trying to come up with a place where there is a horse, any horse, that can be hugged” (p. 36). Elena seeks a horse who can stand in for her son so she can, even if briefly, take comfort in the role of caretaking; the narrator, of all people, understands this. While using the horse as a surrogate for the dead son is perhaps problematic and appropriative with respect to the actual horse, the idea of substitutability also points to the human characters’ situatedness in a more than human world where they become in relation to a variety of actors who offer new roles and possibilities. In this case, a perpetually grieving mother, in the final days of her own life, might repeat, relive, re-imagine acts of care in a new context as a means of reconnecting with what she lost.¹³

4. Responding to Silence in “An Eye in the Throat”

The weight of caretaking, often related to perceived failures in care, arises in various works by Schweblin. The Spanish title of *Fever Dream*, *Distancia de rescate* (Schweblin 2017), refers to a character, Amanda’s, habit of calculating the distance between herself and her daughter in a given context, as a means of ensuring that she remains close enough to rescue her daughter if danger arises. Tragically, though, Amanda cannot protect her daughter, or herself, from the toxic agricultural chemicals that seep into the water and thus collapse any attempt to measure or maintain safety. As Rodrigo Ignacio González Dinamarca points out, Amanda’s desperation reflects the realities of living in contemporary social and economic structures that allow for dangerous environmental threats, simultaneously created by adults and rendering them powerless to protect and care for their children (Dinamarca 2015, p. 103). In other words, external, invisible threats put caretakers in the impossible position of protecting those they care for, resulting in seemingly unavoidable failures in care. The story “William in the Window” in *Good and Evil* explores this theme specifically regarding care for a cat, though the external threat, rather than broadly impacting a community, is targeted specifically at the cat, William, and his human companions. After a first poisoning attempt by a neighbor, William’s human companions fear a second attempt, though they remain unable to determine the perpetrator and thus to protect William from the threat. From this perspective, the demand to care confronts the powerlessness to care, or to care well, in a dangerous world where even known threats cannot be prevented.

In “An Eye in the Throat,” the father of a toddler, despite “keeping constant watch over what [his son is] doing, always attentive to [his] movement, [his] constant conversation with the things that surround [him],” doesn’t see his son swallow a battery (p. 59). The burden of caretaking here, like we see in *Fever Dream* and “William in the Window,” relates to the weight of what sometimes emerges as an impossible responsibility—impossible in the sense that it reveals the powerlessness or inability to avoid the multitude of unseen threats that might cause harm. The mother in the story demonstrates anxiety about the dangers of seemingly safe environments, particularly since her child has the common habit of putting objects in his mouth as he investigates his surroundings. She advises, “Please pay attention,” to anyone charged with watching her son, and says it twice to the father the day the boy swallows the battery (p. 59). Nothing in the story indicates that the father acts carelessly or fails to care responsibly for his son, unless we operate under the illusion that bad things can only happen when one fails as a caretaker. I would again argue that the scarier possibility here—and in *Fever Dream*—has to do with powerlessness. After all, the son—who is also the narrator—describes his father’s caretaking that afternoon as “always attentive” and “keeping constant watch” (p. 59). Though this story does not involve nonhuman animals, the pre-verbal boy’s navigation of his world poses various caretaking challenges; the father must rely upon hyper-attentiveness and an ability to imagine the world from the perspective of a curious, investigating toddler.

Even if the battery incident does not result from poor or neglectful care, the story does seem to point to the father’s failure, or inability, to care well for his son after the accident—though the narrator remains sympathetic to his father’s shortcomings, understanding that trauma often has far-reaching impacts, beyond a particular moment or individual body. The narrator describes his mother in different terms, as someone “who has learned that taking care of someone means understanding what to do and why” (p. 61); she actively responds to the crisis by examining, listening, comforting, advocating. After initial visits to doctors, she seeks additional medical support, insisting that the doctors have not yet identified and treated the problem. X-ray imaging eventually reveals the battery, “a perfect white, circle, so brilliant that the light from the box pulsates there” (p. 62). Seeing the image, the father “goes to Grandma’s house and checks all the objects I had

been playing with,” confirming the origin of the crisis and, it seems, affirming his own guilt (p. 62). The father emerges here as unable to engage with his son—the source of his guilt and victim of failed supervision—the way the mother does, who offers direct, responsive care. The narrator’s subsequent tracheotomy becomes a kind of open wound—one that “looks out” at the father, presumably reminding him of his failure to protect his son and also producing anxiety that his son’s body is now even more vulnerable to external threats. The narrator remembers the shift in his father’s regard: “He avoids my eyes, his frowning gaze focused on the plastic protrusion of the tracheotomy” (p. 64).

The narrator senses his father’s anxiety and a growing distance, even though his father remains silent about his experience and feelings: “He has lost a capacity whose circuit is also connected to his embrace. He can’t let go of me, but neither can he hold me. I’m the same size I was a week ago, but there is something in his hugs that no longer recognizes me, something that is misaligned” (pp. 64–65). Soundlessly, the narrator begs for his father’s attention and wants to know what’s wrong; the father, refusing or simply unable to look at his son, imposes silence on the relationship by failing to respond to his son’s pleas, his desire for comfort and connection. The narrator makes an important distinction here, clarifying that his own silence does not result from his tracheotomy: “the problem is not that I can’t speak; the problem is that because I don’t speak, he won’t look at me” (p. 65). The father’s refusal to meet the narrator’s gaze contrasts what we see in both “Welcome to the Club” and “A Fabulous Animal,” where the respective narrators allow themselves to be *seen* by another and thus to recognize the suffering and subjectivity of the other. In these cases, meeting the gaze of the animal other provokes a sense of accountability—a responsibility to another subjectivity with a gaze of his/her own. Perhaps the father, more like the narrator of “William in the Window,” chooses to look away as a means of coping with the profound fear of losing his son.¹⁴ His sense of powerlessness, combined with responsibility, makes it impossible to confront his son’s vulnerability and mortality, and thus the limitations of his care.

A second traumatic event further distances the father from his son. Exhausted and trying to complete a long car trip home after the narrator’s final operation, the narrator’s parents stop at a gas station and don’t notice that he has exited the car. The parents leave their young child at the gas station before they eventually realize what has happened and race back to retrieve the boy. Interestingly, at this point in the story, the narrator describes events that he doesn’t experience first-hand, as if a part of him remains in the car to bear witness to his parents’ terrible realization. In some sense, the narrative becomes detached from the narrator’s single perspective and expands outward, exposed to and absorbing the experiences and pain of others. He reflects on the strangeness of his floating narrative consciousness: “And me? From where am I looking at them? Whatever has happened to me, it has turned me into something else. It has disarmed and expanded me, enlarged me. It is a pain that is outside my body. I am an open plastic valve, and whatever is happening inside me emerges and touches others” (p. 77). It seems the narrator attributes his expansion—of “self,” of consciousness—to his trauma, and, more specifically, to the hole in his throat, which makes permeable the boundary between inside and outside. The narrator becomes more than human—or, perhaps more accurately, becomes aware of his more than humanness, made evident by the erasure of a firm boundary that separates him from others.

Both parents sense a change in their son after the event and wonder if something happened to him, though the father, in particular, is haunted by whatever might have happened at the gas station. His son has somehow become even more silent at this point, refusing to respond to his father’s inquiries about what transpired while the boy waited for his parents to return. Giving his son a bath, the father inspects the boy’s body, looking

for signs of an injury but finding nothing. The father asks his son if someone hurt him, wondering if his son would actually tell him, and the son reacts with anger. He tries to free himself from his father's grasp, indignant that his father can't understand him: "I am telling him. Doesn't he see it? I've been saying it this whole time? Wasn't it my father's job to read things on people's faces that they didn't know were written there? What is it that he doesn't see? What is it that he doesn't hear?" (p. 83). The narrator expects his father to hear him and to respond to his needs, despite the linguistic barrier—particularly given the narrator's description of his father as his preferred caregiver and comforter before he lost the ability to speak. The narrator wants his father to *see* what he can't say with a voice; he wants his father to rely on his other senses to hear what remains unspoken, expanding his capacity to communicate beyond the verbal. The father fails to imagine what he doesn't know and can't access. In the words of Haraway, the narrator yearns for his father's curiosity—his willingness to engage with his son and to develop new ways of knowing in the face of alterity. Instead, the father inspects his son's body as an object, a text, that might tell him the truth of what happened.

Without an answer, the father becomes fixated on late-night phone calls that he imagines come from Morris, the gas station owner, whom the father thinks hurt the narrator in some way. When the father picks up the phone, he encounters silence on the other end and interprets it as a kind of sadistic taunting by the man who took advantage of his vulnerable son. The father waits for the phone calls, intuiting when they may happen and trying to answer before the phone even rings: "He learns to lift the receiver to his ear slowly, without saying hello, imposing his own silence, gripping the cord tightly as he waits, feeling himself a part of that mute telephone. He thinks he is learning to listen, for the first time in his life" (p. 85). The father's humanness becomes muddled and even mechanical, as if the phone pulls him into a hole where he no longer knows inside from outside, self from silence. The narrator frames his father's obsession with the phone calls as compensatory—as an attempt to master the silence of the phone call with his own "hearing superpowers" despite his inability to develop a means of communicating with, and thus caring for, his son (p. 86).

In order to account for the change in his son's demeanor after the gas station incident, the narrator's father invests in a story that provides an explanation—one that identifies a perpetrator and presumes some kind of abuse. While the reader has insight that the narrator grieves the loss of his father as a caregiver—his touch, his playfulness, his understanding—the father remains unaware, misunderstanding the nature of his son's injury. Though the mother learns sign language, the father only learns a few signs—including, tellingly, the sign for "doesn't matter," which his son signs when he tries to communicate something the father doesn't understand. The narrator's grandfather wrestles with him, reads to him, and teaches him other languages, finding ways to engage and relate despite the lack of a shared verbal language; the narrator remembers when his father played with him, looked at him, and recognized his gaze. As noted, the narrator doesn't seem to fault his father and instead perceives his father's unresolved pain and guilt. From an early age, despite the narrator's initial anger over his father's inability to understand him, the narrator senses the weight of his own trauma on those responsible for his care: "There is a hole in my throat, a hole in my body that hurts in theirs" (p. 79). Years later, when the father returns to the gas station where he left his son, he learns what actually happened. After the narrator's parents drove away without him, the boy wished to call his father on the pay phone. Since the event took place before the widespread use of cell phones, Morris, the gas station owner, could only pretend to make a phone call, hoping to appease the child. More disturbing to the father, though, is the realization that, even if he had a phone, he couldn't respond to his son's plea for his father's comfort and care: "If my son calls

me, how will he tell me it's him?" (p. 96). The father becomes aware of the significance of this moment—it's not that he abandoned his son, leaving him unprotected from the wrongdoing of others, but that he didn't, and couldn't, respond to his son's call.

5. Inspirational Care in "Atlántida"

While many of the characters in *Good and Evil* struggle to provide care in situations where they must imagine the needs of another, the two sisters in "Atlántida" seem to revel in the imaginative and transformative possibilities of caretaking. Under the leadership of the older sister, they appoint themselves caretakers of an alcoholic, suicidal poet, initially as a way to pass time during an uneventful family vacation. The girls ask the woman what caused her to attempt suicide, and the woman blames "a third of a century of tedium" and "a lack of inspiration" (p. 105). After learning this information, the older sister proposes that she and her sister will respond to the woman's need—and account for their unsolicited management of the woman's house—by providing what lacks: "We are inspiration" (p. 106). The sisters proceed to care for the woman, washing her, cleaning her house, re-arranging her things in an effort to "cleanse" the woman of the dirt and clutter that theoretically stifle inspiration. The older sister comes up with inspiration rituals and other activities meant to stimulate the woman's desire to write and to reclaim her life as a poet, and the woman generally accedes to the rules and assignments given to her. As the girls become more and more invested in their caretaking, they develop a sense of ownership over the woman, as a kind of project: "She was something we had discovered all by ourselves, a treasure that belonged to us. Alive or dead, the woman was ours, and if we left her at her house in the morning, that's where we wanted to find her at night when we went back" (p. 112). Tying a notebook to the woman's wrist, the girls await poetry, hoping that they can convince the woman of their inspirational powers and therefore provoke her to write.

While the woman remains amenable to most of the directives she receives, she sometimes demonstrates frustration with the process: "Once she lost interest, she only wanted to escape. She'd lock herself in the bathroom to cry, or she'd climb in bed, or disappear into the utility room [...]" (p. 117). Furthermore, the woman expresses her desire to talk about her life, to engage with the girls not in their supposed role as inspirational muses but as people with names and lives. While the older sister insists that the process requires anonymity, suggesting that inspiration relies upon the absence of the person, the younger sister begins to wonder if their efforts to help the woman are having the opposite effect: "Maybe the woman couldn't find inspiration because we were there siphoning it off all night. What if our energy as we moved, our eagerness for everything, was actually confusing her even further?" (p. 121). The younger sister seems to awaken to the possibility that this kind of overwhelming caretaking and managing can become a form of taking rather than giving. She still idolizes her older sister and feels attached to their "project," but her rising awareness of the woman as a subjectivity who wants a say in her own life causes the girl to question their approach to "helping" the woman. The younger sister ultimately breaks the older sister's rules about remaining anonymous, recognizing that the woman wants to identify herself and to emerge from the shadows of the strange performance of rituals and activities that might provoke her to write again (p. 124). The older sister's insistence on anonymity creates a sense of silence and erasure, and the woman clearly yearns to share something of herself and her life with the girls, outside of the confines of inspirational activities, cleaning, and roleplaying.

As the girls' interventions into the woman's life and habits ramp up—presumably in the hopes of addressing the fact that they have, as of yet, failed to inspire poetry—the younger sister's unspoken concerns about their activities also intensify:

What were we doing in that house? What were we really doing to that woman? She was our poet—were we going to leave her just like that, from one day to the next, when vacation was over? Would she think about us? Would she miss us? [...] And who would wash her every day? If in our absence she hung herself from the fan again and finally managed to kill herself, would we be responsible? (p. 123)

The younger sister seems slowly to realize that not only had the girls entered the woman's house and taken control over her life without an invitation to do so, but that their departure would likely have an impact on the woman after weeks of intense entanglement. Since the younger sister narrates the story, the reader has insight into her growing sense of responsibility and increasing discomfort with the girls' intervention in the woman's life; we also see that she considers the situation from the woman's standpoint and imagines how it must feel to her. While the older sister might also have unspoken complicated feelings about her impact on the woman, her behavior, as described by the younger sister, seems to reveal a kind of blind, fervent investment in her role as an otherworldly, nameless muse and caretaker who will ultimately find a way to inspire the poet. The younger sister does not admonish the older sister for this, and I would argue that she paints her sister's actions as well-intentioned and often tender, though sometimes misguided and overbearing. Perhaps the younger sister is trying to craft a narrative that would help her to understand her older sister's choice to follow the woman into the ocean at the end of the story, seemingly without any thought for her safety in the towering waves, as if tied to the woman by an invisible rope.

The woman—now known by the name "Pitys," given to her by her sister—manages to write a few lines of poetry after the sisters trap her in the bathroom with food and water for a full day; this evokes the confinement of a pet in a crate or other enclosed space. Like Blimp in "Welcome to the Community," Pitys responds to her confinement by deciding to bolt. Though no one tries to prevent her from leaving, it feels like a kind of escape after weeks of carefully managed confinement: "The woman saw the ocean, peeled off her T-shirt and jeans, and sprinted toward the water in her underwear" (p. 131). The older sister runs after her, inspired by the woman's desire for flight and freedom, and tangled up in the woman's plight as a result of weeks of managing her life. The younger sister notes that as the two swim together in the ocean, they become difficult to distinguish: "the resemblance took me aback" (p. 131). This kind of eerie doubling arises in different ways throughout *Good and Evil*—as we saw, for example, in the doubling of the horse and Peta in "The Fabulous Animal"—and points to a process of becoming-with that reflects transformative relational practices. In the case of Pitys and the older sister, the two engage with each other for multiple weeks in performative rituals of cleansing and inspiration that seek profound transformation—maybe even "rebirth." While the focus of the transformation is clearly Pitys, the older sister becomes obsessed with her role in that transformation, as the one who takes care, manages, inspires, and produces the desired change. By the time the two get to the ocean, they mirror one another, nearly indistinguishable—though, at this point, they switch roles in the sense that Pitys becomes the source of inspiration, the older sister following her lead.

Unfortunately, the specific rules and dynamics of the relational caretaking practice instituted by the older sister have tragic results. The fact that the practice takes place at the direction of one person, without responding to the voice, input, or desires of the other, has a silencing effect on the woman and disempowers her as an agent in her own life. At the end of the story, the older sister's insistence on anonymity and silence has practical consequences. When the older sister disappears under the water, Pitys calls for her: "She was shouting, her hands cupped around her mouth, elbows bent to the sides—but what

was she shouting? The noise of the waves kept me from hearing. Did she know my sister's name?" (p. 133). The narrator wonders how Pitys could possibly scream for her sister over the crashing sound of the waves, calling her muse forward, without knowing her name. This scene recalls the father's revelation of his son's attempted phone call in "The Eye in the Throat." Even if the son could call, how could he identify himself? In "Atlántida," even if the woman could shout loud enough to be heard, whose name would she call? In both cases, the anonymity and voicelessness that arise in particular dynamics of care end up posing an entirely practical problem. Though the specifics of the stories differ, their respective final revelations seem to suggest something similar: to call out and to be heard requires responsive caretaking practices.

The younger sister clearly participates in these dynamics as well, though we have the sense that she mostly follows and observes the older sister, rather than becoming consumed by the "project" of caring for, managing, and inspiring Pitys. The younger sister tells the story of the summer at the beach retrospectively and has recently returned to Atlántida to live alone, working at a salon. Though no words are exchanged, Pitys comes to the salon every couple of weeks to get her hair washed by the narrator; she reeks of alcohol and manages to collect seashells in her matted hair. The narrator describes the process: "At the salon, every time Pitys lay back at the third washing station and closed her eyes, I massaged her scalp and concentrated on her body's fragility, and on my uncanny desire to take care of her; that is, I copied the movements I'd seen my sister make that night, so long ago" (p. 110). One can imagine that the narrator and Pitys reenact this scene from their past as a way to reconnect with, remember, and grieve the older sister. Similar to what we saw at the end of "The Fabulous Animal," performing acts of care allows the characters to take comfort in the rituals that defined their relations with lost loved ones. While the contexts and roles change, caretaking allows for reconnection and opens new relational possibilities.

6. Conclusions

The caretaking practices in the stories of *Good and Evil* resonate with one another but also reflect the complexities of particular relational dynamics and raise distinct ethical questions. While acts of care may generally work to provide comfort and nurturing to one in need of care, Schweblin's stories demonstrate the challenges of care in specific situations—those, in particular, that highlight the sometimes silencing effects of caretaking for both providers and recipients of care. Though some of the stories in Schweblin's collection highlight relations of care between humans and other animals, others portray human-to-human relationships that, I would argue, confront similar challenges. The mesh-like environment of Schweblin's fiction encourages the reader to consider entanglements across species, defying attempts to create firm boundaries. Human-animal relations in the text draw attention to a set of questions that also apply to human-human relations that foreground alterity, isolation, and linguistic limitations. Care emerges as non-innocent, even if well-intentioned, particularly when one fails to imagine different, marginalized standpoints, human and nonhuman. At the same time, Schweblin's stories also provide examples of responsive, evolving relations that point to the importance of recognizing significant others with their own gaze and thus to the transformative potential of care in more than human worlds.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Schweblin's work often demonstrates the agency of entangled subjectivities, human and nonhuman, in complex naturecultures. In Schweblin's celebrated novel, *Fever Dream* (Schweblin 2017), that entanglement takes shape in explicit ways, as toxic agricultural chemicals seep into the water, soil, and air, permeating the lives and bodies of all those who inhabit a small, rural town in the Argentine countryside. Her novel *Little Eyes* focuses on technologies—in this case, robotic furry toys through which a human from one part of the world can see and dwell in the environment of another human anywhere else in the world—that re-shape human experiences of the world and relations with others.
- ² In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour famously exposes the problems and contradictions of a “purified” notion of Nature, and its foundational role in conventional western conceptualizations of objectivity and fact (Latour 1993). For Puig de la Bellacasa, Latour articulates “a now well-established tradition that rejects the representation of science, technology, and nature as depoliticized matters of fact, as uncontested truth” (p. 18). For her part, Puig de la Bellacasa uses feminist care theory to shift Latour's “matters of concern” to “matters of care,” foregrounding the ethico-political aspects of such knowledge practices.
- ³ Clearly, many nonhuman animals dwell in habitats where they do not come into direct contact with humans. Approaches to and problematics of interspecies caretaking largely apply to animals who live alongside or with humans. Schweblin's stories in *Good and Evil* feature “domesticated” animals, in particular. That said, Puig de la Bellacasa also points to broader notions of care that extend beyond direct interactions, given the wide reach of human impacts and threats to nonhuman animal habitats and populations.
- ⁴ Tronto identifies this problem as “Paternalism/maternalism,” writing, “we can also imagine that those who are attentive to certain needs begin to develop a sense of their own relative importance in solving a problem. Such a proprietary sense of being in charge is even more likely to occur among those who have assumed responsibility for some problem, who are taking care of a caring needs” (Tronto [1993] 2006, p. 170).
- ⁵ To clarify, I am not identifying specific human and animal experiences in the text as a means of erasing important differences, nor the persistence of alterity. Rather, the framework of my paper depends upon the notion that difference and alterity are not limited to human–animal relations. From that perspective, my paper's consideration of human–human and human–animal relationships alongside one another reflects the posthumanist challenge of conventional boundaries and dualistic separation of the human from the nonhuman. One can read the story “William in the Window” with this in mind. While the narrator of that story at first dismisses her friend, Denyse's, grief over the loss of her cat, William (Schweblin 2025, p. 50), she seems later to realize that Denyse's fears about losing her most cherished loved one resemble her own worries about the potential loss of her husband. In other words, the narrator eventually recognizes William, regardless of his species identity, as a subjectivity with a gaze (p. 55)—as a significant other who has specific value to Denyse, Denyse's husband, and their role as companions and caretakers.
- ⁶ The stories in *Good and Evil* that I have chosen to discuss in depth illustrate most clearly an interest both in the complexities of caretaking relations, along with the particular challenges and demands that come with linguistic barriers.
- ⁷ The opening of the story allows for multiple interpretations: perhaps the woman saves herself and returns to her life; perhaps she dies and returns to her life in a kind of liminal or ghostly state; perhaps the narrative represents an instantaneous flash before her death, suggested by the last line: “the dark and mossy feeling on my fingertips, right when they touch the lake bottom and twitch for the last time” (Schweblin 2025, p. 22). I will read it through the first lens, though I would not argue that this reading necessarily negates or is more convincing than the other possibilities.
- ⁸ Tronto also cites a study that shows that single women report higher levels of happiness and better health than married women, despite conventional assertions about the unhappiness of single women (Tronto [1993] 2006, p. 119). Tronto writes, “This result makes sense when we realize that women are expected to care for those in their household” (p. 119).
- ⁹ See the House Rabbit Society website for a description of how a human companion can provide a safe and enriching environment for domestic rabbits (House Rabbit Society n.d.).
- ¹⁰ See for example, “How to Hold a Rabbit,” on the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA) website. “Never pick rabbits up by their ears. This is extremely stressful for them and is highly likely to injure them” (RSPCA n.d.).
- ¹¹ The proposed sacrifice of Blimp evokes Haraway's discussion of killing and “making killable” in *When Species Meet*. She writes, “Sacrifice works; there is a whole world of those who can be killed, because finally they are only something, not somebody, close enough to ‘being’ in order to be a model, substitute, sufficiently self-similar and so nourishing food, but not close enough to compel response” (Haraway 2007, p. 79). Haraway makes a complex, nuanced, and provocative argument about the killing of animals—for laboratory experimentation, for food, or for other purposes that primarily serve human interests—drawing attention to, specifically, the question of whom or what we “make killable” (Haraway 2007, pp. 77–82). For Haraway, killing is

inescapable and also impossible to justify with the logic of sacrifice: “Try as we might to distance ourselves, there is no way of living that is not also a way of someone, not just something, else dying differentially” (Haraway 2007, p. 80).

- 12 The neighbor emerges as a creepy and potentially dangerous character on many fronts. Aside from the man’s suggestion that the narrator cause pain in her girls as a means of giving herself reason to live, the story implies that he might have harmed a woman who accused him of harassment. He also erects a barbed wire fence around his property and vaguely threatens parents who object. At the same time, the neighbor is the only one who *sees* and communicates with the narrator about her suffering. In this way, he parallels Joel in “A Visit from the Chief,” in the last story of *Good and Evil*—neither man representing a “good guy” in his respective story, though both seemingly capable of seeing the suffering of women who feel isolated and invisible.
- 13 The story following “The Fabulous Animal” in *Good and Evil* also features a nonhuman animal—William, a cat. Due to space constraints, I have chosen not to discuss this story in depth, though the story does resonate with other stories where animals figure as main characters. In the story, William is the cherished cat of a woman who attends a writers’ conference with the narrator. William endures two poisoning attempts, supposedly by a vengeful neighbor, and dies as a result of the second.
- 14 In “William in the Window,” the narrator goes to a writers’ retreat in Shanghai soon after her husband receives a diagnosis of an illness that threatens his life. She eventually confides to her friend, Denyse, that she fears that she might die if her husband dies (p. 45). Denyse reveals a similar feeling about her attachment to her cat, William, insisting that she can’t live without him (p. 43).

References

- Derrida, Jacques. 2008. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Edited by Marie-Louise Mallet. Translated by David Wills. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Dinamarca, Rodrigo Ignacio González. 2015. Los niños monstruosos en *El Orfanto* de Juan Antonio Bayona y *Distancia de Rescate* de Samanta Schweblin. *Brumal* 3: 89–106. [CrossRef]
- Francica, Cynthia. 2021. Beyond the Human: Maternity, Affect, and Monstrous Lives in the Narrative of Argentine Writer Samanta Schweblin. In *Gender, Development and Social Change*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 127–45.
- Haraway, Donna. 2003. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 2007. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- House Rabbit Society. n.d. Available online: <https://houserabbit.org/> (accessed on 18 February 2026).
- Juliá, Quimey. 2025. Lo fantástico como ‘buen mal’: Una lectura de ‘Bienvenida a la comunidad,’ de Samanta Schweblin. *Cuadernos del CILHA* 43: 1–15. [CrossRef]
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. Why Has Critique Has Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern. *Critical Inquiry* 30: 225–48. [CrossRef]
- McDowell, Megan, and Samanta Schweblin. 2025. Interview: “Samanta Schweblin by Megan McDowell”. *BOMB*, September 15.
- Pierce, Jessica. 2016. *Run, Spot, Run: The Ethics of Keeping Pets*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, Maria. 2017. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). n.d. How to Hold a Rabbit. Available online: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rabbits/company/handling> (accessed on 18 February 2026).
- Schweblin, Samanta. 2017. *Fever Dream*. Translated by Megan McDowell. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Schweblin, Samanta. 2025. *Good and Evil and Other Stories*. Translated by Megan McDowell. New York: Knopf.
- Spartz, Alia, and Samanta Schweblin. 2025. Interview: “Good and Evil and Other Stories: A Conversation with Samanta Schweblin”. *The Rumpus*, December 12.
- Tronto, Joan. 2006. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. New York: Routledge. First published 1993.

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.