

Fostering the Feral in Civilization: Reading Animal Characterization in Ken Kesey's *One Flew*

*Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

by

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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

Representations of the animal, although prominent in literature, are often overlooked as sources for rigorous analysis. When acknowledged, their interpretation is restricted to the realm of archetypal significance and rarely explored beyond the moment of their mention. By examining the role of the animal (more specifically canine characterization) as it appears in Ken Kesey's 1962 novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, this thesis demonstrates ways that the biological and behavioural elements of the animal used to characterize humans is critical to exposing any given text's underlying sociopolitical commentary - in this instance, the parallels that exist between human civilization and the domestication of the animal. With that in mind, this project combines biological and behavioural research of the animal with anarcho-primitive theory and psychology in order to question and reorient the perceived boundaries between humans and animals, as well as between civilization and wildness. Reading animal characterization from such a perspective is an important way for literary critics to take part in and revise some of the emerging conversations in the broader field of Animal Studies.

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To Z the Headcase, and his album of the same name. Thank you for inviting me to partake in the visual creation of the album, and thus keep my artistic inclinations active, despite my ongoing scholastic fixation and entrenchment.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my high school art teacher, Mr. Jason Fallaise (lest this be the closest I come to writing a book).

Furthermore, I would like to voice the inclination I feel toward dedicating this to my pack, both members described within and those outside of the text's reference. While the spirit of this piece is in tune with that which my pack represents, hesitation arises in light of the ironic distancing that has occurred betwixt myself and those very members through this academic undertaking.

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## Introduction

What can reading the animal in literature do for us? For several years, I have dedicated my studies in the field of English literature to tracing the significance that animal characterization can have for any given text's larger social commentary. What I have uncovered, time and again, is not a simple case of animal symbolism, or metaphor that remains limited to the scene in which it is figured, but access to a sociopolitical narrative that pervades the text for its entirety. What comes of observing such a narrative is often an enrichment of the text's primary political themes and relationships, but also, an invitation to read the human experience at hand as more akin to that of the animal than we might otherwise realize or even consider. The animal experience is shown to *be* the human experience, and vice versa, ultimately resulting in a commentary that suggests our experiences are not separated as a binary, but are actually *one*. Such revelations often have the effect of providing insight to our human existence and the effects that modernity and civilization have had on our mutual being and wildness in ways that humans may otherwise not consider.

This project is academic in nature, but it also contains personal roots. I was eleven years old when I wrote an excerpt through which my personal experience of low-key standardization and group separation was expressed through the process of canine domestication. Up until that point, my friends and I had a tight bond and realistic form of play comprised of our imagined embodiment as wolves. We were a pack, and members came and went, leaders took turns as seasons and years changed. It was the only play seen on our small school ground in which kindergarteners (the generation deemed "pups") played alongside sixth graders. But rather than receive praise for inclusion, this element of our game was deemed problematic.

The school grounds were divided to the extent that there were separately assigned jungle gyms for "primary" and "junior" aged students. Within each were further divisions as single grades were assigned specific recess times during which they *alone* could utilize the equipment. Our pack ran free, between and outside of the constructed playgrounds and limitations of age, outside of the segregation - outside of organized play. And through our embodiment of animals, we learned. We learned to form relationships of care and exchanged roles of leadership, as well as devoured factual information about the species with which we were fascinated. We moved, "hunted," fought, organized and inhabited space as these "canine" bodies, saw and heard ourselves as the creatures we described to one another and envisioned ourselves to be. There was no pretend. We were ourselves. And we were animal.

At eleven, it was ultimately decided by the administration of our school that we were "too old" to continue playing this untamed way. According to their standards, pretending to be wolves was not a positive reflection of the elementary institution's instruction, or perhaps *control* over, their students. There was concern that we were not mature or "sophisticated" enough to move on to middle school and represent Trillium Public in a positive light. In short, we were not civilized enough "pre-adolescents" and were deemed to be a poor representation of what institutional progress had to offer society. And so we were broken, our play forbidden, interrogated, and bullied out of us by an administrative presence. In the process of this castration from ourselves, we were also told that bringing stuffed animals to class was no longer appropriate, and similarly needed to come to an end. The consequences of conformity proved immense. Once the prized pupil, and indeed, still top of the class academically, my friends and I were thereafter consistently targeted as trouble makers, and the tight bond that persisted between us as we tried to cope with a mangled pack mentality was criticized as "isolated behaviour." The physical



separation of middle school that came immediately afterward was debilitating, and my struggle to cope was expressed by writing a short excerpt that depicted the reactions of each of my friends to the condemnation of our play, and our separation from one another as we were enrolled in seventh grade:

I growled and snapped in fury as many hunters came to our territory, to break us up, and take us to a training school where we must learn to be domestic. Two-Tail snarled, and leaped away, her silvery, shiny fur gleaming in the wild sunlight. The wind grew strong and howled a song of defeat. We could not fight off these awful creatures. As I was pushed into a cage, all of the wild nature around me stirred. Two-Tail beside me, had a muzzle over her jaws and was fighting as if [trying to escape] hell ... Patches took it, and laid down solemnly and silently in the metal contraption. Prima whined, and chewed on the bars of her cage. We were put into the back of an old truck. It reeked of mold[,] rust, and the many others, who, like us, had been caught and either domesticated or destroyed. We were driven away from our homes we had gotten used to, had been free in, ... with boundaries of none ... We were being driven into a hell. A hell that we must face and learn to live in.

As the truck travelled on, we whined for sympathy, and the wind howled a sad song back to us. The earth cried, and the trees wept, for more of us were being taken away. The truck stopped, and I was shoved up against the door of my cage. The back lock unlocked. A click sound came, and the light which we had known before came rushing in to greet us. It was then broken up[,] as we were about to be, by ... the ... silhouette of a man ... [painted] against the back of the rusty old truck. We barked, howled, snarled, snapped, snorted and growled, but were still taken away. Two-Tail was the first removed ... then

Prima and Patches. I would not see my faithful allies again until we were at a training school. One where we would be domesticated to be used as sled dogs. Slaves[,] really. *They'll never break us, we thought. We're strong and shall live through this and return.* Yet, they all th[ought] this, didn't they?

What I didn't know then was that I'd be writing versions of this same narrative thirteen, fourteen and fifteen years later, still grappling with my lifelong attempt to "return." And while I, personally, used the wolf and its domestication because of my identification with the species through play, the use of animal metaphor (and particularly that of the canine) to describe exactly the sociopolitical implications that my small scale experience exemplifies, is not unique to me or my writing. Although I did not fully understand the biological implications or processes of domestication at that age, I nonetheless used the concept as it pertained to both animal and myself, to represent the mandatory imposition of civilized ideology and expected behaviour. As an academic pursuit, I have repeatedly found this narrative echoed through the use of animal characterization in the work of other fictional writers, and have additionally found the sociopolitical commentaries of their work to be enriched when the biological and behavioural are read into the animals referenced or alluded to.

Jennifer Ham, in the compilation *Animal Acts*, suggests that animals have always been used to define humans. Whether that is through our opposition to them, or through our noticed similarities, Ham claims that such "zones of contact" hold the potential for conceptual breakthroughs in which "men and women participate in the dignity[,] splendor [...] and eternal truthfulness of the animal" (1). While she suggests that Western philosophy has more often been fixated on what is "exclusively human in the human animal" (2), she furthermore suggests that another direction can be taken in which the human and animal are configured in ways that

question the boundaries between the two. She calls critics "to write zoomorphically and anthromorphically" and to "define zones of animality in the human and zones of humanity in the animal" (2). Such a shift, she proposes, is "in its essence [...] a flight from the humanistic definition of man" that is replaced with "a quest for another kind of language which merges with the sounds and gestures of animals, [...] a pre-humanistic language from the 'dawn of thinking' which lets nature speak for itself" (2). While instances of this effect exist and have in many capacities for centuries, very little has been said or explored of its prevalence as a narrative commentary, or as a critical lens through which to read that literature, and thus reconsider the implications of what means to be human, and how much our own experiences mirror that of the animal.

It is through this shared experience of human and animal, civilization and the wild, ideology and domestication that I am exploring the animal characterization of human individuals in Ken Kesey's 1962 novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. By reading not only the symbolism, but the parallel between the animals alluded to, their biology and their experience with domestication and civilization itself, a criticism of Euro-American civilized thought and ideology is revealed. Furthermore, by not treating the animal as a symbol alone, but akin to the human condition, Kesey's novel is shown to not only question the structures and institutions of dominant ideology, but to undermine civilized thought entirely by way of reclaiming our own identity as wild, instinctual, *animal* beings.

Kesey's narrative is presented through the experiences of Native American character, Chief Bromden, allegedly deaf and mute but physically giant, and his time as a chronic patient in a psychiatric ward. The story unfolds with the arrival of rebellious character, Randall P. McMurphy, whose presence in the asylum challenges the passively tyrannical head nurse, Miss

Ratched, her practices of treatment and maintaining order, as well as the thinking of the other mental patients. On the surface, the institution is one to house, medicate and allegedly "cure" those so debilitated by mental illness that they are unable to function normally in society, but not so subtly, the conditions represent an institution set on "normalizing" those who are unwilling or unable to conform to the dominant social order of America. Therapeutic practices of group interrogation, as well as the administration of doping anti-psychotics, electroshock therapy and lobotomy are used to treat and moderate the patients, though their positive effects are questioned and doubted by Bromden who views all elements of the ward as an extension of society's demands for conformity and obedience; an always present and intervening force he refers to as "the Combine." Gambler, sexually potent, loud and full of joy McMurphy arrives and not only upsets the smooth operation of the ward in and of itself, but inspires others to free themselves, and their thinking, from the oppressive and sterilizing hold of both the Big Nurse and the larger workings of the Combine. Through validation of self and experience, as well as by seeing another utilize their own power to combat forces of authority that seem impossibly oppressive, several of the patients, including Bromden, come to find strength in themselves for being what they are, and to disregard thoughts of themselves as lesser or abnormal beings due to their inability to cope with civilized conditions. Yet the confrontation and rescue does not come without consequences. Culminating in a violent face-off between McMurphy and the Big Nurse, the heroic and liberating figure of McMurphy is rendered lobotomized, and Bromden is brought to mercifully kill the man who once inspired the patients, before executing the radical liberation McMurphy once represented by breaking out of the madhouse himself.

## **Tracking: Past and Current Interpretations of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest***

Given the complex narrative of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, it is no surprise that there is a range of critical interpretations that characterize its discourse. Glorified as a major counter-culture text of the early 1960s, a message of non-conformity and a criticism of contemporary psychotherapeutic practices are two of several themes most widely recognized in the text. Broadly speaking, the novel is generally discussed in regard to its mental institution scenario in order to criticize the dominant culture and ideology of capitalist America, including its treatment of the mentally ill, and the Native American both of which can be read literally and symbolically. The text has also received a great deal of criticism for its misogynistic naturalization of the male (Vitkus 66) and in more recent criticism has been observed as an Althusserian critique of the "suppressive operation of ideology" (Lotfi 17), all of which are acknowledged but deepened when read through the animal characterizations available but overlooked in the text.

*Cuckoo's Nest's* discussion of mental illness and how it regarded by society also makes it readily available for metaphoric, literal and historicized interpretations surrounding questions of mental health. Madness is seen as both ailment, and symbol of those unable or unwilling to conform to the dominant social order. Daniel J. Vitkus has approached the text from Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, and regards the role of "madness as a body and a voice that expresses a truth-telling protest against the dominant order of things" (65). In a society that "itself is crazy, false, unjust [, ...] the voice of madness becomes the voice of sanity" (65). Following this line of inverted thought, Vitkus reveals Bromden and McMurphy to be natural, sexual males to which "overly aggressive women are presented as a threat and as the cause of madness" (79). He describes the conflict and final standoff between the two as McMurphy's "response to the system,

his 'natural' rebellion to an unnatural mechanical system [...] a kind of violent, instinctive reaction to [...] authority - not a real, viable form of protest or a strategy to create change" (83). Being "reduced to a bestial combat, at the lowest level of human response" (83), Vitkus suggests that "if this is the return to nature that the text promises, [that] we should think twice about the wisdom of such a regression" (84). Furthermore, he insists that the final attempted "rape" of Nurse Ratched is not progressively subversive, but "is an act of insane misogyny, a violent impulse which plunges McMurphy to the level of non-rational animality and destroys him" (84), dismissing his "code" as a revolutionary representative "for action against the dominant social order" (84). Ultimately, he suggests that what we are to take from the text's representation of heroic masculinity is how McMurphy serves as both symbol of resistance to oppressive institutions and at the same time showcases how male power can "function [...] in a destructive way" for Bromden (85).

Such a reading, while worthy in its criticism of the text's misogynist themes, does a great disservice to the implications of the quarrel between McMurphy and the Big Nurse as an ideological and systemic rebellion, as well as to McMurphy's character and the love and liberation he brings to Bromden and the other men on the ward. This happens most poignantly in that there is a deep animal relationship to be explored in both McMurphy's relationship with the Nurse, as well as that with Bromden when read through subtle characterization, but here, animal rhetoric has been used to indicate abhorrent behaviour. To regard McMurphy's violent rage at the culminating struggle between the two as pejoratively "bestial" and "animalistic," is to detrimentally misinterpret and disregard a reading of the wild versus domestication that becomes evident once the characters are examined and read through the biological and behavioural implications of the species they are subtly associated with throughout the text. When such

animal characterizations are made note of and furthered by additional research pertaining to the species in question, an additional reading of the text's misogyny becomes available, suggesting that although problematic in this regard, *Cuckoo's Nest* should not be dismissed entirely on these grounds. Rather, a critical investigation through an alternate lens will demonstrate that reading the animal can be integral to making sense of that which seems flat out controversial.

Similarly, not taking into consideration a broader reading of re-wilding humanity at large, Elaine Ware reads Bromden exclusively as representative of a Native American identity crisis, which again has merit but is also demonstrates certain limitations when regarded as an unresolved downfall of his character. Representing the Chinook generally, Ware argues that despite McMurphy's influence, Bromden remains void of identity, forever defined by and obedient to others, and that this representation is symbolic of the greater tribe's inability to "return [...] to their original state in nature" (101). Speaking outside of the text, Ware points to the historical tendency for minority groups to be swallowed up by the larger culture, and suggests that (as represented by Bromden) "the Indians may literally come to fulfill the description, accepted by Kesey, of the 'Vanishing American[s]' [65]" (101). To resolve that Kesey "accepts" the disappearance of Native Americans is complicated in its finality. While the text does depict this reality as a true threat, I would argue that Kesey concludes *Cuckoo's Nest* with a chance of reclamation for not only the Native American but for the ability of anyone to discover and re-identify with an ancestral self. Denying Bromden heroism at the end of the novel, and suggesting that he has been "molded by McMurphy, who is an influence just as strong as that of his tribe, his mother, the army, and the hospital" (Ware 100) is to deprive his character of the personal development and inspiration brought out in him through the efforts of McMurphy. However, Ware raises an insightful observation that McMurphy does share a tie of

inspiration for Bromden with his tribe. When explored through the ancestry of both wild and domestic Canidae, both sources are shown to be one in the same (see Chapter 2). Bromden's Native Americanness should not be dismissed, but his identity does invite readers into a larger conversation regarding the imposition of colonial and Euro-American ideology upon not only the Native American, but all individuals subject to (what has been recognized as, and which will be redefined) "civilized" society.

More recently, Shima Lofti presented an Althusserian reading of *Cuckoo's Nest* in which the focus was the novel's exploration of the operation of reigning ideology to which the patients are submissive subjects. Maintaining the approach taken by Althusser's "student and collaborator, Pierre Machery" (18) and his proposed idea of "symptomatic reading" (that is, observing that there are always two meanings in a text - an explicit that "comes out of the author's conscious intention, and the implicit [...] of which the author is not conscious" [18]), Lofti concludes that while the novel appears to undercut dominant ideology on the surface, there is an unconscious subtext at play that actually serves to repress rather than express the intended ideas (18). In accordance with Althusser's belief that "no one can release themselves from the bondage of dominant ideology" (20), Lofti concludes that McMurphy is not only consequently punished by the system he ideologically defied, but that it was the other patients who "paradoxically r[a]n him toward his destruction by urging him [to] act as a hero that stands against the very ideology that rule[d] over them" (20). Lofti thus fixates on a paradoxical reading of the text through her application of Althusser's theory, and utilizes that paradox to prove Althusser's unconditional belief that ideology is inescapable.

While Althusser's theories regarding ideology are incredibly useful as a lens through which to view *Cuckoo's Nest*, and shall indeed be utilized in the course of the animal



interpretation at hand, I propose that it need not doom the text to a defeatist end. The extension of Machery's valuable symptomatic reading offers more than the limited contrary scope suggested here as well. Such a reading is not incorrect or dismissible, but nor is it absolute. Whether or not Kesey intended to utilize the canine family to the extent explored in the course of this paper is itself arguable, but by opening Machery's proposition of their being two readings to every text to the possibility that there are a vast range of interpretations to every text, what becomes available to the audience is seemingly limitless, and by no means restricted to a simple bi-fold pair of readings that contradict or undermine one another. Furthermore, while Lofti's utilization of Althusser's theory aims to arrive at the theorist's conclusion (that is, that ideology cannot be escaped), it shall be demonstrated that there are useful ways to engage Althusser's thought, but to use his propositions as tools with which to navigate the text's multilayered themes and events, rather than use the theoretical framework in its totality in order to arrive at a predetermined conclusion bound by its limited implications.

### **Leaving New Marks: Why Read Animal Characterization?**

As Matthew Calarco suggests in his overview of recent writings in the field of animal studies, the area of research has, in the past, focused mostly on ethical matters regarding non-human animals, and that assumption still prevails. However, contemporary conversations reveal that the nature of the field has become extremely diverse and interdisciplinary. Calarco, a professor of philosophy whose research focuses on continental as well as animal and environmental philosophy, provides an overview of work done in the field between 2013 and 2014, identifying the presence of animal studies in regard to themes such as "ontology, politics, economics, ethology, history and activism" (20), most of which bring into the question the relationship and boundaries of identity between the human and animal. Still adhering to an

ethical end, these conversations often lead to or arise from an interest in how human relationships with animals affect the latter, and questions of subject-hood, anthropomorphism and the sociopolitical rights of those without voice tend to comprise the trajectory nature of such discourses. While such questions and contemplations are certainly valid and important, there is also an emphasis to be put on the re-identification of the human subject as animal, not for the sake of animal justice, but to open a sociopolitical conversation about what it is to be human, and what the consequences are of denying a human nature in the process of becoming and staying civilized.

Conversations that challenge and deconstruct the human-animal binary are indeed underway in the field, if not to this end, suggesting that the focus of animal studies is at least headed toward one that considers not only the non-human animal, but the animal-identity of humankind as well. Demanding we step away from anthropocentrism, contemporary philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti, for example, questions the ontological binary that defines man as distinct from animal, suggesting that eliminating the concept of distinction between the two at this level could then extend such radical thinking to ethical and political realms and result in a more ideal and respectful existence for non-humans as well as marginalized groups (Calarco 22). Similarly, Canadian social theorist, writer and philosopher Brian Massumi challenges the anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism placed on activities and phenomenon such as play and creativity, and suggests that by recognizing such shared traits as part of a larger set of forces than that which is identifiably "human," we might come to realize the extent to which both are intimately tied politically, ecologically and biologically (Calarco 23). Like Braidotti, Massumi's proposed deconstruction of the human-animal binary is to an end that advocates for the well-being of animals, rather than to question the animal nature of

humankind and the detriment done unto the species itself through the processes of civilization. Animals, instead, are "brought up" to the level of the human, and are asked to be considered with as much dignity and right as the civilized subject. What is less often addressed is the other side of the binary deconstruction which likens the human experience in civilization to that of the animals' own exploitation under the same conditions.

In addition to this needed shift in regard to the thematic reconnection of the human and animal, another area that has yet to be furthered in present conversation is the serious study and application of animal studies as a mode of literary criticism, which an animal reading of *Cuckoo's Nest* will demonstrate to be necessary and viable. Mirosław Loba, a professor of French and Italian literature, advocates a "rethink[ing of] the approach of humanity and animal in literature" (259), and while he even suggests that conversations in literature can lead to an investigation of what humanity is in regard to animality, his applications remain based largely on explicit metaphor, or the physical presence of animals in any given text. Thus, while I agree that reading the animal in literature "invites us to rethink the category of animality [and] to revisit its literary representation" (Loba 261) and that we do need to consider the animal where it is "not presented as a central theme" (Loba 262), I think it is further necessary to become aware of and note animality where it is not directly indicated at all, tracking and collecting instances of animal language as it is used to describe a human character. By carefully reading such underlying commentary, the human-animal conversation is extended to ask what has become of our own animal-identity, and how we have been subject to the same forces of domestication, exploitation and enslavement as animals themselves have with the expansion of civilized living.

As previously stated, when studying literature and culture, my own critical disposition is to consider how human relationships are characterized in terms of animal behaviour in order to

pull sociopolitical readings from the combination of the two. But this initial explanation is incomplete. I suspect there is something further to be discovered in regard to *why* specific writers choose to write human characters and human experience through certain *animals*. This artistic maneuver is not being done because a particular animal conveys something that the human cannot, but because the animal expresses something that is more human than we, especially as civilized human beings, are permitted to be. With this in mind, we are invited to regard and question the nature of our existence and relationships with others, both personally and on a larger societal scale. Too often, the animal in literature is overlooked, dismissed, or even regarded as problematic for the implications of its historical usage (to pejoratively characterize "lesser humans" (Salisbury 15), but a reconsideration is worthwhile, indeed *necessary*, in order to reclaim the usage of animal metaphor, and also rediscover and reclaim the animal in ourselves. *Cuckoo's Nest* demonstrates how enriched our readings and considerations become when we open ourselves to a deeper exploration and application of the animal characterization contained not only in literature, but within our biological and psychological states of being.

Much of the existing critical conversations surrounding *Cuckoo's Nest*, including those aforementioned, draw attention to the few explicit instances of animal symbolism and characterization in the text to illustrate an argument at hand, but never has the text been explored through the consideration and application of the animals' biological existence as it relates to other animals made mention of, or the conditions in which the characters or animals are situated. For example, critics will often make use of a scene in which Bromden observes a dog crossing the asylum grounds toward a highway, or another in which a discussion of the patients as rabbits and the Big Nurse as wolf takes place, and indeed, these instances are significant and worth noting. But in every case, the conversation is limited to these literal instances of animal

comparison, and the readings derived remain detrimentally underdeveloped. Rather than limit the reading and significance of the animal to the confines of these few overt mentions (and to limit them to their implications as they are presented in the text - that is, to not explore the biological and behavioural reality of the species) and conclude the reading as it may be interpreted symbolically within a single scene, such instances should instead be regarded as cues to a larger and longer running animal and sociopolitical narrative that persists through the novel's entirety.

This requires an interpretive reception and awareness of animal behaviours and practices, even when they are not readily indicated in the text. Such attentiveness implies reading the squeaks, licks, barks, sniffs, snarls and howls of animals and humans as something indicative of an association with a particular animal, as well as reading the interactions between characters associated with different specimens through those animals' biological and behavioural facticities and relationships. By extending the reading of the animal to take the biological into consideration, an underlying sociopolitical commentary is almost always revealed, or the broader commentary enriched. Such an effect is the result here in which the reading of wolves, foxes and domestic dogs leads to a criticism of our blind and unquestioning adherence to dominant ideology. But rather than return to an echo of Lofti's Althusserian reading of the text, the biological relationship between the wild, ancestral and the domestic deepens the question of systematized thought, enculturation and interpellation with a more optimistic resolution of there being a hope for deconstructing, challenging and ultimately undoing ideological thought. And while taking the biological, behavioural and relational significance of the aforementioned species into account is crucial to the reading of ideology in the text, these elements, like Althusser's conceptual terms themselves, should be regarded and utilized as tools with which to assist, not limit, our reading. Considering the hard facts in combination with common reception of and

historical mythology surrounding these species, as well as taking into consideration the specific situations and relationships of the characters with which particular species are associated, is the most thorough way in which to receive and interpret this animal metaphor.

Furthermore, I propose that such a reading should not be, and indeed is not, restricted to a metaphor useful only in that it symbolizes the experience of the human as a non-animal being. Instead, when the characterization of the human akin to the animal is read exactly as such (that is *as* animal itself), yet another level is given to the criticism of civilized thinking and ideological indoctrination. As a society, and a species, we have become accustomed to disassociating ourselves from the animal, and thus from our barest and most instinctual, true selves. Bromden's struggle with a lost identity, expressed through his evolution from domestic to wild canine, represents not only the effect of imposed ideology and enculturation upon the Native American, but upon all of humanity when born into and existent within so called "civilized" society. By denying our reactions, desires, and impulses and dismissing them as "wrong," "immature" or "uncivilized," we are denying, dismissing and betraying ourselves and thus our relationships with one another and our surroundings.

By comparison, acknowledging the animal experience in *Cuckoo's Nest* as our own, regarding the domestication of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) into the domestic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*) as our experience from wild to civilized and domestic ourselves, the text is shown to advocate for not only a criticism of dominant ideology, but an active shift away from it through the rediscovery of our animal selves. Adhering to ideas of re-wilding, of getting back to and understanding nature, and of seeing the harm implicit in civilized thought and operation, Kesey's text, when read through the animal, is shown to advocate for a return to ourselves - not through organized political movement, but through love, play, and undoing. Inspired by the trickster and

ancestral figure of the fox (with which McMurphy is characterized), both non-animal and domestic dog associated characters are inspired to reconsider and abandon the mental constructs of the Combine that have enforced and mandated that what they *are* as human beings and individuals has been wrong. That their experiences and reactions are invalid, incorrect and in need of "adjustment." As McMurphy, and thus the fox, have more and more of an effect on the believed-to-be-broken patients of the asylum, they each in turn adopt characteristics that are more and more wild and canine that mirrors the way in which their way of thinking, and thinking of themselves, is inspired to change. In the end, the ancestral Fox (the inspiration to rediscover our own instinctual and authentic selves) guides the once domestic and defeated Chief to his own identity as Wolf, expressed at the culminating point of the latter character's escape from the ward and from the confines of oppressive ideological thought.

Of course, a full dismissal or undoing of ideological thought may be impossible, but as *Cuckoo's Nest* suggests, there is still a chance of and potential for breakthroughs that allow momentary glimpses of truth and the self to commence. In turn, such revelations further lead to a larger re-wilding of the self and re-identification as animal. There is something about taking the recognition of the human as animal and not something separate that is liberating and necessary to realizing the downfalls of civilization which not only have the effect of separating us from our wild and instinctual responses, but which have set the groundwork for and have just as necessarily led to the political, pedagogical, ideological, and social struggles of every systematic oppression we can list - be that racism, sexism, terrorism, war, poverty, slavery, etc. The movement itself becomes one not of "power," but of re-becoming wild at the individual level, if only for a moment.

## Lining the Den: The Theory and History Behind an Animal Reading

To illustrate that the aforementioned approaches Kesey's text can be extended in regard to their consideration of *Cuckoo's Nest's* ideological conversations, it is necessary to first foreground the ideological and the consideration of the human as animal present in the text, the latter of which is so often overlooked. Necessary to understanding the dissolution of this binary opposition involves a foregrounding discussion of how the civilization vs. wild binary underlies all ideological thought, as is evidenced in an "animal" reading of the text. Kesey's subtle, yet powerful, demonstration of this effect is delivered not only through the use of the wild to domestic ancestral relationships as an illustrative narrative, but by the way in which he also features animal archetypes that are familiar to his readers (given their own ideology). When said archetypes are challenged by following through to the animals' biological end, the reader's own blind adherence to ideological thought is exemplified. In the same way that reading the wild behaviours of wolf and rabbit against the ways in which they are conventionally thought of and archetypally utilized (as will be demonstrated in this reading), ideological thought is challenged and invited to be undone when the conversation is extended to question what truly constitutes normal behaviour for the human being, and what has been prescribed as normal within civilized conditions.

Central to an understanding of the forthcoming exploration of *Cuckoo's Nest* is a reconsideration of what is meant here by the term "civilized." The OED defines "civilized" as that which is "at an advanced stage of social and cultural development, usually marked by the existence of organized communities and an adherence to established conventions of behaviour; highly developed; refined and sophisticated in manner or taste; educated, cultured" ("civilized").



Already the definition is subjective rather than innate. For what does it mean for something to be "advanced," "refined," or "sophisticated?" Indivisible from civilization is the need to self-define, which in turn always implies an opposite (civilization to the wilderness; human to the animal) to which the self-defining term is deemed superior. It is then upon this binary of superiority and inferiority, of right and wrong, that the ideology particular to any given society or civilization is created and enforced.

Ideology is defined by the OED as "a systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics, economics or society" as well as "a set of beliefs governing conduct" and "the forming or holding of such a scheme of ideas" ("ideology"). Marxist theorist Louis Althusser suggested that an ideology's primary function, once crafted, "is to control subjects through cultural institutions [...] without which no state can maintain [...] power" (Lofti 18). Such cultural institutions include the religious, educational, legal and political realms, but extend also into the family and cultural (Althusser). The prevalence and consistency with which these institutions and cultural realms enforce such thinking implies that without consent, any and every individual is born into an atmosphere saturated with ideology, thus born into a mode of thinking that supports the function and operation of a society that has power over them. Ultimately, ideology can be described as a way of thinking that suggests that current and prescribed conditions are both socially normal and biologically natural.

One of the biggest issues foregrounding the animal narrative present in *Cuckoo's Nest*, for both characters of the text as well as for readers, is the conflict that arises between *truly* natural (in an instinctual sense) behaviour and that which has come to be recognized *as* "natural" or "normal" according to civilized definition. Views on what constitutes normal behaviour and

human responses are inherently present in the text due to its being set in a mental asylum; an institution created to deal with "abnormal" behaviour, by either removing the problematic individual from society, or by "correcting" said behaviour. Already, this discussion leads to a question of very subjective terminology - what is normal, and what is abnormal, and who decides? In civilized society, those able to cope within and serve and support the industrial world are regarded as normal. Those who struggle to bend to the indoctrination and mandates demanded by society, on the other hand, are those considered abnormal, problematic and in need of adjustment so they are able to cope. Thus, the behaviours that serve to maintain and benefit institutions that advance the values of a dominant power group are those which are "normalized" and by extension, regarded as "natural."

What becomes interesting in this regard is the way in which the modified (and often even mythologized) behaviour of animals is used to justify the "naturalness" of social inequality, exploitation and oppression by way of being compared to behaviour witnessed in the animal. We can admit to being animal so long as the comparison acts as a justification for (as opposed to a viable argument against) the social structures in place in any given society. A prime, and relevant example that contributes to the core of the text's canine narrative, is humanity's distinction and separation from both the wild and its own (that is, humanity's) true animal nature. In the same way that the wild world will be shown in this section to have been historically and necessarily demonized, "natural" animal behaviour (both non-human and human) will also be discussed in terms of its undue vilification.

## Decapitating the "Natural": A Process and a Construct

From its beginnings, the creation and domination of civilization rested upon distinguishing the wild from the civilized as something to be feared. As civilization spreads, it necessarily opposes itself to the "natural", and in so doing, creates an opposition by attempting to set apart. In contemporary anarchist philosopher Feral Faun's chapter "Nature as Spectacle," the rhetorical implications of language used to differentiate the wild and civilized characteristics of the world are scrutinized. Speaking in tandem with Althusser's views on ideology, Faun declares that "nature has not always existed ... [and that] it is found in the philosophies and image constructions of civilized human beings," not "in the depths of the forest [or] in the heart of the cougar" (15). Rather than identify what has come to be recognized as "the natural," such ideological constructs of progress "serve ... to domesticate us [and] to suppress and channel our expressions of wildness" (15). In many cases, this is done by the necessary and ancient practice of perpetuating the wilderness as evil, and the civilized as comparatively safe.

Faun points to descriptions in the Bible of "the evil wilderness, a place of desolation inhabited by ferocious and poisonous beasts, malicious demons and the mad," saying that "it induced fear of what was wild [which] ... helped create the dichotomy between 'human' and 'nature' that keeps individuals from living wildly" (15). Gary Snyder echoes the sentiments of Faun in *Practice of the Wild* by drawing attention to both the negativity and actual *negation* which have (through civilization) come to define wilderness and wildness. The word "wild" comes to mean: "Of animals - not tame, undomesticated, unruly; of plants - not cultivated; [...] of societies - uncivilized, rude, resisting constituted government; of individuals - unrestrained, insubordinate, licentious dissolute; [...] of behaviour - violent, destructive, cruel, unruly - artless, free, spontaneous" (9-10). Each definition commonly associated with wild spaces, behaviours or

beings are thus rendered obtuse, and a threat to the comparative benefits and order of civilized behaviour. The prevalence of these definitions themselves function as the rhetorical support and perpetuation of dominant ideology that vilifies wildness. Snyder describes the definition of wild "in our dictionaries [as] what - from a human standpoint - it is not" (10), rather than by what it has to offer. By adhering to such ideology, Snyder insists that wildness, in all of its complex diversity, "cannot be seen [...] for what it *is*:

Of animals - free agents, each with its own endowments, living within natural systems;  
of plants - self-propagating, self-maintaining; [...] of societies - whose order has grown from within and is maintained by the force of consensus and customs rather than explicit legislation [...] societies which resist economic and political domination by civilization;  
of individuals - following local custom, style, and etiquette without concern for the standards of the metropolis. Unintimidated, self-reliant, independent; of behaviour - fiercely resisting any oppression, confinement, or exploitation; of behaviour - [...] free, spontaneous, unconditioned. Expressive, physical, openly sexual, ecstatic" (10-11).

When posed side by side, it is easy to see why the potential power, independence and freedom of the wilderness is denied in the dominant definition and reception of the word. Directly opposed to the confines and legislative "order" of civilized living, the freedom of wildness is at its core the ultimate threat, for it results in and indeed necessitates civilization's demise. This is true not only biologically, but socially, behaviourally, and ecologically as well. On a larger scale, a combined lack of cooperation would be devastating to the successful operation of civilized society. But it is on the level of the individual that beliefs must be cultivated. It goes as follows, then, that it is at the individual level first that one is instructed and cultivated to not only distrust, but deny and dismiss their own instinct.

## **Vilification of the Wild Self: Catholicism, Animist Religion and Werewolves**

Along with the demonization of the wild, as was alluded to previously with Faun's assessment of the Old Testament's role in perpetuating such beliefs, as Catholicism and Euro-civilization spread into wild land, animist cultures and belief systems also came under threat, were vilified and exterminated ("Legends of the Werewolves"). If the self-proclaimed greatness and superiority of civilization were to prevail in these newly invaded lands, it was necessary that the wild itself, as well as groups of people and ways of living and belief that held an intimate association with wilderness, were cast in a negative light. This involved not only degrading such lifestyles and peoples as "unsophisticated," but actually demonizing any belief system or mythos that cast an eye of awe or admiration toward the power and non-profitable potential of the wild. It was this sort of ideation that led to the many witch hunts and trials of the 16th century, as well as the prevailing fear and hunts of *werewolves*, a creature that civilized cultures claim to be synonymous with madness and insanity ("Legends of the Werewolves").

In animist belief systems creatures such as werewolves were thought to be closer to the spiritual realms of both good and evil, but Catholicism and European civilization vilified such mythos and alleged characters (Beresford 88). A were, of any sort, is a human being capable of transforming (either fully or partially) into another non-human animal. For animist groups, such an ability was regarded as sacred, and the individual "afflicted" (or perhaps to this interpretation, "capable") with/of such an ability was regarded as more enlightened, spiritual and even divine (Beresford 89). Catholicism, by contrast, labeled such figures (imagined or otherwise) as demonic, dark, and creatures of the devil. What is more, as Faun detailed of the wilderness itself, such figures were considered out of control, malicious and ultimately "mad".

Such interpretations of the human-animal hybrid become particularly significant to understanding ideological uses of language and the way that the civilized human has come to deny its identification as animal. To consider the etymology of the term, "Werewolf" can be divided into two parts and produce several readings that offer complementary implications. The German "wer" from which the term is derived, presents the name as a literal combination of man and animal: Manwolf ("Legends of the Werewolves"). To bring the contemplation into a postmodern close reading, the English spelling modification lends itself to the dual interpretation of "were" animal, thus implying that the transformed animal is a representation of what humanity once was ("were" being the past tense), but at the same time, offers the subtle hope that it is something still extant in the human species when read as "we're" animal. This latter reading has more truth than one might expect, considering many of the attributes associated with weres in medieval times were in fact human qualities that challenged or were contrary to civilized ideology and mythos. Examples exist in many cases, among which were children abandoned but who survived by a life of solitude in the forest. Their lack of a language, isolation, preference for the brush and uncooked berries and nuts over prepared foods were among the traits declared symptomatic of lycanthropy, and punishable by death or imprisonment. For adults, characteristics as innocent as heavy eyebrows, rough palms and living in isolation or in the wilderness by choice could lead one to be suspected ("Legends of the Werewolves"). At large, it can be referred to as a metaphoric "fear of the beast within" ("Legends of the Werewolves"), but what that "beast" is, is really not so bestial at all.

On the contrary, the uncontrollable "beast" within so greatly feared by the civilized world is exactly that which it rhetorically implies: The Animal. So long endowed with associations of viciousness, brutality and a lack of control, the positive and empowering implications of such a

concept are easily (and intentionally) overlooked. There is nothing inherently "bad" about the human instinct, but civilization cultivates a mind and "creature" that is expected and commanded to deny its creature-dom. One that is "above" the level of other animals, who refuses to acknowledge that they are a part of the wild world. Like the environment, humankind posits itself as "otherly," a non-wild (that is, "tamed" or perhaps "domesticated") entity that lives within the self-created confines of its concrete domain. This superiority complex, as related to the figure of the werewolf, more recently expressed itself in the 1930's when the film *Werewolf of London* had to censor the transformation scene due to its being "too close at heart with Darwin's evolutionary theories" ("Legends of the Werewolves"). What was there to be denied of this? Presenting the same religiously grounded dissonance as animist beliefs and peoples did four centuries prior in the face of Catholicism, the same ideologies denying man's animality were and are still at play.

It comes as more than coincidence, then, that the audience of *Cuckoo's Nest* is *self* introduced to the liberating character of Randall McMurphy with this exact controversial figure - the werewolf. The canine rhetoric, characterization and transformation of others that proceeds beyond this point through the figure of McMurphy, make it clear that such a seemingly dismissible term of identity should not be overlooked. Responding to the court's ruling of his being a psychopath, McMurphy suggests that he is happy to "be whatever their little heart desires, be it psychopath or mad dog or werewolf" (13), all three of which are interrelated in regard to his effect on others, and metaphorically representative of the instinctual power of the wild human. Speaking to a fellow patient, Mr. Harding, McMurphy further details his assessment as a psychopath, attributing it to his being "a guy [that] fights too much and fucks too much" and concludes by adding, "They ain't wholly right, do you think?" (14). This doesn't suggest that the

court is incorrect about his participation in such activities, but rather, contests that such qualities should earn him the title of "psychopath": "Whoever heard tell of a man gettin' too much poozle?" (14). And yet, in saying so, McMurphy pinpoints the exact thing that has resulted in his diagnosis: he is too in touch with and indulgent in his own life essence - his instinct. His animality. Psychopath, mad dog or werewolf, each mythos itself identifies and labels an individual in touch with their wild self and reactions as one who is *dysfunctional*.

What becomes particularly threatening about McMurphy and his (if not overt) recognition of himself as a werewolf, psychopath or mad dog is his blatant disinterest in changing. For him, the problem does not lie within, but without, and just as realization of the empowering potential of the wild might dangerously lead to the deconstruction of civilization as a power structure and system of control, it is McMurphy's lycanthropic wildness, and his indulgence in it as something *vital*, that threatens to disempower the powerful by way of revealing that wildness is something to be envied. As a sort of "infection" in itself, McMurphy's influence over the thinking of the others gradually leads to the transformation of those characters into stronger and more liberated individuals, accepting of their own wildness. The way in which this "infection" or "transference" works within the text directly mirrors the potential threat of challenging and deconstructing any ideology.

The werewolf metaphor in question is not only limited to the confines of this 1960s novel, but expands to an ideology that has been at work for centuries and which still persists today. The rhetoric is so thorough and crucial that it vilifies the wildness of land, human and animal (here, the wolf), all of which are necessarily opposed to the spread and prosperity of human civilization.



## Reclaiming Wildness: Finding a Pathway to Mental Health

The consequence of this broader generalization of the wild as something undesirable and dangerous is the perception that raw human nature, because of its "wildness," must also be inherently *wrong*, and this is what McMurphy sets out to destroy in *Cuckoo's Nest*. Throughout the novel, the idea of dysfunction as it relates to one's inability to either harness or ignore their instinctual reaction to civilized conditions, is often "diagnosed" as a problem with the individual. It is through this perceived dysfunction that the characters of the text have found themselves in the mental ward to begin with. Endowed with "official" wisdom, the educated man, Harding, like the other inpatients, identifies their being institutionalized as a result of their *failure* to cope with the conditions at hand. He sees the problem as one of the individual as misfit, rather than that of a dysfunctional society that deems their behaviour and reactions "abnormal." Ideology has cultivated this interpretation so that those who find themselves unable to repress their instinctive repulsion to oppressive and harmful conditions recognize themselves as sick. By fostering and encouraging the instinctual, McMurphy's character, by contrast, both validates the experience and feelings of those who have been deemed "ill," as well as demonstrates to them the power and well-being that can come of embracing the instinctual.

Ronald David Laing, a counter-culture psychiatrist of the early 1960s, "developed the argument that there may be a benefit in allowing acute mental and emotional turmoil in depth to go on and have its way, and that the outcome of such turmoil could have a positive value" (*Divided Self* 3). This non-traditional approach is what takes place in *Cuckoo's Nest*, regardless of whether or not Kesey identifies it as such, and it comes to be through the influence of the psychotic, mad dog and werewolf, McMurphy. Laing expressed his wish to "emphasize that our 'normal' 'adjusted' state is too often the abduction of ecstasy, the betrayal of our true

potentialities, [and] that many of us are only too successful in acquiring a false self to adapt to false realities" (14). However, rather than remain victim to this line of thinking, Laing proposes that there is opportunity for the affected human to return to a more instinctual state by recognizing the imposed conditions of normality and adjustment that so thoroughly infiltrate civilized existence. Madness, then, really becomes a question of imposed ideology, and this is where the demonization of the werewolf, and McMurphy's diagnoses as "psychotic" unite. In the same way that the figure of the werewolf was not threatening to the pagan cultures from which the mythos stemmed, nor are McMurphy's identified "ailments" truly "abnormal." In both cases, the so-called threatening aspect has been ideologically defined as such.

When Laing speaks about the indulgence of mental illness, allowing illness to manifest, he is not suggesting physicians and patients do so because schizophrenia is a particularly enlightening or beneficial state for the individual. Rather, what he suggests is that such manifestations are those which do arise because of toxic environmental conditions (social, political etc.), and that they should be allowed to manifest instead of be "prevented" by means of drug inducement or physical restraint. In the same way that fever or vomiting are necessary to the expulsion of the flu virus, manifestations of so-called mental illness can be necessary and justified reactions to environmental toxicity. As the individual works through the fit by letting it take its course, he or she comes to find health (or some element of it, as much as it might be allowed to exist) that would not be found through drug induced "prevention." Mental illness, it stands, is not something of which to be ashamed, or a condition that suggests something ill of the individual in which it develops, but is rather an indication of something wrong with the environmental conditions - civilization itself. To take actual preventative measures against the prominence of mental illness would be to alter or completely remove the institutions, ideologies

and necessities of civilization. Because the culprit in question operates upon the very conditions that induce mental illness, such a deconstruction is never considered a practical measure of prevention. Instead, ideology is tailored to deny, condemn and silence (via drugs, surgery or physical restraint) such effects, creating the delusion that the problem is not the system, but the sensitive individuals who break under its weight.

Psychologist, medical biophysicist and author of *In an Unspoken Voice*, Peter A. Levine, suggests that a reconsideration of the role of trauma and the way in which it is met and treated is necessary in order to prevent or undo lasting conditions such as post traumatic stress disorder. Above all else, he suggests that this must come through allowing the physical body to process and translate experiences of trauma in much the way that animals themselves do (if left to respond outside of human interference). Like Laing's reception of schizophrenia and other such mental illnesses, Levine does not regard trauma as "a disease [...] but rather a human experience rooted in survival instincts" that when allowed to be fully expressed will result in the "traumatic state [...] loosen[ing] its hold on the sufferer" (Mate xiii). Recalling an instance in which he was hit by a car, Levine mentions expressing relief that at the moment of trauma, his body was allowed to follow its "self-protective response [... in order to] help [... him] to 'reset' [his] nervous system" (8). More often than not, medical personnel are trained to "purposefully stop people from shaking [...] sometimes [...] strap[ped ...] down [...] or give[n ...] a shot of Valium" (8) which Levine argues does much more harm than good. While providing a temporary "solution" in the form of momentary relief, the inability to shake keeps traumatized individuals "frozen and stuck" (8). By allowing the shaking to manifest, the elevated heart rate and blood pressure are naturally and gradually brought down, and the body is allowed a "completion of the defensive and orienting responses" (9), even allowing the inevitable "'survival emotions' of rage and terror"

(9) to be experienced without the individual becoming overwhelmed by them. When such responses are denied or cut short, the unprocessed trauma is left to manifest in the form of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) - a common form of mental illness.

This exhibition of shaking is not limited to the moment of physical trauma either, and the resolution of traumatic events (physical or otherwise) is exhibited very often in "therapy clients [...] as they recover from trauma," a necessary process also involved in the "release of captured animals back into the wild" (15). Speaking to park biologist of the Muzu Environmental Center in Malawi, Central Africa, Andrew Bwanali informed Levine that the exact behaviour described of his trauma patients was necessary and had to be ensured in order for any released animal to survive in the wild (15-6). The acknowledgement, acceptance and allowance of traumatic response and processing are thus intimately tied with the wild self, and necessary for mental well-being. And yet, such responses are repressed as quickly as possible. Shakes are restrained, tears shunned, and fears dismissed as irrational. The result of such persistent rejections and repressions are the conditions of anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and other psychoses that condemn individuals to a life of suffering and/or institutionalization. What becomes even more fascinating is the way in which trembling itself is present in so many other instinctual responses that are also forbidden and even condemned by civilization such as that which manifests in situations of fear or anxiety and sexual climax. Levine focuses on the way in which the manifestations of such "gyrations and undulation" exist to "'shake off' the last rousing experience and 'ground ...' us in readiness for the next encounter" (16). Ultimately, such mechanisms "help restore our equilibrium" (16).

It's straightforward enough to see the correlation such shaking has to the discussion of mental illness as it has so far been discussed, but what of sexual trembling? In *Cuckoo's Nest*, as

McMurphy related his promiscuity to his alleged psychosis (indeed, it is the documented "symptom" that lands him a position in the institution), it is sexual desire itself that is regarded as pejorative by civilized standards. Yet, it is something so inevitable and central to human relationships, and is indeed also necessary for the species' perpetuation, that it cannot entirely be rid. Still, it is a "primal" element of being human that is (and particularly was at the time of Kesey's writing) regarded as embarrassing, inappropriate, and "private" - something that happens, but should never be spoken of. Like shaking sobs, traumatic convulsions or shakes of fear, human sexuality as it is related to the undulation of orgasm is similarly associated with that which is to be repressed or denied, and if openly embraced or desired, is regarded as a symptom of uncontrollable psychosis.

Psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, suggests that "we recognize that a country has attained a high level of civilization when we find that everything in it that can be helpful in exploiting the earth for man's benefit and in protecting him against nature [...] is cultivated and effectively protected" (15). In sum, civilization is that which distinguishes and opposes itself to the natural and seeks to protect itself against the latter's allegedly harmful potential, the ironic consequences of which manifest largely in widespread unhappiness, dissatisfaction and the development of innumerable neuroses. Civilization, then, for the purpose of this discussion is the removal from and disassociation with the wild, and is thus a repression of the self. In that it is the conditioned, altered and moderated, this definition automatically associates itself with the domestic - a modification of the wild animal that, via selective breeding, results in a more amiable and obedient creature, biologically distant from its ancestry.

Like civilization, domesticity goes so far as to even breed a canine, the hound (be that wolfhound or foxhound), that will possess the drive and determination to hunt and destroy the

very ancestors from which they are descendent. In this sense, ideology is shown to mirror the effect of the biological relationship seen between the domestic dog and wolf or fox, in that it too alters individuals to dismiss and strive to eliminate that which is ancestral to them. While the example of the canine is the result of generational biological alteration that has commenced over time, it nonetheless parallels the effect that occurs with the civilization of the human individual in a single life time. Born wild, the individual is then immediately subjected to alteration and ideological influence and conditioning (through education, manners, religion, through the restriction of free time and the standardization of play, by being told not to cry, to disregard fear, to be quiet, wear shoes, and to stop clinging to their parent) so that by the time of adulthood, a being that is fully domestic and obedient, who believes in the rightful repression of their own instincts and reactions for the sake of progress and financial stability, has been cultivated.

The writings of my youth were rather accurate to this effect, even if an individual wolf cannot be domesticated, the metaphor is suitable for describing the process of regulation we were subjected to. What is further pertinent about my original story and the utilization of this process is the fact that I identified it beyond our particular group - the truck smelled of others just "like us" who had similarly been born wild, but now faced indoctrination and domestication. And speaking to the dismissal suggested by our society's dominant views regarding mental illness and/or the refusal to concede to standardization and regularized behaviour, was the potentiality of being "*destroyed*" (a euphemism for the euthanasia or extermination, usually of a dangerous animal) should we not concede to the process of domestication.

While this holds literally true for McMurphy (he is essentially eliminated from the ward once lobotomized and rendered vegetative) it also holds relevance as a representation of the destruction of the individual's mental state when they are unable to cope with the conditions of

civilized life, *and* to the destruction of the instinctual when the inability to cope is regarded as problematic and sought to be eliminated. Such a destruction of the animal instinct is succinctly summarized in the text when Bromden describes another vegetative Chronic (in for life) who had come in an Acute, but "got fouled up bad" from the effect of electroshock therapy, and thereafter remained mounted against the wall "like a stuffed trophy" (16). The patient, afflicted by his own instinctual rejection of the situation in which he finds himself - afflicted by his own *wildness* - is effectively destroyed and then likened to the image of the deceased body of an animal that has undergone the process of taxidermy. "Trophy killing" is the terminology generally used to refer to the deliberate and glorified killing of a *wild* animal, and its use here further supports this reading by likening the "treatment" of the instinctual, to destruction. Including so early on a reference to the animal in regard to methods of regularization, Kesey foreshadows the narrative of man and animal to come, of wildness, and the potential consequences that come of being wild in a world that demands domesticity.

Feral Faun similarly characterizes civilization as domestic, claiming that "each of us has experienced the processes of domestication" and that it is in major part our "distrust of our own experience [... that] keeps us from rebelling as freely and actively as we'd like" (13). We have effectively been trained and "conditioned not to trust ourselves, not to feel completely, nor to experience life intensely [...] to accept the humiliation of work and pay as in escapable [...] to expect disappointment, to see it as normal, not to question it [...] to accept the tedium of civilized survival rather than breaking free and really living" (13). Each element of his description is that with which this reading adheres. Descriptions of the uncivilized, of a time or people that exist outside of or prior to civilization are not pejorative in their usage. Rather, such descriptors are indicative and refer to states of human existence that exist outside of the doctrine of domesticated,

civilized conditions and their manipulative ideologies. To become uncivilized, instinctual, wild and, yes, *animal*, is to "trust in ourselves, [and] our experiences" (13). It is to dismiss civilization's denial and rejection of what we are, and in so doing, to begin the process of scrutinizing and challenging all that we've been led to believe is normal and necessary within the confines of civilized institutions.



## Canine Connections: An Application of Ancestral Reading

The closeness with which the process of human civilization mirrors the biological process canine wildness and domesticity is directly reflected and utilized in Kesey's text in order to emphasize the way in which characters are positioned at certain times in their lives, how they influence one another, and how they regard themselves. Tying the conversation back to the subject of the animal and the human's essential but denied instinctual identity as that element of being (that is, animal), the canine qualities observed in characters and read in this project are not comparisons that *liken* the human to the animal - they are direct embodiments and arguments for a refusal to acknowledge a binary relationship between the human and other animals. References to actual animal beings invite a reading of *Cuckoo's Nest* that suggests such human-animal observations are indicative of the human character's experience and self. But beyond explicit mentions (the identification of a character as a non-human animal such as a fox, or their association with such a species), behaviours that are commonly recognized as animal are also given to the character without further indication or clarification that they could or should be read as anything other than human in nature. This hybridity of describing the human in terms of the animal is what allows for a reading of their parallel experience, and shared identity.

The fact that my reading, in being identified as one of the animal, suggests we undertake the task of noticing certain behaviour as that which is indicative of the animal, rather than to accept it as human and read on might at first seem contrary to my larger argument that human and animal are not binary oppositions. However, because we habitually, as civilized subjects, do *not* recognize the particular behaviours, quirks, movements, sounds and expressions in question as those which are human (or at least those which are civilized - it is not proper for humans to

bark, squeak, sniff, etc.), overlooking them as mere creative verbiage does a disservice to the text and the animal narrative at play. By passing over such details, failing to acknowledge the animal implications they supply, we ultimately reject the invitation to take note of a rhetorical device within the text that deepens and illuminates elements of its broader sociopolitical commentary. This becomes particularly evident when we look into the biological implication of the characterizations before us and find that they provide a reading contrary to what we thought we were being presented, and which might at the same time, make sense of otherwise problematic or confusing elements of the text. We must thus commit ourselves to noticing and carrying out extended examples of animal metaphor as they appear through less overt characterization, and read such subtleties in accordance to the specific animals to which they refer (eg. that of the wolf, rabbit, fox, etc.). It only through this level of sensitivity and commitment to noticing the animal that we can then apply and read its biology and behaviour onto the relationships of the human characters with which they are associated in order to arrive at the point of revelation suggesting our shared identity and oneness with the animal.

### **How to Read the Canine: Wolf, Fox, Hybrid, Domestic, Purebred?!**

What is most essential, and most often overlooked, when it comes to interpreting the presence or implied suggestion of any animal in a text is to explore that animal's biology and behaviour and compare it to the way in which it is being represented in the text. This means being aware of and acknowledging relationships between characters (those in association with the same species, a different species, or perhaps no animal species at all), taking into account the text's setting and sociopolitical atmosphere as well as considering the prevailing mythos and archetypal assumptions associated with the animal in question. More often than not, as products of civilization, we do not even realize that a contrary or alternative reading of wildness is even

available to us - we simply cannot recognize implications within the text due to our lacking familiarity with the reference or subject. In the case of canine characterization as it appears in this text, it is first necessary to note the species overtly indicated, and is then worthwhile exploring their social relations to one another, both within the text, and biologically. From this starting point, a narrative that invites a reading committed to engaging the biological relationships and social positions of the characters in question, is made available.

In the same way that it is all too common for us to overlook the implications of the human as animal, McMurphy's relationship with Bromden might easily be regarded as one of cultural opposition (the white man and the indigenous, the cowboy and the Indian), and yet, tracking the canine references of the two characters reveals a contrary suggestion of their shared and connected experience. Throughout *Cukoo's Nest*, Chief Bromden and his ancestors are biologically and socially mapped through the canine family, extending from the wolf (*Canis lupus*) to the domestic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*). The latter species is featured in instances where colonization and enculturation bear their marks, and the former in conditions where a more traditional Native American way of life is still strong standing. Although McMurphy is not an indigenous figure, he is likened to a fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) -- not biologically part of the same genus as the wolf and domestic dog, but still a part the Canidae family. His tie to the broader ancestral family implies a connection and likeness to the wolf, and therefore to a way of life that precedes the imposition of Euro-American civilization. In the same way that ties to the wilderness were undercut in the case of animist religion during medieval times, so too were traditional Native American ways of life destroyed. By extension, and touching on what it is that McMurphy represents, much of what constitutes human nature, and instinct has similarly been forbidden, scorned and repressed for all members born into Western civilized society. It is

through this similarity and connection that McMurphy, and his characterization as fox, is tied to Bromden's ancestry and an expression of a more "in-tune with the wilderness and the self" way of living.

The relevance of wolf characterization is most clearly shown through Bromden and his human ancestry through the association of his Native American heritage and its juxtaposition to Euro-American civilization. Like other characters in the novel, Bromden's own association with the canine is a journey, and he starts out as a sort of domestic/wolf hybrid. Identifying himself as "half Indian" (3), and then "half-breed Indian" (4), Bromden extends an invitation to read his hybridity akin to canine language, considering that "half-breed" is most often the language used to describe a canine hybrid. Soon after, in what may be called a "fit" of sorts, he slips into a recollection of his father who speaks of the "no-'count mongrels" (7) of the village, again likening the "half-breed" term to that used to describe a muddied half-wild wolfdog. By contrast, Bromden's father is a "full-blood Indian - a chief" (11) and thus a full-blood wolf. Throughout the novel, Bromden's social journey hinges upon the reclamation of his suppressed genealogical identity. At one point, for example, Dale Harding, one of the ward's most insightful commentators, indicates that Bromden – more often referred to as "Chief Broom" – is said to be "clutching his namesake" (69). Harding's failure to specify whether he is referring to the broom or Bromden's chieftom gives the reader the opportunity to read a foreshadowed holding of hope for Bromden's character who still possesses something of a "freer" ancestry. Later in the novel, further tying his heritage to the wolf, Bromden recalls an uncle by the name of R. J. Wolf with whom his father cajoled white government officials (95). The association of the still strong Native American ancestors and their overt opposition to American government, to the wild

canine, again emphasizes the relationship between human and animal, and the way in which both oppose and undercut civilization.

When readers are attentive to the presence and implied allusions to canines throughout *Cuckoo's Nest*, a structural pattern of the narrative emerges. We find that references between the canine and Bromden's ancestry are not restricted to namesake, and that nearly every recollection he has of his father is overtly associated with canines of some sort. Near the beginning of the novel, in what appears to be a mental "fit" or hallucinogenic state of delusion, Bromden's narrative transitions in and out of real time events and a past hunting trip with his father in which a pedigree hound is featured. The canine narrative overlays the real-time event of his hiding from a hair cut on the mental ward. Reacting to being found, his mental state transports him to a memory of his father telling him to hold still while their borrowed hunting dog is left to his senses to find a bird for them (9), initially likening him to the hunted. Further in the scene, upon his violent capture and restraint by ward workers, his mind again transports him to the dog, now "out there in the fog, running scared and lost because he can't see [...] fear burning down into him like steam" (9-10), imagery with which Bromden is often associated during his own experience on the ward. Through this vision, Bromden begins the story of McMurphy, and suggests that the revelation of the tale to come will likewise "burn him just that way" (10). Already, the introduction of McMurphy has the effect of inviting Bromden to identify himself as canine. In addition to their shared burning, Bromden's identity and development also matches the description of the purebred blue-tick hound throughout much of the book. Both find themselves lost to fits of fog, and if not physically, at least mentally, run scared and lost within the confines of the ward. The fact that it is a purebred domestic dog, that furthest from the wolf, through which Bromden starts the story and first identifies himself is pertinent to reading his personal

development this way. Least capable of dealing with the wild, it is through this dog that the most fear and incapability is expressed regarding Bromden's own most impotent state.

Comparatively, as Bromden becomes more and more affected by McMurphy, an independent and wild figure entirely willing to embrace his "diagnosis," his own associations and descriptions shift from domestic to lupine, blurring the lines between not only domestic and wild, but between human and the human-animal self. The effect is also utilized to illustrate a loss of that freedom and identity. Gradually run down by the insistence of the government officials by the imposition of enculturation (the "Combine" as Bromden describes it), Bromden's once wolf-associated father is beaten in town and his hair cut short by his own influenced tribe for not surrendering the falls, or agreeing to have them live in inspected houses, until he gave up and took to drinking which "shrunk [him] so wrinkled and yellow even the dogs [didn't] know him" (221). Expressing the travesty and extent of the effect of enculturation through the inability for even the domestic dog to recognize the once wolf-like individual emphasizes the extent to which civilization's imposed force can completely alter the self and eliminate any trace of the ancestral or instinctual.

What can be understood, then, from this ability to shift across species, is a "canine scale" of sorts that measures and connects one to wildness, and to the instinctual self. Along this scale, the wolf figures as the ultimate symbol of freedom and power (most likely due to its available connection to the descendent domestic dog), and both itself and other ancestral wild canids can inspire those associated with the domestic to slide toward the wolf - in effect, inspiring a re-wilding, or a "return" as I described it in my youth: becoming feral. What is more, those identified with the ancestral also have the ability to inspire the wild in those to which it is entirely unknown (in the text, those not initially identified with the canine in any way), or those

who are so deeply imbedded in ideological constructs that they have never considered that there could be truth outside of and contrary to what they have always been told and believed.

### **Howling at the Moon: Lunacy and Liberation**

Using the canine to express the relationships and social conditions present in *Cuckoo's Nest* deepens the text's narrative of human re-wilding because of the intimate parallels that exist between wolves and the wild human. Both share a mirrored destruction when met by civilization, and are connected to societal conceptions of madness - that which vilifies the species or behaviour to be exterminated. Alongside the werewolf, the wolf was similarly demonized with the expansion of civilization across England, likening the negation of the wild human instinct to the animal's experience. Necessary to exterminate for the purposes of expansion, the prominence of werewolf hunts directly corresponded to the prominence of wild wolves in a given region (Beresford 13). Vilification of the wolf was necessary for the justification of the species' mass slaughter as civilization expanded into wilderness areas. Little information was circulated regarding the wolf's familial traits, its loyalty or intelligence, for it was first and foremost a threat to civilization and the human societies within. The wolf was thus inevitably and necessarily demonized in much the same way that wild human instinct was (and continues to be) in order to preserve and allow for the expansion of civilization ("Legends of the Werewolves"). Wolves threatened the spread of civilization because of their predatory nature, and civilization likewise threatened the livelihood of wolves as it not only eradicated their territory and food supply, but exterminated them directly and deliberately.

In the same way that the werewolf, and the human instinct of which it is more broadly implicit, is connected to the idea of madness, so too is the wolf connected to the concept of

"lunacy" via its association with the moon. The word "lunacy" is directly tied to the moon (lune/luna), with which wolf mythos is associated; the species is known for its inclination to howl toward it in a way that has been deified. Initially connected to the prevalence of "mental unsoundness" caused by the "influence [of] the moon" ("lunacy"), lunacy (or madness, insanity, etc.) is intrinsically tied to the suggestion of a wild human response to natural phenomena, directly joining the implication of madness and the natural together. Early 20th century film and fiction were the first to connect lycanthropy to the moon ("Legends of the Werewolves"), suggesting that by the time of Kesey's writing, the mythos surrounding werewolves and the moon was widely recognized, and in Kesey's text, episodes of wild ancestral freedom are very often accompanied by the presence or rhetoric of the moon.

Initially coming into the institution, McMurphy wrestles for dominance to be the "biggest loony" (19) on the ward, establishing a leadership position and role that already invites a canine significance through its connection to the moon. As previously stated, McMurphy is associated with the solitary fox, an animal that is particularly relevant to his wanting to be "head loony" of the *madhouse* when one considers the reputation of the fox itself as being notoriously "crazy." As an ancestral canid that, unlike the wolf, cannot be domesticated, McMurphy is figured as inherently wild and resilient to domestication. He is "free enough to foul things up" (41) that is, to jam the Combine and live in a way considered "crazy like a fox" (263), an insightful connection given the ability of wild foxes to thrive in urban areas (see Chapter 4).

The selection of the fox as the canine species to represent the persistence of the wild holds further relevance in regard to the larger conversation of domestication and civilization given that unlike the wolf, the fox has not had much success being domesticated. While tame foxes are common enough, taming refers only to the behavioural alteration of a still wild animal.



Compared to a domestic animal, it will not be as easy to train, nor have been bred to be as dependent on and affectionate toward humans as the household dog (Nosowitz). Fox domestication has been attempted, and accomplished, but as a scientific experiment intent on observing the links between behaviour and breeding, and resultant physical traits (Nosowitz). But even "domesticated," the fox's wildness persists. Highly intelligent and difficult to break of digging habits, as well as hard to train and control generally, the wildness of this creature is exactly like that within McMurphy; despite being subject to the same ideological constructs and institutions as others, he simply cannot, and will not be compliant.

One of the most effective ways in which McMurphy happens to expose the working of civilization is by teaching the domesticated patients on the ward that they are no "crazier than the average asshole on the street" (65). In this regard, McMurphy doesn't *deny* the manifestation of an insane reaction to insane conditions, but gives it validation. Ultimately, it is through the validation of the instinctual, the wild, what is "improper" in civilization, that other characters come to acquire strength and freedom from the ideology that has convinced them that their inability to cope is the problem. Furthermore, their mental freedom also gives certain individuals the power to free themselves from the institution itself.

After proclaiming himself the biggest loony, leader of the mentally unstable pack, McMurphy continues to play into his diagnosis as well as inspire others to play with theirs, effectively reclaiming that which has been diagnosed as a limitation. When accused of potentially faking insanity, McMurphy insists that he "[is] crazy," pointing to details in his record that speak of his "*repeated* outbreaks of passion" finally "stand[ing] up to his full height" (in the same way that he continually prompts Bromden to do) and asks of the doctor, "Do I look like a sane man?" (47). Not only does he embrace his alleged psychosis, he takes control of it,

guiding the doctor's attention to the information within his own file in order to prove his mental illness. This behaviour is the counter opposite of that exhibited just before when the anxieties of Harding are not only laid out as defective and shameful, but are presented to others in the group for the purpose of intimidation and humiliation - a prevention against camaraderie and a behaviour that McMurphy describes as chicken-like. The comparison of the behaviour to that of chickens is soon after extended by Harding to an assessment of the group as rabbits, again placing emphasis on their shortcomings, timidity and powerlessness. By contrast, McMurphy embraces diagnoses, and by inspiring others to embrace their own rather than to further demean them, he creates a pack-like environment of support and lays the groundwork for true healing.

Here, the audience may observe the crafty canine character's undercutting of the *imposed* ideological practices of systematic demoralization and feelings of shame toward one another's sufferings, for a shared and validating embrasure of that which has been dictated to them as that which is "wrong." The very thing that society has established, and which the nurse enforces, that deems a wild response as sick, weak and to be ashamed of, McMurphy *reclaims* and endows with power through rhetoric that is tied to the canine. As alluded to in the opening chapter, even prior to this moment in the text, McMurphy is introduced to both audience and patients through his self-announced diagnosis as "psychopath or mad dog or werewolf" (13) all of which he announces he is only too happy to be. What on the surface appears to be a gentle mockery of the medical terminology used to label him and his behaviour (as problematic, and implicitly vicious), the tri-fold descriptor ties the subject of lunacy to the canine and to human wildness. What is more, the terms selected to be interchangeable with his official diagnosis are those which are transferrable - both mad dog and werewolf (and least in contemporary mythos) are capable of transmitting their conditions through an infectious bite. The implication of the risk of "infection"

associated with McMurphy's character and particular form of insanity, furthermore speaks to the influential *threat* that he poses to the strict operation of the asylum and to the patients' perception of themselves.

The nature of this shift in reception of mental illness is a dangerous one, and leads the discussion at hand back to the figure of the werewolf and how the creature was initially vilified due to its symbolism of man's wild nature ("Legends of the Werewolf"). For the instinctual to be embraced, regarded as a "natural" response to unnatural conditions, civilization and the ideology that surrounds it regarding man's expected and allegedly "civilized" behaviour are brought into question and threatened. What appears small to begin with is shown to be key to undercutting and deconstructing what has come to be regarded as "normal" human behaviour. As well, such deconstruction leads to a questioning of the motives and validity of the institutions that not only operate upon ill reactions, but strive to maintain them. In essence, the whole prescription of human civilization could be ripped to shreds by such a demonstration of werewolf strength!

Such a demolition of ideology is precisely what occurs as characters come to recognize and embrace the potential strength of their lunacy, speaking directly the theories of mental illness and its treatment proposed by R.D. Laing in the 1960s as well as those of Peter Levine. While neither advocated that being mentally ill was a source of power, they both suggested that by allowing fits and episodes to manifest rather than repressing or denying them, that the individual would be able to work through the traumatic experience that lead to illness. This may be something as singular and identifiable as Levine's example of the car accident he was in, or it may be more of a gradual effect - the wearing of living in a society in which one's fears, doubts and passions alike are monitored and often dismissed according to civilized standards. As the characters come to realize that they are not wrong in the feelings and neuroses that have

manifested in their civilized state, they begin to find liberation in their alleged "madness." And this is precisely what the mythos surrounding the werewolf and its demonization were intended to stand against.

### **Tracking Lunacy and Embracing Madness**

A significant element of Bromden's trust in McMurphy, as well as the foundation of their relationship outside of that which is overtly canine (but which is still related due to its ties to lunacy and thus the wolf), is the respect and indulgence that McMurphy gives to madness. First openly validated in their initial verbal encounter at a point when McMurphy's influence has effectively but without direct prodding brought Bromden out of his silence, McMurphy assures him that although Bromden's concern that he'd been "talking crazy" (221) about the way in which colonization (the Combine) had changed his father and their tribe were indeed so, it wasn't because what he was saying "didn't make sense [... It just] was talkin' crazy" (222) because the conditions described were so. Not only does this clarification validate what Bromden has become ashamed of and hesitant to express (perhaps because of his own doubts regarding its truthfulness), it invites a reconsideration of what should or should not be regarded as the abnormal. In the same way that civilization and domestication have led us to regard abnormal human and animal behaviour as normal, so too do such systems necessarily come to regard normal behaviour or truthful perceptions, as abnormal. Similarly, it is with these closing words of validation that Bromden is compelled to touch McMurphy, a desire that causes him to question his motives due to the extent to which we are conditioned against the impulse to touch - particular when that impulse arises between males. The desire leads Bromden to a moment of panic, but is quickly resolved when he realizes that he wants to touch McMurphy simply "because he is who he is" (222). Such authenticity of the self, as embodied by McMurphy, is

something no one in the institution has dared to either show themselves, nor witnessed in others, given the repercussions of one's being so confident with oneself in such an institution as an asylum where one's presence at all is based on the alleged "defectiveness" of who they are.

Prior to this encounter, Bromden is already affected by McMurphy in a way that results in his own becoming wild, as his senses awaken and play a vital part in his observation of the other man and his own self-realization. Bromden is fascinated with, and delights in McMurphy's undercutting of the practices of the ward, and early on, the observations of what McMurphy brings to the space are described through Bromden's sensual responses. Snooping for mice under McMurphy's bed, he:

"get[s] a smell of something that makes [him] realize for the first time since he's been in the hospital that the [...] dorm [...] has always been sticky with a thousand other smells [...] of germicide, zinc ointment, [...] piss and sour old-man manure, [...] Pablum and eyewash, the banana smell of machine oil, and sometimes the smell of singed hair - but never before now, before he came in, the man smell of dust and dirt from the open fields, and sweat, and work" (101).

The contrast of McMurphy's "wild" scent to those of the ward (all others of which indicate the sanitization of civilization, the deterioration of the individual within, and the cold mechanics of its very inhuman, machine-like operation), and the fact that Bromden is only awoken to the presence and implication of such smells in McMurphy's presence, suggests that the awareness is one brought on by the simple presence of the wild and ancestral.

As Bromden's story continues under the influence of this newly wild element, he allows his canine inclinations and understandings to lead him not into the drug-induced foggy blankness

he usually finds himself when entering an apparent fit of insanity, but into very sensual processions and observations of events. Reflecting on McMurphy's strength, and the incredulity of his ability to be "strong enough being his own self [to] ... never back down," that his being "what he is ... [is] what makes him strong enough" to escape the grips of the Combine (161), Bromden looks at his own reflection in a mirror and wonders "how it [is] possible that anybody could manage such an enormous thing as being what he [is]" (161). How can McMurphy be the strong and independent individual he is, but how too, can one simply *be*? His reflection transitions into a journey in which he allows himself to "taste" the air of the dorm, "g[iving him] a sudden yen to get up out of bed and do something" (163), after which he "walk[s] barefoot across the cold tile [... feeling] the tile with [his] feet and wonder[ing] how many times [... he] had run a mop over the same tile floor and never felt it at all" (163). Coming to an open window, he runs his face along it, rubbing his forehead against the mesh "from side to side to feel it with [his] cheeks, and [...] smell [...] the breeze" (163). More than embracing scent, Bromden reads it, and knows that fall is coming. Becoming more animal, more instinctual (even in his being barefoot which allows him an intimate relationship with his surroundings), Bromden begins to awaken in both the sensual sense and in his thinking.

As the instinctual is embraced, the presence of the moon is made mention of as well, again reinforcing the connection between the wild, the canine and lunacy. Previously "scared to look outside" (163), Bromden realizes his eyes have been shut this whole time, and now opens them to regard the "moon; [...] the face of it [...] scarred and scuffed" as well as "stars [that] got brighter and braver the farther they got out of the circle of light ruled by the giant moon" (164). While it could be suggested that the presence of the moon and its relation to lunacy here identify madness as something negative (which is contrary to the way in which its purpose and embrasure

have heretofore been discussed), what the moon, "scarred and scuffed," may actually come to signify is that dog-like insanity that does manifest as an ill reaction to ill-conditions, and that the further away the individual is capable of getting from that *source* of insane inducement (here represented by the mythologically guilty moon as it relates to lunacy), the stronger they will become.

The connection between the instinctual and the animal to lunacy becomes very clear on the eve of the aforementioned occasion during which it is suggested the Bromden's sleeping pills have been either overlooked or miscalculated, leaving him in an unaltered frame of mind. In his un-medicated state, he partakes in a clear-headed and canine-focused experience that acts as a breaking point from which he later continues to grow. Taking in the presence of the moon, feeling its resonance with a memory from back on the Oregon prairie, the object of Bromden's focus takes a shift to the physical presence of a dog with which he is shown to be intimately tied. The dog is a reflection of himself - perhaps the one he failed to see in the reflection of the bathroom mirror. The "young, gangly mongrel" below the window, illuminated by the glow of the moon, itself "so took with what was coming off - the moon up there, the night, the breeze full of smells so wild makes a young dog drunk" (164) is shown to be sharing in Bromden's immediate experience. When the dog's sniffing comes to a sudden halt in order to listen, Bromden "listen[s] too" (164). Trying "to look where the dog was looking" (165), he finds it is too dark for him to follow the progression of the geese the dog has noted until they appear silhouetted against the moon. His listening, too, fades out before that of the dog who would "still hear them a long time after [him]" (165). What is suggested here is that while Bromden is easing into a self-realization, he himself is not yet confident or self-aware enough of the power of his own instinct to break away - not yet. The dog, the animal, is still one step ahead of him in this

regard, its paws "big" (165) like McMurphy's empowering hand, still out of Bromden's reach. Nevertheless, the potential has been identified, suggested by the way in which Bromden has already begun following his senses. Watching the dog approach a fence along the hospital grounds (in much the same way that Bromden has approached this open window), at the same moment that Bromden hears "a car speed up out of a turn ... [its] headlights loom[ing] over the rise [and sees] ... the dog and the car mak[e] for the same spot of pavement" (165), his own experience is brought to an end by the presence of one the ward watchmen. Pulled away from the window, Bromden's ability to come in touch with his instinctual self is cut short, replicated in the anticipated death of the dog he was observing. Key to this event is the fact that the dog's death is never confirmed, subtly foreshadowing the potential that still exists in Bromden's own capacity for eventual escape.

### **Restoring Instinct: How the Canine Characterizes Human Wildness**

Bromden's escape and ultimate release from dominant ideology is encapsulated in the culmination of the sensual, bringing back into discussion Peter Levine's observations regarding PTSD patients and the necessity of shaking to resolving and processing trauma. As such, the moment of Bromden's escape, both mental and physical, brings together the sensual, the question of mental illness and the animal, all of which represent and exemplify the instinctual nature of the human repressed and denied in civilization. Bromden's eventual escape occurs at the end of the text at a point when McMurphy's influence and transference of the ancestral and instinctual has been completed and even surpassed -- Bromden does not stop at the point of the fox, but exceeds McMurphy's own canine standing, and comes to recognize himself as wolf.



The scene of McMurphy's death, and Bromden's killing of his already vegetative body, are framed by a "cold moon at the window, pouring light into the dorm" (322), again shedding light on the two men's association with the canine and their instinctual inclination as implicated through the wild association of the moon. Granted a sensual death that echoes the nature of his very diagnosis and psychosis, Bromden's mercy killing of McMurphy is executed through sexual language, uniting the final moment between the two (and that preceding Bromden's moment of escape and realization as wolf) as that which is both intimate and condemned. Despite his vegetative state, McMurphy's eyes, wide open "stare [...] into the full light of the moon" but still "fasten on the movement" of Bromden as he makes his way over to the other man's bed (322). Following his own very canine demise (his final collapse accompanied by "a sound of cornered-animal fear and hate and surrender and defiance [...] the last sound the treed and shot and falling animal makes" [319]), the lobotomized McMurphy is only able to stare longingly at that with which he was always aligned - a symbol of the natural, lunacy, and the canine. His otherwise dead eyes are only able to look toward what he once was. As his gaze is transferred to Bromden, the other man is implicitly tied to the moon himself; a foreshadowing and confirmation that he has reached a realization of being wolf.

In this moment of wild canine embodiment, if not yet the moment of realization to himself, Bromden takes on the sensual nature with which McMurphy and his association with the ancestral canid has been aligned. The death becomes a final moment of transference and is executed in an act of love. McMurphy's body is described as "hard" (322) suggesting arousal, but is also described as having a "tough grip on life" (322), thereby tying the sensual to the force of life. Bromden is forced to "lie full length on top of [the body ...] for what seemed like days [...] until the thrashing stopped. Until it was still a while and had shuddered once and was still again"

(323). It is only after that final shudder and the following stillness that Bromden then rolls off the body and views the man before him, dead, and again in the moonlight (323). Although McMurphy's shudder is actually one of death, the invitation to read the shudder as orgasm lends a deep level of intimacy to the act, suggesting the presence of the instinctual in regard to the loving relationship between the two men, as well as to that of the instinctual necessity of destroying that which destroys the wild. Were McMurphy to remain "alive," his vegetative remains would become an example to other patients of what *could* happen should any of them refuse to conform. He would become a tool of the authorities, a "stuffed trophy," and thus a prize to those who had succeeded in the annihilation of the wild. To kill McMurphy was the greatest expression of love Bromden could have given, and the suggestion of the sexual in this scene conveys that element of instinctual passion.

Simultaneously, the final shudder serves as a symbol of transference to Bromden, and summarizes the way in which his character has been changed thanks in large part to the influence of the other man. To apply Levine's interpretation of the manifestation of shudders as that which exist to "'shake off' the last rousing experience and 'ground [...]' us in readiness for the next encounter" (16), McMurphy's final shudder also applies to Bromden, as the moment of their final shared experience allows him to recover from his past at the asylum and grounds him in readiness for escape. Furthermore, Levine suggests that such undulations "help restore our equilibrium" (16). In the same way that the trembling allows the wild animal to recover from the trauma endured in capture and ensures its survival once released back into the wild, so too does McMurphy's final shudder act as this restorative symbol for Bromden.

And indeed, following the death, Bromden is more ready than ever to leave, equipped with his own being - not only canine, but wolf. Scanlon, another patient awoken by the death

struggle, suggests Bromden "breeze [his] tail outa there" (323), signaling that the ancestral transference between the two has been complete, particularly when considering the fact that a few evenings back, it was McMurphy who had planned to escape. Trying on McMurphy's hat, Bromden makes a literal attempt of sorts to "become" the other man but the hat is too small. For this action, he expresses shame. The shame does not arise out of his "wanting" to be like McMurphy, but out of the fact that he has tried to become McMurphy rather than himself. The wolf, larger in size biologically than the fox, is further suggested by the difference in size between the two. And while Bromden's potential had always been encouraged by McMurphy, Bromden, because of his association with the wolf (the largest and most powerful of extant Canidae, as well as most mythically and culturally criminalized) is the one actually capable of executing a complete escape from the ward.

Framed by the same moonlight that drew McMurphy's eyes in his final moments, Bromden makes his escape and throws a control panel that McMurphy himself was incapable of lifting through a window, "glass splash[ing] out in the moon" (324). "Panting," Bromden "vault[s] after the panel, into the moonlight" (324) and runs across the grounds in the direction he saw the dog run earlier. Finally aware of his size, self and potential, Bromden runs from the ward "taking huge strides" (324). It is now his own "paw" size that is compared to that of the dog whose large paws he'd made note of earlier, themselves reminiscent of the huge hand McMurphy extended toward Bromden on the day of the former's arrival at the institution. The physical description of size shared by the three figures ties their ability to escape to a sense of power and enormity that simply comes of their own being, and which allows them to transcend oppressive conditions (via the travel of foot) and transfer their liberating essences (via the touch of a hand).

Describing himself and his running in a single worded sentence: "Free." (324), Bromden reflects on the fact that no one would be "coming after an AWOL" (324), uniting the two words in a poignant affirmation and recognition of the wolf narrative at play in the text, and in Bromden himself. Borrowing the capitalized F from the single worded sentence just preceding the acronym, it becomes possible to read the implication that no one would be coming after "A WOL(F)"; there is no hope in trying to "fix" or utilize something so wild and ever hope that it would function properly within the Combine again. Acronymic for "Absent Without *Official* Leave," the tie between Bromden's escape, the wolf and the deconstruction and refusal of officialdom (that is, civilized ideology) is made clear. In sum, Bromden's freedom is the implication and definition of his status: "Absent Without Official Leave: Free." A WOLF.

Bromden's relationship with McMurphy is unarguably strong as it is in the text, but when read through the canine, the depth of their bond and the extent to which McMurphy's presence and being inspire and influence Bromden is magnified. It is not that he has come to inspire Bromden in ways that are not already available in the text, but it emphasizes these effects as well as reveals another way of interpreting and understanding the relationship between the figure of the Native American character and the redheaded rebel. By reading the two as connected by the ancestral, their relationship and what they discover and inspire in one another brings to the argument the implication that civilization's negative effects are those which effect all of humanity, and are those to which everyone is subject. The significance of the Native American, as told through the wolf, when connected to a white male, should not be taken as a suggestion to dismiss the experience or history of Native cultural genocide. Rather, the canine should be taken to act as a complementary conversation that grants the experience of the Native its rightful space

within the text, and then brings that experience into a larger conversation and issue of the indoctrinating and destructive nature that is *inherent* to Western civilization.

The canine comes to act as a symbol for those and that which do not adhere to the requirements and regulations of a dominant capitalist society, and while it may be suggested that this narrative is already prevalent in the text and expressed through the metaphor implicit in the use of mental illness, the canine allows the conversation to actually take mental illness into account as a consequence of the conditions being criticized, as well as extend it to include those outside of the institution. Bromden's father, for instance, was not mentally ill (he later fell to addiction) during most of Bromden's memories, but he was always associated with the canine. His independence from civilization, and later deterioration, when expressed through the use of the canine family, provides a more overt tie to the question between the consequences of non-conformity and those successfully surviving outside of it.

The narrative of domestication and the wild, paired with the narrative of non-conformity already prevalent in the text, brings us to further question and realize the effects that civilized existence has had on each of us and our reception and execution of ourselves and our deepest instinct. Furthermore, it asks us to reflect on how the relationship between domestic and wild, manufactured specifically to destroy that from which it originally came, reflects our relationships with or reception of instances of the wild outside of ourselves (how we view the animal in comparison to ourselves, the wild environment) and asks us to reconsider whether that which has been fed to us as normal, or "natural," inherently is, or whether such thinking has been cultivated in order to serve a larger master.

## Who is the Tyrant?: Ideological Usage of the Rabbit and the Wolf

While the last chapter drew attention to the way in which reading animal characterization can illuminate the spaces through which to interpret and realize our own human instinct, this chapter will focus on the way in which common beliefs regarding animal behaviour and relationships are circulated in our culture to support dominant ideology. Historical and critical studies lecturer, Steve Baker, discusses the many ways in which animal symbolism is used in civilized society in order to endow one party with power, and represent another without. He details that "Western society [...] draw[s] heavily on symbolic ideas involving animals and that the immediate subject of those ideas is frequently not the animal itself, but rather a human subject drawing on animal imagery to make a statement about human identity" (ix). Furthermore, he advocates that part of his text's purpose is "to question and to demythologize the idea of animal imagery as a 'natural' resource for saying-things-about-humans" (x). And while Baker's endeavour is focused on reconsidering why the animal is and must be used in this way within our culture, asking the same questions of symbolism but positioning them in literature both acknowledges his concerns while at the same time providing answers to them.

Focusing on the significance of the alpha male wolf and such a figure's relationship to the rabbit in this section, *Cuckoo's Nest* is shown to not only demonstrate an instance of the exact symbolism Baker is concerned with (its usage "invisible" in a sense, given how naturalized the symbolism has become in a given culture [8]), but itself invites and provides the means of critique when read through behavioural actuality. The "mythic" as conceived of by Roland Barthes (quot'd in Baker), that is, that by which the workings of everyday culture has been established as "natural" or assumed, is overtly placed in the text, but is invited to be challenged

when the biological and behavioural considerations of the animal are tracked. Taking on Baker's intention to question the representation of the animal and the way in which it shapes our understanding of both beast and human, such a reading as the one demonstrated here does not serve to exemplify the way in which humanity has exploited or otherwise used and vilified the animal generally through symbolic usage. Rather, it takes the conversation in a direction that illustrates our misunderstanding of the animal world, and our eagerness to use it in an attempt to justify our own oppressive behaviours. By extension, the conversation implicitly begs us to reconsider the many ways in which we regard ourselves and our own behaviours as "natural" or otherwise, and gives us reason to question whether what we've come to regard as "normal" has just as much been "naturalized" and intentionally circulated as such as the examples of animal behaviour discussed below.

### **Naturalization: Ideology and Prescribed Normality**

As has been alluded in the previous section, what has been said so far about animals and ideology can also be said for both the "natural world" and humanity. It is perhaps ironic to identify the environment when speaking of ideology as the "natural world" since the word "natural" is actually a rhetorical implementation for perpetuating civilized society's ideation about the wild world and its inherent opposition to the civilized. The ideological usefulness of categorizing the "wild" or "natural" from the "civilized" or "artificial" is taken from the same sort of misunderstanding as the animal instances to be mentioned with one difference - this misunderstanding is intentionally created and perpetuated in order to garner a specific response and control. In the case of the wolf or rabbit, the inaccurate behaviour so widely used as social justification actually originated in mistake - or did it?

Naturalization is a crucial element to the formation and perpetuation of any given ideology, and hierarchical divisions of power are no exception. Sociologist Dr. Mike Sosteric draws attention to the particular example of the wolf and the way in which mythologized and *unnatural* canid behaviour is systemically utilized to justify and instill "bullying" behaviour in every social and institutional situation that is found - exactly what we see in *Cuckoo's Nest*, when Harding's assessment of the nurse justifies domineering alpha behaviour. In his article "Ding Dong the Alpha Male is Dead" (recently expanded to include the added "or The Delusional Donald Trump"), Sosteric echoes Althusser's ideas about ideology, here suggesting that the dominant ideas surrounding the wolf and the concept of "alpha" are insisted upon due to the way in which they support the present social structures of our societies.

However, the dominant beliefs regarding alpha behaviour as witnessed in wolves are not in fact accurate to wild wolf behaviour, but instead arise when the animal is confined to unnatural living conditions. It is this abnormal behaviour, aroused by a state of abnormal conditions, that is then used to validate domineering human behaviour as that which is "natural" because it is perceived in the "natural world." David Mech, a contemporary researcher of wolf behaviour, published scientific findings in the 1970s which suggested that "in any pack of wolves there would be a leader that would, presumably owing to its greater strength and greater aggressive drive, 'naturally' rise to the top and dominate the weak. He called these dominant males 'alpha males,' [and] called the behavior 'natural'" (Sosteric). Recently, however, Mech discovered his findings to have been in error, given that the animals observed were wolves in captivity reacting differently to an "unnatural" environment, and has requested his previous work stop being reproduced. Despite his pleas, the book continues to be published, and the announcement of his new findings remains comparatively unheard. Mech himself sees the



connection his personal findings have had to justifying male aggression and systemic dominance, admitting that "the concept of the alpha wolf is well ingrained in the popular wolf literature; at least partly because of [his] book, *The Wolf: Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species*, [...] published in 1970 [...] and currently still in print despite [his] numerous pleas to the publisher to stop publishing it" (quot'd in Sosteric).

What may arise in defense of the myth of the domineering alpha are theories of social Darwinism that hold fast to the belief that "the life of humans in society [i]s a struggle for existence ruled by 'survival of the fittest'" in which "the weak [a]re diminished [...] while the strong gr[o]w in power" ("Social Darwinism"), but much of this can be absolved by addressing a common misinterpretation of Darwin's theories. Darwin's use of the term "fittest" to describe the species most adept at survival in any given circumstance is often wrongly associated with "fitness" -- stronger, bigger, and more powerful -- but the intended usage of the word was to imply that the variation of species most "appropriately suited" for survival would be the one to prevail. This does not automatically imply that which is most aggressive or most domineering. On the contrary, such an animal, if reliant on other members for survival, might lessen its chances of survival by possessing an excess of aggression. Feral Faun speaks to this argument as well, suggesting that violence itself does not perpetuate violence. Rather, it is "the social system of rationalized violence" (21) (that is, that violence which is constantly held as a threat over a society's citizens to maintain order) that perpetuates itself as systemic. In the animal world, contrary to the conditions described in social Darwinism, "there is no perpetual war of all against all. Rather[,] at specific moments under particular circumstances, individual acts of violence flare up and then fade [...] There is no systematic violence in the wild [..., only] momentary expressions" of it (21).

Sosteric attributes this insistence on perpetuating incorrect but socially supportive information to ideology and the way in which the misinformation or "myth" is used to "justify [...] domineering and aggressive behaviour" by identifying it as "natural." He goes on to further identify ideology as comprised in part of "an organized set of archetypes that provide justification for the actions of individuals or groups." Applied to the example of the alpha wolf identified here, and already used in *Cuckoo's Nest*, is the justification of domineering behaviour: "Whenever we see a bully on the field, or a capitalist getting rich, or a dominating CEO, we mark it down as the 'natural' behaviour of the glorious Alpha Male" (Sosteric). What is more, there is no need for explicit justification to be given each time such a situation is encountered. In the same way Althusser speaks of the individual being hailed or interpellated by ideology, there is no need for this explanation to be "trot[ted] out because the ideology is so ingrained that we do it ourselves" (Sosteric).

Sosteric elaborates that like domesticated animals, subject to the biological and physical constraints of containment, "alpha[s] are sick puppies [... They] are the result of toxic social conditions [... and] arise when humans interfere with the natural order." Thus, any justification found in the nature of what is "natural behaviour" ends up being wholly mythical (in the sense of the word as a widely held misconception). Wolves, and the behaviour observed in the creature outside of a natural setting, are not the only species to be misinterpreted and perpetuated for the purpose of supporting ideological constructs. Like the rabbit as featured in Kesey's text (soon to be discussed), humankind too is subject to these misguided generalities.

In the same way that the altered behaviour of contained animals is circulated as that which is natural in order to justify patterns of dominant ideology, certain conditions of human physicality, mentality and behaviour are similarly misidentified as "natural" when their presence

has arisen in an environment that is not. Arnold DeVries calls attention to human nutrition and the functionality of the human body and mind in reaction to the dietary patterns present in civilized settings, claiming that what we observe as "normal" in human physicality is actually degeneration. Just as Mech observed the behaviour of wolves contained within a laboratory, DeVries points to error in the prevailing concepts of human health based on the fact that "in civilization, one studies civilized people [... T]he frequency of the forms of degeneration which are found then determine what we consider normal and abnormal. As a result, conditions which generally form no part of undomesticated animal life are regarded as normal and necessary for the human species" (31). It is easy to see how each instance relates directly back to Althusser and his ideas regarding ideology and interpellation. Like Harding in *Cuckoo's Nest*, individual subjects in civilized society are encouraged to and do come to believe that the social and systemic positions of degradation in which they find themselves are "normal" and that their inability to adapt to or cope are problematic. By looking into the significance behind the misrepresentations as well as the biological actuality of the species alluded to in Kesey's text, a commentary deeper than either would singularly allow is revealed.

### **Rabbits in the Nest: Misunderstanding Who is and What it Means to be "Rabbit"**

One of the few and most extended instances of direct animal metaphor encountered in Kesey's text is the comparison the patients make between themselves and rabbits. In their analogy, they liken themselves to a presumed "lesser" species of prey, known to be gentle and cowardly, and designate the role of a "dominant" and predatory wolf to Nurse Ratched. Harding, whose insights sustain the metaphor, implies that the inpatients are dysfunctional, weak creatures in need of a dominant outside force (the wolf) to moderate their behaviour and keep them in check: "All of us in here are rabbits of varying ages and degrees [...] we're not in here *because*

we're rabbits - we'd be rabbits wherever we were - we're all in here because we can't *adjust* to our rabbithood. We *need* a good strong wolf like the nurse to teach us our place" (64). To complete the relationship, his choice of a predatory animal is intended to signify power and dominance. While this is a readily available interpretation of the analogy at hand, considering the biological reality of both species, both together and individually, reveals a great deal more about the characters' relationship with one another and the society in which they struggle. More importantly, this example illustrates the way in which the animal is so often deliberately misrepresented in order to justify and support the structures and ideologies of human civilization. By comparing the structures and relationships of the manmade world to that of the animal, systemic injustices and exploitations are made to seem "naturalized" when they are actually constructed by institutions and representatives of social power.

Althusser speaks to this naturalization as well, which he calls the earlier mentioned "interpellation": "Ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals [...] or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects [...] by that very precise operation which [he calls] *interpellation* or hailing." Kesey visually recreates this concept when Harding, in convincing McMurphy of the inpatients' inferior "rabbithood," asks: "Mr. Bibbit, hop around for Mr. McMurphy here. Mr. Cheswick, show him how *furry* you are" (65). In making this request, Harding demonstrates the physical enactment of "hailing;" an acknowledgement of and response to one's designated subjecthood. To further the physical enactment of the ideological apparatuses at hand, the hailed characters complete the transformation into subjecthood by "chang[ing] into hunched over white rabbits" (65) in Chief Bromden's eyes. That the characters turn into *white* rabbits speaks directly to the situation's allegiance to Althusser's declaration of ideology as a State Apparatus - they do not turn into wild rabbits, but into lab rabbits, generated

by the self-declared dominant species (humankind) for the latter's profit. What becomes interesting in this regard is the way in which the modified (and often even mythologized) behaviour of animals is used to justify the "naturalness" of social inequality, exploitation and oppression by way of being compared to behaviour witnessed in the animal. We can admit to being animal so long as the comparison acts as a justification for (as opposed to a viable argument against) the social structures in place in any given society.

The opening discussion of ideology addressed the misinterpretation of the wolf and the way in which its behaviour has been deliberately circulated in order to justify the social structures of hierarchical society and exploitation. In the case of the wolf, dominating and oppressive "alpha" behaviour witnessed in the contained animal was used to justify such behaviour in human civilization. From the opposite end of the equation, Harding just as naturally identifies himself as the ruled; there is no need to "talk [him] into [his rabbithood], no. [He] was born a rabbit [and] simply need[s] the nurse to make him *happy* with [his] role" (65). Not only does the character exemplify the naturalization of his own position as the weak and oppressed, he furthermore believes in the necessity of a "natural" unequal order for his contentment. Speaking back to Althusser and his ideas of interpellation and hailing, Harding, like the others in the ward, is a willing subject of the ideology that prescribes his position, enforcing it upon himself as that which is "right" and criticizing himself for his inability to adhere.

The rabbit functions differently than the wolf, in this text, but its biological and behavioural facticity are just as crucial to take into consideration given the way that its involvement in the text exemplifies how the animal world is misused to naturalize or normalize human ideology. When McMurphy is first exposed to a Group Therapy session, he describes and criticizes the behaviour witnessed (a group of tattling and verbal bullying of a single individual

put on the spot) as a "bunch of chickens at a peckin' party [...] The flock gets sight of a spot of blood on some chicken and they all go to *peckin'* at it, see, till they rip the chicken to shreds" (57). While McMurphy selects the chicken to characterize the behaviour, based on his own familiarity (a fact which corresponds to his own characterization as a fox), this behaviour is replicated exactly in contained *rabbits* (to which Harding directs the metaphor) as well, as noted by ethologist Konrad Lorenz.

Echoing the observations of both Sosteric and DeVries and their discussions of normalizing abnormal civilized or contained behaviour, Lorenz draws attention to the causes underlying lethal aggression in animals not physically equipped to assert serious harm (generally prey animals such as chickens or rabbits), attributing the abnormal and naturally unlikely behaviour, to unnatural conditions. According to his research, "animals which are capable of killing living creatures of about their own size [exhibit more] reliable inhibitions [to] prevent such actions" (17) (of killing their own), of which they are perfectly capable. A wolf or a tiger, therefore, would demonstrate a greater inhibition to actually kill another of its species. By contrast, animals like doves or hares which are unable to kill their own kind with a single peck or bite, lack killing inhibitions because there is no selective pressure (in the *wild*) to breed such measures of insurance (17). As with interspecies violence inflicted upon them by predators, prey animals are also capable of hiding or fleeing from intraspecies aggressors. Under conditions of captivity, however, "where a defeated animal cannot escape from its victor, it may be killed slowly and cruelly" (17). The allusion to this behaviour, and the fact that it is specific to conditions of captivity, speaks to the way in which the rabbit (prefaced by the chicken) is used as a metaphor to point to the errors that underlie the initial implication we take as fact to justify what are truly abnormal behaviours and conditions of living.

The rabbit metaphor further lends itself to this general comment on the misrepresentation and perpetuation of selective information which *does* support dominant ideology when McMurphy describes his opposition to Harding's assessment of not only the group, but of McMurphy himself, as rabbits. The aggressive behaviour of rabbits discussed above is briefly alluded to, but moved beyond when McMurphy asks Harding what exactly it is that makes *him* a rabbit - his "psychopathic tendencies? [His] fighting tendencies, or is it his [fucking] tendencies?" (66), deciding to expand on the latter. By including the other elements of behaviour known to rabbits, and by specifically including psychopathy (to be compared to Sosteric's analysis of the "sick" alpha puppies) in his description, Kesey provides readers with the opportunity to explore other information relevant to the species in question. Investigating and applying that information then presents an additional depth to the conversation in which dominant assumptions regarding the individual's thoughts about themselves and their place within society are challenged. The fact that it is McMurphy, the character who both literally and animalistically comes to undo the facades of the asylum, who alludes to these other elements of rabbit behaviour again lends the power of revelation and truth to *his* character in a way that is in some sense foreshadowing. He is a threat, not only because he possesses such insights, but because he dares to utilize them in order to deconstruct the delusions surrounding the other characters and their perception of one another.

### **The Dominant Doe: How Ratched as Rabbit Makes Sense of Misogyny**

McMurphy is not the only character to deliver such animal-related insights, and while he does not seem to realize it for most of the story, Bromden similarly offers such opportunities for reading alternate interpretations of characters and contradictions to their overtly associated roles. Told from Bromden's point of view, many of his descriptions of the Nurse allude to her not as

wolflike in nature (though he provides no comment contrary at the time of Harding's declaration), but rabbitlike. Like Mech's negatively affected wolves, Nurse Ratched similarly embodies behaviour akin to that of *contained* rabbits. She herself is subject to the aggressive and destructive behaviours associated with both domestic wolves and rabbits, but other descriptors characterize her as rabbit over the former species. Not only does her subtle destruction of the patients imitate the gradual killing behaviour of prey animals described by Lorenz, her position as a *female* authority figure speaks to another effect of rabbit domestication -- the tendency toward female dominance.

While both domestic and wild rabbits live in social groups maintained by the establishment of hierarchy, in the wild hierarchies for male (buck) and female (doe) groups develop separately. In captivity, however, these separate hierarchies do not necessarily form. In the same way that lethal aggression is rampant in captive hares given their inability to escape aggressors, containment has the effect of eliminating the division of rabbit groups into single sexed hierarchies. What is more, is that once dominance is established within confined conditions, the top rabbit is very frequently female.<sup>1</sup> This is not to suggest that there is something unnatural about female dominance (indeed, we see the opposite abnormal behaviour form in captive wolves where the male establishes dominance). Rather, the similarity provides another reason for which to not only read the Nurse as a rabbit (rather than wolf), but to further suggest the abnormality of civilization and the conditions that manifest in such a setting.

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<sup>1</sup> Informational resources and behavioural advice forums concerning rabbit hierarchy and practices of establishing dominance in the wild vs. when in a domestic setting repeatedly make note of the significant sex-based differences that exist in this regard. For more on this topic, see: <http://rabbitadvocates.org/careinfo/packet/behavior.html> and <http://www.justrabbits.com/rabbit-hierarchy.html>



As was briefly mentioned in the introduction, *Cuckoo's Nest* has been criticized and dismissed for its misogynist themes, as well as its highly controversial climax point during which McMurphy rips open Nurse Ratched's blouse to expose her breasts, ultimately reclaiming a sort of male dominance executed in the act of sexual harassment. While such a reading as this is not intended to dismiss such concerns, it does invite another reading and purpose to what at first appears only a very problematic element of the text, and even reason for its dismissal. What is presented instead is another way in which to read the negative conditions of civilized society alongside the narrative of animal captivity and domestication.

Throughout, Nurse Ratched not only dominates the men on the ward, but emasculates them, and her method of doing so is directly associated with the discussion of chickens that leads into the conversation regarding rabbits, again, likening her position of authority to that of captive conditions. Said to be the first to peck at the men, that is to begin nitpicking and demoralizing him during group therapy, McMurphy points out to Harding that it is not their eyes but at their "everlovin' balls" (60) that she pecks. He describes her as "a ball-cutter ... [someone] who tr[ies] to make you weak so they can get you to toe the line, to follow their rules, to live like they want you to. And the best way to do this [...] is to weaken you by gettin' you where it hurts the worst" (60). As such, emasculation, particularly when accomplished as a means of dominance by the female, becomes illustrative of a demoralizing effect of captivity when read through the animal.

The rhetoric further speaks to domestication and the taming of the wild when one considers the effect that neutering a pet has on their increased willingness to be handled and trained. It comes as no coincidence that the removal of reproductive organs is colloquially referred to as "fixing," and that Bromden uses this exact word to describe the way in which the Combine, and by proxy the ward, "*install* things [...] start[ing] as quick as they see you're gonna

be big [...] and keep on and on and on till you're *fixed*" (221). Utilizing language that relates to machinery to describe the effects of enculturation, education and ideological state apparatuses at large (as so-called by Althusser), Bromden unites these manufactured conditions to the altered animal, both of which necessitate the taming (represented here by social emasculation) of the individual. In eliminating something so vital to the male person, Nurse Ratched denies them exactly that -- vitality -- in order to keep them manageable. And this narrative, in which she is alleged to have power over the self-perceived "rabbits," is precisely the ideology she wishes to feed into.

In addition to the social neutering of the men, the Nurse feeds rabbithood into the patients over which she has authority, effectively reducing them to the "feeble, stunted, weak little creatures" (67) that Harding sees them to be. While the characters hold the potential, indeed, the instinctual inclination, to be powerful and independent agents (later characterized through the canine) the Nurse ensures rabbit-like compliance by fueling them with rabbit-appropriate fodder. Often associated with the bounty of her bosom, the Nurse is at the same time always associated with an absence or unnatural form of nutrition and feeding. Early on, she receives a package from a "foreign address and [...] suck[s] into hypodermic needles the grass-and-milk-liquid that came in vials" (27) to inject nourishment appropriate for rabbits into her patients. Harding furthermore condones and even appears to appreciate this foreign substitute for nourishing mother's milk when he defends the Nurse against McMurphy's assessment of her as a bitch. He insists, with reference to a prior act of kindness, that the Nurse is "*intoxicated* with the sweet milk of human kindness [... which good deeds] generate [...] within her large bosom" (61). By drawing a correlation between her alleged good intentions, the improper nourishment for those with the potential to be wolves *and* the fact that in contrast to McMurphy's liberating hand "big

as a dinner plate" (25), her own lips are described as ready for a "fake nipple" (emphasis added 25), the nurse and the social position she represents are exposed as deceptive in all their acts and intentions.

By reading the subtle characterization of the Nurse as a (domestic) rabbit rather than as a wolf which she presents herself as through her terror and which, in response, her patients recognize her relationally, it becomes apparent that Kesey's text speaks very intimately with the subject of ideology on simultaneous levels. In the same way that the Nurse's subjection to the Combine is expressed in the mechanical name she bears ("ratchet"), the characterization of her as rabbit, rather than wolf, and the discussion surrounding the rabbit that takes place in the text, emphasizes on this level too, that she is just as much a subject of civilization and its ideologies as anyone else. By reading further into the subtle hints that confirm her as this species rather than the suggested wolf, the latter is free to be inhabited within the text by the other characters, and its significance allowed to shift from that which wields tyrannical power, to that which holds another kind of power to break *out of* the oppressive restraints of ideological thought.

This introduction of all of the characters to the reader through explicit animal metaphor suggests that such characterizations and relationships are of great importance throughout the text. And indeed, through the animal Kesey already offers the reader entrance to an expose of dominant ideology. On the surface, the metaphors that Harding and McMurphy present seem straightforward and indicative of social stratification and power imbalances that define and control civilized existence. However, when one extends the commentary to regard the biological facticity of the creatures in question, an additional level is brought into discussion that critiques and disproves the exact devices and examples of ideology that Harding turns to in order to explain and justify the power relationships within the ward. The instance in the text is an exact

mirror of the way in which our own Western society uses the supposedly natural behaviour of the alpha male wolf in order to circulate a narrative that justifies domineering behaviour as that which is "natural."

This re-characterization (or character correction) of the Nurse as the appropriate species (rabbit) rather than the one the patients assume her to be (wolf) based on the way in which the animals biologically behave and interact with one another, demonstrates the value of extending and exploring what seems like an offhand and straightforward animal metaphor. It offers not only an insight as to how the human species has been similarly affected by the conditions of civilization as animals have to captivity and domestication, but invites its audience to reconsider humanity's similarly skewed characterization via ideological naturalization. What is more, the scene in question when read alongside the behavioural information regarding how prey and predatory animals are equipped and inclined to kill their own respective species, the relevance of characterizing the inpatients as rabbits becomes even more astute given their transformation (through McMurphy) into the canine. Convinced, in the same way that the individual is interpellated or hailed by ideology to believe in the conditions and role ascribed to him or her, the characters are initially convinced of their rabbithood. It is then through the "werewolf-infectious" canine character of McMurphy that their rabbithood, and their conviction of it, is undone.

## The Vulpine<sup>2</sup> Virus: Myth, and How the Fox Sparks Rebellion

Ideology works in such a way that it convinces its subjects to be exactly that - subjected to imposed pre-existing conditions. Born into any given society saturated with civilized thinking and conditioning, the individual abides by that which they are told to be, and told they are, without thought or encouragement to suspect otherwise. In the same way that Harding, and the other patients of *Cuckoo's Nest*, cling to their prescribed roles and identification as submissive rabbits born to bend to and obey the tyranny of the supposed "wolves" that operate the Combine, how (if ever) can ideology come to be identified as such, let alone challenged and deconstructed? If, within the conditions of civilization, ideology plays such a persistent and prevalent role as Althusser describes, how can it ever be refuted?

Althusser claimed that one's subjecthood in regard to ideology is inevitable, and in a sense, forever so, meaning that an individual will never fully escape its grasp. While I have refuted this claim throughout my analysis so far, our daily ability to challenge, undo and break out of ideology to find our instinctual selves may more realistically come in glimpses, rather than as a clear and all-encompassing shift. But these evolutionary changes are not to be dismissed. Feral Faun demands a "feral revolution," a re-wilding to translate literally, that would in its loyalty to instinct "break down civilization [through the] eradicat[ion of] the social institutions that domesticate" (12). The freedom he speaks of *must* be strived for and recovered, and can be broadly likened to the visceral pleasure experienced in the young child. It thus implicitly necessitates passion and play. To go wild is "to destroy whatever destroys our wildness and to act on our instincts" (13), to "learn to scream, cry, laugh, howl, growl, roar, jump, roll, dance, caress, kiss, hug, fuck, somersault, sing [and] feast" (42), none of which are barbaric or brutal in

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<sup>2</sup> Of or relating to the fox

their instinctual nature, but rather, are very *playful* and expressive. Faun describes such liberations as "the greatest cruelty to civilization, for such action mocks it mercilessly"(42). This is exactly what McMurphy's character does and inspires throughout the entirety of *Cuckoo's Nest*.

What comes to be when wild instincts are embraced is a sort of festival, or carnival of play in which the standards of civilization are entirely refuted, undermined and dismissed, and in such, have the effect of crumbling the otherwise strong hold of civilization and its ideologies. It is in moments such as these that ideology can, and must be, escaped. McMurphy and the other characters of *Cuckoo's Nest* provide a narrative pathway of resistance, play, and reclamation for readers to follow and explore. Interestingly, the greater McMurphy's influence on the other patients, the greater the prominence of canine language in their relation, tying his effect back to the canine narrative of domestication vs. wildness that has already been established. What is more, the strength and moments of revelation granted to the characters often come through embracing the fact that they are mentally ill - seeing value in themselves for being what and who they are, rather than feeling shame for it - which again, through the connection of mental illness to the moon, weaves the significance back into the canine narrative and implications at play in the text.

### **Fact and Fiction of the Fox: Archetypes and Mythos Can Still be Useful**

Contrary to the way in which the wolf's dominant alpha behaviour was shown to be circulated in order to justify unjust behaviour, the figure of the fox is one whose mythical relevance is largely to be taken into account. Associated with its cunning and trickery, the fox is largely recognized as an animal figure that is considered intelligent, but questionable in its motives. As a trickster, the fox is implicitly tied to a trick - at once both a means of deception,

but also a source of playfulness in that it can be a sort of *joke*, a game. All of these characteristics are embodied in McMurphy. Laughter is his power, and it is one of the first things to disturb the monotonous order of the ward. In so doing, his character, particularly when read as the ruse making fox, functions on multiple levels that speak to the way in which he is able to give other characters strength. He breaks the mundane patterns of institutional life by rolling in with card games and laughter, and also liberates the men of the ward "because of who he is" – the embodiment of a wildness and playful trickery that can undercut civilization. .

What deepens the significance of the fox as it is used to characterize McMurphy is the way in which its mythological understanding closely adheres to its factual existence in the face of human civilization. Unlike the wolf whose existence is eradicated by the spread of civilized progress (by both intentional extermination, as well as through the effects of its invasion into and destruction of the animal's natural habitat), the fox is one of a handful of creatures that still manages to thrive in urban settings. Rather than be forced to move into smaller and smaller territories as human development invades wild space, the fox remains and adapts to living within the city, inserting itself as an insistent wild element into the civilized realm. This ability alone, for the wild to exist within the civilized, identifies the fox as one which disregards the limitations of human imposed binary restrictions. The very existence of the fox and its cunning ability to survive within a civilized setting already imply its character as one that undercuts and enacts a sort of trick by executing an expression of contradictory existence that should be impossible.

### **Dealing Out Wild Cards: How Play Fosters Pack Solidarity**

Upon his arrival at the institution, McMurphy immediately identifies himself as a gambler and social trickster in much the same way that he broadcasts his lunacy. He announces

his intentions of being "a sort of gambling baron on th[e] ward" (19), creating a connection between his canine-associated role as pack leader (the "biggest loony") and his cunning ability to undermine that which is forbidden by the strictures of civilization. Elaborating on his history as a poker player, McMurphy alludes to how the nature of his playfulness is not only disapproved of in society, but condemned: "You know how society persecutes a dedicated man. Ever since I found my callin' I done time in so many small-town jails [...] they say I'm a habitual hassler" (22), an assessment that pertains to his gambling habits, but which more largely and metaphorically apply to the effect that his character has upon civilized protocol and on others. As his storytelling continues, he makes the suggestion that "they didn't mind so much when he was a dumb logger and got into a hassle; that's a hard-workin' feller blowing off steam [...] But if you're a gambler, if they know you get up a back-room game now and then [...] you're a god-damned criminal" (22).

Unanswered, the audience is left to wonder what it is about McMurphy that makes him a hassler. The secrecy and slyness implied by the "back-room" of his *game* play when read alongside its connection to his canine-lunacy, suggest that the criminal behaviour in question is that akin to what Michel de Certeau identifies as using "tactics" to undermine the institutions into which we are born and forced to operate. It comes as no surprise that de Certeau himself describes such subtle and tactical undercuttings as "sly as a fox and twice as quick" (47). More specifically, de Certeau speaks of *la perruque* ("or its equivalent" [47]), which refers to "the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer" (44). While this is not precisely the sort of practice in which McMurphy is engaged with his gambling, it does nonetheless match his methods of survival by sneaking. In the case of *la perruque*, the worker cannot be accused of stealing since the practice consists of only the borrowing of tools or the taking of otherwise



discarded scraps, but in so doing, the worker takes time back from the factory for which he works, and "cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his work and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family" (de Certeau 44). Through the practice of gambling, McMurphy acquires money (the means of survival in civilization) which allows him to keep *playing* in the civilized domain, aligning his illegal behaviour with de Certeau's proposition of the underdog's ability to "make do" in the conditions in which they find themselves.

The role of gambling, itself a controversial form of play according to "legal" standards, as well as a way itself of "making do" financially by unconventional means, is also seen to have the effect of and act as a mode of transference on Chief Bromden in a way that once again is connected to the instinctual and the canine. During a scene in which McMurphy tries to convince Nurse Ratched to allow the men to indulge in the leisure activity of rearranging their scheduled television time so as to catch a big baseball game and insists upon a vote to have the action pass, McMurphy begs Bromden to raise his hand, telling him that he is their "last bet" (142). The implication of Bromden's being brought into McMurphy's gambling sphere in this way may seem simplistic at first, but serves as a point of foreshadowing for Bromden's eventual escape. He does become a final chance, an opportunity for what McMurphy represents, to be expressed and prevail, in the same way that the fox itself continues to survive and infiltrate the urban environment.

The hand raising scene also ties the subject and power of hands and intimate touch to the qualities of play associated with gambling and the canine. During the scene where Bromden desires to touch McMurphy after he's broken his nearly lifelong silence and the two have spoken, he looks at McMurphy's arm and can "just make out the aces and eights tattooed there" (222). He

then expresses his desire to "reach over and touch the place where he was tattooed" (222) tying their bond to play, a dominant characteristic of the fox. What develops is an intricate weaving of physical intimacy, play and the canine, all of which play a significant role in the text's broader conversation of conformity, civilized existence and the power of the instinctual to undermine the forces of control that have been imposed upon and which have imprisoned the individual.

The transference effect that occurs between McMurphy and Bromden is shown to be connected to the interlaced themes of gambling, the canine and the ancestral as well as that of mental health during a hallucination that Bromden experiences just prior to his escape. By the time the Bromden and McMurphy undergo electroshock therapy together for dually attacking the ward henchmen for bullying another patient, Bromden fades in and out of a delusional state of mind that brings together and thus makes a connection between the canine, his ancestry and gambling. The narrative focus jumps erratically from images of a dog, to his father and uncle R. J. (here fully identified as the playful "Running and Jumping") Wolf (285-7) as well to the rolling of a set of "loaded" dice (286). Finding some sense of power in the entangled narrative, Bromden proudly proclaims that he is "the load" (286), suggesting that it is now he who is loaded with the gambler's vitality and cunning. Endowed with the playful power of McMurphy, Bromden pulls through this bout of EST as he never has before - he'd "never worked at coming out of it before" (288) - and "this time [knows he] ha[s] them beat" (288). To connect the influence and the strength of this experience back to their canine bond, Bromden self-identifies as more than the domestic dog depicted in his hallucination. As though speaking to the government officials himself as his father and uncle once did (cajoling and enraging them), Bromden asserts that "they wouldn't be so cocky if they knew what [he] and the *moon* ha[d] going. No damned regular Indian" (286). While the statement may be ambiguous without the

reading of the canine, when considered alongside the relationship between McMurphy and Bromden, and Bromden's discovery of himself as one capable of wolf-like freedom and strength, the symbolic and narrative weight of it becomes immense. The scene and Bromden's mental processing are shown to connect the canine, the playful and mental illness to a common expression of instinct and wildness that is now embraced. Although chaotic in nature and readability, the scene's association with McMurphy, his influence, and his gambling make it an extremely relevant and powerful statement concerning McMurphy and his spreading influence on others.

### **The Red Ruse Maker**

To further the tie that McMurphy's gambling has as a form of play and trickery to the figure of the fox is the colour scheme often particular to such game play: Red and Black. The traditional colouration of card suits, chips in a poker game, the roulette board, even common as a representation of dice, the combination of red and black give another reason to read this form of game play as that which correlates to the fox whose coat bears the same scheme. In accordance to the fox, McMurphy himself is red-headed, and is often identified by the colour of his hair and sideburns. Upon telling McMurphy he needs to play within the boundaries set by the Big Nurse in order to undermine her, Harding suggests that he must keep control (his temper), but doubts the man's ability due to his "red hair and black record" (73). Harding's reasoning at first seems ambiguous to the point of vacant, but when likened to the fox, and related back to McMurphy's mischievous and legally questionable play preferences, Harding's statement is given significant weight, and multi-layered meaning.

The significance of the colour combination, particularly of red, is further magnified by its association with socio-anarchist movements and thus, their philosophical outlooks. Indicating his connection with Bromden's ancestry once again, the fox-associated colour combination connects the descriptions of McMurphy and Bromden's father, uncle R. J. Wolf, and their tribe when he reflects on how McMurphy is able to cajole authority figures in a way that "not many men could" (94), but of which his father was also capable. Similarly playing into the "role" prescribed to him, Bromden's father plays the "dumb Indian" to the government officials trying to buy land, effectively mocking them for his own entertainment. Other of the tribe are described as wearing "red and black plaid wool shirts" (95) while exchanging grins amongst one another in anticipation of the officials' realization of their being made fun of. The red and black of the plaid shirts unites Bromden's relatives with McMurphy and what both the then resistant to American capitalist society tribe and the redheaded roughneck represent as a stubborn, disregarding and particularly cunning threat to the maintenance and/or expansion of civilized order.

McMurphy's "redhead" (95) trait alone already presents a tie to Bromden's ancestry which he refers to in the scene as that of the "red man" (95), but the colour, both alone and when combined with black, also imply their association with leftist branches of socialism and anarchism in connection with their common held thoughts and perceptions regarding civilization. The particular combination of black (the colour of the anarchist flag) and red (that which is associated with socialism and the working class rebellion) together comprise the anarcho-syndicalist flag ("The Classical Symbol of Anarchism"). While neither the Native American nor McMurphy himself may be said to be dedicated to either political stance, the nature of their very existence and indulgence in behaviours that undercut and oppose civilized conditions, nevertheless align them with the values and philosophies central to those political philosophies.

As such, the association emphasizes the threatening aspect of both McMurphy, and of a traditional Native American way of life, both of which in themselves oppose civilization by their ability to exist outside of its mandates.

Granted, McMurphy doesn't inspire the characters to take what would more commonly be recognized as "political action," but the aforementioned ties made to the colour red, and its association with both the trickster figure of the fox, to games and play, and to anarchism, all point to the way in which he encourages them on some level to challenge conventional thought - primarily about themselves. As the effect of McMurphy's own visceral nature begins to imprint on other characters, just as with Bromden, the scenes and characters in question start accumulating references to both the canine, and the colour red, bringing the two together as a clear indication of the effect of the fox.

### **Spread of the Vulpine Virus**

What cannot be forgotten of the fox, before plunging into a reading of McMurphy's effect on the other characters, is its connection to the wolf and werewolf figure, both of which associate the canine with the moon, and by proxy, lunacy. Again approaching madness as an effect of the instinctual, a reaction that is to be respected and endured rather than ashamed of or sought to be "cured," McMurphy's encouragement of the men to embrace this side of themselves is itself a threat to the asylum considering its primary purpose is to "cure." In the same way, when man's instinctual self, his playful self, the impulse to cry, howl, growl, etc. are permitted and encouraged, civilization is threatened in just the way Feral Faun describes it must be - destroyed by the very wildness it seeks to destroy (13). Embracing madness himself "when rational order has proven its absurdity," he concludes that "to those who love to be ordered [such expressions]

will appear to be the greatest madness. But to our friends [...] or any wild being, it will be the gentlest love" (42). It is in this spirit that McMurphy's own madness is spread, an effect quite akin to the fox in that it is recognized as a primary carrier of the rabies virus ("Understanding Rabies"). That which infects and results in a dog gone mad.

A fishing trip organized by McMurphy (against the wishes of the Big Nurse) most vividly encapsulates his own influence in this regard upon the others, and again demonstrates the beginnings of a shift toward more wild thought and the eventual escape of Bromden. The chapter begins following the first spoken encounter between McMurphy and Bromden, and as Bromden, the only chronic in attendance of the trip, reflects empathetically upon the other chronics who watch him leave, he newly regards their mental state as sharper in some way than one "unaffected." He describes their knowing of his going as "instinctive [... and that] they could know because enough of the man in them had been damped out that the old animal instincts had taken over" (227), further detailing that sometimes upon the death of another chronic, such afflicted patients would reactively "throw back their heads and howl" (227). The way Bromden speaks of the chronics here gives their instinctual behaviour an element of praise, raising their intuition to that which is more acute than a "normal" *man*. The juxtaposition here of man to instinctual animal is also interesting and carries through not only the werewolf narrative previously discussed, but also the development through the text of normal "man" to more enlightened, and thus more powerful, wolf.

As the chapter progresses, behaviours of varying lunatic degrees are embraced, their strengths utilized, shortcomings overlooked, continuously presented through canine-related language. Hygienically concerned OCD character (and eventual sailor on the trip), George, recalls a past trip at sea that began at "Half Moon" Bay (228) and McMurphy convinces him to

attend at all by comparing the sterilization of the boat to that of a "hound's tooth" (229). His concerns regarding the filth of the boat are not dismissed or discouraged, but assured against, through the use of an additional canine reference - one that aligns with his own pleasant memories of the past, identified through his reference to the wolf-related "Half Moon" bay.

Upon arrival at a gas station, the group in telling green smocks are threatened by outsiders, but McMurphy defends the morale of the "pack" by building their egos *based* on qualities of the criminally insane (237). Fully embracing his newly given diagnosis as a dangerous criminal, Harding raves to other passers-by of his lunacy, confiding to McMurphy that he's "never before ... realiz[ed] that mental illness could have the aspect of power" (238). He extends his reflection to suggest that "perhaps the more insane a man is, the more powerful he could become" (238). While Harding jokes about Hitler as an example, his words are quite telling and threatening when regarded in the sense that embracing so-called insanity could be the mere denial of an unfounded and unnecessary diagnosis imposed upon one's valid reaction to civilized living. Leaving the gas station, Bromden relaxes in the vehicle, "lick[ing his] tongue to the wind[, able to] taste the ocean before [they] could see it" (241), tying his comfort and new-found strength in the canine, in much the same mannerisms displayed by McMurphy and his own disregard for what we might generally count as "officialdom." He too "lick[s] his tongue at [a] bloody gap in his teeth" (277) and keeps "licking out a tongue" (311) upon their overnight "party" on the ward before his planned escape.

Adding to the rhetoric of reclaiming lunacy, the colour red is also seen to become prevalent on this trip, marking other characters as McMurphy influence takes effect on them. At the point of McMurphy's bragging, he is given the nickname Red by one of the gas station attendants, and from this moment onward, the colour presents itself in others as they partake in

the day's joyous endeavours. Attracted to the first and only girl he's ever been with (generously "supplied" by McMurphy), the socially timid Billy Bibbit "blushe[s] so red that [the girl] blushe[s] with him and laugh[s]" (232). Not only does Billy share in McMurphy's influence by the colour descriptor, he does so also in the indulgence of his own sexuality, and his ability to spread *laughter*, arguably the most powerful element of McMurphy's character.

Another instance of explosion laughter accompanied by the colour red commences at a point during the trip in which several events that would normally be considered the result of things "gone wrong" instead become sources of joy. Bromden's failure to reel in a fish leads to the line cutting his thumb and making it bleed red (248), and at the same time results in the crank's "fluttering [against] Candy's breast, leaving it "smarting red" (249). The disaster sends McMurphy into an infectious fit of laughter, "spreading [it] out across the water" and to the others until the whole group finds themselves in hysterics, "start[ing] out slow [...] swelling the men bigger and bigger" (250), inspiring them as he did Bromden to realize and embrace that which they instinctually were. Returning, "most of the people in [the boat] were dappled with red and silver" (251) from the successful catches, and while some of the men took off their shirts and "tried to clean them" (251), their efforts would seem unsuccessful. In the same way, McMurphy's influence, his vitality, love of life and laughter, once transferred cannot be undone, and this is what makes him a dangerous influence.

Immediately upon their return, still feeling liberated from their swelling laughter and leisurely outing, the Big Nurse sets to undercutting McMurphy's influence over the others in order to reestablish her own position of dominance by reminding and "warning" the men that McMurphy is "crazy like a fox" (264). While she suggests that her comparison to the canine of choice is to emphasize the way in which he thinks only of himself, deceiving and manipulating



others to his advantage in order to win bets (further tying the warning to play), Ratched's use of the fox is particularly threatening because it is also she, and the system that she largely represents, that has convinced the men that they are rabbits. By using a relevant predator to both rabbits and chickens, Ratched abuses the species with which McMurphy is associated in order to re-establish her own pecking order, and redirects their mistrust of her and the Combine, to McMurphy.

Despite her attempted demonization of the canine, McMurphy maintains an attitude that emphasizes the strength of the canine bond established on the fishing trip, again refusing the nurse's attempts at re-instating order through ideological manipulation. Hurt by the sudden and unexplained distrust that has arisen in the group, McMurphy expresses his confusion by asking "what [...] everybody [...] is] giving [him] the cold nose about" (269). While McMurphy could have gone with the expression "cold shoulder" instead, his use of "cold nose" keeps the other characters canine despite their sudden shift in attitude toward him. He still offers them respect, and tries to maintain their canine-dignity, contrary to the way in which the Big Nurse has just re-imposed their rabbithood by describing their relationship to the *foxlike* McMurphy as one in which they are in danger. McMurphy further maintains his respect for the others by walking away from Bromden instead of continuing to argue when he can see that Bromden is about to cry while confronting him about the matter (270). Following this moment, despite the others' suspicion of him, McMurphy again demonstrates his respect for the others in their newly established "pack" by defending George when he finds him being harassed in the shower by the Nurse's faithful "black boys." Reassured that they had "all been wrong" (271) to believe the Nurse, McMurphy's reputation among the pack is restored by his unfailing allegiance to them.

The moment of restoration established through McMurphy's defense of George serves as a confirmation of solidarity between the men, and it is from this point forward that others begin to share in and embody characteristics otherwise associated with McMurphy as they too become canine. Following this reaffirmation is a sending off party (organized for McMurphy's intended escape), itself intimately tied to the playful, serves as a celebratory and culminating moment for the pack. Praised upon their return, Bromden describes McMurphy as "growing bigger than ever [...] almost into a legend" (291), a reflection evident in himself and the impact that this expression of pack unity has had on him as well. His return, and his actions in the shower against Washington (one of the nurse's boys) earn him the glorified greeting from Harding as "the *Wildman* who broke the arm [...] of the black boy!" (290), suggesting that he has become similarly legendary, as well as similarly wild like McMurphy. When Bromden enters the room, "everybody's face turn[s] up to [him]" (290) and he grins "realizing how McMurphy must've felt these months with all these faces screaming up at him" (290). The upward facing heads provide not only the visual of a howling pack, but also behaviourally replicate a display of respect common to canines in greeting. Expressing their respect for the dominant dog, as the characters do of both McMurphy and now Bromden as well, submissive members will approach from beneath and lick the mouth and face area of their superior (Hotchner 165). This behaviour should not be confused with what has been said early on of the myth of the alpha male. The concept of pack leader is still true to wolf behaviour, but maintenance of this position is not associated with the aggression and domination of the weak that our ideology purports. Instead, a pack leader may be thought of more as an organizational leader, and is more often than not, the parent of the offspring who comprise the rest of the pack (Mech).

As the party commences rhetoric of the wild and the canine begin to pick up in regard to the aforementioned prevalence of colour, language, behaviour and playfulness associated with McMurphy's influence. Billy's neck flushes (294) and McMurphy prepares him to consummate his love for Candy who has arrived with another girl, Sandy, "barefoot, [...] red-cheeked and giggling" (298). Brought into the ward at all by McMurphy, their description again signifies the how he, as fox, brings the wild where it "does not belong." To further support this reading, Sandy repeatedly utters the colloquial expression, "wild" (298), to describe the situation on the ward that night. Shifting into canine confidence himself, another patient, Sefelt, guards the door of the latrine while Sandy goes inside, "defend[ing] it against all comers" (303) as though he were a watchdog. After a seizure, which is dealt with intimately but without fuss, Sefelt insists that he is alright, and just tells the men to "medicate [him] and turn [him] loose again" (303). Sefelt's request for rerelease suggests a contrasting canine freedom (being "turned loose" from either containment or being on leash) compared to the restraint he might otherwise be subject to under professional care. His ability to recover, and request to do so in an animal way, directly links back to Levine's conversation regarding madness, and although Sefelt does request medication, he does so of his own accord in order to ease the potential harm he could do to himself, such as bite through his own tongue - a recurrent image in the novel.

Reflecting on the mention of medication, Harding has a realization that this evening of mischief would be their "last fling" and that they would be "doomed henceforth" to an impending fate of being "shot at dawn": "Miss Ratched shall line us all against the wall, where we'll face the terrible maw of a muzzle-loading shotgun which she has loaded with Militowns! Thorazines! Libriums! Stelazines! And [...] tranquilize all of us completely out of existence" (304). His description likens the Nurse's methods of treatment to that of a weapon through which the

individual will be exterminated. This moment reflects a deep change in Harding who once fought against McMurphy to justify the group therapy practices of the hospital. The weapon type he selects to make this analogy further speaks to the way in which he is embracing the animalist influence of McMurphy. He at once describes a type of shotgun, and simultaneously implies that their muzzles (the mouth and snout structure of the canine) will be loaded *by* the shotgun, suggesting that the orally administered drugs would be the things to render them tranquil, and without existence. In effect, he recognizes that the effect of the institution has not been so much to help as it has to rid the individual of their most instinctual being.

It is particularly relevant that this shift happens in Harding, the character who initially defends the Big Nurse against McMurphy's criticism and rather mistakenly views her as a "rabbit in wolf's clothing," so to speak. Following the events of the fishing trip, and his revelation regarding his own mental illness, as well as the true intentions of the asylum, Harding himself begins to take back the role of leader he held before McMurphy's arrival, but now fulfills his place in such a way that McMurphy would himself. Welcoming Bromden back to the ward after treatments of EST, Harding is shown to have adopted McMurphy's carnival tone, even adjusting his speech to replicate McMurphy's playfulness: "Here, in front of your very eyes ... is the *Wildman* who broke the arm of ... the black boy! Hey-ha, lookee, lookee" (290). Coming from a man of high education, this playfulness with language already symbolizes that a significant shift has taken place in regard to the way in which Harding now regards the dominant institutions of civilization and their principles.

Beyond the element of playfulness, Harding is also shown to take on the canine loyalty McMurphy had repeatedly demonstrated, and is at this point associated with a specific canine himself, emphasizing the extent of his change. When McMurphy is taken away for lobotomy,

Harding not only gets "the tub room back open and [...] deal[s] blackjack himself" (319), he is the one to press the Big Nurse for answers regarding whether or not McMurphy is coming back, taking on the leadership role as it would be fulfilled by a pack leader looking out for and concerned with the well-being of other pack members. The reference to blackjack furthermore not only links Harding to McMurphy in regard to game play, it invites the audience to read the reference as one that connects him to the black backed jackal - a canid that is behaviourally and ecologically similar to the fox (a scavenger that can make do in the face of civilized expansion) (Fishman) but which is closer to the wolf genetically ("jackal"). Uniting the influence and symbolism of both fox and wolf, Harding shifts from a supporter of the practices of group humiliation during the first therapy session we see operated by the Nurse, to the one now protective of others in his pack. His shift represents a transformation from one in allegiance to systemic ideology to one that not only rejects that destructive ideological framework, but embodies its opposite, embracing all of that which the ideology to which he was loyal before identified as useless and intended to obliterate.

By examining the fox in accordance to its behaviour, biology, relationship to other canids and combining it with the creature's mythos, all that is implied by a supposed offhand warning of the Big Nurse (that McMurphy is crazy as a fox) is brought to light. The significance of the fox as it pertains to McMurphy's character is shown to be in no way limited to the nurse's instance of usage, and in fact, when read further, actually demonstrates that her utilization of the term is intentional and has been implemented in order to undercut McMurphy and re-establish control in more ways than one.

Each of the animals we have read in this analysis so far have in some way or another mirrored the human condition, but the fox might be the most encouraging given its ability to

infiltrate the civilized as a wild being and actually thrive within such a setting by adapting (while still maintaining its wildness), shifting its food acquisition practices to focus more heavily on repurposing human trash for nourishment. Given the rhetoric of nourishment and growth with which McMurphy is also associated, the implication made by the fox's ability to repurpose trash and McMurphy's insistence on keeping alive that which civilization wishes to dispel (including the individuals who do not adhere to its standards of productivity and usefulness), he too is seen to repurpose mental illness so as to endow the concept, as well as those afflicted, with power. Speaking back to de Certeau, the fox appears an exact embodiment of the practice of "making do" and maintains a playful mode of undercutting.

This fact in itself contributes to the way in which we may regard the dominant mythos surrounding the fox as a trickster. Resilient and unchanging despite the way in which the surrounding civilization should impact its existence, the fox embodies that which we must aspire to be - wild within the conditions of civilized living. The fox's biological and behavioural reality thus emphasize its archetypal significance, and further serve as support for reading the connections between McMurphy and the animal as those which are in line with movements, philosophies and people who oppose and deny the alleged necessity of civilization. And while such a commentary may still be deductable without the deep reading of the fox, the way in which such resistance may actually be executed by way of play and love would not come through were we to overlook the larger narrative of the canine, and the way in which the species has been used to characterize our own instinctual reality.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

Through this analysis of *Cuckoo's Nest*, the importance of deeply reading and considering animal characterization has been illustrated and shown to be a vital undertaking for the understanding of a text and all of its implications. It is as though we are so familiar with the animal that we have come to bypass it in our critical pursuits, or alternately, have become so accepting of a rhetoric that suggests our opposition to anything non-human that we do not give a second thought to the possibility that it might hold relevance to a human narrative. Our error could not be greater. By turning the practice of reading metaphor into an exercise of research and application, it becomes evident that considering the biological, behavioural as well as the archetypal significance of animals in regard to that which is available on the surface is not only worthwhile, but necessary.

As an emerging interdisciplinary field, contemporary conversations in animal studies have yet to fully explore and give proper acknowledgement to the potential insight literary criticism can bring to such discussions. Rhetorician Mary Trachsel, in the piece "Reviving Biophilia: Feeling Our Academic Way to a Future," states that "curiosity about life *in common* with the lives of other animals inclines Animal Studies [as a field of discipline] toward a morality that acknowledges and is prepared to recognize and even love the presence of other animals" (79) in our own. Furthermore, such a field of study "allows animals to command human attention" (79), and while both elements are exactly that which have proven themselves evident in *Cuckoo's Nest*, the practice of reading animal significance in literary fiction, and thus literary criticism as a discipline, has yet to become a major voice in such conversations. While animal subjects of "research [...] domestic companions, [...] livestock, [...] photography [...], microbes

viewed through magnifying lenses" (79) are all made mention of in Trachsel's discussion, the animal subject as a literary figure is left out. To date, when the written animal is considered in the conversation of Animal Studies, it has most often been so in regard to its rhetorical implications to animal welfare -- how they are used to define a superior humanness, or are described in such a way that dismisses their experience and renders them expendable. Such an endeavour is necessary and to be respected, but the involvement of literary criticism must not end there.

The exclusion of literature is perhaps due in part to the fact that one might question fiction's ability to contribute to contemporary conversations of "environmental threats to animality in its many earthly forms, including our own" (Trachsel 73). However, such conversations often traverse the subject of humankind's animality, and as has been evidenced here, the deepened reading of animal metaphor in a literary text may actually have a great deal to say regarding such concerns. As was detailed in the opening chapter, where present conversation regarding the literary animal is extant, its discussion tends to focus on the animal in the text where directly present, rather than where it is metaphorically alluded to. Still, both approaches and levels of engagement hold significance, and to dismiss the side of the conversation that literature could bring to the otherwise "hard science" approach presently domineering this realm of animal studies, is to exclude some of the most powerful and radical conversations that pertaining to the question of the human-animal-environmental relationship.

The acknowledgement of overt animal identification (as seen in the work of Miroslaw Loba mentioned in the introductory chapter) in text aside, conversations that do acknowledge the rhetoric of animals within literature are usually concerned with the way in which the animal is exploited or demeaned in the process of humans defining humanity. As a result, we become quite



accustomed to noticing only the derogatory usage and implication of animal language (i.e. to treat someone like a "dog" or describe someone particularly obtuse in the political arena as a "hyena"), and on the surface that does appear to be the way in which Ken Kesey has featured the animal as well. Indeed, the rhetoric of animal language *to* demoralize particular groups does still deserve recognition and confrontation, but a standstill has been reached if we do not take the invitation to read the animal in other ways. In doing so, many narratives that would otherwise be dismissed as racist or derogatory usage of the animal are shown to undercut such rhetorical practices. Furthermore, by broadening the way in which we read and receive the animal, its function in literature is shown to contribute significantly to conversations regarding the relationships between humans, humans and non-human animals, of our environment, and of the societies in which we exist.

By acknowledging that animal characterization can be used in this way, and that it is already functioning as such, the opportunity to read the animal as a reclamation of dignity and liberation presents itself, and the writer is shown to be taking back a rhetoric once used to demean. This effect is particularly significant in instances where contemporary writing by individuals of historically oppressed groups features an animal narrative that undermines a more commonly recognized usage of animal rhetoric (for example, the way in which bovine and equine references are utilized in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, effectively reclaiming the identity of the animal through which black slaves were oppressed and dehumanized for centuries prior). As is the case with Kesey's text, such narratives often (either intentionally, or by proxy) put the humans in question on the level of the animal to a positive extent, one which results in the human subject's healing, strength or liberation through association with the animal.

Reading the animal deeply, and as the human, through the shared experience of both we are invited to rediscover something crucial and sacred about our relationships with one another, with non-human animals and with the earth. The prevalence of such narratives, and reclamation in contemporary fiction, demand that we as readers and critics reconsider how the animal is utilized in-text, not only to enrich our experience as readers, but so that we might become active participants in the shift to at least recognize the undeniable, shared experience between the animal and ourselves. By seriously utilizing animal reading in this way, the mythic alongside the factual, as a critical lens, it becomes clear that animal characterization is not used to communicate that which is non-human, but to reveal something that is inherently human but suppressed and forbidden in civilized living.

In many ways, the description and discussion of humankind's animality through the use of animal metaphor in fiction is something unique to the capacities of literature, making the practice of reading the animal in this way crucial to advancing contemporary discourses in Animal Studies. In the book *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, Jungian psychologist, Clarissa Pinkola Estes likens the visceral human spirit (particularly that of the woman) to a wolf, and speaks through a similar metaphor as was observed in *Cuckoo's Nest* to express a rediscovery of instinct as a means of maintaining mental health within a domestic society. Like instinct, and like the wolf in Bromden, this deep soul-psyche, the "ancient and vital wild self" (28), is something that already lies within but which is necessarily suppressed in the civilized realm. Without it, individuals are left with "symptoms of a disrupted relationship with the wildish force in the psyche [...]: [F]eeling extraordinarily dry, fatigued, frail, depressed, confused, gagged, muzzled, unaroused [...], frightened [...], weak, without inspiration, without animation, without soulfulness, without meaning [...], volatile, stuck, uncreative [and] crazed" (10). As a therapist,

Estes turns to *story* to elicit the wildish self by the way in which it brings the individual to "remember" themselves, suggesting that "sometimes a word, a sentence or a poem or a story, is so resonant, so right, it causes us to remember, at least for an instant, what substance we really are made from" (5-6). It is through story, that we are perhaps able to "live through this and return" as I so desperately hoped possible when I was eleven.

While Estes speaks of the use of story through myth in her examination of the wild archetype expressed through the animal, contemporary fiction is also a viable source for such rediscovery. The narrative at hand, that of reclaiming instinct through the animal, is not the only one that becomes available through such readings, but is almost always inevitably expressed regardless of the other sociopolitical ends to which the animal has been utilized. We must, as Mary Trachsel suggested we already do in other areas of Animal Studies, learn to acknowledge and recognize the animal in literary fiction. In so doing, we will inevitably join other disciplines in the movement and bring valuable insight to the conversation of human-animal relationships as they pertain to those between species, and as they express our own deepest humanness.

In this sense, an analysis of animal characterization as it plays out in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is doubly appropriate for introducing such a practice. Not only does it serve as a narrative that acts as a comparable lead to the wild as Estes describes is found in the storytelling of myth, it also delivers that narrative through *this* story as well. It both guides us to that which we are, and *tells* us that this is absolutely vital to our well-being. By using the animal through a surface narrative that already questions the way in which civilization regards and addresses mental health problems, as well as what may lead to the prevalence of psychosis, *Cuckoo's Nest* becomes a viable platform from which to join the discussions and causes called for by Trachsel, Estes, Baker and Ham.

The short wolf-story excerpt with which I opened this discussion was not the first article of rhetoric I'd crafted that concerned the relationship between human and animal, domestication and the civilized, nor will this piece have been my last. In the same way that McMurphy's canine-associated vitality persists and is shown to constantly re-express itself, so too will my reading, writing, research, artwork and daily life continue to unleash the animal when encountered. By persistently opening ourselves to noticing, acknowledging and recognizing the animal everywhere that it exists (which happens to be most places), we can come to read and understand not only our relationship relative to them as distinct non-human animal species, but to see and understand a self that we have been told to forget.

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