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Virtuoso Beasts: Modernist Fables and the Vitality of Style

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Virtuoso Beasts: Modernist Fables and the Vitality of Style

Abstract

This dissertation examines the pivotal function of animals in modernist writing, particularly where modernist style confronts inherited moral codes. Classic accounts of modernism emphasize “impersonality” as the prime method for artists seeking cultural and ethical authority in the period after 1880. This project digs into what I argue is ultimately the more palatable capacity of literary beasts to animate a similar poetics of authority. Where doctrines of impersonality often resorted to figures of the inorganic in order to simultaneously disavow and indulge the expression of authorial intention, modernists such as Gerard Manley Hopkins, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Rudyard Kipling, and Marianne Moore instead avowed their didactic ambitions by appealing not to traditional expressive and explicit methods nor, on the other hand, to the complete evacuation of personality, but to the vitality and instinct of animals. More than any platinum filament (T.S. Eliot’s famous catalyst), animals offered modernists a vocabulary for the bodily and behavioral mechanisms by which individuals become ethical and historical subjects. In my chapters, I examine specific formal effects that require animal energy—from the modeling of queer poetic virtuosity upon animal instinct (as in Hopkins’s windhover, for example, or Moore’s slapstick critters) and the casting of fictional characters along evolutionary-typological lines (as in Woolf’s *The Waves*) to the anticolonial implementation, even, of a “bestial” prose style resistant to modernism’s self-authorization (exemplified by the indifferent creatures we find in *Finnegans Wake*).

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VIRTUOSO BEASTS:
MODERNIST FABLES & THE VITALITY OF STYLE

Cliff Mak

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VIRTUOSO BEASTS: MODERNIST FABLES AND THE VITALITY OF STYLE

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Jos, you're all over this sucker. In you, this finds some righteousness.

And this is not all it, but this will do.

Philadelphia, PA
April 30, 2015

ABSTRACT

VIRTUOSO BEASTS: MODERNIST FABLES AND THE VITALITY OF STYLE

Cliff Mak

Jed Esty

This dissertation examines the pivotal function of animals in modernist writing, particularly where modernist style confronts inherited moral codes. Classic accounts of modernism emphasize “impersonality” as the prime method for artists seeking cultural and ethical authority in the period after 1880. Literary beasts, however, had a more palatable capacity to animate a similar poetics of authority. Where doctrines of impersonality often resorted to figures of the inorganic in order to simultaneously disavow and indulge the expression of authorial intention, modernists such as Gerard Manley Hopkins, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Rudyard Kipling, and Marianne Moore instead avowed their didactic ambitions by appealing not to traditional expressive and explicit methods nor, on the other hand, to the complete evacuation of personality, but to the vitality and instinct of animals. More than any platinum filament, animals offered modernists a vocabulary for the bodily and behavioral mechanisms by which individuals become ethical and historical subjects. The chapters here examine specific formal effects that require animal energy—from the modeling of queer poetic virtuositities upon animal instinct (as in Hopkins’ windhover, for example, or Moore’s slapstick animals) and the casting of characters along evolutionary-typological lines (as in *The Waves*) to the anticolonial implementation, even, of a “bestial” style resistant to modernism’s self-authorization (exemplified by the indifferent creatures in *Finnegans Wake*).

These examples bear out my main historical claim about modernist animals: after Darwin, it became necessary to address the individual as a complete, organic being whose developmental bandwidth was now not only more capacious—encompassing a range of instinctive and affective faculties beyond the classically rational *cogito*—but also, and for that very reason, as a more precarious, volatile subject, vulnerable like any animal to the unrelenting flux of biology. Drawing on the established tradition of the fable mode, then, as a “lowly” but highly effective form for conveying ethical dicta and, at the same time, anticipating the work of modern affect studies, what I call the *modernist fable* reframes the field’s relation to style, highlighting its centrality as a specialized mechanism by which to mediate and stabilize the volatilities of language, ethics, and bodies.

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**INTRODUCTION:
MODERNIST ANIMALS
& THE ARTICULATION OF AUTHORITY**

“make visible, mentality.”

—Marianne Moore

INFINITELY PERFECTIBLE

Sometime during the early hours of June 17, 1904, the exhaustion and wariness of Leopold Bloom after a singularly long day prompt him to profess to Stephen Dedalus both the scope of his inherent utopianism and the degree to which the obstructions of modern life have only, so far, discouraged him. As we read in “Ithaca”:

Why would a recurrent frustration the more depress him?

Because at the critical turningpoint of human existence he desired to amend many social conditions, the product of inequality and avarice and international animosity.

He believed then that human life was infinitely perfectible, eliminating these conditions?

There remained the generic conditions imposed by natural, as distinct from human law, as integral parts of the human whole: the necessity of destruction to procure alimentary sustenance: the painful character of the ultimate functions of separate existence, the agonies of birth and death: the monotonous menstruation of simian and (particularly) human females extending from the age of puberty to the menopause: inevitable accidents at sea, in mines and factories: certain very painful maladies and their resultant surgical operations, innate lunacy and congenital criminality, decimating epidemics: catastrophic cataclysms which make terror the basis of human mentality: seismic upheavals the epicentres of which are located in densely populated regions: the fact of vital growth, through convulsions of

metamorphosis, from infancy through maturity to decay. (*U* 17.989-1006)¹

Registering his frustration with Stephen's obtuse counter to his own last-minute, only half-thought-out, and ultimately disingenuous proposal—that Stephen tutor (or rather, unwittingly, distract) Molly in exchange for housing—Bloom's thoughts end up conflating the personal and the cosmic, the modern and the cyclic, the social and the biological. His stakes, however quixotically, become the universe's; the possibility of rehabilitating his marriage now depends on the capacity for life itself to overcome precarity. For insofar as “the human whole” is “infinitely perfectible,” even in the face of all cataclysm and pain, so too, somehow, are “many social conditions” and by inclusion, his life with Molly. From Bloom's perspective, in other words, the climax of *Ulysses* turns on nothing less than the most ambitious form of morality imaginable to moderns at the beginning of the twentieth century: the total continuity of ethics and biology.²

What eventually becomes plain, however, is the ultimate inadequacy of Bloom's straightforward practice of self-help for the most demanding challenge asked of him in *Ulysses*—that of reconciling himself to the state of his marriage. Faced with a choice between “equanimity” and violent “retribution,” Bloom's conscience almost tips in favor of the latter,

¹ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, et al. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1984, 1986). Hereafter cited parenthetically by episode and line number as *U*.

² That Bloom would fancy so monumental a task pivoting on *his* individual agency is, of course, not that surprising. At his most ardent, after all, Bloom is a character prone to outlandish messianic impulses, and at his most quotidian, one eminently preoccupied with what “Ithaca” describes as “the importance of dietary and civic selfhelp” (*U* 17.28-29). Indeed, Bloom seems rarely not to be “on” in this regard: from his first inner monologues in “Calypso” to the Ithacan reveal of his library, stocked with practical guides, it is a “DIY” attitude of self-improvement that characterizes his ethos—and that situates him as heir to a liberal tradition of pragmatic ethical autonomy inaugurated by Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859) and effectively cemented into the mass cultural imagination by books like Eugen Sandow's *Strength and How to Obtain It* (1897, and included on Bloom's shelf). For more on the self-help texts of *Ulysses*, see Brandon Kershner, “The World's Strongest Man: Joyce or Sandow?”, in *Images of Joyce*, ed. Clive Hart et al., vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 237-52; Vike Martina Plock, “A Feat of Strength in ‘Ithaca’: Eugen Sandow and Physical Culture in Joyce's *Ulysses*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 30 (2006): 129–36; and Beth Blum, “*Ulysses* as Self-Help Manual? James Joyce's Strategic Populism,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 74 (2013): 67-93.

and he returns to the former only after deeming “the inanity of extolled virtue” reason enough to avoid a self-valorizing display of moral rectitude (*U* 17.2225). Being a righteous husband, Bloom seems to belatedly realize, does not on its own ensure marital harmony. A self-guided morality might not, perhaps, conduce to social welfare; an *insistence* on its ostensible authority might even interfere with its social transmission.³ Rather, a means of supplementing—and, even, bypassing—the traditional rhetorical, cognitive, and affective channels of ethical expression becomes necessary.

Readers of “Ithaca” know what comes next. Bloom famously ends his day with a comforting appreciation of Molly’s sensual posterior, and a bawdy Joyceness, certainly, gets top billing as far as cheek goes. At the same time, Joyce is wrapping up a series of philosophical considerations operating concurrently throughout *Ulysses*: Molly’s sensuality—deemed by Bloom to be “expressive of ... animality”—is one in a long line of whimsical (metempsychotic, perhaps) equivalences on Bloom’s part between animality and ethics (*U* 17.2235-36). From the inscrutable nature of his cat’s “avid shameclosing eyes” to the curious burial customs of ants, Bloom is singularly fascinated by the bewildering opacity of animal biology and behavior, seeing in them—for reasons not always clear either to him or us—not only a *heuristic* but also an aspirational *model* for human conduct. “Ithaca,” just to drive the point home, even “proves” that Bloom “loved rectitude from his earliest youth” by citing his youthful familiarity with both *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* (*U* 17.1634-1645). Animal ethology and evolutionary biology form the backbone of Bloom’s moral reflections: individual animals, entire species, taxa, and types, and animal life taken as a structural

³ Thus a closer look at the actual logic behind Bloom’s moral decision seems to resist Blum’s claim that, “[i]n light of Sandow’s emphasis on mental discipline, Bloom’s choice of ‘equanimity’ above violence in ‘Ithaca’ suggests that despite his disappointing muscular development, perhaps he succeeds in following some of Sandow’s principles after all.” See Blum, 74-75.

whole—these are all at different times the figures that Bloom, weighing them in his hands, relies on in order to better adjust himself to his world.⁴

Where Joyce ends his narrative is therefore this dissertation's starting point: the infinite perfectibility of human life, as a horizon of luminous possibility offered by the cognitive, epistemological, and ethical figure of the animal. Taking a cue from some of its most canonical works, I argue that much of modernism can be inscribed into a longer history of animal biology that begins with the robust descriptive practices of natural history and culminates with the various schools of evolutionary ethics. As the ability of natural animal life to remain vital, whole, and equilibrial in the face of both internal and external precarities—or what Darwin called “that perfection of structure and coadaptation”—became a pervasive and fundamental model for ethics in general, many modernists developed aesthetic analogues along these lines, using the various literary tools at their disposal to transmit or embody the new sense of animality.⁵ Aesthetic form *itself* became a way to elucidate what was taken to be animal life's capacity for self-preservation and -maintenance.

Bergson suggests as much, for example, in *Creative Evolution* (1907), when he discusses the difficulty of making instinct intelligible. For Bergson, intelligence and instinct are analogous but qualitatively different faculties: intelligence is limited to articulating the quantitative principles of inert physical matter; instinct has access to *élan vital*, or the ineffable vital impulse that brings matter to life. “We see that the intellect, so skillful in dealing with

⁴ Hence “Ithaca”: “Equanimity? // As natural as any and every natural act of a nature expressed or understood executed in nature by natural creatures in accordance with his, her and their natured natures, of dissimilar similarity. [...] As not more abnormal than all other parallel processes of adaptation to altered conditions of existence, resulting in a reciprocal equilibrium between the bodily organism and its attendant circumstances, foods, beverages, acquired habits, indulged inclinations, significant disease. As more than inevitable, irreparable.” (U 17.2177-2194)

⁵ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6.

the inert, is awkward the moment it touches the living,” he writes.⁶ Instinct, however, remains illegible to the conscious intellect, no matter how well that intellect is able to perceive the objectively equilibrial structure of life, and it is only through intuition, a difficult “disinterested, self-conscious,” and, even, “purified” form of instinct, that the vital impulse becomes intelligible:

That an effort of this kind is not impossible, is proved by the existence in man of an aesthetic faculty along with normal perception. Our eye perceives the features of the living being, merely as assembled, not as mutually organized. The intention of life, the simple movement that runs through the lines, that binds them together and gives them significance, escapes it. This intention is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model.⁷

Despite this insight, Bergson stops short of providing any concrete examples of how the intuitive “aesthetic faculty” is able to illuminate the vital impulse in living beings. Yet the possibilities afforded by such a privileging of the aesthetic are precisely what fascinated many modernists contemporary with Bergson, and it is their experiments with making the ineffably instinctual and vital concretely intelligible that constitute the primary subject of the following chapters.

More specifically, this dissertation investigates a late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century literary-historical question, framed on either side by rather large seismic shifts in the realms of natural science and ethical-cultural criticism: in the wake, that is, of both Darwinian evolutionary theory and the waning of didacticism as the default mode of authoritative cultural transmission, why did modernism witness an unprecedented resurgence of the *beast fable*? The fable as a historical form, after all, traditionally has its roots in both

⁶ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1911), 165.

⁷ Bergson, 176-177.

Aristotelian didacticism and pre-Darwinian conceptions of animality, and its highly conventional formal and thematic parameters might not have been, at first blush, entirely amenable to modernist experimentation. Yet fables, this study argues, proved not only compatible with but, more importantly, even *generative* for modernists.

As we will see, new theories of animality offered themselves up readily as explanatory models for various schools of ethical thought in the second half of the nineteenth century. As various Victorian cultural and social institutions encountered crisis after crisis of authority, they turned with remarkable frequency and depth to these models in order to either reinforce their waning validity or to find a way beyond it. Where, previously, their authority might have seemed self-evident and their doctrines easily propagated through traditional didactic channels, the dawning realization of their arbitrary and constructed nature required that their conceptual apparatuses be welded with as much strength as possible to the armature of the *biological*. That is, not merely naturalized (by, say, a Romantic or Christian pastoralism) but revitalized and organicized from the inside out, as it were, through the articulation of an internal dynamism sufficient to propel their authority into the future—or, as Bloom needs to believe, made “more than inevitable, irreparable” (*U* 17.2194). Only life itself could serve as a compelling-enough model for the autonomy and cohesion authority required.

Hence we find not only the rise of what we might call species-level evolutionary philosophies (namely, in the work Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley) that followed from a basic mapping of social ethics onto evolutionary theory, but also more focused and granular analogies that mapped individual and institutional ethics onto proportionally more localized biological faculties like instinct. In Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863), for

example, the climax of the protagonist's ostensibly auto-didactic and muscularly Victorian moral development actually turns on trusting the illegible course of his own instinctual, animalistic actions; or, contemporaneously at an institutional in addition to the individual level, John Henry Newman's summa *Grammar of Assent* (1870) attempted to defend Roman Catholicism by characterizing spiritual development (expressed as both individual belief and collective religious discourse) as "a living growth, not a mechanism; and its instruments are mental acts, not the formulas and contrivances of language."⁸ And by 1887, it is probably safe to say, such ethico-biological thinking reached its single strongest formulation in Nietzsche, who in *On the Genealogy of Morals* calls for a "*physiological* investigation and interpretation, rather than a psychological one," for "every table of values, every 'thou shalt' known to history or ethnology."⁹

Yet at the same time, it became clear, *any* adequation of ethics to biology risked opening ethical being up to the other side of the new vitality—that is, to precarity. As Foucault explains in *The Order of Things*, the new biology reinserted life into the ever-forward movement of history, making it all the more difficult to describe precisely what kept any living body *alive*.¹⁰ By the end of the century, we thus find, in addition to the unilateral iconoclasm of Nietzsche, modernists of many stripes absorbing the lessons of precarity: one might even characterize, without too much exaggeration, *all* of modernism as a set of

⁸ John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1874), 350. See also Jessica Straley on Kingsley's use of evolutionary recapitulation theory in *The Water-Babies*. Straley ultimately sees Kingsley's story as registering the contradictions and impossibilities of Herbert Spencer's materialist pedagogy, for example, while also opening up literature itself as the space of "experimentation" in a "child's miniaturized evolution," allowing the child to exercise the vague faculty of "wit." In the first chapter of this dissertation, I extend Straley's observations and formalize "wit" and "imagination" not just as "play" or "nonsense" (which Straley sees as fundamental to much Victorian children's literature) but as a *stylistic* analog for self-directed animal instinct. See Jessica Straley, "Of Beasts and Boys: Kingsley, Spencer, and the Theory of Recapitulation," *Victorian Studies* 49 (2007): 583–609.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, and *Ecce Homo*, trans. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 55.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 263–279.

different aesthetic responses to this new awareness of precarity—each of which might be easily plotted on an axis from its disavowal at one end, to its difficult stabilization in the center, to a complete capitulation to it at the other end. To venture onto this axis at all, moreover, was a tricky task. Hence Bergson, again, turning to aesthetic form as *the* privileged venue for intersubjectively translating the ethical (understood as a capacity of the intellect) and the biological (understood as the site of instinct), is never fully able to turn artistic perception into the stabilizing heuristic he needs it to be. In discussing the ethical capacity of a poem to give a reader intersubjective access to the poet's singular experience of *élan vital*, Bergson at first wants to avow a certain degree of agency on the part of the reader:

When a poet reads me his verses, I can interest myself enough in him to enter into his thought, put myself into his feelings, live over again the simple state he has broken into phrases and words. I sympathize then with his inspiration, I follow it with a continuous movement which is, like the inspiration itself, an undivided act.¹¹

The hypothetical poem, however, leads Bergson's train of thought to slip in quick succession from a concerted "sympathetic" intellection of the poet's instinctual "simple state" to, first, a relaxation of his attention, then to a "letting go" of the self "in the direction of dream," and finally to "a deficiency of will."¹² As crucial as the aesthetic faculty is to qualitatively understanding one's vital structure and therefore also the perfectibility of life itself, it is also a terribly precarious faculty in terms of individual agency, either requiring or, perhaps, encouraging its complete dissolution.

The challenge for modernist intellectuals, then, following Bergson, was to find the proper aesthetic mechanisms by which instinct and the evolutionary processes could become intelligible, and in doing this they dramatically renovated and reengineered the beast fable for

¹¹ Bergson, 210.

¹² Bergson, 210.

a thoroughly modern purpose. The seeming middle ground occupied by intuition between instinct and intelligence, we will see, despite having the “simple movement” of *élan vital* as its object, often seems to elude the grasp of the modernists. At the same time, however, we can clearly understand Bergson’s fixation on this articulation to be symptomatic of the same ideological crisis facing modernists more largely: a growing distrust of the seemingly transparent and straightforward individual cognitive and rhetorical processes underpinning any form of discursive authority.

Any form that would henceforth aspire to such authority would have to find a compelling way to make the subjective and the objective mutually conversant. In the anthropomorphized beasts of fables, modernists eventually found a form that seemed, essentially, custom-built for the task: in what was conventionally the charm and whimsy of making unvarying animal behavior embody subjective moral virtues, the fable provided a template for nothing less than bringing ethical authority *to life*. Short of this, however—and we will see that the fabular tradition, in addition to its animal content and didactic form, is distinguished for the rigorous balance of tone or style the form seems to require, the lightness of its touch—expressions of authority tended to slip into the banal, dualistic languages of dehumanization, naturalism, or rarified intellection we have come to associate with modernism.

Michael Levenson has explained that what was at stake in the movement from Victorian liberalism to the various manifestations of high modernism were precisely these grounds of cultural and literary authority: not just, that is, in terms of the epistemology of *fact*—accelerated in both directions by the natural sciences and the rise of psychology—but

also how such content was supposed to provide *meaning*.¹³ Where the ever-growing individualism of Victorian liberalism could, however improbably, still be seen to uphold traditional social values (as in the self-help ethos of Samuel Smiles, for example), proto-modernists such as Pater understood the rise of subjectivism as a comprehensive sloughing-away of external constraints, leaving only the imperative to “burn always with this hard, gem-like flame” of individual consciousness as the sole marker of “success in life.”¹⁴ The many varieties of “high” modernism can therefore be seen as both compensating for the excessive nihilism of Pater’s aestheticism and throwing the inherent instabilities of liberal individualism into higher relief. Hence, as Levenson characterizes it, we find in fiction, for instance, a rejection of the unitary and sovereign omniscient narrative voice as the sole guarantor of meaning and value in favor of an extreme bifurcation—at the level of both subjectivity and literary form—between objective, sensory reality (i.e. true value) and a sort of mitigated individual consciousness (for the still-required act of interpretation).

Levenson’s primary example is the move from George Eliot to Conrad, but his characterization certainly helps explain many other varieties of modernism as symptoms of the same ideological fissuring. No longer could one pretend that a liberal ethos of autonomous and individual ethical self-development and self-perception was in any sense a guarantee of epistemological truth or compatible with traditional social values. Rather, modernism gave itself over to either unrestrained subjectivism (often formalized under the rubric of stream-of-consciousness) or (perhaps even more frequently) a radical evacuation of personality in general. Hence we find the prevalence of a number of familiar modernist

¹³ Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908-1922* (Cambridge UP, 1984), 8-10.

¹⁴ Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 120.

doctrines of impersonality in which value is attained only insofar as expressive sentiment and straightforward didacticism are emphatically disavowed and exchanged for nonhuman figures: from Imagism and William Carlos Williams' axiom that there be "no ideas but in things," and the machinic obsessions of Futurism and Vorticism, or the Orientalized self-effacements of Yeats and Brecht, to the many quasi-theological schools of aesthetic purity echoing Pater and encompassing, say, both the clarified poetry of Rilke and Brancusi's numinously-wrought forms.¹⁵ And indeed, in many of these cases—as Levenson illustrates in Conrad—radical impersonality becomes the only way to ground an independent subjectivism, and an expressive subjectivism the only way to interpret, or give meaning to, impersonally objectified data.¹⁶

The extremity of these modernist bifurcations, however, points not only to the originary instabilities of nineteenth-century liberalism but more revealingly, I argue, to the agonized inability of their poetics to resolve those contradictions. In the case of what is,

¹⁵ As Andreas Huyssen famously puts it: "Only by fortifying its boundaries, by maintaining its purity and autonomy, and by avoiding any contamination with mass culture and with signifying systems of everyday life can the art work maintain its adversary stance: adversary to the bourgeois culture of everyday life as well as adversary to mass culture and entertainment which are seen as the primary forms of bourgeois cultural articulation." See Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 54.

¹⁶ Even some schools of literary criticism that would seem to rigorously supplant modernist schools of impersonality could therefore be said to be continuous with these symptomatic bifurcations. If, for example, the modernists' many experiments with perspective and character in fiction helped pave the way for the modern study of narratology, then its endpoint in the schools of ethical criticism circa 1980 index a culmination and inversion of the familiar bifurcations. Here, reading "ethically" means restoring expressive subjectivism to all literature while simultaneously reducing the reader's agency to a simple and tedious toggling operation of approval: either one approves of each ethical "norm" in a text or one does not. This is important to Wayne C. Booth, for example, because he imagines the reader as phenomenological vulnerability par excellence. To be occupied by a text, for Booth, is to be "taken over, colonized," to allow oneself to "succumb" to the text. "Ethics" is therefore reduced to a manically pedantic and facile reading practice through which one learns to protect oneself from unsavory ethical dicta. Again, however, this bifurcation elides the more diligent work of the middle ground: and it is precisely this middle "ethical" ground that this dissertation shows some modernists attending to—neither evacuating expressive agency in the face of history nor granting literature undue moral power over the reader, but rather avowing the precise, equilibrating conditions through which text and reader could be said to be in an ethical relation at all. See Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 138-153, for Booth's "ethical" reading of one of Aesop's fables.

perhaps, the most prominent modernist formulation of impersonality—the platinum filament in T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919)—the *actual process*, for example, by which one establishes a poet’s value is never sufficiently elucidated. Consistent with his peers, Eliot’s primary concern is the re-organization of the artist’s relationship to literary history and its traditional values, but he is able to do so only through chemical metaphors that, however evocative, ultimately do more to mystify than to explain: as a “bit of finely filiated platinum,” the mind of the poet should be able to catalyze, or “digest and transmute the passions which are its material,” without being affected at all; the poet is to remain “inert, neutral, and unchanged.”¹⁷ Even the most canonically virtuosic and obsessively examined of artists remains opaque to his analysis: Shakespeare seemingly only had to “absorb” knowledge, rather than “sweat for it,” in order to achieve a historical authority.¹⁸ Such complete objectification of literary experience, therefore, was not a solution but a symptom; not a revolution but rather a disavowal of the individual expression and affect that, we know, would inevitably redound upon these selfsame modernists.

These polarized formulations, though, merely represent the most iconoclastic and, often, reactionary strains of modernism, and their penchant for dualism markedly neglects the expansive conceptual middle ground between unadulterated subjectivism and the exhaustively, if disingenuously, depersonalized. As Douglas Mao has shown, a number of other sciences and discourses existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to address the insufficiency of the sovereign-subject mythos as a self-help ethos.¹⁹ The problem, as we’ve seen with Bloom, is that a narrow insistence on straightforward

¹⁷ T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 47-48.

¹⁸ Eliot, 47.

¹⁹ Douglas Mao, *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860-1960* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

didacticism and the rational, self-reflexive development of a liberal subject *can actually become its own interference*: whether socially in terms of style and affect (“the inanity of extolled virtue”) or cognitively, in terms of a gradual inculcation of self-satisfied and therefore obtuse pedantry (a charge often leveled by other characters against Bloom and against which Eliot, in fact, is compelled to defend himself in “Tradition”). As Adorno observes, a “writer will find that the more precisely, conscientiously, appropriately he expresses himself, the more obscure the literary result is thought, whereas a loose and irresponsible formulation is at once rewarded.”²⁰ We will see that a number of authors discussed in this dissertation—especially Charles Kingsley, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Marianne Moore—all struggled deeply with this hurdle in ways that constituted the primary engine of their poetics, though Bergson, again, puts it best when he boils down the basic operational limits of not just the rational faculty of intelligence itself but also all discourses and activities based upon it: “There are things that intelligence alone is able to seek, but which, by itself, it will never find. These things instinct alone could find; but it will never seek them.”²¹ Intelligence, for Bergson, inevitably locks itself into a set of repetitive cognitive operations, lapsing into “pure mechanism”: the freedom of thought and movement it was supposed to permit in fact require the assistance of another faculty (instinct).²²

It is therefore along these lines that this dissertation begins to approach the figure of the animal in modernist literature. If modernism can, à la Jameson, be characterized most

²⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London and New York: Verso, 1978) 101.

²¹ Bergson, 151.

²² More specifically, intelligence is, for Bergson, structured around divisibility and discontinuity. In terms of biology, for example, the search for the cause of life leads the intellect to smaller and smaller and more and more detailed of every element of organs, tissues, cells, etc., and thus only finds “that what is really life in the living seems to recede with every step by which it pushes further the detail of the parts combined.” Instinct alone, in this Bergsonian sense, is what allows modernism to overcome the Zeno’s Paradox of the intellect. Bergson, 162.

fundamentally as “the gradual and historical realization that consciousness as such cannot be represented, and that it must be conveyed indirectly, by way of the detour of things,” then we might say that animals in particular become the most effective of non-human “things” for formalizing that “detour.”²³ Perhaps slightly contra Jameson, however, I want to suggest that animals, despite their easy adequation into Cartesian dualisms in which animality is made to stand in for everything excluded from the mental or rational, actually have the capacity to draw out the middle ground between the customary poles—in a sense, even short-circuiting them. The two primary faculties operating in Bergson’s philosophy, after all, do not fall neatly into Cartesian categories: intelligence is in no way fully transcendent and free; instinct, meanwhile, can perceive qualities and operations opaque to intelligence. Rather, the attentive study of animals—in the behavior and vitality of an individual organism, its species’ evolutionary transmissions, or its ecological relations—reveals that the two faculties are often externally indistinguishable.²⁴ Hence in the most ambitious modernist representations of unmediated consciousness—as we might find in “Circe” or in Stein, for example—we find not only a grammatical fixation on animals as a sort of base morpheme but also an emphatic realization that consciousness itself is constituted by a mechanistic linguistic determinism and can no longer be counted sufficient grounds for autonomous cognitive and ethical action. As Maud Ellmann observes, “Circe,” for example, “out-Descartes Descartes, in so far as it endorses the Cartesian conception of the body as an animal-automaton, but extends this automatism to the human mind, laying bare the animal-machinery of

²³ Fredric Jameson, “Joyce or Proust?”, in *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007), 194.

²⁴ See, for example, Bergson’s use of the example of the hymenoptera to intervene in the Neo-Darwinist/Neo-Lamarckian debate. Bergson, 170-176.

consciousness.”²⁵

Animals preoccupy post-Darwinian modernists precisely because they straddle the line between natural determinism and free, nearly autonomous development. A sharper, more zoologically-pitched understanding of Jameson’s formulation, then, would be that some modernists sought not to *escape* determinism but to dialectically wield it *together* with autonomous consciousness. However, a too-strict or lockstep alloying of animality to the cognitive-linguistic aspect of human agency generates only a limited set of aesthetic permutations, in a sense recapitulating the vices of didacticism. Or as Jameson himself describes “Circe,” what results is “something like a zero degree of the script of *Ulysses*,” “in which the book begins to talk for itself and meaninglessly to repeat its own contents and to vary their succession in a purely mechanical way.”²⁶ Some more elbow room is called for.

Foucault has shown in *The Order of Things* that by the nineteenth century, the synchronically-ordered taxonomies of seventeenth and eighteenth-century natural history had given way to *biological* thinking, in which classes of beings were re-introduced into diachronic history. With this shift—which culminated in but was not limited to the rise of evolutionary theory—came a new understanding of natural beings as dynamic, vital, and organic. The question for the new biologists was no longer only how to *quantitatively* enumerate and classify the similarities and dissimilarities of different classes of beings but how to articulate *qualitatively* how beings (as either individuals or classes) are able to move through time at all while remaining discrete, whole, and intact. As Rudolf Virchow, the founder of modern pathology, put it in 1858, “The living element only maintains itself as

²⁵ Here Ellmann is echoing Adorno on occultism: “The heartier the spirituality, the more mechanistic: not even Descartes drew the line so cleanly.” Maud Ellmann, “*Ulysses*: Changing into an Animal,” *Field Day Review* 2 (2006), 77; and Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 242.

²⁶ Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*, 192.

long as it really presents itself to us as an independent whole”; indeed, “this is the only possible starting point for all biological doctrines.”²⁷

By the twentieth century, a number of disciplines had been established in order to address this new organic, holistic view of the human subject. These included not just the rise of sociology in its treatment of man as a social animal, and not just the Freudian account of man as a libidinal animal, but also many sciences that, as Mao and Glenn Willmott have shown, understood the autonomous liberal subject-in-training as a malleable but therefore also vulnerable organism inextricable from its environment.²⁸ (William James would name this “plasticity,” or “the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once.”)²⁹ Simply put: the human animal as a whole could not be engaged solely by didactic methods; it required methods of shaping that quietly activated the “many operations of thought [occurring] outside the purview of full attention,” including the schoolrooms and domestic furnishings of Mao’s “aesthetic environments” and the biophysical processes of Willmott’s habitats.³⁰ This dissertation will show that animals therefore became not only a particular figure for *focusing* these scientific and pedagogical

²⁷ Rudolf Virchow, *Cellular Pathology, as based upon Physiological and Pathological Histology*, trans. Frank Chance (London: John Churchill, 1860), 4, 13.

²⁸ As Mao summarizes: “A twenty-first-century nonspecialist might—in the wake of a hundred years of dissemination and reinterpretation of the work of Sigmund Freud—think of the unconscious as a dark place in the mind where desires and drives inadmissible to consciousness carry on a largely unseen activity that occasionally erupts into symptoms or analytic revelations. From the middle of the nineteenth century up to the Great War (after which Freud’s formulations began to assume their preeminence), however, the unconscious covered a much wider range of elusive phenomena, including the unwilled operations by which we synthesize sense data into meaningful forms, the knowledge that we seem to store even while sleeping or thinking of other things, the cognitive operations that transpire away from the light of consciousness, the capacities that our bodies develop without explicit direction, and the neurophysiological changes that subtend experience and the evolution of personality.” Glenn Willmott, meanwhile, has proposed that modernist novels be read not just as microcosms of modern economic ideology but also, following the work of environmental economist Paul Ekins, as snapshots of “total biophysical throughput”—both in the sense of representing local habitats at certain historical moments and “enacting the novel as a total, entropic product of English writing, the novel as linguistic and literary habitat.” See Mao, 46; and Glenn Willmott, *Modern Animalism: Habitats of Scarcity and Wealth in Comics and Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3-23.

²⁹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1890), 105.

³⁰ Mao, 46.

explorations but also a reminder that such operations were not always inaccessibly submerged beneath consciousness.³¹

As such, it became clear to modernists that the only way to address the non-didactic faculties of the human animal was through style—that aspect of literary aesthetics that is the most conducive to making content *felt* in an immediate fashion and therefore, also, the most mimetically bestial. And one form in particular was historically primed for this specific modernist need: the fable. Both defined by the animal figures deterministically put through the motions of its formulaic plots yet, at the same time, bent upon the effectuation of a free and sovereign morality, the fable was a form basically condemned to the unending Bergsonian balancing act of instinct and intelligence—an act that, in general, was successfully brought off solely by virtue of its trademark style of winsomeness. More than any genre, the fable was burdened with the pressure of overcoming the unvarying flatness of nature with—as one writer described La Fontaine’s style in 1838—a “nameless charm” made of “delicacy,” “grace,” and “naturalness of language.”³² Indeed, this is all most fabulists have: “Fontaine invented nothing but his style.” By connecting themselves to this history,

³¹ The unconscious of Freudian accounts, after all, wed the instinctual or libidinal to the linguistic (as we see in the automatisms of “Circe” and Stein, again): the problem, however, was that a conscious animality, or intelligible instinct, could only become self-reflectively livable only after analysis. A modernism committed to the exigencies of the present required more immediate, and perhaps more level, approaches. (For all of his desires given phantasmagoric form in “Circe,” after all, Bloom in “Ithaca” opts for the more immediate, and still animalized, textures of domestic life as a way to make both legible and livable his affective/psychic contradictions. Moreover, the fantasies of “Circe” only exacerbate, we note, the pedantic didacticism that Bloom is often prone to: the unconscious, sadly, does not necessarily provide a detour around the dictates of the superego.) Many modernists therefore sought other means of engaging human animality by tentatively detaching instinct from the linguistic intellect, and seeing how they might interact in ethically and psychologically consequential terms without the eruptive Oedipal violence of analysis.

³² As this writer explains, La Fontaine had to overcome not only the initial contrivance of putting speech and morality into the mouths and actions of mechanistic animals but also the tedium of too-familiar fables: “The fables were become familiar as household words, even on the lips of children. In reproducing, therefore, the same delineations of character, it was necessary to impart a freshness to the hues while he altered, by heightening, the expression. This task he has accomplished by breathing into the poetry a gentle gaiety peculiarly his own; a gaiety which, while it bears no relationship to the boisterous excitement of laughter, exhilarates and brightens even the gravest subjects.” See “The Fabulists: Aesop, Phaedrus, Gay, and Fontaine,” *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* 17.98 (1838): 202.

however, modernists were able to debug and reload its lessons, as it were, now more than ever avowing the impossibility of explicit didacticism more generally while exploiting the animality at the heart of style itself and its capacity to carry the full but disguised weight of the didactic work.

FABLE MACHINES: TOWARDS A VITAL STYLE

“He that writeth in blood and proverbs doth
not want to be read, but learnt by heart.”³³
—Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

In Western literature, the fable has always had a privileged and necessary relationship to technology. From its Aesopic origins, through its subsumption under the medieval Christian bestiary, to its rediscovery by the neoclassicism of the European Renaissance, and finally its modernist mutations, the fable has always been structured around two defining features: its “lowly” animal content and the mimetic link between that content and its form.

Leslie Kurke, for example, explains that mimetic prose itself finds its origin in the mythological life and practice of Aesop, whose coarse, satirical interventions into “high wisdom” taught the Greeks to adopt new modes of “realistic” characterization in their philosophical discourse: in place of earlier didactic forms that “consisted simply of bare assertions or propositions articulated as a series of impersonal third-person statements,” later philosophers, and Plato above all, were able to formulate their discourse through the speech of characters like Socrates, the texture of whose speech was described by contemporaries as being, bestially, “clothed in such words and expressions, like some hide of a hubristic

³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Modern Library, 1930), 39.

satyr.”³⁴

Certainly, such a fabular texture is more a rhetorical tool or technique at this point in history (designed to allow “a purified nonmimetic philosophy to emerge like the soul disencumbered from the body”) than a necessary meditation on the technological. And so it is not until (skipping ahead) the modern period and its fixation on the mechanicity of the nonhuman that we find fabulists coming to terms with the cross-species content of their chosen forms. In the *Fables* of La Fontaine, especially, we find in the last four of his twelve books an increasing preoccupation with not only entertaining but *declaring* the agency and ontology of animals, as if finally realizing what was at stake in his light-hearted, whimsical verse. Hence there are not only a number of long poems explicitly critiquing his contemporary Descartes (that function as lessons for La Fontaine’s patrons) but also a sort of loving, albeit exhausted, discovery that his own work as a fabulist and thinker is perhaps not as autonomous and rational as he himself, along with Descartes, may have wanted to believe before.

*Qu'on m'aïlle soutenir après un tel récit,
Que les bêtes n'ont point d'esprit.
Pour moi si j'en étais le maître,
Je leur en donnerais aussi bien qu'aux enfants.
Ceux-ci pensent-ils pas dès leurs plus jeunes ans ?
Quelqu'un peut donc penser ne se pouvant connaître.
Par un exemple tout égal,
J'attribuerais à l'animal
Non point une raison selon notre manière,
Mais beaucoup plus aussi qu'un aveugle resort.*

Who dares the inference to blink,
That beasts possess wherewith to think?
Were I commission'd to bestow

³⁴ See Leslie Kurke, “Plato, Aesop, and the Beginnings of Mimetic Prose,” *Representations* 94.1 (2006): 7, 29.

This power on creatures here below,
 The beasts should have as much of mind
 As infants of the human kind.
 Think not the latter, from their birth?
 It hence appears there are on earth
 That have the simple power of thought
 Where reason hath no knowledge wrought.³⁵

The *raison* or “simple power of thought” is thus turned into sort of mechanism, able to be separated from knowledge proper but still something more than *aveugle ressort*. Thought becomes a set of parameters and functions through which content can flow, even existing independently from intentional content. And as La Fontaine becomes more and more occupied with metafictional considerations of the fable mode (increasingly calling attention to the rules of his chosen form), so he inevitably comes to see his own poetry as more a mechanistic force with its own trajectory, operating independently from any promise of return as far as moral content goes. Here, Marianne Moore’s translations bears the sense best, in two different poems:

What moral can I deduce from what has just been said?
 Fables aren’t fables if not brought to a head.
 I seem to detect outlines which escape me; no use...

But the windings of my thought have imperceptibly
 Brought me out where each step I take will be a loss
 If I let myself drone on suicidally
 And make my Muse a mouse for the young prince to toss,
 Like one the cat pretends to free.³⁶

Hence the poetic project of fables itself becomes a technology independent from and even at odds with La Fontaine’s authorial *cogito*, likened either to something like a mathematical proof without a conclusion or to an animal, about to be devoured.

³⁵ “The Two Rats, The Fox, and the Egg: Address to Madame de la Sablière,” in *The Fables of La Fontaine*, trans. Elizur Wright (London: George Bell and Sons, 1882), 255.

³⁶ “The Cat and the Two Sparrows” and “The Cat and the Mouse,” in *The Fables of La Fontaine*, trans. Marianne Moore (New York: Viking, 1964), 281, 284.

The fable's inherent technological determinism becomes even more apparent in the modernist fable. Where earlier modern fables don't quite abandon the formal imperative to moral didacticism even while acknowledging the possibility of its failure, the modernist fable avows the impossibility of direct moral didacticism in general while attempting to find stylistic countermeasures that allow authorial moral intention to bypass direct explicitness. As Moore puts it in one poem about "nonchalance", "his by- / play was more terrible in its effectiveness / than the fiercest frontal attack."³⁷ Behind this "byplay," like Jameson's detour, was, of course, precisely the modernist crisis of authority. To think of the modernist fable as a sort of technological byplay, then, is to see style and form—whether literary, filmic, digital, or material—as the fable's solution to the didactic excess that modernism more broadly was fleeing. At heart, for many of the authors in my dissertation, the problem is this central artistic (and ethical) problematic: how one can most effectively teach, reveal, or approach us humans about our own animality without resorting to the *too*-human techniques that have traditionally flowed from modes of rhetorical directness.

In terms of didactic rhetoric alone, this is already tricky enough: "Men must be taught as if you taught them not, / And things unknown proposed as things forgot," writes Pope in *An Essay on Criticism*, summarizing what we've already seen to be a concern from Plato on through La Fontaine. Like "the inanity of extolled virtue" that "Ithaca" names vis-à-vis Bloom, directness already carries with it an invitation to resistance. And throughout a tradition of modern literature, then, that is the task of my dissertation to index through a small collection of authors, this difficulty only expanded exponentially—encompassing understandings of poetics, prosody, narrative structure, characterology, and so on, at

³⁷ Moore, "In This Age of Hard Trying, Nonchalance Is Good And," *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (New York: Viking, 1981), 34.

simultaneously macro and micro levels. By the time we arrive at the end of modernism with Moore, for example, this problem comes to circumscribe the ethics of art and culture *tout court*. In an essay that actually also cites the same Pope couplet, Moore binds together her famous tongue-in-cheek rejection of poetry and her repulsion to anything rhetorically too-direct: “Of poetry, I once said, ‘I, too, dislike it’; and say it again of anything mannered, dictatorial, disparaging, or calculated to reduce to the ranks what offends one.”³⁸ At stake for Moore is the *authority* by which any literature, art, or person imposes an opinion upon another person; the understanding being that something only as forceful as a straightforward personal style is still more than enough to violently, irresponsibly trap somebody as if an unfortunate animal.³⁹ That is, both the cultural and the social come to be entangled in a more totalizing relationship to ethics, one now resembling less an abstract system than an ecology in which a work of art or a piece of philosophical language is no longer beholden only to, say, a person’s rational faculties but also to her entire being.

This dissertation therefore traces how the fable shifted under the modernists from what Colleen Glenney Boggs calls its “didactic ontology” to a mode in which instinct became the very horizon of reason and ethics’ teachability. Where in its classical instantiations, the fable relies on a doubling of the animal—making it both an anthropomorphized agent and a passive object, and hence both a model and object of care for the child in training as a liberal subject—the modernist fable goes beyond this binary and

³⁸ Moore, “Subject, Predicate, Object,” included in *Tell Me, Tell Me*, (1966) collected in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (New York: Viking, 1986), 504.

³⁹ I make this aspect of Moore’s social ethics clear in Chapter 5, through a reading of Moore’s poem “People’s Surroundings,” in which a person’s “instinctive” sense of straightforwardness in personality can end up trapping that person like a bat in a bat-roost, a trout on a line, or an “obedient chameleon” in décor. Hence Moore also at times diverges from other writers in my dissertation by sometimes understanding traditionally “rational” and “autonomous” human behavior as already animalized.

asserts the continuous re-objectification of agency itself.⁴⁰ That is, the modernist fable is not interested in an ontology in the service of didacticism but rather the ontology of didacticism. At the same time, as I will explore further, the modernist fable did not offer a simple deconstruction of the ontological human-animal divide, as a critical animal studies approach might expect. Wresting the fable away from Cartesian dualisms was not merely a matter of erasing cross-species hierarchies or of universalizing the animal within the human (locating it as an irreducible repressed interior or substrate) but rather a re-conceptualization of being as always already a style of being. For just as style, modernists wagered, and not just, say, form or analytics, is always precarious and fluid and therefore prone to undoing itself through its own movement, so humanity itself, in its own display, often shades into animality. Just as an excess of style might negate that very style, so the animal, it turned out, might be less humanity's *lack* and more a name for its *over-performance*.

ANIMNESIAC

But he had turned, little by little, a disturbance into words, he had made a pillow of old words, for his head. Little by little, and not without labour.⁴¹

—Beckett, *Watt*

Where modernism's quest for an authoritative impersonality ultimately foundered, of course, was on the shores of style. Subjectivity always returned with a vengeance, and it brought with it the unexpected stabilizing forces of style, trickling curatively out into the texture of language itself. Adorno, himself perhaps the last of the modernists, described this

⁴⁰ Colleen Glenney Boggs, *Animalia Americana: Animal Representations and Biopolitical Subjectivity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 147.

⁴¹ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (London: John Calder, 1976), 115.

phenomenon dialectically: the relentless iconoclasm of the modernists led them to reject particular styles for being merely conventional—that is, too bourgeois. Yet in the process, modernists eventually introduced a pure, singular style—style “as such”—that was defined as the *conflict* against specific styles.⁴² There was, it turned out, something resilient about style, something that prevented modernists from stripping language of *all* subjective authority, even after decades spent exploding every convention in which it had grounded its authority.

For many modernists, this resilience had to do with the fact that style seemed intrinsically tied to some irreducible and particular integrity of experience itself, especially insofar as that experience was connected to individual living bodies. For unlike form proper, which in its different varieties is more often tied to abstract quanta of human life (the novel, for example, lends itself well to formalizing the historical life of an individual or a family), style seems to arise from the very texture of experience itself and is therefore often highly particularized in qualitative ways that form isn't. In this regard, style is precisely the interface between the universal and the particular, or, we remember, the intelligible and the instinctual: it is that which mediates between forms—which give shape to and thus make portable certain universal or collective principles—and individual subjectivities, translating each to the other. It is the manner in which a body walks through the world of letters—whether elegantly, clumsily, or with slapstick aplomb. As Ben Hutchinson puts it, style is “the body language of language.”⁴³

At the same time, however, the mediatory function of style by no means guarantees any mutual intelligibility between the universal and the particular. In fact, its very position too easily signals something close to the complete loss of intelligibility. As Barthes explains,

⁴² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 207.

⁴³ Ben Hutchinson, *Modernism and Style* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 34.

it is because of its biographical-cum-biological nature that style “plunges into the closed recollection of the person and achieves its opacity from a certain experience of matter.”⁴⁴ Benjamin, sounding a plaintively subjunctive note in the face of Proust’s achievement, writes that something like a “physiology of style,” were one to systematically discover its terms, “would take us into the innermost core of [Proust’s] creativeness.”⁴⁵ But short of that, whatever might be essential to a writer can only remain inaccessible, gestured crudely at. For Benjamin, Proust’s style ends up as “the highest physiognomic expression which the irresistibly growing discrepancy between literature and life was able to assume.”⁴⁶ In the end, style itself seems to gesture towards the impossibility of reconciling the individual to the universal. As long as its object, either explicitly or as implicit substrate, remains complexly embodied life, style often seems able to get only so close, perhaps asymptotically so, to the essence of a person. Thus Peter Nicholls, discussing Gautier, observes that style “is at once supplementary—it adds nuance and detail to its object—and destructive—it ‘decomposes’ the matter upon which it ‘works.’”⁴⁷ Yet how else was a writer to bring life *to life*?

The segment of modernism that took up the animal as its object could be said to have treated precisely these irreconcilable contradictions or final gaps at the heart of style. Though often what resulted was less an articulation of style’s necessary relationship to both the individual and the universal, the instinctual and the intelligible, than an intentional exaggeration of their seeming mutual and fundamental incompatibilities. The animals in D. H. Lawrence or Rilke’s work, for example, represent a desire to move irreparably beyond the

⁴⁴ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 11-12.

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Image of Proust,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 214.

⁴⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 202.

⁴⁷ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 46.

strictures of human language and culture, completely merging the ontology of human will with animal instinct. Kafka, meanwhile, understood the central challenge of modernity to be that which faces humans as postlapsarian animals, abandoned to bare life and unable to comprehend the demands of a transcendent human language and law.⁴⁸ In these extreme cases, however, what is accomplished by their formal analogues is not (in Bergsonian terms) any translation between instinct and intelligence or (in the more general terms of this dissertation) an understanding of the actual mechanisms of organic vitality, but rather a deterministic intensification of a single faculty at the expense of the other. Lawrence's desire to make his characters' psycho-sexual makeup more transparently immediate through stylistic bestialization—or what Virginia Woolf describes as his “impatience, the need for getting beyond the object before us,” his ability to “to flash character simply and starkly in front of us”—seems to leave them, after all, incapable of ethical action apart from fulfilling their predetermined, instinctual desires.⁴⁹ The hermeneutical opacity, on the other hand, both thematized in and enacted by Kafka's parabolic style leaves available to his estranged readers-cum-animals only the inexhaustible operation of an exhausting and ultimately unfulfilled intelligence (as Michael Wood puts it, an “infinite, elaborate, patient, uncertain interpretation”).⁵⁰ Hence such strenuous determinisms occlude both a free futurity for one's

⁴⁸ Margot Norris thus writes that Kafka's stories demonstrate “the oppression and suppression of all that is creatural in the human—the body, feeling, pain, libido—in the ostensible interest of the twin demigods of human culture, rationalism, and idealism. Kafka's critical tool in unmasking the hypocrisies and absurdities of cultural violence is pornography, because pornography functions as a parody, a travesty, a *reduction ad absurdum* of cherished intellectual and spiritual habits, and celebrates, in the libidinization of thought, the ultimate anthropocentric triumph over the vanquished beast.” See Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, & Lawrence* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 101.

⁴⁹ Virginia Woolf, “Notes on D. H. Lawrence,” *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols., ed. Andrew McNeillie, Stuart N. Clarke (London: Hogarth, 1986-2011), 6:466. Hereafter cited as *E*.

⁵⁰ On the other hand, following Frank Kermode, we might say that interpretation in Kafka is always already too easily fulfilled and pre-figured by the texts themselves. Indeed, Kafka actually seems to meditate on what for him is the indescribable gap of interpretation in his parable of the leopards: “Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be

subjectivity and the ability to comprehend another being's subjectivity.

Neither do attempts to wield instinct and intelligence together—instead of one at the expense of the other—necessarily produce any vital compatibility. In Stein, for example we often find instinct and intelligence merged into a very minimal sort of subjective vibration. But instead of producing a coherent sense of identity or subjectivity, what results is more what Astrid Lorange calls “a vague and catastrophic theory of becoming-identity.”⁵¹ In Stein's *Ida*, for example, *Ida* is entirely preoccupied with establishing her own “naturalness” as an individual—“natural” in fact being one of the novel's most frequent words. Here naturalness names what should be an ideal Bergsonian style of being, with *Ida*'s peculiarly textured instinct striving to be at home in the world. Hence *Ida* fills her life with a never-ending series of dogs, as if the presence of these other playful instinctual beings were enough to organize her experience and make something about her intelligible. “Dogs are dogs, you sometimes think that they are not but they are. And they always are here there and everywhere.”⁵² Or as Stein famously writes elsewhere, “I am I because my little dog knows me.”⁵³ Yet what results, despite *Ida*'s insistence, is an experience less natural and more “funny”—maybe the novel's second most frequent word. As Lorange writes, “*Ida*'s

calculated in advance, and it becomes part of the ceremony.” As Kermode, quoting his wife, points out, it is easy enough to compare an interpreter of the parable to the leopards; this, however, only succeeds in making the parable self-referentially empty. Total transparency is revealed to be the same as utter opacity. Hence intelligence is absorbed into the very thing it is trying to interpret, and is in fact reduced from a free-ranging act of volition to nothing more than calculable, deterministic instinct. Significantly, this is *not* an act of intuitive translation in the Bergsonian sense: Kafka indexes but elides the actual process of transformation as a absolutely nondescript act of repetition: “this is repeated over and over again.” See Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1961), 93; Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 26-27; and Michael Wood, *Franz Kafka* (London: Northcote, 2003), 330.

⁵¹ Astrid Lorange, *How Reading Is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 134.

⁵² Gertrude Stein, *Ida: A Novel* (New York: Vintage, 1941), 100.

⁵³ This is the refrain of *The Geographical History of America*, collected in *A Stein Reader*, ed. Ulla E. Dydo (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993).

funniness (which is also Ida's funniness) is a particular kind of dissociation: the affect of being or becoming dissociated from oneself."⁵⁴ Indeed the dogs themselves remind Ida that instinct recursively destabilizes intelligence: "A dog has to have a name and he has to look at you. Sometimes it is kind of bothering to have them look at you. // Any dog is new."⁵⁵ With instinctual beings constantly reasserting their alterity and impinging upon the consistency of her intelligence, Ida's subjectivity remains opaque to itself.⁵⁶

Or, as the inverse of Stein, Beckett—and it is no surprise that these are the two exemplary writers of what Sianne Ngai has named the feeling of "stuplimity"—imagines worlds in which instinct and intelligence are as far apart as possible and yet are compelled to find a way to work together.⁵⁷ Where, Stein's "funniness" marks a kind of auto-opacity (which is what, in the first chapter, I call the inability of a being to reflect upon its own instinctual actions), Beckett's trademark comic style is recognizable more as the effect of an authorial voice imposing a determinism, the source of which always seems to remain hidden, upon his characters, occluding their freedom and restraining the possibilities available to their language. That is, instinct and intelligence are constantly *using* each other in Beckett; they seem far apart and opaque to each other yet nonetheless intensely connected, as if

⁵⁴ Lorange, 132.

⁵⁵ Stein, *Ida*, 98.

⁵⁶ Stein's writing and interests do, certainly, at many points, reflect a Bergsonian vitalism. However, as Juliana Chow points out, the two nevertheless diverge in important ways: "Motion, in Bergson's philosophy, is a continuous flow—not a discontinuous series—out of which and into which individual consciousnesses arise and melt, and as such, his version of life does not value personality and labor as Stein's does." This contrast helps underline the trouble Bergson had in finding an aesthetic corollary to intuition. "Where Bergson's vitalism would leave experience unnarrated and whole, Stein's vitalism must risk itself in language, words, horses, cars, and people, which are eminently and immanently breakable—fragile and capricious vehicles that are as prone to breakdown as they are to becoming." Hence, from a Bergsonian standpoint, instinct and intelligence come together only to break apart in Stein. See Juliana Chow, "Motion Studies: Vitalism in Gertrude Stein's Work," *Arizona Quarterly* 69.4 (2013): 95.

⁵⁷ See Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 248-297.

examining each other from opposite sides of a nervous system. Hence Molloy, for example, approaches murder by thinking of himself as an animal, albeit in a very meticulous fashion: after the deed is done, he “pricks up my ears, like an animal I imagine.”⁵⁸ Similarly in *Watt*, the narrator and Watt come “nearest to God” by feeding young rats to their mothers. Theology is a mirthless sadism, for Beckett, intelligence turning instinct against itself.⁵⁹ Which, of course, is not to say that Beckett is all sadism: merely flip the equation, make intelligence instinct’s object, and the side of Beckett that is gentle and the most humane among the modernists becomes legible. Having finally grasped, after nearly thirty pages, the “mechanism” of the arrangement by which Mr. Knott’s dog is fed, Watt makes “a pillow of old words, for his head.”⁶⁰ The exaggerated, exfoliative intelligence of the Beckettian voice is here wrapped up and bundled into an object for creaturely comfort—or what is elsewhere called “semantic succour.”⁶¹ In this way, Beckett’s description of Watt’s speech can be read as a précis of his work more generally, comprising as it does characters picking through the linguistic ruins of Western culture like animals at the end of modernism: “But Watt spoke as one speaking to dictation, or reciting, parrot-like, a text, by long repetition become familiar.”⁶²

These were not the only types of modernist engagement with the evolutionary dialectic of instinct and intellect, however. For writers interested less in impossible transformations and linguistic aporia and more in the elaboration of actual, autonomous ethical freedoms, figurations of instinct still offered a means by which to model a modernism of *possibility*. Like Bloom in “Ithaca,” the instinct of animal individuals and

⁵⁸ Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 82.

⁵⁹ Beckett, *Watt*, 153.

⁶⁰ Beckett, *Watt*, 115.

⁶¹ Beckett, *Watt*, 79.

⁶² Beckett, *Watt*, 154.

species was a way to think about social and subjective equilibrium more broadly, and the possibility of bettering human behavior in more immediately harmonious ways. But as Bergson intuited and as the foregoing examples make clear, any application of the instinctual to the aesthetic or ethical carries the immanent risk of carrying the object of the former into either dissolution or fraught impenetrability. Animals are valuable precisely for their instinctual capacities, but insofar as they also introduce instability, vulnerability, and fragility into the literary equation, they also require the right kind and degree of modulation through the faculties of intelligence as well.

Intelligence, however, cannot simply *teach* instinct and make it *present* through semantics. As we have seen, not only had traditional didacticism revealed its own self-defeating futilities at the rhetorical level, but it had also, in its psychoanalytic strain, hit a hard limit by revealing a bestial determinism at the bottom of the self-examined life. The only thing it could teach, ultimately, was the human's unteachability. Perhaps the only way, therefore, was to extend the scope of the teachable beyond both rhetoric and the linguistic side of cognition and to the body itself. But while Lawrence, Kafka, Stein, and Beckett largely did so by unearthing and explicitly making present the mechanics of the human's inherent bestial determinisms—only to freeze their writing into variations on a single repetition (“No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; right or left, or in any direction”; “you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on”)—other modernists sought to dialectically exploit the bodily determinism inherent to style itself, allowing them to engage cognitive and affective faculties *directly*, short-circuiting the blunt present-ness of one-dimensional language. In this way, animal instinct allowed modernists to extend Pope's prescient formulation—“Men must be taught as if you taught them not, / And things

unknown proposed as things forgot”—by inscribing forgetfulness into the *texture* of teaching, taking the pressure off its apparent content. The narrators and characters of Lawrence, Kafka, Stein, and Beckett, after all, never seem to forget; or rather, when they do, the narrative action preoccupies itself with recovering what has been lost and cannot therefore move forward. By utilizing *style* in an ever-instinctual fashion, however, it, and not the explicit word-for-word, semantic arithmetic of language, could carry the weight of what had to be conveyed. Style itself could become memory; the words themselves happily amnesiac. Instinct thus becomes virtual.

Here, Nietzsche is instructive. Ever the champion of unbridled instinct, Nietzsche nevertheless saw a necessary value in intellect vis-à-vis the becoming-accountable of the human animal. On one hand, *On the Genealogy of Morals* is consumed by Nietzsche’s wish for the return of the instinct-driven strong man. Such a man would prove an antidote to the inbred *ressentiment* of Christian morality. On the other hand, in those moments where he earns his incisiveness by expanding his “physiology” of ethics to the physiology of the polity as such, Nietzsche entertains a nobler utility of morality or the law, not just as repressive apparatus to be cast off but as nothing less than a technology through which the human animal might achieve an even greater potential still qua animal. The internalization of morality as conscience grants man a sense of sovereignty; having become “*calculable, regular, necessary,*” the human animal now has a right to “stand security for *his own future.*”⁶³ But in order to fend off the dyspeptic encroachments of *ressentiment*, calculable and moral man must also learn to harness the power of forgetfulness:

To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs

⁶³ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 58, 60. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

working and against one another; a little quietness, a little *tabula rasa* of the consciousness, to make room for new things, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for regulation, foresight, premeditation (for our organism is an oligarchy)—that is the purpose of active forgetfulness, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette: so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present*, without forgetfulness.⁶⁴

At the social level, this would amount to a society healthy enough in its “consciousness of power” that “it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible to it—letting those who harm it go *unpunished*. ‘What are my parasites to me?’ it might say. ‘May they live and prosper: I am strong enough for that!’”⁶⁵ The intelligible mechanics of individual and social ethics must be able to absorb what to Nietzsche is the most valuable part of animal instinct: the ability to forget and move on.

It is in this light that Nietzsche’s statements concerning the necessity of style become clearer. Among his peers, Nietzsche was exceptional in understanding how the mapping of ethics onto biology could not function in any vital manner without a cogent aesthetic engagement. (Though in the following chapters, I will also examine both John Henry Newman and Leslie Stephen’s ambitious explorations in the same direction.) For Herbert Spencer and T. H. Huxley, for example, perhaps the two most prominent English interlocutors in debates around the social implications of evolutionary theory, instinct and intelligence were either separated or combined in impossible fashion. Indeed, insofar as their respective positions reduced to either naïve fantasy or a zero-sum gridlock, they either recapitulated Victorian liberalism in its blindest form or anticipated the absolutist determinism of the modernist limit-cases. Spencer’s doctrine of the survival of the fittest—

⁶⁴ The next sentence, of course, could easily describe the determinism of Lawrence, Kafka, Beckett and Stein: “The man in whom this apparatus of repression is damaged and ceases to function properly may be compared (and more than merely compared) with a dyspeptic—he cannot ‘have done’ with anything.” *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 57-58.

⁶⁵ *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 72.

significantly distinct from Darwin's own more sanguine natural selection, and which Huxley condemned as an "administrative nihilism"—resembled nothing so much as the endless internal automatisms in Stein, "Circe," or the naturalists. All that mattered was the remainder after x number of instincts cancelled each other out. Huxley's own vision of evolutionary ethics, meanwhile, defined ethics as the degree to which human society should be able to surpass the precariousities of the natural world (or what Huxley called the "cosmic process").⁶⁶ In this Huxley was but the most exemplary of the Victorian liberals—and not in the least because he offered no explanatory mechanism for this ethical advancement beyond the "virtue of intelligence."

The contribution of Nietzsche's genealogy, however, was its insistence on the fact that morality was itself already inextricable from the instinctual. Not as a Spencerian degree-zero animality, however, but as a secondary instinct, instilled over millennia through a "mnemotechnics of pain" into the human animal's very flesh, "quivering in every muscle."⁶⁷ Thus, despite his avowed anti-Kantianism, Nietzsche nevertheless arrives at another kind of dualism, recognizing the necessity of an intelligible, external technology to shape the ethical capacity of the body itself. Whatever ethics there is must still be written physiologically into the flesh, since that was all man had in the first place. It is the malleable animal part of the human, not just its seemingly autonomous rational faculties, that allows the human to function ethically. And style, as that aspect of language most suited to the scale and texture of embodied life, becomes a capacitor for the human's ethical obligations. As Douglas Burnham summarizes:

Style is more important than content, but not because of a simple inversion

⁶⁶ T. H. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics* (New York: Appleton, 1899), 81.

⁶⁷ *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 59.

of the traditional content/style variation. Rather, style designates that aspect of language in use whereby language can be re-enchanted, so that its expressive possibilities—and especially its possibility of *changing something* in an intersubjective setting—exceed its strict semantic possibilities.⁶⁸

Style for Nietzsche, then, was an “essential detour” that goes *around* the human animal’s rational cogito from the outside and changes it and its interlocutors on its behalf.⁶⁹ Unlike Huxley, who assumed that intelligence could simply transcend instinct’s vitiations with some concerted effort, and unlike Spencer, who imagined society progressing through a constant making-present of its instinctual forces, Nietzsche recognized the need to keep instinct at arm’s length, but still always at hand, as it were—to remember that consciousness, as he writes in *Ecce Homo*, is a “surface.” Vitality, he realized, depends not on presence but on the virtual.

Of course, Nietzsche’s doctrine of robust vigor does not have much patience for those unable to access such autonomous vitality: it is primarily the domain of those sufficiently healthy to begin with—generally men, ideally Aryan, probably blonde. In other words, those few with the luxury to forgive and forget. Hence, despite Nietzsche’s interest in discoursing upon the nature of literary and philosophical style, he does not actually fully elaborate on what the aesthetic analogs of his doctrine might look like beyond his aphoristic style—which, in the end, only has room for a definition of vitality as virile play, fueled by ruminative ingestion and vigorous excretion (i.e. forgetfulness).⁷⁰ Moreover, the precarious nature of the vital instincts finds figurative expression only as a series of digestive illnesses. Despite its promise in terms of virtuality, therefore, the animality of Nietzsche’s style seems

⁶⁸ Douglas Burnham, “Nietzsche, style, body,” in *Style in Theory: Between Literature and Philosophy*, eds. Ivan Callus, James Corby, and Gloria Lauri-Lucente (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 97.

⁶⁹ Burnham, 98.

⁷⁰ Hence Nietzsche characterizes a “good aphorism” as “too hard for the tooth of time” and “not consumed by all millennia, although it serves every time for nourishment”—both ahistorical and universally relevant. Collected in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 176.

to reduce to the luxuriousness of the well-fed, free-range beast.⁷¹

This dissertation, then, further interrogates and attempts to expand the politics of Nietzsche's vitality, exploring the pursuit of similar styles of virtual animality by individuals under conditions of constraint (whether celibate, gendered, non-normate, and colonial subjects). To do this requires understanding Nietzschean instinct as only one aspect of instinct among many but in its basic formulations essentially oriented to the same end. The human animal, after all, encompasses a range of capacities beyond the merely sanative or dietetic. As William James puts, living creatures are "bundles of habits."⁷² And any value they might seem to embody should therefore not be restricted to the "play" or "vigor" made possible by strength. Rather, a whole range of aesthetic and stylistic possibilities opens up when the human is considered as an organic type: as the modernists in this dissertation prove, the simple challenge of elucidating the mechanisms by which animals are able to cohere and *live* in the face of precarity has no single solution and thus inevitably prompts an array of aesthetic responses. At the same time, the sheer specificity of any animal's essential, immanent unity can prompt an excess of description, even overwhelming and obscuring the initial object. These semantic quantities must therefore be wielded in such a way that one's intellectual capacities are not overloaded. The *technological* ability of literary style to make such details qualitatively cohere into a seemingly self-sustaining and vital whole, to translate intelligence intuitively into instinct in both Bergsonian and Nietzschean senses, thus remains paramount. And the key to this virtual, spontaneous didacticism was style's mimetic fidelity to the animal. This was the insight of the modernist fable.

⁷¹ From Nietzsche's preface: "To be sure, one thing is necessary above all if one is to practice reading as an *art* in this way [...] something for which one has almost to be a cow and in any case *not* a 'modern man': *rumination*." *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 23.

⁷² James, 104.

PUT A TYPE IN MOTION: VIRTUOSIC PRECARITY

“The proper METHOD for studying poetry and good letters is the method of contemporary biologists, that is careful first-hand examination of the matter, and continual comparison of one ‘slide’ or specimen with another.”⁷³

—Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*

More generally, then, the particular techniques of the modernist fable this dissertation examines could be said to be responding to not only a modern sense of basic human-animal continuity (as in La Fontaine) but also a more fundamental re-ordering of what constitutes being, or life, to begin with. For in the periods preceding the nineteenth century, as Foucault has stressed in *The Order of Things*, taxonomic practices organized classes of living beings as if synchronically on a table, with distinct and immutable demarcations in between them, no matter how many characteristics two different classes might share (say, in the case of La Fontaine again, the capacity for thought). By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, taxonomic thinking had given way to biological thinking, in which classes of beings were liberated from synchronic tables and re-inserted into diachronic history. Hence—while this new episteme culminated in the rise of Darwinian evolutionary theory—the shift was, more essentially, to a preoccupation with how beings (as either individuals or classes) are able to move through time while remaining discrete, whole, and intact. Or, in other words, *living* and *organic*.

Revealing are the ways in which eighteenth and nineteenth-century theorists of didacticism formulate their respective aims. Pope’s teaching-by-*praeteritio*—“Men must be taught as if you taught them not”—is restricted, like La Fontaine, to a pedagogy of the *cogito*;

⁷³ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1987), 17.

any rhetorical techniques of “byplay” here remain basically within the same dimension of rational discursivity. By the time we get to Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863), on the other hand, similar axiomatic prescriptions have come to encompass all of “man” as a living organism and not just an abstract receptacle for thought. Reflecting, as I argue in my first chapter, the emerging “self-help” discourses of the Victorian period (including Samuel Smiles *Self-Help* (1859) and George Rolleston’s *Forms of Animal Life* (1870), in which we find the imputation of this new conception of automatic ethics in a number of assertions, e.g., that birds are “possessed, immediately after hatching, of the faculty of self-help”), Kingsley articulates his fairy tale’s most fantastic central premise as the ability of the fairy Mother Carey to “make things make themselves.”⁷⁴ That is, the ethical imperative is no longer just the acquisition of knowledge but the disciplining and care of one’s entire self. And the auto-pedagogies needed to accomplish such a task would have to resort to more than just rhetorical tricks: some capacity in the human organism *beyond* the purely rational or discursive would have to be activated, a capacity only describable—for Kingsley and the other authors in my dissertation—in terms of the nonhuman or the animal. Hence in *The Water-Babies*, Tom’s ethical development necessitates the activation of what I call an “auto-opaque” animal-like subconscious instinct, like that of an animal not knowing how or why it does what it is doing. Within the fantastic parameters of the fairy tale, instinct’s necessity is symbolically figured as a dog that Tom must follow *backward*.

But before discussing the actual formal techniques that my dissertation’s authors develop in order to accommodate the more animalistic aspects of the human being, I want to distinguish the technological function of the fable from other theorizations of

⁷⁴ Charles Kingsley, *The Water-Babies: A Fairy for a Land-Baby* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 155.

technology's relationship to animality. The descriptions of fabular animality thus far might seem to conform to topological models that see the animal as the site of the uncanny, unconscious, cryptic, or mad in the human—as in the work of Susan McHugh, Carrie Rohman, or Akira Mizuta Lippit, for example.⁷⁵ Lippit especially has articulated a Derridean understanding of the animality not just thematized in but also inherent in, or more accurately, somehow hidden in, the logic of modernist technological media. And while Lippit dwells primarily on the photographic and filmic, he also extends his sense of technology back in time, as I have, to include the metaphorical machinery of language itself. But this dissertation draws attention to another lineage of thinking the animal that is concerned less with the invisibility or ontological hiddenness of animality within the human than the imperceptible or granular nature of animality, recasting the epistemology of animality more as a matter of resolution than of penetration. For the authors in this dissertation, the animal is not a mode of being that returns from a repressed interior (the animality of desire) or a disappeared past (the animality of the sign itself) but rather a sort of mathematical operation on the same plane as that of the human, an operation that allows one to gradually refine shared kinematic vectors of behavior and motion.

Or, to put it another way: both an animal's natural capacity for a particular kind of organic being or behavior and the ethical value it might be made to figure are not a matter of impossible and often violent return, but rather a matter of eminently *possible* if asymptotically difficult expression. For what was emphasized by the living animal as the object of nineteenth-century biology was not the impossibility of its life in any way but rather the

⁷⁵ See Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2011); Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2000).

fundamental difficulty in describing what precisely kept any living body, or group of living bodies, together and organically functional. As Foucault explains, this difficulty reflected a new conception of life as not only that which sustains but also that which supersedes, as if history itself: “There is being only because there is life, and in that fundamental movement that dooms them to death, the scattered beings, *stable for an instant*, are formed, halt, hold life immobile—and in a sense kill it—but are then in turn destroyed by that inexorable force,” a force that discloses “not so much what gives beings their foundation as what bears them for an instant towards a *precarious form* and yet is already secretly sapping them from within in order to destroy them.”⁷⁶ The sheer flux of history reduces any and every living body to a mere form constituted by a precarious arrangement of organic matter, and it became the task of biologists in the nineteenth century to deduce the mechanisms (e.g. physiology and natural selection) that made life both possible and recognizable. Hence the classification of living beings was no longer organized around static and external taxonomic tabulations but around the new category of the *type*, which, synecdochally including both individual bodies and groups of bodies like a species, was meant to express dynamic principles of inner necessity. Moreover, the explication of the many features that make up a given type required a new degree of explanatory facility: the intricacy of not only, say, an animal’s inner physiology, but also its motion and behavior and even the inner ethological workings of its species, demanded nothing short of an equivalent *virtuosity* in the observer, often as if she were an animal herself.

The unique descriptive challenge posed by animals was certainly not new to the nineteenth century, of course. Edmund Burke, meditating in 1757 on the continuously

⁷⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 278.

curved lines of naturally beautiful bodies, both raises and reproduces the issue as he attempts to illustrate the inherent difficulty:

But as perfectly beautiful bodies are not composed of angular parts, so their parts never continue long in the same right line. They vary their direction every moment, and they change under the eye by a deviation continually carrying on, but for whose beginning or end you will find it difficult to ascertain a point. The view of a beautiful bird will illustrate this observation. Here we see the head increasing insensibly to the middle, from whence it lessens gradually until it mixes with the neck; the neck loses itself in larger swell, which continues to the middle of the body, when the whole decreases again to the tail; the tail takes a new direction; but it soon varies its new course: it blends again with the other parts; and the line is perpetually changing, above, below, upon every side. In this description I have before me the idea of a dove; it agrees very well with most of the conditions of beauty.⁷⁷

Burke, in an effort to prove that natural beauty does not simply comprise an easily quantified linearity, unwittingly reduces a dove to a series of vague instructions unfit for a child's coloring book—even comically expecting the reader to recognize the bird in his words. And Burke is not alone: a glance through the annals of natural history turns up a host of descriptive clunkers. Whether W. P. Pycraft's description of a bird's wing as “a lateral extension of the body, presenting a relatively large surface, but having no appreciable thickness” or Edmund Selous' self-consciously strained delineation of a “curious curve” in “the anterior part of [the raven's] spread wing, at first backwards towards the tail, and then again forwards towards the head. All the primary quills seem to partake of this shape and they are also very noticeably disjoined one from another, so that the interspace, even whilst the wing is beaten, looks almost as wide as the quill—by which I mean the whole feather— itself,” it is all too easy to flatten with obdurate specificity the vital *je ne sais quoi* of the animal

⁷⁷ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Thomas M'lean, Haymarket, 1823), 165-166.

type one is trying to illuminate.⁷⁸ Yet at what point do successive, quantified descriptions cohere into a living picture? Somehow, one gets the sense, even animals themselves are able to effortlessly conjure qualitatively substantial life out of meticulous quanta, but without any of the difficulty many natural historians seem to stumble over. Louise Glück's recent poem "Nest" formulates the question with elegance:

The bird
collected twigs in the apple tree, relating
each addition to existing mass.
But when was there suddenly *mas*?⁷⁹

What is necessary, then, is to make one's writing move like the animal itself, as it were. This is, perhaps, both more intuitive and more difficult when describing an animal in motion. In his classic *The Natural History of Selborne*, first published in 1789 and widely regarded, for the vividness of its prose, as the high-water mark of English natural history writing, Gilbert White sets forth what should constitute the natural historian's perceptive and descriptive acumen:

A good ornithologist should be able to distinguish birds by their air as well as by their colours and shape; on the ground as well as on the wing, and in the bush as well as in the hand. For, though it must not be said that every species of birds has a manner peculiar to itself, yet there is somewhat in most genera at least, that at first sight discriminates them, and enables a judicious observer to pronounce upon them with some certainty. *Put a bird in motion.*⁸⁰

⁷⁸ That such duds are found in the same passages of Selous as genuine pieces of lyrical vividness like the following only underlines the difficulty of sustaining capable style vis-à-vis animal objects: "To watch this curious action through the glasses is more interesting. Each time there is a perceptible second or two during which the bird remains completely reversed, back to earth and breast to sky. The appearance presented is equally extraordinary, whether it makes the half roll and returns, or goes completely round. I have sometimes seen rooks make a turn over in the air, but his was more a disorderly tumble, recalling that of the peewit, and, though striking enough, was not nearly so extraordinary as this orderly and methodical, almost sedate, turning upside down. [...] Most often it is done in silence, but sometimes, at each roll, the raven cries 'pyar,' a penetrating and striking note." Both Pycraft and Selous are quoted in Jen Hill, ed., *An Exhilaration of Wings: The Literature of Birdwatching* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 114, 215, 216.

⁷⁹ Louise Glück, "Nest," in *Vita Nova* (New York: Ecco Press, 2001), 38.

⁸⁰ Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*, ed. Richard Mabey (Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), 213. My emphasis.

Quoting Vergil next—“et vera incessu patuit [by her tread the goddess shows herself true]”—White drives home the virtuosic standard to which the natural historian is compelled to aspire. Compelled, that is, not by any external ideal of stylistic excellence but by a mimetic ideal engendered by the animal object itself. As White’s biographer Richard Mabey notes, this was something White himself exemplified, arranging “his sentence structure to echo the physical style of a bird's flight.”⁸¹ Thus the “white-throat uses odd jerks and gesticulations over the tops of hedges and bushes,” and “wood-peckers fly *volatu undoso*, opening and closing their wings at every stroke, and so are always rising or falling in curves.”⁸²

By the mid-nineteenth century, the descriptive virtuosity required by the natural historian had itself become an emblem for Victorian liberal virtue more broadly. In one of his numerous pieces championing the admirable suitability of natural history as a leisurely yet vigorous outdoor exercise, Kingsley praises naturalist George Montagu for his “indelible word-pictures, instinct with life and truth.”⁸³ Like White, Montagu imbued his prose with enough vividness to make it seem bestial in its own right; what’s more, his talent was not just any savant’s facility but “that ‘seeing eye’ of the true soldier and sportsman.”⁸⁴ Descriptive virtuosity was hence a self-reinforcing loop for Kingsley: more than anyone else, the vigorously masculine and self-sufficient subject was trained to be instantaneously perceptive of his natural surroundings, and for this reason, the natural vividness of his descriptions was more than well-suited to inculcate a similar vigor in its readers, sending them out to experience the wonders of the shore on their own.

⁸¹ Richard Mabey, *Gilbert White: A Biography of the Author of The Natural History of Selborne* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 173.

⁸² White, *Selborne*, 214-215.

⁸³ Charles Kingsley, *Glaucus; or, The Wonders of the Shore*, collected in *The Water-Babies, and Glaucus* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1908), 231.

⁸⁴ Kingsley, *Glaucus*, 231.

Thus animals had the particular privilege of promising to be a more fruitful lens for modernist style while for the same reason threatening to blunt any style that would take it as its object in the first place. Pound, for example, pointedly invokes the tradition of natural history writing at the start of his 1934 *ABC of Reading*, in which he readily grasps the degree to which animals were an exemplary object and figure for what otherwise seemed like the otherwise irreducible contradictions of modernist style. He even begins his book with what has come to be known as the “Parable of the Sunfish.” In this story, based on actual reports of Swiss biologist Louis Agassiz’ demanding pedagogical style, one of Agassiz’ students amusingly tries to properly describe the fish before him.

A post-graduate student equipped with honors and diplomas went to Agassiz to receive the final and finishing touches. The great man offered him a small fish and told him to describe it.

Post-Graduate Student: “That’s only a sunfish.”

Agassiz: “I know that. Write a description of it.”

After a few minutes the student returned with the description of the Ichthus Heliodiplodokus, or whatever term is used to conceal the common sunfish from vulgar knowledge, family of Heliichtherinkus, etc., as found in textbooks of the subject.

Agassiz again told the student to describe the fish.

The student produced a four-page essay. Agassiz then told him to look at the fish. At the end of three weeks the fish was in an advanced state of decomposition, but the student knew something about it.⁸⁵

Pound here, in fact, all but spells out precisely what animals contribute to modernism’s epistemological ambitions, but obstinately Pound till the end, he predictably falls back in the other direction, seeing in the tension between technical description and the essential “thing” only an argument for the latter rather than any necessary relationship between the two. Piling

⁸⁵ Pound, 17-18.

on seeming abstraction after seeming abstraction, the student blinds himself to the *gist* of the fish, its “vulgar knowledge.” Like poets who have lost touch with the immediacy required by poetry and who must therefore be reinvigorated by the ostensibly instinctive and concrete sense of Chinese ideograms, the student’s intellect neglects the fish’s vitality to the point that it disappears. As long as the goal of language is presence, as it was for Gautier, style—especially any style invested in technical precision—risks being destructive, literally decomposing its object.

Other modernists, however, made the connection that Pound misses. Following the lessons of natural history (and also, of the life sciences more generally, as Peter Morton reminds us in his seminal book *The Vital Science*), these modernists understood that precise, technical description, even to an excessive degree, was not averse to poetic “truth” of any kind.⁸⁶ Rather, as we see in Gerard Manley Hopkins, Rudyard Kipling, and Marianne Moore, sometimes the essential truth of any object or experience only emerges through a virtuosic

⁸⁶ Morton looks at this question from the perspective of scientific writing. For many scientists trying to reach popular audiences in the nineteenth century, it was a question of how exactly one could make the sciences of life *in particular* be vital in their own right. In this regard, Morton explains, critics have often held up Darwin as an exemplary scientist whose writing was highly popular either *because of* his exceptional knack for the homely phrase or *despite* the formidable level of technicality of his books. Further critics, moreover, have asserted that the palpable anxiety often detected in Darwin’s writing was due to his own awareness of having to reach these two different audiences. In Morton’s own exacting estimation, though, Darwin was in fact a perfectly decent writer, unremarkable in both rhetorical appeal and technical precision. Whatever anxiety one might detect in Darwin had less to do with stylistic balance and more the general Victorian clime: “Darwin is not anxious in the sense that he cannot decide whether to speak to the professional or to the layman, because in biology our present distinction between ‘technical’ and ‘routine educated’ prose did not then exist.” Instead, what bothered Darwin was, Morton argues, his inability to make his observations cohere into a theoretical unity: “For the mid-Victorian Darwin and his predecessors shared the supposition that science is a unity, so that investigation into any branch should render up general laws applicable everywhere.” The connection Morton doesn’t make, however, but which the modernists did, is that these anxieties were two sides of the same coin, and that the stylistic split between the technical and the vulgar is itself caused by the inherent instability of its object: life. The quest for unity in regards to life heightened both the technical and the popular tendencies *equally*. A too-popular account might not be able to capture how manifold and precarious the complexities of animal life actually are, but a too-technical or systematic account just as well, under the weight of its detail, would be unable to keep up with the ever-changing fluidities of life or do justice to its natural, rather than merely artificial, robustness. See Peter Morton, *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination, 1860-1900* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 44-45.

engagement with the technical and meticulous, and sometimes only through a temporary mutation into the virtuosity's doppelganger, pedantry. As if in response to Adorno's dictum that a writer's painstaking precision should only ever "dam up" and "throw into relief" language rather than surrender to communicability, Moore, for example, doubles-down on precision's wager, by "engineering strategy" and remaining uncompromising in terms of that "hobgoblin obscurity," in the hopes that such "contagious gems of virtuosity" will indeed "make visible, mentality."⁸⁷

For both stylistic categories were, in fact, eminently figured by animal instinct. While the virtuosity of White's avian descriptions could certainly be said to be mimetically bird-like, so too might the clumsy pedantries of Burke and co. in their own way. And more importantly, the animality of pedantry keeps it tied to virtuosity at every point. First, however, it might helpful to think of pedantry as a species of what Avital Ronell has examined as stupidity. As she so forcefully reminds us, stupidity—which takes on a few more zoological clicks when it is translated (difficultly) as *bêtise* or *Dummheit*—"offers no place of intervention that would not merely produce a boomerang effect, returning stupidity to the sender who has presumed to launch an attack against its self-contentment."⁸⁸ In the same way, the effort to achieve a truly and seemingly effortless, instinctual style never escapes the threat of pedantry. And hence, not only do we find a fundamental struggle with pedantry at the core of Hopkins, Kipling, and Moore's precise styles, we can see how, in general, a modernist virtuosity animated by animals is easily unbalanced—tipping readily, say, into the "stuplime" pedantries of Stein or Beckett. (More specifically, however, we might say

⁸⁷ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 85, 101; and Moore, "Subject, Predicate, Object," *Complete Prose*, 506, and "Arthur Mitchell," *Complete Poems*, 220.

⁸⁸ Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 42, 44.

that Stein's stuplimity mimes virtuosity, making a pedantry *of* virtuosity, while Beckett's stuplimity, like "Ithaca," makes a virtuosity out of pedantry.) The animal, therefore, straddles the fault line between not just instinct and intelligence, but between the good and bad sides of the instinct-intelligence alloy.

Virtuosity and type can therefore be defined more specifically in relation to the didactic capacity of style. Virtuosity, broadly speaking, is a specific measure of style interested in competence, precision, and yet also an almost-completely ineffable, playful *something* that sets it apart from its stylistic inverse: pedantry, which has all the appearance of virtuosity without any of the heart. Or, put another way, virtuosity is that style of highly conscientious scrupulousness that at its best appears wholly un-self-conscious, while pedantry is a style fundamentally lacking in self-consciousness while retaining the air of complete deliberation. Hence Walter Benjamin could write that, "without knowing it, even the most arid pedant plays in a childish rather than a childlike way; the more childish his play, the more pedantic he is."⁸⁹ And Moore, translating La Fontaine could say of "farfetched magniloquence— / Discursive intrusiveness world without end," that "If there are creatures who err / More than boys at play, it is pedants as inane."⁹⁰ As such, virtuosity can bring out the technological aspect of the fable, though often by slipping back into the latent pedantry that it always bears within itself: like the child playing with his toys, virtuosity highlights the intricate mechanics or syntax of whatever material is at hand, but often at the risk of eclipsing the content of that material. Hence La Fontaine, as we've seen, notes (like a proto-structuralist) and even gives in to (like a very tired structuralist) the mechanical quality

⁸⁹ Benjamin, "Toys and Play: Marginal Notes on a Monumental Work," *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 1, 1927-1930, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 120.

⁹⁰ Moore, *The Fables of La Fontaine*, 213-214.

of the fable mode, which he realizes is able to churn out any number of finished stories and morals after plugging content into a set of parameters (animal x , antagonist y). And Hopkins, as I show in my first chapter, for all his exemplary poetic virtuosity in both describing the flight of the windhover and representing its motion mimetically in his prosody, still (*because* of the difficulty) oscillates dramatically into a stunted pedantry that threatens to reduce both the bird and his verse to a mechanical plodding. What was before the religiously inspiring, even transcendently Christ-like flight of a bird toggles—“in a flash, at a trumpet crash”—into what Hopkins refers to elsewhere as a deep, abject sense of bestial ineffectuality.⁹¹ Or, as I argue about Moore’s virtuosity, the technological becomes especially apparent in the assimilation of her modernist verse to the filmic style of slapstick. What allows Moore’s poetry to *work* both artistically and ethically is, according to her, an animalistic instinct that she also detects in the styles of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton: and it is this instinct alone that, however ineffable, keeps Moore’s verse from lapsing into pure pedantry in much the same way that any slapstick performance is always precariously on the edge of capitulating to pure mechanistic.

Meanwhile, typology provides in a sense the building blocks of the fable mode. Whether in more strictly narrative forms or in fabularly-inflected forms such as the animal-centric verse of Hopkins or Moore, the primary descriptive effort is usually focused on the elucidation of and fidelity to type. While in the classical fable, this is usually a matter of an animal character simply conforming to the traditionally pre-determined behavior associated

⁹¹ There is a similar bestial twinning of virtuosity and pedantry in Kafka as well. As in Hopkins, virtuosity seems to partake, somehow, of the divine: “A. is a virtuoso,” writes Kafka, “and Heaven is his witness.” At the same time, however, as Kafka writes in his diary of one of his own drafts, the failure of style is just as much a deeply bestial matter: “Just now read the beginning. it is ugly and gives me a headache. In spite of all its truth, it is wicked, pedantic, mechanical, a fish barely breathing on a sandbank.” See *The Zürau Aphorisms*, ed. Roberto Calasso (New York: Schocken, 2006), 49; and Kafka’s diary entry from 9 Feb 1915, in *Diaries, 1910-1923* (New York: Schocken, 1976), 330.

with its species, typology comes to include any feature, aspect, of characteristic of a living being that seems necessarily connected to its continued and integrated existence through history. Thus also converging with the emerging practices of the realist novel in the nineteenth century, in which characters had to carry the weight of being both unique and universal, exceptional and exemplary, animal typology provided a very supple epistemological system through which to figure/negotiate the precise *quantity* of descriptive detail needed to make any given being or group of beings seem *qualitatively* distinct and complete unto itself. My dissertation first traces this use of animal typology through a perhaps surprising genealogy. First via Newman, who innovatively and radically used Darwin's "historical method" in his *Grammar of Assent* to build a defense for religious belief against the rising tide of secularism in the mid-nineteenth century. And second, Newman was in turn both critiqued and adapted by Virginia Woolf's father Leslie Stephen, who saw in his *Science of Ethics* (1882) the potential in treating either religious belief or personal character, individual or collective, typologically—as if belief or character itself was a sort of living organism that needed its particular physiological mechanisms of vitality and integrity to be elucidated. Originating, too, in a primarily philosophical register, this thinking of typological ethics eventually found its home, I argue, in the far more vernacular and literary ethics of Woolf, many of whose novels can be read as charting the development of characters as if each was, to take a phrase from Stephen, an animal "always feeling itself out," finding its place in relation to others in a collective ethical equilibrium.⁹²

At the same time, as historian of science Lorraine Daston reminds us, typological practice and its generalizations were not—as one might assume at this point—necessarily

⁹² Leslie Stephen, *The Science of Ethics* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1882), 79.

essentialist: that is, there is a difference between finding a coherent set of descriptors for any type, even when they suggest a principle of inner necessity, and concluding that such a unity necessarily indicates an *a priori* predetermined essence.⁹³ Hence it is also important to account for the ways Newman, Stephen, and Woolf, to varying degrees, all attempt to avoid a frozen essentialism while risking slipping into it. For Stephen, this meant thinking of types as fully *ad hoc*, always contingent and provisional groupings that had a means of evolving, adapting, moving from recognizable unity to unity in a way that Darwinian theory made possible to think. This importantly signaled Stephen's departure from more prominent Victorian evolutionary ethicists, such as Herbert Spencer and T. H. Huxley, who theorized their ethics at the level of the entire human species: Stephen, on the other hand, was far more interested in developing an ethics of particularity that approaches an individual on his own singular terms, or at least those of his personality type. For Woolf, this problem was slightly more complicated, as her attempts in realist narrative to experiment with "transparent" typological characterization inevitably ran up against the actual politics of such violent physiognomic practice. It is from a feminist, anti-colonial, and non-normate perspective, then, I argue, that Woolf attempts to represent an *undoing* of typology's propensity for essentialism in her later novels—something especially apparent, for example, in *The Waves* (1931).

In a sort of aesthetic Darwinism, moreover, Stephen proposed that the evolution of types was also akin to the gradual refinement of types of art and even physical tools over time. For animal species are as much types as things like classical sculpture and weaponry for Stephen: and we can detect their unity or principle of inner necessity through nothing less

⁹³ Lorraine Daston, "Type Specimens and Scientific Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2004): 168.

than an aesthetic “rule of thumb”: “Though we cannot calculate, we can *feel* the utility. The recognition of the perfection adaptation reveals itself to our feelings as aesthetic satisfaction.”⁹⁴ This makes functionally analogous a living being’s *internal* instincts—those physiological and cognitive mechanisms which keep it alive and whole—and the instinct of an *external* observer—that intuitive facility for description necessary to make visible the mechanics of the type, as we have already incipiently seen in the writings of natural historians. Thus we can see how virtuosity (a style) and typology (an epistemological form) constitute two complementary sides of the challenge of animal representation introduced by the new biological episteme of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, virtuosity is particularly well-suited to mimetically represent what makes a type a type: both the style and the epistemological form are structured by a toggling of the quantitative into the qualitative, the diachronic into the synchronic, the describable into the indescribable. Hopkins and Moore, for example, are especially representative in this regard: for them, poetic virtuosity was the primary tool for representing the singularity of their favorite animal species.⁹⁵ It thus also became a tool for figuring their own singularity as queerly celibate persons. As a space in which one can describe—almost infinitely—a singular type and thus make it present or known *without having to name it explicitly*, virtuosity became the means for asserting particular kinds of sexuality or social relationality that do not, by definition, lend themselves to assertive display.

As the first chapter of this dissertation will explore, moreover, virtuosity was the real

⁹⁴ Stephen, *The Science of Ethics*, 76.

⁹⁵ We can see this in other modernist discourses, such as psychoanalysis, in which the virtuosity of the analyst illuminates the principles of inner necessity in psychological types. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud even describes the move to typology, a result of his universalization of pathology, as a demystification of earlier *fabular* understandings of sexuality. See Freud, *Three Essays*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 2.

fault line at the center of Kingsley's entire ethos: on one hand, it conduced very well to an liberal, Carlylean ideology of self-sufficient, muscular Christianity; on the other hand, it threatened to undo that ideology from the inside out. Kingsley, I argue, was in particular unnerved by the similarity of his animal-inspired virtuosity to Newman's. The fact that Newman justified his rhetorical style—the infamous Tractarian “reserve” that Kingsley and others found unwholesomely suspect and effeminate—via what he claimed was the (biblically authorized) instinctual capacity of animals for deception threatened to reveal Kingsley's own construction of the instinctually virtuous Victorian subject as equally disingenuous. Despite his admiration for Montagu, after all, and his marked hatred of both the pedantic and the effeminate (Ruskin, for example, was odious for both these reasons), Kingsley himself was never exactly the consummate virtuoso: pedantry plagued him at every turn, carrying in its excess language also the treat of excessive flesh and desire. Thus types work both ways. The precarious *work* upon which virtuosity balances always destabilizes any ideology that would seek to deploy it yet disavow its origin. What is presented as natural and spontaneous inevitably shows its ragged edges.

Hence any authority that would stake itself upon a virtuosic ethos finds itself constantly challenged by the same authority. This is a lesson that the virtuosic modernists of this dissertation would therefore learn deeply: virtuosity is never less than a burden, a constant impetus to further revision and calibration. Furthermore, insofar as the politics of the Victorian virtuosity fallout still reverberated through modernism—as James Eli Adams writes, “The rhetorics of Carlylean heroism and of John Henry Newman's Tractarian priest, for example, can be seen to shape the narrative strategies of high modernism in James and Conrad through the crucial mediating rhetoric of Paterian aestheticism”—we are reminded

that any attempt to stabilize cultural authority between the poles of unbridled subjectivism and depersonalized objectivism draws on and engages gendered, classed, and national histories.⁹⁶ In order to not simply recapitulate in modernist guise, then, the contradictions of Victorian liberalism, virtuosity must remain vigilant. Like the sustained slapstick of Marianne Moore's later poems, virtuosity, and the types it brings to life, must find a way to remain open and ever vibrating and not close in upon themselves.

Type can also be a catalyst for virtuosity. In the case of Kipling, for example, we could say that his most successful fiction—*The Jungle Books* and the *Just So Stories*—are so much more effective (than, say, *Kim* or *The Light That Failed*) precisely because in them he has pared down his narrative technique to a core repertoire of scenes built around animals. For the seemingly inherent vitality and character of Kipling's animals lends a level of descriptive effectuality that his more anthropocentric scenes lack: the latter, especially those representing complex action of any kind, tend towards a tediousness and pedantry of explanation. A certain interchangeability of figures, however, seems to produce (and be produced by) more streamlined action in Kipling. This is, in fact, I argue, necessitated by the complexities of imperial development for which *The Jungle Books* were a didactic expression. Like Edward Said's Orientalist experts, Mowgli—and by extension, Kipling's young readers—can only master the parties and parameters of colonial life if they are reduced to and “compressed” into frozen types.⁹⁷ This kind of virtuosity—embodied in the fascinating pedagogical figure of the Law of the Jungle—*depends* on the deceptively simple, nearly arithmetical nature, of its objects. Through such apparent simplicity, it casually plays its own descriptive labor off as

⁹⁶ James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 3.

⁹⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995), 234.

nothing more than a lark—even when the object of these descriptions are the violent and often deadly machinations of empire.

And in virtuosic modernism more broadly, there is an inclination to figure scenes of colonial, transnational, and global conflict as scenes of animal conflict, as if geopolitics were now a mere matter of ecology, of different animal types finding a workable equilibrium. The global and transhistorical scope of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* is one instance of this tendency being occasioned: my chapter on Joyce argues in part that the *Wake* is less the Mallarméan monument to totality it is often held to be and more a sort of manic fable machine par excellence. And as such, it is interesting to note how the *Wake*—which, composed over seventeen years, took on a life of its own in much the same way La Fontaine's twenty-six-year spread of fables did—repeatedly dramatizes the failure of the classical fable mode to properly signify its moral content: its animals (so often standing in for a large variety of marginalized subjects) in a number of striking passages very literally turn their backs on the instrumentalizing intentions of the fable. Thus this dissertation looks at a number of other globally-minded texts—including not only Kipling, but also Kingsley's *Water-Babies* and Woolf's *The Waves* (while anticipating contemporary films like Ang Lee's *Life of Pi*)—in which the fabular content is shown to run up against, with varying degrees of self-awareness, the form that was supposed to authoritatively make the content appealing or accessible. It is as if the animals themselves were resisting their text's aspirations toward representing globality. They protest their own instrumentalization as figures for the global other. Virtuosity thus hits a limit. The boredom and exhaustion of both animals in the *Wake* and animalized bodies in *The Waves* exposes the degree to which virtuosic animality or ecology is too often called in to paper over the gaps in representations of global structures.

I.

THE ANIMAL OPAQUE:
KINGSLEY, HOPKINS
& THE ECONOMY
OF INSTINCT

DETERMINATION & DETERMINISM

When Samuel Smiles wrote in the first paragraph of *Self Help* (1859) that “help from without is often enfeebling in its effects, but help from within invariably invigorates,” he was encapsulating a singular Victorian fantasy of the liberal subject.⁹⁸ For Smiles, the subject was rational, sovereign, and autonomous, and this freedom of action and development was premised on a certain subjective transparency—the idea that an individual could know and master his own self completely and without resistance. Any kind of self-improvement, after all, relied principally on memory, and, further, on assiduously recording one’s daily tasks in order to optimize one’s use of time. This was man’s first and foremost line of defense against the inevitable precarities of history. “For time, like life, can never be recalled.”⁹⁹ Only by committing the fleeting texture of one’s self could one turn waste into potential productivity: “The practice of writing down thoughts and facts for the purpose of holding them fast and preventing their escape into the dim region of forgetfulness, has been much

⁹⁸ Samuel Smiles, *Self Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1859), 1.

⁹⁹ Smiles, 83.

resorted to by thoughtful and studious men.”¹⁰⁰

The stalwart face of Smiles’ *homo economicus*, furthermore, was underpinned by a clammy hysteria, one terrified of the fantasy’s true fragility. Anything short of the utmost vigilance, he held, would lead to ruin. Specifically, this would lead to a condition below man’s station: “If a man allows the little pennies, the results of his hard work, to slip out of his fingers—some to the beershop, some this way and some that—he will find that his life is little raised above one of mere animal drudgery.”¹⁰¹ Without the discipline to make one’s self present to oneself at all times, man would be reduced to an ignoble life of “drudgery” and tedium—otherwise known as the natural state of beings in bondage to their bestial side: “Economy also means the power of resisting present gratification for the purpose of securing a future good, and in this light it represents the ascendancy of reason over the animal instincts.” To be fully responsible, aware, and alive to one’s temporal and economic means was also to be in control of one’s own body; thus to leave a portion of one’s self out of the equation and uncalculated—that is, the instinctual, animal portion, opaquely independent and ineffectually deterministic—was to risk letting everything grind to a halt.

In a wider cultural moment, however, there was a growing sense that the free rationality of the human and the deterministic instinct of the animal were not mutually exclusive faculties. Broadly speaking, this was one result of what Foucault has described in *The Order of Things* as the new biological or vitalist episteme of the nineteenth century, in which the question for scientists was no longer only how to *quantitatively* enumerate and classify the similarities and dissimilarities of different classes of beings but how to articulate *qualitatively* how beings (as either individuals or classes) are able to move through time at all

¹⁰⁰ Smiles, 84.

¹⁰¹ Smiles, 230-231.

while remaining discrete, whole, and intact.¹⁰² Evolutionary theory was the most radical expression of this epistemic shift, of course, and just as important as the question of how animals could evolve over time through, say, natural selection, was the question of how they could also continuously possess the vital unity of both body and species necessary to stay alive through such flux. *Instinct* named the mechanism by which this happened. Hence in *On the Origin of Species*, published the same year as *Self Help*, Darwin would write, in an Austenian turn of phrase, that “[i]t will be universally admitted that instincts are as important as corporeal structures for the welfare of each species, under its present conditions of life.”¹⁰³

Two different forms of self-sufficiency were, therefore, developing. One was premised on independence; the other on coherence. One through sheer determination; the other through a bodily determinism. The former has many well-known philosophical, religious, and aesthetic expressions beyond Smiles, from the Carlylean hero to the “muscular Christianity” of which Charles Kingsley was the most prominent proponent. And the latter is often taken to be fundamental to many modernist schools of aesthetic experimentation, from literary naturalism to various auto-didactic or inhuman poetics. This chapter, however, argues that not only did instinct-driven subjectivity find a home in the work of many proto-modernists, but that traditional liberal subjectivity found that it contained within itself an anxiety about its counterpart—sometimes even arriving, in its rare, most honest moments, at the same conclusions. Hence, rotating one of the traditional axes of modernism (the totalizing relationship of subjective consciousness to bodily determinism) so that it intersects the category of style allows us to read canonical modernism alongside a number of writers and discourses not generally included in the same conversation. Instead of limiting

¹⁰² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 263-279.

¹⁰³ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 156.

modernism to rubrics of aesthetic fragmentation or refusal, for example, we might consider how style makes subjective coherence both possible and impossible—a dialectical tension crystallized in the singular figure of the animal.

In a recent *PMLA* article, Judith Hamera defines virtuosity as a particular type of aesthetic performance in which the great amount of technical labor and precision required by a work is both exemplified and transcended by the work and thus, paradoxically, made to seem spontaneous and exceptionally effortless.¹⁰⁴ First emerging in relation to the bravura solo musical performances so prized by Romantic culture, virtuosity hence naturally took on a religious or superhuman aura, and virtuoso performers were often figured as “‘angels,’ ‘devils,’ ‘heroes,’ ‘monsters,’ ‘magicians,’ and ‘machines,’ sometimes all at once.”¹⁰⁵ Missing from this list of figures, though, is the animal—which, I argue, went one better than its magical counterparts in its capacity to *naturalize* the paradoxical quality of virtuosity. As Darwin summarizes: “An action, which we ourselves require experience to enable us to perform, when performed by an animal, more especially by a very young one, without experience, and when performed by many individuals in the same way, without their knowing for what purpose it is performed, is usually said to be instinctive.”¹⁰⁶ In contrast to angels and magicians, animals actually existed; the seemingly exceptional actions they performed were empirically observable in nature. And in contrast to, say, machines, animals were seemingly self-sufficient and self-selecting, actually accomplishing the impossible task of adapting to ecological flux over time.

Animals were, in this way, the perfect figure for modernists intent on achieving the

¹⁰⁴ Judith Hamera, “The Labors of Michael Jackson: Virtuosity, Deindustrialization, and Dancing Work,” *PMLA* 127.4 (2012): 751–765.

¹⁰⁵ Hamera, 752.

¹⁰⁶ Darwin, *Origin*, 155.

otherwise impossible. This becomes clear when we recognize the degree to which many modernists were in fact steeped in the culture of natural history. The long tradition of natural history writing, especially—particularly in its English variety—had provided a vocabulary for representing the qualitative exceptionality of animals through the medium of language. Since at least Gilbert White’s 1789 dictum that the natural historian’s prose should be able to “put a bird in motion,” the success of any work in the genre was measured by how well it was able to bring its animal subject “to life.”¹⁰⁷ Thus even after the decline of the virtuosi in popular Romantic concert and poetry culture, virtuosity as a stylistic virtue lived on in both natural history and other animal-centric literature, even becoming central to the ethos of writers such as Charles Kingsley who otherwise objected to the perceived mechanicity, effeminacy, and excess with which Romantic virtuosity had been associated.¹⁰⁸ As natural history writing began to absorb the lessons of evolutionary theory, however—and this emphatically anticipated the slightly later development of photography and film as new media—it became clear that the stakes were much higher and that a descriptive virtuosity simply defined as exceptional technical excellence would not suffice. Rather, life itself, now more than ever center stage as an eminently indescribable quality, seemed to require ever-multiplying layers of descriptive language, and the sheer opacity of the technical apparatus threatened to obscure the basic vitality for which the animal had been recruited in the first

¹⁰⁷ White, *Natural History of Selborne*, 213.

¹⁰⁸ In Gillen D’Arcy Wood’s book on Romantic virtuosity, he explains that the classical nightingale topos—perhaps deployed most famously in Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Nightingale”—was often used as “an anti-virtuosic fable of nature’s triumph over technique and artifice.” Thus by the end of Romanticism, for Wood, virtuosity had fallen completely out of favor: “even as a species of vulgar greatness, it is rarely now taken for an aesthetic future, let alone a revolutionary mode of being.” Against this end-stopped cultural history, however, this dissertation argues that virtuosity survived in and energized modernist genres and other media—such as film slapstick—going beyond the simple Romantic binary by discovering the dialectical interrelation of nature and technique. See Gillen D’Arcy Wood, *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840: Virtue and Virtuosity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 214, 215.

place. The inevitable stylistic drag had, therefore, to be incorporated into the equation.

For the premature modernism of Gerard Manley Hopkins, this meant the incorporation of virtuosity's obverse—pedantry—into virtuosity's own economy. More than any of his peers, Hopkins was always treading the thin line between exceptional adroitness of rhythm, sound, and imagery, and bloated, self-indulgent, and overly meticulous experimentation. Yet this stylistic bifurcation was something Hopkins was highly cognizant of and intentionally exploited as far as possible. This is nowhere more evident than in his many poems about birds, in which Hopkins summons all the poetic resources at his disposal to both describe and imitate animal motion and musicality.

In “The Windhover,” for example, often taken to be one of Hopkins’ most accomplished and representative sonnets and one he himself considered “the best thing I ever wrote,” the sprung rhythm and enjambment of the first seven lines mimetically reproduce the kestrel’s ability to seemingly float on and dive down from currents of air: “in his riding / Of the rólling level úndernéath him steady áir, and stríding / High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing / In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing, / As a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend.”¹⁰⁹ The concentrated spondees, repeated syllables, and participles left to hang midsentence at the end of a line together create the effect of momentary suspensions and quick, balletic dips. And insofar as Christ is the explicit primary allegorical object of the kestrel’s “Brute beauty,” Hopkins’ virtuosity is also intended to bring forth an otherwise indescribable spiritual truth: “My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of; the mastery of the thing!” As one critic puts it, “the final meaning

¹⁰⁹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 132.

depends on our seeing and feeling this dive.”¹¹⁰

At the same time, the absolute transcendence Hopkins seeks is not so easily, first, figured by an animal or, second, effected by prosodic virtuosity alone. The seemingly spontaneous internal dynamism he so admires in the kestrel and in natural animal life more broadly—“The whole landscape flushes on a sudden at a sound,” he writes elsewhere in a fragment about the song of a cuckoo—is always underpinned by a painful awareness of the “brutal” limits of animal bodies: describing a nightingale, he winces at the fact that “the air must cut and strain / The windpipe when he sucked his breath.”¹¹¹ And, as “The Windhover” makes clear, the analogous spontaneity of his virtuosic mimesis cannot sustain itself for very long. Hopkins’ descriptive powers falter, and his language breaks down into the acoustically material spondees that are the building blocks of his sprung rhythm more generally, until he can no longer handle it: “Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here / Buckle!” At the edges of Hopkins’ virtuosity, pedantry rears its head and draws fancy back to earth, blurring transparency into renewed opacity, poetic determination into poetic determinism.

What Hopkins stylistically wagers on in his poetry, however, is that this pedantry, rooted in the materiality of the body both figurally and prosodically, can and must still be redeemed. For insofar as the windhover’s Christ-like unattainability expresses not just any old Christology but a particular transubstantiation of his unspoken homoeroticism—“ah my dear,” he cries to Christ, his courtly “chevalier”—the heavy descriptive labor needed to render its flight also represents the Jesuit poet’s lifelong struggle to come to terms with his

¹¹⁰ Frederick L. Gwynn, “Hopkins’ ‘The Windhover’: A New Simplification,” *Modern Language Notes* 66.6 (1951): 366.

¹¹¹ Hopkins, 80, 144.

embodied desires. On one hand, as this chapter will discuss, Hopkins painfully routed his sexuality into the poems of his so-called “terrible sonnet” phase, in which the abjection of his body is figured as every negative aspect of animality: its bestial dumbness, ineffectuality, and savagery—or “drudgery,” as Smiles would put it. On the other hand, though, the very excess of this painful awareness of materiality could itself produce a kind of ascetic *bonus*.

Hence, even as Hopkins’ description of the windhover begins to fail and he is forced to switch metaphors, he picks up the Christological allegory with even *more* aplomb at a second degree: “No wónder of it: shéer plód makes plóugh down síllion / Shine.” Not only do these lines describe the counterintuitive aesthetic result of a literal pedantry, and not only do they obstinately embody the pedantry they describe with bullheaded spondees; they also, doing triple duty, in the very appearance of a new agricultural metaphor, simultaneously admit to the first avian metaphor’s limit *and* propel themselves further with this admission—“rebuffing,” like the windhover itself, “the big wind.” Hopkins, as an animal learning to describe itself, is not always successful. Yet it is precisely at the edges of his stylistic facility, those moments where it “fails” and an inherent, blunt instinct takes over, that there is a fleeting glimpse of aesthetic and erotic possibility.

THE SECRET LIVES OF ANIMALS

“To most men argument makes the point in hand only more doubtful, and considerably less impressive,” wrote John Henry Newman in the sixth of seven pseudonymous letters to the editor of *The Times* in 1841. “After all, man is *not* a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal. He is influenced by what is direct and precise. It is very well to freshen our impressions and convictions from physics, but to create them we must go

elsewhere.”¹¹²

Letting loose upon the secular educational reform espoused by his interlocutor Sir Robert Peel (then in between stints as Prime Minister) in an address at the opening of a Tamworth reading room, Newman was in this series of letters publicly entrenching himself, at the climax of the Oxford Movement against the liberal mainline of both church and state in England. Later described by Newman as the most important year of his life, 1841 also saw the publication of *Tract 90*, the last of the *Tracts*, and there would be only another four years before his conversion to Rome.¹¹³ Yet in addition to his public critique of both Anglican ecclesiology and Evangelical theology was also Newman’s concern that the church as a whole was being supplanted by secular institutions as the primary source of moral vision and inculcation in England. On one hand were the educational reforms espoused by Peel—which, truth be told, were less secular than might seem, and only proposed that education and the “useful knowledge” of the physical and moral sciences be installed in such a way “that an increased sagacity [administer] to an exalted faith.”¹¹⁴ And on the other hand was a further-reaching vision of secularism, exemplified for Newman by the liberal utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, whose “stern realism” was supposed to have precluded the reality of anything beyond the empirically verifiable—including the “scientific consolations” still romantically necessary to Peel:

People say to me, that it is but a dream to suppose that Christianity should regain the organic power in human society which once it possessed. I cannot help that; I never said it could. I am not a politician; I am proposing no

¹¹² John Henry Newman, “The Tamworth Reading Room,” in *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 179. The first two letters were anonymous, but subsequent submissions were published under the name “Catholicus.”

¹¹³ Twenty years later, in the midst of his self-vindication in response to Kingsley’s public attacks, Newman would write that “From the end of 1841, I was on my death-bed, as regards my membership with the Anglican Church.” See Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 141.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Newman, “Tamworth,” 168.

measures, but exposing a fallacy, and resisting a pretence. Let Benthamism reign, if men have no aspirations; but do not tell them to be romantic, and then solace them with glory; do not attempt by philosophy what once was done by religion. The ascendancy of Faith may be impracticable, but the reign of Knowledge is incomprehensible. The problem for statesmen of this age is how to educate the masses, and literature and science cannot give the solution.¹¹⁵

In both cases, for Newman, was a misapprehension of man's animal nature. Man, he writes, is not an animal of reason but one of sense, affect, contemplation, and action, and it is precisely the role of religion in society to address—whether by educating, inspiring, or consoling—this basic ontological condition of the human, however modern he becomes. To treat man either as a being, with Peel, capable of satisfaction primarily through the exercise of ratiocination, or, with Bentham, as a being with basic animal needs and desires would be to confine man to one of two ontologically opposed corners that we recognize as classically Cartesian: the rational, abstract cogito, and the mechanical, corporeal animal. Newman's wager, however, is that man is characterized, in fact, by neither of these Cartesian absolutes in any exclusive fashion, and that the religious functions to address the ground in between, where the rational and animal meet in the midst of man's affective life. And this wager, one needed to justify the persistence of the church's "organic power" into a rapidly secularizing and regulated modernity, is (though Newman does not dwell on this point in these letters) one that opens up a further implication—the possibility of a feeling animal, an animal endowed with affective and, perhaps, even ethical agency.

Newman, of course, had a fairly rigid and uncharitable reading of Bentham's philosophy, which in other ways actually accorded well with his own social philosophy. He begins to admit as much when he writes, "Surely, there is something unearthly and

¹¹⁵ Newman, "Tamworth," 177.

superhuman in spite of Bentham; but it is not glory, or knowledge, or any abstract idea of virtue, but great and good tidings which need not here be particularly mentioned.” The problem for Newman was that Bentham’s idea of social welfare was not grounded on religious “virtue” and that spiritual romance was being disenchanted, reduced to a logic based only on the empirically evident. “Mr. Bentham's system has nothing ideal about it; he is a stern realist, and he limits his realism to things which he can see, hear, taste, touch, and handle. He does not acknowledge the existence of anything which he cannot ascertain for himself.”¹¹⁶ That is to say, for Newman, man has invisible spiritual desires beyond materially evident pleasures and pains. This also indexes for us the difference between Bentham’s intervention into animal ethics (as the first to ask whether animals could suffer) and what I am tracing as Newman’s incipient and theologically motivated animal ontology: it is not just a matter of alleviating an animal’s suffering (at the level of biopolitics), but of recognizing the possibility of interiority. More broadly, the difference between Bentham and Newman here further highlights the way in which Newman is departing from Cartesian dichotomies: the radical extension of ethical consideration to animals by Bentham’s utilitarianism is ultimately a quantitative extension (with “great and good tidings”), and the animal, its precarity now recognized, remains an *object* of ethical consideration;¹¹⁷ Newman’s theological approach, on the other hand, in granting the animal a certain amount of agency begins to qualitatively re-imagine it as not only an ethical *subject* but more pressingly as an *exemplary*

¹¹⁶ Newman, “Tamworth,” 164.

¹¹⁷ “It may come one day to be recognized,” writes Bentham in his seminal footnote, “that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate [of being gratuitously tormented]. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?” *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (2nd ed., 1823), ch. 17, n. 122.

subject to be imitated. We will see, moreover, that this move of exemplarity, from the quantitative to the qualitative, from an ontology of the *mechanical* and *reactive* animal to one of the *volitional* and *responsive*, seems to constitute, albeit only incipiently, an ethical event. For insofar as the animal comes to exemplify this move from determinism to freedom, this radical overturning of Cartesian absolutism, it becomes a resource for ethical imagination where once religion held sole domain.

Over the next two decades, Newman would continue to be a public and outspoken figure on the terrain of religious life in England, remaining at the forefront of a particular brand of, first, Anglicanism, and, finally, Catholicism that would polarize the national culture of Victorian society in a number of ways—foremost among which, perhaps, was the dramatic way in which the charisma, novel biblical hermeneutics, and homosocial organization of the Tractarians scandalized what was, at the time, the sedimentation of a strong, new sense of Victorian masculinity. James Eli Adams has shown how, in particular, the “muscular Christianity” associated with Charles Kingsley—often taken as a cultural pivot between older ideals of masculinity as a sort of spiritual discipline (espoused by Coleridge and Thomas Arnold, among others) and emerging Victorian norms of “unreflective bodily vigor”—was not only a response to but, in fact, deeply structured by the effeminate asceticism Kingsley, horrified, saw in the public personae of Newman and the Tractarians.¹¹⁸ The deep national divide between these two public currents of masculinity would explode, moreover, in a fiasco of letters between Kingsley and Newman, leading to the publication of Newman’s *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* in 1864 and turning public opinion back in Newman’s

¹¹⁸ James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1995), 17, 108. See also David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (London: J. Murray, 1961), 197-198.

favor.

Adams is right, of course, in tracing beneath the ecclesiological and national fissures between Newman and Kingsley a deeper and culturally broader anxiety over gender performance, and it is tempting to think, with some scholars, that Newman's preoccupation with education reform and Benthamism faded after the writing of the "Tamworth" letters, ceding priority to more politically charged battles with Kingsley and other staunchly Anglican public figures.¹¹⁹ But I would like to put more pressure on this hitherto more critically muted trope of the theological or rhetorical animal in the story of these tumultuous years—a trope that seems rooted in Newman's youthful Evangelicalism and which runs through his subsequent grapplings with secular modernity and popular Anglicanism alike, perhaps giving us more explanatory purchase on the eruption of dread so tactlessly showered upon him by Kingsley. There were a number of factors, after all, that set the stage for the Kingsley-Newman throwdown, both external and internal.

For concomitant with Newman's absorption into the Catholic church was, first, the steady establishment of evolutionary science, culminating in the 1859 publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, and, second, as an effect of the first, though perhaps more urgently, the growing movement among liberal theologians in the Broad Church Movement to reconcile the church with science—this coming to a head with the 1860 publication of *Essays and Reviews*, which, appearing only three months after Darwin's volume, ended up outselling it within two years.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, Newman's own biblical hermeneutics developed

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Jerry Coats, "John Henry Newman's 'Tamworth Reading Room': Adjusting Rhetorical Approaches for the Periodical Press," *Victorian Periodicals Review* (1991): 173–180. Though Newman returns swiftly with aplomb to his disdain for Liberalism and its affiliated reform programs in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*: see the bullet points of his "Note A."

¹²⁰ It took two decades for Darwin's *Origin* to sell as many copies—22,000—as *Essays and Reviews* did in two years. For fuller accounts of the immense and controversy-ridden public reception of *Essays*, see Adrian J.

further along recognizably Tractarian lines, though not without some surprising yet important detours into animal ethics as interpreted in Scripture. Kingsley's twinned investments in Anglicanism and natural history thus came to stand directly across from what he saw as a particularly problematic implication of the animal in a troublingly *unethical* theology—an implication that for Kingsley anchored the entire problem with Tractarianism more broadly. In such a context, I argue in this chapter, the animal came to figure not just a new scientific horizon of human experience vis-à-vis the natural world, but also, and often in the service of different politics of masculinity, the ethical viability of Christianity as such.

THE ECONOMY OF INSTINCT

Often honored as the book that ushered in the “Golden Age of children’s literature” in Britain, Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby* (1863) nevertheless seems to stand apart from many of its widely treasured and canonical successors—well-known texts that include Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), and A. A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926). Perhaps more than any of these texts, Kingsley’s *Water-Babies* traffics in a heavy didacticism: rarely does the reader make it through more than a few pages before either the narrator or a character of authority within the story offers up a warm and encouraging but nonetheless sharp moral or social observation. And indeed, didacticism was the natural element in which Kingsley—priest in the Church of England, active Chartist social reformer, university professor—swam, and also the characteristic mode for which he most often criticized. No less than George Eliot complained about Kingsley’s “perpetual hortatory tendency” in 1855, writing

Desmond and James Richard Moore, *Darwin* (New York: Norton, 1994), 500-523; and Ian Hesketh, *Of Apes and Ancestors: Evolution, Christianity, and the Oxford Debate* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 35.

that

If, however, Mother Nature has made Mr. Kingsley very much a poet and philanthropist, and a little of a savage, her dry-nurse Habit has made him superlatively a preacher: he drops into the homily as readily as if he had been “to the manner born”; and while by his artistic faculty he can transplant you into whatever scene he will, he can never trust to the impression that scene itself will make on you, but, true to his cloth, must always “improve the occasion.”¹²¹

Yet for all the weight of its didacticism, *The Water-Babies* remains Kingsley’s triumph, a lasting staple of children’s literature and his most popular publication.¹²² Distinguishing it from its predecessors in both children’s literature and the classical fable tradition of which it is also a part, *The Water-Babies* achieves a sort of winsomeness and charm that is not reducible to the Dickensian portrayal of Tom the chimney-sweeper’s plight, the lightness of Kingsley’s prose (we note that Kingsley, according to his wife Fanny, is supposed to have written the kernel of “the story of Tom” in half an hour), or its main resource: the sheer joy and delight that Kingsley takes in imparting his naturalist’s knowledge of all manner of creatures.¹²³ Rather, we could say that all these elements serve only to set up the text’s most sweeping gesture, which is the wink with which Kingsley’s narrator, in a number of moments, insists that the story has no moral. The novel ends—in a section ostentatiously headed “MORAL,” no less: “But remember always, as I told you at first, that this is all a fairy tale, and only fun and pretense; and, therefore you are not to believe a word of it, even if it is true.”¹²⁴

This chapter’s intention, of course, is not to explain in any positive fashion what

¹²¹ George Eliot, “Belles Lettres” review, *Westminster Review* 64.125 (1855): 289.

¹²² It remains, I believe, his only work still in print. But this is also indicative, of course, of the waning of Kingsley’s larger appeal: stemming largely from his outmoded theological appropriation of Darwin and chauvinistic imperialism both.

¹²³ The long tradition of beautiful and whimsical illustrations for *The Water-Babies* also surely accounts for much of its appeal.

¹²⁴ Charles Kingsley, *The Water-Babies: A Fairy for a Land-Baby* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 190.

makes this text stylistically winsome or what has given it its lasting appeal. But the marked bifurcation between Kingsley's two most predominant modes seems indicative, I contend, of an anxiety central to his own ethos—an anxiety over the imperative of masculine, Christian virtue and its relation to the animal through naturalist eyes. For if animality is an essential term in Kingsley's poetics of virtue and, vice versa, virtue an essential term in his poetics of animality, the pressing question is how to make both these terms attractive to his readership. On each front in the social and national arena, as naturalist and English clergyman, Kingsley faced considerable competition or ambivalence, and what we might call his particular ethos and style of winsomeness can be seen as a single strategy, dialectically synthesizing his personal investments in and fidelities to religious and naturalist practice, for responding to both these advances. *The Water-Babies* saw this to fruition most effectively.

On one front was Kingsley's anxiety over the general perception of naturalists. This is more than evident in *Glaucus*, his extended 1855 celebration of natural history named for the Greek fisherman-turned-sea-god, despite the fact that it was riding what could be justly called the high watermark of the British public's enthusiasm for natural history—a popularity largely due to the success of such books of natural history as Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) and Philip Henry Gosse's *Naturalist Rambles on the Devonshire Coast* (1853). *Glaucus*, which in fact began its life as an expansion of a review of a number of Gosse's books and was originally entitled "The Wonders of the Sea Shore," betrays this anxiety in its desire to consolidate and promulgate an image of the naturalist as a vigorous and virtuous outdoorsman by setting itself apart from two undesirable identities: the frivolous and faddish young woman, and the bookish, dense pedant.

Addressing the apparently paternal reader in the opening pages of *Glaucus*, Kingsley

in a single move coins the name for and dismisses a new fad among young women:

Your daughters, perhaps, have been seized with the prevailing ‘Pteridomania,’ and are collecting and buying ferns, with Ward’s cases wherein to keep them (for which you have to pay), and wrangling over unpronounceable names of species (which seem to be different in each new Fern-book that they buy), till the Pteridomania seems to you somewhat of a bore.¹²⁵

Diametrically opposed to this fad for ferns is Kingsley’s own approach to nature: where Pteridomania is domestic and constraining, natural history draws one out into the freedom of the great outdoors; where the former is portrayed as trivial and full of the folly of youth, the latter is aligned with paternal authority and wisdom; where the display of the former depended on Wardian glass cases, a costly commodity, the latter is appealing precisely because of its distance from market commerce of any kind—Kingsley condemns “a self-seeking and mammonite generation, inclined to value everything by its money price, its private utility” (234)—and because of its do-it-yourself ethic; where the former is seemingly trivial, ornamental, and subject to the whim of “each new Fern-book,” the latter is morally and spiritually weighty, steadfast in its connection to the eternal truth of God.

But this misogyny registers for Kingsley the triviality that continues to haunt the reputation of natural history just as much as older forms of natural history are represented within *Glaucaus* as the other identity to be fled—that of the pedant. “What a change from the temper of two generations since, when the naturalist was looked on as a harmless enthusiast, who went ‘bug-hunting,’ simply because he had not spirit to follow a fox!” (214). In fact the more reviled of the two identities, the pedant shares some of the same characteristics as the lady fern-enthusiast: firstly in a preoccupation with proliferating nomenclature, and secondly,

¹²⁵ Kingsley, *Glaucaus; or, The Wonders of the Shore*, collected in *The Water-Babies, and Glaucaus* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1908), 212.

and perhaps, as a corollary, a domesticated sort of fastidiousness that, in the exemplary case of Ruskin, serves only to limit the imagination.

See, close by is another shell bed, quite as large, but comely enough to please any eye. What a variety of forms and colors are there, amid the purple and olive wreaths of wrack, and bladder-weed, and tangle (oar-weed, as they call it in the south), and the delicate green ribbons of the *Zostera* (the only English flowering plant which grows beneath the sea), surely contradicting, as do several other forms, that somewhat hasty assertion of Mr. Ruskin, that nature makes no ribbons, unless with a midrib, and I know not what other limitations, which seem to me to exist only in Mr. Ruskin's fertile, but fastidious fancy. (242)

The science of natural history—especially its sub-branch of zoophytology—on the other hand, was supposed to release the imagination from its shackles, opening it out onto new vistas of biological splendor, but even here, it remains in danger of being seen as pedantic and trivial:

for from no branch of physical science has more been learnt of the *scientia scientiarum*, the priceless art of learning; no branch of science has more utterly confounded the wisdom of the wise, shattered to pieces systems and theories, and the idolatry of arbitrary names, and taught man to be silent while his Maker speaks, than this apparent pedantry of zoophytology, in which our old distinctions of 'animal,' 'vegetable,' and 'mineral' are trembling in the balance, seemingly ready to vanish like their fellows, 'the four elements' of fire, air, earth, and water. (227)

Just as the alchemy of previous epistemes, as elementary as it was originally, ossified and grew too unwieldy under the weight of seemingly arbitrary nomenclature, so the new science of natural history threatened to suffer the same fate in its "apparent pedantry." The alternative to such vitiating re-systematization, then, for Kingsley was to engage with nature aesthetically rather than systematically. Exemplified in the person of George Montagu, eminent author of the 1802 *Ornithological Dictionary*, the ideal naturalist would be possessed of "that 'seeing eye' of the true soldier and sportsman," the gift essential to making any naturalistic descriptions into "indelible word-pictures, instinct with life and truth" (231).

Kingsley goes on to quote the naturalist Edward Forbes on Montagu's writing: "'There is no questions,' says Mr. E. Forbes, after bewailing the vagueness of most naturalists, 'about the identity of any animal Montagu described... He was a forward-looking philosopher; he spoke of every creature as if one exceeding like it, yet different from it, would be washed up by the waves next tide. Consequently his descriptions are permanent'" (232).¹²⁶ Pitting the aesthetics of synchronic, perhaps even epiphanic, vision against durable systematicity, these "word-pictures"—which Kingsley goes on to perfect in his own right in *Glaucus* and *The Water-Babies*—ultimately resist any ethics of utility as well. Montagu's descriptions aspire to be particular to individual creatures, independent of any continuity that would obtain in a taxonomy of species, let alone genus, rendering in some sense the scientific utility of such descriptions void.

This aesthetics of naturalist practice is not confined to the *writing* of natural history, moreover: it informed Kingsley's entire conception of natural history—especially in his early but idiosyncratic embrace of evolutionary theory—drawing science into the realm of the Platonic. "And now, worshipper of final causes and the mere useful in Nature, answer but one question—Why this prodigal variety?" Beyond mere utility or the logical exfoliation necessity, evolution exists as the mechanism by which to make Nature fit an a priori aesthetic vision. "Of all unfathomable triumphs of design (we can only express ourselves thus, for honest induction, as Paley so well teaches, allows us to ascribe such results only to the design of some personal will and mind), what surpasses that by which scales on a butterfly's wing are arranged to produce a pattern of artistic beauty beyond all painter's skill? What a waste of power, on any utilitarian theory of nature!" (267). This aesthetic vision is

¹²⁶ The quotation is from Edward Forbes, *A History of British Starfishes, and Other Animals of the Class Echinodermata* (London: John Van Vorst, 1841), 46.

expressly that of a “Creative Mind,” which “gave life to new species, a development of the idea on which older species were created, in order that every mesh of the great net might gradually be supplied, and there should be no gaps in the perfect variety of Nature’s forms” (250).

So far so good, but Kingsley’s aesthetic theory of nature runs up against a tautological wall. To propose that evolution serves to “fill up each chasm in the scheme” (252), as it were, is of course to beg the question of what, or *whose* scheme, and *how* one is supposed to recognize that scheme. The familiar escape routes of theology allow Kingsley to skirt this question of natural beauty, though: he displaces the appreciation of nature in its sublime totality onto the Christian God, while at the same time adamantly denying any human agency in the particular construction of this aesthetics.

Mystery inexplicable on all theories of evolution by necessary laws, as well as on the conceited notion which, making man forsooth the centre of the universe, dares to believe that variety of forms has existed for countless ages in abysmal sea-depths and untrodden forests, only that some few individuals of the western races might, in these latter days, at least discover and admire a corner here and there of the boundless realms of beauty. Inexplicably, truly, if man be the centre and the object of their existence; explicable enough to him who believes that God has created all things for Himself, and rejoices in His own handiwork, and that the material universe is, as the wise man says, ‘A platform whereon His eternal Spirit sports and makes melody.’ (267)

The evacuation of aesthetic agency from human observers, reducing them to mere witnesses to a larger aesthetic project, only disavows the nearly transcendent authority Kingsley grants the eye of the naturalist as “the true soldier and sportsman.” This having of his cake and eating of it, too—all in the name of escaping an abjectly utilitarian, materialist, effeminate, and fastidious pedantry—begins to resemble what I will examine in a moment as the nineteenth-century phenomenon of virtuosity: for the naturalist is, unproblematically for Kingsley, both immanently *embedded* in the work (or “handiwork”) of an aestheticized natural

world and transcendently *outside* it all, able to fashion seemingly effortless representations of nature that, despite the avowed ever-changing evolutionary thrust of nature, are able to remain “permanent” and “indelible.”

This is not to say, however, that nature for Kingsley has nothing of utility about it. Rather, nature’s creatures are useful insofar, and only insofar, as their particular mode of utility matches up with their aesthetic function. The stony coral Madrepora, for example, “is by profession a scavenger, and a feeder on carrion; and being as useful as he is beautiful, really comes under the rule which he seems at first to break, that handsome is who handsome does” (261). The *Maja squinado* spider crab, which Kingsley christens a “true sanitary martyr,” is canonized not just for the beauty it brings to its immediate neighborhood in the sea by tidying it up, but even moreso for the virtuous way in which it goes about this beautification, for the “sublime simplicity of economy” of its labor, which cuts through and transcends all encumbering pedantries: “Happy Squinado! He needed not to discover the limits of his authority, to consult any lengthy Nuisances' Removal Act, with its clauses, and counter- clauses, and explanations of interpretations, and interpretations of explanations” (286).¹²⁷ We might recognize here, then, and in a number of other micro-descriptions and mini-fables throughout *Glaucus*, a sort of allegorical mode at work, albeit a mode that departs from more traditional conceptions of allegory. Here, in distinction to modes in which one-to-one correspondences between animals and theological precepts were arbitrary but tacitly accepted for their didactic force, the biological determinism active in the behavior of Kingsley’s animals allows one to collapse “ethics” and “aesthetics” into each

¹²⁷ Kingsley’s preoccupation with sanitary reform, perhaps his most lasting political contribution, is in this light most clearly understood as a political program prosecuted under an aesthetic aegis: society in *Glaucus* is envisioned as an aquarium, the cleanliness and ecological viability of which is gauged through an estimation of its beauty. *Glaucus*, 284.

other entirely and explicitly, the signified into the signifier, gaining, furthermore, a superadded didactic theological value because the perceived aesthetics and ethics tautologically confirm each other. The term that makes this equivalence possible, of course, is *instinct*.

But here is where the dichotomy between nature and naturalist that Kingsley has so assiduously been attempting to magnetize begins to collapse: if the ethical capacity of the naturalist is supposed to lie in his transcendence of the material, utilitarian, and effeminate, participating in nature only insofar as nature has already been pared down to a clean, pastoral, and masculinist vision of a “sublime simplicity of economy,” this is attainable only through some covert animalization of the naturalist himself. Yet Kingsley very markedly departs from some of his contemporaries when he downplays the actual process by which the naturalist apprehends the pertinent taxonomic characteristics of a specimen—perhaps precisely because an adequate description of the naturalist’s descriptive process would short-circuit his semantic field, revealing in one move both the degree to which the naturalist’s faculty of perception resembles something animal-like, and the pedantry necessarily involved in any description of that process. Indeed it’s difficult for us to imagine Kingsley describing the process of naturalist description in the way Forbes describes Montagu’s “seeing-eye” above; he in fact omits in his quotation a large portion of Forbes’ praise of Montagu, a portion whose language would be utterly out of place in Kingsley’s natural prose: “There is no question about the identity of any animal Montagu described. It is not merely the copiousness of his descriptions which gives them their peculiar value, though their fullness is a great merit; nor merely their perspicuity, though that is a still greater merit; but it is their logical character, that instinctive perception of the essential attributes and relations of each

species, which is the most important faculty a naturalist can possess.”¹²⁸ Rather, Kingsley demurs and names the naturalist’s descriptive faculty as “instinct” only once, and even then in passing, calling Montagu’s word-pictures “instinct with life and truth”: to expand on the significance of “instinct” here, to inquire into the ways in which the naturalist’s virtuosic apprehension of nature’s beauty and utility together is itself *animal*-like in its seeming naturalness or effortlessness, would risk being too pedantic. The double-bind of virtuosity thus leaves Kingsley with a skein of aporias in both his aesthetic theory of nature and his social ethics: the question of *how* the naturalist achieves his vision—artistically, cognitively—is left unanswered (Kingsley instead opting to elaborate on naturalism’s cultural and gender politics), just as the material conditions necessary for ethical action are either ignored or dismissed as too bureaucratic or pedantic (as in the spider crab mini-fable). In each case, virtuosity is constructed from a spurious amalgamation of ethics and aesthetics, of virtue and beauty, under the sign of instinct—which remains as a *minimal* marker of animality for the naturalist and the social reformer, serving wholly to elide the artistic or material labor necessary for any real aesthetic or ethical achievement.

ON TRUTH AND LYING IN AN EXTRA-HUMAN SENSE

Natural history, of course, was not the only area in which Kingsley was attempting to define virtue along the lines of the virtuosic. Quite publicly, various deployments of performative virtuosity were at the time being used to negotiate the “virtue”—whether theological or national—of competing religious institutions and movements, with Protestants tending to

¹²⁸ Forbes, 46. We might also note that Kingsley, by omitting this passage, stresses the individual particularities of creatures—attributes comfortably apprehended by what Forbes calls “copiousness” and “perspicuity” here—over the ideal and “instinctive” typology of species.

view both Tractarian and Roman Catholics with suspicion for what was perceived as an intentionally deceptive biblical hermeneutics and homiletics. The Tractarians in particular were immediately demonized as duplicitous for their notion of “reserve” in religious knowledge, “which entailed that the communication of religious belief might be adapted to the character of an audience; certain beliefs might be ‘economized,’ portions of them held in reserve.”¹²⁹ The faculty by which a priest might “adapt” religious knowledge to a particular audience was especially virtuosic and theatrical and required what Max Weber, in a sociological register, has called the “routinization of charisma,” or the mediation of what is portrayed as an individual personality’s transcendent access to divine knowledge and that knowledge’s collective and everyday, accommodated or adapted, propagation.¹³⁰ In an emergent Victorian milieu, moreover, these performances of virtuosity by Tractarians and Roman Catholics—in and alongside their homosocial structures and mystique of regimented secrecy in a culture already saturated by secret homosocial societies—became a fraught point of cathexis for public figures such as Kingsley interested in consolidating national ideals of muscular, Christian masculinity.¹³¹ Kingsley’s concern, though, with Tractarian and Roman Catholic reserve seems to have been broader than just an antagonistic anxiety over dissident masculinities. One of the more vocal critics of Tractarian hermeneutics, Kingsley made a number of scathing remarks in letters and novels in the 1840s and 50s about the movement’s “lawless allegorizing,” which “prevents men from accepting God’s promises in their literal sense, with simple childish faith, but drives them to spiritualize them away—i.e. to make

¹²⁹ Adams, 86.

¹³⁰ See Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth, C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 262.

¹³¹ See Adams, 100, for various examples of Victorian reactions to Tractarian reserve.

them mere metaphors, which are after all next door to lies!”¹³² Yet the frequency and intensity of his attacks, perhaps, suggest that Tractarian hermeneutics touched a nerve by coming too close to Kingsley’s own politics of virtuosity, which, we’ve seen, carry their own loaded sense of masculinity but which seem also to proceed out of a prior and stronger commitment to his aesthetic theory of nature.

As Kingsley explained to Newman in a letter eventually published in the latter’s *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, the text in question that had touched off the ensuing public fiasco between the two was Newman’s sermon “Wisdom and Innocence,” a meditation on Matthew x, 16: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”¹³³ The sermon as a whole considers the ethics of self-defense open to the marginalized subjects; for Newman, the salient limitation is the Christian imperative of non-violence:

Now, our Lord and Saviour did not forbid us the exercise of that instinct of self-defence which is born with us. He did not forbid us to defend ourselves, but He forbad certain modes of defence. All sinful means, of course, He forbad, as is plain without mentioning. But, besides these, He forbad us what is not sinful, but allowable by nature, though not in that more excellent and perfect way which He taught—He forbad us to defend ourselves by force, to return blow for blow.¹³⁴

But other modes of self-defense are expressly still available to those who cannot do otherwise:

Thus the servants of Christ are forbidden to defend themselves by violence; but they are not forbidden other means; direct means are not allowed them, but others are even commanded. For instance, *foresight*, “beware of men:” *avoidance*, “when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another:” *prudence*

¹³² Kingsley, *The Life and Works of Charles Kingsley* (London: Macmillan, 1901-1903), 1:138.

¹³³ The sermon was originally given in 1842 and later collected in *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day* (London: 1844), 261-271.

¹³⁴ Newman, *Sermons*, 261.

and skill, as in the text, “be ye wise as serpents.”¹³⁵

And so Newman makes an explicit analogy to animal ethology here: at the level of bare life, when no other means avail and with “direct means” out of the question, the marginalized, like “the inferior animals,” have recourse to the “indirectness” of artifice and deception:

But how were Christians to prevent them when they might not fight? I answer, they were allowed the arms, that is, the arts, of the defenceless. Even the inferior animals will teach us how wonderfully the Creator has compensated to the weak their want of strength, by giving them other qualities which may avail in their struggle with the strong. They have the gift of fleetness; or they have a certain make and colour; or certain habits of living; or some natural cunning, which enables them either to elude or even to destroy their enemies. Brute force is countervailed by flight, brute passion by prudence and artifice. Instances of a similar kind occur in our own race.¹³⁶

It is precisely this turn to animals to justify an ethics amenable to deception that sparks Kingsley’s ire. Commentators have, of course, tended to read the controversy of 1864 as representative of a larger national ideological conflict between Newman’s contemplative and ascetic Roman Catholicism and Kingsley’s masculinist liberalism (Adams’ sociological emphasis on the controversy’s politics of masculinity traces a particular intersection of emerging discourses within that conflict),¹³⁷ but any comprehensive reading of Kingsley’s ideology—and of Victorian culture more generally at this point in the nineteenth century, I’m arguing—must also take into account the degree to which natural history and

¹³⁵ Newman, *Sermons*, 261.

¹³⁶ Newman, *Sermons*, 260-261.

¹³⁷ For accounts of the 1864 spat in ideological terms, see Walter E. Houghton, “The Issue Between Kingsley and Newman,” in John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Norton, 1968), 390-409; and David Alderson, *Mansex Fine: Religion, Manliness and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Manchester University Press, 1998). Alderson’s reading downplays most of the political and ethical charges of the conflict, somewhat oddly reading the conflict as primarily an expression of Kingsley’s distaste for the degree to which Newman was *merely* departing from accepted cultural norms. This is a decidedly facile reading, especially in light of the fact that even as the controversy was being publicly fought out in 1864, observers were already casting the episode as representative of the age’s cultural forces. Thus Julia Wedgwood writes to Robert Browning in 1864 that “there is something wonderfully typical in the passage of arms between the Apostle of the flesh and the last of the Ascetics. Can you not fancy some future Strauss sublimating it into an allegorical representation of the tendencies of the age” (quoted in Houghton, 390).

evolutionary theory formed a sort of ethical through-line for these broader issues. Thus Newman's location of cunning and artifice *in animals* is too much for Kingsley, whose naturalism and theology together permit no sin or vice in the garden. As Kingsley wrote to his wife Fanny in 1856, natural history was his dearest pastime precisely because it gave him relief from "men's lies."¹³⁸ To suggest otherwise was for Kingsley tantamount to heresy, regardless of how much Scriptural proof Newman was able to muster. As he would put it in his pamphlet "What, Then, Does Mr. Newman Mean?": "I found a preacher bidding Christians imitate, to some undefined point, the 'arts' of the basest of animals and of men, even of the Devil himself."¹³⁹

Kingsley's position at this point in 1864, as theologically weighted as it is, is also representative of a longer Western philosophical tradition that, at least since Descartes, has relegated the animal to an ontology of "reaction" and necessity rather than one of "response" and freedom. The degree to which this dichotomy has been defined in terms of deception, or more precisely the capacity to deceive or dissimulate, has proven, moreover, to be a particularly sensitive pressure point for philosophy. For Lacan, for example, the animal must remain incapable of deception: it must remain mythically innocent; for this axiom that the animal partakes of a prelapsarian wholeness to which man is no longer privy founds Lacan's entire theory of language, law, and the symbolic. Or as Derrida critically summarizes: "Entry into the human order of the law presupposes this passive finitude, this infirmity, this lack from which the animal does not suffer. The animal does not know evil, lying, deceit. What it lacks is precisely the lack by virtue of which the human becomes subject of the

¹³⁸ Frances Eliza Grenfell Kingsley, ed., *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1890), 41.

¹³⁹ Kingsley, "What, Then, Does Mr. Newman Mean?", in Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. David J. DeLaura (New York: Norton, 1968), 316.

signifier, subject subjected to the signifier.”¹⁴⁰ Yet the tenability of maintaining such an absolute and indivisible frontier between reaction and response with respect to animal and humans reveals itself as more and more suspect in the degree to which it is insisted upon. When it comes to Lacan’s distinction again, for example, Derrida amply demonstrates how the rubric of the trace, of the ability to erase one’s own tracks or trace is an insufficient and suspect rubric for distinguishing between human and animal. To claim, with Lacan, that the animal only inscribes, imprints, and is incapable of erasing that trace and therefore incapable of deception, while man is capable of active deception, of erasing his own tracks, is ultimately to blithely ignore the fact that the act of erasure itself *always leaves its own trace*.¹⁴¹ Thus all instances of human language, of language at its most structurally “pure” in the form of fiction or deception, inevitably come to resemble the disavowed behavior of animals.

Derrida’s biting coup de grâce, of course, is to ask, “is it necessary, above all, to remind a psychoanalyst of that?”—a reminder that even, or especially, the expert is prone to self-blindness in the assiduous attempt to authorize one’s own philosophical conceits. In a similar fashion, Kingsley’s commitment to—or we might say *fidelity to*, in a more appropriately religious vein—the seeming natural innocence of both animals and proper Christians in his rejoinder to Newman ends up being both overblown and pedantic. Considered by most third-party contemporaries to be unfounded in the majority of its accusations and fairly unjustified in the extent of its rhetoric, Kingsley’s pamphlet found itself the easy prey of Newman’s gleeful self-defense, which almost condescendingly outwits Kingsley’s accusations at every turn.¹⁴² Most saliently, Newman finds Kingsley unable to

¹⁴⁰ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 130

¹⁴¹ Derrida, *The Animal*, 135-136.

¹⁴² R. H. Hutton, literary editor of the *Spectator*, considered Kingsley a “too helpless victim” of Newman’s

come to any definite conclusion as to whether Newman should most properly be dismissed as a fool or a knave.

[W]hen a man is said to be a knave or a fool, it is commonly meant that he is *either* the one *or* the other; and that—either in the sense that the hypothesis of his being a fool is too absurd to be entertained; or, again, as a sort of contemptuous acquittal of one, who after all has not wit enough to be wicked. But this is not at all what Mr. Kingsley proposed to himself in the antithesis which he suggests to his readers. Though he speaks of me as an utter dotard and fanatic, yet all along, from the beginning of his Pamphlet to the end, he insinuates, he proves from my writings, and at length in his last pages he only pronounces, that after all he was right at first, in thinking me a conscious liar and deceiver.¹⁴³

Yet this only serves to demonstrate one of the central assertions of Newman's sermon, which proposes something approaching a dialectic of innocence and cunning, in which a true pursuit of the former will be illegible to others and therefore often enough appear as the latter.

It is remarkable, however, that not only is harmlessness the corrective of wisdom, securing it against the corruption of craft and deceit, as stated in the text, but innocence, simplicity, implicit obedience to God, tranquility of mind, contentment, these and the like virtue are in themselves a sort of wisdom; I mean, they produce the same results as wisdom, because God works for those who do not work for themselves; and thus they especially incur the charge of craft at the hands of the world, because they pretend to so little, yet effect so much. This circumstance admits dwelling on.¹⁴⁴

This is certainly unthinkable for Kingsley, who, like Lacan, founds an entire ethics on a strict dichotomy between the vicious yet responsive human and the virtuous yet reactive animal.¹⁴⁵ This, however, does not stop Kingsley in the end from coming to resemble the

“undue scorn,” which was “more than adequate literary retribution.” Even better, the *Saturday Review* described Newman as both an “old lion” and a “serpent, erect, defiant, and pitiless, and hissing with scorn, when the hour of vengeance arrived and a helpless victim were within reach of his cruel fangs.” Quoted in Martin J. Svaglic, “Why Neman Wrote the *Apologia*,” in DeLaura, 376.

¹⁴³ Newman, “Mr. Kingsley's Method of Disputation,” in DeLaura, 344.

¹⁴⁴ Newman, *Sermons*, 261.

¹⁴⁵ And indeed, Newman himself was aware of how much his sermon confounded Kingsley's ideology, writing later in the *Apologia* that “Divine Wisdom had framed for its action laws, which man, if left to himself, would

animal more than the human in his rhetoric: what registers, ultimately, as the regrettable thoughtlessness of his attack on Newman is that which animalizes him, insofar as his words read less as a ethically-aware *response* and more as a purely automatic, affectively-motivated *reaction*.

In the same way, furthermore, that Kingsley's emphasis on the virtuosity of naturalists and socially-conscious citizens in *Glaucus* tacitly relies on a minimal marker of animalization ("instinct") in order to elide the (pedantic) aesthetic and ethical labor involved, here he disavows the cunning he sees in Newman's rhetorical virtuosity despite the fact that its central mechanism—Tractarian reserve or what Newman himself calls "expediency"—seems to echo Kingsley's own aesthetic "sublime simplicity of economy." In opposition to Newman, Kingsley's Christian morality relies on the innocent Edenic animal, free of cunning—and *only insofar* as the animal is innocent. Yet the tenor of Kingsley's writing has changed almost entirely at this point: not ten years after the successful and breezy winsomeness of *Glaucus*, Kingsley finds himself confronting in Newman the religious mirror of his beloved virtuosic naturalist, only to find himself embodying the pedantry he has all along been fleeing.

Hamera observes that the virtuosity of a performer, despite being a quality of exceptionality and individuality, is always relational, never operating "apart from communally

have antecedently pronounced to be the worst possible for its success, and which in all ages have been called by the world, as they were in the Apostles' days, 'foolishness'; that man ever relies on physical and material force, and on carnal inducements,—as Mahomet with his sword and his houris, or indeed almost as that theory of religion, called, since the Sermon was written, 'muscular Christianity'; but that our Lord, on the contrary, has substituted meekness for haughtiness, passiveness for violence, and innocence for craft; and that the event has shown the high wisdom of such an economy, for it has brought to light a set of natural laws, unknown before, by which the seeming paradox that weakness should be stronger than might, and simplicity than worldly policy, is readily explained." *Apologia* (1968), 237-238.

sanctioned ideals of appropriate, even virtuous, display.”¹⁴⁶ Always embedded in a social morality, virtuosity draws attention to both a performer’s “virtuous work and the transcendence of it,” simultaneously making visible the labor behind the performance and masterfully refining it into an effortless and natural polish. Thus performers who fail to display some sort of socially legible labor do not “earn” their virtuosity and remain too problematic for affective and social identification on the part of the audience.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, if one of the paradoxes intrinsic to virtuosity is its simultaneous accessibility and impossibility—“the ability to appear path-breakingly original in a way that is collectively obvious,” as Hamera puts it—then we might say that this paradox is located, at one end, in the ethical or moral, and at the other, in the aesthetic or stylistic. The virtuosic performance allows the audience to enter into identification at one end with the value of *work* and to exit at the other end, alienated by the impossible transcendence of that work performed for them. The force of this paradox, moreover, easily obscures the actual technical and mechanical work behind the performance, and is given to common mystifications, ultimately of a theological or fantastic nature: “Virtuosos are ‘angels,’ ‘devils,’ ‘heroes,’ ‘monsters,’ ‘magicians,’ and ‘machines,’ sometimes all at once.”¹⁴⁸

The performers with which Hamera is concerned are human dancers and musicians, of course, and their various mystifications bespeak both the fluid possibility and compelling appeal summoned by such embodied performances: fluid in the affective and ethical identifications, or virtue, available between humans; compelling in the way the virtuous labor

¹⁴⁶ Hamera, 753.

¹⁴⁷ Hamera’s example of the failed virtuoso is saxophonist Kenny G., whose position within the jazz community is particularly problematic for *not* conforming to standard plots in which a jazz musician “finds music” through “struggle,” for seemingly emptying his technical precision of the affective weight associated with idealized racial and class histories of jazz. Eschewing visible virtue and violating the ethos of jazz, he forfeits the title of virtuoso; 754.

¹⁴⁸ Hamera, 752.

is aestheticized. But as we've seen with Kingsley, the *animal* functions just as conveniently as a mystifying figure for the virtuoso. The virtuosic naturalist, the self-sufficient and civically-minded citizen—both of these positions are reified under the rubric of bestial instinct, and further validated and valorized by what we might recognize as a basic logic of the fable: for if these *mere animals* can fulfill their moral duty, what excuse have you? Perhaps *unlike* Hamera's virtuosic projections, however, the animal is also a particularly unstable figure for any sort of performative morality or ethics. To map, through "instinct," an ethical program onto an aesthetic theory of nature allows Kingsley, for example, to naturalize the Christian notion of "innocence," but this sort of correspondence ultimately runs up against biologically determined limits. Namely, what Newman acknowledges and Kingsley does not, is the natural state of precarity to which an animal's instincts are necessarily tied. Where Newman's exploration of the dialectic between wisdom and innocence takes into account the degree to which "inferior" and "defenseless" animals must resort to flight, prudence, and artifice, and, in a sense, proceeds entirely out of that position of compassion, Kingsley's program, despite his immense preoccupation with more miniscule forms of life and his attendant hope in *Glaucus* that a reverent zoophytology might "sweep away the sensuous idolatry of mere size," has no room for thinking about the ways in which even these smaller animals might be more prone to perishing. Precarity is subsumed and erased under his larger aesthetic vision of nature: the delicacy and fragility of zoophytes indexes less any biological precarity and more the fine touch of the Creator's painterly hand.¹⁴⁹ It is as if these creatures' mere existence were, for Kingsley, itself an act of theological virtuosity, the ethological and ecological means

¹⁴⁹ For accounts of zoophytology in Victorian culture more generally, and the way in which zoophytes in their tininess came to mediate liberal notions of individual and collective agency in particular, see Danielle Coriale, "When Zoophytes Speak: Polyps and Naturalist Fantasy in the Age of Liberalism," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 34.1 (2012): 19-36.

by which they otherwise survive spun away into an afterthought.

When forced to *deny*, then, the labor that might obtain in the precarious animal's survival and becoming-ethical, Kingsley's rhetoric—against its own intentions—makes its own labor visible as pedantry. As the unspoken mechanism we have been tracing through *Glaucus* and the 1864 controversy, we might speak of pedantry now as a style that indexes one sort of labor that fortifies an individual being in the face of precarity. The imperative to survive, to constitute oneself, thus asks to be described and articulated, despite efforts to erase it. Yet—and here we turn to the most remarkable aspect of Kingsley's career—what is surprising is not that Kingsley would in 1864 end up being too pedantic in his public conflict with Newman despite having written so vociferously against pedantry not ten years ago (we began by noting his larger reputation—e.g. in Eliot's review—for being too overbearing), but that he would not recognize the degree to which just a year prior, with the publication of *The Water-Babies*, he had essentially dreamed up an entire ethical heuristic built uniquely around something closely resembling (if not precisely reproducing) the bestial logic of pedantry.

MAKING THEM MAKE THEMSELVES

“You once accused me of being a pre-Darwinian,” responded Alain Badiou to an interviewer in 1997, as if just admonished from inheriting the wind; “this was an important objection in your view”—as if, to paraphrase the objection, the stakes of any intervention into contemporary ethics were, dogmatically, epochally, the biological or ontological continuity of humans and animals. Of course, continues Badiou in a materialist vein, “I don't think I am pre-Darwinian. I accept absolutely that man is an animal and, in a certain sense, nothing else.

From the point of view of what composes us, there is nothing except matter. Even a procedure of truth is never anything other than the seizing of materiality.”¹⁵⁰

Yet Badiou’s commitment to materialism is cognizant of its own horizons as well; a limit exists at which materialism ceases to be an adequate foundation for any ethics. This horizon has a theological character, and the event of its being crossed Badiou names “grace”:

Having said that, I do think that, *by grace*, this particular animal is sometimes seized by something that thought cannot manage to reduce strictly to the thought of animality as such. It is not a very different claim from the one a physicist will make by saying that, however mathematized physics becomes, there nevertheless remains a moment where it is experience or the experiment [*l’expérience*] which decides an issue, where everything is not reducible to that sole space exhaustively thought by pure mathematicity. As for truth, it’s the same thing - that is to say, it is thinkable only by that mortal animal which human beings happen to be.¹⁵¹

In other words, grace for Badiou is that ineffable stroke in time where experience surpasses the accountability of mere *quantitative* logic and becomes *qualitatively* distinct. This is the moment in which the animal ceases to be a Cartesian machine and not only attains a *cogito* of its own but becomes available to an ethics as well.

If there is no ethics ‘in general,’ that is because there is no abstract Subject, who would adopt it as his shield. There is only a particular kind of animal, convoked by certain circumstances to *become* a subject—or rather, to enter into the composing of a subject. This is to say that at a given moment, everything he is—his body, his abilities—is called upon to enable the passing of a truth along its path. This is when the human animal is convoked [*requis*] to be the immortal that he was not yet.¹⁵²

Out of this initial proposition Badiou develops an ethics of truth: the subject of which is called to a certain “fidelity” or “perseverance” to his founding event, whether that event be a political revolution, an epistemic shift in a science, or the moment a person falls in love with

¹⁵⁰ Badiou, *Ethics*, 132-133.

¹⁵¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 133.

¹⁵² Badiou, *Ethics*, 40.

another. And, moreover, despite the fact that Badiou goes to pains to distinguish his conception of grace from that of Christian writers, his coming-into-language or coming-into-law of the animal, “the passing of truth along its path,” remains theological or religious in its barest logic and thus lines up to some degree with what we have been pursuing in the discursive clash between Kingsley and Newman insofar as the stakes for these last two comprise the visibility of labor and acknowledgement of precarity behind any becoming-ethical of the animal, and by analogy, the Christian subject.¹⁵³

Kingsley’s *Water-Babies*, written in 1863, is the story of a soot-covered “little chimney sweep” named Tom, whom we find at the beginning of his story spending half his time laughing and half his time crying under the abusive hand of his sorry, drunken master Grimes. As the protagonist of Kingsley’s most compelling satire and critique of contemporary Victorian society, Tom is an exemplary, nearly Dickensian subject of precarity, whose journey through the fantastic world of the water-babies is designed by Kingsley to highlight and satirize the vices of a society alienated from the inherent virtues of the natural world. Towards this end, Tom’s challenge, *Bildung*, and ethical triumph—which commences after he runs away, somewhat ambiguously drowns, and is transformed into a water-baby—is to eventually be tasked with selflessly finding and coming to the aid of Grimes, who is by the end of the story incarcerated in a chimney in the infernal asylum at “the Other-end-of-Nowhere.” Along the way, as a water-baby, he encounters a full panoply of different fabular creatures—caddis flies, otters, lobsters galore—and the mythical fairy godmothers Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, and Mother Carey, each of whom either teaches or reflects a different step in Tom’s ethical education. Once Tom finally finds and,

¹⁵³ See Badiou, 122-124.

without any thought of his past grievances, helps to free Grimes, he is returned to his beloved Ellie (now both grown adults) and swiftly socialized, quickly becoming “a great man of science.”

What makes *The Water-Babies* innovative, of course, is not necessarily its naturalist content, its sheer imagination, or even its extended social commentary (much of which appears in eruptions of Rabelaisian editorializing that satirize Kingsley’s hated pedants), but the way in which Kingsley’s commitment to the veracity of evolutionary theory and his by-now well-developed aesthetic theory of nature rivet an ethical Bildung to a fantastic and whimsical vision of natural metamorphosis and progression. An early supporter of evolutionary theory and a fanboy of Darwin especially, Kingsley’s particular tack into the new science was nevertheless idiosyncratic and a tad obtuse. In his first letter to Darwin in 1859 (having had access to an advance copy of the *Origin* only a few days before its publication), he offers a somewhat shorthand and generalized account of the aesthetic theory he set forth five years earlier in *Glaucus*; though where he previously credited the “Creative Mind” with assuring the absolute continuity and aesthetic consistency of “Nature’s forms,” Kingsley here transfers that credit to the mechanisms of evolution and natural selection: “I have gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conception of Deity, to believe that He created primal forms capable of self-development into all forms needful *pro tempore* and *pro loco*, as to believe that He required a fresh act of intervention to supply the *lacunas* which He Himself had made. I question whether the former be not the loftier thought.”¹⁵⁴ Three years

¹⁵⁴ 18 November 1859. Darwin would include a slightly modified version of Kingsley’s words in the second edition of *Origin*, as a counterexample to contentions that his theory of natural selection and religious convictions were incompatible: “I see no good reason why the views given in this volume should shock the religious feelings of any one. A celebrated author and divine has written to me that ‘he has gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conception of the Deity to believe that He created a few original forms capable of self-development into other and needful forms, as to believe that He required a fresh act of creation to supply

later, and one year before writing *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley would extend the umbrella of “Nature’s forms” to include even mythological characters:

I want now to bore you on another matter. This great gulf between the quadrumana & man; & the absence of any record of species intermediate between man & the ape. It has come home to me with much force, that while *we* deny the existence of any such, the legends of most nations are full of them. Fauns, Satyrs, Inui, Elves, Dwarfs—we call them one minute mythological personages, the next conquered inferior races—& ignore the broad fact, that they are always represented as more bestial than man, & of violent sexual passion.¹⁵⁵

The “force” of this rationale for Kingsley—that evolution might also explain the existence of mythological creatures as intermediary forms—is the same force behind the real and imaginary menageries of *The Water-Babies*: i.e. that these forms need to exist not just for the sake of completeness but also because the possibility of their existence is simply too beautiful to pass up. Kingsley’s hypothesis in this letter is, we should note, at once both fairly laughable and expressive of a violent discourse of racial supremacy and genocide,¹⁵⁶ but comes, seemingly, to be somewhat constrained one year later in *The Water-Babies*—and largely as the result of the degree to which, by wisely scaling down the narrative of aesthetically-determined evolutionary progress from the level of race to the level of the individual ethical subject, Kingsley admits something of the animal into the human.¹⁵⁷

As in *Glaucus* and these letters to Darwin, *The Water-Babies* traffics deeply in an aesthetic theory of natural development as its structuring metaphysics and cosmology. Over and against the pedantic stuffiness of “Professor Ptthmlnsprts,” for example (“a very great

the voids caused by the action of His laws.” See Darwin, *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Sydney Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 7:379-380; and *Origin*, 353.

¹⁵⁵ Letter to Darwin, 31 Jan 1862, in Darwin, *Correspondence*, 10:63.

¹⁵⁶ In the same letter, Kingsley goes on to propose the explanatory force of natural selection for the absence of mythological creatures in England, presumably, where “[o]ur race was strong enough to kill them out while it was yet savage.” The English race is immediately contrasted to the African: “We are not niggers, who can coexist till the 19th. century with gorillas a few miles off.”

¹⁵⁷ Though we would be remiss not to nod, at this point, at Jamaica Kincaid’s story “Wingless.”

naturalist, and chief professor of Necrobioneopaleonthydrochtonanthropopithekology in the new university which the king of the Cannibal Islands had founded”), and his skepticism concerning the existence of water-babies, Kingsley champions Ellie’s utter and stirring conviction: “Ah, you dear little Ellie, fresh out of heaven! When will people understand that one of the deepest and wisest speeches which can come out of a human mouth is that—‘It is so beautiful that it must be true’” (85). The epistemology of truth here, granting aesthetics a temporal and causal priority over empirical veracity, is even more emphatically active in the metaphysical mechanism that allows Tom’s moral development to be expressed morphologically:

For then the great fairy Science, who is likely to be queen of all the fairies for many a year to come, can only do you good, and never do you harm; and instead of fancying, with some people, that your body makes your soul, as if a steam engine would make its own coke; or, with some other people, that your soul has nothing to do with your body, but is only stuck into it like a pin into a pincushion, to fall out with the first shake;—you will believe the one true,

orthodox,	inductive
rational,	deductive,
philosophical,	seductive,
logical,	productive,
irrefragable,	salutary,
nominalistic,	comfortable,
realistic,	
and on-all-accounts-to-be-received	

doctrine of this wonderful fairy tale; which is, that your soul makes your body, just as a snail makes his shell. (47-48)

Thus Tom’s transformation into a water-baby in the first place is explained as his fresh start, and his transformation into a sea urchin indicative of his guilty soul after having indulged his gluttonous taste for sea-lollipops.

Yet Tom’s gradual development and transformation from his ethical nadir as urchin

(“the very saddest part of all my story,” the narrator calls it) to socialized liberal subject presents a tricky impasse for Kingsley. For if Tom’s ethical Bildung is tied to the biological determinism of evolutionary development, then it runs up against the limit presented by what this chapter has traced as Kingsley’s theological commitment to the “innocence” of animals and Christians alike, which presupposes and depends on a certain animal lack of volition or intentionality, or perhaps what we might call an auto-opacity. Possessed only of an instinct evacuated of what Kingsley would deem “cunning,” the animal lacks the capacity to learn and develop intentionally, stuck forever in a linear and, for all intents and purposes, mechanical execution of its predetermined function in the grand aesthetic scheme of nature. But here Kingsley is caught: for if this were all that were the case, Tom would have no method of ethical development available to him apart from brute coercion. Kingsley, however, is careful to distance Tom’s pedagogy from any such coercive tactics: most clearly indicative here of what Colleen Glenney Boggs has identified as nineteenth-century liberalism’s identification of children with animals, Kingsley’s “muscular Christianity” is here transmuted into a gentler, more passive approach—one most clearly spelled out when Tom steals Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid’s lollipops:

But what did the strange fairy do when she saw all her lollipops eaten?

Did she fly at Tom, catch him by the scruff of the neck, hold him, howk him, hump him, hurry him, hit him, poke him, pull him, pinch him, pound him, put him in the corner, shake him, slap him, set him on a cold stone to reconsider himself, and so forth?

Not a bit...

Did she question him, hurry him, frighten him, threaten him, to make him confess? Not a bit....

No. She leaves that for anxious parents and teachers (lazy ones, some call them) [...] But perhaps the way of beating, and hurrying and frightening, and

questioning, was not the way that the child should go; for it is not even the way in which a colt should go if you want to break it in and make it a quiet serviceable horse. (122-123)

“*Not even the way* in which a colt should go”: Tom, who himself was “very near being turned into a beast once or twice” (136), is entitled to a more humane form of discipline, but as a near-beast, a child, and a chimney sweep, his options are limited in light of Kingsley’s convictions concerning their ethical self-sufficiency. Yet, despite the fact that Kingsley will in a year retch against Newman’s validation of one form of ethical labor (cunning) as a means of self-defense and –authorization for the marginalized and precarious subject, *The Water-Babies* finds itself, ultimately and somewhat surprisingly, homing in on a related though hitherto unarticulated form of ethical labor and pedagogy that manages to tread the uncertain waters between the education of a self-possessed and freely responsive liberal subject and the violent and coercive discipline reserved for unruly beasts.

Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid’s punishment for Tom—merely letting him feel guilty and ashamed for his gluttonous theft while continuing to give him lollipops—is the first step in Tom’s ethical development and a familiar form of self-reinforcing moral education. Tom’s most significant challenge in *The Water-Babies*, however, the selfless rescue of his abusive master Grimes, ultimately requires a more drastic pedagogical strategy within Kingsley’s developmental scheme. Mother Carey, the final and most important of the fairy godmothers, utilizes a pedagogy of indirection continuous with Mrs. Bedonbyasyoudid’s, but with a formulation at once more explicit and more opaque.

“I heard, ma’am, that you were always making new beasts out of old.”

“So people fancy. But I am not going to trouble myself to make things, my little dear. I sit here and make them make themselves.”

“You are a clever fairy, indeed,” thought Tom. And he was quite right.

That is a grand trick of good old Mother Carey's, and a grand answer, which she has had occasion to make several times to impertinent people.

There was once, for instance, a fairy who was so clever that she found out how to make butterflies. I don't mean sham ones; no: but real live ones, which would fly, and eat, and lay eggs, and do everything that they ought; and she was so proud of her skill that she went flying straight off to the North Pole, to boast to Mother Carey how she could make butterflies.

But Mother Carey laughed.

"Know, silly child," she said, "that any one can make things, if they will take time and trouble enough: but it is not every one who, like me, can make things make themselves." (154-155)

The theology of things being made to make themselves: Kingsley here evinces an awareness, finally, of the "time and trouble enough" required and made invisible by virtuosic acts that otherwise appear self-generating or –sufficient. This theological fantasy of auto-pedagogy is sustained within the expressly fantastic conditions of the fairy tale: thus when we get to the asylum holding Grimes at the Other-end-of-Nowhere, his guard is a self-animated and speaking police truncheon that, in response to Tom's query concerning the absence of a policeman, replies with an echo of Mother Carey's words: "Because we are not like those clumsy-made truncheons in the land-world, which cannot go without having a whole man to carry them about. We do our own work for ourselves; and do it very well, though I say it who should not" (179).

But how is Tom, in a world where the virtue of *work* is accomplished only by magical means, to do the same? To be made to make himself as this truncheon believes itself to have done—or as, for example, *Glancus'* much-championed spider-crab? This is Tom's question to Mother Carey, and the question implicitly presented in Kingsley's work more generally. Where *The Water-Babies* departs, however, from the rest of Kingsley's writing before and after, is in its commitment to making plain the labor and precarity behind virtue; no longer

the transcendent and virtuosic act of the soldier or sportsman, ethics is now something more readily facilitated by the canine instinct.

“But what am I to do, ma’am? For I can’t keep looking at you when I am somewhere else.”

“You must do without me, as most people have to do, for nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of their lives; and look at the dog instead; for he knows the way well enough, and will not forget it. Besides, you may meet some very queer-tempered people there, who will not let you pass without this passport of mine, which you must hang round your neck and take care of; and, of course, as the dog will always go behind you, you must go the whole way backward.”

“Backward!” cried Tom. “Then I shall not be able to see my way.”

“On the contrary, if you look forward, you will not see a step before you, and be certain to go wrong; but, if you look behind you, and watch carefully whatever you have passed, and especially keep your eye on the dog, who goes by instinct, and therefore can’t go wrong, then you will know what is coming next, as plainly as if you saw it in a looking-glass.” (155)

It is not, significantly, Tom’s own dog-like instinct that leads him to his final ethical crux; he must himself follow clumsily, ploddingly, backwards, pedantically. This is underlined by Mother Carey’s follow-up fable of Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus. In Kingsley’s version of the story, Epimetheus is a plodding, foolish pedant, who—named for hindsight—“always looked behind him, and did not boast at all; but said humbly, like the Irishman, that he had sooner prophesy after the event” (156). Prometheus being ever the too-quick fellow and Epimetheus “a clod, and a muff, and a milksop, and a slowcoach, and a bloke, and a boodle, and so forth,” the latter only ever makes good in life through due diligence and the help of his wife Pandora (whose box and myth Kingsley transforms into a tale of hope and fidelity: the frivolous women of *Glaucois* are given more thoughtful treatment here). It is Epimetheus who, no longer *despite of* but *because of* his fumbling, goes on to become a successful inventor, scientist, and man of industry while Prometheus is chained to his

mountain. And where instinct was provisionally, hesitantly, the mark of the naturalist's ethos and virtuosity in *Glaucus*, the one animalistic capacity that Kingsley was at pains to admit into the naturalist's quiver, it comes further downstage in *The Water-Babies*, though now with its duration, labor, and cost on full display.

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In this fable of love, of Tom learning to go to great selfless lengths for his former oppressor, in this fable of innocence, beauty, and pedantry, a faith—or more precisely, a fidelity—adheres in the midst of uncertainty. Both this fidelity and this uncertainty are, as always in Kingsley, a matter of aesthetics and ethics at the same time. The uncertainty is an uncertainty concerning many things: the scale of the challenge (for Tom is but a boy despite being sent to save a man in hell; for the naturalist must pretend to transcendence in the face of all creation); the precarity of one's self and one's work (for both Tom and the naturalist's sketch are prey to the waves); the simple question of where to go next in uncharted territory (for who is left more unmoored? Tom as water-baby or Kingsley in the wake of Darwin?). The fidelity is always to the animal world: Tom is to follow his dog to the Other-end-of-Nowhere with as much assiduousness as the naturalist describes his specimen. But it is even more evident, at least in *The Water-Babies*, that an uncertainty adheres in the heart of fidelity as well. For even in the ceding of primacy to animal *instinct*, one is still left blind and largely helpless; one is *not* the master of one's self. And yet, in this precarity and incoherence, one still finds a way to maintain ethical relationality.

To love, then, is relate freely but without freedom, to give oneself ethically as a free

gift, but without fully knowing why or how. Love irrupts, as Badiouian event, into that space binding the quantitative mathematics of necessity, repetition, and reaction, and the qualitatively different mode of freedom and response; it is always the sum total *and* excluded in-between remainder of the being that is stuck, unable to move forward out of ignorance, fear, innocence, or weakness, and the being who has possessed itself as Self, free, intentional, and secure. Love names *both* the laborious movement of the animal emerging assertively into the language and laws of ethical relationality *and* the human being needing to have its animal precarity acknowledged.

“We could wish ourselves to be wholly perspicacious beings,” writes Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. “But that would be to disavow infancy, dependency, relationality, primary impressionability; it would be the wish to eradicate all the active and structuring traces of our psychological formations and to dwell in the pretense of being fully knowing, self- possessed adults. Indeed, we would be the kind of beings who, by definition, could not be in love, blind and blinded, vulnerable to devastation, subject to enthrallment.”¹⁵⁸ To insist too much, moreover, on one’s own self-sufficiency not only closes one’s own heart to love (and hate, and indifference) from others but also devalues the other’s love: “If we were to respond to injury by claiming we had a ‘right’ not to be so treated, we would be treating the other’s love as an entitlement rather than a gift.” Indeed, love would become less a gift than an essentially contractual obligation.

For Butler, who is here expanding upon one of Adorno’s fragments in *Minima Moralia*, this double-bind of love raises the question of what, ethically, comprises “humanity”: “It is possible to read this as a paralyzing contradiction, but I think that this is

¹⁵⁸ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 102.

not what [Adorno] means to imply. Rather, it is a model of ethical capaciousness, which understands the pull of the claim and resists that pull at the same time, providing a certain ambivalent gesture as the action of ethics itself. One seeks to preserve oneself against the injuriousness of the other, but if one were successful at walling oneself off from injury, one would become inhuman. In this sense, we make a mistake when we take self-preservation' to be the essence of the human, unless we accordingly claim that the 'inhuman' is constitutive of the human. One of the problems with insisting on self-preservation as the basis of ethics is that it becomes a pure ethics of the self, if not a form of moral narcissism. Persisting in the vacillation between wanting to claim a right against such injury and resisting that claim, one 'becomes human.'"¹⁵⁹

Plunging ahead with Adorno, it eventually becomes clear that any concept of humanity cannot be founded on an ethics of self-preservation, –assertion or *will*. For all attempts to construct a morality or ethics, something that holds to self-criticism and confesses one's own fallibility—that is, what we recognize as one's own "humanity"—is nevertheless to erect some sort of persistent, stable, and unerring kernel, even if that is merely the consciousness of one's own fallibility. Standing apart from this human fallibility, furthermore, this kernel is properly inhuman, straining towards the survival of human precarity, becoming itself a pure expression of self-preservation. "It becomes difficult here to condemn violent impingement upon the will without espousing the will as the defining condition of the human."¹⁶⁰ A consistent ethics of human precarity and weakness, then, has to find a way that does not inevitably lead it back to an ethics of strength and self-possession; or, as Adorno puts it, "Love you will find only where you may show yourself

¹⁵⁹ Butler, *Giving an Account*, 103.

¹⁶⁰ Butler, *Giving an Account*, 107.

weak without provoking strength.”¹⁶¹

Where, however, Butler at this point sees the need to move from an individualist ethics of preservation or will (premised on assertion, conviction, and so on) to a social ethics of responsibility, I would like to end this chapter by dwelling briefly on the ethical unit of auto-opacity, on the blindness always attendant in love or any radical relationality—as the unit of individual ethics immediately prior to its expansion into the domain of the social. For this is, in the end, Kingsley’s most durable insight: not the confident consolidation of a muscular Christianity in the face of epistemic uncertainty but the retrieval of that uncertainty for a mode of ethical self-discipline and development. Kingsley’s early acceptance and championing of Darwinian theory, after all, was neither exceptional nor exemplary; if anything, it folded only too well into his existing ideology. Rather, the possibilities opened up by evolutionary theory, in which an animal (species) could by a process of selection determined by the interplay of large-scale environmental factors and individual-level physiological and behavioral traits, stir Kingsley to conceive, if only once, of a scheme in which the *labor* of a single being striving to become virtuous is no longer out of place but aesthetically harmonious with the whole. This is accomplished through the internalization of uncertainty, blindness, or opacity *into* a *Bildung* of ethical development—an opacity that is not only tolerated but transformed into a matter of trust or faith, fidelity, to the environmental processes of the natural and animal world.

Being made to make oneself: thus the baldly self-mystifying formulation encapsulates not just the logic of Kingsley’s ethics here, in which the labor of becoming-ethical is foregrounded *in* its animal obscurity; but also the logic of winsomeness more generally.

¹⁶¹ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 192.

Conscious of the story's charming style, Kingsley's narrator repeatedly insists that, despite the moral seriousness of Tom's predicament and journey, "this is all a fairy tale, and only fun and pretense; and, therefore you are not to believe a word of it, even if it is true" (190). Just as Mother Carey makes Tom make himself ethical by absenting herself *as cause*, so the novel itself, ostensibly written for children, seeks to erase its moral authority at the very moment when its generic predecessor—the classical fable—would customarily have gruesomely thrust forth its didactic head. *Winsomeness*, then, and perhaps its aesthetic cousin *grace*, are thus recognizable as a stylistic equivalent to Badiou's "laicized grace," or, the mathematically inexplicable event by which a being becomes an ethical subject, seemingly and virtuosically all of a sudden—"in a flash, at a trumpet crash" as Hopkins would put it—despite *and* in light of the extensive, opaque, and perhaps unpromising work that might have already been done.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Hilary Schor, in her fantastic reading of *Alice in Wonderland*, suggests that that other foundational work of Victorian children's literature is best understood not merely as a work of fantasy but as a meditation on the uncanny *at the heart of* the realist tradition (a tradition that is for Lewis Carroll, Schor incidentally points out, constructed with the accuracy of the naturalist). This formulation might help us express our reading of *The Water-Babies* with more economy while situating it in its larger literary context: where *Alice in Wonderland* engages with the uncanniness of the realist novel through the eyes of a young child by examining the effects of erasing the genre's claim to epistemological authority, *The Water-Babies* examines the effects of hiding the genre's claim to *didactic* and *ethical* authority. See Hilary Schor, *Curious Subjects: Women and the Trial of Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 71.

II.

ANIMALS FEELING THEMSELVES OUT:

WOOLF'S TYPOLOGY

And what greater delight and wonder can there be than to leave the straight lines of personality and deviate into those footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live those wild beasts, our fellow men?

—"Street Haunting: A London Adventure"

How strange it is to be anything at all.

—Neutral Milk Hotel, "In the Aeroplane Over the Sea"

FIRST FABLE

As far as Kipling parodists go, Virginia Woolf probably doesn't rank very far up the imagined list. Though Kipling appears intermittently in Woolf's writing throughout her career, one wants to believe, initially, that these hauntings index more Kipling's ubiquitous presence in British popular culture than any pointed interest on Woolf's part. Nevertheless, despite already being at odds with Kipling aesthetically and politically, a young Woolf in 1906 composed a fragmentary sketch that begins as a droll, but unmistakable, pastiche of *The Jungle Books*:¹⁶³

Ha ha, laughed [Rustafa?], eat quick grey brother; as the old Baboon,
[Gonazo?], will come [soon?] for his share....

¹⁶³ Woolf's first collected essay, originally published in the *Guardian* on 14 December 1904, castigates Kipling's treatment of men "doing animals." Review of "The Son of Royal Langbrith," *E* 1:3-5.

They left nothing but sucked rind when they had done; and went leaping and swinging, through the maze of trees; Rustafa now leading and now [Mustizi?], till it seemed that they were following the curves of some [?] swift dance. [You?] might hear their bubbling laughter as they flew' and many sleepy and aged apes, turned round on their branches to grumble and curse because their rest had been disturbed.¹⁶⁴

Collected as “The Monkeys,” the sketch’s initial style bears all the well-known hallmarks of Kipling’s Mowgli stories: anthropomorphized animals who speak to each other with gravely laconic, vaguely biblical diction; their whimsical but memorably exotic names; the narration’s patent glee in following the beasts as they swing playfully through the jungle; the humor of seeing wild beasts domesticated into an amusing grumpiness. The sketch also gestures, like Kipling’s fables, towards social commentary, obliquely and abruptly (it’s difficult to ascertain anything more, given its fragmentary nature) comparing the monkeys’ melon breakfast to those of humans in Paris and London. But Woolf pulls quickly away from this style. Our primate friends soon cease to speak, and then to Kipling’s world Woolf soon adds a new sense of architecture, of color, and of intensity. The topmost layer of the treetops becomes a structured roof; the very melons the monkeys eat now contain “the arches and spandrels of the dome” (*CSF* 324). Unlike the Bandar-log of *The Jungle Books*, who are the most despised beasts in Kipling’s moral schema, Woolf’s monkeys eschew all decadence. They take precise advantage of their architectural environment, the jungle’s vibrant aesthetics not at all dissipating but channeling a hard, almost Miltonic, violence forged out of ecological precarity:

The sky rose bare and steep on every side; and the dark colour at the base, slowly kindled higher up to blue, and ran rapidly through all the shades of colour till at the dome it burnt so deeply and fiercely and with such

¹⁶⁴ Virginia Woolf, “[The Monkeys],” in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, 2nd edition, ed. Susan Dick (Orlando: Harcourt, 1989), 324-325 (hereafter cited as *CSF*). The reproduction as quoted here reflects editorial readings of the original holograph.

concentrated fury that one took the sun in the midst for the sudden rays of flame into which the sky had burst....

The green flashed light and dark as the leaves were stirred; and the long palm leaves seemed as swords of green steel, flashing in the hands of innumerable squadrons. But for their protection, advanced thus day after day till the fire had scorched them brown, the monkeys and every creature moving in the depths beneath would be burnt alive. The monkeys knew of the great battle that was daily fought: they could not have been such swift powerful creatures had they not moved always in an air of fierce conflict and crisis. The shock of the great forces seemed to charge their bodies also. (*CSF* 324-25)

Surprisingly anticipating the more mature style to which Woolf will not really return until after her first two novels, the intertextual relationship of “The Monkeys” to the most prominent beast fables of the late nineteenth century expresses a central insight concerning the formal literary treatment of animals that, I argue, structured much of Woolf’s work to come, whether explicitly preoccupied with animals or otherwise. Namely, that any commentary on ethics (whether specific to human relationships or radically cross-species) explored through animal figurations loses its explanatory power when *too close a connection* is posited between humans and animals. A snapshot of Woolf’s poetics in the midst of its development, the sketch dramatizes the limits of projecting the ethical negotiations that inhere in human sociality onto the zoological. The mention of “breakfast tables” in “Paris and London” being manned “at a later hour” draws our attention to the careless ease with which humanity has departed from vital diurnal rhythms (again, a contrast emphasized by Woolf’s recuperation of Kipling’s Bandar-log), but the monkeys’ conversation is too wry to provide any real sense of the jungle’s underlying state of precarity. The cozy humor of one monkey warning the other to eat his share before a third consumes the rest belies the martial vision of scarcity—and imitable vigor—the sketch’s second half so emphatically paints for us. Kipling’s beasts burn fierce enough, Woolf seems to be saying, but the coziness of their

representation *as characters* vitiates the more compelling intensities of nature. Another ethical interface is called for, and so Woolf's style takes off in a new direction.

OUT OF CHARACTER

Recent animal-studies and posthumanist approaches to Woolf have by and large taken at face value the various anthropomorphisms that are found throughout her writing, treating essentially fabular constructions in Woolf as if they described viable modes of ethical interaction between humans and animals. Most have focused most prominently and understandably on *Flush*, Woolf's popular 1933 "biography" of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's pet cocker spaniel. In this, her lengthiest exploration of nonhuman subjectivity, Woolf narrates a period of the Brownings' life from Flush's canine perspective. Alice Kuzniar, in her work on the affective powers of human-dog relationships, notes the irony of Woolf's device yet celebrates Woolf's account of the therapeutic potential of canine intimacy.¹⁶⁵ Derek Ryan, more recently, names "four key moments where Flush and Miss Barrett gaze at each other," claiming that Woolf describes Flush as possessed with some degree of freedom and agency (as opposed to merely reacting, as if a mere Cartesian automaton); for Ryan, Flush's face and eyes mark a legible site of subjectivity.¹⁶⁶ Both Kuzniar and Ryan read against earlier tendencies in Woolf criticism that pass over Woolf's interest in animality by treating *Flush* as "a little joke" (Woolf's words) or by reducing the pet to an avatar for feminist writing, class oppression, psychological repression, or even the politics of canonicity itself.¹⁶⁷ Yet if we accept Woolf's anthropomorphization of Flush as an exemplary moment

¹⁶⁵ Alice A. Kuzniar, *Melancholia's Dog* (U Chicago Press, 2006), 120-123.

¹⁶⁶ Derek Ryan, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 143-150.

¹⁶⁷ Woolf, in a December 1932 letter. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne

of modernist cross-species identification, we continue to miss a different ethical operation that animates the rest of Woolf's writing and to much more important effect: that of animalizing the human in a more or less fabular mode.

What sets the classical fable apart from cognate modes such as allegory or fantasy, after all, is its foundational separation of biologically determined beasts from anthropomorphically animated animals.¹⁶⁸ What Woolf's modernist exploration of the fable mode reveals, however, is that the literary operation by which an animal is granted subjectivity also, and perhaps necessarily, involves a concomitant "kickback" operation of *zoomorphism*, in which the human accompanies the animal returning, as it were, to its proper state of biological determinism. But what are, in plain terms, the ethics of figuring humans as animals? This is a very simple but pressing question in Woolf, especially in light of the frequency with which Woolf's narrators and characters compare humans—their actions, personalities, and faces—to animals. In a modernist milieu that emphatically valorizes the exploration of radically particular subjectivities, what does it mean for Woolf to refer the construction of character not to psychological detail but to received, generic animal typologies and physiognomies? To compare Mr. Ramsay, in Mrs. Ramsay's eyes, to "the great sea lion at the Zoo tumbling backwards after swallowing his fish and walloping off," or his eyes to "lizard's eyes;"¹⁶⁹ to have Bernard remember the "shape of [his] own nose and

Trautmann (New York: Harcourt, 1975), 5:140. See Ryan, 132-134, for a survey of the flat allegorical readings, most of which date from the 1980s.

¹⁶⁸ For Colleen Glenney Boggs, writing about nineteenth-century animal-compassion discourses, this bifurcation operates along the lines of what she calls "didactic ontology," in which animal figures function both as subject, anthropomorphically modeling certain ethical behaviors, and as the nonhuman object of those behaviors. Boggs is specifically interested in the didacticism of children's literature as it participates in liberal discourses of compassion and sympathy; I am interested in how this bifurcated ontology ascribed to animals still structures literary animal-studies approaches today. Boggs, 147-148.

¹⁶⁹ *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 36, 39 (hereafter cited as *TL*).

strike with this spoon upon this table pugnaciously”¹⁷⁰; to describe the “stupid face” of one unnamed and unfortunate woman as having “something of the greedy petulance of the pug-dog’s face at tea-time”¹⁷¹ We don’t have to go on; though we will, later.

This is not by any means to deny the animality of the human. But any reading of animality in Woolf would be remiss not to heed Agamben’s difficult warning in *The Open* that jamming the “anthropological machine” cannot proceed merely by animalizing the human or by humanizing the animal. No, the machine has *always* been premised on precisely these two operations.¹⁷² Derrida puts it more topologically: “I have never believed in some homogeneous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal,”—the challenge being not to abandon the limit between humans and animals but to “think what a limit becomes once it is abyssal, once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but more than one internally divided line.”¹⁷³ Woolf indeed seems to be trying to think about this limit. The turn, after all, in “The Monkeys” is one from a single-species fable to a multiplicity of animals: from breakfasting primates to ones “floating and twisting like falling butterflies”; to “delicate gazelles” and “bright birds” like “hanging jewels”; an “august stag” and “the tawny spots of a leopard’s coat”; also, a firefly; “beautiful creatures” moving “ceaselessly among the mazes of the trees, as though they trod the figures of a dance” (*CSF* 325). Woolf’s menagerie begins to move from individually named characters to a series of

¹⁷⁰ *The Waves* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006), 166 (hereafter cited as *W*).

¹⁷¹ “The Plumage Bill,” *E* 3:242.

¹⁷² Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford UP, 2004), 37.

¹⁷³ In language echoed by many scholars working in the environmental humanities today, Derrida also describes his project as one of “limitrophy”: “Not just because it will concern what sprouts and grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it. Everything I’ll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply. Moreover, the supposed first or literal sense of *trephe* is just that: to transform by thickening, for example, in curdling milk.” *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham UP, 2008), 29, 30-31.

briefly illuminated species, their typological organization blending seamlessly with Woolf's aesthetics of color and machinic synchronicity.

In the following essay, therefore, I will show that this aesthetics, which anticipates Woolf's mature style (especially in *Jacob's Room* and *The Waves*), provides Woolf with a compelling ethical alternative to the fable's anthropomorphisms even as it animalizes the human. For looking to a multiplicity of other animals (animals that do not share the singularly exceptional status of the modern bourgeois dog) begins to illuminate a new epistemological frame for modeling a modernist ethics beyond the human, or humanized, face.¹⁷⁴ Animals thus, I argue, lead Woolf to develop a typological ethics—which, departing from the charismatic humanism that underpins both fabular and realist characterization, helps Woolf to avoid the trap of didacticism while still allowing her to understand subjective experience as both materially coherent and ethically dynamic.

A number of recent studies have sought to read an ethics directly out of Woolf's aesthetics.

Emily Hinnov puts the case succinctly: "Woolf views aesthetics as a vehicle for social action

¹⁷⁴ *Flush* has an important place in a number of scholarly works on canine cultural value that predate and anticipate the particular configuration of critical animal studies as it has come to be established in the past decade. See, for example, Marjorie Garber's comprehensive *Dog Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), which straightforwardly avows the cultural role of dogs as "the repository of those model human properties that we have cynically ceased to find among humans" (15). Stephen H. Webb's *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), on the other hand, resonates more with Agamben and Derrida in his observation that canine intimacy, as we can see in *Flush*, is not always best pursued through identification but by keeping "a certain distance between the human and the animal world" (99). Yet the centrality of dogs, and *Flush* in particular, to animal studies more largely has only underlined how limitingly cynocentric posthumanist discourse remains today. *Flush* is the foundational starting point for examining the "narrative ethology" of twentieth-century animal literature in Susan McHugh's recent *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines*, for example. And Donna Haraway, of course, in *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, the last section of which is dedicated to Woolf, has famously exchanged her '80s-era cyborg for the 21st-century agility-trained dog as *the* figure for thinking through posthuman bodies and naturecultures. What, however, would it look like to think a cross-species ethics that didn't take dogs as the synecdochal representative for animality at large, or rely on the particular forms of domestication and intimacy that pet (and sport) cultures alone provide?

that might bring about humanistic [...] coherence and interconnectivity.”¹⁷⁵ And Jessica Berman more specifically argues that Woolf locates her ethics *in* aesthetic judgment and in the epistemology of immediate experience: ethics here being a folding-together of a Levinasian emphasis on radical alterity and a feminist emphasis on care and intimacy.¹⁷⁶ These readings have (in a way clearly parallel to attitudes towards *Flaubert*) come as a corrective to earlier phases of criticism that either relegated Woolf to the realm of aesthetics—“the immured priestess in the temple of art”¹⁷⁷—or completely politicized her, reducing her work to a set of ideological effects.¹⁷⁸ Against this tendency to focus solely on one aspect of Woolf, then, these more recent ethical recuperations seek to read Woolf comprehensively, giving credence to the weight Woolf herself placed on seeing the ethical and the aesthetic as parts of a whole.

But such recuperations can themselves neglect the trenchant dismantling of subjectivity that Woolf places at the center of her narrative style. This is what we have to learn from Woolf’s animal figures, as we’ve already begun to see in “The Monkeys.”¹⁷⁹ Delineations of an intimate, communitarian, or even cosmopolitan ethics in Woolf are inevitably structured around expressions of subjectivity, or around the *personal* as the especial

¹⁷⁵ Emily M. Hinnov, “The Nature of Time and Cosmic (Comm)unity in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*,” in *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World: Selected Papers from the 20th International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Kristin Czarnecki and Carrie Rohman (Clemson: Clemson UDP, 2011), 218.

¹⁷⁶ Jessica Berman, “Ethical Folds: Ethics, Aesthetics, Woolf,” in *Virginia Woolf: An MFS Reader*, ed. Maren Linett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009), 257-279.

¹⁷⁷ The phrase is Alex Zwerdling’s and ostensibly a paraphrase of Quentin Bell’s characterization of his aunt. *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 9. See, however, James Gindin’s “Politics in Contemporary Woolf Criticism” for a critique of Zwerdling’s hyperbole and method. In *Modern Language Quarterly* 47.4 (1986): 422-432.

¹⁷⁸ Such criticism—as in, for example, Jane Marcus’ seminal essay on *The Waves*—reduces even Woolf’s undeniably substantial aesthetics to a “parody” or “swan song” of the Romanticism that sustains white British colonialism, mocking “the complicity of the hero and the poet in the creation of a collective national subject through an elegy for imperialism.” Jane Marcus, “Britannia Rules *The Waves*,” in *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Margaret Homans (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 235.

¹⁷⁹ Or as Gillian Beer puts it, Woolf’s fascination with “taking language out towards obliterativeness.” See Beer, “Virginia Woolf and Prehistory,” in *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 12.

locus of ethical agency. Berman looks, for example, to the literary and photographic representations of Orlando in Woolf's biographical fantasy for a way to think about challenging ethical interfaces: the photographic gaze of Orlando's face "forces" us "to acknowledge the demands that this being-together makes upon us."¹⁸⁰ Yet Woolf's contemporaries were not so quick to ascribe this sort of ethical authority to her treatments of personality. (And here we can begin tracing a long literary and institutional history of phenomenological ethics as developed around the site of the *face*, especially as it becomes central to the work of Levinas, and later, Judith Butler.) In a 1922 review, Rebecca West, for example, distinguishes between proper novelistic technique, which "must primarily concern itself with humanity," and Woolf's in *Jacob's Room*, which "is not about individuals at all but about types as seen through the refractions of commonplace observer's eyes."¹⁸¹ West even goes as far as to suggest that the "derivation" of Woolf's representations of sociality is "surely a drawing in *Punch*."¹⁸² And Forster, eminent modernist of intercultural ethics, comes to understand Woolf's approach to character in *Jacob's Room* as an adaptation to the new conditions of modernity. In contrast to the Victorians and Edwardians, whose characters possess a materially "continuous life," Woolf's characters are "discontinuous," "movable monuments" resolving into recognizable figures across the jagged chronotope of the modern metropolis only as "airy drifting atoms piled into a colonnade" do.¹⁸³

Jacob, as the hole at the center of his novel, thus emerges not as a classical sort of character, but as what West recognizes as a "type." As a type, moreover, Jacob is more properly suited to his modern environment than realist characters are: not as organically

¹⁸⁰ Berman, 269-270.

¹⁸¹ Rebecca West, review, [*New Statesmen* 4 November 1922] in Majumdar, 101.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ E. M. Forster, "Visions," [*Daily News* 31 July 1919] in Majumdar, 69; and "The Novels of Virginia Woolf," [*New Criterion* April 1926] in Majumdar, 174, 176-177.

fleshed out as the latter supposedly are, but somehow slowly built up through a steady accretion of external details and perspectives, like particles of dust blowing through the streets of London, each one subject to a multiplicity of scrutinies before agglomerating into—Woolf’s own exquisite phrase names this “a density of meaning, a conglomeration of loveliness”—“one of those statues [...] in the British Museum” to which Jacob is constantly compared throughout the novel.¹⁸⁴ In other words, not even a solid person, nor even a specific sculptural representation of a person, but some *type* of statue. And while Forster in 1926 saw this calculus of personality as only the first step towards a modernist “solution,” my contention is that character typology, and as we’ll see, specifically *animal* typologies, continuously occupied a central function in Woolf’s entire body of writing. Woolf herself, by 1928, after the publication of *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando* and before embarking on *The Waves* and, yes, *Flush*, would speak seriously of wanting to “give things their caricature value” (recalling West’s *Punch*-cartoon comparison) and to eliminate all the “waste, deadness, superfluity” that “come from the inclusion of things that don’t belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist.”¹⁸⁵ As I hope to show, this focus on types and caricatures will come to a head in *The Waves*, Woolf’s most experimental book, manifesting less as a resolution of the modernist disjuncture between aesthetics and ethics but more as a necessary patch, as it were, sewn over the gap of radical modern uncertainty.

FLY FISHING & MODERNISM

An aristocratic and seemingly arcane tradition firmly ensconced within the exclusive purview

¹⁸⁴ *Jacob’s Room* (Oxford UP, 2008), 108, 147 (hereafter cited as *JR*).

¹⁸⁵ This is in the same diary entry where Woolf importantly calls *The Waves* a “playpoem.” *A Writer’s Diary*, ed. Leonard Woolf (San Diego: Harcourt, 1981), 134, 136.

of men, fly fishing is not quickly associated with Woolf. Indeed, previous studies of animals in Woolf's writing have tended to dismiss the ethical and artistic significance that fishing actually had for Woolf, opting to read her father Leslie Stephen's well-known but mild distaste for fishing and Woolf's bland response (as recorded in "A Sketch of the Past") as the starting point for a definitive aversion to fishing altogether—if they note it at all.¹⁸⁶ And as a tradition with its own attendant literary genre of fly-fishing writing dating back to 1496 (with the publication of the *Treatise of Fishing with an Angle*), it was given to a rarefied technical pedantry understandably not to Woolf's tastes.¹⁸⁷ Fly fishing, however, was nonetheless a practice that, in its particular relationship to its animal objects—both as a sport and as a *discourse about* sport—resonated with important aspects of Woolf's own writing practice. And in fact, Woolf's anecdote about her father's opinion of fishing is followed immediately by a passage linking fishing to a mode of penetrative vision, urban *flânerie*, and counterfactual speculation unmistakably continuous with her own narrative style:

But from the memory of my own passion I am still able to construct an idea of the sporting passion. It is one of those invaluable seeds, from which, since it is impossible to have every experience fully, one can grow something that represents other people's experiences. Often one has to make do with seeds; the germs of what might have been, had one's life been different. I pigeonhole 'fishing' thus with other momentary glimpses; like those rapid glances, for example, that I cast into basements when I walk in London streets.¹⁸⁸

Woolf's recollection in 1939 of her childhood desire to experience "the sporting passion"

¹⁸⁶ "It was a perfect lesson," Woolf writes. "It was not a rebuke; not a forbidding; simply a statement of his own feeling, about which I could think and decide for myself. Though my passion for the thrill and the tug had been perhaps the most acute I then knew, his words slowly extinguished it; leaving no grudge, I ceased to wish to catch fish." "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Orlando: Harcourt, 1985), 135.

¹⁸⁷ Attributed to Dame Juliana Berners, to whom is also sometimes attributed the *Book of St. Albans* (later editions of which would include the *Treatise of Fishing*), which was the first text to codify more than a number of collective nouns for animals that we still use today—e.g. a school of fish. See, for your amusement, James Lipton, *An Exaltation of Larks: The Ultimate Edition* (New York: Penguin, 1991).

¹⁸⁸ *Moments of Being*, 135.

already indicates the degree to which fly fishing had been alloyed to a phenomenology complete with its own unique senses of temporality, subjectivity, and modernity: the modern conditions of intersubjective relation being as they are, one can only “represent other people’s experiences” through “momentary glimpses” (echoing, of course, Forster’s description of Woolf’s technique in *Jacob’s Room*). But what might seem to be merely symptomatic effects of modernity can turn out to be constitutive of modernist practice, and it is precisely the ethics of this switch in the ontology of the “momentary glimpse” that Woolf begins to ponder in a 1936 essay-review of the book *My Sporting Life*, which just happened to be written by her brother-in-law, the intrepid fly-fisher, lepidopterist, and popular MP John Waller Hills.

Jack Hills was, as you may know, Stella Duckworth’s suitor and tragically too-late husband. He was a familiar presence in the Stephen household as Woolf was growing up, and was the first to introduce Woolf to her lifelong love of lepidoptery. He is usually cited as one of the more progressive voices in Woolf’s family biography, though he naturally drifted away from Woolf’s circles in the decades after Stella’s death in 1897. Hills is, though, maybe most important for being what a number of critics have argued is the original model for Richard Dalloway, who first appears on the scene in *The Voyage Out*, mocking Helen Ambrose’s recreational activities:

‘May I ask how you’ve spent your time? Reading—philosophy?’ (He saw the black book.) ‘Metaphysics and fishing!’ he exclaimed. ‘If I had to live again I believe I should devote myself to one or the other.’¹⁸⁹

Dalloway then goes on to read a sentence of Helen’s book, which is apparently G. E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*, before trivializing the entire venture of moral philosophy as “the

¹⁸⁹ *The Voyage Out* (Oxford, 2009), 77. Hereafter cited as *VO*.

kind of thing we used to talk about when we were boys” (*VO* 78). This odd pairing of philosophy and fishing, with the latter silently serving to devalue the former, constitutes a chauvinistic and anti-intellectual operation characteristic of fly-fishing writing in general, and, as we’ll see, is consistently the implicit object of critique when fishing does figure in Woolf.¹⁹⁰

When critics, again, do discuss the significance of fishing in Woolf, they tend to emphasize its association with violence in Woolf’s fiction, the killing of fish usually taken as a symbol for a violent gender politics. The scenes of fishing in *Between the Acts*, for example, are taken, firstly, as a “display of dominance over nature” that, secondly, foretell later social and sexual discord—the masculine displays of violent prowess themselves “capturing” the women in the novel, whether it is the marital strife between Giles and Isa or the friction between implacable old imperial Bart and his sister Lucy.¹⁹¹ But these readings neglect, I argue, the attention Woolf pays to the particular modes of organizing knowledge, affect, and virtue that are historically attached to fly fishing, and also especially how the violence of fishing *and* these attendant phenomenologies together cannily reflect Woolf’s own style. We see in this passage, for instance, not just the ugly violence of fishing, red in tooth and claw, but also an organizational (technical, technological) fastidiousness that we will see is characteristic of the practice:

Lucy, [Bartholomew’s] sister, was three years younger than he was. The name

¹⁹⁰ Hence the famous extended metaphor for thought at the start of *A Room of One’s Own*, in which Woolf compares “the sudden conglomeration of an idea” to a fish at the end of a line. Woolf, lost in thought, is interrupted and shooed off the lawn by a chauvinist, sending her “little fish into hiding.” Resembling the fly fisher who throws the “insignificant” fish back in the water, the man’s anti-feminism is thus revealed as anti-intellectual as well, driven by “[i]nstant rather than reason.” *A Room of One’s Own* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6-7.

¹⁹¹ Christina Alt’s study is representative of this kind of reading, Woolf’s fish being regarded merely as “symbolic of human fate” or just “negatively symbolic” and thus in line with Stephen’s prohibition. See *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature* (Cambridge UP, 2010), 165, 206.

Cindy, or Sindy, for it could be spelt either way, was short for Lucy. It was by this name that he had called her when they were children; when she had trotted after him as he fished, and had made the meadow flowers into tight little bunches, winding one long grass stalk round and round and round. Once, she remembered, he had made her take the fish off the hook herself. The blood had shocked her—"Oh!" she had cried—for the gills were full of blood. And he had growled: "Cindy!" The ghost of that morning in the meadow was in her mind as she replaced the hammer where it belonged on one shelf; and the nails where they belonged on another; and shut the cupboard about which, for he still kept his fishing tackle there, he was still so very particular.¹⁹²

Here what is recognizable as Bart's lifelong bullying of his sister manifests as a sort of fastidiousness of style. Recalling Woolf's description of Hills himself as eminently "scrupulous" in "A Sketch of the Past,"¹⁹³ this passage draws our attention to how fastidiousness and particularity function as both features of personality (or personal style) and as a kind of moral virtue in their own right—though one that blindly inflicts violence on others. Indeed, having introduced the basic prominence of fly fishing in Woolf, I turn now to fly fishing proper and examine how fishing's specific phenomenologies sublimate, under the rubric of ethical self-discipline, the violence visited upon one's concrete animal others.

The single most defining feature of fly fishing is its phenomenology of time. As Hills and many fly-fishing writers before him stress, fly fishing cultivates patience and an openness to failure that other aristocratic sports don't quite. In his 1921 *History of Fly Fishing for Trout*, Hills surveys an English history of the genre since the middle ages and notes that it is the formal convention to begin with a prologue justifying not only the virtue of sport in general but also the virtue of fishing above all other sport. For where all sport is laudable for helping to prevent the sin of idleness, *fishing* surpasses the rest by virtue of its contemplative

¹⁹² *Between the Acts* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2008), 15 (hereafter cited as *BA*).

¹⁹³ "He was scrupulously clean; he washed all over ever so many times a day, and was scrupulously well dressed, as a Victorian city solicitor; also as a countryman. The word 'scrupulous' suggests itself when I think of Jack Hills." *Moments of Being*, 103.

character. Where other sports such as hunting are about *activity* and therefore “too laborious,” fishing by its very nature must be done in relative solitude and quiet. “It enables a man to eschew all contrarious company and all places of debate where he might have any occasion of melancholy,” writes Hills. “Perhaps this is the reason why politicians in all ages have found relaxation in fishing.”¹⁹⁴

The temporality of the actual act of waiting for fish, secondly, is mirrored by the temporality of learning one’s way around the technical apparatus. According to fishing writers, fishing surpasses other sports in the quantity and quality of technical information required to pursue the sport successfully. Fishing lore—especially that concerning the tackle, and the construction of an angling rod—is a special art handed down and refined over centuries, and Hills warns the “casual reader,” faced with the exceptional amount of fastidiously technical detail in any given fishing book, from thinking that “the practical part of the book is worthless.”¹⁹⁵ It is, in fact, the opposite, and for Hills, the ability of pedantically profuse technical directions (especially in the pre-modern treatises) to *snap* together and nigh-miraculously describe an “uncommonly” effective fishing rod, for example, reveals that “[n]ot only are they excellent; they are modern.”¹⁹⁶

Thus in two ways, fly fishing is structured around the sudden, almost epiphanic, synchronic synthesis of a longer or larger quantity either amassed or experienced diachronically through time—whether the wait that culminates dramatically in the big catch (as Hills quotes the fisher-poet John Dennys: “When you have hookt him, give him leave, keeping your Line stright, and hold him from rootes and he will tyre himselfe. This is the

¹⁹⁴ John Waller Hills, *A History of Fly Fishing for Trout* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1921), 16.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

chiefe pleasure of Angling”)¹⁹⁷ or the sheer volume of technical and optical data that resolve into the physics of a simple rod and tackle. In each case, moreover, the actual mechanism by which the *quantitative* suddenly resolves into something *qualitatively* new is never fully elucidated. It remains vague, mystified under the sign of “intuition”—what Hills can only call “the imponderable element which places you in the right temper.”¹⁹⁸ Unable to see the trout beneath the surface of the stream and across the length of line and rod, the fisher’s primary skill is learning how to sense, somehow, the fish’s approach by intuition alone. Hills speaks of the fisher’s “day” of good fortune, when the multiplicity of unaccountable and uncontrollable factors align and the trout is yours:

On your day—and such days come to all of us, to make up for the many when we are either maddened or drugged and stupefied by our incurable ineptitude—how delicately and how surely you throw. [...] You know exactly what to do, and you do it. Wherever the fish may be rising, your fly sails over him, hardly touching the water, wings up, floating like a cork, following every crinkle of the slow current. You gain an extraordinary sense of power. Your rod and line, right down to the fly, are part of yourself, moved by your nerves and answering to your brain.¹⁹⁹

The perceptual and cognitive synthesis beautifully unites the fisher, his nerves, and his brain to his surroundings and even the trout itself, providing a brief, flashing moment of cross-species contact. Later on in *My Sporting Life*, Hills, in a very revealing analogy that Woolf will latch onto in her review, describes fishing in terms of learning Latin and Greek in a classroom.

That quick correlation of nerves and sense that knowledge that comes like a flash from nowhere that a fish has taken my fly, that steady stare over the broken water of an unknown river to make sure where the trout will be lying. And when I prove myself right, when a trout and another and then another rise confidently, I get the same exhilaration from solving the unknown as I

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹⁸ Hills, *My Sporting Life* (London: Philip Allan, 1936), 10.

¹⁹⁹ *A History of Fly Fishing for Trout*, 135-136.

got along ago in quite different circumstances. It is as though I stepped back through the years to some Eton or Oxford examination, and were staring at a piece of unseen Latin or Greek which I had to translate. Twisting it this way or that, trying to bore through it, seeing no meaning, nothing but words; suddenly it springs to life, there it is lying open to me, vital and real. So with a new river: I can read it, make sense of it, I know where trout are, and where they are not. Thus do the most opposite experiences give similar emotions.²⁰⁰

Or as Hills gracefully puts it a little later: “You must know your river in all its moods and tenses.”²⁰¹ The opacity of the object and the spontaneous vision that burns all that opacity away; the extreme patience and technical detail required; the crucial but ineffable burst of instinct that locks everything together. What better description could we find of Woolf’s own prose?

This resemblance, in fact, is what Woolf focuses on in her review of Hills’ book. The first half of the essay, succinctly entitled “Fishing,” is mostly a record of Woolf’s half-tongue-in-cheek surprise at how effective Hills’ prose is, hyperbolically comparing his writing to Flaubert’s:

Now, if the art of writing consists in laying an egg in the reader’s mind from which springs the thing itself—whether man or fish—and if this art requires such ardour in its practitioners that they will readily, like Flaubert, give up all their bright spring mornings to its pursuit, how does it come about that Major Hills, who has spent thirty years in the House of Commons, can do the trick? (*E* 6:493)

But Woolf is also relatively serious about the compelling mimesis of Hills’ language. “All books are made of words,” she writes, “but mostly of words that flutter and agitate thought. *This* book on the contrary, though made of words, has a strange effect on the body. It lifts it out of the chair, stands it on the banks of a river, and strikes it dumb” (*E* 6:492). There is something hypnotic, almost, about Hills’ prose—something akin to experience of fishing

²⁰⁰ *My Sporting Life*, 10.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

itself.

Woolf's wonder at what we might call Hills' aerodynamics of thought pivots through a number of different considerations, first linking the history of the English novel to its intimacy with the English countryside: for without the old fishermen of centuries past, Woolf asks, where would Scott, Dickens, and Eliot be?²⁰² "No wonder, since the poachers are gone, that fiction is failing...." (*E* 6:494). But perhaps more pertinently compared to poets, Hills's writing does what effective poetry should do. As Woolf describes it, while the conscious reading mind is occupied with the embodied phenomenology of fishing—it "must be all body"—the unconscious mind "leaps to the top and strips off veils" (*E* 6:493). And this transparency effected by Hills' prose is again much the same as the spontaneous transparency the fisher quietly waits for, standing alone in the river. Can we know, for example, what Hills himself dreams about?, asks Woolf. Can we tell from his prose what his highest aspirations are? What we glean from his book, is that he dreams only of the catch. But reading Hills' dreams is for Woolf the same as trying to penetrate the mind of a fish: "the trout subtle, the salmon ingenuous; each with its nerves, with its brain, its mentality that we can dimly penetrate, movements we can mystically anticipate, for just as, suddenly, Greek and Latin sort themselves in a flash, so we understand the minds of fish?" (*E* 6:495). The phenomenology of cross-species contact now daringly comes to resemble a basic intersubjectivity: to know the gentleman fisher, it seems, is to know the fish.

²⁰² Woolf is being slightly funny with her assertions again, but fishing, and especially fishing writing, was indeed fiercely nationalistic. The French, for example, may have written the first hunting manual (according to Hills, *La Chace dou Serf* from the thirteenth century), but it was up to the English to write the first *fishing* manual, an aristocratic tradition that would culminate with Lord Grey himself writing a wildly popular tome in 1899. So nationalistic was fishing writing that in 1883, in the midst of the Victorian Shakespeare craze, one Rev. Henry Nicholson Ellacombe, Vicar of Bitton, had to claim the Bard himself as one of their own, publishing the short treatise *Shakespeare as an Angler*. This bald proposition, of course, was brought into question a mere thirty-five years later in 1918 with Max Hühner's seminal intervention into the field, *Was Shakespeare an Angler?*

Yet the aim of Woolf's elucidation of Hills' remarkably transparent and mimetic prose is not to celebrate it uncritically but to suggest that there is, in fact, an *ethics* of transparency, and that Hills' prose is in the business of actively disavowing this ethics. Thus Woolf's point when speculating about the content of Hills' dreams is to ask what he elides when he raises the Big Catch to the mountaintop of his dreams—namely, his political ambitions. (“For dream he does. ‘I always, even now, dream that I shall astonish the world. An outstanding success...’ The Premiership is it?” [E 6:495]) It is hence with this elision in mind that Woolf actually begins her review with a curious invocation of Oriental wisdom: “While there is a Chinese proverb which says that the fisherman is pure at heart ‘as a white sea-shell,’ there is a Japanese poem, four lines long, which says something so true but at the same time so crude about the hearts of politicians that it had better be left in its original obscurity” (E 6:492).²⁰³ Woolf is here contrasting a performance of moral purity with the ethical censuring of political crudeness—a crudeness that ultimately turns on what Woolf says is “a confusion in the mind of the reader between fish and men.” That is, Hills' confusion, stemming from his lifelong immersion in both fly fishing and politics, leaves him unable to distinguish ethically between animals and men.

My Sporting Life ends with an apology for sport in general, arguing against claims that sport is animal cruelty by constructing an ad hoc economy of benevolence, in which social compassion and animal compassion are found to have incommensurate ethics and cannot therefore be compared. How can you, after all, compare the beating of a child with the killing of an animal? “Which is right?” Hills asks, “Are we, on both sides, ruled by those

²⁰³ The editors of Woolf's collected essays have been unable to trace the source of either.

inscrutable and eternal contradictions lying deep in our spiritual and material nature?”²⁰⁴ This inscrutable incommensurability *deep* in our nature: Hills’ ethical language is taking on the topological rhetoric of fish and rivers we are now familiar with. The ethical justification for sport, Hills seems to be saying, should be as clear to you, ultimately, as the movement of trout is to him—forgetting for a second that this movement is not clear at all.

Indeed, Hills consistently repeats this language elsewhere and ends up (unwittingly) calling the legitimacy of his ethical position into question by chalking up a number of not-even-difficult questions to some kind of theological inscrutability—the same epistemological gap that the fly fisher feels between himself and the trout beneath the water. Discussing a traditional fly-fishing dictate against fishing with bait (which leads to overfishing), Hills quite sloppily dismisses the entire debate, claiming that it is ultimately not a matter of reason but of mere compulsion on the part of fishers: “But the greater is one of those eternal contradictions which lie at the root of all powerful emotions. We are not ruled by reason. We follow a different law, and we recognise its sanction. It is not the less binding because we cannot set it out in words. It is a part of our make-up as an angler.”²⁰⁵ Clearly, in each case here—whether concerning the ethics of sport in general, or the practical ecological considerations necessary for keeping fishing sustainable—there are real reasons for choosing to proceed one way or another. But in both cases, Hills defers to the ineffable and inscrutable, and despite his protest that child abuse and killing an animal are ethically incommensurate, effectively flattens ethical judgment and athletic judgment, humans and animals, into a single, clumsy mess of “intuitive” or “instinctual” gut feelings. The fisherman’s valorization of his own pure heart, it turns out, is *itself* the root of the politician’s

²⁰⁴ *My Sporting Life*, 275.

²⁰⁵ *My Sporting Life*, 21.

crudeness. Transparency—seemingly such a simple matter when it comes to reading the minds of fish—ends up blind to its own violent implications.

FACE VALUE: PHYSIOGNOMIC MODERNISM

Looking back at Woolf's portrait of Richard Dalloway in *The Voyage Out*, it is even clearer now the extent to which his character's ethos is informed by Hills'. Dalloway's blowhard emphasis on world systems, for example, or what he calls the "unity of aim, of dominion, of progress," relies ultimately on the elision of particulars and is made possible by the agency of what he calls "political instinct" (*VO* 67, 69). Like Hills, whom Woolf whimsically remembers living as if he had "a system plainly marked in front of him," Dalloway is given to easy synchronic organizations of data, which the faculty of "instinct" makes more facile by allowing him to see the political world as an ethological world—with himself, of course, as the top dog.²⁰⁶ And though the Dalloways exit the novel early on, part of Richard's spirit lives on in a number of the other characters, who at various points compare each other, or humans in general, to animals. Helen Ambrose will mock a woman for having "the face of an impertinent but jolly little pig," for example, "mottled red under a dusting of powder" (179). Clarissa Dalloway (before leaving) writes home, with a not inconsiderable amount of self-satisfaction, to demean Mr. Pepper as "an ill-conditioned fox-terrier" and goes on to remark in this connection that "it's a pity, sometimes, one can't treat people like dogs!" (50). Rachel Vinrace and Terence Hewet—the novel's central couple—first connect over Rachel's comparison of Terence and St John Hirst to ants—"very big, very ugly, very energetic, with

²⁰⁶ "Reminiscences," in *Moments of Being*, 47.

all your virtues on your backs” (150, 342). Hirst, meanwhile, is the greatest offender; Woolf shows us his patronizing superiority by endowing him with a tendency to view all the other characters as cattle, hens, or rats—a pastime all the more unsettling in light of his political aspirations.

The narrative voice of *The Voyage Out* engages in the same animalization of the characters as Hirst’s, which compels us to ask how distinct Woolf’s own style is from the language of these clay-footed political men of the world. Insects, cormorants, more cows, pigeons, rats, even crocodiles: to all these beasts and more the characters of *The Voyage Out* are reduced and made trivial in the eyes of the narrator, who is always eager to pass ethical judgment on the vices of the bestialized. Consider this reproach to indolence and apathy: “They had the appearance of crocodiles so fully gorged by their last meal that the future of the world gives them no anxiety whatever” (205). Beyond *The Voyage Out*, too, the animalizing figure is one of the most frequent devices in Woolf’s fiction, occurring sometimes as frequently as once every other page in her novels. At times very basic—comparing one character to a horse, maybe—and at other times far more pointed—recall the poor woman who is said to have “something of the greedy petulance of the pug-dog’s face at tea-time”—these figures of speech have a physiognomic function that is both metaphoric and metonymic. In other words, they establish the visual continuity of a small number of facial features with those of a beast (metonymy) in order to impute that beast’s fate to this person (metaphor).

While physiognomy, eminently prevalent in every sphere of nineteenth-century life—whether public or private, in mass or high culture—began to decline in popularity as an institutionally sanctioned practice at the turn of the century, it nevertheless possessed an

important albeit diffuse afterlife in the early twentieth century.²⁰⁷ “Diffuse” because physiognomy’s ubiquity at the end of the nineteenth century was so complete that its spillover into the twentieth was for the most part only lightly marked, even taken for granted—a fact evinced by the absence of critical attention it receives even today, despite the highly diverse ways in which modernist writers, among others, continued to use it as a device for quick and easy characterization. Henry James, Mina Loy, and James Joyce, for example—a somewhat arbitrary grab bag of modernists—were all in conversation with physiognomic discourse in one way or another, whether as theme or device.²⁰⁸ The preeminent physiognomist of the cohort, however, was perhaps D. H. Lawrence, whose deep investment in establishing a continuity between particular physiognomies and their underlying psychologies and physiologies provides an instructive contrast to Woolf’s own practice. In his self-described “pseudo-philosophy,” Lawrence insists on the evolutionary legacy of teeth:

And we, in our age, have no rest with our teeth. Our mouths are too small. For many ages we have been suppressing the avid, negroid, sensual will. Our mouth has contracted, our teeth have become soft and unquickened. Where in us are the sharp and vivid teeth of the wolf, keen to defend and devour? If

²⁰⁷ See Sharrona Pearl, *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harvard UP, 2010); and Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²⁰⁸ We might consider, for instance, the prominence of faces and “countenances” in the first pages of James’ *The Ambassadors* or the centrality of the faciality to Loy’s story “Transfiguration.” Joyce, meanwhile, actually rarely pays much attention to his characters’ faces when describing either their appearance or their personality. When he does, however, we get the sense that he is departing from his normal method of characterization: it is not their faces that are being brought to our attention but the very act of attending to faces. This is most evident in *Dubliners*, a book we can read as an extended pastiche and critique of physiognomic commonplaces. The collection begins with “The Sisters,” in which its child narrator is fascinated and haunted by the “truculent, grey and massive” face of a degenerate priest, “with black cavernous nostrils and circled by a scanty white fur.” And in the penultimate (or as initially planned, ultimate) story “Grace,” we find, over the course of twenty-five pages, at least twenty-eight descriptions of, or references to, faces and facial features. Together, the stories of *Dubliners*, we get the sense, are a text eminently concerned with exposing the sham of making superficial ethical evaluations on the part of its characters, narrators, and readers: Joyce puts forward the individual face and its pseudo-scientific typologies as ultimately another sort of gnomon, not always the complete expression of character that the inhabitants of Dublin want it to be. See *Dubliners*, ed. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (New York: Penguin, 1996), 14, 150, 157, and *passim*.

we had them more, we should be happier.²⁰⁹

Lawrence continues in similar fashion with a number of other facial features, including the nose and eyes—the latter prompting a brisk survey of ocular typologies among different creatures, beginning with cats, cows, horses, predators more widely, and finally, “savages.” The different configurations of sensuality, affect, and consciousness that make up Lawrence’s sexual cosmology and that are then exemplified by the discrete anatomies of different animal species, are reproduced *within* the human species; and it is this length to which he goes to incorporate animal typologies into a language for describing his human characters, even to the point of reproducing violent racial typologies, that testifies to what Leo Bersani has isolated in Lawrence as “the necessity of forging a correspondence between language and being.”²¹⁰

Some critics have seen Lawrence’s physiognomies as superfluous, a merely symbolic expression for the more essential exploration of will and desire,²¹¹ but more evident here—in light of Bersani’s reading and Lawrence’s own specification of the writer’s task as “the passionate struggle into conscious being” of “unborn needs and fulfillment”—is the exceptional epistemological utility animal physiognomies provide as aesthetic devices in Lawrence’s fiction. Lawrence counts on his physiognomies to trigger in his readers, by virtue of their evolutionary continuity with the rest of animal life, an intuitive recognition of his characters’ psycho-physiological makeup. Or as Woolf herself admiringly writes, Lawrence’s “impatience, the need for getting beyond the object before us, seems to contract, to shrivel up, to curtail scenes to their barest, to flash character simply and starkly in front of us. We

²⁰⁹ D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1961) 9, 57-58.

²¹⁰ Leo Bersani, “Against *Ulysses*,” in *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990), 171.

²¹¹ See, for example, the aptly named Lawrence Jones, “Physiognomy and the Sensual Will in *The Ladybird* and *The Fox*,” *D. H. Lawrence Review* 13 (1980).

must not look for more than a second we must hurry on.”²¹²

Woolf’s description of Lawrence’s prose highlights an economy of character toward which her own writing strives. Like Hills’ take on fly-fishing, too, Lawrence and Woolf’s physiognomies condense a certain amount of empirical data into an isolated phenomenological unit. For Hills, it is the chronotope of the stream, and for the novelists, the face. And in each case, the opacity of the data qua data suddenly gives way to a shocking transparency, a succinct crystallization of subjectivity. But Woolf diverges from Lawrence by virtue of the otherwise carefully nuanced psychologies elsewhere in her writing. Thus instead of a strong theory of evolutionary determinism (which generally emerges for Woolf as a way to figure the primal *outside* of written history), Woolf tends toward a weaker theory of biological determinism—that is, toward an animal typology not structured around evolutionary progress.²¹³

Both Woolf and Lawrence are preoccupied with exploring the ontological limits of human subjectivity, pushing their writing to find different ways of representing the edges of human experience.²¹⁴ But, whereas for Lawrence will and ego are suffused vitally and evenly through flora, fauna, and humans, Woolf holds her radical visions to be ultimately impossible and only imaginary resolutions, however resplendent. Her narratives are often forcibly contained and abruptly concluded, the protagonists in whom Woolf’s many asubjective aspirations are placed, whether Rachel, Jacob, or Bernard, tragically cut short by death or the inevitable predations of age. For just as Hills’ nearly mystical penetration of the mind of trout, having ostensibly “transcended” the limitations of human subjectivity, turns

²¹² “Notes on D. H. Lawrence,” *E* 6:466.

²¹³ Beer, 17.

²¹⁴ Certainly at this point Woolf begins to inhabit a Bergsonian/Deleuzian space of intensity. Later in this essay, however, I will suggest that these aspects, insofar as they lend themselves to a typological ethics, are more useful from the methodological standpoint of sociology.

out to be ethically inextricable from his crude political epistemology, so Woolf's asubjective experiments are not without their own tangent violence.

Woolf's purposeful departure from a Lawrentian evolutionary determinism is evident in *The Voyage Out*, which plants its central exploration of intersubjective ethics (here, the romance plot between Rachel and Terence) in the middle of a South American colonial adventure colored all over with Darwinian hues. Over the course of the novel, Rachel and Terence's courtship passes through a series of pivotal ethical considerations of a physiognomic nature (reflecting the prominence of physiognomy in the whole novel), each reading the other's face and ultimately foundering upon an either too-critical or too-inefficacious interpretation:

She turned her back on the sea and regarded Hewet with friendly if critical eyes. He was good-looking in the sense that he had always had a sufficiency of beef to eat and fresh air to breathe. His head was big; the eyes were also large; though generally vague they could be forcible; and the lips were sensitive. One might account him a man of considerable passion and fitful energy, likely to be at the mercy of moods which had little relation to facts; at once tolerant and fastidious. The breadth of his forehead showed capacity for thought. (248-249)

'You're not beautiful,' he began, 'but I like your face. I like the way your hair grows down in a point, and your eyes too—they never see anything. Your mouth's too big, and your cheeks would be better if that had more colour in them. But what I like about your face is that it makes one wonder what the devil you're thinking about—it makes me want to do that—' He clenched his fist and shook it so near her that she started back, 'because now you look as if you'd blow my brains out. There are moments,' he continued, 'when, if we stood on a rock together, you'd throw me into the sea.' (347)

The unsettling way these physiognomic readings are not very complementary—one registering a facile transparency, the other a threatening opacity—only makes the couple's *actual* moment of mutual recognition, far into the group's trek deep into the heart of the Amazon, all the more odd. While this particular episode of the novel begins almost

pastorally, holding out a number of primitivist commonplaces to spur on the ardor of the lovers, it eventually reveals itself to Rachel as what Jed Esty has argued is the representation of “horrifying stasis, the permanent absence of a special developmental destiny.”²¹⁵ While Woolf’s romance plot ostensibly prepares the reader to expect the space of the jungle to be a catalyst for Rachel’s feminist development, imparting to her a new sense of freedom away from patriarchal institutions and their built-in narratives of liberal *Bildung*, Rachel herself is disoriented by the experience, and now sees her freedom rather as the convergence of a “never-ending generational chain and the stasis of arrested development”²¹⁶: “So it would go on for ever and ever, she said, those women sitting under the trees, the trees and the river” (*VO* 332).

This, for Esty, is a vision of a “Hegelian bad infinity” and the cost of escaping from the conventions of *Bildung*.²¹⁷ It is also a confrontation with the bad infinities subtending otherwise developmentally-focused Darwinian narratives, a vision of perpetual change without transformation that Gillian Beer has observed is indicative of Woolf’s departure from the causal and teleological forms of nineteenth-century thinking and also constitutive of her aesthetic project—thus the turn, more and more in Woolf’s later writing, to both images and structures of undularity.²¹⁸ Alongside notions of evolutionary descent and progress is a “sense of unchanging life and of the sheer chanciness of survival,” Beer notes, and instead of an idyllic and liberatory jungle encounter with the primitive colonial other, Rachel and Terence instead find themselves confronted by the implacably opaque, staring faces of Amazonian women and by the possibility that the seeming animality or non-

²¹⁵ Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford UP, 2012), 139.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

²¹⁸ Beer, “Virginia Woolf and Prehistory,” in *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, 16-18.

humanist subjectivities of “these soft instinctive people” portend not an ethically transformative, cross-cultural and intersubjective experience but the threat of stasis inherent in Woolf’s own physiognomic epistemology—especially as it approaches something recognizably Lawrentian in its explicit biopolitical formulation of a scene of reproductive domestic life under the sign of “instinct.”

The women took no notice of the strangers, except that their hands paused for a moment and their long narrow eyes slid round and fixed upon them with the motionless inexpressive gaze of those removed from each other far far beyond the plunge of speech. Their hands moved again, but the stare continued. It followed them as they walked, as they peered into the huts where they could distinguish guns leaning in the corner, and bowls upon the floor, and stacks of rushes; in the dusk the solemn eyes of babies regarded them, and old women stared out too. As they sauntered about, the stare followed them, passing over their legs, their bodies, their heads, curiously not without hostility, like the crawl of a winter fly. As she drew apart her shawl and uncovered her breast to the lips of her baby, the eyes of a woman never left their faces, although they moved uneasily under her stare, and finally turned away, rather than stand there looking at her any longer. (*VO* 331-332)

Confronted with the opacity of the women’s “motionless inexpressive gaze,” Rachel and Terence experience the paradoxical return of violence in an economy of subjective transparency—an economy in which their mutual physiognomic readings have actively participated. Flattened to nothing more than a state of “soft instinct,” the animality of the native women is now worn *on* their faces: they are in fact so immediately transparent that there is no need to look through a surface into an interior depth of subjectivity. Rather, surface is all.

That this flattening ominously reflects Rachel’s own apparent subjective opacity in relation to Terence further confirms the risk of violence introduced when physiognomic thinking runs up against sexual difference. The “inexpressive gaze” of the native women “far far beyond the plunge of speech” not only anticipates Terence’s ambivalent reaction to

Rachel's violently opaque face a mere fifteen pages later but also reveals the extent to which such an inability to relate intersubjectively (the result of too-assuredly presuming one *can* relate intersubjectively) is grounded in and reinforces a position of sexual difference. The language of the passage, by beginning with an emphasis on the group of multiple women staring at Rachel and Terence before slipping us an unspecified singular "she" that "drew apart her shawl and uncovered her breast to the lips of her baby," in fact leads the reader to hold Rachel, for a fleeting moment, as the referent of the ambiguous pronoun, interpellating her into the position of the nurturing but already bestialized mother before supplying the actual referent. Thus, while the narrative of *The Voyage Out* often takes on, as Esty argues, an almost adolescent style, imitating the anti-developmental temporality of Rachel herself,²¹⁹ we might also read the perspective in this particular passage as momentarily Terence's. And despite his aspirations to become the ethically responsible and feminist author of a novel (fatuously titled "Silence, or the Things People don't say") concerned, we are told, with the movements of inexpressive and impersonal subjectivities, or that which goes "on in the background, for all those thousands of years, this curious silent unrepresented life" (*VO* 245), the attempt at intersubjective relation through their mutual physiognomic readings here short-circuits and collapses species difference and sexual difference into each other. The potential post- or non-human possibilities offered by the asubjectivity consistently associated

²¹⁹ As Esty writes: "In other words, Rachel's character yields (to) a narrative trope of undevelopment, an erratic, semi-omniscient, semi-embodied third-person perspective from which Woolf's key writerly innovations emerge in the temporal vacuum left behind by the suspended coming-of-age plot. Rachel cannot interpret or describe the effects of her own self-dissolution, but Woolf absorbs the subject/object dissolve into an experimental fictional language. In a sense, style transforms and even displaces plot; that is to say, style *has* a plot, while the novel itself, dilating and distending arrhythmically for long stretches, often does not. As the chapters roll out, readers can sense Woolf testing the limits of her form: the unintegrated subject at the center (Rachel) making space for thematic digressions, animated objects and decor, rather loose figurative play, a good bit of minor-character-shuffling, and— most conspicuously—multipolar perspective." Esty, 136.

with Rachel in *The Voyage Out*—figured, for example, in her illness as that of a butterfly “flitting around the room” (404)—are disavowed and subsumed by (or essentialized into) the figure of the primitive, bestial, feminine other to be suppressed. “Well,” Terence immediately confesses after their encounter with the native women, “it makes us”—men, he means—“seem insignificant, doesn’t it?” (332).²²⁰

SURFACE READING

The human face is hideous... I am sick of prettiness.

—*The Waves*

Woolf is rightly celebrated for the way her prose can glide in and out of subjectivities and personalities, “through” faces that are neither absolutely transparent nor opaque but somewhere in between, translucent. Hence for Janet Lyon, writing on mental disability in Woolf, the non-normate face of disability presents itself as *both* a partial limit to Woolf’s aesthetics of transparency and an incitement to a new modernist uncanny (in line with what Woolf famously calls “the shock-receiving capacity” that “makes me a writer”).²²¹ This

²²⁰ This is a consistent pattern for both Terence and the narrative. When Rachel attempts to articulate the reasons for her preference for music as an expressive (and, importantly, nonverbal) medium, we again read from Terence’s perspective, unable to separate the more animal or posthuman aspects of her subjectivity from her gender: “Why do you write novels? You ought to write music. Music, you see?—she shifted her eyes, and became less desirable as his brain began to work, inflicting a certain change upon her face—‘music goes straight for things’” (239). Rachel’s Woolfian asubjectivity is thus inseparable, in Terence’s eyes, from the question of her availability as sexual object. This is then *once more* collapsed again into an asymmetrical species difference when Terence, just a little further down the same page, explains the power of men over women as that which men are “said to have over horses. They see us three times as big as we are or they’d never obey us.” Music itself, as a cultural practice, moreover, is consistently compared to and made equivalent to animals as the object of patriarchal and imperial domination. Terence explains to Rachel that his “musical gift was ruined” because his mother “thought music wasn’t manly for boys; she wanted me to kill rats and birds” (253). And Rachel’s father tells her, in an affirmation of the value of his own shipping business, “If it weren’t for the goats there’d be no music, my dear; music depends upon goats” (18). In both cases, the particular kind of expression most suited to Rachel’s form of subjectivity is made contingent to an exercise of power that relies on seeing sexual, animal, and colonial others as structurally identical objects of exploitation.

²²¹ *Moments of Being*, 72.

uncanny itself carries an ethical charge continuous with the irrevocable power of the Levinasian face: it is the modernist's responsibility to reveal, however horribly, "that 'others' exist quite naturally among, and may even be, 'us,'" writes Lyon.²²² Thus the central ethical challenge but also most prominent aesthetic contribution of *Mrs. Dalloway* is Woolf's discovery of a language to represent Septimus' interiority and in the process reveal that "the whole world is always on the verge of becoming a place in which one is not-at-home," that "the threat of transformation lurks just beneath the visible world."²²³

Our encounter with Woolf's animal language gives us the opportunity now to consider a modernist aesthetics neither premised on the revelation of a hidden depth nor constructed around a discursive "human" subjectivity. How, we can ask, might such an ethics of asubjectivity (not just non-normate but non-human subjectivity) inform the politics of sexual, racial, and cultural difference? Many modern, largely Levinasian, notions of ethics have relied on the utterly external, alien, and impossible—but therefore also utterly necessary and unavoidable—call of subjective alterity to both begin and delimit any discussion of interpersonal responsibility. Adam Zachary Newton, for example, discussing the politics of raced faces in literature, follows and expands on Levinas to show how an intersubjective ethics of the face "originates in terrain beyond race" but can nevertheless explode into the realm of the political with the universal "no to violence uttered by a face."²²⁴

But Woolf, as we've seen, from her earliest writing onward is intent on representing an asubjectivity beyond subjectivity, a sense of being not phenomenologically tied to

²²² Janet Lyon, "On the Asylum Road with Woolf and Mew," *Modernism/modernity* 18.3 (2012): 568.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 569.

²²⁴ Or in more quantitative terms, Newton hopes to show "that Levinas' privileged realm of the intersubjective defers to politics, where a single face of a representative Other looks out at, commands, or becomes the object of, a crowd of gazers; the Other shows the way to the others." Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 238, 183.

translucent individualized faciality but rather oriented around multiplicity, intensity, and the flatness and opacity of type—or what Bernard calls in *The Waves* a “world without a self.” Yet Woolf does not merely unearth this radical break with Levinasian phenomenology from beneath or behind the “visible” world; rather, the aim is to make it plain, and to put it on the same level as the visible world. To put it another way: if the uncanny aesthetic of *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, finds its power in making known that the “threat of transformation lurks just beneath the visible world,” as Lyon puts it, then the asubjective aesthetic of *The Waves* aims to make that transformation not only come to the surface but also, finally, to constitute the surface itself. Hence representations of the horrific, often non-human, transformations in Septimus’ visions (“It was turning into a man! He could not watch it happen! It was horrible, terrible to see a dog become a man!”)²²⁵ become naturalized in *The Waves* and in two distinct ways. First, in a more general physiognomic way, Woolf treats characters so transparently—as predictable beasts—that they resolve into opaque caricatures. Second, and more specifically in the form of the novel, the structural decision to follow a group of six individuals from young childhood to maturity casts those individuals as *animals* in the midst of transformation, learning to adapt, evolve, individuate, proliferate, and perhaps, even, achieve some sort of ecological (i.e. ethical) equilibrium among equals.²²⁶

As in *The Voyage Out*, however, the ethics of extra-discursive subjectivity in *The Waves* inevitably butts up against larger, more intractable political divisions. Thus Woolf’s exploration of Rachel’s apparent asubjectivity tragically culminates in a lining-up of species and sexual difference in much the same way that Richard Dalloway and Hirst—and Jack

²²⁵ *Mrs. Dalloway* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1981), 68.

²²⁶ Suggestively, the keyword “instinct” appears *nineteen* times in *The Voyage Out*, while appearing only *three* times in *The Waves*. The novelistic perspective has moved from outside the animal to *inside* the animal, “instinct” no longer a phenomenological category to be noted insofar as it indexes the opacity of cross-species difference in an economy of perceived intentionality vs. observed behavior.

Hills before them—boorishly line up species and racial (or more generally social) difference, treating sociological and political complexity with the same amount of perspicacity they would fish or cattle. The dual status of *The Waves*, therefore, as both the consummation of Woolf's modernist aesthetics, her self-described “playpoem” and “abstract mystical eyeless book,”²²⁷ and a high watermark of Woolf's critique of the Romantic ideologies subtending British imperialism can but prompt us to ask how the naturalization of asubjectivity in *The Waves* might depart from, or even overcome, the too-often intractable politics of the posthuman.

If we can detach Woolfian ethics from the discursive face, we might now begin to address the limitations of influential readings like Jane Marcus's more effectively. Marcus collapses the subjective difference so strenuously articulated by Woolf in *The Waves* into colonial difference. She reads, for example, the lyrical interludes of the novel as “a Western imitation or homage to the Hindu Gayatri, or as prayers on the course of the sun,” suggesting that “the text of the East,” surrounds “the text of the decline and fall of the West.” Evacuated of the transcendent Romantic subjectivity populating the interior passages of the book's first sections, Bernard's “world without a self,” insofar as it resonates with the asubjective interludes, is recognizable to Marcus as “the white postcolonial world.”²²⁸ But we can also—without turning a blind eye to the undeniable colonial contours of *The Waves*—see in the novel an attempt by Woolf herself to pry these intersecting planes apart, indexing a commitment both to exploring the local possibilities of innovative aesthetics and to critiquing cultural place of that innovation in a global imperial context.

²²⁷ Woolf's description of *The Waves* as “mystical” already suggests her aesthetics' deep resonance with what she calls Hills' “mystical anticipation” of a trout's movements.

²²⁸ Marcus, 243, 234.

Scholarship has spent a good deal of energy identifying the biographical referents of the characters of *The Waves*: Louis is largely regarded as a cipher for T.S. Eliot, the “former colonial subject... most afraid of the dissolution of empire”; the silent, farcically heroic figure of Percival a memorial to her brother Thoby (along with an aunt who fell from a horse in Bombay); Bernard a thumbnail précis of chauvinist literary critic Desmond MacCarthy.²²⁹ But what of the women in *The Waves*? Despite her important reading of the novel’s gender politics, Marcus consigns Rhoda and her unique internal language to the status of a tragic echo of Shelleyan Romantic diction.²³⁰ Yet the degree to which Rhoda’s internal language not only exceeds Shelley-quotation but also continues a line of Woolfian exploration into non-discursive subjectivities (stretching back at least to *The Voyage Out*) merits further examination.

Look now at what Percival has given me. Look at the street now that Percival is dead. The houses are lightly founded to be puffed over by a breath of air. Reckless and random the cars race and roar and hunt us to death like bloodhounds. I am alone in a hostile world. The human face is hideous. This is to my liking. I want publicity and violence and to be dashed like a stone on the rocks. I like factory chimneys and cranes and lorries. I like the passing of face and face and face, deformed, indifferent. I am sick of prettiness; I am sick of privacy. I ride rough waters and shall sink with no one to save me. (*W* 115)

Spurred on by the significance of Percival’s death in its mix of seeming heroism and utter, ignoble contingency, Rhoda approaches the moment of her suicide around the midpoint of *The Waves*, like Bernard constantly haunting the streets of London, but unlike Bernard in her rejection of a comforting traditional aesthetics and sense of liberal subjectivity: she rejects the easy aesthetics of Bernard’s pretty phrases and Jinny’s powdered face; she rejects the monadic, punctual, and enclosed sense of Levinasian interiority, taking up instead both a

²²⁹ See Marcus, 231, 238, 239, 244.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

complete opacity of faces—simultaneously deformed and uniform—and a complete and violent tearing-away of faces—in order to expose what she believes to lie beneath: “‘Like’ and ‘like’ and ‘like’—but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?... Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean; we have made oblongs and stood them upon squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation” (118). Attacking the metaphoricity underpinning Woolfian physiognomy, Rhoda is seeking to articulate, like Woolf herself, a sense of the structural (or architectural) pattern of all existence when no longer contingent on the limitations of human perception and expression, to undo the hermeneutics of depth that attends the humanist subjectivity and replace it with one of absolute surface and metonymy.

But what precisely brings Rhoda to this point, allows her to see the underlying structure? There is one important catalyzing condensation in the train of thought set in motion by Percival’s death. For one brief passage, before she returns to the London streets, Rhoda’s vision bears us back, in a wave stretching across decades, to the earliest experiments with asubjectivity in Woolf—the anti-fable of “The Monkeys” and Rachel’s non-discursive love for music:

Here is a hall where one pays money and goes in, where one hears music among somnolent people who have come here after lunch on a hot afternoon. We have eaten beef and pudding enough to live for a week without tasting food. Therefore we cluster like maggots on the back of something that will carry us on. Decorous, portly—we have white hair waved under our hats; slim shoes; little bags; clean-shaven cheeks; here and there a military moustache; not a speck of dust has been allowed to settle anywhere on our broadcloth. Swaying and opening programmes, with a few words of greeting to friends, we settle down, like walruses stranded on rocks, like heavy bodies incapable of waddling to the sea, hoping for a wave to lift us, but we are too heavy, and too much dry shingle lies between us and the sea. We lie gorged with food, torpid in the heat. Then, swollen but contained in slippery satin, the seagreen woman comes to our rescue. She sucks in her lips, assumes an air of intensity, inflates herself and hurls herself precisely at

the right moment as if she saw an apple and her voice was the arrow into the note, 'Ah!'

An axe has split a tree to the core; the core is warm; sound quivers within the bark. 'Ah!' cried a woman to her lover, leaning from her window in Venice. 'Ah, ah!' she cried, and again she cries 'Ah!' She has provided us with a cry. (117)

What begins with a series of demeaning physiognomies that congeal into a scene of torpid animal bodies too reminiscent of the first half of "The Monkeys" is quickly and irremediably shattered by the violent arrival of *music*, which, as Rachel explains to Terence in *The Voyage Out*, "goes straight for things" and draws out their core.

It is this vision and this violence that haunt Bernard in the second half of *The Waves*: not merely Percival's absence, but the increasingly unlivable pressure exerted upon him by the "scarcely formulated faces" he passes in the street (180). Bernard's "world without a self," then, is not only the "white postcolonial world" but also an expansion or adaptation of Rhoda's unique asubjectivity—Rhoda whose death is more impressed on his mind than the others (214). This world is a flight not only from violent Romantic hero-worship but even more specifically from Bernard's own subjective epistemology, his practice of summarizing the lives of friends and strangers in pithy phrases and sketches, slotting them into convenient physiognomic descriptions. The poet, who from childhood on imagines others to be transparently like camels, vultures, cranes, or dogs, is now made to feel the consequent, paradoxical opacity of those faces as well. His rather micro-estimations of the world begin to feel insufficient in the face of a metropolitan modernity: "While one straightens the fork so precisely on the tablecloth, a thousand faces mop and mow" (189). Like Jack Hills himself, once an avid champion of spontaneous transparency, Bernard must now reckon with the opacity that results from treating too many people too easily like fish:

Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others leap and sizzle, making the cauldron bubble like boiling silver, and slip through my fingers. Faces recur, faces and faces—and they press their beauty to the walls of my bubble—Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda and a thousand others. (190)

These pressures eventually lead Bernard to generate his vision of a world without a self. Weighed down by the burdens of subjective experience, the boundaries of the self break down, and Bernard, in a world filled with intensities, multiplicities, and vigor—“The earth absorbs colour like a sponge, slowly drinking water”—can no longer summon any conception of his own self or subjectivity (212). Discursivity itself flees him, too, his phrases no longer prove welcome; the world without a self is a world also without any subjective aesthetics, without any appeal to personal taste—for Rhoda, “prettiness,” and Bernard here, “loveliness”: “How describe or say anything in articulate words again?—save that it fades, save that it undergoes a gradual transformation, becomes, even in the course of one short walk, habitual—this scene also.... Loveliness returns as one looks with all its train of phantom phrases” (213).

But can this new mode of experience sustain Bernard? Must the horrific faces of liberal subjectivity that drove Rhoda to a tragic death also drive Bernard to a similar fate? Or, confronted with the utter illegibility of asubjectivity, can Bernard only flee in a fit of mania and narcissism as Terence finally does before a sick Rachel’s complete, indifferent opacity?²³¹ The ending of *The Waves*, after all, remains ambiguous, and the reader is compelled to wonder whether Bernard flinging himself at Death suggests that Woolf’s poet overcomes death in the end, or that he is overcome by death. In the latter case, Bernard’s death might

²³¹ One of the curious features of *The Voyage Out* is how both Rachel and Terence, at times together and at other times separately, manically proclaim *not* their love for each other but the perceived excellence and exceptionality of their love.

be consistent with Marcus' reading: the physiognomic epistemology and imperial ideology of transparency finally turn on and overcome him after all these years in a moment of postcolonial justice, the asubjectivity ostensibly belonging to the postcolonial other being simply too much to bear. In the former case, Bernard's triumph could be a sign of Woolf's artistic success: asubjectivity is wrested into a vital, livable position no longer merely mapped onto and essentialized in a wholly illegible cultural or sexual other.

This question of Bernard's ultimate relationship to the politics of faciality is dramatically posed in the final section of *The Waves*, in which it is revealed that Bernard's monologue is, in fact, a dialogue with a stranger only vaguely recollected from a trip to Africa (on what was probably one of Louis' luxury liners). This stranger has a just-as-vague face, "a mere adumbration of eyes, cheeks, nostrils," but he or she nevertheless has the power, as Bernard says, "to drive me back, to pinion me down among all those other faces" and cause him suffering and insult (217-218). Yet thus confronted again by the ghosts of physiognomies past, Bernard, importantly, does not merely flee out of fear or repulsion, or demand this stranger be removed immediately from his presence. Rather, he wills himself to stay and adapt to this world justly bereft of subjective transparency, and learns to use the ethical force of opacity itself to activate a new sense of perception. "But wait," he says,

Now that I have reviled you for the blow that sent me staggering among peelings and crumblings and old scraps of meat, I will record in words of one syllable how also under your gaze with that compulsion on me I begin to perceive this, that and the other. The clock ticks; the woman sneezes; the waiter comes--there is a gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and unification. Listen: a whistle sounds, wheels rush, the door creaks on its hinges. I regain the sense of the complexity and the reality and the struggle, for which I thank you. (218)

Bernard accumulates his perceptions in bare, ambient sounds and "words of one syllable" until, inscrutably, there is a "gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and

unification.” Sitting among “peelings and crumbings and old scraps of meat,” Bernard now might as well be one of the repulsive walrus-like men in Rhoda’s vision, waiting to be struck awake by “a howl; a cry” (219). But here, under the gaze of a scarcely formulated face, confronted with the fruit of his own physiognomic thinking, he is actually able not only to grasp the posthuman potential of non-discursivity but also to wield it, however incipiently, as a dialectically new, asubjective aesthetics.

Bernard, then, is the fulfillment of Terence’s fatuous aspirations from *The Voyage Out*; the liberal-chauvinist writer, charged by the inscrutability of the other, is finally compelled to record “the things people don’t say.” By having the ethical ignominy of physiognomy inflicted back upon him in a simple fabular inversion, by being made to feel as transparent as a beast and to understand, finally, that he, too, is reducible to a “hairy, ape-like” man, or also, suddenly, a caricature of an old man, Bernard gains access to an intersubjective ethics not premised on discursive selfhood—representing, for Woolf, a decisive step beyond the violent mapping of nontraditional subjectivities onto patriarchy’s manifold but singularly abjected others.

PRECARIOUS TYPES & THE NECESSITY OF DESCRIPTION

Loneliness is the very essence of tragedy, for the soul that has attained itself through its destiny can have brothers among the stars, but never an earthly companion.

—Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*

Which is not to say that the ethical avowal of another’s opacity and their refusal to be subjectively instrumentalized is by any means secure once it is expressed. Woolf is

emphatically clear in this regard. For Bernard, the “world seen without a self” that allows him to finally recognize the violence his literary instrumentalization once wreaked on Rhoda is exceptionally precarious. The ostensibly neutral, ambiently-tuned descriptive style that he lights on perhaps only fleetingly wrests asubjective experience from identitarian taxonomy; almost any language whatsoever threatens with its “thickness” to collapse back into a too-subjective, too-habitual perspective—“loveliness,” “prettiness,” sentiment. It is indeed a risky line to tread at all. For Bernard, compelled to confront the totality of his own biology—his body through time, the bestial, libidinal “old brute” inside him—all too easily, for the space of a few paragraphs, converts that corporeal self-awareness into a narcissistic self-worship. “But no more,” he cries, as if three words of such brevity were enough to convince us of his earnestness’ good intentions. No, tonight his body rises “tier upon tier like some cool temple,” his hand, his sensibility, even, new objects of aesthetic devotion (215).

This essay therefore ends with a consideration of the difficulties and instabilities inherent in the recent turn to sociologically-informed surface reading over and against critical hermeneutics of suspicion. For if, as I have been arguing, we can narrate the ethical trajectory of *The Waves* as a move away from an interpretive ethics to one based on opacity, then it is a text already intimately involved in the excoriation of the “ethical heroism” or “charisma” of the humanist critic in favor of a flat, minimalist descriptive method that “register[s] the losses of history rather than repairing them.”²³² What, however, *The Waves* alerts us to is the further possibility that the neutrality of Goffmanian description itself can

²³² Heather Love, “Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn,” *New Literary History* 41.2 (2010): 386.

too easily be subsumed under a new regime of narcissistic humanism.²³³ For Woolf, again—and here we are reminded of “The Monkeys”—this was the impasse faced by fictional portrayals of ethics more broadly: without realism’s familiar devices of interiority (sentiment, physical description, idiom, *character*), how was one supposed to compellingly represent subjective transformation?

It is for this reason that Woolf can, perhaps, be taken as an exemplary test case for surface reading. To put it with a blunt question, do the descriptive methods to which surface reading generally hews offer themselves up very readily to objects invested in dynamic change? This question, after all, is not only the question behind the humanistic ethical turn in Woolf criticism (which, as I have noted, often problematically locates faciality as the site of intersubjective ethics), it is also central point of contention in many earlier feminist recuperations/repudiations of Woolf. The fragmentary and constantly mutating aesthetic practices associated with Woolf’s modernist experimentation have been taken to be at odds with, for example, a feminist politics committed to a historical realism made efficacious primarily through the Lukacsian reconstruction of a “complete human personality.”²³⁴ And this is even more of a problem when the object of such aesthetic representation is an especially demanding kind of asubjective and, to some, adamantly anti-identitarian experience.²³⁵ What I want to suggest here, then, is that Woolf’s writing has been a unique and vital focal point for so many opposing and accelerated polemics not just because the

²³³ Certainly, Love’s call to read closely but not deeply readily acknowledges something like this possibility: alongside the flat, descriptive, and anti-humanist aesthetics that Love draws our attention to in *Beloved*, for example, is still the humanistic “richness” of a novel concerned with restoring agency and interiority to its characters. Yet—to ask a stronger question for fiction more broadly—is there, perhaps, a third way?

²³⁴ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), 4-5; Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Howard Fertig, 2002), 5.

²³⁵ Moi, “I am not a woman writer: About women, literature, and feminist theory today,” *Feminist Theory* 9.3 (2008): 267.

different aesthetic elements motivating each polemic are all present and so strongly exercised in Woolf, but also because Woolf herself, over a career-long arc, was working through precisely these problems of representation via the particular device of the *type*.

As we have seen, type is a more appropriate denomination than “character” for the organizing unit of agency and perception in much of Woolf, and her interest in exploring asubjective experience led her to animal typology in particular as a suitable novelistic method. And while such typology risks the ugly assumptions of physiognomy, for instance, it also, I contend, opens up as part of a longer tradition of post-Darwinian social ethics a way to represent agency without falling into either the violent humanism of charismatic individuality or the stagnant naturalism of deterministic taxonomy. Additionally, because surface reading’s anti-humanist investments have naturally led it to make good use of disciplines beyond the humanities, especially those that take animals as their object of study, the type offers a possible way to re-conceptualize the relationship between neutral description and agency—as, perhaps, another rejoinder to dismissals of surface reading as too “quietest.”²³⁶

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault explains that, as taxonomical thinking gave way to biological thinking at the turn of the nineteenth century, classes of beings were liberated from synchronic tables and re-inserted into diachronic history. This new episteme

²³⁶ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 16. See also S. Pearl Brilmyer on character in George Eliot’s *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* as not as “a hidden or buried kernel of personality or moral fiber” but as “a surface phenomenon produced through a dialogue between outward observations and inward beliefs.” Brilmyer, “The Natural History of My Inward Self: Sensing Character in George Eliot’s *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*,” *PMLA* 129.1 (2014): 35-51. Meanwhile, in terms of the interaction between animal studies and anti-humanist readings more broadly, for example, see Bruce Boehrer, “Animal Studies and the Deconstruction of Character,” *PMLA* 124.2 (2009): 542–547; Cary Wolfe, who uses Luhmann and systems theory to rethink poetry beyond humanism, in *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 267; and Elizabeth Grosz, who uses post-Darwinian animality to rethink the materiality of art more generally, in *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 186-190.

culminated most visibly in the rise of Darwinian evolutionary theory: more fundamentally, though, the shift was to a preoccupation with how beings are able to move through time while remaining discrete, whole, and intact. Or, in other words, living and organic. The *type*, therefore, rather than the external taxon, became a container, a unit of vitality, for understanding the dynamic principles of inner necessity that kept, at any given moment in history, either individual bodies or classes of bodies recognizably coherent and functional (and also open to evolution).²³⁷

Crucially, the type is *not* a frozen and essentialist taxonomy, but rather a heuristic for facilitating a being's successful biological and social existence. It is well known, for instance, that Erving Goffman was himself at different points in his approach inspired by the work of animal ethologists, and in distinguishing between his concept of "display" as a unit of social formalism and the more traditional Durkheimian sense of ritualization, he was drawing on the typological mechanisms of animal science. For where ritual suggests that side of sociology with a historically humanistic emphasis on the "social structure and ultimate beliefs in which the performer and witness are embedded," displays are a highly formalized and performative genre of stylized behavior that push an individual not into conformity with a predetermined group of any kind but back into "the unfolding course of socially situated events."²³⁸ The space, that is, of social action and ethical responsibility both opened and parametrized by the formalism of display lies somewhere *between* the two extreme poles of modernist humanism, whether the deterministic universalism implied by "ultimate beliefs" or the subjectivism of absolute individuality.

Moreover, if this vital utility of the type is to resist a humanist resumption, its

²³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 278.

²³⁸ Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (New York: Harper, 1969), 1.

parameters cannot be formulated “externally” or artificially. They have to arise, instead, from the apparent internal “necessity” of a being’s body or its relation to its surroundings, reflecting neither an essence of any kind nor a conformity to telos but rather the observable workings of whatever equilibrial mechanism—physiological, ethological, social, evolutionary—are sustaining that being’s life *at all*. Hence Goffman models his concept of display on structures of animal behavior, citing, for example, the work of ethologists like Julian Huxley (who himself was building off the work of geneticist C. H. Waddington and, further down the line, Darwin) as evidence for the ability of social forms *qua forms* to arise organically while remaining somewhat free of anything like biological determinism. According to the ethologists, patterns of animal display can actually and, perhaps, counterintuitively, consolidate themselves over time through a process called “canalization” as a repeatable meme *regardless* of variations in genotype or the environment.²³⁹

We can begin to see, then, how the ethological background to typological sociology speaks to a similar method in Woolf’s fiction. The whole of Woolf’s style is generally directed not quite at the “essence” of experience but at an intrinsic necessity that seems to make experience cohere, and thus tends to be built gradually through a slow, descriptive, even quantitative elaboration to a sudden and qualitatively revelatory finish: from the syntactical structure of her prose (the familiar three beats followed by a flash of insight) to the macrostructure of her novels (and their famously bracing final sentences). So wrought, the individual works seem to attain an integral completeness that detaches both them and

²³⁹ Julian Huxley, “Introduction: A Discussion on Ritualization of Behavior in Animals and Man,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B* 251.772 (1966).

the characters they contain from the reader's own temporality. Speaking of the ending of *To the Lighthouse*, Eric Hayot writes,

The charm of imaginary art, like that of imaginary artists, lies in its unimagability; whatever it does, however it produces and organizes an aesthetic world internal to the novelistic or poetic space in which it appears, in the end justifies itself directly in proportion to the audience's inability to evaluate it on terms other than its own. [...] The conjunction of that metafictional ending and Lily's line guarantees, more than any mental picture of her painting, the authority and legitimacy of her judgment.²⁴⁰

The works achieve that desired effect of modernist aesthetic autonomy, made permanent and intensely graspable like one of Woolf's solid objects, while the characters rise towards a metafictional coincidence with Woolf herself, their latest ethical apprehensions deemed, for the time being, provisionally sufficient.

In this sense, as I suggested earlier in this essay, Woolf's style is also highly resonant with, and might even be seen as a vernacular deployment of, the typological ethics outlined by her father Leslie Stephen in *The Science of Ethics*—itself a precursor, albeit more philosophical than scientific, to the concretized mechanisms of ethology. Like Goffman, Stephen insisted not on any essentializing function of typology but on the utility of type for expedient, vital social interaction and hence analogized the formation of personality types, like social displays, to self-organizing evolutionary principles found in animal life. Additionally, however, Stephen analogized the structure of personality types to principles behind man-made forms as well—from the gracefully self-evident utility of physical tools like a bow to exemplary refinement of Greek sculpture, or even the haphazard but undeniable aesthetic unity of a dish like roast pig—arguing that all these classes of objects are types in the sense that, though we might not be able to explain how a type was first

²⁴⁰ Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 177.

discovered, it nevertheless recognizably presents as “the solution of an amazingly complex problem,” “rolled in countless minds till it is rounded to perfection, like the pebble on the sea-beach.”²⁴¹ And to make this equivalence was also—as Stephen’s contribution to aesthetics, in a kind of evolutionary Kantian corollary—to claim that aesthetic forms lack any absolute essence or deterministic function apart from their detectable mechanisms of necessity. “As the bow is felt out, the animal is always feeling itself out”: and for Stephen, this meant that the artwork, too, must feel itself out—understanding itself neither as a singular work of genius (just as any given animal is not an unprecedented problem to be solved by evolutionary history) nor as a mere symptom of historical conditions (just as an animal is not simply the solution to an environmental problem) but as a continual process of both inhabiting a received world and making that world habitable for itself.²⁴²

As a conjectural submission to the ongoing conversation around surface reading methods, then, I here end by proposing that one logical outcome of reading Woolf descriptively, consistent with the typological thinking behind surface reading’s sociological grounding, would be to understand both Woolfian form and Woolfian individuality as types or displays—each a discrete and provisional *alignment* (to use another term from Goffman) designed to simultaneously adapt and adapt *to* “the unfolding course of socially [or, literary-historically] situated events.” Instead of as a symptomatic reaction to increasingly fractured conditions of modernity, hence, or as a single monumental corpus, Woolf’s highly varied

²⁴¹ Stephen is somewhat whimsically citing Charles Lamb’s “Dissertation upon Roast Pig” (1823), in which a clumsy ancient Chinese man, naturally, is said to have discovered the dish by accidentally burning his house down. See Leslie Stephen, *The Science of Ethics* (1882), 74, 76, 77.

²⁴² Stephen’s concept of the animal as both solution and problem, of course, cannily anticipates Bergsonian and, eventually, Deleuzian theory. See Stephen, 79.

series of works, for example, might be understood as a set of highly focused and constantly readjusted forays into a literary ecology. And what often seem to be formulations of ethical finality in each of these works—which are, in turn, extracted and universalized by ethical critics—might be taken more responsibly as only transiently available.

For to insist on anything more permanent or ethically consequential would, perhaps, be a kind of injustice. What other interpretation could there be of the fragment entitled “The Dog”—probably written, we are told, in 1939 and stitched into a notebook Leonard Woolf labeled “Between the Acts”?²⁴³ In it, a dog curiously reminiscent of Woolf’s most autobiographical characters is castigated for her cowardice. Her owner, the speaker, seems Leonard-like. And emphatically unlike the riotously sentimental Flush, she possesses neither a name, a face, nor any real agency—she does not even seem to have control over her own legs: “From this fur legs extracted themselves.” Rather, the dog finds vitality in attaching itself to the speaker. “She became like a supplementary limb—a tail, something attached to my person. I never had to call her. I had great difficulty in detaching her.” The dog is no longer a dog in the traditional sense. It has in fact chosen but one of its parts to be its “type.” “She was a coward,” the speaker complains. “She had none of that sporting instinct which her species has. She never attacked. She always ran away.” But the evasion of type is not always a sin, and to demur not itself a cowardly thing.

Therefore, as Sir Thomas has no call to conciliate his reader, these short books of his are dull if he chooses, difficult if he likes, beautiful beyond measure if he has a mind that way.

—“Reading”

²⁴³ “The Dog,” *CSF*, 334-335.

III.
 THE WHITE MAN'S FABLE:
 VIRTUOSIC EMPIRE
 & KIPLING

The world changes, and the minds of men. Helen Keller outstrips Laura Bridgman, as Rudyard Kipling outstrips Maria Edgeworth. Will Helen herself appear quaint and old-fashioned fifty years hence, to a generation spoiled by some still more daring recipient of its sympathy and wonder?²⁴⁴

—William James

Yes—the creature was a thinker along the lines necessary to his sport; and he was a humorist also, like so many natural murderers. One knows the type among beasts as well as among men. It possesses a curious truculent mirth—almost indecent but infallibly significant.²⁴⁵

—“The Bull That Thought”

ECCE KIPLING

The previous chapters in this dissertation have explored the utility of animal instinct as a model for modernist style in three primary ways. In Hopkins's poems, to review, animal virtuosity, in its capacity to accomplish the seemingly impossible, helped figure a fleetingly aestheticized homoeroticism. In Kingsley, we have seen how auto-opacity—the experience of remaining unaware of one's instinctive behavior—became a crucial device for didactic form, stylistically transforming readers into animals to be manipulated. And we have seen

²⁴⁴ William James, “Laura Bridgman,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 93 (1904): 95.

²⁴⁵ Rudyard Kipling, “The Bull That Thought,” in *Debts and Credits*, ed. Sandra Kemp (London: Penguin, 1987), 162.

Woolf negotiate the pleasures and pains of the novelist's natural-historical gaze as her fiction came to terms with the consequences of bestializing subjective difference. This chapter, in turn, looks at what happens when all three modes of adapting animal instinct to modernist style are deployed together to a single end. Specifically, in Kipling, I argue, we find a concerted repurposing of these techniques towards what was perhaps the more ambitious horizon of empire. The ability of animal style to transmit or perform a sense of moral urgency without being overly didactic became a way to process the complexity and palliate the violence of empire's many intellectual and ethical demands—and, maybe, for Kipling, the only way.

At first blush, it may seem counterintuitive or arbitrary to take the animals that feature in, admittedly, only a portion of Kipling's writing to be generative of or more essential (than, say, *Kim*) to his whole literary or ideological program, or even the entire rhetoric of empire for which Kipling has been a frequent synecdoche. There is, after all, no shortage of operative figures for writerly craft within Kipling: one has only to turn to the numerous painters, mystics, or even machines strewn throughout his stories to see how else Kipling, at times, understood and portrayed his poetics. Taking a simultaneously broader and more granular look at Kipling's writings, however, I hope to show that the particular "style of being" that Edward Said has called Kipling's White Man took shape and sharpened itself—in Kipling and others—distinctly in relation to animality. Indeed, insofar as Kipling is noted primarily for his style, this chapter looks at a moment in his career in which his stylistic powers were consciously crystallized under the aegis of the animal, and, secondarily, insofar as modernism has often been defined as the pursuit of a "pure style," what such a bestial style says about Kipling's exceptional and highly polarizing position within the

modernist ecology.

Kipling, after all, has long been the object of eminently ambivalent fixation among his contemporaries and critics. Among his peers' opinions, nothing was more common than a begrudging and sometimes perplexed admiration for what was emphatically the seeming "naturalness" of his virtuosity. Joyce considered Kipling, along with Tolstoy and D'Annunzio, one of the "three writers of the nineteenth century who had the greatest natural talents" despite their respective political fanaticisms and grouped him alongside Emily Brontë and Yeats as one of those possessed of "pure imagination."²⁴⁶ Wilde was impressed by the "superb flashes of vulgarity" in Kipling: to him, such masterfully style-less realism was the work of a "genius who drops his aspirates."²⁴⁷ Henry James wrote to his brother William that Kipling struck him "personally as the most complete man of genius (as distinct from fine intelligence)" he had ever known.²⁴⁸ William, a year earlier, had been even more generous, writing, "He's more of a Shakespeare than anyone yet in this generation of ours, as it strikes me."²⁴⁹

For so many, Kipling was an exception among modern writers for the degree to which his style—or seeming lack of style—seemed to fall outside the normal ambit of explainable literary technique. At stake was what seemed to be the *impossible* capacity of language to be made so baldly vivid that it would have an almost immediate effect on the reader. "I am laid low by the absolutely uncanny talent," Henry James wrote in another letter, "the prodigious special faculty of it. It's all *violent*, without a dream of a *nuance* or a hint

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 661.

²⁴⁷ Oscar Wilde, "The True Function and Value of Criticism," *Nineteenth Century* 28 (July, Sept 1890).

²⁴⁸ Henry James, to William James, 6 Feb 1892, quoted in Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 193.

²⁴⁹ William James, to Henry James, 15 Feb 1891, in Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of Williams James as Revealed in Unpublished Correspondence and Notes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 274.

of ‘distinction’; all prose trumpets and castanets and such—with never a touch of the fiddle-string or a note of the nightingale. But it’s magnificent and masterly in its way, and full of the most insidious art.”²⁵⁰ Both “without nuance” and subtly “insidious,” Kipling’s writing seemed to transmit its content in such a spontaneous and total way that it could only have been a matter of preternatural instinct, as if proceeding not from any rational faculty but directly from his body. As Randall Jarrell puts it: “Often Kipling writes with such grace and command, such a combination of experienced mastery and congenital inspiration, that we repeat with Goethe: ‘Seeing someone accomplishing arduous things with ease gives us an impression of witnessing the impossible.’”²⁵¹

In fact, it would not be an exaggeration on my part to say that Kipling was often understood as effectively some sort of remarkable animal or non-human being. In his preface to a selection of Kipling’s verse, T. S. Eliot speaks of his “peculiar detachment and remoteness from all environment, a universal foreignness, [...] a remoteness as of an alarmingly intelligent visitor from another planet.”²⁵² Such ontological strangeness was all the more alarming, moreover, for the way it seemed to throw into higher relief something hitherto unspoken but essential to everybody else. Thus writing to Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry James would call Kipling an “infant monster.”²⁵³ And again, William James would even go so far as to compare Kipling to Helen Keller and Laura Bridgman in an essay attempting to use the success of the two most well-known deafblind Americans as proof of

²⁵⁰ Henry James, to Jonathan Sturges, 5 Nov 1896, *The Letters of Henry James*, vol. 1, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York: Scribner, 1920), 248. Emphasis is James’.

²⁵¹ Randall Jarrell, “On Preparing to Read Kipling,” in *Kipling, Auden & Co.: Essays and Reviews 1935-1964* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 336.

²⁵² T. S. Eliot, “Rudyard Kipling,” in *A Choice of Kipling’s Verse*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), 23.

²⁵³ Henry James, to Robert Louis Stevenson, 12 Jan 1891, *The Letters of Henry James*, 174.

the relational nature of consciousness.²⁵⁴

Such a comparison is troubling, but far from unexpected in an epistemic moment where both the arts and sciences were coming to terms with the radical importance of apparently non-rational faculties. The autonomy of Western Man's sovereign ego was waning. Now evidence from all quarters suggested that what he had until recently taken to be his proprietary intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, even physiological and affective domains, were, perhaps, more ably exemplified by uneducated, uncivilized, even non-human outliers. Thus, like Darwin and many others, William James used the exceptionality of deafblind individuals to prove the universality of many underlying physiological and psychological principles. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, for example, Darwin consistently cites studies of Laura Bridgman as proof that any number of emotional expressions are not acquired but innate.²⁵⁵

So in a similar manner, Kipling came to signify among his peers a similar exceptionality revealing a deeper exemplarity. Without any external signs of refined intellect or aesthetic polish, Kipling's particular virtuosic style called into question the "realism" of its other practitioners. How, indeed, could this one writer from the fringes of the empire, untrained and possessed only of an uncouth journalistic eye, produce such powerful depictions in language? To what aspect of language, ostensibly available to all, did Kipling have seemingly exceptional and spontaneous access? In this chapter, I argue that Kipling was by no means unaware of the questions surrounding his style and, in fact, spent a great

²⁵⁴ William James, "Laura Bridgman," 95, 98.

²⁵⁵ "Laura Bridgman, from her blindness and deafness, could not have acquired any expression through imitation, yet when a letter from a beloved friend was communicated to her by gesture-language, she 'laughed and clapped her hands, and the colour mounted to her cheeks.' On other occasions she has been seen to stamp for joy." See Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, ed. Joe Cain and Sharon Messenger (London: Penguin, 2009), 182 and passim.

amount of time working out a solution to the evident contradictions his writing presented. For what to others seemed like an irreconcilable opposition between the masterful and the vulgar was to Kipling the natural two-sided-ness of a single imperial coin. More than anyone else, Kipling was aware of the precarious equilibrium that empire demanded and knew that no individual could hope to navigate it without the means to internalize it, make it part of one's very self, in advance. Virtuosity was this means.

THE VIRTUOSO'S BURDEN

In April of 1892, in between getting married in London and beginning *The Jungle Books* in Vermont, Rudyard Kipling and his new wife Carrie arrived in Yokohama. Life, Kipling tells us, was looking up, and empire, that singular horizon of Kipling's being, guaranteed that everything could only come up roses. About to embark on a ship to Japan from Vancouver, he would write, "At the railway wharf, with never a gun to protect her, lies the *Empress of India*—the Japan boat—and what more auspicious name could you wish to find at the end of one of the strong chains of empire?" (*Travel* 34).²⁵⁶ Even those beyond the reach of, or at the furthest edges of, the British Empire are subject to its re-signification; Japan and Vancouver, both literally defenseless, are kept figuratively vulnerable as well, and therefore readily concatenated into Kipling's imperial machine. By the time he arrives in Yokohama, the stage is set for an even more exhaustive undertaking. Japan, ethnographically, was his oyster; the sea upon his arrival "as smooth as the inside of an oyster shell"; and everything in it, if Kipling is to be believed, even easier to read (*Travel* 35).²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ "Across a Continent," in Rudyard Kipling, *Letters of Travel: 1892-1913* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1920). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *Travel*.

²⁵⁷ "The Edge of the East," in *Travel*.

Kipling, of course, is the exemplar of exemplars when it comes to Saidian Orientalists. And nowhere is this more on display than in his travel sketches—this particular one published later as “The Edge of the East.” As Orientalist, only the White Man can interpret and make sense of the obstreperously opaque Orient. Not even the Oriental himself is qualified for the task; he must have his culture and very essence explained back to him by the Expert, who alone holds the keys to the East.²⁵⁸ “There are ways and ways of entering Japan,” writes Kipling, referring initially to maritime approaches (*Travel* 35). What becomes clear, however, is that there is, in fact, only one true way to entering Japan, and that such a way—that is, Kipling’s—is the only way precisely by virtue of being able to absorb and describe all other ways of entering (including the way degree zero of being Japanese to begin with).

So far, so good. Cartography soon gives way to linguistics gives way to the full sensorium of the East gives way to an overly detailed account of land tax for rice farms. At each stage, Kipling makes it clear that what matters is, first, the total aesthetic immanence of Japan and, second and more importantly, the need for Kipling to describe and explain that aesthetic back to the Japanese themselves. “The warmth of the East, that goes through, not over, the lazy body” suffuses everything, telescoping outward in an immaculate aesthetic vision ordered through Kipling’s note-perfect descriptions, everything locking together into a finely tessellated picture through a series of repeating, metonymic adjectives; Japan is eminently “slate-coloured,” “ridged,” etc.:

Outside, beyond the foliage, where the sunlight lies on the slate-coloured roofs, the ridged rice-fields beyond the roofs, and the hills beyond the rice-fields, is all Japan—only all Japan; [...] For some small hint of the beauties to be shown later there is the roof of a temple, ridged and fluted with dark tiles,

²⁵⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995), 233.

flung out casually beyond the corner of the bluff on which the garden stands. Any other curve of the eaves would not have consorted with the sweep of the pine branches; therefore, this curve was made, and being made, was perfect. (*Travel* 38)

In a typically Kiplingian move, ensconcing his description in passive constructions, he strips Japan's exceptional beauty of all intention beyond the flick of a wrist, the perfection of the temple's curve casually exquisite. Echoing his wish from a previous Japanese jaunt to "put the whole Empire in a glass case," Japan becomes a self-contained tautology—the fields are not just *all* Japan, they are "*only* all Japan," unable to signify anything but "Japan"—and one anchored by the sole blasé agency of Kipling.²⁵⁹ And it is not just that, to take an earlier example, he presumptuously gives voice to a line of coolies ("it was as though they were welcoming a return in speech that the listener must know as well as English"); nor even that his aesthetic vision alone grants their speech any coherence ("They talked and they talked, but the ghosts of familiar words would not grow any clearer till presently the Smell came down the open streets again"); but that even this fantastic Orientalist labor on his part is played off as no big deal, a mere shrug in its spontaneous essentializing (the Smell signifying "that this was the East where nothing matters") (*Travel* 36). Hence, I will submit at the start, Kipling's style goes a step further than Saidian Orientalism. The casualness of Kipling's Orientalism suggests a second-degree reflexivity: the Orientalist, maybe, always runs the risk of being too involved in his work. Perhaps it wouldn't hurt to have a little distance.

Despite, in *Orientalism*, first gleaning his trope of the White Man from Kipling, Said doesn't

²⁵⁹ *From Sea to Sea: Letters of Travel, Part 1* (New York: Scribner, 1899), 373. See also Joseph Lavery, "Empire in a glass case: Japanese beauty, British culture, and transnational aestheticism" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013).

actually spend much time dwelling on its function within Kipling himself. This reflects, perhaps, Said's broader examination of Orientalism's basis in institutionalized nineteenth-century racial theory and its attendant rhetorical effects. Racial theory presses the empiricisms of linguistics, anthropology, and biology into the service of what Said (following Talal Asad) identifies as the typologies of synchronic essentialism. What more objectively should lead to an epistemic recognition of *both* the contingent variety and evolutionary capacity of the empirical (something this dissertation has emphasized) actually came to reinforce a "structured irony." The categories—"the Oriental," "the Muslim"—in which concrete groups of people were characterized and studied in the present were "compressed" and abstracted so as to simultaneously refer "backwards to a *radical* terminal of the generality."²⁶⁰ Moreover, such compression—the hallmark of Orientalism as a discipline and style—also indexed the manner in which the White Man as Orientalist was driven to *insert himself into history*: that is, actually, by imposing his own static, descriptive "vision" onto the narratives of diachronic history. This disavowal of historical realities, unsurprisingly, often left the Orientalist expert unprepared for the imperial project's frequent failures, thus leaving the White Man qua style to culminate only in the affect of self-important disappointment—along which lines Said cites Forster and T. E. Lawrence.

Unlike the latter two, however, Kipling has, certainly, less of a propensity to conclude his works in disappointment. Rather, his stories typically evince a stubborn commitment to push through the failures and contradictions of the imperial project by whatever means necessary—whether through the mysticism of *Kim* or the outright fantasy of *The Jungle Books*. (Even the narrative most starkly named for disappointment, *The Light that*

²⁶⁰ *Orientalism*, 234. Emphasis Said's.

Failed, ends in a stagey display of moral triumph in the face of adversity, the blind artist Dick Helder throwing himself fatalistically into battle.) And such stylistic ergodicity expresses less a disavowal of the “structured ironies” of the imperial project, I contend, and more Kipling’s recognition—albeit still a somewhat naïve one—of the need to throw his descriptive energies into the fray, pushing the ironies even further into a more didactically palatable form.

This chapter, then, pushes back against the general critical characterization of Kipling as interested more in stasis than in change. Since Noel Annan’s 1960 essay “Kipling’s Place in the History of Ideas,” at least, there has been an emphasis on the “flattened temporality” of Kipling’s historical and sociological vision.²⁶¹ On the one hand, such an inability to think beyond the static and equilibrical can certainly be said to accurately describe the historical horizons of, say, *Kim*. But on the other hand, I want to turn our attention to the possibility that what is absent from *Kim* but wholly operative a decade earlier in *The Jungle Books*—that is, the animal—is precisely what allows Kipling a certain access to the temporality of historical *process*. Said describes the White Man as rigidly self-confirming—“One became a White Man because one was a White Man”—but for Kipling, his status as Expert White Man was never completely a given.²⁶² Hence we find in Kipling the constant need to demonstrate his capacity for process. What *The Jungle Books* provided was a fantastic environment in which that capacity could come into its own—as virtuosity.

Finally, it is not without irony that Said seems to pass over the literary labor evident in Kipling. In his later work, Said is preoccupied with this very question of how aesthetic and

²⁶¹ Noel Annan, “Kipling’s Place in the History of Ideas,” *Victorian Studies* 3.4 (1960): 323-48. For a succinct survey of critical readings of Kipling’s stasis, especially *Kim*, see Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7-14.

²⁶² *Orientalism*, 227.

technical excellence might *in and of itself* transmit an intellectual program—as if, on the surface, a critical continuation of the Expert White Man’s historical self-insertions. And it is virtuosity that Said identifies as the particular style of presentation most suited for intellectual transmission.²⁶³ Said, however, is not quite successful (or sufficiently specific) in elucidating exactly how a virtuoso such as Glenn Gould is able to impel one to see his musical performances as a “rational activity intellectually as well as aurally and visually transmitted to others”; the only sense one really gets from Said’s essay is that Gould is able to extend the act of composition and reinvention into his performances themselves.²⁶⁴ Nor does virtuosity as a style bear a relation any longer to imperial epistemologies. A refocused examination of Kipling, therefore, has the potential to supplement and connect Said’s accounts of both Orientalist method and didactic virtuosity, for it is in Kipling’s animals that we find expressed not only an acute desire to embody and revitalize the codes of history but also to do so through the effects of virtuosic style.

Written only a few months before *The Jungle Books*, “The Edge of the East” helps us see the precise function the figure of the animal would have in Kipling’s attempted self-inscription into history. The Japan Kipling sets out to describe in 1892 had just accepted the new Meiji Constitution three years prior, and Kipling’s main objective in his sketch is to document with an aromatic condescension the seeming laughability of Japan’s efforts at Western-style modernization. For resistant to every modern bureaucratic measure taken by the Japanese

²⁶³ See Edward Said, “The Virtuoso as Intellectual,” in *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 121.

²⁶⁴ *On Late Style*, 130-133.

government to quantify and regulate the country was that absolute Oriental essence of aesthetic immanence: “Here, as you know”—Kipling is referring to Japan’s bid to be treated fairly as a nation state vis-à-vis treaty revisions—“the matter rests between the two thousand foreigners and the forty million Japanese—a God-send to all editors of Tokio and Yokohama, and the despair of the newly arrived in whose nose, remember, is the smell of the East, One and Indivisible, Immemorial, Eternal, and, above all, Instructive” (*Travel* 42). Suffused so perfectly with beauty, Japan is unable to comprehend itself, let alone systematically gauge its own economic potential. And whatever “instruction” its beauty might impart seems precisely designed to speak to the futility of seeking any further instruction.

What happens in Kipling, however, is that everything is subsumed into a larger aesthetic problem. At its most general, this is the question motivating all of Kipling: how precisely can one describe the concrete mechanics of large vital organisms or constructions, whether animal bodies, aesthetic styles, or entire nations? We can see this at work in “The Edge of the East.” As Kipling begins to attend more closely to the finer details of the dawn of bureaucracy in Japan, he parcels out the problem of its perceived intrinsic resistance into an opposition between a rude, pastoral instinct for the “picturesque” and the Western, civilizational desideratum of “accuracy.”

If one knew Japanese, one could colloque with that gentleman in the straw-hat and the blue loincloth who is chopping within a sixteenth of an inch of his naked toes with the father and mother of all weed-spuds. His version of local taxation might be inaccurate, but it would sure to be picturesque. (*Travel* 43)

The picturesque quality of the Japanese man and his opinions are continuous with Kipling’s earlier vision of “only all Japan.” Like the farmhouses around him, it is as if his entire being

were “chosen with special regard to the view,” and so restricted to the land’s aesthetic dimension that any modern, systematic organization applied to it would necessarily and comically balloon out of control.

A revenue map of a village shows that this scatteration is apparently designed, but the reason is not given. One thing at least is certain. The assessment of these patches can be no light piece of work—just the thing, in fact, that would give employment to a large number of small and variegated Government officials, any one of whom, assuming that he was of an Oriental cast of mind, might make the cultivator’s life interesting. I remember now—a second-time-seen place brings back things that were altogether buried—seeing three years ago the pile of Government papers required in the case of one farm. They were many and systematic, but the interesting thing about them was the amount of work that they must have furnished to those who were neither cultivators nor Treasury officials. (*Travel* 43)

Yet the clear delight in the inevitability of the bureaucratic apparatus’ excessive and, perhaps, futile expansion, beyond even the immediate relationship of farmer and Treasury official, belies Kipling’s own investment in the picturesque, along with his own difficulty in actual systematization of any kind. (As Andrew St John has suggested, Kipling was in fact quite uncomfortable with the language of records and regulations, despite, or perhaps in light of, his long immersion in the empire’s bureaucratic and journalistic apparatuses and their archival machinery.)²⁶⁵ It is almost as if the picturesque *alone* were able to bring to fruition his own practice of descriptive accuracy, as if the Orient in particular were made specifically for the task: “for if there is one thing that the Oriental detests more than another, it is the damnable Western vice of accuracy” (*Travel* 46). It, at least, in any case, sets the stage for the triumphantly virtuosic set piece that follows, comprising at least five paragraphs of rather unnecessary detail concerning the taxable value of land in relation to crop yield.

The picturesque, perhaps precisely because of its singular vagueness as an aesthetic,

²⁶⁵ Andrew St John, “In the Year ‘57: Historiography, Power, and Politics in Kipling’s Punjab,” *The Review of English Studies* 51.201 (2000): 62-76.

always bears an immediately polarized relation to history. Sara Suleri has described the general “aura of unnatural calm” in the Victorian feminine picturesque as indexing the “repression of a sense of historical responsibility.”²⁶⁶ But the picturesque, for the same reasons, can certainly also function as a fantastic incitement to historical action. Where the feminine picturesque was an act of aesthetic seclusion by which the Anglo-Indian woman was able to “disempower” spectacles of imperial authority, the Oriental picturesque, similarly feminized and sealed in its own way by Kipling, actually immediately activates a manic performance of imperial authority.²⁶⁷ In the face of Oriental calm, the White Man can *only* swing into high, high action.

We can tell that Kipling has in fact been gearing up for such a show by the language he uses to introduce the land-tax section of the sketch: “If one knew Japanese, one could colloquy with that gentleman in the straw-hat and the blue loincloth who is chopping within a sixteenth of an inch of his naked toes with the father and mother of all weed-spuds.” Framed by an extradiegetic conditional and built on load-bearing semi-technical, semi-whimsical/folksy diction (in the same sketch: “scatteration,” “twangling,” “umber nets and sepia cordage,” “father-fisher, sitting frog-fashion”), the sentence is characteristically Kiplingian in its fantasy of a world both completely disenchanted by modernity and hermetically sealed in an aesthetic enchantment.²⁶⁸ Indeed, even though Kipling makes many moves to keep the binary a strict one, it becomes clear that his real interest in setting up the

²⁶⁶ Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 86.

²⁶⁷ Suleri, 80.

²⁶⁸ Hence St John’s claim that Kipling was entirely averse to cluttered bureaucratic, technical, and theoretical language is not completely correct. Certainly Kipling was, throughout his career, invested in a rhetorical strategy of “plainness,” from *Plain Tales from the Hills* on, but it is also necessary to account for Kipling’s taste for colorful pseudo-jargon throughout his writing (other favorite examples include “judgmatically” in *The Jungle Books* and “metagrobolised” in *Something of Myself*.) Such displays of technical familiarity, moreover, cannot be categorized merely as parody on Kipling’s part, given both their length and frequency and Kipling’s love for the mechanical and seemingly systematic more generally.

binary in the first place is the creation of an exceptional space for himself. Thus the last characteristic component of the sentence—the threat of immanent bodily violence emerging suddenly with a swish from between his bon mots—marks both what Kipling wants to do (establish his stylistic virtuosity as the preeminent or only way of reconciling the picturesque and accurate) and how his solution undermines its own necessity (what is here more precise than the picturesque danger of the blade?).

In this regard, what I call Kipling's *strong virtuosity* is always its own undoing. The unbridled demonstration of accuracy (in describing the land tax) and the auto-opacity of the Japanese picturesque that Kipling contrasts against it begin to dialectically converge. The picturesque itself becomes, at a high enough resolution (“within a sixteenth of an inch”), a form of transparent accuracy. (The elucidation of which seems to be behind Kipling's fixation on the terraced, ridged, and perfectly curved geometry of Japan.) And accuracy, when it becomes the sole object of discourse for too long, loses its own transparent relationship to the signified and is transmuted into a new stylistic opacity. It not only becomes less precise, in some sense (of this Kipling is aware, admitting that his figures are only “approximately accurate”), but also assumes, in its excessive attention to detail, that style of knowledge we call pedantry (*Travel* 45).

The centrality of this dialectic to Kipling's writing begins to help us see, perhaps, why he held such an exceptional place among modernists in terms of stylistic estimation. For Woolf, it is actually “The Edge of the East” in particular that exemplifies a more general connection between the still ostensibly literary style of descriptive accuracy and the narcissisms of empire. In her review of Kipling's recently collected *Letters of Travel* (written at a time when Woolf herself was beginning to intervene in, via considerations of animality,

British gender politics, a critique of the 1920 Plumage Bill being the next thing she would publish), Woolf situates a juvenile tradition of landscape note-taking within the rise of a broad Victorian realism. In a young Tennyson, for example (but not in earlier poets like Keats), the “incessant matching and scrutiny of nature” presents itself as a “malady.”²⁶⁹ For young writers seeking to hone their skills of description, “[w]ords must be found for a moon-lit sky, for a stream, for plane trees after rain. They ‘must’ be found.” “Nothing,” in fact, “can exist unless it is properly described.”²⁷⁰

This solipsistic fantasy of realism—of descriptive vividness preceding ontology—is what Woolf sees as centrally operative in Kipling particular, and it is from the final section of “The Edge of the East” that Woolf pulls what she considers one of Kipling’s most accomplished passages:

A fat carp in a pond sucks at a fallen leaf with just the sound of a wicked little worldly kiss. Then the earth steams, and steams in silence, and a gorgeous butterfly, full six inches from wing to wing, cuts through the steam in a zigzag of colour and flickers up to the forehead of the god. (*Travel* 48)

“That is a perfect note,” judges Woolf. “Every word of its has been matched with the object with such amazing skill that no one could be expected to bury it in a notebook.”²⁷¹ The problem, however, is that virtuosity of description, in its technical excellence, becomes its own hindrance at the level of style when extended beyond the scale of a single note.

But when it is printed in a book meant to be read consecutively, and on to it are stitched all the notes that Mr Kipling has made with unfaltering eye, and even increasing skill, it becomes, literally, unreadable. One has to shut the eyes, shut the book, and do the writing over again.²⁷²

As a writer especially attuned to the somatic and cognitive textures of language, Woolf does

²⁶⁹ Woolf, “Mr Kipling’s Notebook,” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1986), 3:238. Hereafter cited as *E*.

²⁷⁰ *E* 3:238.

²⁷¹ *E* 3:239.

²⁷² *E* 3:239.

seem the perfect reader for Kipling. Homing in on what others have identified as the actual *tedium* of reading Kipling, Woolf formulates the dialectic, pithily:

All notebook literature produces the same effect of fatigue and obstacle, as if there dropped across the path of the mind some block of alien matter which must be removed or assimilated before one can go on with the true process of reading. The more vivid the note the greater the obstruction.²⁷³

Everything must be properly described, but the closer the description is to the described, the harder the described is to grasp. In Kipling's terms, the accurate becomes the picturesque.

With characteristic perception, Woolf connects Kipling's style to his not-actually-all-quite-there imperialism. He is, certainly, a proponent of empire, but still "a man of sympathy and imagination" and at least "a little ashamed" of his jingoism.²⁷⁴ This shame actually "vitiates" his writing and causes the humans he represents to act mechanically, as if, compelled by his presence, to "make them talk more by rule than ever," "carefully observing the rules of the game."²⁷⁵ Drawing out the lines of Woolf's observation, then, I argue that this small, hesitant gap between the affect of historical presence Kipling wants to achieve and what he ends up stylistically effecting gestures toward an awareness that he has run out of all options but one. In the end, this is the reason that Kipling almost always resorts to violence as his primary device for narrative and stylistic resolution. What he attempts to bring to historical life, as it were, through his virtuosic descriptions ultimately fall flat; only the threat and, perhaps, realization of bodily violence can spark the reader's excitement if but for a moment.

²⁷³ E 3:239.

²⁷⁴ E 3:240.

²⁷⁵ E 3:240-241.

PROLEPSIS FOR THE PEDANTS

Another way to formulate the inevitable dialectic of style in Kipling would be as an opposition between form and content. Though one gets the sense that Kipling would like to conceive of Japan as pure form, it is nevertheless the nature of Orientalism to be undecided as to whether its object is actually either pure form or content. (Is the East, after all, wholly an exquisite geometry or an immanent and immediately instructive smell?) And the more Kipling attempts to disentangle the immaculately lacquered form of Japan and introduce it into the material flow of imperial history, the more his own descriptions come to resemble empty forms void of content. What Kipling needs therefore is a mode in which excessive form does not come off as excessive but perfectly suited to content.

It is at this point that Kipling joins an intellectual history from Aristotle and Kant, say, to Bergson and Benjamin, in which the only way to resolve the apparent unstable oscillation between content and form is to submit one's actual self wholly and violently to form, as if physical violence were the kinetic release of style's potential energy. For Kant, for example, it is the charge of the humanities to "further the unification of science with taste, which rubs off coarseness and furthers the communicability and urbanity in which humanity consists."²⁷⁶ Short of this normative elegance (based, for Kant, on the wisdom of the ancients), the sciences "degenerate" into two primary models of taste: gallantry and pedantry. Gallantry is an affected "popularity" that restricts the sciences "in respect of their content"; pedantry is an affected thoroughness that restricts the sciences "in respect of their use."²⁷⁷ It seems, though, that pedantry is the more worrisome of the two degenerations: the pedant is

²⁷⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on logic*, trans. J. Michael Young (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 554.

²⁷⁷ *Lectures on logic*, 555.

a “fanatic for formalities,” and his “hair-splitting” is always an obstructive danger in every sphere of life, leading to an ossified ceremonialism “in conversation, in clothing, in diet, in religion.”²⁷⁸ Every sphere but one, that is: “In the military this is not completely so, although it seems so,” observes Kant. In an unelaborated way, militarism’s fixation on the ceremonial actually seems to be its salvation. Still, there is something, we might say, about the absolute submission of the body to an exhaustive formalism solely with an eye to eventual violent release that circumvents the need to make “content” communicable. The potential violence of bodies against bodies becomes, to borrow Kipling’s earlier tautology, all content—only all content.

But for Kipling, violence is not just one mode or sphere among many in which form and content might be resolved in such a way that pedantry be overcome, as it seems to be for Kant. Rather, it is the *only* way: it is as if Kipling—more than Kant, and even more than, say, Benjamin, and perhaps because he serves so well as the exemplary embodiment and endpoint of Victorian liberalism’s contradictions—were so torn between the frozenness of the descriptive impulse and the exigencies of historical action that all other relational modes emerge only in relation to the violence that catalyzes and sublimates them. Indeed, when violence in Kipling is detached from other modes—be it the sexual, the erotic, the obscene, the comic, or even the aesthetic—it becomes visibly drier, stuffier, sterile. Kipling’s numerous martial poems come to mind now, and Robert Baden-Powell’s adaptation of *The Jungle Books* into a manual for the Boy Scouts, or even the public school fiction of *Stalky & Co.*²⁷⁹ (Though we might hesitate to claim that all eroticism or sexuality is drained, as John

²⁷⁸ *Lectures on logic*, 555.

²⁷⁹ Whereas the reverse seems to be the case in *Kim*. Suvir Kaul points out that *Kim* is different from other tales of male adventure in that it makes homosexual desire, usually kept secret, visible. Meanwhile, unlike the rest of

Kucich argues, from the sadomasochistic logics of those stories.)²⁸⁰ Which is to say, having just proposed violence as a stylistic mode well-suited to reconciling form and content, that it cannot do it alone. The violence of strong virtuosity, again, is too easily flattened into its own kind of pedantry—this time into the literal plodding of the march.

For immediately preceding the point where history makes Kipling's ethos entirely reducible to expressions of cardboard bravado is a compact but non-trivial interval in which a palpably greater amplitude of affective and thematic content briefly vibrates and makes itself stylistically known before being finally sublimated into a conclusive, violent stroke. This is the hesitant shame that Woolf identifies. In fact, we find a revealing example in the note-perfect description Woolf quotes, where a shadow of the erotic and obscene flits through the language for a split second—a carp in that precious Kiplingian fashion sucking “with just the sound of a wicked little worldly kiss”—only to be almost literally sublimated in a hiss of steam and the slice of a ~~blade~~ butterfly that cuts through it. In a sense, this is precisely the space of Kipling's charm as a writer: not the marchable rhythms of an unswerving imperialism but the glimpse of effervescent and otherwise unspoken desires before, or as, they fade.

Anjali Arondekar, considering the almost complete absence of the 1857 Indian Mutiny in Kipling's writing, suggests that the difficult “nonnarratability” of the Mutiny as an object of representation actually generates new narrative forms in Kipling. “That is, instead of simply revising earlier records of colonial breakdown into redemptive imaginings of

Kipling, the presence of actual sexuality is accompanied by an absence of violence: “India is here being ruled not be military methods (although the army is on call) but by those who know it so well that they face no resistance, or perhaps preempt resistance before it can turn violent.” See Kaul, “*Kim*, or How to Be Young, Male, and British in Kipling's India,” in Kipling, *Kim*, ed. Zohreh T. Sullivan (New York: Norton, 2002), 429-430, 436.

²⁸⁰ John Kucich, “Sadomasochism and the Magical Group: Kipling's Middle-Class Imperialism,” *Victorian Studies* 46.1 (2003): 36.

colonial control, Kipling mines the very language of failure to secure narrative success.”²⁸¹ The colonial terror of an unspeakable archive “becomes a source of extended male articulation—founding imperial presence rather than eradicating it,” and these newly eroticized dynamics are “detoured through narrative forms (fiction, historical records, biographies) rather than through bodies.”²⁸² In a similar fashion, I am arguing that Kipling’s wider difficulties in realizing an “imperial presence” spread like cracks through his writing and, in those cracks, generate what Arondekar calls “pleasurable hauntings, as gestures contained by the paradoxical fullness of a defeated masculinity.”²⁸³ These hauntings, though, are legible not just in narrative forms, but also homogeneously throughout Kipling’s style—to such a degree, moreover, that his style is always riven with the effort to immediately close them down.

These desires are always held stylistically at a short distance. As a cartoonishly good Victorian, Kipling never fully admits to the fleshly, obscene, or perverse pleasures. But they are always there, vibrating around his language. At some point, however, Kipling finds a way to give some sort of unspoken heft to these desires—primarily, I argue, through the figure of the animal and its embodied instincts. In “The Bull That Thought,” one of Kipling’s later stories (originally collected in 1926), for example, we see how the force of these desires only increases (while still remaining tacit and vague) the closer Kipling cleaves to the thematic necessity of his animals. Of the many ways Apis, the featured bull of this story, could be compellingly anthropomorphized and granted intelligence and agency, Kipling chooses the vaguest and ultimately the most tautological:

²⁸¹ Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 135.

²⁸² Arondekar, 135.

²⁸³ Arondekar, 136.

Yes—the creature was a thinker along the lines necessary to his sport; and he was a humorist also, like so many natural murderers. One knows the type among beasts as well as among men. It possesses a curious truculent mirth—almost indecent but infallibly significant.²⁸⁴

The amused pleasure the bull takes in its own murderous actions is not fully described, and Kipling resorts to one of his most reliable tools—extradiegetic address—for merely gesturing towards the truth. “Yes,” he confirms to himself, as if the real-world referent were already entirely clear, “one knows the type.” But the “type” here must remain vague in order to work. The violent impulses in both man and animal are naturalized as instinct, but Kipling insists on retaining an unexamined, additional datum as part of the murderer’s makeup. It cannot just be that these natural-born killers kill either out of pure instinct or in a wholly calculated fashion for the sake of killing: either case would be actually indecent, their mirth no longer really “curious” and “significant” but either uninterestingly opaque or truly obscene. Rather, we sense that, in telling the story of a virtuosic bull, Kipling knows he must tread the middle ground of neither boring nor completely shocking his reader. As Adorno writes of Toscanini’s musicality, “Behind his confident manner lurks the anxiety that if he relinquishes control for a single second, the listener might tire of the show and flee.”²⁸⁵ But at the same time, a conspicuously excessive degree of control has the same effect: “The ideal of clarity that seduces him into such extremes collapses into its opposite.”²⁸⁶ Kipling’s virtuosic style, especially when it is representing a virtuosic figure, must likewise be perfectly calibrated but not seem too much so. Style needs the gap to show.

And insofar as the bull is a stand-in for Kipling himself—his narrator realizes “that it

²⁸⁴ Rudyard Kipling, “The Bull That Thought,” in *Debts and Credits*, ed. Sandra Kemp (London: Penguin, 1987), 162.

²⁸⁵ Theodor Adorno, “The Mastery of the Maestro,” in *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 47.

²⁸⁶ Adorno, *Sound Figures*, 48.

was an artist we had to deal with”—we get a glimpse into how such portentous vagueness is actually given form in Kipling’s self-described art.²⁸⁷ First, we find the exceptionally efficacious and precise virtuosity so prized by Kipling characterized as a kind of *prolepsis*:

...I did not realise the murder before it was accomplished! The wheel, the rush, the oblique charge from behind, the fall of horse and man were simultaneous. Apis leaped the horse, with whom he had no quarrel, and alighted, all four feet together (it was enough), between the man’s shoulders, changed his beautiful feet on the carcass, and was away, pretending to fall nearly on his nose.²⁸⁸

The artist is virtuosic to the degree to which he exceeds the observer’s perception in accomplishing the remarkable. Second, however, what the narrator makes clear is the absolute calculation behind Apis’ “assassination” must be naturalized to some degree. “In that instant, by that stumble, he produced the impression that his adorable assassination was a mere bestial blunder.”²⁸⁹ And third, the murder is not simply a matter of instinct either but rather trivialized further as a palliative comic effect that accidentally accrues in the otherwise natural sequence of things.²⁹⁰ In other words, strong virtuosity is artistically viable (“curious” or “significant”) insofar as it accomplishes its precise goal with a severe degree of narrative or representational economy, and without evincing too much or too little intention. Like the winsome form of Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies*, virtuosity is only as artistically significant as it is seemingly insignificant. (Just as, by corollary, obscenity is only truly so as long as it is only “almost” obscene.)

This chapter, of course, does not pretend to positively discern, any more than

²⁸⁷ *Debits and Credits*, 166-167.

²⁸⁸ *Debits and Credits*, 166.

²⁸⁹ *Debits and Credits*, 166.

²⁹⁰ The fact that the other use of the adjective “adorable” in *Debits and Credits* is to describe Eve as Adam’s “adorable consort” in Kipling’s re-telling of the Islamic tale of the fall suggests that Apis’ virtuosity is eroticized after all. Insofar as the prolepsis of strong virtuosity, then, is an adaptive sublimation of unspoken homoeroticism, we might compare it to what I discuss in my last chapter as Marianne Moore’s *weak* virtuosity, which functions as an *avomal* of her celibate sexuality, rather than as a sublimation.

Kipling himself does, how, ultimately, he discovered so purposive a stylistic potential in animal figures. Nevertheless, it is thirty years earlier, in the months immediately preceding the invention of *The Jungle Books*—a period that Kipling famously describes in *Something of Myself* as nothing less than the beginning of his “contract” with his “Daemon”—that his writing begins to intuit the shape of beasts to come.²⁹¹ And, while lacking in the sharpness of exposition in “The Bull That Thought,” the stylistic études of “The Edge of the East” intimate where Kipling will go next. At this point, Kipling’s virtuosity is still wobbly, the small gap of shame he feels still destabilizing his stylistic apparatus. He nevertheless partially apprehends how his stylistic devices must be improved in order to accomplish his historical task as imperial White Man.

In this capacity, Japan serves as the perfect object for his experiments. The difficulty of describing Japan requires a high degree of virtuosity, and yet he cannot insist too much on accuracy: his virtuosity would then seem too calculated and therefore too pedantic. On the other hand, he cannot just give in wholly to his martial, imperialist instincts, lapsing into Robo-Kipling™. To naturalize, functionally, his violent impulses as instinctual renders his style either opaque (making it resemble Japan itself) or even too transparent in the sense of being completely superfluous (including violence within the picturesque reveals the latter’s inherent accuracy). In either direction, Kipling finds his style bent tautologically back into itself by Japan’s gravitational field. At the same time, Japan as Orientalist object offers Kipling two stylistic operations by which to escape the stylistic deadlock—namely, the casual quality of its exquisiteness, and, as a corollary, the proleptic quality of its violence when it occurs. And Kipling’s success in the future depends on the degree to which he is able to

²⁹¹ See *Something of Myself: For Friends Known and Unknown*, ed. Robert Hampson (London: Penguin, 1992), 100-101, 156-157.

seize upon their potential. Short of that, however, the only available solution seems to be the rather abrupt violence that, in Kipling's eyes, emerges as a natural response to the imposition of Western accuracy upon the Oriental picturesque. "If the villages up the valley tamper with the water supply," writes Kipling, "there must surely be excitement down the valley—argument, protest, and the breaking of heads." This, for Kipling, is the only respite from both the hermetic picturesque quality of Japanese life and the overwhelming bureaucratic apparatus inaugurated by Meiji modernity. He thus ends this section: "The days of romance, therefore, are not all dead" (*Travel* 46).

That Kipling is in fact looking very intently for a stylistic solution is clear from the final section of "The Edge of the East." Typographically separated by a rule from the main body of the travel sketch and just after his wry acknowledgement of romance's persistence, begins a short coda that both extends and elevates the stylistic preoccupations of the preceding pages. In this section, Kipling first describes the famous bronze Buddha at Kamakura that later recurs as a constant motif through his work (perhaps most famously as the epigraph to *Kim*). Here, as if proof that the days of romance are "not all dead," the Buddha's all-consuming and yet elusive beauty stands as the ultimate challenge to a writer's craft. It is at once utterly describable and beyond description:

He has been described again and again—his majesty, his aloofness, and every one of his dimensions, the smoky little shrine within him, and the plumed hill that makes the background to his throne. For that reason he remains, as he remained from the beginning, beyond all hope of description—as it might be, a visible god sitting in the garden of a world made new. (*Travel* 47)

Kipling, it goes without saying, take up this challenge, though he spends less time describing the Buddha himself than he does lamenting what he sees as the quaint Buddhist proscription against illusory beauty. "To overcome desire and covetousness of mere gold, which is often

very vilely designed, that is conceivable; but why must a man give up the delight of the eye, colour that rejoices, light that cheers, and line that satisfies the innermost deeps of the heart?" (*Travel* 49). But Kipling's descriptive powers are nevertheless in full force here: it is from this passage, of course, that Woolf quotes his perfect notes—notes which, we remember, feature animals.

As a synecdoche for Japanese aestheticism, the Buddha is clearly a prime object for virtuosic description and therefore just as frustrating in the same regard. Instead of allowing these stylistic frustrations to give way to explicit violence, however, Kipling here diverts that same energy into the semiotic violence of animal figures—a dramatic change in register from the foregoing folksiness. And rather than imposing his explanatory didacticism externally, as it were, upon the aesthetic object to the point where both rupture and break down in a violent gesture, Kipling here coyly invokes a form from the Oriental object itself, one with the potential to both represent historical change and instructively transmit that content to others: namely, the fable. Or more specifically, it is a reverse fable. As Kipling relays it, the kind of fable the Buddha would have spoken, sitting in this very spot, is a variety of the ancient Jatakas in which the focus is not on the anthropomorphization of animals but the having-become-animal of the Buddha:

This would be the way he began, for dreamers in the East tell something the same sort of tales to-day: 'Long ago when Devadatta was King of Benares, there lived a virtuous elephant, a reprobate ox, and a King without understanding.' And the tale would end, after the moral had been drawn for Ananda's benefit: 'Now, the reprobate ox was such an one, and the King was such another, but the virtuous elephant was I, myself, Ananda.' (*Travel* 48)

It is unclear exactly to which particular Jataka tale Kipling is referring, if he is at all—the fable actually only the outline of a form, its “virtue” and “reprobation” without content—but the import seems to be that it is in the actions of beings stripped of intention and

foresight (until they are “without understanding”) that moral and even political awareness can begin to instinctually cohere. Significantly, the tale’s Buddhist framework allows it to go one step further than, say, the conventional Aesopian fable. The moral delivery here is given an extra boost through the reincarnational reveal, distinguishing this form of Oriental didacticism from the more homogeneous Orientalism structuring the rest of “The Edge of the East.” Where, earlier, the Orient is “instructive” in the way that its “smell” is indivisible, eternal, and ahistorical, the fabular moment of instruction here occurs punctually, after the fact and with a shock: it turns out the Buddha has been actively arranging the components of the fable’s narrative ahead of time, as if all in anticipation of the present’s moral lesson. This narratorial prolepsis, I argue, helps Kipling begin transitioning from a model of virtuosity fixated on accurately describing the opaque and hermetically immanent to a (still strong) model bent on the *imminent* transmission of moral and historical content.

Furthermore, what the style and structure of this last section suggest is that the devices of the Jataka fable, though effective and a foretaste of Kipling’s future development, are in themselves slightly too explicit or fantastic, perhaps. It is not through the mechanism of reincarnation or the announcement of a reincarnated identity that Kipling will choose to make his stylistic virtuosity more effective (though, of course, Kipling never quite relinquishes his reliance on the mystical) but through the calculus of literary style. In this section, Kipling very carefully nests the Buddha’s mini-fable in the midst of language that emphasizes the stylistic and aesthetic qualities of the natural surroundings as *the* proper didactic tool. “Thus, then, he told the tales in the bamboo grove, and the bamboo grove is there to-day” (*Travel* 48). Quite deftly, Kipling seems to be doing two things at once: he is not only cheekily, presumptuously installing his new style as the latest source of instruction

in the Buddha's reincarnational didactic chain ("Now"... "Thus, then"... "there to-day"); he is also recapitulating the exquisite concentric geometry of the Yokohama rice fields. In other words, the effect is that of Kipling having, perhaps all along, proleptically prepared this revelation of his artistry for the reader to finally, fortuitously find. It is at this point, after all, that the animalized styles come alive and his descriptive virtuosity begins to find its footing. The accurate and the picturesque begin to come together, with almost casual effort. Now, instead of the halting descriptions of mechanical humans, of, even, a "largish Japanese doll" that turns out, to Kipling's own amusement, to be an actual Japanese baby "with a shaven head and aimless legs," and instead of the violence that recurs in the inevitable event of these fantasies' malfunction, there is the more natural—at once more picturesque and more virtuosic—harmony of carps and kisses, butterflies and ballet, animals and the aesthetic. As if in the presence of a murderous bull, the reader is compelled to realize "that it was an artist we had to deal with," all along.

NO SEX, SOME DEATH, ALL STYLE

It is perhaps an effect of Kipling's personal biography and historical legacy that *The Jungle Books* activate readings on so many different critical registers. Kipling's own childhood in both India and England and the later adaptation, with his approval, of *The Jungle Books* by Robert Baden-Powell into a program for the Boy Scouts are certainly responsible for readings that tether, in some fashion, aspects of the Mowgli stories to concrete biographical components from Kipling's youth. Often this is in straightforwardly jurisprudential, even literal, terms, with the Law of the jungle representing Kipling's investigation into the practical status of the law and ethics more generally—these readings stemming from

Kipling's own oppressive experiences at Lorne Lodge and Westward Ho! (of Kingsley fame).²⁹² Or, in the vein of much children's literature criticism, *The Jungle Books* are read in highly concentrated developmental terms, whether psychoanalytic or behaviorist: in these approaches, the narrative's characters and motifs are cast as the allegorical equivalents of the psychic, cognitive, and emotional apparatuses of a young child's internal life.²⁹³ In each case, it is the seemingly exceptional quality of Kipling's upbringing and development that matters to scholars: the hybridity of his Anglo-Indian experience is taken to be an unprecedented position from which to dispense with received social conventions; what remains is a unique, often childish, and always deeply ambivalent worldview characterized simultaneously by austere resilience and surprising intimacy.²⁹⁴

More broadly, the biographical, ethical, and developmental elements of *The Jungle Books* are themselves frequently read as symptomatic of wider historical discourses: the most important of which are empire and the rise of evolutionary science. From this methodological side, Kipling's exceptionality becomes exemplary; the uncanny elements of his writing are re-contextualized as canny expressions of the contradictions latent in

²⁹² Jarrell, intending to shock, writes, "Kipling was someone who had spent six years in a concentration camp as a child; he never got over it. As a very young man he spent seven years in India that confirmed his belief in concentration camps; he never got over this either." Jarrell, 338. See also Shamsul Islam, *Kipling's "Law": A Study of His Philosophy of Life* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 124; and John Murray, "The Law of *The Jungle Books*," *Children's Literature* 20 (1992): 1-14.

²⁹³ For a Freudian reading of the Law, see Marie Fernandes, *The Animal Fable in Modern Literature* (Delhi: B. R., 1996), 14. Also, U. C. Knoepfmacher, "Kipling's 'Just-So' Partner: The Dead Child as Collaborator and Muse," *Children's Literature* 25 (1997).

²⁹⁴ Sue Walsh, we should note, makes an important intervention into critical examinations of Kipling and children's literature more generally, pointing out the methodological self-contradictions at work in many studies: while many critics assert from developmental and narratological perspectives the capacity of language itself to constitute reality—an important axiom when a text is read primarily as a cognitive tool—they often nevertheless fall back on the necessity of biographical or historical referents for child cognition, undoing their previous claims for the autonomy of language. My own approach, similarly, declines to make a hard distinction between child and adult cognition vis-à-vis the ontology of language: for me it is precisely the *ambivalence* of style as an affective and cognitive tool for all readers that is at stake. That this ambivalence is often expressed as the developmental gray area between child and adult cognition *is* the point. See Sue Walsh, *Kipling's Children's Literature: Language, Identity, and Constructions of Childhood* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 71-94.

Victorian liberalism and imperialism. If the instabilities of Kipling's biographical development are allegorized in *The Jungle Books* as Mowgli's conflicting human-animal impulses, then this instability in human-animal ontology itself can also be seen as a wider example of how, as Jopi Nyman puts it, the animal trope in a colonial context both naturalizes national and racial identities and "poses a threat to the maintenance of order and hierarchy, challenging conventional ideas of the primacy of masculinized reason and culture."²⁹⁵

In this following section, I want to reframe the basic parameters of reading Kipling's fiction around the rubric of his style. More than any critic, Kipling was aware of how precisely he sat at the pivot point between being an exceptional individual and an exemplary Victorian, and at stake in many of his narratives is, say, not realism's familiar reincorporation of a protagonist into the body social, but the process by which an exceptional protagonist actively comes to master the code of and thus become the greatest exemplar of a society. This, perhaps, does not even require saying. Mowgli and Kim, after all, are two of the most prominent milestones in the history of fictional white savior narratives, marked as outcasts in their own societies but preternaturally able to adopt and save another in its entirety. What I am arguing, however, is that this formal relationship between the exception and the exemplar is not only thematically ubiquitous throughout Kipling's writing but dominates his stylistic considerations as well—to the point, moreover, that we might understand style as the single most concerted expression of Kipling's attempt to negotiate this relationship in his work. That is, rather than reading *The Jungle Books* solely biographically, symptomatically, or as children's literature, we can see the presence of each of these elements—evolutionary

²⁹⁵ Jopi Nyman, *Postcolonial Animal Tales from Kipling to Coetzee* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2003), 39.

theory, developmental theory, even every “daemonic” act of self-mythologization—as reflective of a larger interest in style. In this sense, the narrative—Mowgli’s development, the Law of the Jungle, his many allies and enemies—becomes nothing less than Kipling’s own allegory of style.

This examination of the virtuosic bestial action of *The Jungle Books* therefore aims to expand and concretize what Said calls the White Man’s “style of being.” As noted earlier, Said does not spend much time exploring the actual style of Orientalism’s self-presentation beyond the “compression” of racial types and the subsequent disappointment experienced by the Orientalist when his vision of history fails to come to fruition. And despite both Said’s later preoccupation with virtuosity and the foundational role of Kipling in his account of Orientalism, Said pays little attention to what I have so far sought to demonstrate as Kipling’s extensive preoccupation with calibrating a perfectly virtuosic descriptive style—especially in relation to the Orient. Where the historical certitude of Forster and Lawrence, Said’s two other examples, inevitably ends in disappointment, however, their attempts to synchronically simplify the complexities of diachronic history ultimately failing, Kipling seems to find a way to surmount these same difficulties through style. By molding his vision of imperial action onto animal figures, he was able to make the particular kinds of individual development it required seem, at least temporarily, measured yet instinctual, historically vital yet already-all-there.

Allen MacDuffie, for example, has recently demonstrated the absolute utility of animal figures to Kipling’s representations of ethical and historical development. Perhaps more prevalent in the nineteenth century than Darwinian evolution, at least in certain circles, Lamarckian evolutionary theory “provided ideal underpinnings for narratives of individual

development because it emphasizes the value of experience, the directive role of culture, and the potential for active self-shaping.²⁹⁶ Specifically, its logic of organic memory, by which species are able to inherit acquired characteristics through the “memory” of flesh itself, offered a positive fantasy by which ethical and cultural content could be purposefully and efficiently transmitted from generation to generation. MacDuffie quotes Laura Otis, who observes that Lamarckian evolution

promised the expansion of knowledge and, more important, the restoration of dignity and a sense of purpose. Darwin’s version of evolution had shaken Europeans’ confidence, but Haeckel’s and Lamarck’s teleological version and the organic memory theory that rested upon it glorified Europeans’ position in the universe. . . . In short, the theory promised eternal life.²⁹⁷

Hence, by “Red Dog,” the climax of the second *Jungle Book*, Mowgli seems to have absorbed the instincts of the other jungle beasts into his own body. In his own words: “‘Mowgli the Frog have I been,’ said he to himself; ‘Mowgli the Wolf have I said that I am. Now Mowgli the Ape must I be before I am Mowgli the Buck. At the end I shall be Mowgli the Man. Ho!’ and he slid his thumb along the eighteen-inch blade of his knife” (*JB* 291).²⁹⁸

As that last line portends, however, in a manner continuous with “The Edge of the East,” the individual development that Lamarckian evolution underpins here leads to an unavoidable dead end. As MacDuffie points out, the Lamarckian promise of “eternal life” cannot ultimately work, especially not in the context of Victorian cultural imperialism. According to its logic, an individual may be able to internalize and encode experience into his own flesh, but “how was individual experience translated into the stable genetic matrix of

²⁹⁶ Allen MacDuffie, “*The Jungle Books*: Rudyard Kipling’s Lamarckian Fantasy,” *PMLA* 129.1 (2014): 19.

²⁹⁷ Laura Otis, *Organic Memory: History and the Body in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 25.

²⁹⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Books*, ed. W. W. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Hereafter cited as *JB*.

the species?”²⁹⁹ Within *The Jungle Books*’ biological and historical parameters, Mowgli has “no coherent reproductive context” in which his experiences can “enter into the life-sap of generations.”³⁰⁰

Mating with animals is impossible, while a European female would raise the specter of miscegenation. Natives, meanwhile, have been consistently portrayed as culturally and biologically stunted and would threaten to submerge Mowgli’s various acquisitions back into what Kipling wants us to regard as a swamp of superstition, cruelty, and childishness.³⁰¹

There are, therefore, hard limits intrinsic to animal and colonial representations in a Victorian milieu. And faced with these limits, both Mowgli and Kipling are forced to find alternative but ultimately unsatisfying outlets for the energy and experience accrued over the course of Mowgli’s development. Diegetically, Mowgli’s only outlet is the brilliant blaze of running in “The Spring Running,” the final story of *The Jungle Books*. As the other jungle beasts grow sexually excited and “run” with each other during the mating season that they call the “Time of New Talk,” Mowgli is left to run alone, albeit in a virtuosic demonstration of his Lamarckian inheritances: his “muscles, trained by years of experience, bore him up as though he were a feather,” making his stride “more like flying than anything else” and his tree-swinging a similarly buoyant “monkey-fashion” (JB 310).

At a formal level, Kipling, too, is able only to *gesture* towards a futurity for Mowgli. He begins “Red Dog” by cataloging the infinitely numerous exploits of Mowgli which he is unable to include in *The Jungle Books* for want of space: “The things that he did and saw and heard when he was wandering from one people to another, with or without his four companions, would make many many stories, each as long as this one” (JB 278). For

²⁹⁹ MacDuffie, 31.

³⁰⁰ This last evocative phrase quoted by MacDuffie belongs to the tragic Austrian biologist Paul Kammerer, and is found in Arthur Koestler, *The Case of the Midwife Toad* (New York: Random, 1972), 28.

³⁰¹ MacDuffie, 31-32.

MacDuffie, this points to “the troubling possibility” that “the only available form of reproduction for Mowgli is fictional, through the potentially inexhaustible variations of his childhood adventures.” Development, however, here becomes an “endless process” and thus, “not development at all.”³⁰²

Where MacDuffie ends, though, I would like to pick up. For both Mowgli and Kipling, the remaining outlet for their energy is not merely the aimless, nonteleological expenditure of either unbridled running or limitless narration. Rather, it is what I have been examining as strong virtuosity, with all its potential and realized violence. What MacDuffie neglects to say about Kipling’s gesture towards narratorial open-endedness is that the untold stories of Mowgli’s exploits are not part of a single endless stream but rather, as Kipling lists them, individual tales primarily of deadly violence. And just as an “eighteen-inch blade” waits glimmering at the end of Mowgli’s own Lamarckian development, so Kipling’s narratorial prowess tends toward the fatally spectacular and virtuosic. It is as if Kipling were, in fact, sublimating his and Mowgli’s desires into violent activity. Now that sexual reproduction is end-stopped by the narrative’s animal and colonial parameters, another means must be found by which to pass on the acquired knowledge, experience, and discipline to other bodies.

The problem, however, is not just that, diegetically, Mowgli’s violence as a kind of sublimated sexual transmission would actively prevent its recipients from receiving the transmission (by virtue of having killed them), but that structuring plots around violent finality actually seems to produce a further, formal limitation. In what amounts to a form of structuralist pedantry, the stories Kipling *could* tell actually end up either resembling stories

³⁰² MacDuffie, 32.

we've already heard (what is Mowgli being "nearly crushed to death" by a herd of deer if not a mere retelling of "Tiger! Tiger!?!") or, as Kipling himself seems to realize, repeating themselves as they go (Mowgli saving Hathi the elephant "from being *once more* trapped in a pit with a stake at the bottom" both recalls a story he himself told in "Letting in the Jungle" and repeats itself immediately as the "next day, he himself fell into a very cunning leopard-trap"). Like the overweening accuracy he so readily demonstrates in "The Edge of the East," Kipling's virtuosically violent storytelling here threatens to flatten out into pedantic repetition. There are, it turns out, only so many ways to kill.³⁰³

DON'T LOOK BACK IN ANGER

To humbler function, awful power!

—Wordsworth, "Ode to Duty"

It seemed to Dick that he had never since the beginning of original darkness done anything at all save jolt thought the air.

—*The Light that Failed*

Given this limit, Kipling must find a way to curtail the violence. Otherwise, like the artistry of Apis the bull, his and Mowgli's virtuosity threatens to spin out of control and, in the process, resolve dialectically into the tediousness of the excessively plotted. As the narrator of "The Bull That Thought" asserts, true artistry consists in playing off virtuosity as a "bestial blunder"—a mere side-effect of animal instinct, passing by virtually unnoticed until

³⁰³ In the *Jungle Book* manuscripts, there are actually a number of occasions where Kipling either mistakenly first wrote one character's name for another's or changed his mind later on. In "Tiger! Tiger!?", it is first Akela, and then later, Mowgli who shouts "Keep count!" And in "Mowgli's Brothers," Akela's name at one point is later changed to Shere Khan. The interchangeability of stories also suggests an interchangeability of characters. The manuscripts are currently housed in the British Library, and are cited by MS page and corresponding page in the *Jungle Books* where applicable. BL Add MS 45540: 17, cf. *JB* 62, and BL Add MS 45540: 7, cf. *JB* 11.

after the fact. Acts of violence should, as it were, be tucked imperceptibly into the course of events rather than made the telos of any narrative unit.

This is important both thematically and formally. The story of Mowgli, after all, is the story of the exception, a feral child, taken in by a community of animals and made the exemplary animal, but also, along the way, an exemplary human being—or, more specifically, the exemplary subject of Victorian children’s literature. Thus for Kipling, I argue, the didactic form of *The Jungle Books* needs to be an extension of the mechanism by which Mowgli’s development is effected in the diegesis—that is, the Law of the Jungle. In particular, it is style that potentially has all the pedagogical and disciplinary power of the Law. For Kipling, it is the means by which an unformed reader, as savage as Mowgli, can become formed and do so just as instinctually. But just as Mowgli cannot violently express his instincts without limit, even under the auspices of the Law, so the reader, enabled instinctually by style, cannot be carried on by the violent force of Kipling’s virtuosity indefinitely. Kipling must rein Kipling in.

In 1887, only a few years before the inception of *The Jungle Books*, Nietzsche would assert that what man had come to call his conscience was only the product of a long prehistorical process by which the human animal was made accountable to himself, “calculable, regular, necessary.”³⁰⁴ This, for Nietzsche, was only made possible through a mnemotechnics of *pain*: “How can one create a memory for the human animal? How can one impress something upon this partly obtuse, partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment, in such a way that it will stay there?”³⁰⁵ The becoming-human of the animal thus required a tremendous labor—“performed by man upon himself during the

³⁰⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 58.

³⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 60.

greater part of the existence of the human race”—that consisted in no less than the eventual *embodiment* of morality itself.³⁰⁶ Through the legal apparatuses of morality, its pleasures and its pains, man was able, like no other animal, to inscribe the “right to make promises” into his own flesh, as Nietzsche writes, “quivering in every muscle.”³⁰⁷ It was only then that, having subjugated himself to a second instinct in addition to, and against, his initial, more bestial instincts, man was able to feel himself finally free, autonomous, and sovereign.

Where Nietzsche, of course, in the face of conscience’s inevitable mutation into the bad conscience of Victorian religiosity, imagines the return of the strong man, unapologetically at one with his animal instincts, Kipling, we could say, demurs. Nevertheless, there is much in Nietzsche’s genealogy that is recognizable in Kipling’s narrative, I argue. At heart, the Law functions as a regulatory system for the jungle: we will see that *accountability*, in its most basic quantitative sense, is one of its most essential aspects, both thematically and stylistically. In a world filled with impulsive beasts, there must be a system by which to formalize their actions and make them representable. Furthermore, where Nietzsche traces ethical development on a prehistoric scale filled with self-inflicted pain and suffering, Kipling accelerates the process. As we’ve seen, Kipling is no stranger to dilation and violence, especially when it comes to historical action, but he is just as aware of how those same tendencies in discourse become self-defeating when left unchecked. Through the figure of the feral child, then, Kipling compresses the process by which the human animal is made accountable, using a style alloyed to animal instinct both to make the process seem more spontaneous and, at the same time, at least a little less vicious.

Much of the consensus around *The Jungle Books*, both critical and popular, has

³⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 59.

³⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 59.

emphasized the “fun” of his fables. In her seminal study, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling*, for example, J. M. S. Tompkins, like many of Kipling’s peers, insists on the exceptionally inventive and “light” quality of his writing: “Kipling had this sort of fun all through his writing life. It came on him spontaneously, without any moral afterthought.”³⁰⁸ I argue, however, that such levity is not simply the spontaneous condition of children’s literature but rather the product of a conscious and very careful calibration on Kipling’s part, a formal winsomeness more in line with a Nietzschean mnemotechnics of pain than any universal virtue of playfulness. In this section, I turn to an examination of the manuscripts of *The Jungle Books*, currently housed in the British Library. Kipling, as I have been arguing, was more than aware of his own tendencies towards excess in terms of both his style and the violence in his representations. A genetic approach to his writing confirms this observation, and reveals the lengths to which Kipling modified the style of his drafts as he was writing them in order to make it conform to his idea of valid and viable children’s literature—even to the extent that such stylistic considerations subtly transformed the parameters of his jungle representations. Without such precise adjustments, playfulness would dissolve into the overly mechanical and/or self-indulgent. As Benjamin observes, “without knowing it, even the most arid pedant plays in a childish rather than a childlike way; the more childish his play, the more pedantic he is.”³⁰⁹

It is this ambivalence that explains and helps demystify, I believe, much of the appeal of Kipling’s style. How else, in fact, do we account for the universally-cited power of “Tiger! Tiger!”, for example, a story in which the moral—Tomkins casts it in a pastoral, Wordsworthian light: “Me this uncharted freedom tires”—is effected by a scene of

³⁰⁸ J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Methuen, 1959), 62.

³⁰⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 120.

cataclysmic murder?³¹⁰ In the story, Shere Khan's blatant antinomianism (earlier, in "Mowgli's Brothers," he draws the younger wolves away from the discipline of the Law) and general gluttony mark him out for fabular punishment (Mowgli's self-defense does not genuinely seem to be the point). But at almost every point, the rigor one would expect to snap back upon the tiger does not actually materialize. In its stead, we find Mowgli's too-gleeful plan to trap and trample Shere Khan in ravine with a herd of buffalo. "Ha! Ha!" cries Mowgli, his double-laugh echoing the story's title. "Now thou knowest!" (*JB* 58).

Or, rather, the expected rigor is present only as a second-order anxiety, after the fact of the style's own excess. Thus, throughout the *Jungle Book* drafts, we find examples of passages that indulge violent tendencies either completely struck or dialed down in intensity. From the first story on, in fact, this is the predominant genre of revision in the manuscripts. In the original manuscript of "Mowgli's Brothers," for example, Kipling strikes a section of dialogue he had written in which Bagheera and Mowgli discuss the danger posed by Shere Khan. Mowgli comes off as absolutely reckless and even trivializes the Law as a matter of self-preservation alone: "What is death to fear? Baloo says and I see each day that it comes to each one in the jungle who does not use his feet and eyes and ears. If I do not look to myself I shall die. That is the Law of the Jungle." This is replaced by dialogue in the published *Jungle Books* in which Mowgli more reasonably cites the protection of Bagheera and the Pack as reason not to fear.³¹¹ Elsewhere: a "a half-shriek like a giant in pain" becomes "a shriek snapped off short."³¹² Gratuitously rough details are smoothed over: the fact that

³¹⁰ Tomkins, 67-68.

³¹¹ BL Add MS 45540: 8, cf. *JB* 11.

³¹² BL Add MS 45540: 139, cf. *JB* 190.

“something made of wood” is gagging Messua at one point is deleted.³¹³ A passage in which Mowgli playfully wrestles with well-coiled Kaa goes down better without his knife jangling precariously about: in its place Kipling has his “fingers full of grass.”³¹⁴ And at the climax of “Red Dog,” Mowgli’s most definitive victory, Kipling removes the line, “There is no such thing as mercy in the jungle,” bringing the world of *The Jungle Books* back from the precipice of complete savagery.³¹⁵ Like a young Mowgli, for whom, “only the knowledge that it was unsportsmanlike to kill little naked [human] cubs kept him from picking them up and breaking them in two,” Kipling as narrator must always remind himself to hold back (*JB* 51).

Meanwhile, as counterbalance for this excess, Kipling incorporates into the body of *The Jungle Books* numerous passages that seem to stabilize the action of the jungle. And, almost naturally, at this point, these often take the form of what we have come to recognize as the picturesque. In the middle portion of “Tiger! Tiger!,” most notably, between learning of Shere Khan’s imminent return and putting his buffalo-based plan into motion, Mowgli rests and keeps watch by some of the mud wallows preferred by the herd he is tending. This is an occasion for Kipling to dilate stylistically: we are treated to a descriptive passage of pastoral tranquility steeped in the same sensuous Orientalism we know so well from “The Edge of the East:

Then Mowgli picked out a shady place, and lay down and slept while the buffaloes grazed round him. Herding in India is one of the laziest things in the world. The cattle move and crunch, and lie down, and move on again, and they do not even low. They only grunt, and the buffaloes very seldom say anything, but get down into the muddy pools one after another, and work their way into the mud till only their noses and staring china-blue eyes show above the surface, and then they lie like logs. (*JB* 54)

³¹³ BL Add MS 45540: 139, cf. *JB* 192.

³¹⁴ BL Add MS 45540: 87, cf. *JB* 237.

³¹⁵ BL Add MS 45540: 83, cf. *JB* 300. In the same passage of the manuscript, Mowgli originally finds Akela already dead under a pile of dead dholes. In the revision, Akela still has enough breath to have a final conversation with Mowgli.

Like the rice fields of Yokohama, albeit with a different geometry, this is a scene of beautiful immersion, poise, and opacity—and more aesthetically successful, perhaps, in terms of the “naturalness” imparted to it by its animal objects. However, even in this moment, the stability offered by animal instinct is threatened by the instincts of other animals:

The sun makes the rocks dance in the heat, and the herd children hear one kite (never any more) whistling almost out of sight overhead, and they know that if they died, or a cow died, that kite would sweep down, and the next kite miles away would see him drop and follow, and the next, and the next, and almost before they were dead there would be a score of hungry kites come out of nowhere. (*JB* 54)

This is a remarkable passage, but not only because the virtuosity of Kipling’s violent imagination is displayed with such clarity, telescoping concentrically outwards as the Orient can only do.³¹⁶ Nestled in the structural center of the story is an extradiegetic check on the otherwise uncontrollable, even if hypothetical, violence in the diegesis. The single kite hanging in the sky, barely visible, is the picturesque’s *point de capiton*, knitting together the deeply ambient scene into a perfect composition of barely stirring but still wholly vital life. Content to lie back and listen to its whistle, one forgets Shere Khan. Yet the punctuation is telling, and the singularity of that one kite marks the interruption in such a way that it bifurcates the narratorial voice. There are now two temporally-differentiated streams of descriptive precision where before there was a unitary stream: one continuing the natural momentum of fatal violence with an almost insidiously delectable eye for rhythmic sequence, and the other insisting on the static, indexical actuality of the scene in the present. Where, however, in “The Edge of the East,” Kipling seemed at least superficially more confident in

³¹⁶ This passage continues with more imagery founded in violence (recalling the similar effect of the carp’s sucking in “The Edge of the East”): “Then evening comes and the children call, and the buffaloes lumber up out of the sticky mud with noises like gunshots going off one after the other, and they all string across the gray plain back to the twinkling village lights” (*JB* 55).

the natural vividness of his picturesque descriptions (what Woolf calls his vitiating shame still only implicit), here, the parenthesis is self-consciously aware that the compositional balance of the picturesque is only a fantasy, no matter how much it gestures towards the predictability of kites and wallows in the real world. Or rather, at the same time, only a fantasy *precisely because* it gestures so conspicuously towards the real world.

In his famous essay on punctuation, Adorno suggests that “brackets implicitly renounce the claim to the integrity of the linguistic form and capitulate to pedantic philistinism.”³¹⁷ And Kipling, perhaps more than most, was captive to exactly this form of “pedantic philistinism.” As we’ve seen, Kipling is desperate to establish the *accuracy* of what he is writing, as distinct from its aesthetic integrity. In his children’s stories, especially, he goes to great lengths to establish an intimate rapport with his readers, frequently informing them—with an extradiegetic “you must know” or “you can imagine”—of “facts” they should know, if they don’t already, pertaining to natural history, Indian culture, or even to theretofore unknown aspects of Mowgli’s fantastic world.³¹⁸ These are all intended to serve the internal and external coherence of the diegesis, indexing the *Jungle Books*’ content to what are made to seem like known quantities.

And yet, as I have argued, Kipling’s numerous pedantries consistently work to undo the “integrity of the linguistic form.” The coherence of knowledge, facticity, or what Adorno calls a “capitulat[ion] to what merely exists,” is posed directly against the coherence of the stories as form.³¹⁹ This is a problem of which Kipling is keenly aware, and hence we find the deletion of extradiegetic pedantries as the second-most frequent revision in the *Jungle Book*

³¹⁷ Adorno, “Punctuation Marks,” trans. Shierry Weber Nichol森, *The Antioch Review* 48.3 (1990): 304.

³¹⁸ In *The Jungle Books* alone, there are approximately twenty-four instances of extradiegetically-focused sentences of this sort marked by “you can,” six by “you must,” and five by “you will remember.”

³¹⁹ Adorno, “Punctuation Marks,” 304.

drafts. Portions of writing that seem compelled to explain various superfluous aspects of the *Jungle Book* world to his readers are either excised or minimized—whether these are, for example, the means by which Mowgli judges the time of day (“He looked at the sun and began to calculate”), how silently elephants are able to walk (“turn your back on one in a circus and see if you can tell whether he has crossed the sawdust or not”), an evolutionary dig at the degenerate Bandar-log (here, in their own voice: “Once we were men, and some say we shall be men”), or a disquisition on the ontology of bee-speech (“Of course Mowgli knew just so little of the talk or thoughts of the Little People as you or I do. All insects are a people apart”).³²⁰ Like the uncontrollable violence of the kites, Kipling’s need to cover all his bases threatens to tear apart the integrity of the jungle.

In this sense, Kipling bites off more than he can chew when it comes to thoroughly realizing the conceit of animal instinct at the heart of *The Jungle Books*’ didacticism. Instinct, as an intrinsically precarious mechanism, runs *both* ways, towards equilibrium and towards disintegration—something equally true of Kipling’s style as well, insofar as his descriptive virtuosity and represented violence remain yoked together. Hence we also find Kipling deploying his parentheses in a third, dialectically informed fashion—as a kind of proleptic calibration of violence. Though the pedantic parenthesis, as Adorno writes, more often than not, openly undoes the integrity of the linguistic form in which it is placed, there is also a kind of *minimal* pedantry that functions as a stabilization of form. In the next chapter, I will explore how boredom and indifference are a minimal anthropomorphic affects used by Joyce to resist the instrumentalization of fabular anthropomorphisms more generally. Here,

³²⁰ In fact, this last passage, ultimately excised from the final publication, becomes a winsome disavowal of *The Jungle Books*’ own fabular conceit: “Not even Hathi or Kaa can say anything whatever about their minds; and that is why you should never believe stories about insect talk. It is as nonsensical as fairy tales.” See, respectively, BL Add MS 45540: 137, cf. *JB* 189-190; BL Add MS 45540: 45, cf. *JB* 117; BL Add MS 45540: 53, cf. *JB* 38; BL Add MS 45540: 81, cf. *JB* 297.

similarly, virtuosity and pedantry work together to tamp down what Kipling himself senses as an excess of violence. Minor stylistic obtrusions actually serve to make the violent action of both diegesis and narration more fluid and less obtrusive in their own right.

Thus the parenthesis “(never any more)” in “Tiger! Tiger!” anticipates the proleptic device that Kipling will use with increasing frequency throughout *The Jungle Books*. At the center of a story whose title invokes Blake’s “fearful symmetry,” the parenthesis bifurcates the action of the narrative, reminding the reader that aesthetic illusion and the facticity of animal violence cannot exist in the same space. Kipling’s discovery in *The Jungle Books* is that this bifurcation can be bent to his purpose. Once aesthetics and accuracy, narration and description, are separated and no longer made to constantly run interference with each other, it becomes possible to more fully immerse the reader in one or the other. For Kipling, this means being able to effect, through a stylistic mimesis, the experience of instinctual action. If, like the Buddha in “The Edge of the East,” one can reveal the violent action as having already taken place without one’s full knowledge, then one saves the reader the trouble of struggling to reconcile two stylistic registers in real time.

Hence prolepsis, like a growing cloud of kites on the horizon, tends to pile up in Kipling’s more spectacularly violent stories. The causal action is revealed only after the effect, and the reader becomes caught up in the moment, focusing only on one character’s perspective at a time—usually Mowgli’s: “Mowgli laughed a little short ugly laugh, for a stone had hit him in the mouth” (*JB* 62). The stone here is thrown by the Indian villagers at both Mowgli and Messua after he returns the herd he used to trample Shere Khan: for a moment, the reader inhabits Mowgli’s haughtiness and rises above what we are to take as the provincial bigotry of the villagers. This blinkering of focus works to absolve the reader of the

more murderous violence as well:

Mowgli heard an answering bellow from the foot of the ravine, saw Shere Khan turn (the tiger knew if the worst came to the worst it was better to meet the bulls than the cows with their calves), and then Rama tripped, stumbled, and went on again over something soft, and, with the bulls at his heels, crashed full into the other herd, while the weaker buffaloes were lifted clean off their feet by the shock of the meeting. (*JB* 59)

The last we see of Shere Khan is a brief nod to his final thought. His death is not narrated at all, and it is only from Rama the bull's perspective—as he trips and makes a “bestial blunder”—that we realize the tiger has been killed, ignobly reduced to “something soft.”

It is not surprising, then, that “Red Dog,” the story of Mowgli's greatest victory and penultimate tale in *The Jungle Books*, is essentially *about* instinctual prolepsis. Mowgli and Kaa's design, from the very start, is to activate, let loose, and make converge the instincts of at least two different groups of actors: the invading dhole and the instrumentalized bees. First, as Kaa explains to Mowgli, it is possible to both trigger and survive the deadly instincts of the bees—as a hunted buck once did. One just has to move faster than they can react. “Because he came first, running for his life, leaping ere the Little People were aware, and was in the river when they gathered to kill” (*JB* 289). Second, the plan depends on the insatiable, lawless instincts of the dhole, who unlike the Free People, “drive straight through the Jungle, and what they meet they pull down to pieces” (*JB* 281). Thus Mowgli is able to cut off the tail of their leader and still have the dhole completely within his grasp: “‘Take thy tail,’ said Mowgli, flinging it back along the course he had taken. The Pack instinctively rushed after it. ‘And follow now—to the death’” (*JB* 294).

And Mowgli himself, finally, is guided more than ever by the uncanny intuitions of his beast-like instincts. Like Apis the bull, he has mastered the art of the exquisitely casual blunder, using it to slow the foe down: “Now and then he would pretend to fall, and the

Pack would tumble one over the other in their haste to be at the death” (*JB* 294). And the style does not lag behind; Mowgli’s physical achievements are here matched by passages that bubble with burnished Kiplingisms. As the bees terrorize the dhole above the water, Mowgli is able to sow confusion beneath—“‘One kills in the dark behind us!’ snapped a dhole. ‘Here is tainted water!’”—while a well-placed pluperfect reveals the proleptic evasion and bodies are summarily dispatched with cutely gruesome verbs and gratuitous detail: “Mowgli had dived forward like an otter, twitched a struggling dhole under water before he could open his mouth, and dark rings rose as the body plopped up, turning on its side” (*JB* 296).

If one were to cinematically present these scenes as written, the most suitable style would not, as one might expect, perhaps, be that of action genres but of horror. The action of these cataclysmic scenes is always articulated into discrete, intersecting planes, taking place behind the camera, in the corner of one’s eye, even present only as the sound of a foreboding buzz:

as Mowgli’s first foot-falls rang hollow on the hollow ground he heard a sound as though all the earth were humming. Then he ran as he had never run in his life before, spurned aside one—two—three of the piles of stones into the dark, sweet-smelling gullies; heard a roar like the roar of the sea in a cave; saw with the tail of his eye the air grow dark behind him; saw the current of the Waingunga far below, and a flat, diamond-shaped head in the water; leaped outward with all his strength, the tailless dhole snapping at his shoulder in mid-air, and dropped feet first to the safety of the river, breathless and triumphant. (*JB* 295)

Without sacrificing the characteristic attention to certain pedantic details—pinning, in fact, the scene together with some arithmetical stone-pushing—Kipling puts the reader in Mowgli’s position, our perspective moving so quickly across the cliffs that the world and everything in it recedes far into the background. And in a striking metaphor, Mowgli’s immersion in instinctual action becomes so complete that the corner of his eye is animalized

as a “tail.” What matters is adamantly not the mass murder that is about to take place but only the rush of air past the ears, the blur of shapes in the distance limning perception itself like a parallax abstract painting. The aesthetics of animal instinct, not any of its consequences.

In this way, violence is made an afterthought in *The Jungle Books*. Initially a way to make language more vivid, it ends up requiring calibration so as not to overwhelm the entire proceedings. As an afterthought, it becomes seemingly more calculable—just as, at the same time, the calculations of Kipling’s pedantic accuracies are modulated into the winsome. Accuracy is turned into a shrug, as easy as “one—two—three” piles of stones. Only after, for instance, indulging his predilection for slaughter in the ravines does Mowgli return the buffalo herd to the village, shouting with supreme haughtiness and indifference to any real accountability, “Keep count!” (*JB* 62). Kipling, finally, finds a way to at least play off his deep fixation on accuracy as only a passing whim. No longer always insisting on the coherent reality of his represented world, Kipling here approaches something closer to Barthes’ reality effect: it is the cumulative insignificance of the details, rather, that creates the sense of a whole, coherent, world. (For those who care to systematically work out the world of the jungle, the pieces, of course, are still there—hence, additionally, the poems or songs that frame each separate story in *The Jungle Books*, filled with supplementary lore but independent from the action of the narratives.)

There is one further revision in the manuscripts that now seems to take on the weight of everything Kipling has learned about his own stylistic instincts. In the draft of the second

Jungle Book's "How Fear Came to the Jungle," we learn in the first sentence that "The Law of the Jungle—by far the oldest law in the world—has provided against almost every kind of accident that can overtake the jungle people."³²¹ In the final version, after a number of changes that are clear in the manuscripts, this becomes: "The Law of the Jungle—which is by far the oldest law in the world—has arranged for almost every kind of accident that may befall the Jungle People" (*JB* 149). "Provided against" becomes "arranged for"; "can overtake" becomes "may befall": a slight difference, but one that indexes a shift in Kipling's conception of the Law, I argue, from what we might understand as a general, self-contained ethos that stands as a bulwark against equally strong obstacles or assailants, to a near-Foucauldian apparatus that somehow not only anticipates but even, however improbably, *plans* for all likelihoods and accidents alike.

Indeed, this shift seems to account for the primary difference between the first and second *Jungle Books*. In the first book, the ethos of the Law is synonymous with sportsmanship: at least twice, including the first appearance of the Law in any of the stories, Kipling reminds the reader that man and beast should refrain from killing each other when the other is defenseless; to do so would be "unsportsmanlike" (*JB* 3, 51). Thus Mowgli's battle with Shere Khan in "Tiger! Tiger!" has more the tone of a heroic confrontation between well-matched rivals. In the second book, sportsmanship disappears. What "sport" remains, in fact, comes primarily to name wasteful killing (e.g. *JB* 155, 203, 227). And Mowgli's fight to the death with the dhole, the second book's counterpart to the first's fight with Shere Khan, is represented not as a clash between equals but as a virtuosic operation counting on and incorporating into itself from the very beginning an intricate series of

³²¹ BL Add MS 45540: 162.

inevitable instinctual blunders.

In other words, the Law is recognizable as the intradiegetic embodiment of Kipling's fully developed style. Just as proleptic style does not reveal a violent action until after the fact, so every time the Law of the Jungle is invoked, it imagines an originary, sovereign Law projected back in time that rationalizes, calculates, and adjudicates the violent instinctual economy of the jungle in advance. Should we, for example, see some young wolves "cantering down a path, looking for open ground in which to fight," we would be remiss to think that such casual play were not already accounted for within the structure of the Law: "(You will remember," writes Kipling parenthetically, making us believe we had known all along, "that the Law of the Jungle forbids fighting where the Pack can see)" (*JB* 309). Hence the Law is like both Mowgli and Kipling, who, over the course of their respective developments, discipline themselves not just by denying their violent or pedantic instincts but by learning to deploy their obtrusive instincts wisely, tucking them imperceptibly in as mere afterthoughts or blunders. In the same way, the Law of the Jungle and its totalizing authority are all but constituted by these winsome back-formations: as Baloo says, "the Law was like the Giant Creeper, because it dropped across every one's back and no one could escape" (*JB* 149). And so even the style in which it is invoked comes to resemble Mowgli at the start of "The Spring Running," in what we might call his final #PeakMowgli form: "And yet the look in his eyes was always gentle. Even when he fought, his eyes never blazed as Bagheera's did. They only grew more and more interested and excited; and that was one of the things that Bagheera himself did not understand" (*JB* 303). Never an interdiction or violent intervention on its own; rather it is spoken with a degree of dissimulatingly casual surprise at its own completeness, with a gentle, if not always welcome, "you will remember."

That the developmental and jurisprudential potential of instinctual prolepsis is restricted to an imperial horizon, moreover, marks the limits of *The Jungle Books* as a fantasy. The exceptionality the Orientalist ascribes to himself means that only he has access to the mechanics of both the Law and animal instinct. Mowgli is able to master the Law, but even he, as both child and subaltern, is unable, until the very end, to grasp as they happen the means by which the Law is gradually written into his very flesh. In this sense, the native is more animal than the animal itself in Kipling. Where the beasts of the jungle and the imperialist alike are instinctively able to grasp the order necessary for making a jungle ecology conducive to the production of a liberal subject, the native indulges only in impulsive self-destruction. Like his father John Lockwood Kipling, who, writing only a year before the first of the *Jungle Books*, finds in the wild monkeys of India a capacity for “fastidiousness” and, even, the ability to teach each other moral lessons, despite their “precarious existence,” while finding no such capacity among the native human population, so the younger Kipling ascribes the ability to regulate violence only to beast and Western man, not anybody else.³²²

Hence even when a native evinces a canny awareness of the law’s workings, it is not enough for Kipling. When the villagers plot to kill Messua and her husband for allegedly bringing Mowgli into the world yet hesitate in fear of the colonial policing of the British—“a perfectly mad people, who would not let honest farmers kill witches in peace”—Buldeo explains, not without some indignation, that they would merely have to “report that Messua and her husband had died of snake-bite. THAT was all arranged, and the only thing now was to kill the Wolf-child” (*JB* 189). Buldeo’s plan in fact formally resembles the proleptic back-

³²² John Lockwood Kipling, *Beast and Man in India* (London: Macmillan, 1891), 62-66.

formations of the Law of the Jungle: death by snake has been “arranged for” in advance by colonial law. But for Kipling, as the tone and framing of the story makes clear, this is only an opportunistic exploitation of colonial law, not a genuine understanding of “the Law” as such. Like the modernizing Japanese before them, their plan fails by virtue of being a machination and not a matter of casual instinct.

In the end, the internalization of the Law can only work in the fantastic space of the Jungle, where the Law enforces and is enforced by a constant loop of instinctual exercises. This—and not just, say, the interdiction against bestiality that end-stops Lamarckism’s ideological promise—is a hard limit encoded into the very structure of the Law. In order for the Law to be truly consistent and comprehensively anticipatory, it must treat all possibilities, including its own nullity, as accounted for in advance. In order for any subject of the Law to truly achieve mastery of the Law, relating to it not blazingly, as it were, but like Mowgli’s eyes, gently, interestedly, and excitedly, that subject must turn the Law itself into an afterthought. Thus the Free People, at the end of Mowgli’s time, reveal what was, all along, the final provision of the Law: that “the Master of the Jungle goes back to Man.” The Law’s most definite prolepsis is its own self-effacement. True instinct does not remember itself. And style, too, must cover its tracks.

IV.
 BEASTS OF BOREDOM:
 FABULAR INDIFFERENCE
 IN *FINNEGANS WAKE*

Truly, learning is a most useful accomplishment and a great one. Those who despise it give ample proof of their animal stupidity.... When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her? ³²³

—Montaigne, *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*

Let each one learn to bore himself.³²⁴

—*FW* 585.36

ANIMALS & REALISM

How one should treat animals and how one should represent them are never quite commensurate, but they necessarily converge over the question of language. The former demands an absolute responsibility, expanding the purview of ethics beyond human linguistic subjectivity and any accountable form of reciprocity; and the latter, though often in the service of the former, is delimited by the very nature of language and its expressive limits. How, in other words, can language be used to direct one's conscience to the plight of

³²³ Michel de Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1993), 1, 17.

³²⁴ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1968). Hereafter cited by page and line number as *FW*.

a being who is seemingly without language? And how can one be faithful to the specific plight of that being without access to that being's particular form of self-conception? Without that fidelity to experience, how can one justify speaking for another? These are the core questions that have structured all modern writing on animal rights. From Jeremy Bentham's foundational observation that "the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?" to the final recognition of Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello of the simultaneous necessity and futility of the writer's responsibility to indifferent creatures—"I believe in what does not bother to believe in me," she submits—the task has been to delineate what precisely in the non-human animal other requires an ethical response.³²⁵

The problem facing literature specifically, no matter what virtue one finds in the animal to justify its ethical treatment, is that the linguistic representation of that virtue will almost always exceed its particularity in the animal. To speak of the unflinching loyalty of a pet, for example, transposes that animal's particular, embodied relationship to its guardian into a cultural and moral discourse of affiliation in which the animal is not an equal partner or interlocutor. This is an asymmetry of representation that generates a further ethical concern: namely, having initially developed a sense of response in relation to a literary representation of an animal, to a being shot through with language (whether through the contrivances of plot or anthropomorphism), how does one sustain an equivalent response to the actual being who is the silent object of that representation once language is taken away? Modernists, in different ways, throw this impasse at the heart of ethics into higher relief: not only the initial question of how to faithfully represent or imitate an animal's particularity but also how these representations—these fables—necessarily bifurcate ethical attention into

³²⁵ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (2nd ed., 1823), ch. 17, n. 122.

separate registers of the discursive and the concrete. Virginia Woolf's *Flush*, D. H. Lawrence's *St Mawr*, and especially Joyce's extensive bestiary, all engage this disjuncture between knowledge and being, and weigh in, with varying conclusions, on the ethical considerations that each register ends up triggering in response to the other.

Although even the most cursory survey of Joyce's writing will turn up a generous and well-rooted panoply of animals both figurative and real—the “arctic beast with a rough yellow coat” that breaches the surface of a young Joyce's epiphanies,³²⁶ the moocow conscripted by Stephen Dedalus to open *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and not least the Blooms' celebrated cat—it is only recently, in the wake of animal-studies considerations of other modernist authors, that scholarship has started to explore this particular concern of the Joycean corpus at any length. The reasons both for this oversight in Joyce studies and for its subsequent and somewhat belated correction are not immediately clear, and we might consider some possible explanations.

From the perspective of modernist form, for example, we might venture that if the self-described “scrupulous meanness” of style for which Joyce's fiction is most well known is bound primarily to the mimesis of personality and character, then critical interest only naturally remains with the human in Joyce. Leo Bersani, putting the case most stringently, observes that the “peculiar and disturbing power” of Joyce's fiction seems to derive from his particular facility for maintaining a nonperspectival narrative point of view. As the “most refined technique” of “the mimetic tradition in literature,” Joyce's style is able both to mimetically embody or perform the point of view under consideration and to disinterestedly consider it from a seemingly extradiegetic distance *at the same time*. Thus the first sentence of

³²⁶ Epiphany 7, in James Joyce, *Epiphanies*, ed. O. A. Silverman (Buffalo: University of Buffalo Press, 1956).

Ulysses “is at once seduced by Mulligan’s rhetoric and coolly observant of his person”; for “a complete or objective view of Buck can be given *neither by a direct quote nor by an analytical description*, but only by a self-performance at a certain distance from the performing self. In other words, the sentence objectifies the point of view that it takes.”³²⁷ A deployment of what Bersani identifies as Stephen’s understanding of Aquinas’ concept of “radiance” in *Portrait*, Joyce’s nonperspectival style makes it seem “as if literature could quote being [scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing] independently of any particular being’s point of view.”³²⁸ But this method, we might add, which so deftly unites the scholastic and the stylistic under the rubric of realism, necessarily excludes representations of real animals. While Joyce’s method is, as so clearly on display in *Dubliners*, able to objectify the subjectivity of even non-human (strictly speaking) entities such as the collective consciousness of Dublin itself and thus in completeness represent the city’s whatness, this is still a whatness *premised on discursivity*. (Dublin being, of course, the exemplary embodiment of such, for Joyce.) Animals, in contrast, are without discursive purchase: thus Bloom’s cat, unlike Buck Mulligan, for example, cannot hypothetically step out of and perform itself with irony, and therefore remains exempt from the exhaustiveness of a Joycean “complete or objective view.” Joyce represents her, in fact, *only* “by a direct quote” (“Mkgnao!”) or “by an analytical description” (“Clean to see: the gloss of her sleek hide, the white button under the butt of her tail, the green flashing eyes”).³²⁹ It is as if, then, the critical Easter egg hunt on which Joyce’s stylistic nonperspectivalism so gleefully sends his readers necessarily skips over the appearance of animals: their objectification in prose remains a non-question for analyses of

³²⁷ Leo Bersani, “Against *Ulysses*,” in *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990), 161.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

³²⁹ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986), 4.16-23. Hereafter cited parenthetically by episode and line number as *U*.

style, external to what is taken to be the whatness of Joyce himself.³³⁰

Recent criticism has, however, begun to push back against these more classical conceptions of Joyce's fiction. Notably, Maud Ellmann, David Rando, and Sam Slote have highlighted the ways in which Joyce's animals figure a number of strategic interventions: whether in terms of the ontological distinction between humans, animals, and automatons (Ellmann), the newly consolidated discourse of veterinary science (Rando), or colonial discourses of hybridity and mongrelization (Slote).³³¹ From each of these perspectives, moreover, the animal occupies a significant position in any reading of Joyce: the thematic richness and capacity of animal figures, which is often a matter of problematizing binaries and destabilizing received meanings, entails complementary formal and representational techniques that throw into stark relief Joyce's modernist engagement with traditional humanist conceptions of language that would seek to maintain linguistic barriers between the human and the animal. Maud Ellmann argues that "Circe," for example, "out-Descartes Descartes, in so far as it endorses the Cartesian conception of the body as an animal-automaton, but extends this automatism to the human mind, laying bare the animal-machinery of consciousness."³³² But problematizing these linguistic barriers *through* a linguistic medium is itself a difficulty: in their muteness, animals lend themselves almost too

³³⁰ Thus when Bloom's cat is described as "blink[ing] up out of her avid shameclosing eyes, mewing plaintively and long," we know that the rhetorical texture belongs necessarily to a Joycean narrator and not to the cat, and probably not to Bloom. The stark presence of the Joycean voice, in the neologisms and adverbial rhythm, while perhaps interesting from a stylistic angle, does not ultimately encourage much critical inquiry into the cat's subjectivity the way it would were its object a human character. The cat's subjectivity, if any, is a foregone conclusion; the texture merely Joyce, as usual, showing off. One characteristic, however, is left unaccounted for: the moral content of "shameclosing," which treads a mysterious line into Bloom's psyche. It is, after all, *Bloom* who inquires, with emotional investment, into the cat's whatness (here: her cruelty)—in direct contrast to Stephen, whose ironic musing that "Horseness is the whatness of allhorse" strictly remains an academic exercise. (*U* 9.84-85).

³³¹ Maud Ellmann, "Ulysses: Changing into an Animal," *Field Day Review* 2 (2006): 74-93. David Rando, "The Cat's Meow: *Ulysses*, Animals, and the Veterinary Gaze," *James Joyce Quarterly* 46 (2008): 529-543. Sam Slote, "Garryowen and the Bloody Mangy Mongrel of Irish Modernity," *James Joyce Quarterly* 46 (2008): 545-557.

³³² Maud Ellmann, 77.

readily to rhetorical instrumentalization as the objects of discursive power. “Joyce’s intervention,” as Rando writes, “is necessarily a modest one. This is because the extraordinary language acts by which *Ulysses* redefines the representation of humans and animals simultaneously reinforce the precise linguistic basis that maintains the barrier.”³³³ The challenge, then, both faced by scholars and, I argue, posed by Joyce himself, is to find a place in the literary imagination for animals as *more* than mere literary tokens, to question the sheer force of Joyce’s virtuosic realism and the ways it represents a wide range of subjectivities only with a certain degree of violence.

This article thus sets out to trace a number of moments in Joyce that evince an awareness of the ethical limits of his own writing and of literature’s responsibility to the animal in general. It is abundantly plain, first of all, that Joyce was seriously concerned with creaturely life and animal welfare—and not only in literary terms. On at least two occasions he penned popular pieces on the national politics of cattle and foot-and-mouth disease between Ireland and England, taking pains to defend Irish farmers and stock-owners against their vilification at the hands of the English press and legislature.³³⁴ The fact, however, that these actual concerns are rarely reflected in critical examinations of animals as they appear in Joyce’s literary works, reducing more often than not these appearances to mere vehicles for other tenors—be they political allegory, aesthetic discourse, or the *Odyssey*—is perhaps

³³³ Rando, 531.

³³⁴ See “Ireland at the Bar” (1907, translated from the Italian by Conor Deane) and “Politics and Cattle Disease” (1912), both in *Occasional Critical, and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry, pp. 144-147, 206-208 (hereafter *Writing*). In attributing the latter essay to Joyce, I am following the corpus as determined by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann in their 1959 *Critical Writings*, and after them, Barry. In a recent article, however, Terence Matthews has compellingly argued that “Politics and Cattle Disease,” which originally appeared in the *Freeman’s Journal*, was, in fact, *not* written by Joyce. Matthews claims that Ellmann and Mason misattribute the essay to Joyce, too hastily identifying it as the “sub-editorial” about a cure for foot-and-mouth disease mentioned in a letter from Charles to Stanislaus Joyce. See Matthews, “An Emendation to the Joycean Canon: The Last Hurrah for ‘Politics and Cattle Disease,’” *James Joyce Quarterly* 44 (2007): 441-453.

indicative of a more general ease with which actual animal concerns are consistently elided and subsumed into other areas, turned into what Rando calls “consumable tropes.”³³⁵ Hence the modernist compulsion to excessive figuration that Bersani calls the novel’s “affectless busyness” can in fact engender a suppressive violence of its own—and one that we would be remiss to see as free from any sort of affect.³³⁶ Indeed, this article demonstrates that Joyce, throughout his career, engaged at length with conventional styles and forms that, grouped under the traditional umbrella of the “fable,” premise particular affective expressions *on* the consumability of animals as trope. Whether fear, hate, whimsy, or a self-satisfaction with one’s own cleverness, the affective premium produced by fable forms runs up against what, I argue, amounts in Joyce to a recognition of the ethical need to exempt animals from such suppression. This essay, then, traces the development of Joyce’s ethics of animal representation through his work, including not only *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* but also his early literary criticism on Defoe and Bruno and the short fable *The Cat and the Devil* written for grandson Stephen Joyce, and takes up the question of how an author might come to terms with the negligently triumphant affective performances so often associated with animal figuration—and how he might ethically mitigate them, neutralize them, even open the possibility of indifference to them.

By way of example, we might begin instructively with an example of fabular logic in *Ulysses*. The topic of foot-and-mouth disease—then a cause for much commercial and

³³⁵ Following Vincent Cheng on Joyce’s horses, Rando writes: “Thus, the tendency to use animals instrumentally in the form of images is unexpectedly prior to the literary critical cleavages that we imagine separate formalism from various forms of post- structuralism. It is not simply that animal imagery in *Ulysses* produces antithetical critical interpretations, as many contested tropes in *Ulysses* do. Rather, the literary critical endeavor seems always to begin only after actual animals have already been processed into consumable tropes.” Rando, 532. See also Vincent Cheng, “White horse, dark horse: Joyce’s Allhorse of another color,” in *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (Cambridge UP, 1995), 251-277.

³³⁶ Bersani, 174.

agrarian panic, especially on the English side—comes up in conversation in the middle of “Cyclops,” inevitably drawing in, to the ire of the narrator and the other patrons, Bloom’s soft-footed pedantry, “coming out with his sheepdip for the scab and a hoose drench for coughing calves.... Because the poor animals suffer and experts say and the best known remedy that doesn’t cause pain to the animal and on the sore spot administer gently. Gob, he’d have a soft hand under a hen.” (*U* 12.833-835). But the conversation quickly turns away from Bloom’s compassionate emphasis and to the English ban on Irish national sports, prompting a parody of parliamentary proceedings in which Irish sports and Irish cattle are conflated:

Mr Cowe Conacre (Multifarham. Nat.): Arising out of the question of my honourable friend, the member for Shillelagh, may I ask the right honourable friend, the member for Shillelagh, may I ask the right honourable gentleman whether the government has issued orders that these animals shall be slaughtered though no medical evidence is forthcoming as to their pathological condition?

Mr Allfours (Tamoshant. Con.): Honourable members are already in possession of the evidence produced before a committee of the whole house. I feel I cannot usefully add anything to that. The answer to the honourable member’s question is in the affirmative.

Mr Orelli O’Reilly (Montenotte. Nat.): Have similar orders been issued for the slaughter of human animals who dare to play Irish games in the Phoenix park?

Mr Allfours: The answer is in the negative. (*U* 12.860-872)

Conservative prime minister, 1st Lord of Treasury, and former chief secretary for Ireland Arthur James Balfour here makes his appearance as an animalized “Allfours.” Notorious for his stance on policies of coercion, he nevertheless demurs and hesitates to answer when he is questioned about his motivations.

Mr Cowe Conacre: Has the right honourable gentleman’s famous Mitchelstown telegram inspired the policy of gentlemen on the Treasure

bench (O! O!)

Mr Allfours: I must have notice of that question.

Mr Staylewit (Buncombe. Ind.): Don't hesitate to shoot. (Ironical opposition cheers.)

The speaker: Order! Order! (The house rises. Cheers.) (U 12.873-879)

The Cyclopean parody is premised upon the presumed consistency of Balfour's conservatism: the mention of the 1887 Mitchelstown riot, where three men were killed by police fire during Balfour's tenure as chief secretary for Ireland, is meant to emphasize the unhesitating ease with which Balfour, nicknamed "Bloody Balfour," was known to prosecute violent suppression of the Irish on the slimmest of pretexts. But the nationalism which this representation is meant to serve—so far consistent with the violent hyperbole of "Cyclops" in general—is not without resistance. That a fictional Balfour is allowed to hesitate (where his historical counterpart would presumably not) in the complete conflation of political coercion and economic-agrarian suppression is a trenchant moment of critical grace on Joyce's part: the two concerns should not have to be conflated, however much such a generalization might serve *both* English politics and Irish depictions of the same English villainy.

Joyce, moreover, is here obliquely engaging with the fable mode, as indicated by the generalized bestialization of Balfour into "Allfours." The traditional fable is always composed of two aspects: an imaginary fabular aspect and a deterministic aspect. These are recognizable as the two typical stages in a fable wherein a talking animal contrives to break the natural order before being inevitably dragged back in: the indolent grasshopper who wants the fruit of the ant's labor, we are told, never gets it, as if all natural behavior were as predetermined as the actions of a Cartesian automaton. This formally inevitable triumph of

determinism is also occasion for a didactic moment in the fable, which typically ends with a moral dictum delivered from on high, over the now-silenced voices of animals: for if these *mere animals* can fulfill their moral duty, what excuse have you? (“It is wise to worry about tomorrow today,” proclaims one popular translation of “The Ant and the Grasshopper.”)³³⁷ In the “Cyclops” parody, Balfour is bestialized as the animal Allfours whose unswerving deterministic aspect is his penchant for swift and severe use of murderous force. Running against these pre-determined expectations of Balfour, though, is a brief moment of fabular imagination: as if trying to break free from his tragic, mechanical repetitions, Balfour hesitates to collapse cultural politics into animal ethics. In a metafictional sense, then, Balfour’s hesitation to slaughter the Irish as if they were animals is also a hesitation to resume the fable mode itself, which in its didactic turn seeks to draw political and ethical value from the instrumentalized animal.

That Balfour’s moment of counterfactual redemption is ham-fistedly defeated by someone named “Mr Staylewit” signals Joyce’s awareness of the fable form’s hackneyed nature—and also of the larger need to pull back from the immediate rhetorical instrumentalization of animals, the violence of which inevitably spills over onto the reader. When Maud Ellmann observes that animal metaphors in *Ulysses* “memorialize our rejected animality,” she is suggesting from a psychoanalytic perspective that language, when it instrumentalizes animals as mere figures, retains as a symptomatic imprint the bodily

³³⁷ For a description of the traditional logic of the fable mode, see Jill Mann, *From Aesop to Reynard: Beast Literature in Medieval Britain* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 31-39. What I am focusing on as the interplay between the dual aspects of the fabular and the deterministic Colleen Glenney Boggs develops in more detail with her concept of “didactic ontology,” in which the child as liberal subject-in-training first identifies with the fabular animal modeling proper behavior before learning to return it to its status as a non-animal object of liberal kindness. See Boggs, 147.

proximity to and continuity with animals associated with childhood.³³⁸ Thus the actual texture of language in *Ulysses*, especially as it comes to a dense head in the psychodrama of “Circe,” can be understood as bestial and automatic in its own right.

Yet what Ellmann stops short of saying is that this animalized quality—especially when extended to such a hypertrophied degree—reflects the ability of Joyce’s language, in turn, to animalize the reader. The intertextual, allusive form of *Ulysses*, after all, comes to embody its thematic content (here the problematization of human-animal-machine ontology) by turning us into animal-machines ourselves: as readers, we hunt down each reference in “Circe” to a previous figure of Joycean speech or flutter of Bloomean consciousness, sniff out every Homeric allusion, and pant by the shifty waves of Joyce’s perspectival tricks. We might, then, recognize the readerly “busyness” engendered by *Ulysses* as being less “affectless,” as Bersani puts it, and more a function of the novel’s sadistic impulse to instrumentalize its reader in order to ensure its longevity and import. Derrida, for example, famously hyperbolizes Joyce’s readerly instrumentalization as an act of war in *Finnegans Wake*, the successor to the dream-logic slipperiness of “Circe.” Compelled to follow each referent across the book in a limitless cascade, we experience the *Wake* as a “hypermnesiac machine, there in advance, decades in advance to compute you, control you, forbid you the slightest inaugural syllable because you can say nothing that is not programmed on this 1000th generation computer.”³³⁹ And such a totalizing machine can inspire only one response—that of resentment.

³³⁸ Maud Ellmann, 91. She quotes Freud: “‘A child,’ Freud points out, ‘can see no difference between his own nature and that of animals . . . Not until he is grown up does he come so far estranged from animals as to use their names in vilification for human beings.’ Metaphor recalls that period before this estrangement has occurred, when children still perceive themselves as animals.”

³³⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Two Words for Joyce,” trans. Geoff Bennington, in *James Joyce: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Mary T. Reynolds (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993), 208.

In some sense the endpoint of Joyce's nonperspectival realism, which "scrupulously" objectifies a character's subjectivity by merging it with a mimetically textured but still external linguistic perspective, the vision offered by Derrida of *Finnegans Wake* as a massive supercomputer synchronically linking in advance a million bits of data similarly reduces each referent—be it a person, animal, thing, text, or what have you—to an instrumentalized figure: it is, we might say, no less than a fable machine. But just as Joyce, as we've seen in *Ulysses*, understands the fable mode and its instrumentalizing functions to be the product of, at best, a stale wit, so he is all the more aware that the outrageously dilated fable machine of the *Wake* hits a receptive limit. What emerges in Joyce's final work, then, I argue, is a meditation on its own irrelevance and the indifference that might attend it, a meditation that centers its locus of inquiry on the animal figures which have borne the brunt of Joyce's totalizing ambitions. For as every reader of Joyce knows, it's the scale of the enterprise that can be at once the most attractive and most tiresome aspect of both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. But it is also in the *Wake* especially that Joyce sets out to understand what it might mean to undo the monumental self-importance of modernism from the inside-out, granting animals the ethical capacity to refuse their literary instrumentalization by remaining indifferent to the cultural forces—the bread and butter of the *Wake*—that would subject them so.

IS THE FABLE FALLACIOUS? LEWIS VS. JOYCE

The fable continues to be a staple of Joyce's stylistic menagerie after *Ulysses*, and the critique of the politics of the form first explored in "Cyclops" is only sharpened during the composition of *Finnegans Wake*—in large part as a response to his developing rivalry with

Wyndham Lewis. Though much has been written about the two most recognizable fables of the *Wake*—the Mookse and the Gripes, and the Ondt and the Gracehoper—especially in relation to the polemics launched by Lewis against Joyce and other modernists in tracts such as *Time and Western Man*, little attention has yet been paid to Lewis' *The Lion and the Fox*—despite the fact that it squarely converges with *Finnegans Wake* in its preoccupation with the fable mode as a way to interrogate the politics of form.

Published in 1927, indeed just as Joyce was beginning to write his Wakean fables, Lewis' *The Lion and the Fox* is a monograph on the psychology and Machiavellian politics of style in Shakespeare that ultimately functions as a corollary to his more well-known polemic in *Time and Western Man*. In a concluding chapter of *The Lion and the Fox*, Lewis mounts a critique of popular notions of the “divine *impersonality*” of Shakespeare, and by extension, other artists and their works as well (284, Lewis' emphasis).³⁴⁰ For Lewis, such notions are completely fallacious: the artist can only ever be personal. “There are only different ways of being personal,” he writes, “and one of them is that admired method of insinuation whereby a particularly compendious pretended reality enables its creator to express himself as *though he were nature*, or a god” (286, Lewis' notable emphasis, again). Lewis does not specify which artists or critics he is here invoking, but it is not unlikely that it is the “particularly compendious pretended reality” of the last chapters in *Ulysses* (the artifice in “Ithaca” of extra-subjective narration in particular, perhaps) and maybe even the first published episodes of “Work in Progress” that are on his mind. He goes on:

The “impersonal” fallacy appears in light of a genial bluff; it is a similar device to that whereby a man hunting a seal will cover himself with the skin of a dead seal, and, disguised in that way, stalk his prey. The “impersonality” of the artist is as simply a device as the primitive bull-roarer employed to

³⁴⁰ Wyndham Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox: The Rôle of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1966).

frighten the women and children of the primitive tribe.

What is at stake for Lewis in *The Lion and the Fox* is the recovery of Shakespeare as a man of worldly action and shrewd (and ultimately conservative) Machiavellian wisdom despite his “divinely” calm and seemingly impersonal exterior. But he achieves this end only by privileging the didactic or political purpose of a work of art over the imaginary reality of its representation, which, by virtue of aspiring to the appearance of impersonality or animality, is ontologically demoted to the status of a mere disguise, trick, or toy.³⁴¹ If this is, as I contend, a passing swipe at Joyce, it is not one that Joyce can very easily afford to ignore: Lewis is, after all, broadly anticipating the very project of *Finnegans Wake*—that which begins as “Work in Progress” and eventually becomes Joyce’s self-writing myth machine, in which the land itself is often the voice of history—though he reads it as simply a didactic fable and nothing more than a romantic conceit.

Joyce does not fail to address this, and frames a number of episodes in the *Wake* in terms that both mimic and undermine Lewis’ polemic. When, in the quiz-show chapter, Shem poses his eleventh question—here designed to test his brother Shaun’s sense of charity—Shaun responds with a flush of his wonted hostility, equating the social ethics of Bolshevism with thoughtless behavior: “No, blank ye! So you think I have impulsivism?” (*FW* 148.33, 149.11). In an effort to defend himself, Shaun changes the subject to his particular brand of “spatialist” science and philosophy (*FW* 149.18), which Joyce develops into a savage spoof of Lewis’ aesthetics, politics, and personality.³⁴² Unable to explain himself very clearly, however, even after a number of attempted examples, professorial

³⁴¹ This is continuous with the larger argument of *The Lion and the Fox* as well: Lewis critiques Shakespeare for getting too caught up in the grand style of his heroic blank verse. Shakespeare is more properly the shrewd fox, the Ulysses, but nevertheless the fox who loses himself in the grandeur of the lion, or Achilles.

³⁴² For explications of the Joyce-Lewis rivalry as represented in their writing, see Scott Klein, *The Fictions of James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis: Monsters of Nature and Design* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1994).

Shaun announces that he will, finally, “revert to a more expletive method”—his “easyfree translation of the old fabulist’s parable” (*FW* 152.6-13). The resulting product, the fable of the Mookse and the Gripes, is ultimately a markedly poor attempt by Shaun either to entertain his pupils or to propound his Lewisian aesthetics (spatial and visual) over and against the Joycean alternative (temporal and verbal). (Despite the Aesopian fox-and-grapes skeleton, the actual rhetorical vehicle is an extended pastiche of papal history, which is neither as entertaining as Shaun might hope nor very well suited to aesthetic theory.) This pedagogical failure is plainly registered in a confused Shaun’s summary interpretation of his own fable: “And from the poingt of fun where I am crying to arrive you at they are on allfore as foible-minded as you can feel they are fable-bodied” (*FW* 160.33-34). Shaun’s attempt to tell a “fun” fable is strained: he is trying, to the point of crying, to get his students to see that “they” (the characters of his fable) are as foolish as they are fabularly embodied. That is, Shaun holds his own chosen discursive mode in contempt, possibly because he thinks, “To put it all the more plumb-sily. The speechform is a mere sorrogate” (*FW* 149.28). It is at once clumsy and more plumb, straight, direct. Or, clumsy *in* its didactic and political directness, the “speechform” of the beast fable actually attempts to divert attention from its manifest content (all the imaginative possibilities of animal agency) and towards that for which it is the “surrogate” (Shaun’s ethics).³⁴³

In addition, the allusion to Balfour-Allfours in “allfore” reminds us again not only of

³⁴³ Just before Shaun’s summary interpretation, he invokes one of the recurring motifs of the *Wake*, this time in Esperanto: “Sgunoshooto estas preter la tapizo malgranda. Lilegas al si en sia chambro. Kelkefoje funcktas, kelkefoje srumpas Shultroj. Houdian Kiel vi fartas, mia nigra sinjoro?” (*FW* 160.29-32). McHugh translates this as “S is beyond the small carpet. He reads to himself in his room. Sometimes functions, sometimes shrinks shoulders. Today how are you doing, my black sir?” and Clive Hart calls this “the multilingual verbigeration of a wrathful militant society demanding the abdication of the pacifist.” Again, Shaun’s real agenda—here, the most disturbingly aggressive expression of his relationship to Shem—is actually obscured in the attempt to be more direct and accessible through the supposed universality of Esperanto. See Clive Hart, *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake* (Northwestern UP, 1962).

the all-too-easy flattening of actual animal concerns into political and national didacticism, which is something further underlined by the passage's numerous references to the politics of the fabular tradition—first and foremost being Kipling, perhaps, whose *Just So Stories* Joyce blithely swats away as “justotoryum” Tory bilge (*FW* 153.26)—but also of the instability of the fable mode itself, which swings between the stale bluntness of its rhetorical or didactic purpose and the threat of its imaginatively and aesthetically appealing diagesis taking on a life of its own as it strives to dramatize more sharply the conflict which its didactic maxim is meant to resolve.

Joyce's jab thus comprises both a parody of Lewis' hostility and a critique of Lewis' hermeneutics. Shaun's denigration of the depersonalized or bestialized content of the fable as a fallacious “mere surrogate,” like Lewis' dead seal skin, turns out, moreover, to be a corollary of the fixation on determining the thing *itself*, or the thing *as such*, at the expense of the manifest animal. In the passage leading up to the fable of the Mookse and the Gripes, at the start of his series of less-than-lucid examples, Shaun as Professor Jones attempts to explain precisely why the “speechform” is insufficient:

To put it all the more plumbily. The speechform is a mere sorrogate. Whilst the quality and tality (I shall explex what you ought to mean by this with its proper when and where and why and how in the subsequent sentence) are alternativomentally harrogate and arrogate, as the gates may be.

Talis is a word often abused by many passims (I am working out a quantum theory about it for it is really most tantumising state of affairs)... Or this is a perhaps cleaner example. At a recent postvortex piece infustigation of a determinised case of chronic spinosis an extension lecturer on The Ague who out of matter of form was trying his seesers, Dr's Het Ubeleeft, borrowed the question: Why's which Suchman's talis qualis? to whom, as a fatter of macht, Dr Gedankje of Stoutgirth, who was wiping his whistle, toarsely retoarted: While thou beast' one zoom of a whorl! (*FW* 149.28-150.14)

The pedantry being parodied in this passage condenses for Joyce a number of targets: here

Lewis' Vorticism is given a German-philosophical spin, bringing into relief a shared preoccupation with pinning things down as "such and such a kind" with the Latin *talis*. Like Yawn, who later very confusedly tries to explain "aliona equal and opposite brunoipso" to the Four Old Men (*FW* 488.9), or the Mookse himself, "promulgating ipsofacts and sadcontras" (*FW* 156.9), Shaun struggles for analytic directness and clarity but in doing so, only ironically obscures his didactic point, which should itself be an explanation of how the "speechform" obscures its own didactic points. Again, Joyce weighs in on this fixation of the thing *as such*, the fact *itself*, hiding behind something else—or what might otherwise be known as a hermeneutics of depth or of suspicion—and reveals that it becomes all the more clumsy in its desire to show something for what it presumably really is.³⁴⁴ There is, it seems, a certain kind of clarity in *letting* the animal subsist in literary artifice that cannot successfully be exchanged for a more didactic clarity: to let the Mookse be Mookse, and the Gripes stay Gripes, and not the allegorical skins for something else.

Neither is this pedantry without its politics. When his interlocutor "Dr's Het Ubeleeft" raises an earnest question about the seemingly self-evident authority of his discourse, a defensive and self-satisfied "Dr Gedankje" returns, "While though beast' one zoom of a whorl!" (*FW* 150.14). For well-mannered "Ubeleeft" is querying the grammatical correlation between *qualis* and *talis*, or the interrogative and the demonstrative—which is to say, the correlation between a moment of inquiry ("Of what kind is X?") and the moment of classification ("Of *such* kind, of *such* folk is X")—and in so doing questions the central logic

³⁴⁴ The propensity to name or call something what it rightly is might also be a parody of Bruno. According to James Atherton, "Bruno is one of the most verbose of all writers and on one occasion takes a page to say that he himself, *Il Nolano*, calls things by their right names: *Chiama il pane pane, il vino vino, il capo capo, il piede piede...* and so on to say that 'He calls bread bread, wine, wine, a head a head, a foot a foot,' until he has given nearly a hundred examples of his own virtue in calling things by their right names." See James Atherton, *The Books at the Wake* (New York: Viking, 1974), 37.

of all biological determinisms, which trace individual qualities to what Shaun here calls “talities,” to the taxonomic or typological features of a *kind*. And to do so here, to merely question, prompts an unceremonious classification and return to one’s biological origin: “because you’re a son of a whore.” And, moreover, *weil du bist ein Sohn der Welt* is made to do triple duty as an insult, taking on not only a Vorticist valence but also, significantly, the work of animalizing the professor’s victim. Biological determinism is here emphasized through an equation with the animal. Nor does Shaun feel there is anything unethical about denigrating or neglecting somebody’s humanity and particularity: “I need not anthropologise for any obintentional [...] downtrodding on my foes” (*FW* 151.7-11). The power of the *talis*, the “such,” then, like the power of the fable, is that it *both names and demeans* things “as such.” This is especially true when the “as such” animalizes—the animal here being reduced to a synecdochal marker of determinism, allowed to be “as such” or the animal “itself” only insofar as it is the marker of genus.

The framing of the fable of the Mookse and the Gripes therefore brings to our attention the dangers of a politics of form that would seek to flatten the imaginative, aesthetic life of the fabular animal by emphasizing the artifice of its didactic “surrogacy.” For just as Lewis privileges the political instrumentalization of art, so Shaun as a caricature of Lewis is obsessed with ascertaining and propounding a correct and urgent politics otherwise obscured by the foolishness of art (despite the fact that he himself, like Lewis, resorts to artistic practice as a means of political engagement). For unlike “surrogate” art, Shaun’s rhetoric of “quality and tality” is supposed to be more *immediately* political, alternately proprietary (in the sense of unjust arrogation) or curative (like the medicinal bath waters of Harrogate, England). Yet this quest to express such a politics “all the more plumbily” not

only falters in its clarity, mangling the artistic possibilities offered by the fable form, but also reduces the possibilities of politics proper to the level of biopolitics: the typological determinism of the “as such” leaves no room for any negotiation when it comes to the individual. Perhaps counterintuitively, the attempt to expose the fabular animal as mere pretense ends up re-bestializing the human subject as mere cattle to be appropriated and made to live.

ANIMALS AFTER THE FABLE

from zoomorphology to omnianimalism
—*FW* 127.13

We find in the rest of the *Wake*, then, moves by Joyce to sever animal representations from these kinds of biological determinism: not to be bought or sold, animals are to be taken in as the ethical recipients of hospitality. When Joyce turns the tables on Shem three chapters later in “The Mime of Mick, Nick, and the Maggies,” putting him in the position of having to guess the color chosen by Shaun and the Maggies, there occurs between Shem’s second and third attempts a remarkable menagerie of a passage that begins:

It darkles, (tinct, tint) all this our funnaminal world. Yon marshpond by ruodmark verge is visited by the tide. Alvemmare! We are circumveiled by obscuritads. Man and belves frieren. There is a wish on them to be not doing or anything. Or just for rugs. Zoo koud!” (*FW* 244.13-17).

Here, at the structural midpoint of *Finnegans Wake*, the sun decisively sets on the waking, phenomenal, “fun animal” world, and man and beast together rest and escape the cold in what seems alternately a zoo or Noah’s Ark. This twilight interlude occurs, of course, just before Shem fails to guess the color (“heliotrope”) in his final attempt, and the darkness is

generally read as mirroring his “increasing castigation and abjection.”³⁴⁵ Often glossed over, however, in favor of the *Wake*’s perennial fraternal Olympics are two of the passage’s most important features: the proliferation of animals and the theological and religious register with which it is colored.³⁴⁶ Considered together, these two features help to illuminate the passage in a less abject light, recovering an ethical space for animals that runs counter to their fabular instrumentalization by Shaun. The passage continues and culminates in a nod to Rabelais³⁴⁷:

Nought stirs in spinney.... Quiet takes back her folded fields. Tranquille thanks. Adew. In deerhaven, imbraced, alleged, injoynted and unlatched, the birds, tommelise too, quail silent. ii. ... Panther monster. Send leabarrow loads amorrow. While loevdom shleeps. Elenfant has siang his triumph, *Great is Eliphas Magistrodontos* and after kneeprayer pious for behemuth and mahamoth will rest him from tusker toils. Salamsalaim ! Rhinohorn isnoutso pigfellow but him ist gonz wurst. Kikikuki. Hopopodorme. Sobeast! No chare of beagles, frantling of peacocks, no muzzing of the camel, smuttering of apes. (*FW* 244.26-245.4)

Here Joyce presents us with a series of animals that are neither fabular figures, allegorical placeholders, nor uncanny creatures. These are, almost surprisingly, largely quiescent beasts at rest that perhaps belong in more pastoral settings. We might, moreover, naturally expect this tranquility to be a condition optimal for contemplation and clarity—Shem, most urgently, could use some of that in his guessing. The Rabelaisian note, at least, *would* suggest as much: if the original posits a hypothetical philosopher who is thwarted from his solitary

³⁴⁵ Slote, “Blanks for When Words Gone: Chapter II.1,” in *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*, ed. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote (Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 199. Also, cf. John Bishop, introduction to *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Penguin, 1999), xxii.

³⁴⁶ Slote only touches on the animal and theological content without elaborating beyond the biographical: “Our father (*pater noster*) has been awakened from the zoo in which he sleeps. This suggests the Fluntern cemetery in Zürich (where Joyce is buried), which adjoins a zoo that Joyce had compared to the one in Phoenix Park. Because of the fraternal quarrel HCE is raised in the cemetery by the zoo.” Slote, “Blanks,” 199.

³⁴⁷ Joyce is referencing this passage from *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (III.13, trans. Urquhart): “He gave us also the example of the philosopher who, when he thought most seriously to have withdrawn himself unto a solitary privacy, far from the rustling clatterments of the tumultuous and confused world, the better to improve his theory, to contrive, comment, and ratiocinate, was, notwithstanding his uttermost endeavours to free himself from all untoward noises, surrounded and enviroined about so with the barking of curs ... nuzzing of camels ... frantling of peacocks ... charming of beagles ... snuttering of monkeys ... and wailing of turtles, that he was much more troubled than if he had been in the middle of the crowd at the fair of Fontenay.”

work by a noisy rabble of animals (a “charming of beagles,” etc.), then the absence of this from the Joycean twilight (“*No chare of beagles*”) should prove conducive to intellectual efforts. Yet the passage makes a point of resisting any conclusive allegorical or theological clarity:

And now with robbly brerfox's fishy fable lissaned out, the threads simwhat toran and knots in its antargumends, the pesciolines in Liffeyetta's bowl have stopped squiggling about Junoh and the whalk and feriaquintaism and pebble infinibility and the poissission of the hoghly course. (*FW* 245.9-13)

While the Mookse and the Gripes spend their time fruitlessly re-enacting the annals of religious conflict, the fish in the sea have here stopped “squiggling about” the same business completely; the law (Torah) and its allegorical interpretations (the integument as undergarment?) are now “somewhat torn” and knotted; and fables, no longer sane, perhaps, are “listened out.” The animals are not just tired but bored.

But this does not mean the scene is evacuated of all theological significance whatsoever. The animals presented are still minimally anthropomorphized and engaged in a form of prayer: the panther lurks in an Our Father; the elephant kneels. And a collection of birds is not without its joyful but silent praise, too. In his annotations for this passage, which he compiled with Joyce’s help, Jacques Mercanton explains the otherwise-opaque, doubled and lowercase “ii” as “*deux petits oiseaux, mâle et femelle ... Probablement la phrase la plus petite de toute la littérature: la dernière prière des deux oiseaux blottis l’un contre l’autre, lançant leurs petites prières minuscules et conjointes,—les deux points sur les i, et affirmant leur identité devant l’univers entire ébabi.*”³⁴⁸

More emphatically than the other animals, these two small birds are in possession of their own prayers, which remain inaccessible and illegible to the outside world. If the normal binary of the didactic fable names the animal as such *and* anthropomorphizes the animal,

³⁴⁸Jacques Mercanton, “L’Esthétique de Joyce,” in *Écrits sur James Joyce* (Vevey: Aire, 2002), 217.

forcing it to speak, it inevitably ends by having the animal go silent at the moment of the narrator's enunciation of the fable's moral maxim. Yet in this passage, the silence of the animals does *not* mean the return to a predetermined conclusion. Instead, the allegorical truths of religious and folk traditions are confused or ignored, pointedly eschewing any editorial didacticism in favor of the diffuse but substantial supplication of the animals.

Finally, it would be wrong to claim that the content of the animals' prayers, apart from the two small birds', are entirely inaccessible. From the context of the passage and what cues we have, it is evident that the animals' prayers are for shelter and rest: Deucalion is named as he who is asked to "Drr, deff, coal lay on" (*FW* 244.17). Creature comforts, as it were: the provisions for biological life are what emerge as the basic ethical stakes of the *Wake's* more bestial episodes—even if Joyce must, with a bare minimum of literary anthropomorphism, instrumentalize his animals briefly to make this point. Where Shaun mobilizes the fable form in order to justify refusing hospitality to "a poor acheseveld" on the grounds of a vague biological determinism (giving the profligate grasshopper his just deserts, as it were), Joyce eschews the instrumentalization of the fable and has a "Mr Knight" and his crew offer lodging to the tired animals and the wayward "wenderer" once the sun sets (*FW* 245.24-36).³⁴⁹ Here, the deserving and undeserving, ant and grasshopper, are received alike.

³⁴⁹ Mr E. H. Knight was actually the manager of the Euston Hotel in London, where Joyce and Nora stayed in 1922 as his eyes were rapidly deteriorating—thus the twilight. See *Letters* II.536n.

THE TERROR OF STRANGE BEASTS (& SOLITUDE)

Whosoever is delighted in solitude, is either a wild beast or a god.³⁵⁰
—Francis Bacon, “Of Friendship”

In an August 1936 letter to his grandson Stephen, Joyce composed a fable, later to be published posthumously as the children’s story *The Cat and the Devil*, about the town of Beaugency and its need for a bridge to cross the river Loire (*Letters* I.387-388).³⁵¹ The town’s ostentatious lord mayor, a Monsieur Alfred Byrne, receives a proposition from the Devil, who offers to build a bridge for the Balgentians. The bridge will cost them nothing: the one catch is that the first person to cross the bridge will belong to him. The lord mayor consents but thwarts the Devil after the bridge is built by sending over it, to the Devil’s chagrin, not a Balgentian but a cat. This fable reveals, almost a decade after the *Wake* passages just discussed were first written, not only Joyce’s continued preoccupation with the form but a renewed focus on subverting some of its traditional tenets. Indeed, while Amanda Sigler classifies *The Cat and the Devil* as a variant of the “Devil’s Bridge” folktale type, we might further note a number of moments where Joyce purposefully draws attention to its conventions, especially as they allow him to condense in one brief but invigorating breath a number of his recurring thematic points.³⁵² The lord mayor, for example, induces the cat to cross the bridge by dousing it with a bucket of water, thus defeating the Devil’s fabular moment of trickery with the reliability of a cat’s instinctual, i.e. predetermined, behavior.

There is some humorous payoff, too, when Joyce writes that the Devil, as a result, “was as

³⁵⁰ Bacon is paraphrasing Aristotle’s *Politics*. *Bacon’s Essays*, ed. Richard Whately (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1856), 248.

³⁵¹ See Amanda Sigler’s article “Crossing Folkloric Bridges: The Cat, the Devil, and Joyce,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 45 (2008): 537-555, for a comprehensive survey and study of the story’s origins and many subsequent illustrated (and translated) editions.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 537.

angry as the devil himself”: the trickster Devil (like the fox of fable lore) is forced to fulfill his predetermined role as devil, in some sense both short-circuiting and revealing the fable logic of the form. But Joyce notably does *not* end the fable with the farcical abjection of the Devil and the cat. Instead, the fable’s two “losers” find solace in each other: “And he [the Devil] said to the cat: Viens ici, mon petit chat! Tu as peur, mon petit chou-chat? Tu as froid, mon pau petit chou-chat? Viens ici, le diable t’emporte! On va se chauffer tous les deux” (*Letters* I.388). Like the beasts of “our funnaminal world” and, eventually, the Gracehoper, all the cat wants is rest and warmth; and like Joyce’s hospitable Mr. Knight and Bloom, the Devil here takes the cat in.

A few further considerations link this story for Stephen Joyce to the passages at hand in *Finnegans Wake*, bringing together the politics of fable form and Brunonian ethics. Joyce includes a winsome but curious postscript with the story: “P.S. The devil mostly speaks a language of his own called Bellsybabble which he makes up himself as he goes along but when he is very angry he can speak quite bad French very well though some who have heard him say that he has a strong Dublin accent” (*Letters* I.388). The Devil is clearly identified as someone quite like the author of *Finnegans Wake*, whose Wakean “Bellsybabble” resolves into a Dubliner’s “bad French” when provoked.³⁵³ But it is in this bad French that he offers his hospitality to the cat—an ethical victory over the conventional strictures of the fable. This mirrors a similar move in the *Wake*. At the end of the twilight menagerie passage, before the children’s game resumes, there is a quick run-through, once again, of the *Wake*’s primary mythological axioms:

For these are not on terms, they twain, bartrossers, since their baffle of

³⁵³ And indeed, many illustrated editions of *The Cat and the Devil* paint the Devil with amusingly Joycean features. For examples, see Sigler, 553, 554.

Whatalose when Adam Leftus and the devil took our hindmost, gegifting her with his painapple, nor will not be atoned at all in fight to no finish, that dark deed doer, this wellwilled wooer, Jerkoff and Eatsoup, Yem or Yan, while felixed is who culpas does and harm's worth healing and Brune is bad French for Jour d'Anno. Tiggers and Tuggers they're all for tenzones. Bettlimbraves. For she must walk out. And it must be with who. Teaseforhim. Toesforhim. Tossforhim. Two. Else there is danger of. Solitude. (*FW* 246.26-35)

By day's end, Issy will have to choose either Shem or Shaun, for all three, it is now apparent, operate under the threat of solitude. Shem particularly is in danger of solitude; at this point in the night he is the one on the verge of being completely cast out. And while the trajectory of the *Wake* is perennially towards the Brunonian (re)union of the brothers, the particular mechanics of renewal here (Giordano's *jour de l'an*) are expressed as "bad French": like the shredding and knotting of religious and folk traditions, language itself must be irreverently received and rejected by Devil-Shem-Joyce, "that dark deed doer," who is in turn himself rejected, before the *ricorso* of Viconian history can take place. Moreover, in both the menagerie passage and *The Cat and the Devil*, the linguistic mischief of either Shem or the Devil is aligned with the turning away of the animal: in the former, the fables are "lissaned out" by the beasts; in the latter, the cat actually becomes "tired of looking at the lord mayor (because even a cat grows tired of looking at a lord mayor)" (*Letters* I.388). In each case, the party at risk of abject solitude finds companionship in an animal other that has tired of its fabular instrumentalization at the hands of the victor.³⁵⁴

These are configurations from the later parts of Joyce's career, but they are not

³⁵⁴ This seems to comport well with what Jean-Michel Rabaté has written about orangutans in *Finnegans Wake* and their relationship to Poe. Discussing a passage in which Shem is bestialized (*FW* 192.17-23), he writes, "The adjective 'simian' gives a neat echo-rhyme for Shamman,' and Joyce portrays himself more readily in the role of the half-tamed animal, whose gibberish is always understood as meaning something in yet another language, than in the role of the mystical shaman who can directly embody totemic animals." See Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Joyce upon the Void: The Genesis of Doubt* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 76. That is, again, emphasis is not on totemic transformation into animals, but animals as linguistic and ethical resistance. In other words, Viconian transformation is not ontological but ethical.

without precedent. A look at some of Joyce's earlier writing, especially two essays on Ireland originally written in Italian for *Il Piccolo della Sera*, suggests that the attention to the ethics of boredom and solitude that we find in *Finnegans Wake* and *The Cat and the Devil* is, in fact (though not unsurprisingly, perhaps), the culmination of a lifelong preoccupation. The final task of this article, then, is to ascertain precisely the ethical logic of these topoi, particularly as they appear in a Brunonian configuration first in Joyce's early criticism and later in the *Wake*. For while the animals of *Ulysses* often make their appearance in order to unsettle the distinction between humans and animals, this ontological concern largely gives way to an ethical one in Joyce's later works, with the animal appearing as a limit not of what might be realistically represented but of what might be responsibly approached and engaged as an ethical being.

Joyce's ambitious 1912 essay "The Universal Literary Influence of the Renaissance," which follows nearly seamlessly from the slightly earlier double-lecture of the same year on Defoe and Blake, "Realism and Idealism in English Literature," sets out a uniquely and neatly schematic alternate cultural history of Europe, propounding it over and against any sort of popular evolutionary model of development:

The doctrine of evolution in the light of which our civilization basks teaches us that when we were small, we were not yet grown up. Accordingly, if we take the European Renaissance as a point of division, we must conclude that, until that age, humanity only had the soul and body of a child, and it was only after this age that it developed physically and morally to the point of deserving the name of adulthood. It is a very drastic and somewhat unconvincing conclusion. In fact (were I not afraid of seeming to be a *laudator temporis acti* ["a praiser of times past"]), I should like to oppose this conclusion with all my might. (*Writing* 187)

For Joyce, cultural development is not in any sense linear or teleological, nor does his penchant for medievalism *de facto* grant much moral value to the past. Eschewing all

hypotheses of biological determinism, literal or figurative, Joyce instead goes on to paint European history, first, as a matter of affective and psychic economy, and second, as circular or tidal rather than linear.

So when the great rebels of the Renaissance proclaimed the Good News to the people of Europe that there was no more tyranny, [...] perhaps the human spirit felt the fascination of the unknown, [...] and, abandoning the cloistered peace in which it had been languishing, embraced the new gospel. It abandoned its peace, its true abode because it had *tired of it*, just as God, *tired* (if you will permit a rather irreverent term) of his perfections, called forth the creation out of nothing, just as woman, *tired of* the peace and quiet that were wasting away her heart, turned her gaze towards the life of temptation. Giordano Bruno himself says that all power, whether in nature or the spirit, must create an opposing power without which man cannot fulfill himself, and he adds that in every such separation there is a tendency towards a reunion. The dualism of the great Nolan faithfully reflects the phenomenon of the Renaissance. (*Writing* 187-188; my emphasis)

Cultural history, theological poetics, and Eve's psychology here become matters of satiation, boredom, self-fulfillment, and curiosity, which in turn are framed as opposing terms of Bruno's coincidence of contraries: self-fulfillment is decoupled from the sufficiency of being comfortable and satisfied, and is instead located in the movement from sufficiency to *lack*. This describes, more specifically, the movement from one cultural moment to another, which Joyce calls "ideational" art and "the art of circumstance" (*Writing* 189). The former is exemplified in the Middle Ages by Dante's *Inferno*, in which "the poet's hate follows its path from abyss to abyss in the wake of an increasingly intense idea," and the latter in modern culture by Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, which reproduces "every pulsation, every tremor, the lightest shiver, the lightest sigh." And whether one's art is more abstract or more sensible is primarily an expression of the difference in one's "composure" and ability to enjoy one's solitude:

In the high Middle Ages, the compiler of an atlas would not lose his composure when he found himself at a loss. He would write over the

unknown area the words: *Hic sunt leones*. The idea of solitude, the terror of strange beasts, the unknown were enough for him. Our culture has an entirely different goal: we are avid for details. For this reason our literary jargon speaks of nothing else than local colour, atmosphere, atavism: whence the restless search for what is new and strange, the accumulation of details that have been observed or read, the parading of common culture. (*ibid.*)

And like God, who creates the world out of a boredom with his own perfections, so modernity proceeds out of the Middle Ages: “In fact, the Renaissance came about when art was dying of formal perfection, and thought was losing itself in vain subtleties.”

Hic sunt leones: though somewhat vague, this distinction between “the terror of strange beasts” and “the restless search for what is new and strange” starts to illuminate the ways in which Joyce connects human-animal relationships to larger cultural histories. His slightly earlier lecture on Defoe and English realism pivots upon a similar distinction concerning man’s mode of relation to the natural world around him. In its final paragraph, Joyce contrasts two archetypal island-experiences: those of John the Evangelist and Robinson Crusoe. The distinction between the two seems homologously (if not precisely) to be the distinction between the ideational and the circumstantial:

Saint John the Evangelist saw on the island of Patmos the apocalyptic collapse of the universe and the raising up of the walls of the eternal city splendid with beryl and emerald, onyx, and jasper, sapphires and rubies. Crusoe saw but one marvel in all the fertile creation that surrounded him, a naked footprint in the virgin sand: and who knows if the latter does not matter more than the former? (*Writing* 174-175)

Boredom and fear are more clearly connected here. While John, the ancient theologian, exists in a beatific equanimity with the world around him, Crusoe, the modern English imperialist, seems unable to appreciate “all the fertile creation that surrounded him”; the footprint’s indication that he might not be alone simultaneously terrifies him and provides a welcome distraction from his boredom. For short of being completely comfortable in his

solitude the way John is—or, rather, when his solitary being is coextensive with the totality of creation and he is *ipso facto* sovereign—Crusoe turns his attention from what seemed a natural sort of formal perfection to focus solely on the threat of an other’s presence: unlike Joyce’s medieval cartographer, he is unable to maintain his composure in the face of the unknown.³⁵⁵

Joyce’s critique of Defoe and English realism, moreover, goes beyond his comparison of Dante and Wagner, and gains political traction in his reading of Crusoe as the first genuinely *English* literary character. While Chaucer and Shakespeare populate their stables with “Norman clerics and foreign heroes,” only Defoe gets at the “true English spirit” (*Writing* 164):

The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe who, shipwrecked on a lonely island, with a knife and a pipe in his pocket, becomes an architect, carpenter, knife-grinder, astronomer, baker, shipwright, potter, saddler, farer, tailor, umbrella-maker, and cleric. He is the true prototype of the British colonist just as Friday (the faithful savage who arrives on ill-starred day) is the symbol of the subject race. All the Anglo-Saxon soul is in Crusoe: virile independence, unthinking cruelty, persistence, slow yet effective intelligence, sexual apathy, practical and well-balanced religiosity, calculating dourness. Whoever re-reads this simple and moving book in light of subsequent history cannot but be taken by its prophetic spell. (*Writing* 174)

Crusoe, too, is not just the imperialist’s prophetic embryo; he is also in a way its highest perfection. In a draft version of the lecture, Joyce includes a paragraph at the end (that also links it to “The Universal Literary Influence of the Renaissance”) sarcastically suggesting that contemporary English imperialists are not an improvement on Crusoe but something closer to a vitiation, a set of cheap copies:

³⁵⁵ Another figure Joyce contrasts to Defoe’s Crusoe is William Blake, whose poetic vision falls easily under the umbrella of the “ideational” and who, like John of Patmos, was not estranged from the natural world around him: “He who had such great compassion for all things, who lived, suffered and rejoiced in the illusion of the vegetable world: for the fly, the hare, the little chimney-sweep, the robin redbreast, even for the flea, was denied any other fatherhood than a spiritual one.” *Writing* 178.

The narrative that pivots upon this simple marvel [the footprint] is a whole, harmonious and consistent national epic, a solemn and triumphant music which the mournful chant of the savage and innocent soul accompanies. Our century which loves to trace present phenomena back to their origins to convince itself once more of the truth of the theory of evolution, which teaches us that when we were little we were not big, might profitably re-read the tale of Robinson Crusoe and his servant Friday. It would find therein many extremely useful tips for that international industry of our times—the cheap manufacture of the English imperialist type and its sale at knock-down prices. (*Writing* 332n.49)

Defoe, as a realist author whose narratives accumulate detail “like a large snake,” sliding “slowly over a tangle of letters and reports” (*Writing* 169), is firmly what Joyce would call an artist of circumstance and sensation, but as the father of *English* realism, he also manages in the same cultural moment to create in *Robinson Crusoe* its own sort of formal perfection—“a whole, harmonious and consistent national epic”—from which his countrymen have only fallen. The calculus of “perfection” in literary-historical terms thus moves in the opposite direction of what Joyce sees as the history of colonialism—with Defoe’s fiction as the opposite of Dante’s “ideational” and formally perfect art and *Robinson Crusoe* in particular as the expression of colonial perfection. Just as Wagner does not mark an evolutionary improvement over Dante but rather the expression of a Brunonian “opposing power,” so the historical development of English imperialism is not necessarily an improvement but, for Joyce, what seems to be the descent from integrity, homogeneity, and permanence to contingency and high-turnover commodification.

Per Joyce’s own disclaimer against misconstruing him as a *laudator temporis acti*, his rejection of an evolutionary model in both essays is not, moreover, a facile medievalism or nostalgic gesture of re-enchantment. Rather, Joyce’s insistence on deploying a Brunonian frame in this context suggests a double movement in which the course of empire and culture

are *mutually* motivated by both fear and boredom.³⁵⁶ Out of boredom, the modern European from the Renaissance on goes out to explore and seek sensation and circumstance. But like Crusoe, he ends up blind to the wonders of “all the fertile creation that surrounded him” and focuses only on a terrifying trace of the other at the expense of everything else. Yet if Bruno’s axiom is that every power “must create an opposing power,” the European’s quest to discover something beyond his own sphere of comfort leads not to him *creating* an appropriately opposing power in any other but rather to him finding, to his naïve surprise and terror, the other asserting himself. And for Joyce, the lesson of *Robinson Crusoe* is the prophecy of history: that upon finding others and encountering actual strange beasts, the European conquers his own fear by exerting his sovereignty and colonizing them.

This Brunonian logic illuminates Joyce’s mechanics of recursivity. If the modern imperialist begins his project of colonization upon leaving a space of mythically perfect sovereignty, the project culminates in a *different* sort of formal perfection. If Defoe’s characters are in their own way roughly hewn, or as Joyce puts it, like “souls which have but recently emerged from the animal kingdom” (*Writing* 173), the material form in which their experiences are recorded and represented is their opposite—i.e. finished.

Defoe’s masterpiece, *Robinson Crusoe*, is the finished artistic expression of this instinct and this prophetic sense. In this life of the pirate explorer *Captain Singleton*, and in the story of *Colonel Jack*, suffused with such broad and sad charity, Defoe introduces us to the studies and rough drafts of that great solitary figure who later obtains, to the applause of the simple hearts of many

³⁵⁶ Studies of Bruno in Joyce’s thought and writing tend to emphasize either his status as heretic-in-chief, his monism, or his axiomatic coincidence of contraries. But the last especially is often deployed as if it were a slogan, following, understandably, Bruno’s motto: *in tristitia hilaris hilaritate tristis*. The overreliance on this motto, however, often leads to a falling-back on the axiom merely as a simple synchronic pairing of contradictory affects or personalities. While this surely aids, as an effective guidepost, most readings of *Finnegans Wake*, I would like to explore further the actual logic of the axiom, especially as it allows Joyce to plot the relationship of affect and personal disposition to ethics and politics in a historicized and diachronic fashion. As Joyce’s essays indicate, the axiom seems to have a far more capacious function than is normally assumed in both Joyce’s structural schemata and Bruno’s own philosophy.

a man and boy, his citizenship in the world of letters. The account of the shipwrecked sailor who lived for four years on a lonely island reveals, perhaps as no other book in all English literature does, the cautious and heroic instinct of the rational being and the prophecy of the empire. (*Writing* 174)³⁵⁷

Crusoe's journey is the story of moving from a perfect sovereignty in solitude to fear, boredom, contingency, and transience, but finally to a *new* sovereignty again. The interstitial uncertainty is overcome by way of the durability and perfection of the *book*, which immortalizes Crusoe's coming-to-terms with his newfound precarity. At the same time, however, the commodity form of the book means that, in its very popularity ("to the applause of the simple hearts of many a man and boy"), it risks duplication, reproduction, circulation, and so further contingency. Joyce thus adds to the ethics of Bruno's dualism the crucial mechanical necessity of *accident* and *indirection*. One cannot intentionally or directly unite with his opposing power (no more than Shaun, as we've seen, can directly describe the thing itself): he unwittingly encounters more than was anticipated, then seeks to overcome the opposition of that alterity with a movement towards his previous, more "natural" state, only to open himself up to the opposing state once again. Or, to put it more schematically in the case of *Robinson Crusoe*: the risk and contingency represented by "strange beasts" are the same risk and contingency of putting one's story (of overcoming the first contingency) in a book—that is, the terrifying possibility that the Other might not care.

It is perhaps with this logic in mind that Shem thus names his father, in a brief paragraph immediately before the menagerie passage, "Monsieur Rabbinsohn Crucis" (*FW* 243.31). Shem, in a moment of shame following his two incorrect guesses, is complaining about the aid his mother is giving to his father in her capacity as "Helpmeat"

³⁵⁷ As Barry points out, "Joyce ignores the fact that *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) antedates both *Captain Singleton* (1720) and *Colonel Jack* (1722)." See *Writing* 332n.44.

(*FW* 242.25). While first a nod to the chapter's pantomimic presentation, HCE's new guise is also an indictment of Monsignor Paschal Robinson, the Vatican's papal nuncio to Ireland. The tales of two different islands are coupled here as Joyce once again draws out the imperialism of Crusoe's adventure. Ireland becomes his deserted island, and the Irish beasts ready to devour him. Moreover, if we note that this paragraph's placement before the twilight menagerie scene is the result of a typescript error and that it was originally intended to come after "Else there is danger of. Solitude," then the passages together suggest that HCE is, like Crusoe, a modern Adam afraid of solitude and bored of Edenic perfection.³⁵⁸ Like the Brunonian woman who "turns her gaze to temptation," HCE fittingly finds his opposing power in a lively ALP, his Friday: "Winden wanden wild like wenchen weden wanton" (*FW* 243.20). Yet we see that the equivalent of Crusoe's footprint here, that which prompts HCE to realize that he is not really alone, and that which concurrently works to exclude the rest of "all the fertile creation that surrounded him" is the presence of the twilight animals who pray, both indifferent and inaccessible to those around them, in what we might call a mode of nonrelation. "It goes. It does not go": no matter. Perhaps what causes such fear and boredom together in HCE is not that animals or other life can be dangerous or malicious, but that these beings, in fact, might not *care about* humans, that animals are, in their own turn, bored of humans and tired of human culture. Boredom, of course, is a minimal affective marker of anthropomorphism—but a slightly perverse and reflexive anthropomorphism, really, that allows the animal to reject (that allows us to imagine the animal rejecting, that is) our anthropocentrism. Like the cat in *The Cat and the Devil* or the two birds indicated only by "ii," Joyce's animals seem often to be represented

³⁵⁸ Slotte, "Blanks," 198.

and named for no particular reason but their capacity and propensity to be bored or inaccessible, to tire of attending to the narcissism of human beings, and to want to be away.

Discussing the dog paintings of David Hockney, Alice Kuzniar has approached the inaccessibility of the animal as a marker of its own integral wholeness (and vice versa, too): “Complete and separate unto themselves, the dogs exist in their own serene world, without need of the addition or complementarity of words. Their perfection and apartness reinforce their muteness.”³⁵⁹ Joyce’s animals function similarly, marking the limit of verbal media right at the center of an excessively verbal artifact—not because they are lacking in any linguistic way but rather because they have the positive capacity to turn away, sufficient unto themselves. Ontologically, they are not Cartesian machines, nor even the uncanny other of the human, but are possessed of a capacious subjectivity in their own right. And like his rejection of the evolutionary models for art and empire, Joyce here rejects a certain evolutionary difference between animals and humans. Man in this passage has not evolved *beyond* the animal and exceeded it in his religiosity: the two, instead, compose a pair of Brunonian opposing powers, each alternately bored by or seeking solitude away from the other.

Recent readings of the question of the animal in modernist literature have taken up some of these concerns, exploring modes of contact, confusion, and perforation that challenge and subvert the traditional Cartesian distinction between humans and animals. Carter Smith, for example, has recently written that Beckett contributes to this philosophical task the articulation of the term “resting,” which—contra the Cartesian conception of the human as *homo faber*, or most human in the act of making or anxiously thinking—actually

³⁵⁹ Alice Kuzniar, *Melancholia's Dog* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2006), 62.

reveals humans and animals to be most identifiably themselves when *desisting* from activity. Joyce seems, contemporaneously, to be thinking in terms similar to Beckett's (whose novel *Murphy* is published in 1938). The active *homo faber*, who seeks constantly to narrate, moralize, colonize, and convert with the faculties of *logos*, is contrasted sharply to the passive, resting animal that resists all such approaches. But where Beckett spends more time exploring and troubling ontological distinctions, Joyce seems to be more concerned with the ethical questions presented by these distinctions.

The difference between the ontological and ethical concerns of Joyce and Beckett is articulated in part through the temporal framing of the human-animal question. Smith points out that in Beckett, "like the owl of Minerva (about which Hegel was very clear: it spreads its wings only at dusk), rest, like philosophy, appears on the scene only after the fact," as a construction made to reify a Cartesian dualism.³⁶⁰ In this understanding, Beckettian beings seem properly themselves and traditionally defined only while resting, that is, after the fact; diurnal activity, or what is traditionally taken to demarcate the respective characteristics of humans and animals, actually reveals, in the agitated activity associated with it, their similarity: as Smith elegantly puts it, "the resemblance between the animal and the human occurs not at the point where the human builds on its animal nature, thereby exceeding it, but rather where the animal appears to take on the agitation proper to the human and the human appears 'impoverished.'" Joycean animals, on the other hand, actively turn away from the human gaze as the sun sets; they decline their traditional casting as the biologically determined characters in fables and listlessly resist their identification as dualistically "proper" animals. We might say, even, that Joyce's animals are less after the fact than the

³⁶⁰ Carter Smith, "Beckett and the Animal: Writing from 'No-Man's-Land,'" *ELH* 79 (2012): 220.

fact itself: the animal at rest, the bored animal, is that with which the *homo faber*, be it Shaun, Shem, HCE, or the reader, constantly finds himself in ethical relation, prompting him to act one way or the other.

This mode of nonrelation between human and animal is still quite central in Beckett. Indeed, it presents a sort of ontological and psychological conundrum, caught between the necessary and impossible: what for Murphy, Smith argues, is the necessary but impossible task of leaving one's subjectivity behind. In striving to emulate *directly* Mr. Endon's capacity for nonrelation (he does not even see Murphy), Murphy is only returned to his own self-awareness. Via Brunonian metaphysics, on the other hand, Joyce spins this mode of nonrelation and misrecognition into a path of *indirection*, as we've seen, finding a way around the seeming double-bind of the necessary and impossible—thus also offering an alternative to contemporary proposals for a cross-species ethics that emphasize identification between humans and animals as the ethical mechanism *par excellence*. If we take, with Joyce, the Brunonian coincidence of contraries as an ethical mechanism able to leap across the gaps of alterity, then we can see how ethical contact happens not synchronically but diachronically—the one becoming like the other, one after the other, the one always after the fact of the other, in the wake of the other. But never by directly emulating the other: it is always for Joyce a matter of unwittingly becoming like the other while attempting to differentiate oneself from the other. The animal seems self-sufficient, or ontologically commensurate with man, only *after* the fact of its engagement with and sign of its subsequent boredom with seemingly self-sufficient man. Man, too, can seem like an agitated animal (“impoverished,” as Heidegger would have it), but this is also after the fact of his sovereignty, self-assured in its solitude, having been disturbed by the self-sufficiency and independent existence of the

other—just as Crusoe is disturbed by the footprint and the Balgontian mayor instrumentalizes his cat *after* it turns away from him, bored. It is *in* the asymmetrical nonrelation between the human and the animal, then, that the translation occurs and places are exchanged, the boredom and fullness of the one preceding and precipitating that of the other: the impossibility of the necessary ethical gesture, in fact, the impossibility of relating to the nonrelatable, makes the necessary possible.³⁶¹

Finally, this ethical mechanism derived from Brunonian metaphysics comes to underwrite Joyce's own practice as a writer in the later half of his career. Jean-Michel Rabaté has figured Joyce's career, through a comparison with Poe, as a "double murder": "after having murdered the traditional novel in *Ulysses*, he attempts to murder the English language in *Finnegans Wake*."³⁶² Each of these "murders," further, encounters a limit—and each time in the animal. For example, Joyce's works could be said to pass from what he himself in his early 1912 lecture approves of as "ideational" art to what he denounces as the "circumstantial" art of realism, as he moves from the crystalline constructions and "increasingly intense idea[s]" (i.e., epiphanies) of *Dubliners* and *Portrait* to the increasingly baroque accretion of detail that marks *Ulysses* and the *Wake*. His writing inevitably encounters a limit, however: in *Ulysses*, realism encounters one of its limits in Bloom's cat, whose lines, the first dialogue in "Calypso," are onomatopoeic and remain indecipherable to both Bloom and the reader. Joyce's talent for mimetic style can only trace the external

³⁶¹ Joyce's Brunonian ethics thus offers us an alternative to the understanding of boredom Giorgio Agamben explores in *The Open: Man and Animal*. Agamben proposes boredom (*otium*) as a sort of "mutual disenchantment" that occurs after sex (for in sex, man encounters the mystery of his own animality), a disenchantment that allows one "not simply to let something be, but to leave something outside of being, to render it unsavable" and thus break the operation of culture's humanity-producing "anthropological machine." Joyce, on the other hand, proposes a model of ethical cross-species engagement that does not rely on an ontological epiphany of one's own inner-animality brought on by physical intimacy, but rather on an aesthetic and affective economy that can operate across distance and absence.

³⁶² Rabaté, *Joyce upon the Void*, 76.

sounds and features of the cat; though arguably recognized as an agent with its own subjectivity in the novel, the cat nevertheless resists the vivisection of Joyce's psychological realism and nonperspectivalism.

Finnegans Wake presents a second limit to Joyce's attack on the literary tradition. If the *Wake*, as classically described, is a book comprising a series of fables or a return to and redeployment of mythic and oral forms,³⁶³ then what is at stake for Joyce in it is not the representation of social and psychological realities, as it is in *Ulysses*, but rather a kind of pedagogical historicism: the question is, how does one in fact perform, narrate, or interpret history? Through fables? Through quiz shows? Through pantomimes? Yet a number of these modes reach their limit in the sheer contingency, unpredictability, and indifference of "history," which is here indexed by the presence of animals. First, insofar as these oral modes demand the attention of their audience, they hit their limit in the animal reception—the animals of the twilight menagerie, bored by fables, by theology, by history. And second, these modes encounter their limit in the contingencies of recording and reproduction. In the *Wake's* own words, the "pardonable confusion" of its readers is caused by the animals that twitch and play and unsettle meaning as it is inscribed on the page: "a word as cunningly hidden in its maze of confused drapery as a fieldmouse in a nest of coloured ribbons"—not to mention an "absurdly bullsfooted bee," "sick owls," "a palmtailed otter," "threadworms," and "that strange exotic serpentine" (*FW* 119.33-121.21). The *Wake* both turns its readers into animals, as it were, and comes itself to embody a textual animality. In doing so begins to nullify its own significance and coherence.

But, of course, this very contingency of its form, the extreme limit of

³⁶³ For a classic explication of the fables in the *Wake* and their relation to the structuring theories of Vico and Bruno, see Michael Begnal, "The Fables of *Finnegans Wake*," *James Joyce Quarterly* 6 (1969): 359.

“circumstantial” art, ends up engendering its Brunonian opposite. What is ultimately for Joyce the animal proliferation of detail gives *Finnegans Wake* its longevity, just as Crusoe must first surrender himself to his fear of beasts before he can become a citizen of the world of letters. Our “funnaminal world” is also “this prepronominal *funferal*, engraved and retouched and edgewiped and puddenpadded, very like a whale’s egg farced with pemmican, as were it sentenced to be nuzzled over a full trillion times for ever and a night till his noddle sink or swim by that ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia” (*FW* 120.9-14). The indifference and boredom of animals at rest: it is this kernel at the core of the *Wake* that keeps its reader agitated and awake, perhaps out of fear that we might not master its meaning, like “a naked footprint in the virgin sand” that might to either beast or man belong, demanding our attention without promise of return.³⁶⁴

ASININE JOYCE

Joyce’s Ass is understudied, or underappreciated, even. Criticism to date tends to ignore the Ass, concentrating instead on the Four Old Men after whom the Ass often appears. I’d like to make an initial stab at the Ass’s role in the *Wake*, then, and propose that one of the

³⁶⁴ Thus the brief corollary to Bersani’s critique of *Ulysses* with which this article began might be expanded and connected to the contrast between Joyce and Beckett with which we are ending. In his essay, Bersani goes on to claim that Joyce’s virtuosity, however unprecedented, is ultimately a conservative move that preserves the tradition: “Western culture is saved, indeed glorified, through literary metempsychosis: it dies in the Joycean parody and pastiche, but, once removed from historical time, it is resurrected as a timeless design. Far from contesting the authority of culture, *Ulysses* reinvents our relation to Western culture in terms of exegetical devotion, that is, as the exegesis of *Ulysses* itself” (170). This is in direct contrast to “Beckett’s extraordinary effort to stop remembering, to begin again, to protect writing from cultural inheritance” (*ibid.*). We might say, though, that just as animals present a limit to the self-monumentalizing nonperspectivalism in *Ulysses*, so they also present a limit to the double destruction-redemption of culture in *Finnegans Wake* and thus resemble the Beckettian position that seeks to break radically from the cultural tradition. But where Beckett’s break—what Bersani calls his “authentic avant-gardism” (169)—registers more mysteriously at the level of ontology, breaking with discourse *itself*, Joyce’s break in the *Finnegans Wake* occurs at the level of *ethics* as a volitional turning-away-from, or falling-asleep-to. In the same way, while Beckett’s intervention into the traditional Cartesian distinction between humans and animals, per Smith, is to agitate it entirely by drawing out the ontological instability of any such categories, Joyce’s position is less radical and consists mainly of an acknowledgement and an expansion of the sphere of ethical response to include the animal.

discourses circling around the Ass is that of one of our most stubborn affective or mental states, boredom, and that through this constellation of animality and boredom we might articulate an ethics of reading. Along the way, I'll make a detour into Giorgio Agamben's recent book *The Open*, in which he critiques the way our humanity has often been negatively defined against "the animal" at the expense of others, an expense that in modern totalitarian states has amounted to genocide. He calls this the "anthropological machine." In his discussion, Agamben critiques the link Heidegger makes between boredom and humanity: I would like to play around with the solution he proposes, offering the vision of the *Wake* as a complication and perhaps clarification.

We can start this a simple observation: boredom and the Ass are never far apart in *Finnegans Wake*. As early as page 5, in a passage briefly listing Earwicker's achievements as the circumstances around his fall, Shem is called the "merlinburrow burrocks" while Shaun is probably "the bore the more." This characterization of the twins is appropriately ambivalent: Shem, though endowed with magical powers, is nevertheless a donkey; Shaun, though named in Irish as the "main road," is still an overwhelming bore. The relative social status and charisma of each is succinctly encapsulated in each designation; this is the milieu out of which the *Wake* begins.

This ambivalence between the twins is undone and redirected as the book goes on. In I.7, Shaun tells us that Shem or "Mr Himmyshimmy" gives "unsolicited testimony on behalf of the absent, as glib as eaveswater to those present (who meanwhile, with increasing lack of interest in his semantics, allowed various subconscious smickers to drivel slowly across their fichers), unconsciously explaining for inkstands, with a meticulousness bordering on the insane, the various meanings of all the different foreign parts of speech he misused,"

and so on. Shem's art bores his audience, so much so that they begin to drool.

Later on, in the parenthetical interlude of "Night Lessons," we find a long denunciation of Dolph-Shem-Joyce, where Shaun again accuses Shem of being the "Dean of Idlers" (287). Shem is described as a "goodfornobody" whose literary work, though fashionable, is to be rejected by the "beast of boredom, common sense" (292). It is now Shaun who is accusing Shem of being boring, who announces his own boredom and his rejection of all that bores him; and somewhat oddly, Shaun implicitly sets up his "beast of boredom" against Shem as the Ass, the beast of burden; for his beast is superior and has apparently gone to Eaton. Literary currency and bourgeois moral utility are now troped in terms of animality and class. Boredom is the burden the sensible man gladly bears against the tides of fashion.

Clarifying the problem, we see that boredom is a term for an affect or mental state through which we too easily define ourselves against others—others who bore us or feel bored themselves. Patricia Meyer Spacks, for example, notes in her literary history of boredom that

From the eighteenth century on, one can note a tendency to attribute boredom to members of groups other than the writer's own. Middle-class journalists in the eighteenth century believe the nouveaux riches to be bored. In the nineteenth century (encouraged by Lord Byron) the middle class assigns the condition to the aristocracy. The old think the young are bored. The young think the same of the old. Given the residuum of moral opprobrium some circles attach to being bored, many people vigorously deny boredom in themselves while seeing it in others, in those of another "kind."³⁶⁵

Boredom understood this way constitutes a way to construct one's own subjectivity, both psychological and social, at the expense of one's others. Working both ways, we elevate

³⁶⁵ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), x.

ourselves above other classes and groups: those who get bored become boring to us, and we who don't get bored are just more interesting people. The discourse of boredom thus generates and sustains hierarchical chauvinism.

But is there a way to recover boredom productively, funneling it back into more progressive social and psychological constructs, even into the way we understand our own humanity? This first asks us to diagnose the particular failures of what we might call an "immature boredom." Spacks observes that moderns who are bored act as if they have the "right to expect" further stimulation from the world, as if it were the world's duty to entertain and please us.

A good example of a boredom that feels entitled to further stimulation might be Stuart Gilbert's notorious reaction to Joyce's process of mechanically composing Anglicized puns from city names found in the Encyclopedia Britannica for the "Haveth Childers Everywhere" episode:

The insertion of these puns is bound to lead the reader away from the basic text, to create divagations and the work is hard enough anyhow! The good method would be to write out a page of plain English and then rejuvenate dull words by injection of new (and appropriate) meanings. What he is doing is too easy to do and too hard to understand.³⁶⁶

Gilbert's reaction is an illustrative example of the *genetic fallacy* at work, of the desire to find some primordial narrative or skeleton key which Joyce outlined first and only then used as a base onto which he added harmoniously successive layers and textual permutations; when, in fact, as our access to Joyce's notebooks has shown, this is not how Joyce worked at all.³⁶⁷

Rather, although Joyce did often start by sketching out the narrative of each episode, what

³⁶⁶ Stuart Gilbert, *Reflections on James Joyce: Stuart Gilbert's Paris Journal*, ed. Thomas F Staley and Randolph Lewis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 21.

³⁶⁷ Jean-Michel Rabaté, "The Fourfold Root of Yawn's Unreason: Chapter III.3," in *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*, ed. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 304-346.

we now take to be the “meaning” of a passage often did not accrete until very late in the composition of the *Wake*, and then quite felicitously.

Does this anecdote of Gilbert’s frustration not at some level register Gilbert’s feeling of boredom, then, of being bored with what amounts to Joyce’s rather mechanistic creative technique? Gilbert is functioning on the assumption that he, as Joyce’s reader, has the “right to expect” something more out of the *Wake*, out of the textual material produced by Joyce. It is the assumption that the only valid stimulation would be the originary skeleton narrative, a narrative that in a way is supposed to “transcend” and be external to the immediate text.

The frustration generated by boredom and the desire for stimulating narrative is, of course, represented in the narrative of the *Wake*. We can easily identify the voice of the parenthetical interlude in *Night-Lessons* as one of Joyce’s actual critics. Toward the end of the parenthesis, especially, it becomes clear that this critic is *from one angle* none other than Wyndham Lewis: “*Spice and the Westend Woman*” is praised, for example, as “that most improving of roundshows” (292.6) and his final recommendation in the name of “common sense” is that “you must, how, in undivided reawliity draw the line somewhawre” (292.31)—an echo of Lewis’ famous indictment of Joyce’s seeming excess. What prompts this final panning of Joyce is “the beast of boredom,” as we noted at the beginning of this paper, but, furthermore, Shaun’s/Lewis’ boredom precisely mirrors Gilbert’s as well. He complains that Shem-Joyce’s “house of thoughtsam” is but a “jetsam litterage of convolvuli of times lost or strayed, of lands derelict and of tongues laggin too” and that you, the reader, “would real to jazztfancy the novo takin place of what stale words whilom were woven with and fitted fairly featly for, so” (292.14-21). That is, what bores him is how Shem-Joyce merely takes random and disparate words and refits them for new use. What bores him and what he finds

detestable is that Shem-Joyce is, in contrast to himself, a bricoleur with no concern for moral improvement—morality always being a sort of external and originary narrative or/of “meaning.”

Without even having to discuss Lewis’ Fascism, we cannot fail to see that such criticism carries menacingly political and imperial overtones as well: “common sense” is given an upper-class “Eaton” collar and is invoked in a Tennysonian moment “half a sylb, half a solb, holf a salb onward” upon the “Huggin Green,” which Issy in the footnotes tells us is “Where Buickly of the Glass and Bellows pumped the Rudge engineral” (292.F1). The act of judging the Wake “boring” is thus an act of imperial aggression, common sense charging on what it deems to be boring, and Shem-Joyce is set up as the underdog hero Buckley “symibellically” biting the Russian General in the Ass.

Thus Gilbert, too, in his immature boredom ends up writing Joyce off as a “provincial Dubliner” for whom “Foreign equals funny,” setting himself up as more continental, more cosmopolitan, more universalist than our disappointingly Irish Joyce.³⁶⁸ And what he wants from Joyce, and what he himself is guilty of, is what Joyce ends up calling “egoarchy” [188], the recapitulation of every culture, history, religion, and personality in a single master-ego that always remains bigger, better, and external to the others it has subsumed. In Wakean terms, this is the destiny of Shaun as he matures into HCE, subsuming the voices of all the other figures in *Finnegans Wake*, metastasizing into their sole oracle in III.3. The motivation he announces for his self-improvement plan is, of course, *to relieve his boredom*.

In III.2, in his incarnation as Jaun, toward the end of his monologue-sermon, or

³⁶⁸ Gilbert, 21.

“soapbox speech,” he declares, “I’m as bored now bawling beersgrace at sorepaws there as Andrew Clays was sharing sawdust with Daniel’s old collie. This shack’s not big enough for me now” (468.32). Our big baby Shaun has outgrown his station; his immediate surroundings are clearly too provincial for him. For when he next reappears as Yawn in III.3, he is described in cosmopolitan, Orientalist, and cosmic terms, “languishing as the princeliest treble treacle or lichee chewchow purse could buy” (474), with a body of “meteor pulp,” a “seamless rainbowpeel,” “His bellyvoid of nebulose with his neverstop navel,” “his veins shooting melanite phosphor, his creamtocustard cometshair and his asteroid knuckles, ribs and members” (475).

Yawn is the egoarch supreme: he has literally become the cosmos (though perhaps not the “chaosmos”). Yet the orgasmic absurdity of Yawn’s anatomy undermines any pretention or aspiration to totalization immediately. Compare the unflattering portrait of Shem in I.7, where his “bodily getup” includes such gems as a “megageg chin” and “two fifths of two buttocks” (169). Shaun is likely the narrator of this chapter, so it only makes sense when we learn that “Shem was a sham and a low sham and his lowness creeped out first via foodstuffs. So low was he that he preferred Gibsen’s teatime salmon tinned, as inexpensive as pleasing, to the plumpest roeheavy lax or the friskiest parr or smolt troutlet that ever was gaffed,” and so on (170). Shem is portrayed as utterly provincial, but I argue that the shared absurdity of both portraits ends up contaminating and damaging Shaun’s aspirations more than Shem’s: for Shem comes off as a real character, almost, while Shaun ends up more like a recent James Cameron movie: colorful and great to laugh at, but ultimately boring.

In fact, Shaun’s role in this chapter is precisely the one he assigned to Shem in I.7: It

is now Shaun as Yawn who is giving “unsolicited testimony on behalf of the absent, as glib as eaveswater to those present” and “unconsciously explaining for inkstands, with a meticulousness bordering on the insane the various meanings of all the different foreign parts of speech he misused”; of course, now, instead of misusing “different foreign parts of speech,” he is misusing different cultures, nations, cities, and histories as well. Though Shaun accuses Shem of being boring, it is he who ends up the most boring of all—though he goes a step further and consumes the world while he’s at it. Boredom and the act of pronouncing others boring in order to elevate yourself thus come back in a vicious “commodious vicus of recirculation” to bite you in the Ass.

What can we say is the way forward, then? I want to propose that Giorgio Agamben’s critique of Heidegger’s notion of “profound boredom” provides a useful switch with which to untangle the dangers implicated in an immature boredom. For Agamben, the contours of a post-human “new creation” beyond the violent churning of the anthropological machine can only consist in *letting the animal be*, in letting it be *outside of being*. This is the “supreme category of Heidegger’s ontology,” articulated as a new sort of knowledge that is actually an “aknowledge,” from the Latin *ignoscere*. This is to render the animal, the object of our aknowledge, “unsavable,” by which Agamben means that a redeemed post-humanity would be, via Benjamin, in a space that “awaits no day, and thus no Judgement Day... The saved night.” It means pushing toward a history without a telos, free of a metanarrative that silences and expropriates our others.

Thus Agamben, on one hand, rejects Heidegger’s definition of humanity as an awakening “*from its own captivity to its own captivity*,” or, more pointedly, as a

remaining-open “to the closedness of the animal.”³⁶⁹ This is also a rejection of Heidegger’s formulation of “profound boredom” as the constitutive structure of being, since boredom for Heidegger problematically holds man as man insofar as he is set negatively against his own animal captivity. As Agamben summarizes:

While we are usually constantly occupied with and in things [...], in boredom we suddenly find ourselves abandoned in emptiness. But in this emptiness, things are not simply “carried away from us or annihilated”; they are there but “they have nothing to offer us”; they leave us completely indifferent, yet in such a way that we cannot free ourselves from them, because *we are completely riveted and delivered over to what bores us.*

In being left empty by profound boredom, something vibrates [in man] like an echo of that “essential disruption” that arises in the animal from its being exposed and taken in an “other” that is, however, never revealed to it as such. For this reason the man who becomes bored finds himself in the “closest proximity”—even if it is only apparent—to animal captivation.³⁷⁰

Agamben’s problem with Heidegger’s formulation here is that it continues to instrumentalize and dominate the animal other: for if man is human only insofar as he is awake to his own animality and thus to the disconcealedness of the world, then *man is still trying to unearth the closedness of the animal, to secure and master the mystery of his animal other*, leading too easily to totalitarian biopolitics.

On the other hand, Agamben figures his solution of “aknowledge” as a sort of boredom as well, although he doesn’t seem to recognize this explicitly. The illustration he offers of his post-human space is the post-coital pair of lovers in Titian’s *The Three Ages of Man*, who share a common attitude of “mutual disenchantment from their secret.” They have reached “a higher stage beyond both nature and knowledge, beyond concealment and disconcealment.” The lovers “mutually forgive each other and expose their *vanitas*” after

³⁶⁹ Agamben, 70, 73.

³⁷⁰ Agamben, 64-65.

having sex. This forgiveness and letting-go takes place when “their condition is *otium*, it is workless.”³⁷¹ But what is *otium*, leisure, if not, in a sense, *the acceptance of boredom*, a slight modulation of boredom? The state of “worklessness” is a relinquishing of the “right to expect” stimulation that boredom believes itself entitled to. Once you give up the agitation for “something more,” the anxiety and frustration that often accompany boredom disappear, and you can enjoy true leisure *in boredom itself*.

Yawn, then, might at first seem to offer a Joycean equivalent to Agamben’s *otium*. His name alone seems to indicate that he is both in a state of listless boredom and in the moment of waking up from it, perhaps even accepting it. It would only be fitting for Yawn to be in a state of leisure at the beginning of III.3, then, and yet we find him wailing like a baby, with “earpiercing dulcitude” (474.13). If anything, the scene emerges as a Joycean parody of pastoral setting: all the trappings are there—the “dulcitude,” “a blossomy bed,” “daffydowndillies,” and even “epicures waltzing with gardenfillers”—but Joyce as usual punctuates the scene with Yawn’s horrendous crying—“Feefee! phopho!! ... aggala!!!!” (475). Yawn is presented to us as the hope of the Earwicker family, the hope of history and the cosmos, but he comes prematurely. Even the messianic gestures of “Haveth Childers Everywhere” later in III.3 are not enough: Yawn’s declaration of love for ALP as he matures into HCE still needs to be consummated. We, along with the Four Old Men, are left asking why, or Y as Yawn’s initial, signifying the right to expect something more. Thus the Four Old Men drag the Ass around with them rather prominently in this chapter: the animal is kept close by, in clear captivity, and “thass with *hum*pronouceable tail” is explicitly designated as their “dragoman,” or interpreter (479.9). It is through the animal Ass that the Four Old

³⁷¹ Agamben, 87.

Men can keep tabs on what they hope to be a redemptive humanity: despite the “earpiercing” volume of Yawn’s wailing, it is only the Ass, we learn, that can “hear with his unaided ears the harp in the air, the bugle dianablowing” of Yawn’s wail.

That is, that which allows us to interpret, which interprets for us, is precisely the “unpronounceable,” that which cannot be interpreted. Yawn can only become father Earwicker—the “hump” in “withumppronounceable”—through the Ass, though he must accept becoming not the head of the Ass, the one who leads, but the tail, dragged behind. True Agambenian *otium* and aknowledge, then, cannot just be assumed as a change of clothes or turn of the page—especially not by an infantile egoarch. For Yawn, however, much he wants to appear a post-human redeemer, still both requires an animal other and emits out of his immature boredom his own asinine wails.

Thus we are reminded by the opening lines of the next chapter that we still do not know why, though, that whatever Yawn has just spoken remains obscure: “What was thaas? Fog was whaas?” (555). As the chapter transforms into a kitschy cinematic love scene, though, we learn that whatever answer we have been searching for is not an originary and morally improving narrative: it is instead the very immediate, almost intrusive act of HCE and ALP’s lovemaking—not in any pornographic climax but in its banal resolution into the humdrum listlessness of post-coital daily life. Right after “O yes! O yes! Withdraw your member! Closure,” we find a series of interjections reminding Anna Livia and Earwicker to tidy up the house: “Anny, blow your wickle out! Tuck away the tablesheet! You never wet the teal!” (585).

Most markedly, though, after all the banality and excitement of the lovemaking, we are told to “Retire to rest without first misturbing your nighboor, mankind of baffling

descriptions. Others are as tired of themselves as you are. Let each once learn to bore himself,” in these “hours so devoted to repose” (585-6). Like Titian’s lovers, the Earwickers have come to terms with their *vanitas*, which is fittingly expressed as kitsch in this chapter, and have found a space of “repose,” leisure, *otium*. Yet what the Four Old Men add to Agamben’s vision of post-humanity, though, is the imperative to *bore oneself*. Where Agamben asks us to let our others be, Joyce adds that we should let *ourselves* be as well, to *accept ourselves as boring*, relinquishing and thereby neutralizing our dangerously messianic delusions.

This is not, however, a call to complacency and quietism. What I am calling mature boredom should not be a mere negation of immature boredom. It is to realize that the meaning and purpose we so desperately seek in texts and in history are not ancient and originary but generated anew every day and night before our eyes, just as the redemption and awakening of the Earwicker clan is found ultimately not in Shaun’s egotism but in the rather unspectacular and regular sex of the parents.

“The meanings we want to use for our interpretive approaches,” writes Rabaté, “tend to be given not earlier with the first-draft elements but very late, when Joyce reread once more an almost completed text and became his first reader, this time just a little ahead of us.”³⁷² My suggestion is that Joyce as his own “first reader” or the “genreader” in general is homologous to the shift into mature boredom: the reader of mature boredom, unlike Stuart Gilbert or Wyndham Lewis, reserves her interpretation for the moment before he has perceived everything, seeking her interpretive mechanisms not in any supposed external and originary narrative but in the immediate material of the text before her. The reader of mature boredom does not reject the text as boring when its meaning remains obscure; she accepts

³⁷² Rabaté, “The Fourfold Root,” 407-408.

the text's capacity to bore her with its excess of material and *nevertheless* presses on, finding what she can in the text to enjoy and redeploy within her own ever-growing interpretive matrix. In some ways, it is to replicate Joyce's own nearly automatic composition process, which we have seen combat Gilbert's elitism. As the *Wake* itself states, it is "idlers' wind" that is "turning pages on pages," "the leaves of the living in the boke of the deeds, annals of themselves timing the cycles of events grand and national, bring fassilwise to pass how" (13.29-32). Our own reading practice, our own reading *ethics*, will end up "timing" the rhythm of world history—the outcome of which will depend on how we learn to be bored. Our facile *whys* will pass *how*.

And before you become too thoroughly bored, we should remember that the true resolution of the *Wake* is not even III.4 but Book IV, where Anna Livia's love flows out and accepts, forgives, and revitalizes her husband. In Book I, she announces her dissatisfaction with her pathetic fallen husband: "For the putty affair I have is wore out," and she waits for him "to wake himself out of his winter's doze, and *bore* me down like he used to" (201). By the end of the *Wake*, HCE has done so, boring her well in both senses of the pun. In her final postscript, she says that "So has he as bored me to slump. But am good and rested" (619.32). This letting-be is accompanied by her acceptance of her husband not as an admirable man defined negatively *against* the animal Ass but as a likeness of the Ass itself: "somebrey erse from the Dark Countries" (620.9). In Ana Livia's love, the "closedness" of the animal becomes not something to be secured and mastered but just one possible identity among others. She loves her husband, be he cosmopolitan hero or boring Ass.

The odd construction of the line "So has he *as* bored me to slump" (echoing Shem's gloss after the Night-Lessons interlude: "WHY MY AS LIKEWISE WHIS HIS") might be

read as a implying that Anna Livia has bored her husband as well. *He's bored me to slump as I've bored him.* The “as,” then, rather cutely cues us into the Ass’s role as a sort of subjective switch, a comparison that turns our others into ourselves, revealing our own internal contradictions.

“The sehm asnuh,” she says (620.16): the Shem *asinus*, or Latin for ass, is the same *as/Ass* now *and* the same *as/Ass* new. This is what it means to bore yourself: both to accept yourself as old news, the same as now, but also to see yourself as strange, as a split subjectivity capable of boring itself, thus same as new. This auto-boredom is thus the same Ass, as well—the internalization of the Ass. Just as mature boredom is finding the interpretive key not outside the text but within it, so the key to understanding our humanity lies not outside ourselves in a captive animal other but in the short-circuit that finds the inexplicability originally identified with the animal instead in ourselves, in our own strangeness. In boring ourselves, we become our own Ass, and, like ALP, become “good and rested.”

V.

ON FALLING FASTIDIOUSLY:
 MARIANNE MOORE'S SLAPSTICK ANIMALS

“Miss Moore *has* limitations—her work is one long triumph of them.”

—Randall Jarrell, “The Humble Animal”

A GRACEFUL INVOLUTION

One can only stand amazed by the frequency with which contemporaries compared Marianne Moore to different animals. Whether admiringly with Hugh Kenner—like her own zebras, Moore is “supreme in her abnormality”—pastorally with William Carlos Williams—her rhythm is “the movement of the animal, it does not put itself first and ask the other to follow” —or contemptuously with Clement Greenberg—her poems reduce to “pure captiousness, pure kittenishness”—the critical eye, at a loss to describe Moore as anything but, gives in to the temptation to identify Moore with the figures she uses to typify herself.³⁷³

That these metaphors, drawn from Moore herself, are used to illustrate the poet’s immersion in her own poetics might, of course, speak to the effectiveness of Moore’s language in impressing a set of idiosyncratic images on her readers’ minds. But more often than not, the

³⁷³ Hugh Kenner, “Supreme in Her Abnormality,” *Poetry* 84 (1954); William Carlos Williams, “Marianne Moore,” *The Dial* 78 (1925); Clement Greenberg, “Two Poets,” *The Nation* 153 (1941); all reprinted in *The Critical Response to Marianne Moore*, ed. Elizabeth Gregory (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 188-191, 67-73, 132-133. Hereafter cited as CRMM.

suggestion is that her virtuosity comes at the expense of, or as a diversion from, a more fundamentally necessary expression—that of her sexuality.

This is insistently the case for Greenberg, who, while begrudging “Miss Moore’s particular combination of verbal precision and wit,” is primarily occupied with the claim that Moore’s work is “without intellectual consistency, without large opinions, without a felt center of convictions.” Specifically, Greenberg cannot perceive what he wants to perceive, the “felt center,” because he takes Moore’s sensibility to be “too private” and therefore with “no means of transcending itself.”³⁷⁴ Like R. J. Blackmur, who also complained that there was “no element of sex or lust” in Moore’s poetry, Greenberg’s appraisal genders virtuosity itself as a trade-off between masculine heft and feminized fuss.³⁷⁵ Without sexual expression, the animal-like instinct for precision in Moore’s poetry becomes its own undoing, nothing more than an ingrown cuteness, perhaps, a “pure kittenishness.”

Fortunately, this sort of facile dismissal that would treat Moore’s apparent lack of expressive personality or sexuality as a vitiation of poetic authority has fallen out of favor. Interventions since have stressed how Moore’s departure from other modernist models of cultural authority signified not a failure to be authoritative but a powerful revaluation of its terms and presentation. Cristanne Miller has shown how, in place of an authority based upon individual self-assertion and oppositional posturing, Moore pursued an authority built around pluralistic, feminist intertextuality, cultivating an “aesthetic of correspondence, conversation, and exchange rather than one of mastery.”³⁷⁶ And the pointed purposefulness of this alternative authority has been clearest for Moore scholars where her poetic practices

³⁷⁴ Greenberg, *CRMM*, 132.

³⁷⁵ R. J. Blackmur, “The Method of Marianne Moore” (1935); reprinted in *CRMM*, 118-123.

³⁷⁶ Cristanne Miller, *Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority* (Harvard UP, 1995), 18.

resemble those of other modernists but are deployed to different ends, suggesting that Moore was still pursuing a cogent cultural authority albeit without the territorializing self-importance of her male peers. Scholars such as Bonnie Costello, Elizabeth Gregory, Victoria Bazin, and Natalia Cecire, for example, have all demonstrated in various ways how, in the areas of quotation, technical mastery, and descriptive virtuosity, Moore strove to emphasize the labor, instability, and precarity that these practices might otherwise by default elide.³⁷⁷

In this essay, I argue that Moore's deferential and more oxygenated model of authority found one of its most effective expressions in Moore's penchant for the comic. Scholars have always, certainly, noted Moore's ludic wit—everywhere from the winsome ironies of her poems to the Moore family's *Wind in the Willows*-inspired animal nicknames—identifying it as one mode by which Moore performed her trademark moral authority without slipping into overt didacticism or egocentrism. As both supplement and extract, therefore, my argument homes in on what I take to be the most striking image that the comic comprises in Moore's poems: the slapstick animal. From the Aesopian obstinacy of swan and ant in "Critics and Connoisseurs," to the profusion of circus animals, fairy-tale mice, and polo ponies in *Tell Me, Tell Me*, and beyond—an ostrich's spinning "comic

³⁷⁷ With regard to Moore's penchant for quotation, for instance, Elizabeth Gregory opposes Moore's practice to T. S. Eliot's. Where Eliot quotes texts from the tradition in order to subordinate them to his own now-primary talent, Moore's "double attitude of simultaneous self-effacement and self-assertion" "emphasizes the secondary qua secondary, the pointedly unauthoritative" nature of her own citational practice (*Quotation and Modern American Poetry: Imaginary Gardens with Real Toads* [Houston: Rice UP, 1996], 146, 129). Victoria Bazin has recently demonstrated that, as an avowed poet of precision, Moore naturally had an affinity for the "technical mastery" that was often part and parcel of imperial domination but in her poetry sought to resist its fetishistic power by drawing attention to the human cost of labor it often elides (*Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity* [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010], 179). And complementarily, Natalia Cecire has sharply argued that Moore's descriptive virtuosity operated not under the assumption that successful precision and epistemological failure are separate phenomena causally linked by either repression or coherence but rather as "a poetics whose very commitment to knowledge as such lends it a darkly unknowable dimension" ("Marianne Moore's Precision," *Arizona Quarterly* 67.4 [2011]: 85). Along the same lines, Ellen Levy has sharply argued that Moore's frequent martial imagery—perhaps Moore's most violent and concrete troping of her claim to cultural authority—was, in fact, an attempt to express a negated erotics as a kind of "minimal accommodation" under the impossible regimes of modernity (*Criminal Ingenuity: Moore, Cornell, Ashbery, and the Struggle Between the Arts* [Oxford UP, 2011], 42).

duckling head,” a unicorn that “walks away unharmed” after throwing itself headfirst off a cliff, a bear cub that trips over a sleeping python “which looked like a fallen tree,” a unit of “cat-power matching momentum, / each kitten having capsized the other, / one kitten fell”—the figure of the amusingly clumsy and tumbling, falling and failing animal, I contend, allows us to articulate a more fundamental account of the comic in Moore.³⁷⁸ In this sense my argument returns with a different eye to the bestializing judgments of her contemporaries. For as a consummately self-effacing poet, Moore was more than aware of the seeming “failures” in her poetic and social presentation. The kinematic poetics of film slapstick (Charlie Chaplin, especially), however, merged with the instinctive capabilities of animals, provided Moore with a way to avow and figure the limitations of her authority not as defects, say, but as a series of instabilities virtuosically integrated into a greater stylistic whole.³⁷⁹

From a literary-historical perspective, furthermore, Moore’s slapstick animals notch modernist poetics and the history of film comedy more closely together. Specifically, by extracting a theory of the comic from her poetics, we can see how Moore’s well-known investment in a set of related ethical-stylistic virtues (fastidiousness, scrupulousness,

³⁷⁸ Respectively, “He ‘Digesteth Harde Yron,’” “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns,” “Profit Is a Dead Weight,” and “Reminiscent of a Wave at the Curl” (*The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* [New York: Viking, 1981], 99, 77, 244; and *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. Patricia C. Willis [New York: Viking, 1986], 425; both volumes are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number as *COMP* and *Prose*).

³⁷⁹ My emphasis on the *stylistics* of animality cuts a bit against a recent strain in animal studies that has made a case for modernism’s attempts to disturb normative *ontologies* by troubling the species divide between humans and animals. For Moore, linking her up with an alternate tradition of animals in modernism that represent a mode of thinking about style rather than being proper (including, for example, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Josephine Baker, Francis Ponge, and Constantin Brancusi), the issue is not just *what* one is in the world (human or animal, repressed or celibate), but *how* one should move about in it—by what means, in what manner, at what speed? See, for example, Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008); Glenn Willmott, *Modern Animalism: Habits of Scarcity and Wealth in Comics and Literature* (U of Toronto P, 2012); Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating across Species Lines* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011); and Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst and Lawrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985).

precision, “gusto,” “grace”) might be brought to bear on a history of twentieth-century comedy more broadly. In his recent book *Machine-Age Comedy*, for instance, Michael North suggests that, the modern experience of mechanical reproduction brought with it its own “kind of amusement, one not generally available before the twentieth century, in going back to see the same pratfall, which seemed in some cases to be all the funnier now that it was no longer a surprise.”³⁸⁰ I propose that what I call Moore’s own *slapstick verse*, then, is a particular species of that experience, and that the familiar Moorean virtues—insofar as they index Moore’s lifelong preoccupation with describing and defining otherwise ineffable stylistic qualities—give us more traction vis-à-vis a theory of comic style. “To explain grace,” Moore observes with respect to her singularly graceful pangolin, “requires / a curious hand”—and slapstick grace even more so (*COMP* 118). For *explaining* any kind of grace with sufficient precision risks pedantry and tests patience: and when the grace in question is comic in nature and, further, premised on failing, one inevitably risks ruining the joke. Borrowing the lessons of film slapstick and clumsy animals for her modernist prosody, however, Moore was able, through a career-long process of repetition and refinement, to incorporate failure itself (without erasing its constitutive precarity) into an authoritative kind of *surplus* style. As the title of one slapstick poem is explained, “The Mind Is an Enchanting Thing” because it *is*, simply, “conscientious inconsistency” (*COMP* 134).

Finally, this consideration of the “curious hand” of Moore’s poetics expands accounts of the last stage of her career, when she became, as Charles Tomlinson has put it, nothing short of a “national pet.”³⁸¹ Building on Benjamin Kahan’s recent reappraisal of

³⁸⁰ Michael North, *Machine-Age Comedy* (Oxford UP, 2009), 5.

³⁸¹ Tomlinson, in fact, describes the reduction of Moore to a “national pet” as precisely a consequence of critics being unable (he exempts T. S. Eliot and Hugh Kenner) to soberly appraise Moore’s poetics without falling

Moore's queer celibacy as a kind of performativity that is its own end, I argue that slapstick verse in particular was crucial to Moore's catalysis of her earlier social and sexual reserve into a singularly masterful if idiosyncratic embrace of the moral authority with which she was invested as one of the most publicly celebrated American poets.³⁸² (Thus flagging, I might add, the otherwise unquestioned prevalence of male modernists, actors, and theorists in North's study.) At each stage in her career, Moore found a way to more fully inhabit her particular brand of social ethics, attempting not only to describe and represent, but also to socially enact a practice that, however much it aspired to moral rigor, eschewed the "discursive intrusiveness world without end" that Moore saw in more didactically-inclined modernist peers like Pound or Eliot.³⁸³ By turning to the surprising grace of slapstick animals, Moore discovered a means by which to perform authority without asperity, rigor without rigidity, stripping all coercive effect away and hewing, perhaps, more closely in the end to the spirit of another peer—Adorno—who, writing contemporaneously, found it meet and just to remind us that "Love you will find only where you may show yourself weak without provoking strength."³⁸⁴

back on "sentimental rhapsodizing." That this may itself be due to a "potential defect" seems to reinforce the sense for many critics that Moore's animal-like virtuosity is premised on a lack ("Introduction: Marianne Moore, Her Poetry and Her Critics," in *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Tomlinson [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969], 12).

³⁸² Benjamin Kahan, "The Viper's Traffic-Knot': Celibacy and Queerness in the 'Late' Marianne Moore," *GLQ* 14 (2008): 509-535.

³⁸³ The phrase is actually from Moore's translation of *The Fables of La Fontaine* (New York: Viking, 1964), 213-214.

³⁸⁴ Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, 192.



Fig. 1. Image and caption from Chaplin, *My Trip Abroad* (63).

SLAPSTICK & THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT

The singular knitting-together, throughout Moore's career, of her allergy to didactic authority, the curious prominence of disavowed sexuality, her preoccupation with style, and her love for animals, finds a sort of incipient index in a persistent but relatively unexplored interest in film. To date, relatively little has been written about Moore's interest in film. Apart from the single look at Moore's interactions with a few of her friends (James Sibley

Watson Jr. and Melville Webber, et al.) and their own early experiments in avant-garde filmmaking in Susan McCabe's *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film*, there are only a few mentions of film, let alone film slapstick, in most of Moore criticism.³⁸⁵ This oversight is, perhaps, in part due to the fact that only a handful of instances evincing a familiarity with popular film pepper her writing—despite, that is, the avowed interest in American mass culture more broadly (including baseball, Muhammad Ali, and Yul Brynner) that constituted an essential corner of Moore's public image as a national poet in the later decades of her career. A look, however, at the record of Moore's day-to-day social life we find in her diaries and datebooks (many of which are housed at the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia) reveals an abiding interest in slapstick not just as a form of entertainment but as a particular filmic and poetic mode for understanding ethics as well.

Moore's notebooks, which she filled for decades with transcriptions of conversations with her friends, afford us a glimpse at how suffused the everyday texture of her life was with aesthetic considerations of slapstick, even reminding us of once-popular films whose existence has unfortunately been forgotten. In 1922—a revelatory year for Moore, as we'll see—she records her friend's recommendation to see *The Silent Call*, a 1921 silent film directed by Laurence Trimble and starring the canine actor Strongheart. This same friend goes on to recommend Buster Keaton's *The Boat*: "It's wild slapstick stuff but it's so logical. I think you'd like it. He builds a boat in his house, but then it's too large for him to get out, so he has to take the house down also."³⁸⁶ And Moore, we know from the appointment books she began to keep in 1920, did indeed go on to see *The Boat* in June of 1922, along with a

³⁸⁵ Linda Leavell briefly mentions Moore's opinion of Chaplin in *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 360.

³⁸⁶ April 8, 1922, Marianne Moore Papers, Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia. Hereafter cited as RML.

number of other popular silent films, including *Nanook of the North*.³⁸⁷

Moore's most direct and sustained treatment of film slapstick, however, is organized around the work and personality of Charlie Chaplin. We already know, of course, that Moore noted in the occasional letter having seen and enjoyed Chaplin's films;³⁸⁸ what is less known is that in 1921, Moore began reading and saving dispatches from Chaplin's tour across the Atlantic and through Europe (following the success of *The Kid*, his first full-length film), which the star initially serialized in *The Evening World* and later collected and published in 1922 as *My Trip Abroad*.³⁸⁹ Soon after, Moore wrote a review of the volume for Paul Rosenfeld's *Manuscripts*, that (though it seems Rosenfeld did not ultimately publish it) is remarkable for the degree to which it champions Chaplin as a master prose stylist.³⁹⁰ While contemporary reception was primarily concerned with catching glimpses of the *real* man underneath the sheen of celebrity surrounding the world's first film star—*The New Republic's* reviewer, for example, is strikingly surprised to find that Chaplin's "private personality is still uncontaminated" by fame—Moore's dual ear for writerly style and social presentation

³⁸⁷ June 1922, RML. Moore's notebooks are filled with other treasures, too, which often reveal a good deal of animal slapstick in the real lives of her modernist acquaintances—modernism's anecdotal slapstick substrate, as it were. In 1921, for example, Daphne Carr reminds Moore of the time—first witnessed by a "Mrs. Hueffer"—that a "parrot screamed when it saw Ezra for it saw a natural nest in Ezra's hair." 12 Feb 1921, RML.

³⁸⁸ She mentions having seen Chaplin's *The Kid* to her brother Warner and ranks it, in a letter to her friend Bryher, alongside *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* as the only other film "that I have gone to voluntarily in New York"; in a letter to H.D., Moore reminisces about a python that steals the show from Chaplin; and lastly, describes to her brother how delighted she was by the circus animals in Chaplin's *The Circus*. (See *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, ed. Bonnie Costello, Celeste Goodridge, and Cristanne Miller [New York: Knopf, 1997]. Hereafter cited as *SL*: MM to JWM, February 20, 1921, *SL* 145; MM to Bryher, May 9, 1921, *SL* 160; MM to H. D., November 18, 1922, *SL* 190; MM to JWM, January 22, 1928, *SL* 236.)

³⁸⁹ Moore writes to her brother in 1921 that "Mr. Kelly has been saving me at my request, *The Evening World*, which has in it Charlie Chaplin's impressions of London and his crossing on the *Olympic*. I am delighted with it..." (MM to JWM, December 18, 1921, *SL* 185. The clippings themselves can be found at the Rosenbach.)

³⁹⁰ Moore, like much of the public, seemed unaware of the fact that *My Trip Abroad* was only "influenced" by and not actually written by Chaplin himself: it was ghostwritten by then-journalist Monta Bell, who would later actually go on to work as a director for Chaplin Studios. Meanwhile, other scholars maintain that Bell was in fact only "a loyal stenographer and sub-editor in recording Chaplin's own direct impressions." See Philip G. Rosen, "The Chaplin World-View," *Cinema Journal* (1969): 5; and David Robinson, *Chaplin, the Mirror of Opinion* (Indiana UP, 1983), 52.

inevitably found a way to understand Chaplin's candid self-representation not as a matter of providing a glimpse into a hitherto undiscovered subjectivity but rather as a melding of persona and person, simultaneously a performance of celebrity through self-effacement and a revelation of self as already become-slapstick, already contaminated.³⁹¹ And it is, for Moore, Chaplin's cogent prose style that most effectively conveys the mechanics of this melding—its precise mimetic syntax and its humor foremost—and yet these two characteristics together resolve into the somewhat ineffable quality of Chaplin's the elucidation of which preoccupies the entirety of Moore's review and yet which is perhaps intuitively legible as “slapstick.” It is in the physics of slapstick itself, Moore seems to suggest, in the precise yet prepossessing Newtonian back-and-forth of action and reaction, that one can find a mode of successfully presenting one's ego in such a manner that one appears to be failing to do so at the same time, and in so doing carve out a positive ethical space for what might otherwise be seen as a kind of social failure.

It is no accident, furthermore, that the operation I am trying to untangle here resembles incipiently the trio of literary virtues that Moore will later formulate in her essay-cum-manifesto “Humility, Concentration, Gusto,” in which “gusto” names the particularly forceful or vigorous dialectical relationship between poetic freedom and discipline. It is Chaplin's ability to translate this slapstick ethics into prose and give it linguistic form that is remarkable for Moore; and the relatively late date (1949) of the essay as the formulation of a mature poetics only attests to the watershed novelty Chaplin's memoir had for Moore earlier in her career. Critics have cast both Moore's descriptive acumen and her compulsive fixation on animals as a fetishistic diversion from an integral notion of normative sexuality—thus

³⁹¹ Francis Hackett, “Celebrity,” *The New Republic*, March 8, 1922: 60.

effectively reading Moore's preoccupations as mere symptoms of an underlying psychological irregularity, as a self-displacement, essentially. But Moore herself seems to be tracing out an alternative logic of failure in which Chaplin's *stylistic* irregularities help consolidate a *bonus* of self-assertion. As we'll see, this makes following Chaplin equivalent to watching an animal trip up, diverge from its own typical grace, and yet in the process assume, perhaps, a more compelling gracefulness of movement. Moreover, the difficulty Moore has in describing the operations of "gusto" at a date as late as 1949 is perhaps even more evident in her review of Chaplin's memoir.³⁹² For the operation of slapstick is often one, as film comedy scholar Alan Dale puts it, which is "murder to describe, though any child would get it in a single viewing."³⁹³ At best one can perform or embody it, whether on film or "translated" mimetically into language; describing it straight-on leads only to further failure, this utterly contingent *je ne sais quoi* inherent in the departure from type that must nevertheless still be repeatable and re-presentable.

This puzzle structures Moore's review from the start: "Mr. Chaplin's interest in 'feelings,'" it begins—the scare quotes around 'feelings' already suggesting, in fact, the expressive continuity of ethics, language, and filmic affect that Moore needs a Chaplinesque slapstick-function to make possible—"explains perhaps the fact that this book is entertaining both to those who are not aware of its superiorities of craftsmanship, and to those who are interested primarily in its subtleties of writing and behavior."³⁹⁴ Recalling Moore's friend's reminder that "wild slapstick stuff" can still be "so logical," "feelings," here, covers the cognitive enormity between the articulated techniques of "writing and behavior" (style and

³⁹² Moore's descriptions of "gusto" almost always require syntactically idiosyncratic formulations, as in: "eloquence escapes grandiloquence by virtue of gusto." *Prose*, 425.

³⁹³ Alan Dale, *Comedy Is a Man in Trouble* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2000), 4.

³⁹⁴ The unpublished typescript of Moore's review (ca. 1922) can be found among the prose manuscripts at the Rosenbach.

ethics) and the aesthetically “entertaining” effect of those techniques that can simultaneously keep those same techniques invisible. Or as Moore puts it in the poem “When I Buy Pictures,” “Too stern an intellectual emphasis upon this quality or that detracts from one’s enjoyment” (*COMP* 48). It is, in a precise sense, like telling a joke, and just as difficult to describe after the fact: “The writing exerts the same fascination, is droll in the same way that the acting is droll. There are in it, the dispatch, the naturalness, goodhumored [sic] suspiciousness, circumspectness, preciseness, poetic delicacy and moral earnestness that there are in the acted scenes of which often a résumé is not funny.”

Together, the comedy of Chaplin’s performances on screen, the drollness of his prose style, and the “goodhumored” ethics of his actual lived sociality (as detected by Moore) moves Moore ever closer to finding a way to describe her own fastidious social ethics. Indeed her review foregrounds the passages in *My Trip Abroad* in which these aspects are on display at the same time: “Mr. Chaplin’s ‘yes’ and ‘no’—no to a reporter; yes to a lady, when interrogated as to this intention of being married—recall his inadvertent collisions in the movies, with persons from whom he is escaping.” Like the “yes” and “no,” Chaplin’s most effective passages are those whose energetics effectively translate the physical rapidity, the gestural back-and-forth of Chaplin’s filmic comedy, into prose. Short sentences bring the point home for Moore. Citing as a sort of set piece the lines “They don’t wish to intrude. I like this. Then I insist. They weaken. He weakens,” Moore explains the appeal of Chaplin’s prose: “The staccato sentences so short as to suggest the conjugated verb: the instinctive use of antithesis, the crisp punctuation, are photographic in presenting to the reader the matter in hand.” Chaplin’s style is valuable not just for comedy’s sake but for its fidelity to his unique mode of existence, which is characterized as a series of social and psychological

actions, reactions, and micro-adjustments: “The writing in *My Trip Abroad* is not copy-book English but it is psychologically justified at every point,” Moore writes; and later, “Each statement is precisely felt.”

“Each statement,” then: isolating the operative unit of Chaplin’s prose, Moore homes in on the central logic of Chaplin’s writerly slapstick. In both his slapstick manner and his writing, Chaplin prioritizes the small—linking up his physics with his ethics: “Spontaneity with reserve—a synthesis of opposites which is the basis, perhaps, for any sort of charm, this aggressiveness with delicacy, is the force which makes him the Pollyanna of the Intellectual; sober and reflective, courageous and helpful, with capacity for pleasure in simple things.” Moore is here deliberately keeping indeterminate whether she is speaking about Chaplin’s real sociality or his prose. The suggestion therefore is that the style itself carries or translates the ethical force of his social persona: it is able in its language to compel the mind (especially that of “the Intellectual”) to adjust its resolution and attend to the smaller, overlooked things—whether the velocity of verbal conjugations and punctuation or, as the remainder of the review makes clear, various marginalized or often taken-for-granted subjects: children, workmen, even animals. Chaplin’s prose even reminds Moore herself “of Palmer Cox’s brownies—their globetrotting and their altruism.”

Yet the final kernel, the reader will have noticed, is still missing. What exactly makes Chaplin’s style so compelling—without, importantly, being overly imposing or coercive? Without, for Moore, shying into pomposity or preciosity or becoming, as she says in a later essay “mannered, dictatorial, disparaging, or calculated to reduce to the ranks what offends one”?³⁹⁵ By now Moore has familiarized us with the technical recipe for Chaplin’s style, but

³⁹⁵ “Subject, Predicate, Object,” *Prose*, 504.

as her review makes clear, even the most complete description of the Chaplinesque would still omit the one crucial and inimitable element “of which often a résumé is not funny.” Like Moore’s own “Frigate Pelican” over a decade later, Chaplin here emerges as the virtuosic animal that is set apart from “less / limber animal[s]” as a “marvel of grace” (*COMP* 25). And yet, “[hiding] / in the height and in the majestic / display of his art,” the pelican is not descriptively distinguishable from other animals who might possess a “similar ease”: in short lines echoing the physics of Chaplin’s slapstick and his “precisely felt” language, these other birds “move out to the top / of the circle and stop / and blow back.”³⁹⁶ In the end, Moore has recourse only to a set of epigrammatic contradictions when trying to describe the exceptional virtuosity of the frigate pelican: it is at home whether “[r]apidly cruising or lying on the air,” “uniting levity with strength”; it is “an eagle // of vigilance....*Festina lente*.” And promptly translating the Latin adage, Moore approaches the same aporia that structures her appreciation of Chaplin—though here she phrases it not as a paradoxical description but as a question, and one, perhaps, without an answer: “Be gay / civilly? How so?” (*COMP* 26). Similarly, Moore’s review of *My Trip Abroad* is ultimately unable to specify what precisely distinguishes Chaplin from others—that is, beyond such ambiguous qualities as the theological “grace,” or even, of course, the bestial “instinct.” After the first three paragraphs, which we’ve seen are replete with the same Moorean binaries, the review turns out to be composed mainly of extended quotations from the memoir, as if Moore’s descriptive capacities were now exhausted and only unadulterated, simple re-presentation could possibly suffice.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Maybe even more reminiscent of Chaplin’s “staccato sentences” are these other lines in “The Frigate Pelican”: “Make hay; keep / the shop; I have one sheep; were a less / limber animal’s mottoes” (*COMP* 25).

³⁹⁷ Rather, therefore, than see Moore’s review of *My Trip Abroad* as *simply* an instance of Moore’s general

Hence at this early stage in her career, Moore's valorization of Chaplin remains at the door of fully conceptualizing the exceptional quality of virtuosity and so resembles the similarly incomplete account of artistic virtuosity in Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," written only a few years earlier (1919). Like Moore, Eliot is devoted to deducing precisely what sets apart the significant virtuoso of any craft from lesser practitioners but remains—avowedly—unable to do so without resorting to theological (or more specifically in this case, metaphysical or mystical) categories. Shakespeare, Eliot's primary example, is exceptional in his relationship to tradition only in an already-romanticized fashion: while most "must sweat" for knowledge and the ability to "develop or procure the consciousness of the past," the virtuosically talented have merely to "absorb" it.³⁹⁸ But as we'll see, Moore's subsequent development of a slapstick poetics makes transparent the mechanics that Eliot's chemical metaphors for authoritative virtuosity (absorption, catalysis, the platinum filament) only mystify or elide, thus more broadly revealing the obfuscations of "impersonal" modernist doctrine.

SYLLABIC METER & SLAPSTICK VERSE

Chaplin, then, felicitously condenses two related concerns for Moore. On the one hand, his persona demonstrates the viability of a Moorean social ethics in the world, one premised not on the explicit imposition of one's personality on others but on a "spontaneous" charm derived from "reserve." On the other hand, Moore's engagement with his memoir makes clear the difficulty of explicitly, pedantically, describing the singularity of a personality

critical style, in which she quotes copiously from the texts under consideration, I argue that Moore's investment in the comic exemplifies how her critical practice was *always* more fundamentally concerned with the shortcomings of description in the face of the qualitatively indescribable.

³⁹⁸ *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Knopf, 1921), 47.

fundamentally allergic to explication; rather, its mechanics can only be reproduced stylistically. Thus Moore's love for Chaplin not only indexes for us the marked divergence of her particular didactic style from other didactic strains of modernism (Pound, Lewis, Futurism, et al.) but also her recognition of the fact that a transparent, one-to-one relationship between form and content is not always sufficient for conveying a rhetorical or thematic point. Indeed, the lesson of Chaplin seems to be that some ethical dicta can only be properly conveyed through a cumulative stylistic effect.

In this sense, the development of Moore's poetics during this period is recognizable as part of an idiosyncratic lineage of didactic verse that learned to tread the precarious line of its own stylistic failure precisely in order to ensure its own rhetorical efficacy. For Hugh Kenner, this is the history of what he (or Alexander Pope, rather) calls the "Art of Sinking," or, the hitherto unformulated tradition of "comic badness" in English verse since Cowley. It culminates—with a twist of literary-historical virtuosity—in the films of Buster Keaton. Drilling through the thick xylem of received history, Kenner's essay "The Man of Sense as Buster Keaton" re-frames English poetry as nothing less than a Newtonian physics of taste. Pope, in particular, found a way to merge the heroic and the mock-heroic into one, generating a *new* kind of stability—one with grace, verve, and swing—out of successive poetic instabilities: "The follies he mimes of duncery are the dashing risks of excellence. You take your life in your hands when you move a step; for if the single pace of a man walking by be analyzed, by snapshot, into fifty successive phase, *not more than one or two of these, perhaps not any, will be inherently stable.*"³⁹⁹ Like his contemporary Newton's calculus of motion, Pope's poetry achieved its "swing" only "through numerous points of disequilibrium" adapting

³⁹⁹ Hugh Kenner, *The Counterfeiters: An Historical Comedy* (Indiana UP, 1968), 58. My emphasis.

kinetically not only to the various criteria of taste to which it was subject but also to the epistemic rise of *facts* as the governing category for organizing reality.⁴⁰⁰ With modernity came a new sense of knowledge as atomized, fluid, and overwhelming, and English literature, in the wake of the Royal Society, of the birth of dictionaries, was forced to find a new way to accommodate the new scientifically “empirical” texture of language even in all its inherent absurdity, generating finally—after a series of stages in poetry proper (Kenner names Wordsworth here as the last and best “alembicator of Fact”)—“that indomitably comic contrivance the novel, the function of which is to incorporate a random fusillade of information into a loose system, propelled forward by narrative, the data as they accumulate moving steadily forward into a vacuum of expectation.”⁴⁰¹ And with the discovery and development of a new medium—photography first (in 1887 with Muybridge’s experiments in motion) and then film—this comic function of the Man of Sense, “incarnate equilibrium, the man who cannot be surprised [...], perpetually making notes, glancing at his chronometer as his hat is carried away,” finds its final apotheosis in the perfectly calibrated slapstick deadpan of Keaton.

Moore, in the repose of her factual precision, is not far from this idiosyncratic comic lineage. As much as Keaton’s films, her poetry might be described as “study after study of moral imperturbability trapped by mechanism.”⁴⁰² More specifically, if we understand Kenner’s narrative of badness as revealing form (especially rhetorically-, tonally-minded, form) as a way of trying to remain stable, however comically, in an increasingly fluctuating and atomized world, we get a better sense of Moore as always aware of the comic nature of

⁴⁰⁰ Kenner, *Counterfeiters*, 59.

⁴⁰¹ Kenner, *Counterfeiters*, 64, 65.

⁴⁰² Kenner, *Counterfeiters*, 67.

her own poetic experimentation, which—putting it now as schematically as we can—is, perhaps, best conceived as a hydraulics of form, designed very conscientiously to contain and streamline a quick-flowing volume of content. Hence one of Moore’s earliest variations on slapstick as a theme, “Critics and Connoisseurs” (1916), also witnesses the first deployment of syllabic meter, or what is usually counted as Moore’s trademark contribution to modernist prosody. Generally seen, following her own early explanations, as allowing Moore to incorporate the supple yet oft-ignored rhythms of “natural” speech and even prose itself into verse while retaining the structuring principles of the poetic line, the syllabic meter also, I want to stress, provided Moore with a way to re-conceive of language as entirely malleable, fluid, *and* unpredictable. And insofar as poetic language was for Moore a mimetic medium, it also allowed her to dramatize the slapstick physics of her ever-falling, ever-failing social ethics.⁴⁰³

Scholars have tended to read the titular dichotomy of “Critics and Connoisseurs” as immutable. The “Disbelief and conscious fastidiousness” of critics, figured by Moore as an unyielding battleship-like “black swan,” is opposed to the “unconscious / Fastidiousness” of connoisseurs, perhaps, whose supposed unintentionality is figured as the seemingly pointless wandering of an ant, large stick in tow. The question, as it’s been posed, is which fastidiousness is more valuable, which contains, per its first line, “the great[est] amount of poetry”?⁴⁰⁴ Either conscious intent or the lack thereof is pegged as the salient marker of aesthetic appreciation. But the comic dimension we have been tracing in Moore should push

⁴⁰³ My reading of Moore emphasizes her prosody’s brief departures from the “natural” rhythms of either speech or verse, which I want to contrast with, for example, Leavell’s representative description of the poem’s prosody, which equates the “natural” with the “uneven” (*Holding On Upside Down*, 142).

⁴⁰⁴ Jeanne Heuving, *Omissions Are Not Accidents: Gender in the Art of Marianne Moore* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992), 59; and Grace Schulman, *Marianne Moore: The Poetry of Engagement* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1986), 50-54.

us to look back at the images of humor in the first stanza, often passed over in criticism; what the “I” of the poem actually “like[s] better” is a

Mere childish attempt to make an imperfectly ballasted animal stand up,
A determination ditto to make a pup
Eat his meat on the plate.⁴⁰⁵

What is important to the speaking I is not ultimately the legibility of intention itself but rather the slapstick equilibrium of action and reaction: the natural, “unconscious” *determinism* that keeps these animals from perfectly fulfilling the whims and manners of humans and the conscious *determination* that would seek to enforce those whims turn out to be two sides of the same amusing coin. Neither is valuable in itself, but value accrues to the comic effect they produce together. The conscious fastidiousness of the swan mirrors the unconscious fastidiousness of the ant: the former’s “Disinclination to move” is revealed as laughable as soon as it dissolves in the face of “such bits / Of food as the stream // Bore counter to it; it made away with what I gave it / To eat.” Like Pope’s soldering of the heroic and mock-heroic together, the overly-intentional is here revealed to harbor its own unintentional undoing. Hence, nested in the structural center of the poem, Moore’s speaker can claim (with my emphasis), “I have seen ambition without / Understanding in a *variety* of forms.”⁴⁰⁶

The formal analogues to these thematic concerns require Moore to find a way to write slapstick verse. Slapstick verse: what does such a thing look and sound like? To start, Moore reinvents syllabic meter, allowing her to slide the natural accents of conversation across and along the rails of her lines and stanzas. She groups metrical feet together in highly

⁴⁰⁵ “Critics and Connoisseurs,” as first published in the Williams-edited issue of *Others* 3 (1916): 4-5. Later revisions deemphasize the rapid oscillation of the rhythm.

⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, like Kenner’s *Man of Sense*, the emphasis here is not on the value of the facts presented but *the fact that* these facts have been empirically observed: hence Moore’s preoccupation with having us know that her speaker has “seen” things—noting it five times in the poem’s four stanzas: “I have seen this swan and / I have seen you.”

idiosyncratic fashion: in “Critics and Connoisseurs,” for example, there are a number of lines containing both unusual clusterings of heavy spondees and unexpectedly long segments of unstressed syllables. Like the “bits / Of food” that are carried away by the current of the stream, the poem is actually made up of a number of small monosyllabic words (and longer words that have been severed) that allow Moore to herd her syllables into weightier and lighter intervals. Hence the sentence in the poem that explicitly thematizes the back-and-forth between the dense and the atomized also bunches its spondees in such a way that the rhythm becomes thicker at those moments when the movement of empirical reality (the stream) runs up against the conscious fastidiousness of an ego (the swan):

Finally its hardihood was not proof against its
Inclination to detain and appraise such bits
Of food as the stream

Bore counter to it;

And symmetrically, the third stanza witnesses an extra bounty of spondees that underline the ant’s similarly comic attempts to achieve *something*, even if what it is attempting, by carrying sticks and bits of whitewash too large for it in a basic formal pattern, is unclear:

Happening to stand
By an ant hill, I have
Seen a fastidious ant carrying a stick, north, south east, west, till it
turned on
Itself, struck out from the flower-bed into the lawn,
And returned to the point

From which it had stared.

Either conscious form gives way to the flux of content, or material content is meticulously built up into the semblance of form. Both together, though, evince a sense of the mismatch of form and content, of human determination and natural determinism. For like Kenner’s *Men of Sense*, Moore here has raised the merit of her poetics above the smaller units of

success or failure—whether this is the well-metered, tonally poised line, or the individual act of setting a clumsy animal aright—and placed her sights on generating a style that is valuable precisely for the way it swings, like a balanced-unbalanced Keaton, “through numerous points of disequilibrium.”

“Critics and Connoisseurs” is, then, legible not as a poem about the explicitness of intention but about what is produced in the process leading up to the moment of possible explication: the humorous fragilities, the comic fumbblings, their fastidious rectifications. It is therefore necessary to re-evaluate the apparent “moral” of Moore’s poem, which hinges on the precise tone of the final sentence:

What is
 There in being able
 To say that one has dominated the stream in an attitude of self-defense,
 In proving that one has had the experience
 Of carrying a stick?

The customary reading is to see Moore challenging the value of an explicit rendering of conscious fastidiousness, associated here with the intellectual determination of critics—to answer, in other words, the “What is there?” with a “There is nothing: nothing of worth.” Such a reading has Moore coming out morally in favor of “ambition without understanding.” Moore is, however, appraising both swan and ant. It is not that, in either case, there is nothing of value; it is rather that there is, nevertheless, a *something* of worth, however indescribable, in the actions of ambitious yet uncomprehending animals. The speaker has a sense, of course, of what this something is without explicitly naming it—it is the comic—but the closest we get as far as names go is a gesture towards the “childish.” Thus instead of describing (giving a “résumé” of) the value of fastidiousness, Moore points to her own experiment in form: like the swan, she has found a means to “dominate” the

stream of conversational speech with a new modernist prosody; like the ant, she has fitted each small syllable meticulously, examining the timbre from every point of the compass, utility be damned. Yet what matters is not whether one is more successful than the other but that both are vulnerable to failure; and it is this that engenders the stylistic effect. In a sense, after all, the speaker of the poem *is* the “imperfectly ballasted animal” who has been made, finally, to “stand up”—but only by chance: “*Happening* to stand / By an ant hill, I have / Seen...” A slapstick poem is a precarious, felicitous thing. The poem therefore resolves not with the espousal of any single moral or poetic doctrine but—in a cheeky send-up of Aesop’s fable of the grasshopper and the ant—with a genuine, open question. Not the deictic “There is” of the first line, but a softer, more curious and appreciative “What *is*”—line break—“there?”.

THE EROTICS OF LINEARITY

Any consideration of Moore’s sexual life and its relation to her poetry would be remiss to pass over the one important episode in Moore’s life in which a romantic advance was irrevocably, if still ambivalently, rebuffed: Scofield Thayer’s marriage proposal. As we’ve seen, readings of Moore’s sexuality have tended towards two poles, both of which are univocal in their forcefulness: on the one hand, usually gendered complaints or confusion surrounding the fact that “there is no sex anywhere in her poetry”; and on the other hand, the recuperation of Moore’s sexual “lack” as a positive politics of queer celibacy in and of itself. But both poles are unfortunately flattened in such a manner that they neglect a third, more dialectical sense of sexual and ethical performativity in Moore, one in which the question is not simply one of explicit, straightforward sexual expression (or its just-as-stable

negation) but rather of incorporating the fragile precariousities of failure into success itself. And in biographical terms, negotiating the slapstick terrain of this performative middle ground was for Moore never more pivotal than in her singular relationship with Scofield Thayer. For where Moore had already, as we've seen, embarked on an ambitiously comic reevaluation of poetics principles in "Critics and Connoisseurs," it was, perhaps, not until her encounter with Thayer that the social ethics underpinning these principles were brought fully into *social* play. That is, it is one thing to illustrate one's scruples abstractly in verse; it is another to have them tested in the arena of the erotically real.

Editor and co-publisher of *The Dial* from 1919 to 1925, at which point Moore herself was handed the reins as editor-in-chief, Thayer developed what was at first an enthusiastic (albeit somewhat enervating at the same time) literary and professional rapport with Moore, soliciting poems and critical prose from her and inviting her with some frequency to his chic Washington Square apartment throughout the tail end of 1920 and the following months. In 1921, however, matters escalated, and, while no clear record of the event is currently extant, it is all but certain that Thayer proposed to Moore on April 17, during one of her visits to his apartment.⁴⁰⁷ Moore was, it seems, quite shaken by the event (visits to Thayer's apartment in general left her, in her mother's words, "a wraith" from being "so over wrought in resolving to seem low-keyed—elegant and calm"), but her refusal and its strong (if still vague) affective

⁴⁰⁷ Until recently, the only suggestion that this proposal had taken place was a rumor that William Carlos Williams had included in his *Autobiography* (1951), in passing, and most Moore scholars have tended to dismiss these rumors. Linda Leavell's recent work with the Moore family letters at the Rosenbach, however, has turned up confirmations of Williams' rumor: we know, for example, that Moore's mother Mary wrote to Moore's brother John Warner Moore immediately after Thayer's proposal, wryly revealing that "as it turned out, Mr. Thayer was *not* just pursuing Rat for idle chat." For a more detailed rundown of the Moore-Thayer relationship and their immediate social and familial environment, including the fact that Thayer was married but that his wife had had, apparently with his approval, a child with e. e. cummings, see Leavell, "Frightening Disinterestedness: The Personal Circumstances of Marianne Moore's 'Marriage,'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 31.1 (2007): 64-79; and *Holding On Upside Down*, 183-190.

charge did not, I argue, take Thayer's proposal as a straight-up affront to a moral sensibility arranged around a stalwart *a priori* celibacy so much as a performance of, for Moore, an ambivalently attractive *and* repulsive social ethics. By social ethics, here, I mean to consider the basic responsibility and sensitivity with which one expresses and leverages one's own personality, cognitive modes, and body in relation to others—or precisely what Moore values in Chaplin's self-presentation. For like Chaplin, Thayer seems to have possessed a similar mixture of the self-assertive and the recessive—though only a minor adjustment to the recipe was necessary, it seems, to lose Moore's approbation and sense of affinity.

We see this discrimination being explored, for example, in the poem "People's Surroundings," published a year later in 1922, in which the precise coordinates of Moore's social ethics at the time are given physical and cultural form, metonymically figured through a series of alternatingly austere or baroque architectural and aesthetic artifacts—from "palace furniture, so old-fashioned, so old-fashionable; / Sèvres china and the fireplace dogs," to the "vast indestructible necropolis" of an office building, filled with "composite Yawman-Erbe separable units" (*COMP* 55). At the center of these objects and edifices is "Bluebeard's Tower," the sophisticated but foreboding furnishings of which Leavell suggests Moore would have associated with Thayer's own tastes and "odd notions of hospitality." And while, of course, keeping in mind Leavell's additional disclaimer that "it is even riskier to draw inferences about the proposal from Moore's poetry," there is, perhaps, no better image for the glittering but suffocating suddenness of Thayer's proposal, for the particular oddness of his hospitality, than the tower as a conjugal "magic mouse-trap closing on all points of the compass."⁴⁰⁸ For where critics have read the poem as a series of taxonomic contrasts that

⁴⁰⁸ "Leavell, "Frightening Disinterestedness," 69; and *Holding On Upside Down*, 189.

remain paratactically unresolved, I argue that we can read Bluebeard's "magic mouse-trap" as an attempt on Moore's part to show how the poem's two poles—the austere, even violently, straightforward and the excessively aestheticized—are indeed part and parcel of the same personality.

Bonnie Costello, writing about the "breathless list of images" in "People's Surroundings," contends that Moore "resist[s] statement almost completely, so that by the end of the poem the images overwhelm the syntax, which indicates little more than two columns into which an infinite range of nouns for people and places could be placed."⁴⁰⁹ This is certainly true of the poem's minimally syntactical structure, but Costello's reading does not quite take into account the degree to which Moore's poem, at the same time, wants to *make* a statement, not just resist it. Indeed, this investment in rhetorical directness is set out from the start when Moore declares, invoking a Poundian poetics, that "in this dried bone of arrangement / one's 'natural promptness' is compressed, not crowded out; / one's style is not lost in such simplicity" (*COMP* 55). That is, "style" here seems to be something far more essential to the individual than any list of quantifiable linguistic characteristics: even in the most straightforward or prosaic declarations, this ineffable poetic remainder can still be preserved. The question, therefore, is not one of the necessary ratio of signifiers to syntax for making assertive "statement" possible, but rather how, precisely, one can ascertain this singularity of any individual's essential style without the aid of any external signifiers—or, even, *with* the aid of *many* signifiers: "They answer one's questions," the first line says of people's surroundings, but how? One might even have "one's preferences in the matter of bad furniture, / and this is not one's choice"; even, say, if one's "bad" preferences were

⁴⁰⁹ Bonnie Costello, *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981), 173-174.

deducible from their material signifiers (here, furniture), one would still be unable to reduce this style to any single formula of individual agency or “choice.”

There is, nevertheless, a powerful erotic force attached to this capacity of the simple and direct to convey one’s singular style. In fact, the ineffability of style unsurprisingly slides into the non-human territory of animal ethology for Moore, the biological determinism of the animal opening up a way to imagine personal expression. The fifth stanza finds Moore praising

straight lines over such great distances as one finds in Utah or in Texas,
 where people do not have to be told
 that a good brake is as important as a good motor;
 where by means of extra sense-cells in the skin
 they can, like trout, smell what is coming—
 those cool sirs with the explicit sensory apparatus of common sense,
 who know the exact distance between two points as the crow flies;
 there is something attractive about a mind that moves in a straight line—
 the municipal bat-roost of mosquito warfare;
 the American string quartet;
 these are more questions than answers, (*COMP* 55-56)

Here is a getting-things-done, an austere but economical and efficient American ethos that Moore (recalling what she describes elsewhere as “the facile troutlike passage of [T. S. Eliot’s] mind”)⁴¹⁰ likens to the intuitive powers of animal instinct. But while this instinct—as the figure for a social ethics of self-reliance and “common sense”—holds an erotic power over Moore, it is not without its own dangers. Not only does the expressive and directional capacity of instinct begin to give way to a vague horizon of unaccountable violence; there is also a sense in which the vagueness of instinct itself leaves one vulnerable to that violence. Despite the “explicit” nature of the trout’s “sensory apparatus,” there is inevitably a point at which its instinct’s very success fails the trout—the moment a fly-fisher deceives it. (Or, in

⁴¹⁰ In the unpublished essay “English Literature since 1914,” RML. See also John Slatin, *The Savage’s Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1986), 127-136.

an ambiguously more ecological frame of mind, the moment the bats and mosquitoes of San Antonio are manipulated into regulating each other.)⁴¹¹ Hence Moore backs away from the promise of linearity and explicitness, ending the stanza on an equivocal comma: “these are more questions than answers,” the actual implications of invoking instinct as a governing trope remaining unclear. And indeed the weak end-rhymes of the stanza lead us, in a quiet, instinctual way along a straight poetic line to... where? To the next stanza, the trap of Bluebeard’s Tower. “Style,” here, might not be completely “lost in such simplicity,” but it has also—in the vague interval between “completely” and “incompletely”—wrenched itself free of Moore’s ethical intentions.

If, on the other hand, one is tempted to think that, perhaps, a dichotomous alternative to the simply austere might offer a better model for the ethical expression of style, Moore is ready to tamp that hope down, too. After detailing the excessively baroque artifacts of Bluebeard’s Tower in the sixth stanza, gradually building up the promise of a certain revelation of character, the poem treats us instead to a solipsism revealing nothing but the fact of its own existence, and its own impotence: “Here where the mind of this establishment has come to the conclusion / that it would be impossible to revolve about oneself too much, / sophistication has, ‘like an escalator,’ ‘cut the nerve of progress.’” The expressive potential of a signifying plenitude here is rendered ineffectual the way, perhaps, a product of technological progress (an escalator) can *devitalize* that very progress (inducing sloth). Elaborating further in the next and final stanza, Moore posits that this problem, this impasse between signifier and expression, is perhaps legible through the logic of

⁴¹¹ Moore’s citation of the “municipal bat-roost” in “San Antonio, Texas, to combat mosquitoes” in her customary endnotes refers to a bat roost erected by Charles A. R. Campbell in 1911, which successfully solved the local mosquito problem.

physiognomy:

In these non-committal, personal-impersonal expressions of appearance,
the eye knows what to skip;
the physiognomy of conduct must not reveal the skeleton;
“a setting must not have the air of being one,” (*COMP* 57)

For all the embellished surfaces of Bluebeard’s Tower (of Thayer’s apartment?), the poem is unable to grasp what constitutes their unitary, singular style. A “magic mouse-trap closing on all points of the compass” (echoing, of course, Moore’s “fastidious ant,” carrying a stick “north, south, east, west”), it seems Bluebeard-Thayer is so accomplished in the science of manners and expression that their underlying, personal source remains, to the uninitiated, inaccessible and *captured* by appearances: “the physiognomy of conduct must not reveal the skeleton.”

It is possible, I believe to see at this point a growing resonance between Moore’s exploration of expression in “People’s Surroundings” and Chaplin’s own inimitable style. According to Moore, the styles of both Bluebeard’s Tower and Chaplin’s memoir involve an external aesthetic so accomplished that the fact of its externality or artificiality is nearly forgotten: “a setting must not have the air of being one.” Yet just as there was an inarticulable gulf between Chaplin’s slapstick and résumés of that slapstick, or between the frigate pelican and its imitators, so there is *something* that makes the polish of the tower’s “personal-impersonal expressions of appearance” seem suspect and vitiated to Moore. Hence the next four lines are somewhat hard to account for in the poem—Moore does not quite explain by what means she is able to deduce her conclusions, which run directly against the sentiment of the previous four lines—but the almost fantastic quality of the scientific instrument she invokes suggests that they might be best understood as a kind of provisional hypothesis. It is for *this* reason, perhaps, that the style of Bluebeard’s Tower does not resolve

into a sufficiently engaging yet ethically responsible presentation of one's self:

yet with X-ray-like inquisitive intensity upon it, the surfaces go back;
the interfering fringes of expression are but a stain on what stands out,
there is neither up nor down to it;
we see the exterior and the fundamental structure— (*COMP* 57)

The baroque embellishments of Bluebeard's Tower are postulated as mere "surfaces" and "fringes," only a "stain" on the underlying skeleton: they are only superficially linked to a more essential sense of person. Unlike Chaplin, who is successfully able to unite public persona and private person, formalism and biography, Bluebeard, or Thayer, seems to lack a certain quality of assertiveness to balance out the refinement, a spontaneity, that is, to offset the reserve.

There is a sense in which Moore's logic of (im)personality here resembles the stylistically distinct slapstick of Keaton as well. Consider, for example, James Agee's précis of Keaton's art in his classic essay "Comedy's Greatest Era" (which, incidentally, provides the critical coup de grâce for Kenner's essay). Despite Keaton's famed deadpan visage (which "ranked almost with Lincoln's as an early American archetype; it was haunting, handsome, almost beautiful, yet it was irreducibly funny"),

[m]uch of the charm and edge of Keaton's comedy [...] lay in the subtle leverages of expression he could work against his nominal dead pan. Trapped in the side-wheel of a ferryboat, saving himself from drowning only by walking, then desperately running, inside the accelerating wheel like a squirrel in a cage, his only real concern was obviously, to keep his hat on. Confronted by Love, he was not as dead-pan as he was cracked up to be, either; there was an odd, abrupt motion of his head which suggested a horse nipping after a sugar lump.⁴¹²

So while Keaton's general physiognomy of composure does not, as it were, "reveal the skeleton," his comedy would not succeed were it not for the occasional leakage of personal

⁴¹² James Agee, "Comedy's Greatest Era," in *On Film: Reviews and Comments* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1958), 15-16.

affect—always in the most minimal degree (the vanity of his hat, the monumentality of love indexed by the smallest tick), and always comparable only to an animal at one remove from its natural condition. And symmetrically, what Moore seems to require from Bluebeard’s “expressions of appearance” is the one thing they seem to lack—a sense of earnest, affectively legible engagement: the aesthetic surfaces are simply too “non-committal,” however practiced they might be.⁴¹³

Furthermore, what Agee draws our attention back to is the centrality of instinct for understanding the mechanics of slapstick. If slapstick was, for many modernists, the preeminent comic mode for representing the human body’s alienation from industrialized modernity, then animal instinct emerges—just as it did in Moore’s review of Chaplin—as *the* trope by which to understand slapstick virtuosity: the human, no longer in harmonious proportion to his environment, sees his own disproportion as that of an animal instinctively adapting to a new circumstance, with every attendant felicity and pratfall, sugar lump and wheel. Yet the difficulty of calibration, here, of bringing felicity and pratfall together into a series of felicitous pratfalls, is expressed in the vagueness of “instinct” as a governing poetic category. For while instinct names the non-articulable element of behavior, Moore seeks to show us the many ways in which instinct can go awry, be manipulated, sidetracked, or turned against itself. Whether operating as the assertive expediency of the straight line or the passive extravagance of aesthetic expression, instinct is too easily captured and made self-defeating:

⁴¹³ The selection of personal “commitment” as the inexact factor which separates virtuosic style from mere imitation is central to Moore’s poetics more widely as well. In her lecture “Idiosyncrasy and Technique” (1958), Moore elaborates in terms of modernist technique in language that harkens back to “People’s Surroundings”: “Since writing is not only an art but a trade embodying principles attested by experience, we would do well not to forget that it is an expedient for making one’s self understood and that what is said should at least have the air of having meant something to the person who wrote it—as is the case with Gertrude Stein and James Joyce. Stewart Sherman one time devised a piece of jargon which he offered as indistinguishable from work by Gertrude Stein, which gave itself away at once *as lacking any private air of interest.*” *Prose*, 508 (my emphasis).

if Moore imagines herself as the austere American bats of San Antonio, she ends up in a roost too suggestive of Bluebeard's Tower; if she identifies, with a blush of floral slapstick, with the "acacia-like lady" of the sixth stanza, "shivering at the touch of a hand, / lost in a small collision of orchids," then she "disappear[s] like an obedient chameleon in fifty shades of mauve and amethyst" (*COMP* 56).⁴¹⁴ In each case, accommodation and captivity together comprise "odd notions of hospitality," reminding us of the thin line that exists between a consummately adept social ethics and its "odd" variants—between the coercive immobilization of the "obedient chameleon" and, in the case of another exceptional Moorean reptile, the more attractively unencumbered, but harder to describe, "regal and excellent awkwardness" of the plumed basilisk (*COMP* 23).

The common critical assertion, then, that "People's Surroundings" activates a simple moral binary, "utterly dispens[ing] with questions of identity while creating a presence of unembodied but utterly distinctive authority," misses the point slightly.⁴¹⁵ For the matter at hand is never to abandon either identity or embodiedness but, as we've seen, to lay out the difficulties inherent in any articulation of the relationship between identity and embodiedness, between "style" and its relationship to aesthetics and physics, signifier and syntax. To see Moore as choosing one or the other is to collapse her own "physiognomy of

⁴¹⁴ Also included among the artifacts of Bluebeard's Tower are "chessmen carved out of moonstone," which Moore quotes from Anatole France's story "Honey-Bee" (1883, and translated into English in 1922). The story is fittingly about a young girl named Honey-Bee who is held captive by a King Loc in his magic dwarf kingdom, his tower filled with beautiful treasures that include the chessmen. Honey-Bee and her companion end up trapped in the tower precisely because their minds "move in a straight line": as the one passage in the story addressing her name explains, she and her companion George stumble upon the tower unwittingly; their innocence is figured by the fact that they travel in a "bee line" across the fields. "A bee line," explains France's narrator, "is the pretty rustic way of saying a straight line; and they both laughed because of the young girl's name which fitted in so oddly." (And later in the story, suggestively echoing Moore's "X-ray-like inquisitive intensity," the dwarves are said to possess "lenses of a translucent substance unknown to men. These enable the sight to pass through walls as if they were glass.") In *Balthazar*, trans. Mrs. John Lane (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1922), 140, 171, 189.

⁴¹⁵ Miller, *Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority*, 38.

conduct” into Thayer’s, and to miss the much more virtuosic—but therefore also much more inarticulate—slapstick dialectic of “personal-impersonal expressions of appearance” that so many of Moore’s poems are invested in describing.

CONTAGIOUS GEMS OF VIRTUOSITY: ENACTING SLAPSTICK CELIBACY

This eschewal of a conventional didactic ending in “Critics and Connoisseurs,” moreover, is not only a formal modification of the classical beast fable mode, but also hints at the way Moore would begin to model her own ethical persona in more concrete social terms as her career progressed. Indeed, Moore’s strategy for public self-presentation at the height of her celebrity should be seen as a slapstick solution to the age-old problem faced by all didactically-minded art—what, for example, Pope faced when he wrote in *An Essay on Criticism*, that “Men must be taught as if you taught them not, / And things unknown proposed as things forgot.” For by the end of her career, Moore had indeed found a way to effectively perform the moral authority her younger self had sought but hesitated to convey explicitly, and she did so precisely by assuming the role of the slapstick animal herself.

We might thus broaden the conceptual applicability of Moore’s queer celibacy to encompass both her verse and her public authority. On the one hand, Moore’s flight from explicitness lines up superficially with the structure of celibate desire: against the teleological trajectory of normative sexual desire, for example, wherein “the desirer attempts to transform her desire into an act,” the “backwards” trajectory of celibate desire is nonteleological: “rather than desiring something lacking and trying to obtain it, in this second model the celibate desire is the reiteration of celibacy itself.”⁴¹⁶ On the other hand, in

⁴¹⁶ Kahan, 522.

light of Moore's fascination with slapstick, I argue, the refusal to be explicit—whether in verse, in her public persona, or in her sexuality—does not necessarily refuse telos entirely. Rather, what Moore reveled in—as *Tell Me, Tell Me: Granite, Steel, and Other Topics* (1966), her final volume of original poetry, makes clear, with all the avidity of its titular imperative—is more the disequilibria that adhere in the process of reaching any given telos. It is not only a matter of backwardly “speeding to left / speeding to right; reversible” like an “Arthur / Mitchell dragonfly,” but also the way Arthur Mitchell as a dragonfly (we are now reading across two poems) can “make visible, mentality. / Your jewels of mobility / reveal / and veil / a peacock-tail” (*COMP* 218, 220). That is, the nonteleological is not necessarily a practice for its own sake, but can bear an epistemological surplus as well.

After all, the succinctness of “Arthur Mitchell,” the shortest poem in the volume, only brings home what is in fact the uniting theme of the volume as a whole: the notion that certain exceptional beings can obscure *and* illuminate some abstract verity through stylistic precision. Indeed, *Tell Me, Tell Me* is filled with examples of what Moore calls a “contagious gem of virtuosity,” a singular unit of performative style, say, that despite its emphatically manageable size (what more portable than gems, those “jewels of mobility?”), remains “too rapid for the eye / to cage.” In addition to Arthur Mitchell and the dragonfly, the volume names an inordinately large number of virtuosic talents and slapstick animals, including not only classically venerated persons such as Leonardo da Vinci, Henry James, Bach, or Odilon Redon, but also more contemporary and mass-cultural figures such as Achilles Fang, engineer John Roebling (designer of the Brooklyn Bridge), Yul Brynner, Yankees Maris, Mantle, and Berra, et al., alongside animals like the polo pony Blue Bug, a

suspiciously cartoonish roadrunner, or her fantastically invented pet crow, named Pluto.⁴¹⁷ Together, these virtuosic figures—at least fifty-eight total, all in a slim volume of only forty-nine pages and twenty-two individual texts—remind us that Moore was invested not just in the backwardness of the nonteleological, but also in how there are a multitude of other ways of carrying oneself through time and space, whether through, as Kahan puts it, “a set of Doppler effects, diversions, dispersals, serves, and forking paths,” or, as we’ve seen, a series of pratfalls, dances, and gags.⁴¹⁸

These sideways movements perform moral authority *without* the violence of explicitness, without what Moore calls in this volume “egocentricity.” Hence the first lines of the title track “Tell me, tell me” lay out the question motivating the whole volume:

Tell me, tell me
 where might there be a refuge for me
 from egocentricity
 and its propensity to bisect,
 mis-state, misunderstand
 and obliterate continuity? (*COMP* 231)

Implicitly, it is the whole volume that answers this question: only the “told-backward biography,” as Moore puts it in the poem’s final stanza can “[rescue] the reader / from being driven mad by a scold” (*COMP* 232). What in particular, however, sets *Tell Me, Tell Me* apart from Moore’s earlier experiments in slapstick verse is the suggestion that Moore has in fact discovered a way to parlay those lessons in virtuosity and social ethics into an ambitiously cogent *public* presentation, finally assuming a position of nationally celebrated moral

⁴¹⁷ It is hence difficult not to see the figures Moore chooses to illustrate the virtuosic expression of personality as a pointed response to Eliot’s modernist impersonality: in place of Eliot’s “filament of platinum” Moore offers her “contagious gem of virtuosity”; where, in his essay “Dramatis Personae,” Eliot champions Léonide Massine for being, in a nearly Brechtian fashion, “the most completely unhuman, impersonal and abstract,” Moore holds up Arthur Mitchell for his capacity to remain singularly personal, to “make visible, mentality.” See Eliot, “Dramatis Personae,” *The Criterion* 1 (1923): 303-306.

⁴¹⁸ Kahan, 525.

authority after a career spent finding ways to evade it. It is thus for this reason that *Tell Me, Tell Me*, as a “refuge” from egocentricity, restores “continuity” through the citation of numerous public contemporaries, as if biographically inscribing Moore’s unique virtuosity into the same pantheon.⁴¹⁹

Where, however, Moore approached earlier models of celebrated virtuosity—Chaplin, namely—with what was ultimately a sense of mystification regarding the possibility of translating their style and ethics into practice, the late-period Moore of *Tell Me, Tell Me* bridges the gap between private ethics and public style far more confidently and concretely. We see this throughout *Tell Me, Tell Me* both in its specific citations of virtuosity and in the construction of the volume as a whole. Both stress the *continuity* that Moore opposes to egocentricity and thus flesh out the earlier, more basic, formulation of a Chaplinesque ethics—spontaneity with reserve—a constant process of trial and error, or, “the journey from sin to redemption, perpetual” (*COMP* 215).⁴²⁰

Moore’s emphasis on the exposure of process partially explains the nod to narrative throughout the poems of *Tell Me, Tell Me*. For Moore, the question was not about any *single* performance of celibacy or other social ethics, but rather the effects that accrue in the process—a task to which narrative, more than, say, lyric verse, has historically been better suited. It is in this capacity that Beatrix Potter’s *Tailor of Gloucester*, for instance, is invoked in “Tell me, tell me”: a tale of a tailor thwarted by his conniving cat but rescued by a group of

⁴¹⁹ As Kahan puts it, Moore had found a way to move her position as a celibate “from observing the public sphere at a distance to being a central actor within it” Kahan, 527.

⁴²⁰ In this sense, Moore’s move from a nearly mystified account of Chaplin’s slapstick virtuosity to what I am arguing is a more transparent staging of a virtuosic ethics is analogous to the distinction Judith Hamera has drawn between romantic constructions of virtuosity in dance and her modern exemplar, Michael Jackson. The former “obscure the mechanics of creative production,” making “visibly difficult moves look easy,” while the latter, “routinely exposed the very labors that virtuosic dance [...] generally conceal, disrupting conventional visual equations of economy of input yielding spectacular output” See Hamera, “The Labors of Michael Jackson: Virtuosity, Deindustrialization, and Dancing Work,” *PMLA* 127 (2012): 754, 755.

mice with a virtuosic “passion for the particular,” its apparent “moral” is not, for Moore, a matter of traditional morality (a cat’s avarice trumped by the generosity of mice) but of learning to be “dazzled / not by the sun but by ‘shadowy / possibility’” (*COMP* 231). That is, not the glare of explicit moral virtue but something more like an epistemological virtue diffused throughout the story.

Hence the poem gives us very little information about the story proper, despite Moore’s speaker “vowing” to the tailor to flee from egocentricity by way of “the viper’s traffic-not.” The “*précis*” (or, *résumé*) we do get in the final stanza, the *actual* “told-backward biography,” is deliberately brief, leaving us to infer the extent of Potter’s value not from what is stated explicitly but what is left implicitly unspoken as “shadowy possibility”:

A précis?

In this told-backward biography
of how the cat’s mice when set free
by the tailor of Gloucester, finished
the Lord Mayor’s cerise coat—
the tailor’s tale ended captivity
in two senses. Besides having told
of a coat which made the tailor’s fortune,
it rescued a reader
from being driven mad by a scold. (*COMP* 232)

Potter’s tale not only “end[s] captivity” within the diegesis (when the tailor is saved by the mice’s intervention) but also at the level of form by departing from the classical fable mode: as Moore notes it here, it keeps the “reader / from being driven mad by a scold” by declining to deliver any moral dictum at its conclusion. And looking at the story itself, we get a better idea of how the narrative deflects its rhetorical energy away from any didacticism and toward the “possibility” that Moore only hints at.

Commissioned to make a cerise coat for the Mayor of Gloucester’s wedding, Potter’s tailor entrusts to his cat Simpkin their last penny in order to buy more cherry-colored silk.

Without it, the tailor says, “I am undone and worn to a thread-paper, for I have *no more twist*.”⁴²¹ Simpkin, of course, turns out to be the fable’s villain and hides the twist of silk, leaving the tailor unable to finish the coat by his Christmas deadline. But after witnessing the mice—whom he had earlier captured and planned to eat—toiling away through the night at a mysterious task (while chanting the tailor’s refrain, “No more twist! No more twist!”), Simpkin repents and shamefully returns the silk to the tailor. The tailor, however, having fallen ill with despair, is too weak to complete the coat, even with the twist; and with all hope lost, he is saved only by the mice, who had finished the coat for him during the night.

A simple children’s tale, Potter’s story nevertheless seems to fix Moore’s interest for both formal and thematic reasons. Thematically, the story evinces a deep “passion for the particular” in its thick descriptions of the tailor’s textiles, for example, or the meticulous songs and movements of the mice. Formally, it decides not to save Simpkin’s moral anagnorisis for a more conventionally dramatic encounter at the end of the tale and allows that event, now earlier in the story and quieter, to be eclipsed by the tailor’s eventual breathtaking discovery of the completed coat. The temporality of this discovery, furthermore, parallels that of the story’s expositional structure. Curiously for a turn-of-the-century children’s story, both character and plot details are not revealed until relevant—whether the fact that the animal characters can speak, that Simpkin had purposefully hidden the silk twist, or that the mayor’s coat was due in only a few days—a structure imitated by the twisted syntax of “Tell me, tell me,” in which the primary players of the story are related in an utterly unhelpful order: “the cat’s mice when set free / by the tailor of Gloucester, finished / the Lord Mayor’s cerise coat.” Like the tailor himself, the reader is placed in a

⁴²¹ Beatrix Potter, *The Tailor of Gloucester* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1903), 18.

position of “shadowy possibility” in which what is emphasized is neither the moral certitude of punishing a wayward cat nor the credit due some gratefully industrious mice but rather the atomized and sometimes opaquely relevant material particulars of the world of the tale. Thus we see that even the nonteleological does not supplant every sort of telos entirely: rather, the narrative energy of the tale is diffused *away* from the still-present telos (the tailor’s desires are still fulfilled) and towards the objects and techniques of an animal virtuosity.

Like the “metaphysical newmown hay, / honeysuckle, or woods fragrance” to which Moore’s speaker wants to flee, then, we might say that what Potter’s tale illustrates and condenses for Moore is something like the ineffable effect of the literal slapstick device of stage comedy. As Tom Gunning explains: “The slapstick acts as an archetypal machine of displacement in which an instrument detours from its original purpose into a strong sensual effect—it makes a lot of noise, but actually works less efficiently as a pain-inflicting weapon.... As a gag, it produces the collapse of purpose into a noisy nothing, like an exploding bubble.”⁴²² For Moore, the solution to performing moral authority while fleeing the coercive force of explicitness, whether as a modernist variation on the classical fable or as a style of public presentation, works in the same way: the energies of a virtuosic performance (“the viper’s traffic-knot”), are diverted into *another register or sense*—from the verbal to the visual, to the tactile, even to the olfactory—just as the visually “explicit” physical violence of slapstick is diverted into comic sound. Understood from this angle, Moore’s poetic preoccupations and public manner—so often taken to be the symptomatic expressions or fetishistic objects of a repressed or unachieved desire—feel less like displaced psychoanalytic signifiers and more like the intricate arrangements of bodies, machines, and

⁴²² Tom Gunning, “Mechanisms of Laughter: the Devices of Slapstick,” in *Slapstick Comedy*, ed. Tom Paulus and Rob King (New York: Routledge, 2010), 141.

things that precede and lead up to a big comedic payoff. To put it another way: Moore's ultimate sense of ethical selfhood and authority (what Kahan has also named her celibate practice) may at times be imperceptible, but it is not hidden by any signifiers in an uncanny psychoanalytic sense.⁴²³ Rather, it is no less than constituted by the signifiers *themselves* when the precise poetic balance of form and content coheres to create a fleeting, precarious flash of personality. Its grammar bears a resemblance, no doubt, to the uncanny, which returns as the suddenly strange yet disturbingly familiar, but it is more accurately understood through the idiom of slapstick virtuosity, which arrives as the utterly memorable but immediately, thereafter, indescribable. For it gives way instantly and inevitably to the next round of confusion: at the highest resolution, this is the sound of the slapstick device itself; more generally, it is the structure of every gag, the joke's unrepeatable punch line simultaneously cohering and exploding into laughter. Or, as Moore herself puts it in another poem from *Tell Me, Tell Me*, the brief, explicit revelation is like "the exhilarating peak" of a roller coaster, "when the triumph is reflective / and confusion, retroactive" (*COMP* 211).⁴²⁴

We can therefore read the back-and-forth structure of *Tell Me, Tell Me* not just as a device for illustrating the nonteleological, but also as a sort of tutorial enacting a slapstick reading practice that has the reader experience his own cognitive stumbling in parallel to Moore's virtuosic style. The fact that the volume's poems all contain both clear and oblique

⁴²³ I am thus opposing the reading of Susan McCabe, who reads the entirety of Moore's person—whether the syllabic meter of her early poems, her fascination with avant-garde film montage, or her iconically idiosyncratic sense of fashion, so attached to fur—as a fetishistic expression of a desire "refocused away from the explicitly human or genital," the degree of her animal-like dexterity effectively tagging Moore as a savant and evacuating her of actual agency; McCabe turns Moore's poetic virtuosity into a merely "compulsive" and "unstoppable" symptom. See *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film*, 189.

⁴²⁴ From "Old Amusement Park." Filled with easygoing circus animals and rides (a "pygmy replica" elephant riding a larger elephant, a "furry pony" that "sits / down like a dog," the tramcar becomes a "rattling greenish caterpillar"), the park ("Before it became LaGuardia Airport") is Moore's celebration of softer, milder virtuosities (like herself, she wants to say, the animals are "tame-wild"—politely domesticated but no less incisive and energetic) that have been supplanted by modern, egocentric bustle ("Hurry, worry, unwary / visitor, never vary / the pressure till nearly bat-blind," she apostrophizes to the air traveler) (*COMP* 210).

references to each other, forcing one to flip between poems unpredictably, leaves the reader, even after two or three readings cover-to-cover, wondering who, what where, when, how?—interrogatives that Moore has, perhaps, ventriloquized as the emphatic imperative of the title: tell me, tell me! The curious reader, I contend, is put in the position of a younger Moore, the Moore who once asked, “What is there—in slapstick, in Chaplin?” For here, an older Moore is actually making it possible for the reader to experience the lessons of virtuosity that took a career to absorb. Not, of course, with the shock of any monumental explicitness but by a sort of exhilarating Moorean humility brought on by retroactive confusion: perhaps virtuosity is plain before us for a second, but the mind’s eye holds it for only that long.⁴²⁵

If *Tell Me, Tell Me* encodes Moore’s evolution, then, into a “central actor” in the public sphere, it does so not through the consolidation of the nonteleological into an end unto itself but as a tactical performance that draws others into an experience of Moore’s own identity. Hence, while it is important to observe with Kahan that the history of celibacy comprises something more coherent and active than just a collection of anomalously disparate bachelors and spinsters removed from the more recognizable queer and feminist histories, it is still, I argue, necessary to heed Heather Love’s challenge in *Feeling Backwards*: “Given the history of queer refusal,” Love writes, “we might read Foucault’s theory of power as an attempt to make room for ‘special cases’—to create a politics for subjects who do not credibly embody the ‘pure law of the revolutionary.’”⁴²⁶ For Moore’s own celibate practice, let alone her place in a wider history, was far from monolithic, as we’ve seen, and

⁴²⁵ Hence also the ubiquity of eyes in *Tell Me, Tell Me*, which are a sort of metonymic counterpart to the “gems” of virtuosity. The eye—by being compelled to follow the intricate motions of virtuosity—learns itself to perform that virtuosity. Thus the eye becomes the smallest possible unit of virtuosity, in a sense, something Moore suggests when she rhapsodizes the single eye of Blue Bug the pony, who has a “face like a nest.”

⁴²⁶ Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Harvard UP, 2007), 70-71.

was instead made up precisely of “an endless number of refusals”—never final, never stable, and drawn together into a unity only through a stochastic, slapstick physics.⁴²⁷

Thus even at her most public, Moore was prone to retreat. And this hesitancy to be inscribed into the politics of a wider history was never more on display than in her 1957 reading for The Poetry Center at the San Francisco Museum of Art, of which we still have the recording.⁴²⁸ For, while Moore’s performance was certainly not indifferent to her newfound national celebrity (only a few years prior, her *Collected Poems* had won the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Bollingen Prize), one poem in particular stood out as a crystallization of her ambivalence toward the public sphere. Introducing, about halfway into the reading, her early poem “The Labor of Hercules,” Moore mentions that she “was asked to read” it: a poem about the difficulty of morally disabusing bigots and snobs, its selection made clear that Moore’s function, perhaps unique among other prominent American poets of the time (1957 also saw, of course, the obscenity trial for *Howl*), was now primarily to dispense a certain moral consciousness to the public. Moore’s performance, however, was delightfully off-script and evinced, forty years after she first wrote the poem, a new sense of how a poet was supposed to achieve such an arduous moral task. At one point, in a basically slapstick moment of extemporaneity that produced a roar of laughter from the audience, Moore changed her poem. One of Hercules’ labors was now (as transcribed, with Moore’s interpolations in italics and deletions struck through):

to persuade those self-wrought Midases of brains
whose fourteen-karat ignorance aspires to rise in value
“till the sky is the limit,”

⁴²⁷ Love, 70.

⁴²⁸ “The Labors of Hercules,” read by the author, October 10, 1957, The Poetry Center, San Francisco Museum of Art, Poetry Center Digital Archive, MP3 audio, 40:19, <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/poetrycenter/bundles/191206>.

that excessive conduct augurs disappointment,
 that one must not borrow a long white beard and tie it on
 and threaten with the scythe of time, the casually curious:
~~to teach the bard with too elastic a selectiveness~~
...ub, creativeness, no...
 that one detects creative power
...I'm rewriting this as I read it [audience laughs]
 that one detects creative power by its capacity to conquer one's detachment

Cutting the line “to teach the bard with too elastic a selectiveness” from her poem, Moore produced a set of lines with an elastically different sense. While, perhaps, as a younger critic, she found it necessary to teach other “too elastic” poets to write more rigorously and overcome a “detached” dilettantism, an older Moore now seems to realize that any such prescription against capaciousness was itself a form of snobbishness. Indeed, Moore’s own performance enacts this newly modified theme: her “casually” diffuse reading could be said to express a slapstick relationship to her *own* poetry. For where a younger Moore might have balked at the idea of a “detached” poetry achieving a critical concentration, an older Moore’s stumbling over the word “creativity” in a line about creative power only evidences how a poet might virtuosically perform detachment itself in order to “conquer” that same detachment, having charismatically cemented a rapport with the audience.

Hence we can see how Moore’s poetry as a whole—her clumsy animals, her rapturous love of slapstick, her complicated revision history—constitutes a sense of modernism and celibacy neither as solely apolitical, made up of asocial aesthetes and spinsters, nor as strongly performative, aspiring after historical action, but as a constant revision and adaptation. And where a formalist critic might, representatively combining these other senses of modernism, both wonder where she obtained the “authority for using syllabic instead of stress metres” and criticize her public readings for being ineffectually “rather nasal” and “slurred over,” Moore’s own masterful poetic and performative style

reveals the answer: her authority comes from nowhere; her ineffectuality is her effectuality.⁴²⁹ It is, in the end, not a question of authority for Moore, but rather a *falling-away* from authority. A way to flow through the formal trappings of authority, like an imperfectly ballasted animal. For the most straightforward moral tasks are all labors of Hercules for Moore—not because they are themselves difficult, but because the authority they require inevitably entraps: rebutting snobbishness, racism, and sexism in all their guises is difficult to do without becoming, as Moore writes, just another “snake-charmer.” The animal and the poet must never be coerced.

⁴²⁹ Roy B. Fuller, “Virtuoso Fiddling: Marianne Moore’s Syllabics,” *The Times Literary Supplement* (30 May 1968): 552; reprinted in *CRMM*, 226-230.

GLOBAL PRECARITY: A CODA

There is a tendency in critical animal studies to overvalue the alterity of animals. If anthropomorphizing animals, as I have argued, was too dangerously didactic for modernists, so too is the constant ontological distancing of the human and animal—or what I named above as the topological model of animality. In Bergsonian terms, one collapses instinct and intelligence, the other treats them as an inviolable dualism. Understanding, however, virtuosic style's crucial function in linking human intelligence and animal instinct allows us to re-theorize the hierarchy of beings, while drawing attention to the ways in which aesthetics and ethics both often disingenuously rely on the constant other-ing of animals in order to authorize themselves, even going so far as to tacitly support some modicum of violence in the service of this reinvigorated authority. In the global and biopolitical terms of our present moment, this should amount to, I argue, a critique of what Justin Neumann has described as neoliberalism's resurgent self-re-enchantment.⁴³⁰ For at the heart of many of neoliberalism's aesthetic strategies is often a sense of the modern world as a global, intertwined ecology, and it is the value of the animal as both a figure for bare life and as an aesthetic model in its own right that so frequently allows that fantasy to work.

Within the last fifteen years or so, the state of ethics as a field of theoretical and philosophical inquiry has become largely inextricable from biopolitical concerns. By no means a new phenomenon in the history of ethics or biopolitics, this entanglement has been brought into newer, sharper relief by, perhaps, the all-too-belated awareness that the

⁴³⁰ See Justin Neuman, *Fiction Beyond Secularism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

relationship between core and periphery in the current world-system has shifted in ways that have engendered different forms of mediation and representation. As the distribution of power becomes more asymmetrical, whether politically, economically, or militarily, whether domestically in the US and other Western nations or abroad, attempts to apprehend one's cultural others have come more and more to focus on the aesthetics and poetics of these representations, as if any ethical encounter with or access to alterity were possible only in these terms. The events of 9/11, which swiftly inaugurated a new stage in American imperialism characterized by more highly developed regimes of information circulation, surveillance, and security, by a blunt but terrifyingly transparent new logic of sovereignty wielded in the cells of detention camps and across the remote, inhuman flight path of drones, have served as a particular touchstone for theorists of ethics and biopower: with these developments came the decisive intimation that direct encounters with one's remotest others had now been somehow irrevocably precluded—whether through the asymmetries of representation or through actual political and military coercion—and that all that was left in the public sphere were the disembodied images of the news cycle. Thinkers as diverse as Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida have thus brought renewed attention to this widening disparity between the ever-more fantastic mechanisms of modern sovereignty and the ever-barer forms of biological life they seek to control, looking, furthermore, to the latter—especially as it is revealed to be continuous with *animal* life—as a resource through which to build a more capacious, and more humane, ethics.⁴³¹

The premium placed on *precarity*, specifically, as the universalizing aspect of biological

⁴³¹ See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning And Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009); and Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), and *The Beast and the Sovereign*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

life obtains particularly in the figure of the animal. Here, at the limit of both representation and ethical relation, the animal finds itself exemplifying precariousness: the animal—as both individual creature and as exemplary type of an entire species—is that which is most vulnerable to hegemonic violence and coercion, and yet also most prone to fabulous representation. It exists as limit because it is just beyond the ken of human ethics and yet somehow—at the level of biopolitics—dramatically underwrites the possibility of ethics in general. It would, again, be possible to chronicle a history of ethics in terms of its self-positioning vis-à-vis the animal. In a philosophical tradition including both Plato and Huxley, for example, ethics has often been understood as the space between the animal and the human itself, as the act of accounting for and coming to terms with that space between *bare* life and *ways of* life. “Is the ethics of truth ascetic?” asks Alain Badiou. “Does it always demand of us a renunciation? From the dawn of philosophy, this has been a crucial debate. It was already one of Plato’s concerns, in his determination to prove that the philosopher, the man of truths, was ‘happier’ than the hedonistic tyrant, and that as a result, the sensual animal renounces nothing essential by dedicating its life to Ideas.”⁴³² Yet the scale of ethical inquiry and lived social experience constantly expands with history, and this discursive logic of differentiation between human and animal—or what Giorgio Agamben has named the “anthropological machine”—is brought further and further into the light with each stage in the history of biopolitics: in recent history, twentieth- and twenty-first-century regimes of terror, especially those built around detention camps, have served to underscore the degree to which the anthropological machine remains ever-more active (internalizing the human-animal difference into the category of the human itself and thereby abjecting certain classes

⁴³² Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London and New York: Verso, 2001), 53.

of humans as “animal,” or expendable) and therefore in even more need of disarticulation (or “jamming,” as Agamben puts it).⁴³³ In opposition, then, to what is actually the disingenuous, and so, ideological, move of *localizing* the animal within the human to a specific class of humans, what we recognize as critical animal studies—perhaps here deployed in terms broader than usual—has sought instead to *universalize* the animal within the human, whether in terms of phenomenology or biopolitics, emphasizing the status of the human as the animal aware of its own captivity, vulnerability, and precarity.

The abyss between the human and the animal remains, however. Even in ecological thinkers most committed to disarticulating the ontological divide between humans and animals, one can detect a resistance or barrier that must be surmounted in order to make the precarity of animals, despite being continuous in some way with that of humans, first legible and then palatable. What is ultimately a valorization of animal precarity, then, in service of a universal ethics requires some sort of further initial step: more often than not, this amounts to the construction of either a theology or an aesthetics of the animal. Anat Pick’s recent naming of a “creaturely poetics,” for example, in a number of contemporary novels and films that explore the vulnerable animality of the human proceeds first from an attempt to reclaim the logic of dehumanization from the violence of the Holocaust. Rather than rehabilitate the “human” in the wake of dehumanizing atrocities, Pick seeks instead to highlight the ways in which the human is still *inhuman*, to dehumanize and therefore recognize the animal “permutations of necessity and materiality that condition and shape human life.”⁴³⁴ As Pick explains, “the gesture is one of *contraction*: making ourselves ‘less

⁴³³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford UP, 2004).

⁴³⁴ Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5.

human,' as it were, whilst seeking to grant animals a share in our world of subjectivity."⁴³⁵ But this gesture of contraction or withdrawal is one that Pick very expressly derives from the theology of Simone Weil, whose spirit hovers over and indeed energizes the whole of Pick's project. Weil's dictum that "The vulnerability of precious things is beautiful because vulnerability is a mark of existence," which serves as a guiding motto for Pick, gives aesthetic impetus to an ethics of precarity and vulnerability, but we should note further that this aesthetics is predicated on a theological absence: "Love, compassion, and beauty are a response to an a mode of confrontation with the concrete conditions of life, which Weil equates with divine absence. The beauty of necessity is glimpsed once one conceives of creation as an act of benevolent retreat: God's *letting be* of the world, which abandons it to the blind laws of matter."⁴³⁶ Where once theology was the impetus and assurance of ethical or virtuous action in the world, now it is in a sense, theology's absence and the subsequent aestheticization of bare life (what Weil calls necessity or "gravity") that do the same work.

The logic is active in the other direction as well: to aestheticize the animal is just as often to theologize it. We see this most saliently in Donna Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto*, which sets out to imagine a specific ethical modality through which to encounter the needs and desires of companion dogs. Departing very decisively from the radical ethos and figurations of her Cold War-era "Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway turns instead to the exemplary figure of the dog as way to think through the ethics of companion species. Where the porosity of self, body, gender, species, and even the ontology of the elementally "organic" as figured through the feminist cyborg promised an entirely new ethical and political program for marginalized subjects, the dog—especially the dog impressed into

⁴³⁵ Pick, 6.

⁴³⁶ Pick, 4.

agility training—in a sense, like Pick’s creaturely-minded human, *contracts* tropologically. As Haraway writes in a disclaimer of sorts for her more recent manifesto, “I know that a US middle-aged white woman with a dog playing the sport of agility is no match for the automated warriors, terrorists, and their transgenic kin in the annals of philosophical inquiry of the ethnography of naturecultures. Besides, 1) self-figuration is not my task; 2) transgenics are not the enemy; and 3) contrary to lots of dangerous and unethical projection in the Western world that makes domestic canines into furry children, dogs are not about oneself. Indeed, that is the beauty of dogs. They are not a projection, nor the realization of an intention, nor the telos of anything.”⁴³⁷ The possibilities of a cyborg future, in short, have been realized much too violently on the simultaneous terrains of modern warfare and bourgeois domesticity; meanwhile, the companion dog promises a modality of ethical interrelation without the dangers of bodily porosity or psychological projection.⁴³⁸ But the ontological and epistemological distance Haraway wants to enforce between the human and the significant animal other, to preserve even in agility training’s intimate space of encounter a line of freedom, is itself transformed into and mediated by a certain kind of aesthetic expression. This is immediately evident in a number of Haraway’s chapters, for example: the titles of which are “Positive Bondage,” “Harsh Beauty,” and “Disciplined Spontaneity.” Haraway seems to traffic in these paradoxes, which aestheticize the disciplined canine body and in turn valorize that aestheticization. Moreover, the paradoxical formulations carry a

⁴³⁷ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 11.

⁴³⁸ This violence is ultimately a neurotic narcissism, for Haraway: “But even among the pet-keeping folk of contemporary consumer cultures, or maybe especially among these people, belief in ‘unconditional love’ is pernicious. If the idea that man makes himself by realizing his intentions in his tools, such as domestic animals (dogs) and computers (cyborgs), is evidence of a neurosis that I call humanist technophilic narcissism, then the superficially opposed idea that dogs restore human beings’ souls by their unconditional love might be the neurosis of caninophilic narcissism. Because I find the love of and between historically situated dogs and humans precious, dissenting from the discourse of unconditional love matters.” *Ibid.*, 33.

superadded aesthetic value of their own, verging on what Haraway all but identifies as a theology of canine asceticism.⁴³⁹ The animal is valuable only insofar as it is beautiful, and it is beautiful only insofar as it suffers. We are ultimately left to ask what underwrites the *significance* in Haraway's program of "significant otherness" if not a theology of *reinforced* otherness.

To be held apart as other, to have that partition between the ethical human subject and its ethical exemplar in the radical other affirmed and reinforced, and *yet* to have that other remain legible in its exemplarity, requires a theologization or aestheticization of the animal other and its precarity. This valorization of distance—which Pick, following Weil, names animal *saintliness*—is, of course, at once a sort of projection, reification, or fetishization, a re-investment of the other being with an auratic quality, and as such requires further examination, and not least because of the recent ethical turn to animals in critical discourse. More generally, too, the resurgence of post-secular expression in the present cultural milieu has been often, if not largely, premised on a certain return to the animal as the organizing figure of ethical inquiry: from Yann Martel's fable of faith and companion-species ethics in *Life of Pi* to Elizabeth Costello's implication of "fidelity" and animal ethics in J. M. Coetzee's eponymous essay-novel, the animal has reasserted itself as a privileged locus, even a necessary term, in the articulation of the spiritual, or more precisely, the spiritual as foundation of the ethical.

. What I have been trying to demonstrate in this dissertation, however, is that the subjective qualities that we ascribe to aesthetically impressive works are effected not by any

⁴³⁹ It is not insignificant that Haraway makes recourse to Catholic theology to help her explain the simultaneous semiotic presence and negative "absence" of animal relationality. If animal subjectivity is ultimately unknowable, then it can only be approached through a theology that embraces both the material (turning embodied animality into a sacrament) and potential of negative knowledge (granting a more-than-human ethical value to animal alterity). See Haraway, 15-16, 50.

fundamental distinction between human and animal ontologies but by a thorough attentiveness to the *style* of being, behaving, and moving that both human and animal share. Post-secular, quasi-spiritual values that are derived from and yet disavow the precarity of animal bodies thus merit further critique.

For Haraway, canine bodies are an exemplary reminder of our ethical obligations to other forms of life precisely because they—as individual creatures and as larger groups of beings both concrete and abstract—are able to remain vital or “spontaneous” while under conditions of constraint. As the anxieties of modernists, natural historians, and evolutionary theorists have taught us, however, such vitality is a precarious matter. The vitality of any given being cannot be taken for granted: sufficient attention must be paid not only to the discipline, adaptation, and labor required to sustain any kind of vitality (in Haraway’s case, whatever is required to set the specific quality of agility-trained dogs apart from untrained dogs) but also to those inevitable situations in which vitality *fails*. Insofar as there is little room for this possibility in Haraway’s ethics of significant otherness, precarity becomes a mere prop. What, here, is the “significance” of otherness beyond the capacity of the instrumentalized other to provide us pleasure?

It is precisely for this reason, therefore, that modern narratives of global precarity constitute the horizon for the problematics of this dissertation. Whether tales of worldwide ecological precarity (disaster movies, for example) or of more microcosmic tales of survival and cosmopolitan camaraderie (boy vs. tiger in *Life of Pi*, say), such narratives often hinge on a takeaway “moral” emphasizing whatever intrinsic humanistic value (faith, courage, empathy, grit) is necessary for overcoming adversity. These morals, in turn, are often energized and made vital through what is generally received as an analogously vital and

charming style. In film and animation especially—such style circulates as that which brings the subject matter and the material forms onscreen “to life.”

But it is on the simultaneous spontaneity and precarity of animal figures often featured in such texts that the vitality of style ultimately diverges. In terms of content, the use of animal figures allegorizes what a global narrative needs its style to accomplish—namely, a virtuosic, spontaneous, and instinctual self-organization. Hence in films such as *Life of Pi*, *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, or *Avatar*, what the featured animal characters contribute is a fantasy world immediately believable as self-sustaining, and what is required is an analogous style to make that fantasy world more immediately compelling. This usually involves what is acclaimed as landmark technological innovation after landmark technological innovation—whether an uncannily emotive chimpanzee portrayed by Andy Serkis in a motion-capture suit or an uncannily lifelike tiger wowing audiences on a 3D-animated boat.

Yet the seamless quality of such technological and stylistic virtuosity comes at a price: the elision of the labor and the bodies behind its production. In *Pi*, for instance, the “true” tale of human cannibalism at sea is demoted under an explicit preference for the manifest tale of charming boy-tiger companionship—even leading Barack Obama to describe Martel’s novel as “an elegant proof of God and the power of storytelling.”⁴⁴⁰ Meanwhile, as Ang Lee’s adaptation of the novel garnered accolade after accolade, its humanistic value confirmed on the world stage, Rhythm and Hues, the animation studio

⁴⁴⁰ Quoted in “Life of Pi author Martel hears from Obama,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 8, 2010, accessed July 18, 2014, <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/entertainment/books/life-of-pi-author-martel-hears-from-obama-90198067.html>.

behind the film, was forced to lay off 254 of its animators.⁴⁴¹ The spontaneity of style modeled after animal content is thus preserved and promoted at the expense of actual, living precarity. The vital moral of these narratives of the “human spirit” depends on nothing less than the relegation of biological precarity to the background. The vulnerability of bodies and the violence often inflicted upon them diegetically becomes, as in Kipling, for example, nothing more than a passing whim or stylistic accent. What matters is the autonomy of the narrative object, freed from precarious consideration and imbued with all the vitality of a sanctified beast.

Every so often, of course, brief moments of resistance flicker through, and we are reminded that, like the virtuosic style of modernists, the humanistic values so important to narratives of global precarity are only an effect, and that they cannot always elide the labor on which they depend. Like Moore’s slapstick animals, *P2*’s tiger bounces awkwardly around the miniscule lifeboat: its incongruity belies the visual “realism” for which the film is lauded while the very attention to morphological and kinematic detail in such shots—always astoundingly assiduous and unrelenting—underlines the *even higher degree* of skillful animation that both underpins and threatens to overtake the primary action onscreen. Global virtuosity cannot therefore blithely disavow global pedantry, its obverse twin. It is in the stylistic beats of pedantry that human intelligence and animal instinct attend to each other most steadfastly—and only then, finally, virtuosically.

⁴⁴¹ See David S. Cohen, “Rhythm & Hues bankruptcy reveals vfx biz crisis,” *Variety* 12 Feb 2013, <http://variety.com/2013/film/news/rhythm-hues-bankruptcy-reveals-vfx-biz-crisis-1118066108/>.

ARCHIVES

Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* manuscripts are housed at the British Library in London. They are cited by MS page, eg. BL Add MS 45540: 17.

The Marianne Moore Papers are housed at the Rosenbach Museum & Library in Philadelphia. They are cited by date where applicable, e.g. 8 April 1922, RML. I am grateful for the help of Elizabeth E. Fuller, in particular, whose patience, guidance, and intuition were invaluable to a novice research finding his way through Moore's copious archive.

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