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Letters for a Newfoundland Dog and Other Encounters with Nonhuman Animals;
Bird's Work

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Creative Writing

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Abstract

This project encompasses a collection of lyric essays and a collection of poetry engaging with the topic of zoopoetics, which as a field is interested in the way that attentiveness to the *poiesis* of nonhuman animals can shape human creative forms. The lyric essays, which form my critical component, are each centered on what Donna Haraway would refer to as a ‘companion species,’ a term that extends beyond companion animals such as pets to include any animals we share our lives with. Looking at frogs, dogs, whales, cats, bats, and parrots, I explore my personal history with specific animals of these species, and also analyze their representation in literature, art, and popular culture. Within a zoopoetic framework, the essays engage with scholarship around anthropomorphism, animals and gender, animal captivity, and animal history. The poetry collection, which forms my creative component, explores various ways of writing nonhuman animals. Writing with curiosity and attentiveness towards non-human animals, I aim for my poems to embody the shared animal-human *poiesis* at the heart of zoopoetics.

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Several of these poems have been previously published in literary journals. “Flax” and “The Dog-walker” have appeared in Issue 37 of *From Glasgow to Saturn*. A version of “Houseplants” appeared in Issue 13 of *Lighthouse*. “Grok” was published in Mairi Murphy’s wonderful collection, *Glasgow Women Poets*, on which I had the pleasure of acting as an assistant editor. Lastly, “Bass Rock” and “Metamorphosis” were published in Volume 4 Number 2 of *Plumwood Mountain*, an issue themed around the question, “What are the Animals Saying?”

Letters for a Newfoundland Dog and Other Encounters with Nonhuman Animals

A Note on Language

Throughout these essays, I have sometimes made a conscious choice to use the singular “they” to refer to animals of unknown gender, rather than the objectifying “it.” I also frequently use the term “animal” in the sense of its popular usage, to refer to nonhuman animals. For the record, I acknowledge the accuracy of the term “nonhuman animals,” and appreciate its reminder that humans are animals as well. Likewise, I believe there is quite a lot at stake when we choose between “it” and “they” in referring to a nonhuman animal. Not only does the use of “it” reflect a history of human–animal relationships characterized by a person–object hierarchy of dominion and use, but it also presents a semantic barrier to dissolving this historical trend which influences our interactions with actual nonhuman animals. A cow cannot understand and be offended when we call her “it,” but if we think of her as an object and treat her accordingly, she will live the consequences. If I use the word “it” in these essays, or use the term “animals” to mean nonhuman animals, I do so partly for ease of communication: most people who use or read the term “animal” in the popular use of the word know that humans are in fact animals. But my use of the term is also determined by context. When it was useful to remind the reader—and myself—of the constructedness of the term “animal,” or to challenge it, I have used “nonhuman animal.” Likewise, when I wanted to refuse the objectification of any of my companion species or their members, I have used they/she/he rather than “it.”

Though it makes little sense to draw a line between a single species (human) and every other species of animal that has ever lived, the power of the term “animal” in its popular meaning is unquestionable. The term “nonhuman animal” does ease some power away from human–animal divide, but it does little to rectify the reduction of all nonhuman species to a single category. I have had a harder time challenging this aspect of the term “animal” through word choice and phrasing, but I hope that the content and structures of these essays—for example, by looking at individual species, and individuals within species, and relations between these—reveals some of the diversity with which humans have viewed, treated, and portrayed other species, as well as the complexities of interspecies relationships, which cannot be reduced to simply human–animal relationships, and of course include animal–animal relationships.

These are not perfect linguistic and structural systems, but I hope they acknowledge the power language has in our relationships with nonhuman animals.

It is a theme running through these essays that our unique bodies and languages, as species and as individuals, give shape to our phenomenological perceptions of the world and of each other. Harriet Ritvo rightly notes in her essay “On the Animal Turn” that the scholarly assertion that humans are animals (or that they are not) “reveals persistent semantic and cultural tension” (119), and that,

...explicit claims of unity (humans are animals) paradoxically work to reinforce the human–animal boundary they are intended to dissolve. That is to say, such claims incorporate a grudging acknowledgement that this boundary is widely recognized and powerfully influential. Why else would it be continually necessary to deny its validity or remind ourselves of its arbitrariness? (119)

I think the acknowledgement, within animal studies, of this boundary’s power is far from “grudging.” The term “nonhuman animal,” for example, doesn’t deny the power of the term “animal;” it acknowledges the grasp it has on our relationships with real animals, and attempts in a small way to loosen the hold. We deny the term “animal” not only because it inaccurate—even arbitrary in a semantic sense—but because it is reductive and destructive. As Cary Wolfe notes, animal studies is a field burdened with questions of ethics, vulnerability, and action, which “forces us to parse the various components of an actor–network or assemblage in a rather different way, recognizing that some members of a network and not others are bound by a shared finitude as fellow creatures who live and die, who care about what happens to them and to those they hold dear” (Wolfe 4). Wolfe gives the example:

...it is one thing to describe the network of relations between species, ecosystems, political structures, legal strictures, histories of extirpations (both human and animal) and technologies that converge, for example, in the overpopulation of the White-Tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) in much of North America. It is another thing to decide whether or not it is permissible to kill them when we know more than ever about the

complexities and texture of their phenomenological lives and their capacity to experience suffering (both physical and psychological) in ways not that distant from our own. And more pointed still: why would we countenance such a solution to the problem and not recommend it as a way to deal with the overpopulation of our own species, whose effects on the planet are exponentially more destructive?” (4)

Because of humanity’s violent history with nonhuman animals, it is impossible for us to write about them without engaging with their suffering, and in the following essays I have grappled with many ethical questions, both explicitly and implicitly. Even my personal reflections on relationships I have had with individual animals are not free of such issues. But I hope that such reflections also illuminate the potential for growth, meaning, and joy in companion species relationships. The relationships I have had with the frogs, dogs, bats, cats, and parrots in these essays have been some of the most significant and rewarding in my life, and reflecting on them has been both troubling and enlightening. As a writer, I have learned that there is no right way to write about nonhuman animals. The rules I had followed in the past—objectifying is bad, anthropomorphism worse, and whatever you do don’t write from the perspective of an animal—proved limiting not only to my craft, but also to my empathy, the most valuable tool I have to work with. It is true that I have been quite harsh on some of the works I examine here for breaking the same rules I do in my poetry, but I think the job of any reader invested in how we write nonhuman animals is to crack open texts like nuts in search of their zoopoetic potential. I invite you to do so here, and hope that you find some food for thought.

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Amphibious Natures

Though I have scalped open fish, worms, and the disembodied organs of various large mammals, I have never had the misfortune of dissecting a frog. Yet this amphibian—legs pinned, belly split, organs on display—brings to mind a standard image of vivisection, recalling high school biology classes, and harking back to those classic experiments of the late 18th and early 19th century: Luigi Galvani stimulating muscles with electrical currents to make the legs of a dead frog dance (Sleigh 102); Friedrich Goltz bringing a brainless frog to boil in a pot in an attempt to locate the human soul (110).

James White describes how in Victorian “laboratories of the new reflex physiology, frogs became indistinguishable from machines” (61), their often fragmented bodies “transmuted...into working parts of the experimental apparatus” (65). But except for their way of springing out of my grasp like a jack-in-the-box, I see nothing about the frog that could betray its history as a small and perfect electrical mechanism. Perhaps, if my first encounter with them had been one of dissection and experimentation, this would be the case. Instead, at an age before memory, I was submerged into an amphibious world where chirping sounds in the bush came not from birds, but batrachians, where tadpoles wriggled in fresh puddles of storm water as if born of lightning, and where the cool touch of tiny padded feet in the palm of my hand was a familiar sensation.

*

In one of the Grimm Brothers’ most well-known and adapted fairy tales, “The Frog Prince,” a beautiful princess sits by a well in the woods by her castle. She throws a golden ball, her most precious possession, up and down in the air. When it falls and rolls into the water, she is distraught until a repulsive but sweet-talking frog appears, offering to retrieve it for her. The frog is described as “stretching its thick ugly head out of the water,” and the princess refers to him dismissively as “old waddler” (Grimm 37). Though she offers him clothes, jewels, and her golden crown in exchange for his services, he will accept only her intimate companionship, which involves loving him, playing with him, and sharing her food, drink, and bed with him. Thinking that he can’t “do anything but sit in the water and croak with the other

frogs” and can’t “possibly be anyone’s companion,” she agrees to his terms, and runs off back to her castle without a second thought when he delivers her ball, “croak” as he might after her (38). He must “betake himself to his well again,” perhaps for his own amphibious reasons, and seems incapable of pursuing her over land (38). But he nonetheless manages to follow her to the castle the next day, to interrupt the royal family at their dinner. The princess explains her agreement to her father, adding that she didn’t think the “horrid frog...could leave the water” and follow her (39). Despite her extreme disgust, the king forces his daughter to make good on her promises, and she reluctantly lets the frog share her meal and follow her to bed. She is “afraid of the cold frog” and carries him upstairs “with her finger and thumb” (39), where she puts him in a corner. But when he tries to climb into her bed, she flings him in a rage against the wall, yelling “Now will you be quiet, you horrid frog!” (40). At this moment, the frog turns into a beautiful prince, and the princess disappears from the narrative entirely. Bizarrely, the story derails into preoccupation with the Frog Prince’s faithful servant Henry (the story’s alternate title is, in fact, “Iron Henry”), who had placed metal bands around his heart to keep it from breaking at his master’s froggy fate.

Familiarity with this story may lead one to judge the princess’ behaviour as spoiled and ungrateful: she breaks her promise to the frog and treats him with nothing but repulsion until he turns into a prince. Then, allegedly, she reaps the rewards of “a carriage drawn by eight white horses, with white plumes on their heads, and with golden harnesses” (40), and of leaving her home for the prince’s kingdom. But how is she to know that this precocious frog is a human in disguise, and not simply a slimy and presumptuous nuisance? And how are we to know that a prince is what she wanted? It is worth noting that we never get to see her response to the frog’s transformation, or the events thereafter. We are left to assume that she is delighted to find a strange man in her bedchamber in the middle of the night, and that when her father’s consent is sought for the marriage, hers has already been granted. If one of the story’s many morals is not to judge a book by its cover, or a frog by its appearance, then we might be careful applying quick judgment to the princess. Ask yourself how you would feel if, when you sat down to dinner tonight, a frog leapt onto your plate and then sloshed around in your water glass? Imagine him now, bulging eyes, soft sticky belly, bones protruding everywhere, hard where soft should be, soft where hard should be. He is going to share your pillow, tangle in your hair, touch your cheek with his cold clinging toes. Might you not scream

and throw him against the wall as well? For the princess, the frog is just a frog, until he isn't. Only the reader possesses a double vision, seeing frog and human simultaneously.

Joseph Campbell uses "The Frog Prince" as an example of his 'monomyth,' the story of a hero's journey, seen again and again in most world mythologies. For him, the golden ball represents the princess's soul, the well represents the abyss or underworld, and the frog represents the guardian of the threshold (Campbell 124). Fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes would no doubt dismiss such a Jungian interpretation of the tale; he believes such readings "want to stabilize its meaning...and impose categories that are so nebulous and misleading that the tale becomes paradigmatic for their theories and detached from its historical and cultural context" (117). For Zipes, the tale is a meme that informs us about mating behavior, which in its time "advocated for the restoration of the patriarchal word and world order to which young women were to subscribe" (112). While I want to keep in mind Zipes reading of the tale, which acknowledges its gendered power structures, Campbell's reading gets closer to the question I am interested in asking. While Zipes wants to "grasp why this tale has such a powerful grip on our minds" (117), and asks how it functions to inform us about mating behaviour (111), I want to ask why the frog specifically is the animal of choice for this tale.

So what if we read this story, not as a fable of female virginity, or a servant's loyalty, but as a meeting of animal and human, as a story of anthropocentric assumptions and animal-human metamorphosis?

As an amphibian, the frog is the perfect species for the threshold figure of liminality and transformation that Campbell suggests. Amphibians live on both land and water; they are creatures of two elements rather than one, with the ability to pass back and forth between them. This ability is linked with metamorphosis: they typically begin life as water-dwelling tadpoles with gills, and grow into land-dwelling creatures with lungs. Despite these lungs, most species of frog and toad also absorb oxygen through their skin, which "must be kept moist" for this purpose (Sleigh 21), and thus they maintain an aquatic aura around them always. The word 'amphibian' has roots in the greek "amphi," meaning "both, of both kinds, on both sides" ("amphibian"). Thus, in addition to referring to animals within the taxonomic class Amphibia, the word has the alternate, though archaic, meaning of "having two modes of existence" or

being “of doubtful nature” due to this duality (“amphibian”).

Batrachians, meaning frogs and toads, are more associated with metamorphoses than other amphibians, given their historical associations with alchemy. Toads in particular¹ were used physically in the practice of alchemy, and represented its transformative powers symbolically, but in a negative way. The toad was connected with “putrefaction, sin (especially female) and blackness...indicat[ing] the fallen state of matter that must be perfected or saved by the alchemist” (Sleigh 36). Similarly, Sleigh suggests batrachians might also be abhorred for the “unpredictable nature” of their movements (56). That their repulsive bodies can go from ‘there’ to ‘here’ in the blink of an eye is certainly fearful, as our princess well knows when the frog follows her back to the castle. More positively, however, the batrachian ability to move between elements might also be associated with religious resurrection (33–34).

Thus the Frog Prince is an amphibian in every sense of the word, literally and metaphorically, dwelling on land and in water, existing as both animal and human, and urging always towards a higher state of being. But his transformative and ‘doubtful nature’ seems evident only to the reader. His ability to speak, let alone his taste for fine dining, does not seem to strike the princess or her father as unusual. This is a fairy tale, after all (though the horses at the end of the story seem to be simply horses). Moreover, the princess seems unaware of the amphibious nature of frogs in general, believing that the frog is restricted to the water in his well. She is almost as ignorant of his frog nature as she is of his hidden humanity. Perhaps, if she had been educated in the nature of batrachians, she would not be so surprised to find one in her bed.

*

Beneath the back porch light, in a decorative watering can, lived Big Lady. A green tree frog so large she could no longer hunt for herself, she was about the size of a ripe mango, vibrant green with a cream-colored belly. Her whole body, especially the undersides of her plump legs, and her round toe-pads, had a red flush of blood beneath translucent skin. In order

¹ Though “biologists do not recognize any biological distinction between frogs and toads” (Sleigh 13),

to hold her, my parents said, I needed to have wet hands, or the acids on my skin would burn away the delicate membrane of moisture that protected her. I couldn't hold her without feeling that pain in my own body, as though someone was pressing a finger into my open eye.

My sister and I were tasked with scouring the overgrown yard for grasshoppers, looking for the biggest ones, longer than our childish index fingers, with serrated legs sharp enough to puncture skin. We would find them on the porch rails, or camouflaged on large leaves. The key was to move fast, clasp their back legs together between thumb and forefinger, and the creature, almost immobilized, would still be running its front legs wildly through empty space. Even then, you could feel its surprising strength, its struggle, and if you loosened your grip for a single moment it would be out of your hand, having jumped halfway down the porch, landing with a familiar insect “pttt” against the wooden planks. But if you could manage to keep a hold of it, you would carry the insect to the watering can and hold it in front of Big Lady's wide, still mouth until some instinct seemed to snap her like a rubber band, and the grasshopper was in her mouth, legs protruding alongside her head like two antennae. Sometimes you could feel the pressure where her surprisingly strong but gummy jaw had clamped against your fingers.

*

Beatrix Potter's Mr. Jeremy Fisher is one of literature's most famous amphibians, second only to Mr. Toad from *Wind in the Willows*. Disregarding his cultural heritage of putrefaction, witchery, and seduction, Mr. Jeremy presents as an English gentleman living a leisurely life in the Lake District countryside. In Potter's story, “The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher,” Mr. Jeremy decides to go fishing for minnows, and takes his little lily pad boat onto the lake. While he waits, he is bothered by increasingly threatening creatures: a water-beetle tweaks his toe while he is eating lunch, a rat swims through the rushes nearby, and he accidentally hooks a stickleback fish rather than a minnow, and pricks his fingers on its spines. A “shoal of other little fishes” laugh at him for this (Potter 126). But the story reaches its climax when “a *much* worse thing...a really *frightful* thing” happens: an “enormous trout” rises from the lake and swallows Mr. Jeremy whole (127). He only survives because the trout

dislikes the taste of the macintosh he is wearing, though it swallows his galoshes. He abandons his fishing gear and flees back to his house with his “macintosh all in tatters” (128) greatly shaken, but recovers soon enough to invite his friends Sir Isaac Newton, a newt, and Mr. Alderman Ptolemy Tortoise (who brings his own salad) to dinner, where they eat “roasted grasshopper with ladybird-sauce” (130).

Like Mr. Toad and the Frog Prince, Mr. Jeremy Fisher is amphibious in more ways than one, being not only literally an amphibian, but also of a dual frog–human nature. But whereas this is a matter of metaphor and myth in “The Frog Prince,” Potter is, as Peter Hollindale notes, characteristically interested in a “conversation” between naturalism and social commentary (qtd. in Flynn 431). We waver between seeing Mr. Jeremy as a frog, and as an upper class human. The qualities are inseparable, yet distinct, so that Mr. Jeremy seems singular and divided at the same time. He must learn to navigate the multiple elements he lives in and moves through—land and water, civilization and wilderness—while also navigating his own amphibious nature. We would expect a frog to be at home in the water, but this is not the case with Mr. Jeremy. His human demeanour and his clothing especially seem to separate him from the other lake animals, so much so that the shoal of little fish laugh at his incompetence. Perhaps, from a conservation standpoint, Potter is making a comment on how human influence disrupts the natural world. But she is also commenting on how human men of the same class interact with nature through activities like hunting and fishing. Potter is not overly critical of Mr. Jeremy’s human aspects. As Kutzer notes, “her amusement at the foibles of the upper class outweighs her annoyance at their uselessness,” in this tale at least (121). Nor does Potter particularly celebrate Mr. Jeremy’s froggy nature. After all, his human qualities save him: it is the unnatural taste of his macintosh that makes the trout spit him out.

But as a naturalist and conservationist, Potter delighted in creating accurate illustrations of landscape and wildlife in her books (Flynn 431), and “The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher” is no exception, from its botanically correct water plants to the body of Jeremy himself. Mr. Jeremy is at his most frog-like after being spit up by the trout, when his ‘goloshes’ have been removed. In Potter’s illustration, we see him breaching the surface of the lake, only the front of his face and the tips of his webbed fingers visible above the water. Below the water, his tattered macintosh is almost entirely obscured, but we do see, magnified by the distorting

water, his enormous bare webbed feet, until this point hidden in a pair of dainty pointed shoes. This is a frog we can all recognize. It is the one we have seen in a pond or lake, or in a nature documentary. The next illustration shows Mr. Jeremy crawling out of the lake on all fours, and the next in mid-leap over a clump of greenery on his way home, both very frog-like postures. It is as if his brush with nature, his natural habitat, has temporarily stripped him of his human civility.

It is when Potter's characters are behaving at their most human, when the tension between wildness and civility is strained to breaking—such as in Mr. Jeremy's confrontation with the pike—that the contrast between humanity and animality is most clear. We see their specific frog-ness, or kitten-ness, or fox-ness. But we see too the animal-ness in humanity. However, it is perilous to remain between forms for too long, especially if you are a frog: Sleigh says that the actual metamorphosis from tadpole to frog takes as little as 24 hours, in order to “prevent the dangerous situation of the tadpole–frog being stranded in between forms, only half-adapted to its environment and helpless to the forces of natural selection” (27). Perhaps this is true if you are a frog–human as well. After Mr. Jeremy's own brush with ‘the forces of natural selection,’ the story resolves with him settling happily into his more human role. But this formula need not apply to the in-betweenness of Potter's literary form. It would be a disservice to reduce Potter's work to natural history on the one hand, or fable on the other, when she is so skilled at bringing them together and using an amphibious form to examine and reshape the animal–human divide.

*

I believe Big Lady was a *Litoria caerulea*, or Australian green tree frog, which Sleigh describes as “not a tiny, delicate species like so many tree frogs but rather a dumpy and large one” (Sleigh 19). Indeed, they are commonly referred to as ‘dumpy tree frogs,’ and nobody who has seen one could object to this description. Furthermore, they are also called ‘dunny frogs,’ after their penchant for living in toilets, which are ideal cool, damp environments for them. Big Lady did not appear to us in a toilet, but on the seat of a wooden rocking chair on our back porch. Conspicuous even then for her size, my mother nonetheless began doting on her immediately, feeding her insects and creating her watering-can home. The can was filled

partially with water, and a rock was placed inside for her to sit upon. Here, she was sheltered from the sun, and kept cool by the water. At night, the porch light was left on to attract insects for her to eat, if she was able. Other frogs took advantage of this arrangement, latching on to the wall alongside chirping geckoes before leaping back into the dark. But none stayed for long, and none dared share Big Lady's can, except for a small brown frog we named "Boomerang" after his habit of disappearing for days or weeks at a time, but always returning to the porch eventually.

This could almost be seen as a first step towards domestication, but what could these frogs give us in return for a slightly advantageous environment? (I might add that this environment also came with disadvantages; namely, two cats who, though they showed a marked preference for mammals such as rats, were not disinclined to turn claw to batrachians for their own amusement.) Not safety; not food or drink. Curiosity about and familiarity with other ways of being. The touch-memories of encounters that jump the species barrier. What value is there in these things?

After leaving her in the care of a pet-sitter—who mistakenly thought that as a wild creature she would be more competent than our dependent cats and dogs, and was perhaps repulsed by the task of caring for her—Big Lady was found in some underbrush at the bottom of our driveway, starving and dehydrated. My mother took her to the nearby Wildlife Park, hoping they could save her life, but though Big Lady was given expert medical care, which included a tiny intravenous apparatus to rehydrate her, she didn't survive.

*

Mr. Toad is no doubt the most memorable character from Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. Like his literary companions Mr. Jeremy and the Frog Prince, Toad is amphibious in more ways than one, but this is nowhere more apparent than in his changeable personality. He is indeed "of doubtful nature" ("amphibian"), so much so that he seems to transform into a new toad every month. And just as the tadpole and the toad it becomes are the same creature despite their radically different forms, Toad's identity changes with each passing fad, but his unreliability remains the same. His amusing but destructive pursuit of

current fads, from boating to caravans to motorcars, drives the plot of the book. Toad's enthusiasm for motorcars leads him to endanger himself and others, and neglect the duties that go along with his class, until his friends Rat, Mole, and Badger come to his aid. When they place him under house arrest at his residence, Toad Hall, he escapes, steals a car, and is sent to prison. Dressed as a washerwoman, he escapes from prison, and is generally toady to those who try to aid him on his return home; he ultimately flags down a car—the very one he previously stole—and, overcome once again by his motorcar mania, ends up driving it into a horse-pond. In the meantime, Toad Hall has been overtaken by weasels and stoats from the Wild Wood, an unsavoury group that must be ousted by Rat, Mole, Badger, and the newly returned, newly repentant, Mr. Toad. The book ends with all happy and everything resolved, but Toad's impulsivity perhaps still looms as a future threat. How can we know if this latest change of character is truly final? Though real batrachians only undergo one dramatic metamorphosis in their lifetime, they are nonetheless associated with transformation even in their adult form. Similarly, though Mr. Toad appears to have matured, we cannot forget his past changeability.

Grahame's book is notoriously less accurate in terms of natural history than Potter's work (Flynn 431). Grahame is interested in conservation and landscape—Toad's destructive obsession with motorcars reads as a critique of that technology's negative impact on the Edwardian countryside—but seems less concerned about accurately depicting animal behaviour. *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* and *The Wind in the Willows* might find more common ground in their criticism of the upper classes. Just as Potter is humorously critiquing the “nonindustrious” Mr. Jeremy (Kutzer 121), Grahame has created in Mr. Toad an upper class gentleman whose obsession with leisure activities wreaks havoc on the social structure around him, until members of the lower class—weasels and stoats—are literally living in an aristocratic estate. Both books are, in their own way, about the restoration of social order, and also how class can relate to nature in inauthentic and often destructive ways.

But my question is, why batrachians? Why are frogs and toads so suited to playing the role of leisurely but socially disruptive gentlemen? Is there simply something particularly genteel about their bodies: the cravat-like bulge of their throats; their aloof postures; their pompous ‘croak’? Sleigh remarks upon the way that batrachians are “curiously human in form”

(7), but though this no doubt provides fodder for illustrations, it doesn't explain why they have been associated with a certain type of human. Perhaps it has something to do with the idea that batrachians are poisonous. "Toads have been almost universally considered to be venomous," Sleigh says, and "the very word 'toady,' a sycophant, refers to this property" (57). Mr. Toad is certainly venomous, in an abstract way, to the society in which he lives. And though not destructive like Toad, Mr. Jeremy does act as a sort of foreign harmful substance in the body of nature: sensing something off, the trout regurgitates him as it would other poisonous food. In addition to being metaphorically venomous, Mr. Jeremy and Mr. Toady are "toady" in other ways. The word "toady," which means "to flatter, or attend to with servility from interested motives," comes already from the animal ("toady"). At first thought, neither character seems servile in any way: they are after all both of the upper class. But Mr. Jeremy is catching minnows in order to impress his high-status friends at dinner, and Mr. Toad is toady as can be when it comes to pursuing his obsessions. For example, he feigns illness to escape from house arrest under Rat's nose, and he persuades the owners of the car he stole to let him behind the wheel again, dressed all the time in a duplicitous washerwoman costume. The book also emphasizes the fact that Toad is meant to serve a role in his community.

Regardless of whether toads or the word "toady" came first, the animal or the personality we ascribe to them, stories like *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* and *Wind in the Willows* are set in popular imagination and serve to create, reaffirm, and uproot our anthropomorphized assumptions about batrachians.

*

When I was a child living in Australia's Northern Territory in the 1990s, the dog-breeding couple we had adopted our Newfoundland from had dug ditches and erected a low metal fence around their entire property. Cane toads, first introduced to Queensland in 1935 to control beetles in the cane sugar crops, had, by crawling on foot and riding in vehicles, reached Darwin on almost the other side of the country. They are poisonous to predators who eat them, including the water birds and goannas that my mother loved so much, and the breeders hoped to prevent their dogs from catching one and sickening or dying. The fence had to sink at least six inches into the ground, lest the toads crawl beneath it through the wet

season's mud. They were unstoppable. We would see them everywhere, but they were perhaps most noticeable on the roads, where their bodies accumulated, crushed beneath the wheels of speeding vehicles. Years before, in Queensland, my father would leave his office near the cane fields after dark to find the parking lot covered with toads, who were attracted to the asphalt's lingering heat. The language surrounding them was one of invasion, disgust, plague, and unnaturalness. And yet, "all organisms once had to colonize the area in which they now live" (Sleigh 91). What is unnatural about a species adapting successfully to its new environment?

Sleigh outlines how the 'invasive species,' *Bufo marinus*, has become a lens through which to discuss "issues of nation, ethnicity and identity" in Australia since their introduction (89). The "xenophobic connotations" with which cane toads are discussed parallel similar conversations about human immigrants. "This is an instance of an immigrant population" of humans, Sleigh says, "getting extremely upset about another immigrant invader" (92), this time an animal.

*

Frogs have long been experimented upon with the goal of learning about not frogs, but humans. From the human muscular and reproductive systems, through human evolutionary origins, to the body-soul connection (Sleigh 99–100), our scientific explorations have had batrachian origins. Most people are familiar with Friedrich Goltz's boiling frog experiments, in which he wished to explore the nature and location of the soul. After removing a frog's brain, Goltz would submerge it in water gradually heated to boiling point to see if the frog would reflexively jump out (it wouldn't) (110). These boiling frogs seem to have had their brainlessness forgotten by history, and the experiment has now become a common idiom for someone who doesn't know they are in a bad situation until it's too late. The idiom is frequently adopted in debates about climate change since it was used in Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), though perhaps our being brainless about global warming is entirely the point.

Shortly after Goltz reported on his now famous boiling frog experiments, T. H. Huxley presented a lecture called 'Has a Frog a Soul?' He argued that it didn't. Sleigh notes that at

that point questions of the soul had “dropped off the agenda of serious physiological research” (108), and that his lecture was really advocating anti-theism, and also the biologist’s right to experiment on living animals (109). But the very fact that the question of frog-souls was being debated seriously in scientific circles is something that would be unthinkable today. For us today, riding out the wave of 20th century behaviourism, it seems odd to think that the boundary between frog and human could be porous enough to admit such comparisons. But for scientists in the 18th and 19th centuries, universalizing from the frog to other living matter was not a problem. In fact, it was in part politically motivated. The “politically progressive” anti-vitalists, such as Du Bois-Reymond and Helmholtz, wanted their science to generalize across living and non-living matter. The politically conservative vitalists believed, on the other hand, that there was something unique about life (106–107). Yet, for anti-vitalist researchers, such universalizing also meant that, “the frogness of their frogs has been almost completely lost. The anuran has been reduced to a mere instrument” (107).

*

As a child I leafed through book after book on Australian wildlife, and watched nature documentaries showing the mating dances of birds of paradise, and joeys crawling out of their mother’s pouches. Most fascinating to me, however, was a certain species of frog that burrowed deep into the muddy earth at the approach of the dry season, and stayed there until the wet season returned. What life did it live above ground? (Mate, and quickly). We saw only the season’s changing, the frog’s transitional moment from liveliness to hibernation. As moisture was sucked from the soil by the sun and wind of the approaching dry season, the frog slopped and burrowed deep into the drying mud, racing to keep up with coolness and damp. Finding stability in the dark earth, it slept half the year away, dreaming of rain, until the monsoons flooded the cracked mud fields with water. Slowly the dust softened into a slime slick enough for amphibian skin to slide through, and the frog emerged like a Gollum into the air, a somnambulist into wakefulness.

It was likely *Litoria platycephala*, the Australian water-holding frog. These batrachians lie dormant underground during long periods of dry weather, subsisting on a bladder full of

water inside a protective cocoon of dead skin. In times of drought, they can survive like this for up to five years. Sleigh implies that by associating frogs with water, we forget that they live on sometimes very dry land as well (15). The water-holding frog does so masterfully.

Watching these documentaries, reading these books, I felt as though such frogs and other creatures were living in my own backyard, and indeed some of them were. Blue-tongued lizards were several times the unfortunate prey of our Newfoundland dog. There was something about that unnatural color hidden away in their brown-black bodies that made them seem rare, their deaths an event to be mourned. Goannas too slithered up to our back porch, lifting their yellow necks in anticipation as my mother tossed eggs to the ground for them. But those *Litoria platycephala* were hidden from me, waiting in the ground like treasure to be discovered. They were there. They were not there. They were real. They were things of myth.

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Letters for a Newfoundland Dog

I let you smell me: the milky tea on my breath, the gloss on my lips, the lotions on my skin. The oil at the roots of my hair, my sweat, all the things my senses cannot guess. Your own dusty, sour scent is the background for my curious looking: at your black nose wet around the nostrils, but flaking grey on its weathered top; at your black-haired muzzle gone white, shimmering with condensation where it splits above your spotted tongue. Settling on your brown eyes, I bend down to you, touching the tip of my nose to yours. Our eyes shift back and forth, back and forth, as we read in each other which way the situation will turn.

*

As a member of a working breed, the body of a Newfoundland dog is a declaration of human intent. With webbed paws, thick waterproof coat, broad chest, and strong jaws, it is ideal for hauling fishing nets in rough winter seas or, more nobly, for grasping the arms of drowning humans and guiding them to safety. But Newfoundlands are also valued for their temperaments. The gentle giant, the nursery dog, the fisherman's loyal labourer, the drowning man's saviour: historically, they have played all these roles, and something of these past performances lingers around living individuals still. Since at least the late 18th century, Newfoundlands have been the heroes of water rescue stories: in 1789, a young man named William Phillips almost drowned off Portsmouth, but was rescued by a Newfoundland, named Friend, who was later memorialized with a stone statue and a tombstone which noted that he was, "Eminently qualified/ By acuteness of sight, quickness of eye,/ Strength of body, and peculiar sagacity/ For every duty of his species" (Bondeson 16). In 1799, the only survivor of a shipwreck off Yarmouth was a Newfoundland, who loyally waited on the beach for days to retrieve material from the wreck; the politician Lord Grenville adopted the dog, Tippo, and later built a memorial monument for him which narrated, in the first person, Tippo's trial and joy in his "new-found master's generous love" (19). While Friend's body was praised as a tool of his species, Tippo's personality similarly justified his value. The Newfoundland's body and temperament both serve humans in turn, moulded by centuries of what James Serpell calls "anthropomorphic selection," where animals are bred in a way that favours, "physical and behavioural traits which facilitate the attribution of human mental states to nonhumans"

(Serpell 123). Pets, he argues, serve to provide social support to their owners, who reap both physical and psychological health benefits, and the more a pet looks or behaves like a human, the more beneficial is their presence (128-129). Even sleeping on an oversized doggy bed in a suburban household today, the Newfoundland is serving humans in some way, but clearly human–dog relationships were similar in the 18th century. Were Friend and Tippo moved to action by (human) qualities such as courage and loyalty, or by finely tuned instinct? The truth probably lies somewhere in between.

But Newfoundlands are not just dogs, nor are greyhounds, nor spaniels: breed culture plays a significant part in how we perceive, utilize, and relate to various dogs. Friend and Tippo were not Newfoundlands as we know them today: their bodies were smaller, their ears perkier, their coats shorter and rougher. Breed standards were far from fixed, but in such rescue stories we can see the beginnings of what the Newfoundland would become. Breed is part body, and part narrative, both writing and rewriting the other, and holding the pen is both hand and paw.

*

And yet your body fits the template of your breed as well as mine does the Vitruvian Man. We wear these ideals like auras over the smelly, bright, loud, salty bodies we are. Far from being a tireless water-loving athlete, you are afraid of even the kiddie-pool in which we bathe you during the summer months, and those strong jaws of yours have been used for nothing more strenuous than playing tug-o'-war with your chew toys. Your beautiful black coat was often matted and filthy from your copious drool and curious backyard wanderings, until a skin condition required us to shave it off entirely, haphazardly, from the top of your head to the tips of your paws to (almost) the tip of your tail, where a small lion's tuft remains. You are left bald, blotched red, bleeding in places your claws can reach to scratch. You also suffer from debilitating hip dysplasia, that dark body-memory of selective breeding. Similarly, my body is written with genetic traces of breast cancer. We live our histories, looking out at the world through our ancestors' eyes.

*

When Lord Byron was an undergraduate student at Cambridge, he flouted the university's regulations prohibiting dogs by keeping a tame bear in his rooms instead (Bondeson 27). In my experience—having once had a park ranger mistake my family's dog for a bear at a campsite—he could have as easily gotten away with keeping a Newfoundland instead. Byron did indeed come to own two Newfoundlands, Boatswain and Thunder. Boatswain is almost as famous as his master, at least amongst dogs. He was no gentle giant of the nursery, nor was he quite as noble and selfless as Friend or Tippo. He had, like his master, a reputation for bravado and brawn, which Byron helped cultivate. On the lake at his family estate, a tenant farmer recounted watching Byron, “get into the boat with his two noble Newfoundland dogs, row into the middle of the lake, and tumble into the water, having the two dogs seize him by the coat and drag him away to land” (27). Byron also had the dogs bait his pet bear, with Boatswain being by far the fiercer dog (27). For someone so preoccupied with his own reputation, it is unsurprising that Byron's dogs became an extension of his persona, not only through word of mouth, but also through reinforcement of desired (for Byron) aggressive behaviour and through re-enactments of dramatic rescue narratives associated with the breed.

But it is quite possible that Boatswain was not a purebred Newfoundland, despite Byron's mythologizing. According to the poet, Boatswain was born in Newfoundland in 1803 (30), but the most famous likeness of him, painted by Clifton Tomson in 1808, throws his breed into question. The painting—which is of questionable quality regardless of the depicted breed—shows a black and white dog with pointed ears and a short rough coat looking intently off into the distance, with the base of a monument behind him, and farther off some trees and a lake. The dog's breed is not instantly recognizable (which is somewhat the point of breeds), but looks more like a Border Collie than a Newfoundland. There is little to indicate the dog's size, but he lacks the proportions of a Newfoundland, having small feet in relation to body size, and an erect posture but without stockiness. The coat is thin and rough, rather than long and soft, and its pattern is regular, with a black saddle and white underbelly, rather than the irregular patches characteristic of a Landseer Newfoundland. If this is indeed an accurate portrait, it might be safe to say that Boatswain was *not* a Newfoundland, but a hybrid of breeds

unknown. But as with Friend and Tippo, the narrative of breed is sometimes more important than biology.

But what of Boatswain's personal narrative? How little we know of him beyond the famous epitaph his owner wrote for him:

Near this Spot
are deposited the Remains of one
who possessed Beauty without Vanity,
Strength without Insolence,
Courage without Ferocity,
and all the virtues of Man without his Vices.

This praise, which would be unmeaning Flattery
if inscribed over human Ashes,
is but a just tribute to the Memory of
Boatswain, a Dog
who was born in Newfoundland May 1803
and died at Newstead Nov. 18th, 1808

When some proud Son of Man returns to Earth,
Unknown to Glory, but upheld by Birth,
The sculptor's art exhausts the pomp of woe,
And storied urns record who rests below.
When all is done, upon the Tomb is seen,
Not what he was, but what he should have been.
But the poor Dog, in life the firmest friend,
The first to welcome, foremost to defend,
Whose honest heart is still his Master's own,
Who labours, fights, lives, breathes for him alone,
Unhonoured falls, unnoticed all his worth,

Denied in heaven the Soul he held on earth—
 While man, vain insect! hopes to be forgiven,
 And claims himself a sole exclusive heaven.

Oh man! thou feeble tenant of an hour,
 Debased by slavery, or corrupt by power—
 Who knows thee well, must quit thee with disgust,
 Degraded mass of animated dust!
 Thy love is lust, thy friendship all a cheat,
 Thy tongue hypocrisy, thy heart deceit!
 By nature vile, ennobled but by name,
 Each kindred brute might bid thee blush for shame.
 Ye, who behold perchance this simple urn,
 Pass on—it honours none you wish to mourn.
 To mark a friend's remains these stones arise;
 I never knew but one—and here he lies. (qtd. in Bondeson 34)

It seems there is little trace of Boatswain in this text. We know when and where he was likely born, and where and when he died, but the poem is really about humanity, with Boatswain—as a dog not an individual—standing in as a foil to shine light on human nature. The poem does not even reflect what little we know of Boatswain from outside sources. Where is the ferocious dog who baited Byron's bear? In the poem, he possesses "Courage without Ferocity." Far from living up to "all the virtues of Man without his Vices," the praise does seem "unmeaning Flattery" unless one considers that, as a dog, both virtues and vices lacked meaning to Boatswain.

And yet a shared life leaves traces on both parties. Perhaps Byron and Boatswain helped make each other who they were, even if Boatswain could not shape his master in a poem.

*

We named you Brontë, thinking of the presence of your breed in those sisters' novels. In fact, I am willing to say that yours is the most literary of dog breeds: from Lord Byron's "Epitaph to a Dog," to Mr. Rochester's Pilot in *Jane Eyre*, to the maternal Nana of *Peter Pan*, Newfoundlands make for some of the most famous dogs in literature. But what can these idealized and fictional dogs have to do with you, the dog who lays her drooling jowls on my lap, and struggles to stand up on the smooth tile floors of the kitchen? These texts use dogs as symbols for parts of human nature, or tools to critique aspects of society. But it is possible, with attentive reading, to discover what Etienne Benson calls "embodied traces" of the real nonhuman animal in even fictional texts (3). Benson says, "textual sources seem always to arise from the experience or activity of one particular kind of animal—the writing animal, the human" (4). But what of attentive, zoopoetic writing that seeks to value the animal trace for what it is, rather than using it as symbol or tool for exploring the human? For Benson, it is just the sort of writing, that "claim[s] to speak in the voice or see from the perspective of nonhuman animals" (4), that is at the highest risk of anthropocentrism. In writing and reading about animals, that is the risk we take.

And yet relationships with animals are always two sided, even when the relationship is textual. Where can we locate the embodied traces of real dogs in these texts?

*

Let us take the scene in *Jane Eyre* in which the reader meets Pilot (and Mr. Rochester) for the first time. Jane, alone in the woods, sees what she takes to be a supernatural being approaching her:

...close down by the hazel stems glided a great dog, whose black and white colour made him a distinct object against the trees. It was exactly one form of Bessie's Gytrash—a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head: it passed me, however, quietly enough; not staying to look up, with strange pretercanine eyes, in my face, as I half expected it would. (Brontë 136).

Here, Charlotte reiterates some of the novel's central themes: expectation versus reality; projection versus perception; the dual-nature of people and things. Within her gothic setting, Charlotte uses the supernatural, or the nonhuman, to illuminate these themes, and Pilot makes the perfect vehicle. The line between Pilot and the Gytrash is unclear. Does the description, "a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head" belong to Pilot or the Gytrash? Easily both. Does Jane see "strange pretercanine eyes," belonging to Pilot, or just expect to see those belonging to the Gytrash? Pilot is simultaneously a "distinct object" and an elusive being that can barely be described.

Moments later, Rochester himself rides into view, and "the man, the human being, broke the spell at once." In Jane's eyes, Pilot is no longer a supernatural creature, and becomes recognizably doglike. Too doglike, in fact. The descriptions become rife with idealism and anthropomorphism. When Rochester's horse slips and falls, Pilot runs to his master's aid, and then up to Jane: "it was all he could do, —there was no other help at hand to summon. I obeyed him..." (137).

Just as Jane's view of Pilot wavers here between two extremes, so does Rochester's view of Jane. Just as Jane sees first a Gytrash, Rochester sees Jane as an elusive faerie-like creature, and just as Jane then sees an idealized dog, Rochester sees Jane as the ideal wife. This suggests that identity is relational. It is only when Jane sees Rochester with Pilot that she can put him in context and read him 'correctly.' Jane, as an orphan without relations, is hard to contextualize, but Rochester comes to see her alongside both Bertha and himself as someone who can be read as 'wife.' But it is only when she can contextualize herself in a relational web after meeting the Rivers family—her long-lost cousins—and learning that a deceased uncle has left her a fortune, that she can fulfill the 'correct' role of wife to Mr. Rochester. More interesting is the connection between Jane and Pilot. Both are misread as supernatural, possibly because both are seen as less-than-human, Pilot because he is a nonhuman animal, and Jane because she is a woman.

But while as readers we are privy to Jane's most intimate self, the same cannot be said for Pilot, who is but a fleeting presence. Where can we locate the embodied traces of real dogs

in *Jane Eyre*? Perhaps through traces of the Brontës' own family pets: Keeper, Grasper, and Flossy. Though none were Newfoundlands, undoubtedly some trace of their doggish bodies and behaviours found its way into their owners' novels, and the writers' relationships with the dogs most likely informed the way dog–human relationships are portrayed in the texts.

Unlike Charlotte, Emily and Anne both had their own dogs. Or, to phrase it differently, both were attached to individual dogs, and the dogs attached to them. Emily had a fraught yet companionate relationship with a dog named Keeper, a rowdy and headstrong mastiff. Anne, on the other hand, had a dedicated little spaniel named Flossy, who was in many ways the opposite of Keeper in breed, culture, and personality. Maureen Adams writes about the evolution of Emily's relationship with Keeper as it transforms from one of abuse to companionship, and connects it to Emily's depiction of animal abuse in *Wuthering Heights*. Adams values the potentially transformative power of a human–dog relationship, arguing that both human and dog change, and are influenced, by each other.

In Emily and Keeper's case, the "relationship began as a fierce power struggle, but it became one of mutual respect" ("Emily Brontë" Adams 44). In one infamous scene witnessed and recorded by John Greenwood, the stationer in Haworth, Yorkshire, where the Brontë family lived, Emily separates Keeper and "another great powerful dog" who are fighting in the village (48). Greenwood says:

She was in the garden at the time, and the servant went to tell her [...] She never spoke a word, nor appeared the least at a loss what to do, but rushed at once into the kitchen, took the pepper box, and away into the lane where she found the two savage brutes each holding the other by the throat. In deadly grip, while several other animals, who thought themselves men, were standing looking on like cowards as they were, afraid to touch them—there they stood gaping, watching this fragile creature spring upon the beasts—seizing Keeper round the neck with one arm, while with the other hand she dredges their noses with pepper, and separating them by force of her great will, driving Keeper, that great powerful dog before her into the house, never once noticing the men, so called, standing there thunderstruck at the deed. (qtd. in Adams 48)

Emily was notoriously violent with Keeper, at least at the beginning of their relationship. Adams, who is a clinical psychologist, believes that this animal abuse arose from Emily's sense of powerlessness caused by her life circumstances, which were not only filled with loss at a very early age—her mother died before she was three, and her two older sisters died at a boarding school, which she too was attending at age six (44)—but which also limited her, as a woman, to a “constrained, narrow life” (48). As Adams says, “for Emily, as for any unmarried, educated, poor woman in Victorian England, the only options in life were to be a teacher, companion, governess, or to find a husband. Until Charlotte came up with the idea of publishing their writing, the Brontë sisters' very existence, like that of a pet spaniel's, depended on pleasing others” (47). Emily was not good at this, and though she tried several times to work as a teacher away from home, homesickness led her to return (44), and she became in charge of running the house in her sisters' absence. Adams explores the connection between dogs and women in the context of Emily and Keeper's relationship. She tries to answer the questions of why Emily was abusive towards her dog Keeper in real life, and why she depicted abuse towards dogs in *Wuthering Heights*, where Heathcliff almost hangs Isabella's little spaniel Fanny, who was perhaps based on Anne's spaniel Flossy. Adams notes that, “in early nineteenth-century England, especially among the rural poor, spaniels were considered useless dogs. As playthings for the rich, they were despised (and perhaps envied) for being overbred, overfed, and for having overactive sexual appetites” (46). Connected to Isabella, the helpless young lady in Emily's novel, spaniels represented a certain kind of femininity that reflected the vulnerability of Victorian women like Emily and her sisters.

The connection between women and animals can similarly be seen in Greenwood's description of the dogfight. Though her gender isn't mentioned directly in the description, Emily is distinguished by her femininity because she is acting outside expectations for her gender, and is thus contrasted to the men, who are doing likewise. It is expected that the men should have no fear to step in and stop two dogs fighting, and it is expected that Emily, as a woman, should be too afraid and physically weak to separate the dogs. However, Emily is called not a 'woman,' but a “fragile creature,” which is language reminiscent of the way Rochester describes Jane in Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*. In that text, such language serves to dehumanize Jane, separating her from her fellow humans and relegating her to the realm of animals and mythical beings. The word “fragile” is also particularly gendered, given the fact

that Emily was known to be “physically the strongest of all the Brontës” (48), and clearly displays no evidence of fragility in this scene. The word “creature” dehumanizes Emily and associates her with the dogs she is separating, even as it distinguishes her from the text’s other animal: the cowardly man.

While Emily is denigrated to the bestial realm by doing what she shouldn’t, the men watching are denigrated by not doing what they should. They are not ‘manly’ enough to step in and control the animals, therefore they are animals themselves, “who thought themselves men,” and only “men, so called.” Emily’s action dramatically disrupts the power hierarchies of gender and species at play: men over women over animals. The men do not step in to assert their dominance over the animals, so they are therefore shamed by being called animals, who are lower than them in the hierarchy of power. But in this instance they are also associated with women, similarly below them. By doing what they cannot or will not do, Emily inadvertently shames the men, which is emphasized by the fact that she “never once notic[ed]” them. It is implied—Emily is remarkable for the very reason that she is taking action—that there would be no problem if women watched on as men separated the dogs, because this would maintain the proper order of domination. Emily reverses this logic; the men take on the roles of women, and thus also inherit the old association of women with animals. Gender roles are disrupted, and every player in this small scene is dehumanized and made bestial by a violent interspecies interaction, but human conceptions of gender and species mean that this animalization has a different significance for each party. Worst off are the dogs themselves: given the use of the words “savage brutes” and “beasts,” one would think two wild wolverines were fighting each other, rather than domesticated pets.

A more violent scene between Emily and Keeper occurred in the privacy of the parsonage:

Keeper used to steal upstairs and sleep on the beds, which were covered in white counterpanes. This upset Emily, who was in charge of all the housekeeping chores. One evening the servant Tabby came and told Emily that Keeper was sleeping on the bed again. Emily immediately went up after the dog while Tabby and Charlotte watched. Down-stairs came Emily, dragging after her the unwilling Keeper, his hid

legs set in a heavy attitude of resistance, held by the ‘scruff of his neck’ but growling low and savagely all the time [...] She let him go, planted him in a dark corner at the bottom of the stairs [...] her bare clenched fist struck against his red fierce eyes, before he had time to make his spring [...] she ‘punished him’ till his eyes were swelled up, and the half-blind, stupefied beast was led to his accustomed lair to have his swelled head fomented and cared for by the very Emily herself. The generous dog owed her no grudge; he loved her dearly ever after. (Adams 48)

This spectacular display of brutality, paraphrased by Adams from Elizabeth Gaskell’s biography of Charlotte, is shocking in itself, but anyone familiar with Emily’s reputation for being harsh and impulsive might find the story fits well into her mythologized biography. One of the most famous narratives of Emily’s toughness also involves a dog, and also comes from Gaskell’s biography: it describes Emily being bitten by a potentially rabid dog, and immediately going into the kitchen to cauterize the wound with a fire poker, an action which she did not report to any member of the household, deeming it unimportant. She is as brutal with herself as with Keeper, behaviour that is remarkably reminiscent of Heathcliff’s in *Wuthering Heights*, specifically the way he abuses Isabella and her spaniel Fanny. Here again we see Emily subvert gender norms through an interaction with the nonhuman.

But given the unreliability of Gaskell as a biographer—given her personal relationship with Charlotte—and the unreliability of Victorian biography as a genre, we must ask whether these descriptions of Emily’s behaviour are not meant to further the reputation generated by *Wuthering Heights*, rather than being genuine events that may have influenced the novel.

According to Gaskell, “Keeper had been given to Emily with a warning that although he was faithful, if he were ever hit, he would hang on to that person’s throat ‘till one or the other was at the point of death’” (qtd, in Adams 47–48). But clearly he does not act this way when Emily hits him. Instead he “loved her dearly ever after.” This is reminiscent of Isabella’s devotion to the abusive Heathcliff, as well as Fanny’s devotion to her mistress even after Isabella betrays her to Heathcliff’s violence. But unlike Heathcliff, who is repulsed when Isabella responds to his abuse with devotion, Adams argues that it is “because Keeper responded to Emily’s harshness with devotion and loyalty” that “she began to depend on him

for protection and companionship” (48). But Keeper’s breed must be noted here. He was not “a useless, docile dog, like a spaniel, but a dog suited for hunting and protection” (48). This suggests, through comparison, that Heathcliff despised Isabella because of her spaniel-like qualities, or in other words her traditionally feminine qualities. Adams suggests that Emily embraces Keeper because his usefulness and masculinity represent a freedom beyond her grasp, while she rejects Flossy’s—or at least Fanny’s—feminine dependency because they remind her of her own circumstances as a Victorian woman.

Of the three Brontë sisters, Charlotte was perhaps the least interested in animals. Adams describes how in her letters and other writings, “she often misspelled Flossy’s name, forgot whether the spaniel was male or female, referred to Keeper as ‘it’” (50). I suspect there is more to Charlotte’s linguistic choices than simply a lack of love for dogs: they were probably a result of cultural conditioning rather than a conscious choice. I know several enthusiastic pet owners who misgender their cats and dogs and spell their names inconsistently. If anything, misgendering Flossy speaks to the way that human gender constructs ill fit nonhuman animals, despite our conflicting attempts to anthropomorphize them while simultaneously reducing them to sex-driven biological instinct. Similarly, it is not uncommon for humans to refer to nonhuman animals as “it.” The spell-check in my word processor illustrates this even now by suggesting that I change “who” to “which” or “that” every time the word is connected with a nonhuman animal. As for misspelling a pet’s name, perhaps this illustrates that when it comes to human-pet relationships, communication is verbal. When I call my dog, I know that the sound of her name has significance for her, or she wouldn’t respond as she does, perking up her ears or getting up and walking towards me. But that significance is undoubtedly different for me than for her. She does not, like me, associate the sounds with letters on a page, or indeed with the cultural weight that her name carries. To her, the name “Brontë” is sound and gesture. Knowing this, her name becomes different than other words in my mind, part of an interspecies mode of communication that is unlike than the language I use with other humans.

But it is true that the animals of the Brontë house were more under the care of Emily than Charlotte. In 1843, Charlotte, who was away from home, wrote to Emily that,

I should like uncommonly to be in the dining-room at home, or in the kitchen, or in the back kitchen. I should like even to cutting up the hash, with the clerk and some register people at the other table, and you standing by, watching that I put enough flour, not too much pepper, and, above all, that I save the best pieces of the leg of mutton for Tiger and Keeper, the first of which personages would be jumping about the dish and carving-knife, and the latter standing like a devouring flame on the kitchen-floor. (qtd. in Gaskell 262)

In contrast to her referring to Keeper as “it” elsewhere, here Charlotte refers to him—and Tiger the cat—as “personages.” Gaskell even suggests that the dog ‘Tartar’ in Charlotte’s *Shirley* is based on Keeper (Gaskell 267), and the threatening quality of Pilot in *Jane Eyre* is more reminiscent of a Mastiff than a Newfoundland. But of all the sisters, it is Emily whose books contain sketches of such domestic scenes, in which animals and humans together make up the workings of a household, though admittedly those scenes of dogs milling about the hearth in *Wuthering Heights* have an air of sickness and domestic violence that is a far cry from the pleasant scene that Charlotte paints here.

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Nana, from J.M. Barrie’s Peter Pan stories, is possibly literature’s most well known Newfoundland. In contrast to the frightening yet loyal Pilot, who fulfills one Newfoundland stereotype, Nana fulfills another: she is the ‘gentle giant,’ acting as a devoted and maternal nursemaid in the Darling household. Though she serves as a source of comedy and social commentary, Nana’s anthropomorphic qualities emphasize her doggish ones in interesting ways, suggesting that the Peter Pan texts are more interested in the question of the animal than at first appears.

Barrie’s famous narrative follows the Darling children, Wendy, John, and Michael, as they leave their Bloomsbury household behind and are whisked off to fantastical Neverland by the spritely Peter Pan, a boy who never grows up. The story depicts their adventures there, playing house with each other and fighting the villainous Captain Hook, and ends with their returning home and reuniting with their parents. Though the character of Peter Pan dates back

to Barrie's 1902 book *The Little White Bird*, the story as we know it appeared for the first time in the 1904 play *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, and then later in a 1911 novelization of the play called *Peter and Wendy*. The play and novel were wildly popular, and Peter Pan has become an icon in popular culture, aided by many subsequent adaptations including the animated 1956 Disney film.

Nana's role, in both the play and the novel, is small but essential. She is employed in the Darling household as a nurse to the children, and appears only at the beginning and end of the story. But in the play she is the first character revealed on stage. We see her in the nursery, say the stage directions, "reclining, not as you might expect on the one soft chair, but on the floor" (*Peter Pan* Act 1). She "springs into life" when the clock strikes six, and turns down the children's beds "making much use of her mouth," and "carries the various articles on the fire-guard across to them. Then, pushing the bathroom door open, she is seen at work on the taps preparing Michael's bath; after which she enters from the day nursery with the youngest of the family on her back" (Act 1). Barrie notes in the stage directions that,

This first moment in the play is tremendously important, for if the actor playing Nana does not spring properly we are undone. She will probably be played by a boy, if one clever enough can be found, and must never be on two legs except on those rare occasions when an ordinary nurse would be on four. This Nana must go about all her duties in a most ordinary manner, so that you know in your bones that she performs them just so every evening at six; naturalness must be her passion; indeed, it should be the aim of every one in the play, for which she is now setting the pace. All the characters, whether grown-ups or babes, must wear a child's outlook on life as their only important adornment. If they cannot help being funny they are begged to go away. (Act 1)

Nana is the first indicator of the play's childlike fantastical quality. This is not a world where dogs are pets; it is a world where dogs are nursemaids. And yet it is clear that, in Barrie's vision, Nana must still maintain a doggish naturalism alongside her anthropomorphized human behaviour. She still sleeps on the floor, walks on all fours, and uses her mouth instead of her paws, even if she is doing so while performing human tasks. That she should "never be on two

legs except on those rare occasions when an ordinary nurse would be on four” is a direction that serves both to clearly distinguish dog from human, and to draw close comparisons between the two, creating comedy from the similarities and differences.

Barrie’s correlation between naturalness and “a child’s outlook on life” suggests that the performativity of children’s play is more natural than the self-conscious performativity adults practice in an unacknowledged way. This feels ironic, since he is talking within the context of a large-scale theatrical production. But I am more interested in the way he draws dogs into the realm of children’s play. We already associate dogs with play. Dogs, in the perpetual puppydom of their domestication, are inherently playful creatures in the same way children are. Of course there is a difference between a child playing a dog, and a dog playing, but is there *that much* of a difference?

It is well known that Barrie based the Peter Pan stories on his relationship with the Llewellyn Davies boys, the eldest two of whom he first met while they were walking with their nanny in Kensington Gardens, where he was walking his St. Bernard Porthos. He eventually met their mother Sylvia Llewellyn Davies at a dinner party, where she “recognized him as the man who sometimes entertained her sons by telling them fairy stories” in the park, and he recognized her as the daughter of one of his favourite authors, George du Maurier, a character from whose novels Porthos was named after (“J.M. Barrie”). Barrie became very close with the family, and “often initiated games of make-believe with the boys;” these games, and the boys themselves, would ultimately inspire the contents of Barrie’s Peter Pan stories (“J.M. Barrie”). It is perhaps less well known that Barrie’s dogs Porthos and Luath also took part in these games, and together inspired the character of Nana. The playfulness of dogs, alongside the playfulness of children and one childlike adult, helped create the play *Peter Pan*. Porthos was originally a wedding present from Barrie to his wife (Birkin 31), the actress Mary Ansell, but he quickly attached himself to Barrie. Mary wrote that he,

passionately loved his master. He really loved him more than he did me. It was a case of Mary and Martha. I gave him medicine, and kept him clean, and generally looked after him, but his master played with him. And he was a genius at games. They had fearful wrestling matches. These went on until both were exhausted. And they ran

paces, in and out of the rooms, up and down the stair, out of the front door, in by the back, over and over and over again... When it was all over I went round collecting the debris. (31)

This is reminiscent of stereotypical gender roles in parenting, and in fact Ansell mirrors the way that Mr. Darling is written as a fourth child to the Darling family, while Mrs. Darling mothers both Mr. Darling and the children, and Wendy is a sort of mother-in-training to them. Further linking playfulness with dogs and children, Birkin notes of Barrie's playfulness that, "the method of capture held good for both dogs and children" (31).

In Barrie's games with the boys, "Porthos obliged his master by representing a whole host of characters, from the pirates' dog to a ferocious tiger in a papier-mâché mask" (84). There are a number of photos of Porthos fulfilling such roles, stalking through the reeds at the edge of a lake, or sitting near George—the eldest brother—with the tiger mask obscuring his face, or sleeping on a slope of woodland above two sleeping boys. Porthos even took roles in actual plays, such as the pantomime that Barrie put on for "the Davies boys, their father, and numerous other children" in a drawing room, where Porthos played a dog named Chang (77).

Over a year after Porthos died, Mary decided to get another dog, a Newfoundland, named Luath after a dog in Robert Burns' poem "Twa Dogs" (Chaney 192). There is a picture of Barrie standing next to Luath, who comes up to at least Barrie's hip. Barrie stands half turned to the camera, looking into it, his face like a gloomy combination of Proust and Edgar Allan Poe. We cannot see Luath's face at all. He is looking into the distance behind his master's back at something unseen. Both man and dog wear heavy coats, Barrie's, perhaps, of wool, and Luath's of his own thick fur (111). Luath was a Landseer, which is what Newfoundlands with black and white coats are called. Those who are familiar only with Nana from Disney's 1953 film *Peter Pan* might be surprised to learn that, in the original source material, Nana is not a St. Bernard, but a Newfoundland. The two breeds are very similar in appearance, having large bodies with thick heavy coats. Likewise, they both have a history as working breeds, Newfoundlands as water rescue dogs and St. Bernards as alpine rescue dogs. The discrepancy in Disney's adaptation is most likely a biographical misinterpretation that confuses Luath with Porthos. As a Landseer, Luath's black and white coat was more similar to

the brown and white coat of a St. Bernard than the black coat of a regular Newfoundland. Especially in the few old black and white photos that exist of the two dogs, it would be difficult for someone unfamiliar with the breeds to tell them apart. Nonetheless, it was Luath that Nana was based on, not Porthos. When it came to the production of his play, Barrie wanted art to imitate life to the extent that “the Davies boys’ clothes were copied for the Darling children and the Lost Boys” and the dog suit for the actor playing Nana was a duplicate of Luath’s coat (Birkin 111). Yet Luath’s similarities to Nana are based not only on breed and appearance, but also personality.

Like Porthos, Luath played games with Barrie and the Davies boys. “He stepped into Porthos’s role, joining in the *Castaway* games with Barrie and the boys as his predecessor had done, ‘bringing hedgehogs to the hut in his mouth as offerings for our evening repasts’” (98). But unlike Porthos, who was attached to Barrie, Luath was more attached to Mary, and stayed with her when the couple divorced. In her book *Dogs and Men*, she wrote of Luath, “I became a child with him. We played ridiculous games together...What races we ran in Kensington Gardens!...Luath’s proper place was the nursery. How happy he would have been if there had been one, full of gloriously noisy children! (98).” This calls to mind Mary’s description of Barrie playing with Porthos, but also highlights the ‘maternal’ nature that would become so essential to Nana’s character. Mary reiterates this elsewhere, saying that,

Porthos very early had said farewell to wild puppydom. But it clung to Luath for many years...He took life so eagerly...He lived in the present. Porthos might be interested in his past...but the present was always good enough for Luath...Domesticity is what he was cut out for. He would have been a nurse; he should have been a father of a large family, above all he should have been a mother. An adverse fate denied him these delights; but he managed to manoeuvre something of them into all fourteen years of life that never failed to bring him unreasoning happiness. (qtd. in Chaney 193)

The play of *Peter Pan* necessarily represents the canine animal other differently than does the novelization, *Peter and Wendy*. One benefit of the play is that, being a performance, it brings to the forefront the performativity of identities such as gender and species. In both its iterations, the story is at its heart about gender performativity. The Darling children go to Neverland to learn, through play, the gender roles expected of them in their society. Mr. and

Mrs. Darling are the adult products of such play, and models for the children's play. But Nana, despite being a dog, cannot as a caregiver to the children escape the gender dichotomies dictated by that role. There is no ignoring the gender swap Luath underwent as Barrie turned him into the fictional Nana. Mary's language is gendered as well, suggestive of a time when domesticity and taking care of children were almost solely the responsibility of women. Her shift from "father" to "mother" indicates that those labels involve different behaviours and responsibilities, and Luath's domestic inclinations and eagerness for the present make him more suited to the latter. But despite this gendered thinking, there is something subversive about the way she jumps so casually across gender lines. Perhaps it is so easy for her to do because he is a dog, and therefore wears such human constructs loosely. In which case, his doggishness, his nonhuman-ness, has the potential ability to destabilize the human constructs that are applied to him. Barrie does not take advantage of this potential, because the Peter Pan stories are not about subverting gender roles but reaffirming them.

Nor is the story interested in questioning class hierarchies, which are of course intertwined with gender and species. Nana is not a mother but a nurse. She is an employee of the Darling household, and we are never allowed to forget it. The Darlings have one other servant, a child maid named Liza, but while both Nana and Liza are a welcome part of the happy family, and play together with the family in the nursery, their status as servants is more important than their being dog and being child, respectively. For example, Mr. Darling is very insecure about his status in society; the Darlings have a dog for a nurse because they cannot afford a human one, and despite the fact that Nana is very good at her job and "no nursery could possibly have been conducted more correctly," he "sometimes wondered uneasily whether the neighbours talked. He had his position in the city to consider" (*Peter and Wendy* ch. 1). Additionally,

Nana also troubled him in another way. He had sometimes a feeling that she did not admire him. 'I know she admires you tremendously, George,' Mrs. Darling would assure him, and then she would sign to the children to be specially nice to father. Lovely dances followed, in which the only other servant, Liza, was sometimes allowed to join. Such a midget she looked in her long skirt and maid's cap, though she had sworn, when engaged, that she would never see ten again. (ch. 1)

Liza brings another factor into the hierarchy of the Darling household: age. Despite the fact that Liza is probably similar in age to their oldest daughter, Wendy, she plays a very different role in the household. She is “sometimes allowed” to join the family dances, but does not really have a say in the matter because she is a servant. Mr. Darling’s worry that Nana doesn’t admire him parodies a human master–servant relationship, which Nana subverts by virtue of her species. As a maid, but especially as a dog, Nana is supposed to admire her master, but she does not, because he is not an admirable man. He is egotistical and childish to the point of cruelty, especially to Nana.

There is a scene at the beginning of the play where Nana enters the nursery with a bottle of medicine in her mouth. It is for Michael, but he refuses to take it, so Mr. Darling tells him to “be a man” and says that when he was a child he took his medicine “without a murmur” (Act 1). He says he would take his own medicine right then as an example, if he hadn’t lost the bottle—he is lying about this—so Wendy runs off helpfully to fetch it. She soon returns, and Nana stands nearby “holding the medicine spoon insinuatingly in her mouth” (Act 1). But Mr. Darling petulantly refuses to take it, saying that he will be sick and that it’s unfair that his glass holds more than Michael’s spoon. The conversation eventually devolves into he and Michael mocking each other and calling each other names. When they finally agree to take their medicine on the count of three, Michael does but Mr. Darling feigns taking his, disappointing the children and Nana, who “shakes her head sadly over him. . . They are all looking as if they didn’t admire him, and nothing so dashes a temperamental man” (Act 1). To distract the children from his betrayal, Mr. Darling pours his medicine into Nana’s bowl while she isn’t looking and tells her it is milk. In the play, Nana simply “retreats into the kennel”—which is in the nursery—after drinking it, but in the novel she “wagged her tail, ran to the medicine, and began lapping it (Act 1). Then she gave Mr. Darling such a look, not an angry look: she showed him the great red tear that makes us so sorry for noble dogs, and crept into her kennel” (Act 1). When Mrs. Darling finds out, she and the children are very disapproving. In the play, Wendy says,

WENDY (*on her knees by the kennel*). Father, Nana is crying.

MR. DARLING. Coddle her; nobody cuddles me. Oh dear, no. I am only the breadwinner, why should I be coddled? Why, why, why?.

MRS. DARLING. George, not so loud; the servants will hear you.

MR. DARLING. (*defiant*). Let them hear me; bring in the whole world. (*The desperate man, who has not been in fresh air for days, has now lost all self-control*). I refuse to allow that dog to lord it in my nursery for one hour longer. (*NANA supplicates him.*) In vain, in vain, the proper place for you is in the yard, and there you go to be tied up this instant.

(*NANA again retreats into the kennel, and the children add their prayers to hers.*)

MRS. DARLING. (*who knows how contrite he will be for this presently*). George, George, remember what I told you about that boy.

MR. DARLING. Am I master in this house or is she? (*To NANA fiercely*) Come along. (*He thunders at her, but she indicates that she has reasons not worth troubling him for remaining where she is. He resorts to a false bonhomie*). There, there, did she think he was angry with her, poor Nana? (*She wriggles a response in the affirmative.*) Good Nana, pretty Nana. (*She has seldom been called pretty, and it has the old effect. She plays rub-a-dub with her paws, which is how a dog blushed.*) She will come to her kind master, won't she? won't she? (*She advances, retreats, waggles her head, her tail, and eventually goes to him. He seizes her collar in an iron grip and amid the cries of his progeny drags her from the room. They listen, for her remonstrances are not inaudible.*)

(Act 1)

As a dog and a female servant, Nana is at the bottom of the home's hierarchy, while Mr. Darling, as father and breadwinner, is supposed to be at the top. Nana is thus at the heart of his insecurities: if she doesn't respect him then the system fails. But as a dog and servant she is also vulnerable to his whims and displays of power. As a servant about to lose her job, she must supplicate to him; as a dog, she falls prey to his flattery and "false bonhomie," and is

physically overpowered by him. The most interesting aspect of his behaviour is that he refers to Nana indirectly in the third person, as “she” rather than “you.” Thus, his speech becomes a form of command, and also a form of narrative, giving him the control of an author. “She will come to her kind master” is both a demand and a fiction, not least because Mr. Darling is not a kind master. The children recognize the injustice of his behaviour, and his abuse of power: Nana is coddled *because of* her vulnerability. Mr. Darling does not need to be coddled *because* he is the breadwinner. Nonetheless he is coddled frequently by his wife in an attempt to calm his ego and keep the peace. Clearly Nana does not admire him, yet Mrs. Darling casually assures him that Nana does, in a tone suggesting she has said so many times before, after which she instructs the children to coddle him as well.

Mr. Darling’s childishness is very deliberate; we are meant to find it funny to watch a fully-grown man act like a child, and Barrie is also making a statement about gender roles. Between Mr. Darling and Captain Hook, both childish figures—in fact, the two parts are traditionally played by the same actor—there are no real adult men for John, Michael, and the Lost Boys to emulate in their play: they play only sons. Wendy, on the other hand, has her mother to emulate. In the Darling household, Mrs. Darling is a mother to her husband and children, and in Neverland Wendy is mother to her brothers, the Lost Boys, and to Peter, who refuses to play father and husband despite her requests. Peter and Neverland are constants that successive generations of children visit to learn gender roles before returning to their families and growing up into adults, whose own children visit Peter in turn. In this perpetual cycle of mothers and sons, Mr. Darling is only a child *playing* a father and husband, just as Nana is only a dog playing a nurse. This is not a bad thing in the text; the adult world that forces boys to play men is at fault. Mr. Darling is “a desperate man” because he has been at work and “has not been in fresh air for days.”

By the end of the scene, Mr. Darling strips Nana of her ‘humanity’ and she is very much a dog. The more Mr. Darling treats her like a dog, the more doggish she becomes. Her behaviour alters from that of a capable nurse carrying a medicine bottle, to a tail-wagging, paw-rub-a-dubbing canine. Of course, she carries the medicine bottle in her mouth, but nonetheless by the end of the scene Barrie is paying great attention to describing Nana’s doggish movements in the stage directions. It is essential to Barrie’s humour that Nana

possesses both human and canine qualities and capabilities in an indeterminate fashion. Sometimes the humour arises from Nana acting exactly as a nurse would, though she is a dog, and sometimes from her acting exactly as a dog would, though she is a nurse. The overall double-vision effect is what makes her such a charming and memorable character.

Take the way that Nana is introduced at the beginning of the novel. She is described as “prim,” and “having belonged to no one in particular until the Darlings engaged her” (Peter and Wendy ch.1). Both of these descriptions could apply to a human as well as a dog, with the word “belonged” pointing to the objectification of both animals and servants. “She had always thought children important, however,” Barrie continues, a phrase that sounds like a quote from a job application, yet also resonates with Mary’s description of Luath wanting to be a nurse (ch. 1). The Darlings met Nana in Kensington Gardens, “where she spent most of her spare time peeping into perambulators, and was much hated by careless nursemaids, whom she followed to their homes and complained of to their mistresses” (ch. 1). Such descriptions begin to raise questions. How can a dog complain? Did she do so with human speech, or in some doggish manner? Regardless, she “proved to be quite a treasure of a nurse. How thorough she was at bath time” (ch. 1). At this point we don’t know just how anthropomorphized Nana is, and thus get an image of her licking the children clean as if they were puppies.

She had a genius for knowing when a cough is a thing to have no patience with and when it needs stocking round your throat. She believed to her last day in old-fashioned remedies like rhubarb leaf, and made sounds of contempt over all this new-fangled talk about germs. (ch.1)

How did she learn these things? Can she read? How can she tie a stocking around a throat, and is her sound of contempt a scoff or a bark? She escorts the children to school, “walking sedately by their side,” but also “butting them back into line” (ch. 1): “butting” is a versatile verb that could apply to a human but which is also reminiscent of a ram. She carries an umbrella in case of rain—in her mouth—and waits in the basement of the school with the other (human) nurses, though she lies on the floor while they sit on seats: “that was the only difference” (ch. 1). But is it?

There are many other examples in the novel of Nana displaying characteristics both human and canine. After Peter has whisked the children off to Neverland—while Nana was chained up in the yard by Mr. Darling and unable to protect them—Mrs. Darling is distraught. Nana is described as being “perhaps...on the other side of her, holding her hand” (ch. 2). Is the “perhaps” there because Nana can’t actually hold a human hand with her canine paw? Nana is so compassionate because she blames herself for the children’s disappearance, despite its being Mr. Darling’s fault: “‘If only I had pretended to like the medicine,’ was what Nana’s wet eyes said.” Then,

...one or more of them would break down altogether; Nana at the thought, 'It's true, it's true, they ought not to have had a dog for a nurse.' Many a time it was Mr. Darling who put the handkerchief to Nana's eyes.

'That fiend!' Mr. Darling would cry, and Nana's bark was the echo of it... (ch. 2)

Nana clearly understands human language, though she herself speaks with body language and barks. But how well do her human companions understand her? Mr. Darling knows that she is crying, and offers a handkerchief, but does he know *why* she is crying? One of the benefits of the novel over the play is that it allows the reader to be privy to Nana’s thoughts, and conveys a sense of her interiority and mental disconnect from the human characters. The play’s focus on performativity destabilizes gender and species, but watching a human in a dog suit, we see more human than dog. The novel, however, encourages the reader to picture Nana as a real dog performing human actions. When Barrie calls for naturalness at the beginning of the play, he is talking about the naturalness of a capable nurse doing her job punctually, but is the naturalness of a dog being a dog equally important? It is in specific canine details that we can locate the embodied traces of Luath and his breed.

The language Barrie uses to describe Nana is identical in tone to his descriptions of Luath. In a 1904 letter to Peter Davies, on whom the character of Peter Pan was based, Barrie writes,

Sometimes when I am walking in the Gardens with Luath, I see a vision and I cry,

Hurray, there's Peter, and then Luath barks joyously and we run to the vision and then it turns out to be not Peter but just another boy, and then I cry like a water cart and Luath hangs his sorrowful tail. (Birkin 110)

Perhaps the similarity in tone is because of his addressee, since the Davies boys were in a sense the original audience for the Peter Pan stories. But such anthropomorphic narrativizing is not unique to authors preparing plays. Most pet owners I know, myself included, are in the habit of spinning tales and inventing personas to explain their pets' behaviour. When such narratives serve only to amuse the human party with cuteness, effectively building barriers in what could be a genuine relationship, I find them problematic. But some level of narrativizing is necessary even in human relationships if we are to understand our human companions. Here Barrie is simply trying to amuse Peter, not better understand Luath. But I see in Barrie's letter, as well as the play and novel, a tendency to describe Luath and Nana in ways that push the boundary between dog and human without stepping over the line. Luath's emotions echo those of Barrie, giving her the anthropomorphized air of a character, but as is often the case with Nana, he isn't quite doing anything a dog wouldn't do. Dogs do bark loudly and lower their tails; it is Barrie's interpretation of these actions that make them exaggerated. Barrie similarly exaggerates his own behaviour; he is not literally running after visions and weeping like a water cart. But such exaggerations have different implications for dogs and humans.

But on occasion, Barrie gets it right with breed specific details. For the best example, I must return to the medicine scene—this time in the novel—on which I fixate because it reflects a betrayal I have committed time and time again, pressing bitter pills into pieces of cheese or crushing them over dog kibble, only to receive the same quiet, wounded look that Nana gives to Mr. Darling as she retreats to her kennel showing “the great red tear that makes us so sorry for noble dogs” (ch. 2). It is this ‘tear’ that is so breed specific. Barrie is probably referring to the shape of the eye, which in Newfoundlands and other giant breeds often droops to reveal some pink or red flesh, becoming more pronounced with age. This drooping has nothing to do with displays of emotion, being always present, and can in fact lead to obscured sight. To our anthropocentric minds, however, it easily suggests an appearance of quiet sadness. And in the context of Mr. Darling's cruelty, our sympathy towards Nana is warranted.

Another such detail, an embodied trace of Luath, is a scene in which Nana covers Mr.

Darling's new trousers in hairs. Mr. Darling is playing with his son Michael when Nana appears and puts an end to their fun:

The romp had ended with the appearance of Nana, and most unluckily Mr. Darling collided against her, covering his trousers with hairs. They were not only new trousers, but they were the first he had ever had with braid on them, and he had to bite his lip to prevent the tears coming. Of course Mrs. Darling brushed him, but he began to talk again about its being a mistake to have a dog for a nurse.

'George, Nana is a treasure.'

'No doubt, but I have an uneasy feeling at times that she looks upon the children as puppies.'

'Oh no, dear one, I feel sure she knows they have souls.' (ch. 2)

It is true that a mere brush against any part of a Newfoundland dog results in the transference of countless long black hairs onto whatever items of clothing one is wearing. Mr. Darling should be happy that it was hair and not drool, which has the consistency of glue and is almost as impossible to remove. Brushing some hair off new trousers is a mild inconvenience in comparison, one that Mr. Darling's wife has to suffer for him. Though it is unrealistic that Barrie never mentions this particular sticky consequences of living with Newfoundlands, it wouldn't do to have his neat nurse Nana slobbering on her charges. Again, it comes down to balancing canine and human details to create Nana's hybrid character.

But I cannot ignore Mrs. Darling's comment about souls. It is an excellent one-liner, with multi-faceted implications. On one level, it might be taken as a joke about class, and how the Darlings objectify the workers they employ. On another level, Mrs. Darling is implying that the distinguishing factor between humans and dogs is that the former do have souls and the latter don't. The Darlings thus believe that Nana doesn't have a soul, and the humour of the joke arises in part from the idea that Nana can be capable of recognizing a soul—a complicated and abstract concept—while not possessing one herself. It is equally amusing to think that Nana might look upon the children as puppies, rather than human children with souls. Perhaps she is so good at her job because she is acting on canine maternal instinct. But given Nana's high level of anthropomorphism, the comment is rather insulting. She is

employed in a thankless household, and despite her excellent job performance and dedication, she is led to doubt her abilities, worrying that “they ought not to have had a dog for a nurse” (ch. 2). When Mr. Darling says he worries that she sees the children as puppies, he is worrying that she does not understand a distinction that he himself is hazy on: she is a dog, not a human.

*

Though Emily Dickinson’s reclusiveness is infamous, it is less well known that the poet had a canine companion in the form of Carlo, a Newfoundland dog. Maureen Adams asks, “how did such an isolated woman write such powerful poems?” and suggests that “one way to consider the question is to look at the role that Dickinson’s dog played in her creative life” (“Emily Dickinson” 132). Little is known about Carlo. His presence in her surviving letters is scarce, but there is no doubting his importance to Emily. She received Carlo as a gift from her father, possibly intended as a source of psychological and physical protection and support (133). Adams speculates that Emily named Carlo herself, possibly after St. John River’s pointer in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

I first came across Carlo curled up in a footnote to one of Dickinson’s letters or poems when I was taking an undergraduate seminar on her poetry. For a different reader, it might have been a disappointment to learn that this unfamiliar name belonged to a dog rather than a human being: the language Dickinson uses in relation to Carlo is always familiar and intimate. As a biographical detail, Carlo might have worked to cement an image of Dickinson as a recluse cut off from social interactions, having only a pet for companionship. But I was thrilled to learn that I had something in common with one of my favourite poets. It seemed to me that we shared something tangible, the knowledge of a specific class of sensory experiences specific to humans who’ve walked and played and lived with Newfoundland dogs: a hand buried in a thick, oily coat; the sound of claws shuffling over hardwood floors; the leaning of a heavy head against you, and the slick slug trail of drool left behind on the fabric at your knee. I cannot remember which letter or poem Carlo appeared in, but ever since I have carried with me an image of Dickinson walking with him through an overgrown flower garden on a summer day. He is a large dog, and Dickinson, like me, is a small woman. He saunters in

the sun, in that way that Newfoundlands do—a distinctive rolling gait that, along with a lolling panting pink tongue, gives them an unhurried air, a not-to-be-rushed attitude. She stoops to look at flowers, her mind concentrated on scientific names and petals and pollen—she snips a few specimens, here and there, to paste into her herbarium. When the two pass each other, he comes up to her waist, and the brush of his sweeping tail leaves black hairs on her black skirts.

In one letter, Dickinson laments that bad weather keeps her from visiting friends—though her growing social anxiety may have been the real cause—and says that “I talk of all these things with Carlo, and his eyes grow meaning, and his shaggy feet keep a slower pace” (qtd. in Adams 161). How similar yet different this small scene is to Barrie’s scene with Luath in Kensington Gardens, looking for Peter. Both writers use scenes of canine-human interaction to convey loneliness to absent human companions. In both cases, the Newfoundlands seem to display perfect understanding, mirroring their owners’ emotions in body language: Luath “hangs his sorrowful tail,” and Carlo’s “shaggy feet keep a slower pace.” But Dickinson’s relationship with Carlo in this scene seems somehow more intimate than that between Barrie and Luath. While Peter is invited to share in Barrie and Luath’s interaction, Dickinson seems to imply that she alone can understand Carlo’s canine communications, and perhaps not even her. She does not interpret the meaning in his eyes, or the pace of his feet, for her reader; they are left to their own interpretations. We are left with an image of companionship and understanding, of interspecies communication that is not limited to human speech, but which encompasses gesture and intuition as well. Dickinson does not say that she knows what meaning grows in Carlo’s eyes, but she knows that the meaning is there. And when she says, “I talk of these things with Carlo,” who is to say she is talking with words?

Maureen Adams, in addition to her writing on Emily Brontë’s relationship with Keeper, has written about Dickinson’s relationship with Carlo in an essay entitled, “Emily Dickinson Had a Dog: An Interpretation of the Human–Dog Bond.” Unfortunately, Adams’s interpretation gives way entirely to the temptation to mythologize Carlo, with essay sections titled “Carlo as Mythic Guide, Guardian, and Healer,” “Carlo as Selfobject: Functions of Holding, Witness, and Go-Between,” and “Carlo as Psychopomp, Guide between Life and Death.” While I recognize and rejoice in the depth and values of dog–human relationships, I am also of the opinion that nothing can be more harmful to their prosperity than such extremes

of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, where the canine half of the relationship becomes a disembodied and servile extension of the human half's psyche, lacking an independent will and an individual lived experience of the world. That is just what Adams posits in her essay. By taking a psychoanalytical, mythological view of the bond between Dickinson and Carlo, Adams supports the notion that an individual dog is not enough to be valued in themselves, but needs to be read as a representative of their breed and species, and to be enlarged within a significant human framework in order to be worth examining. She does exactly what Derrida—if one substitutes dogs for cats—so laments in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, by having Carlo, “silently enter the room as an allegory for all the [dogs] on earth, the [canines] that traverse myths and religions, literature and fables” (Derrida 6).

Within her psychoanalytical framework, Adams argues that the mythological figures of “the guide, the companion, the healer, and even the psychopomp—can be seen in the relationship between Dickinson and Carlo” (Adams 133). Similarly, she says, Carlo can be seen as what Heinz Kohut called a “selfobject,” which is a person or thing internalized as part of the self, serving a stabilizing and soothing function. Adams says that “since other nonhuman phenomena, such as works of art or memories, are recognized as selfobjects...it seems fitting to include dogs. Dickinson wrote about the calming presence of Carlo in terms that suggest he did serve as a selfobject to her” (133). I don't find it at all fitting to include dogs in the same category as art and memory, and also find it hard to read Carlo as a psychopomp or selfobject rather than a companion, given the way that Dickinson writes about him.

In a similar occurrence of idealism, Adams notes Dickinson's extreme separation anxiety and suggests that “such deep wounds—whatever the cause—can be healed by the unconditional love of a dog” (133). She cites cultural anthropologist Contance Perin as saying, “we reach across species and idealize dogs because...dogs give complete and total love—speechless, yet communicating perfectly; mute, but ever attending” (qtd. in Adams 133). The contradictions in this last statement are obvious: if dogs did provide us with total love and perfect communication, we would not have to idealize them, so those are not the reasons we idealize them, but rather the resultant beliefs of such idealization. Though the companionship of nonhuman animals is undoubtedly of psychological value to humans—and vice versa—the

belief that dogs exist to provide humans with unconditional love, and even the belief that dogs are capable of such a thing, is pure romanticism: this, any dog owner knows. Perfection is not a requirement for fulfillment in any relationship, interspecies relationships included.

As a Newfoundland, Carlo is particularly easy to romanticize, and Adams certainly uses his breed to mythologize him. Carlo was purchased for Dickinson by her father, and the reason he chose a Newfoundland, Adams speculates, is because “Newfoundlands had a heroic reputation in the 1800’s. They were often depicted in paintings rescuing people from the sea” (133). While this is certainly true, no Newfoundland I have ever met could possibly live up to such a reputation, and I expect the same was true of Carlo.

But Dickinson herself was also guilty of idealizing Carlo. She first mentions him in “a Valentine letter she wrote to the editor of the Amherst College paper” (133). She writes: “Don’t be afraid of...[a metaphor], sire, it won’t bite. If it was my Carlo now! The Dog is the noblest work of Art, sir...his mistress’s rights he doth defend – although it bring him to his end!” (qtd. in Adams 133). It is not only Carlo that Dickinson idealizes, but all dogs, who are reduced to singular representations of their species, willing to die to defend a “mistress’s rights.” But in a way Dickinson is right: “the Dog” is a work of art in the sense that it is a constructed fantasy of nobility and loyalty. The breed “Dog” in particular is also a work of art in the sense that it has been physically crafted through selective breeding to resemble a certain aesthetic standard. But the individual dog is hardly a work of art. There is something subversive in the way Dickinson places dogs and metaphors in relation to each other. A dog is a metaphor, she suggests, for art and valour, but he is also a dog. When realized bodily in the form of a wilful individual like Carlo, metaphors can bite.

Adams also suggests that Carlo acted as a “facilitating other” to Dickinson, witnessing and enabling her creative output. In psychoanalysis and mythology, this figure silently and passively supports the creator, and Adams notes that, “Dickinson often mentioned her appreciation of Carlo’s silence. She felt that Carlo and all of nature were “better than Beings – Because they know – but do not tell (#261)”...She preferred her dog to people “[who] talk of Hallowed things aloud – and embarrass my Dog” (#271)” (135). These quotations say as much about Dickinson’s understanding of “Hallowed” topics and of poetry as her

understanding of animals. Subjects like death and grief are skirted in her poems: she prefers to turn corners around them rather than face them directly, so they become notable by their very absence. Dickinson's poetics is one of evasion. So if, as Adams suggests, Dickinson "believed that silence was the appropriate response for both deep emotion and important subjects" (135) when she said, "When I am most grieved I had rather no one would speak to me... When I am most sorry, I can say nothing" (qtd. in Adams 135), then she was not including poetry in the category of "speaking." Is it possible that Dickinson felt some comparison between the way Carlo communicated, and the way she herself communicated in verse? If so, it is no wonder that she might have valued Carlo's silent communications, which are open to interpretation, more than direct discussions of sensitive subjects. Carlo's silence cannot be taken for a lack of communication, or for passivity; rather, it is a different form of communication, based on intuition and gesture, that Dickinson might value because it parallels her own poetics. Carlo is not a passive facilitator, but an active collaborator.

Yet another function that Carlo served for Dickinson, according to Adams, is emotional mediator. Adams says that, "besides acting as a witness, a dog can also serve as a go between for people: a messenger who conveys feelings. If the feeling is too intense for the person, it feels safer to attribute it to the dog... Dickinson relied on Carlo to demonstrate her emotions" (134). Adams refers specifically to the time when, biographers speculate, Dickinson fell in love with the married Samuel Bowles, a family friend, and was ultimately rejected by him. In a letter to Bowles from Dickinson when Bowles was travelling abroad, the poet writes that, "the puzzled look—deepens in Carlo's forehead, as the Days go by and you never Come" (qtd. in Adams 135). Like the earlier description of Carlo's eyes growing meaning, this letter is reminiscent of Barrie's to Peter Davies: both authors are longing for absent friends, and attempt to magnify their emotions by attributing them to animal companions in addition to themselves. What Luath and Carlo really felt for Peter and Bowles, respectively, it is impossible to say, but the way their owners use them to express emotional vulnerability speaks to the complexities of dog-human relationships. Dickinson mentions Carlo again in a poem she wrote to Bowles:

What shall I do—it whimpers so—
This little Hound within my Heart

All day and night with bark and start—
 And yet it will not go—
 Would *you* untie it, were you me—

Would it stop whining—if to Thee—
 I sent it—even now?...

Shall it come?
 Tell Carlo—
He'll tell me! (qtd. in Adams 135)

It is not a coincidence that Carlo finds himself in a poem alongside “This little Hound within my Heart.” By figuring her emotions as a hound, Dickinson seems to have more in common with Carlo than Bowles. She is set apart from Bowles, both physically and mentally, and Carlo, as a dog himself, must act as a translator between them. It is not hard to imagine what the hound’s whimpering, barking, and whining signify, but it is certainly not being signified in human language. Adams suggests that “because [Dickinson] anticipates rejection, she tells him to send his answer through Carlo...she would rather have painful information come from her dog so that it will hurt less” (135). Personifying her emotions as a hound also has a distancing effect, making them a distinct entity that she has some control over—enough, at least, to tie it up within her heart. But who masters the little hound? Dickinson implies that Bowles is the hound’s master, to whom it wants to return. It is interesting then that a real dog, over whom she is mistress, must act as a go-between.

Despite its faults, Adams’ essay is true in essence: Carlo did provide Dickinson with valuable psychological support. To Adam’s credit, her later essay on Brontë takes a vastly different approach to interpreting dog–human relationships that respects both parties as equal participants undergoing mutual change. She does so here as well, if only briefly. In a moment at the end of the essay, she considers what Dickinson might have meant to Carlo. While Dickinson was in Boston receiving “treatment of an eye ailment” for a prolonged period of time, Carlo died back in Amherst, and Adams suggests that “perhaps the long separations were too much for the fifteen-year-old dog who was accustomed to Dickinson’s presence” (136).

No doubt it was stressful for Carlo, but at fifteen he was already stretching the tail end of a Newfoundland's life expectancy. Newfoundlands, as a giant breed, rarely live beyond ten years. We can never know what Dickinson was to Carlo in the same way we can know what Carlo was to Dickinson. Again, it is "the writing animal, the human," who leaves textual traces of themselves and their nonhuman animal companions (Benson 4). In this case, even those traces are few and far between.

*

Who do we write biographies about and why? What do we miss when we overlook the histories of 'minor' figures, the most minor of all being the nonhuman animal? Virginia Woolf might have asked herself the same question before sitting down to write *Flush*, her biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's pet spaniel of the same name. Flush is not a Newfoundland, but Woolf's engagement with issues of breed and with how we represent dogs in literature are illuminating. To say that the book is simply an experimental biography of Browning herself, interested only in subverting the biographical genre, is to ignore the text's genuine concern with animal experience, and with conveying the world from a nonhuman perspective. Though Flush is far from a typical dog in his capabilities and social consciousness, Woolf pays special attention to his nonhuman bodily experiences, in particular his canine sense of smell. Perhaps Woolf was drawing inspiration in her portrayal of Flush from Pinka, the cocker spaniel given to Woolf by Vita Sackville-West. Woolf was no stranger to drawing inspiration from those around her, having written *Orlando: A Biography* about Sackville-West and her family history. Flush follows its title character from adolescent puppyhood to old age, and recounts the dramatic narrative of Flush being stolen for ransom alongside the equally dramatic narrative of Elizabeth Barrett's elopement with poet Robert Browning, though it always gives precedent to Flush's narrative and perspective.

Woolf projects the class system of Victorian England onto various dog breeds in a manner that may seem like a humorous act of anthropomorphism designed to illuminate and critique the system's flaws, but it also betrays an interest in the connection between dog breeding and social status. Prior to the nineteenth century, pet ownership was a phenomenon of the privileged classes (White 59). But though that changed, there was no way of shaking off

the associations that certain breeds still had with wealth and privilege. The spaniel in particular is a breed with a long historical association with nobility, and the book opens with a summary of that history, half mocking and half serious, beginning: “It is universally admitted that the family from which the subject of this memoir claims descent is one of the greatest antiquity” (Woolf 1).

But dogs have not simply been appropriated as status symbols; they have been literally created, their bodies manipulated to possess certain traits, and their bloodlines kept pure to mirror that of their owners. Woolf lays out the attributes considered desirable and undesirable by the Spaniel Club:

Light eyes...are undesirable; curled ears are still worse; to be born with a light nose or a topknot is nothing less than fatal. The merits of a spaniel are equally clearly defined. His head must be smooth, rising without a too-decided stoop from the muzzle; the skull must be comparatively rounded and well developed with plenty of room for brain power; the eyes must be full but not gozzled; the general expression must be one of intelligence and gentleness. The spaniel that exhibits these points is encouraged and bred from; the spaniel who persists in perpetuating topknots and light noses is cut off from the privileges and emoluments of his kind. Thus the judges lay down the law and, laying down the law, impose penalties and privileges which ensure that the law shall be obeyed. (4–5).

Woolf’s phrasing lays the responsibility for these qualities in the dogs’ paws, but it is not the spaniels who are “encouraged” to have good traits and who “persist” in having bad ones: the humans who breed them have complete control, the judges who lay down the law. Woolf accurately conveys the arbitrariness of the breed system, based purely on a human desire for strict and uncomplicated class identity, and for the entertainment of beauty. It is with irony, then, that she elevates the breed system while criticizing human society:

But, if we now turn to human society, what chaos and confusion meets the eye!...when we ask what constitutes noble birth—should our eyes be light or dark, our ears curled or straight, are topknots fatal, our judges merely refer us to our coats of arms. You

have none perhaps. Then you are nobody. (5)

If anything, this comparison serves to further reveal the flaws with the breed system, but it also highlights the way that humans project their insecurities onto other species, who are easier to control. In Woolf's society, and in Barrett Browning's, who had value certainly was more complicated than having a coat of arms, and physical qualities like skin colour did have an immediate significance for how a person was viewed by others.

Gender was also of immediate significance, and dogs were again drawn into anxieties around it. The term "man's best friend" suggests companionship rather than a working relationship, but because companion dogs—"toy dogs" or "lapdogs"—were historically associated with women, the term "woman's best friend" might be just as apt, if it weren't for the way such associations denigrated both woman and dog. Historically, dogs kept by women as pets, as opposed to dogs kept by men as working animals, were seen in the same light as their mistresses: frivolous, useless, indulgent, promiscuous, lusty, lascivious (McHugh 82). The list goes on. Likewise the presence of such dogs seemed to exaggerate the same qualities in their mistresses, as if, when brought into close proximity with each other, animality and femaleness magnified and affirmed each other. The spaniel is perhaps the best example of this association with wealthy women, being one of the earliest and most popular lapdogs. Today "teacup" breeds have the same associations with shallow socialites (80).

By beginning *Flush* with a description of the spaniel's noble lineage, followed by a depiction of a lusty young Flush fornicating with various companions during his adolescence in the countryside, Woolf is drawing upon these associations of the breed with wealthy women. Then, of course, Flush becomes the companion to such a woman, living a life of luxury and indulgence, spoiled by his mistress and her place in society. Flush's qualities as a spaniel also reflect upon Barrett herself, influencing the ways in which we read her. In her love affair and elopement with Robert Browning, for example, we see something of Flush's sensuality and impulsivity. But Woolf does not condemn these qualities; rather, they fly in the face of patriarchal oppression. McHugh notes that both Flush and Woolf's cocker spaniel Pinker were,

gifts to each writer from other women, symbols of friendship as well as the active companions that women take into their married lives. Their status as highly individualized and valuable pets informs the story's central drama, where Barrett (not yet married to Browning) finally leaves her father's house to rescue Flush after he has been abducted by dog thieves. (100)

It was just this emotional value that Victorian dog thieves preyed upon. As Howell argues, the phenomenon of Victorian dog-stealing was largely tied up in gender politics. In the “decisively *gendered* discourse” of Victorian domesticity, he says, dog-stealing could expose the threat of the market economy to “domestic virtues, and the exposure of the market value of domesticity” (46). Noting that those in support of the dog-stealing bill of 1845 focused on the value of men's dogs, while its opponents focused on women's dogs' lack of value, Howell says, “dog-stealing was difficult to combat, then, precisely because the question of property, founded on the principle of utility, was preeminently a gendered issue” (46). Lapdogs had little value under the law, because they were not working animals, despite often costing a small fortune to purchase. Yet it was their sentimental rather than utilitarian value to their (often female) owners that gave them such a great monetary value on the black market of dog-stealing operations. Regardless of the owner's gender, dog-stealing “left the owner, whether male or female, in the ‘feminine’ role associated with emotion, attachment, and tender-heartedness” (48).

*

It turns to play. I can tell by the tilt of your head, the tremble in your toothy lower lip, the mischievous glint in your eye. Thus we begin an old game. As you struggle to stand, back legs slipping on the smooth tiled floors, I back slowly away, chanting ‘predator and prey’ under my breath. Once you have gained your footing you come after me, tail swaying so violently it almost slaps your flanks. I chant louder and faster until we are tearing around the kitchen island in circles, yelping, panting, feet scrambling wildly. My heart beats in a real panic, something akin to the childhood fear and ecstasy of being tickled, despite the certainty that you won't harm me. At least not on purpose. The danger is that you will toss your head in play, break my nose with your thick skull, or claw me with your clumsy feet. But in the dark room at the center of my mind you are sinking your teeth into my neck and shaking.

*

Where can we locate the embodied traces of real dogs in these texts? I locate these traces in you: it is through my knowledge of your body that I read Pilot, or Nana, or Byron's Boatswain, deciphering similarities, differences, holding you up to ideal extremes and watching them fall short of your complexity.

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Book, Bone, and Water

There is, in the enormous Grand Gallery of the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, a likewise enormous sperm whale skull on display. It is near, but set apart from, the museum's 'Natural World' gallery, where a T-Rex skeleton and taxidermy giraffe walk side by side, and model marine mammals hang from the ceiling, swimming in the skylight's aquatic glow towards the glittering mineralogical displays. I suspect there is simply no room left for 'Moby,' as the skull is called, in that already crowded ecosystem.

But Moby's story is similarly set apart from the narratives of natural history being told in that gallery. He does not signify 'Whale' in the taxonomy of life forms represented in that other room; he does not even represent 'Sperm Whale.' His story is specific; his story is local, or at least the end of it is. On Easter Monday in 1997, after swimming inland up the Firth of Forth, the adult male sperm whale (true name known only to himself and kin) beached himself and died at Airth. He was then cleaned of his flesh, absorbed into the museum's enormous marine mammal collection, separated from his spine, and put on display ("Moby the Whale"). His history is more Scottish than Natural, and so he belongs to the rest of the museum, with its Pictish treasures and Lewis chessmen, and to the world you can glimpse beyond him through the hazed windows: the city itself, sea-like with wind and salty rain.

Or rather, his 'history' is Whale. I cannot visit the museum without stopping to stare into that diseased skull cavity which promises to lay bare a world of Cetacean mystery: the irregular, prickly growths near where the spinal column would have attached; the parallel toothed jawbones wired tight together; the basin that held the brain. The brain: dark waters, strange sounds, wild life forms, and none of it dark, or strange, or wild to that brain at all. So I feel rather than see, past the city, the palpable forth, like a garden path leading out to the whale-roads that darken north, where this skull journeyed for years before I was born.

*

The first time I read *Moby-Dick*, I was adrift. I began it during the dry heat of an Ontario summer, and was plunged into the cold gloom of a Nantucket winter during which the

opening chapters of the book are set. When I finished it almost a year later, I was in Edinburgh where, if it weren't for long hours of daylight, the weather could hardly warrant the label "summer." As if fated to be at odds with the setting of the book, I had read of Ishmael's travels through tropical waters during the darkest months of the Scottish winter, huddled in my perpetually cold and dimly lit flat, struggling to read the tiny print by the appropriately watery light of a brass, green-glassed lamp I had unwisely purchased from a thrift shop. I was drawn to read the book on rainy days, so that I would feel like I was sitting in a cabin on a ship.

Moby-Dick is not a book one needs to read in several sittings: there is little narrative to be held on to, and if anything the experience is like reading a long series of very short essays on topics relating to whales, interspersed with sections of personal narrative. So I would read a few chapters at a time, then set aside the book for weeks, or even months, imagining that this method somewhat mirrored the troughs and crests of monotony and action aboard a 19th century whaling ship.

*

From an evolutionary perspective, cetaceans are a lot older than modern humans. *Pakicetus*, an ancestor of the modern whale, was a cetacean living in streams 47 million years ago (Roman 104). In comparison, the genus *Homo* evolved 2.5 million years ago, and *Homo sapiens* only 200 000 years ago (Harari viii). But when modern humans and cetaceans met, they would write a violent history spanning thousands of years. On a sandstone wall in South Korea, a Neolithic petroglyph illustrates a great whale and a boat full of people tethered together by a harpoon and line: this ancient depiction of whaling dates back to 6000 BC (Roman 27). For millennia, the relationship would be one of subsistence hunting, with whales being hunted and consumed locally. But by the eleventh century, the Basques, a group of indigenous peoples originally occupying coastal regions straddling parts of modern day Spain and France, had developed whaling into a large-scale industry (45). The North Atlantic right whale was their victim of choice (46), and they soon had to venture from the Bay of Biscay "to the far shores of the Atlantic" in search of their prey. It was with such commercial whaling that the detrimental environmental impacts truly began. As Roman suggests,

...the transition from subsistence to commercial use meant that the hunters and consumers were often unconnected to the ecosystems of the whaling grounds. Unlike the Inuit, who had elaborate rituals and a strong dependence on the survival of the species, whalers intent on profit had no such motivation. (49)

The Basques were selling “oil for light, lubrication and soap; baleen for whips and fishing rods; bones for posts and gateways; and skin for shoes,” and finally meat for those who followed a Roman Catholic diet, where red meat—from land animals—could not be eaten on Fridays or during Lent (48). This was the beginning of a vast exploitation that would become increasingly unsustainable, and which continues to this day in varied disguises.

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According to the placard next to him, Moby was “the first sperm whale to be stranded in the Firth since 1769.” But there have been a number of sightings in the Firth according to the Sea Watch Foundation, who note “a group of fourteen observed by microlight pilots in 2013” and a sighting of two or three sperm whales in 2016 (“Sperm Whales Spotted”). Also in 2016, a total of 29 sperm whales stranded on various coasts in southern parts of the North Sea. In general, “there have been around one hundred separate sightings in British waters in the last forty years, with the largest group on record being of 20 animals seen off Mousa in the Shetland Islands in 2007” (“Sperm Whales Spotted”). Sperm whales prefer temperate or tropical waters, and though solitary males sometimes wander north (“Sperm Whale”), it is unusual for them to travel south into the North Sea. The Sea Watch Foundation speculates that the 29 whales stranded in 2016 were following prey but “were unable to navigate back to deeper waters” (“Sperm Whales Spotted”). As to why Moby stranded in the Firth, the museum conjectures it was because of illness. His placard reads: though “the back of the skull shows signs of disease,” “it is likely that the whale died from septicaemia, the result of a long-standing injury. This may also explain why he was so far from his usual range in the Atlantic Ocean.”

If Moby did die from septicaemia, he is in the company of countless other cetaceans: some early forms of whaling involved waiting for whales to weaken or die from infected

harpoon wounds. Aleut hunters in the Northern Pacific Ocean, returning from a hunt after harpooning—but not killing—a whale, would seclude themselves without food and water for several days, imitating “the sighs and groans of the injured whale, in an effort to cause it to die and strand” (Roman 41). Kodiak Island whalers off the coast of Alaska used the monkshood-derived poison aconite on their lances to “hasten death,” which occurred after about three days. In Northern Europe, minke whales were trapped with herring nets and shot with arrows, the tips of which were “covered with bacillus—preferably from the inflamed sore of a dead whale or some other rotten meat—causing septicaemia in the small whale” (51). The weakened whale could then be easily killed and processed.

*

Contrary to popular belief, *Moby-Dick* does not begin with the line, “Call me Ishmael” (Melville 93). Instead, the reader is met with an etymology of the word “whale,” and page after page of whale-related quotations from sources “sacred and profane” (77). This content could be considered paratext were it not for the way that Melville’s narrator—present here even before he introduces himself as Ishmael—places it within his narrative web. The etymology is provided to him by “a late consumptive usher to a grammar school” (75), and the quotations by “a Sub-Sub-librarian” (77), both, like Melville and his narrator, curators of cetological facts and fictions. It is important for Ishmael that we know his knowledge of whales comes from libraries as well as practical experience on a whaling ship; in fact, the relationship between these two kinds of knowledge is a major theme of the book.

Tempting though it is to read these first pages as superfluous preamble to the book’s ‘real’ narrative content, or to skip over them entirely and begin reading at the first chapter, they are an accurate prediction of the book we are about to read. The narrative illusion of the first few chapters, during which Ishmael becomes employed on the *Pequod* and meets his crewmates, evaporates, and we find ourselves reading a series of essays on topics of religion, human–animal relations, and cetology. Despite the narrative of revenge that frames the book, as Captain Ahab is driven to kill the great white whale who took his leg, the label of ‘novel’ does not sit well with the text. Ishmael himself seems to play on the dual meaning of “essay”—as an attempted action and a form of writing—when he says of his book, “the

classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less here is essayed” (227–8), and “what am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan?” (230).

*

For much of history, whales have been tangible to the average human only in fragments: light, baleen, fragrance. Even whalers, who interacted with the living animals, valued them as an assemblage of profitable goods rather than whole beings. Fantastically inaccurate illustrations of whales prior to the 17th century demonstrate how unfamiliar the creatures were to the artists who drew them, and how the whale existed in popular culture as “an icon, not an animal that could be observed” (Roman 26). It was in the 16th century that whale oil started to replace vegetable oil as an affordable and reliable illuminant (52): it was sourced from whale blubber, which was rendered—or ‘tried out’—by boiling it in large pots, first on land, and later on the ships themselves (52-53) when whalers began pursuing sperm whales in their tropical waters, and casked blubber spoiled quickly in the heat (71).

Cetaceans are divided into two suborders: baleen whales, or Mysticeti, and toothed whales, or Odontoceti. All of the ‘great’ whales—blue, fin, right, sei, bowhead, bryde’s, humpback, gray, and minke—are Mysticetes, except for the sperm whale, which is an Odontocete (Bannister, 80). Baleen whales were the first to be commercially hunted, starting with the right whale, so called because they were the easiest whales to catch, and therefore the ‘right’ whales to hunt (Roman, 46). Baleen, also called ‘whale bone,’ is “a highly specialized filter-feeding apparatus” in the whale’s mouth (Bannister 80), made up of many keratinous plates (Rice 78), which allows the whale to filter small organisms such as krill from water. Baleen was incredibly valuable: 5,654,300 pounds of baleen fetched \$1,950,000 in the United States in 1853 (79). It was used for “umbrella ribs, corset busks, and hoops for skirts” while “the fibrous fringes were used for brooms and brushes” (79). Sperm whales—the only toothed great whales—did not possess this profitable material, and were not hunted until the early 18th century (Roman 70). They did, however, provide a unique illuminant in the form of spermaceti. The liquid substance—found in the whale’s large head cavity, and potentially used for the purposes of buoyancy and echolocation—became a solid wax when removed from the body, and was turned into “the finest candle wax then known” (70). Though the discovery of

fossil fuels diminished the demand for spermaceti, it was used well into the 20th century in cosmetics, and as a lubricant for machinery during the space race between the US and the Soviet Union (144).

Would a Victorian woman donning a whalebone corset think as little of the whales fragmented against her ribs as we now think of cows when lacing up a pair of leather shoes?

*

In a chapter entitled “Cetology,” Ishmael sets out to “project the draught of a systematization of cetology” (Melville 229). Before outlining his method of whale categorization, however, he provides us with several quotes by authorities on the subject, all of which emphasize the near impossibility of the task at hand. He lists writers who have touched on whales, ranging from “The Authors of the Bible,” Aristotle, and Pliny—all of whom most likely never encountered real whales—through to contemporaries like Thomas Beale, author of *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (1839), who was a surgeon on a whaling ship. This overview of resources available to the curious cetacean enthusiast focuses more on literary than scientific writing about whales, though in Melville’s time a scientist was not an unheard of passenger aboard a whaling ship (Roman 101). Ishmael is more interested in restoring the sperm whale to its rightful place upon the “throne of the seas” (Melville 228) than in educational information concerning them. Additionally, he seems more concerned with their poetic than scientific reputation, lamenting that “reference to nearly all the leviathanic allusions in the great poets of past days” were to Greenland Whales rather than Sperm Whales (229). He also seems to value literary over scientific substance in the texts he references, saying of Beale’s book, (and Bennett’s) that they are “of excellent quality, though mostly confined to scientific description” (229). Because Melville’s text itself sometimes strikes a fine balance between scientific description and literary content, Ishmael’s preference seems particularly significant. It suggests that we read his text as a literary effort, but also emphasizes the fiction of a perfect taxonomy, which he goes on to parody by creating his own.

The whales that Ishmael lists in his taxonomy only sometimes possess the names we

currently know them by, which to the modern reader emphasizes that such categories are constructed, flexible, and ever changing. Instead of providing us with scientific names, Ishmael says, “I give the popular fishermen’s names for all these fish, for generally they are the best” (236). Elsewhere he similarly privileges the opinions of his Nantucket messmates, who think that whales are fish, over those of Linnaeus, the father of modern taxonomy, who thinks that whales need to be categorized separately from fish based on their mammalian qualities (230). Ishmael does not deny these qualities; indeed, he says that the qualities Linnaeus lists—lungs and warm blood—are what distinguishes whales from other fish. It seems that sheer stubbornness, then, is what drives him to his famous claim that “*a whale is a spouting fish with a horizontal tail*” (231, emphasis in text), but it is also his loyalty to popular rather than scientific knowledge. His statement that, “it is by endless subdivisions based upon the most inconclusive differences, that some departments of natural history become so repellingly intricate” (233), can easily be read as a dig at Linnaeus’ taxonomical system.

Additionally, he undermines Linnaeus’ system by agreeing with its content while dismissing its structure, and thus also its authority. There is humour in this because he refutes Linnaeus’ system in order to replace it with his own, but he is poking fun at the futility of systematization itself, and focuses specifically on language and naming. He says of the sperm whale: “it is chiefly with his name that I now have to do” (232). Of the right whale—also called Greenland, Black, Great, and True—he says, “there is a deal of obscurity concerning the identity of the species thus multitudinously baptized” (232–233). But it is not only the issue of naming such obscure animals that troubles him. He also denies that whales can be categorized by external attributes like “baleen, or hump, or fin, or teeth,” or internal attributes, because, “in various sorts of whales, they form such irregular combinations; or, in the case of any one of them detached, such an irregular isolation; as utterly to defy all general methodization formed upon such a basis. On this rock every one of the whale naturalists has split” (235). Except for Ishmael, apparently. He laments,

“What then remains? nothing but to take hold of the whales bodily, in their entire liberal volume, and boldly sort them that way. And this is the Bibliographical system here adopted; and it is the only one that can possibly succeed, for it alone is practicable” (235).

Ishmael is not a naturalist, but a writer, and his system is “Bibliographical” because it is divided into “Books” and “Chapters.” His first book is called *The Folio Whale*, his second *The Octavo Whale*, and his third *The Duodecimo Whale*, and these books divide whales “according to magnitude” (231). The Folio whales are the largest, such as sperm whales and “Hump-backed” whales; the Octavo whales are smaller, such as “Grampus” whales (or orcas) and “Narwhales;” and Duodecimo whales are what he calls porpoises, but which include several (as we know them today) dolphins.

Though the species names he uses are often different than the ones we use today, it is quite easy to determine what whales he is talking about based on his brief descriptions. Sometimes there are duplicates: he lists both a “Grampus” whale and a “Killer” whale, though both seem to refer to killer whales or orcas. Some of his whales may even be fantasy, but accuracies and inaccuracies are somewhat beside the point. He is commenting on the fictionality of taxonomy, but equally important is the ineffable nature of his subject matter. For Ishmael, nothing is so essential to whales as their mystery and unattainability. Humans may chase them, capture them, eat them, process them, use them for light, but the whales themselves are forever out of reach. Writing about them is nothing less than “the classification of the constituents of a chaos” (227–228). And he may have a point. Even today, we are discovering that our classifications of whale species may be inaccurate. Transient and Resident orcas off the west coast of North America may in fact be two separate species, having not interbred for half a million years (Safina 305), and the northern right whale may likewise consist of two species, the populations of which have been separate for millions of years (Roman 106).

*

We know now that whales are mammals, but, as Melville demonstrates, this was not always the case. It was not so much a matter of evidence—historically, the Greeks, Romans, and Inuit, for example, drew distinctions between cetaceans and non-mammalian aquatic life (Roman, 99)—but of commercial consequences. According to 19th century philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill, it was impractical to consider whales as anything but fish in the marketplace (100). Arguably, this kind of thinking—seeing whales as fish, but even more importantly as a commodity—lingered into the 20th century, long after they had been officially

classified as mammals, and justified our exploitation of them beyond the threshold of sustainability.

A poem by the American writer Ellis Parker Butler, called “The Whale,” humorously demonstrates the exploitative attitude towards whales that characterized the late 19th and early 20th centuries:

The Whale is found in seas and oceans,
 Indulging there in fishlike motions,
 But Science shows that Whales are mammals,
 Like Jersey cows, and goats, and camels.

When undisturbed, the Whale will browse
 Like camels, goats, and Jersey cows,
 On food that satisfies its tongue,
 Thus making milk to feed its young.

Asking no costly hay and oats,
 Like camels, Jersey cows, and goats,
 The Whale, prolific milk producer,
 Should be our cheapest lactic juicer.

Our milk should all come from the sea,
 But who, I ask, would want to be—
 And here the proposition fails—
 The milkmaid to a herd of Whales?

The irony of the poem is that the proposition of ‘milking’ whales does not fail. By the time that Butler was born in 1869, through to his death in 1937, dwindling whale populations were being milked for all they were worth in spermaceti and blubber and baleen. Though life on a whaling ship was by no means an easy one, and the venture was not necessarily profitable for those crew members of lower rank, the industry as a whole was highly lucrative, and the lure

of travel to exotic places meant there were plenty of young men willing to be “milkmaid to a herd of Whales” (Roman 73). But the poem also comments on the slippery wildness of whales that guaranteed they could never be captured, bred, and domesticated “like camels, goats, and Jersey cows.” At least not then, or for many decades to come.

*

Most mysterious of all whale-sourced products was ambergris, a rare and valuable substance praised by Ishmael as being “soft, waxy, and so highly fragrant and spicy, that it is largely used in perfumery, in pastilles, precious candles, hair-powders, and pomatum. The Turks use it in cooking, and also carry it to Mecca, for the same purpose that frankincense is carried to St Peter’s in Rome. Some wine merchants drop a few grains into claret, to flavour it” (Melville 519). Its very name, from the French for ‘grey amber,’ seems to ring of gem-set jewellery, to emit a cedar-like scent that echoes the woody origins of amber. Described by Melville, it is luxury itself, consumed bodily by the wealthy and offered to gods. But it is also decadence, in the true sense of the word: indulgence leading to decay. This is only appropriate, given that ambergris is produced, as Ishmael puts it, “in the inglorious bowels of a sick whale!” (519).

Long before the whaling industry reached its height in the 1860s, a decade that “marked a watershed in whaling technology” (Roman 127), ambergris was a valued commodity, with evidence of its trade dating back to the ninth century when “an Arab traveller recorded trade in ambergris among the islands of the Indian Ocean” (Clarke 7). But its origins have long been mysterious, with various theories surfacing to explain the appearance of ambergris floating on the sea, or washed up on beaches, or in the bellies of dead whales. These speculations ranged from mineral, to vegetable, to animal, and even the most scientific maintained an air of exoticism and rarity. Was ambergris “a rare and odorous earth...veined and marbled as earths sometimes are,” or was it “a waxy honeycomb which, melting from the rocks into the ocean, was perfected by the sun and sea” (8)? That ninth century traveller believed ambergris to be “a mushroom or truffle which grew at the bottom of the sea”, while others believed it to be a fungus that fell fruitfully from rocks, or a fruit which fell rockily into the sea (8). One theory,

that “ambergris was a gum exuded into the sea from the roots of certain trees,” connects back to the amber in its name (8). Of the more animalistic origins, some thought it to be “the excrement of a bird which was called *Anacangrispasqui* living on sweet-smelling herbs in the Maldives.” It was even thought to be “dried foam of the sea” (7). Clearly, there is some resistance to the idea that ambergris is faecal matter: it is not the droppings of a regular bird, but rather one that eats only fragrant vegetation. There was even more resistance to the idea that whales were producing ambergris.

Alongside these various theories, ambergris has from at least the ninth century been associated with sperm whales. Clarke notes that the “amber” in its name might actually come from the Arabic “anbar,” a word for “sperm whale” (9) (but which now also means “ambergris”). Despite this association, many people—from Marco Polo (“Ambergris”) to the 17th century naturalist Sir Thomas Browne (Read 221)—believed it was found in the whales because they sometimes consumed it accidentally with their food. Read notes that “the 1600s ended with no very clear consensus on what it was and where it came from” (221). A letter published by the Royal Society of London around the year 1697 speculated that its source was an undiscovered animal thought, “to swarm as bees, on the sea-shore, or in the sea” (“Ambergris”). It was not until much later, with the early 18th century establishment of the New England whaling industry, that the possibility of sperm whales themselves producing ambergris was posited as a theory for the substance’s origins. Clarke cites Schwediawer, writing in 1783 on the subject, as “the proper author of this view of ambergris as a coprolith,” or faecal matter (9).

Melville’s explanation for ambergris is in fact quite accurate. It is not known for sure whether only sick sperm whales produce ambergris, but it is indeed made in the intestinal tracts of some small percentage of that species, and is expelled in their vomit and faeces. Because “the indigestible horny beaks of squid and cuttlefish” are so often found encased in ambergris, it is thought that the substance forms around these objects to protect the whale’s intestines from damage (“Ambergris”). Here Melville is right again; Ishmael humorously describes finding in ambergris “certain hard, round, bony plates, which at first Stubbs thought might be sailors’ trousers buttons; but it afterwards turned out that they were nothing more than pieces of small squid bones embalmed in that manner” (Melville 519). Shocking as it

would no doubt have been for those pomading their hair and perfuming their bodies with ambergris products to learn that they were anointing themselves with the cetaceous equivalent of owl pellets and hairballs, the shock would have been amusingly greater if, as Stubb fears, ambergris also contained bits of undigested sailor. Fortunately, if Ishmael gets one cetacean fact wrong, it is that whales of any kind have a bloodlust for human flesh.

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Moby at the National Museum also has something in common with the many other whales whose bodies—dead and alive—have been exhibited before humans to satisfy curiosity and to entertain. According to Roman, whales have been exhibited “for at least 2,000 years” (172). In the 1860s, one blue whale was chemically preserved and displayed in cities around Europe; it was possible to have tea inside the whale, for a price (173). Even in the 19th century, such exhibits were publicized as a combination of entertainment and education: an 1881 exhibit in Philadelphia encouraged parents to bring their children for “a lesson in natural history” (175). This form of advertising is mirrored today, sometimes in museums (though it is free to visit Moby’s skull in the National Museum of Scotland), but more obviously in marine parks and whale watching tours.

Roman rightly notes the great “distinction between an exhibit hall and the open sea,” but these are not the only places the public can encounter whales (175). Roman doesn’t touch on killer whales in his book, probably because they are not classed as one of the great whales. But there is no doubt that they are seen as whales in popular culture, and there is no overlooking their role in the history of whales as entertainers and educators. Humans did not go straight from displaying dead whales in travelling shows to marvelling over live whales in their wild natural environments on whale watching tours. Since at least the 1970s, humans have been making a business of displaying live whales in captivity, purportedly for educational purposes, but also for entertainment and profit, at marine parks such as SeaWorld.

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When Ishmael categorizes whales according to a “Bibliographical” system, he is referencing the fact that pieces of whale blubber were cut into “books or bibles on long planks

on the deck, the blubber spreading out from the skin like the splayed pages of a ponderous tome” (Roman 82). But he is also suggesting that, for him, the body of a whale is a text to be read, or, more accurately, written. He says, “the sperm whale, scientific or poetic, lives not complete in any literature. Far above all other hunted whales, his is an unwritten life” (Melville 229). His use of the word “lives” is particularly telling. When speaking of literary whales, Melville frequently uses physicalizing language, while when referring to real whales he uses language to do with books and libraries. In his “Cetology” chapter, he describes his task—both the taxonomy he is creating, and the book he is writing—in these terms:

But it is a ponderous task; no ordinary letter-sorter in the Post-office is equal to it. To grope down into the bottom of the sea after them; to have one’s hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing. What am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan! The awful tauntings in Job might well appal me. ‘Will he’ (the leviathan) ‘make a covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain!’ But I have swam through libraries and sailed through oceans; I have had to do with whales with these visible hands; I am in earnest; and I will try. (229–230)

By “letter-sorter,” Ishmael means a writer as well as a postal worker. This phrase also figures whales as letters to be sorted. When he suggests that to write about whales is to “grobe down into the bottom of the sea,” he might mean literally. He has worked on a whaling ship, and touched whales “with these visible hands,” not just with his mind while swimming through libraries. Ishmael values a combination of book learning and practical experience. He seems to ask: what can we really know about whales if they are to us only an inaccurate illustration in a dusty old book, or bones mounted in a church² or museum? *Moby-Dick* would not be the book it is if Melville himself had not experienced life on a whaling ship. But where does that leave the readers of *Moby-Dick*, who close the book having swum through its literary oceans without getting wet?

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² Whale bones were valuable in the Middle Ages as *hierozoika*, or “items from the natural world held sacred for their mention in the Gospels” (Roman 10).

No one thing can be said to have caused the drastic shift in human relationships with whales from exploitation to conservation over the course of the 20th century. It was a course laid out for us long ago, when humans first began to hunt whales on a commercial scale. In 1804, the French natural historian Bernard Germaine Lacépède said, with great prescience,

Since man shall never change, only when [whales] cease to exist will these enormous species cease to be the victims of his self-interest. They flee before him, but it is no use; man's resourcefulness transports him to the ends of the earth. Death is their only refuge now" (qtd. in Roman 139).

This was before even the invention of Norwegian Svend Foyn's bow-mounted cannon in the 1860s, which "became the industry standard" (127), and expanded the market to include blue whales, which were previously too inefficient to hunt (128). It was also before Norwegian Petter Sørllle invented the stern slipway in 1924 (129), which allowed whales to be hauled onto a ship's deck for processing.

It was not only, as Roman suggests, the drastic decline in whale population caused by overfishing in the era of 20th century factory whaling, or the desperate efforts of the International Whaling Commission to save the industry with regulations and quotas for sustainable whaling, or the widely publicized response by Greenpeace to those breaking the rules, or even "the ten-year moratorium on all commercial whaling," passed in 1982, that led us from battling and killing whales to protecting and loving them (170). It was familiarity.

Unlike the other animals in this collection, I can't say that "I have had to do with whales" in the way that Ishmael has: "with these visible hands" (Melville 230). Since Melville's day, whales have become astonishingly more accessible to the average land-dweller, both physically and in our knowledge of them. Whales are no longer the mystery that Melville attempts to awe his reader with. Roger Payne's *Songs of the Humpback Whale*, released in 1970 (Roman 160) after the biologist spent several years recording humpbacks near Bermuda, enchanted the public and gave them something—or someone—to empathize with. Technologies exist that Melville couldn't possibly fathom, allowing us to follow even his

mighty sperm whale on its fathoms deep³ dive after giant squid and other cephalopods on which it feeds. In just a few decades, beginning in the 1960s, marine parks displaying captive whales transformed the killer whale from a villainous pest into a familiar friend (Leiren-Young), while the booming whale-watching industry now gives us access to whales in the ‘wild.’ Yet whalers of the 19th century, and those whalers that still exist today, undoubtedly had and have a more intimate experience of real whales than a tourist watching a show at SeaWorld, or spotting orcas off the coast of British Columbia, violent though such a relationship might be.

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Perhaps whales were once symbols of “the image of the ungraspable phantom of life,” an unanswerable mystery hidden deep in the most inhuman parts of the world (Melville 95), or perhaps they were oversized fish reduced to lamp oil and corset stays. Since the 1980s they have become symbols of environmentalism, breaching through polluted waters astern of Japanese whaling ships under banners reading “Save the Whales.” Most recently, however, they have become symbols of captivity, illustrating humanity’s cold disregard for intelligent, emotionally sensitive non-human life for the sake of profit and entertainment.

The 2013 documentary *Blackfish* explores the consequences of killer-whale captivity in marine parks such as SeaWorld. In a narrative that is part courtroom drama, part psychological thriller, and part environmentalist discourse, the film follows the story of a single whale named Tilikum, captured as a youth, as he grows increasingly violent in captivity and ultimately is involved in the deaths of three people at several marine parks. At the beginning of the film, Tilikum is cast as the Bad Guy, a sinister shadow in the dark. Here is a glimpse of Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, the unfathomable other. There is indeed something threatening about a highly intelligent being, bigger and stronger than humans, who has been wronged: in *Moby-Dick*’s case by hunting, and in Tilikum’s by capture. But unlike *Moby-Dick*, who emerges as a villain out of a narrative of mystery and fear, Tilikum is all the more sinister for rewriting the narrative of friendliness and familiarity that has characterized our

³ A fathom being only six feet, Sperm whales commonly dive to 190 fathoms, and rarely to 550 fathoms (“Sperm Whale”).

relationship with whales, especially orcas, since the 1970s, cultivated in part by the marine parks who capture and display them.

But over the course of the film our perspective shifts, and we come to see Tilikum not as a villain who betrays the trust of those humans closest to him, but as a victim of circumstance, driven mad by the cruelty of his confinement. Furthermore, we see him as a wild animal with whom communication has been largely an illusion. And yet, like whalers of the past, the trainers who worked with Tilikum could say, “I have had to do with whales with these visible hands” (Melville 230). Despite the exploitative, unhealthy, and dangerous circumstances, the human–animal relationships were no doubt intimate and nuanced ones. The film does not explore these complexities, instead portraying the trainers as slightly deluded by SeaWorld’s narrative of orcas as trainable puppy dogs. Are the trainer’s feelings of companionship with the whales unfounded? What is the extent and nature of their communication with each other? These questions go unasked. This is likely because the film rests so heavily on the narrative of the court case between OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and SeaWorld, the end result of which was the cessation of unnecessary physical contact between whales and their trainers. The outcome was certainly positive, though mostly to the benefit of the trainers. The film ends with the suggestion that whales have their place in the wild, humans have theirs in civilization, and the best solution is to leave well enough alone and live in mutual ignorance and awe of each other. But the division between our world and the ‘wild’ is, of course, an illusion, and in a time when whales cannot possibly live beyond the reach of human influence, it is irresponsible to let our relationships with them go unexamined.

It is because of marine parks that the public has come to care about the welfare of whales. In 1957, a pilot whale was captured and displayed by Marineland of the Pacific. The whale, named Bubbles by California’s children, died two years later when she choked on a rubber ring in her enclosure (Leiren-Young 8). In 1961, Marineland captured its first killer whale, nicknamed Wanda, who died after several days of captivity (9). Further attempts to capture killer whales halted until 1964, when Murray Newman, head of the Vancouver Aquarium, successfully led a team to capture an orca off Saturna Island. Initially, his intentions were to kill a whale and have a life-size model constructed, but when the animal

was captured alive, he took advantage of the situation and decided to display it. After the 5-year-old whale was harpooned, two members of its pod supported it in the water so that it wouldn't drown; orcas can hold their breath for only 15 minutes (13). When the pod finally left, the whale was, in the absence of a proper enclosure, towed to a dry dock owned by the local military base while Newman tried to find or build a permanent pen (64). The young whale was named Moby Doll: scientists believed the whale to be female, though he was determined to be male after his death. He was displayed to an eager public, whose opinion of the orca changed rapidly from monster, to curiosity, to Vancouver's own darling whale. Everyone in the industry knew this was a turning point; the enormous potential profit of a captive orca was beyond doubt, and many marine parks and aquariums would go on to capture and display their own orcas. Cetaceans became familiar creatures that waved and whistled and bobbed their heads with friendly grins in exchange for glistening silver fish thrown from a plastic bucket; they became oversized house-pets in stadium-sized versions of living room aquariums. The public interest in marine mammals generated by these displays helped inspire the Save the Whales movement, which would result in an almost global cessation of whaling. But at what cost were such conservation benefits for free whales gained, when their counterparts were living and dying in captivity?

Eventually, Moby Doll was moved to a new enclosure, but his health continued to deteriorate. His skin turned pale and developed lesions from the polluted harbour water he was being kept in, and he ate only sporadically. Occasionally free orcas, likely from his pod, would visit his enclosure and communicate with him. This is what happened on the day he died. Shortly after his pod swam away, he sank to the bottom of his enclosure, drowned (115). Moby Doll had died of exhaustion, unable to hold himself afloat in the low-saline harbour water (120). This narrative of illness and death for captive cetaceans has been repeated countless times since. In November, 2016, two beluga whales at the Vancouver Aquarium died weeks apart from an unknown toxin ("Vancouver Aquarium"). In January, 2017, Tilikum died of a bacterial infection ("Tilikum").

The consequences of *Blackfish* for SeaWorld and its captive whales have been significant. Since the film's release in 2013, the financial impacts of negative publicity have resulted in SeaWorld announcing in 2016 that they would end their captive breeding program,

and phase out their orca shows (“Jamieson”). Other marine parks and aquariums, including the Vancouver Aquarium, have been pressured to do the same for their captive cetaceans.

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Tilikum was also involved in another court case. In 2012, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) filed a lawsuit against SeaWorld on behalf of five of their captive orcas “seeking to establish that [they] deserved protection under the Constitution’s 13th Amendment, which prohibits slavery” (O’Connor). The judge, Jeffrey Miller, ultimately ruled that the Amendment did not apply to orcas, but humans only, and dismissed the case, adding, however, that animals did have other legal rights. This result is not surprising, but PETA arguably achieved their goal. Though they no doubt wanted to emancipate the orcas from captivity, they were probably equally interested in raising public awareness about SeaWorld’s treatment of their orcas. Applying the Thirteenth Amendment to nonhuman animals, and accusing a high-profile organization of slavery, generated plenty of controversy and news coverage. And the case was a landmark one in terms of animal rights. As PETA’s article on the case suggests, the most ground-breaking element of the whole ordeal is that a judge was willing to “listen to arguments and give careful consideration to the idea that the definition of slavery does not exclude any species” (O’Connor).

*

Maybe it is my distance from whales that gives them such power in my psyche. What I share with a dog is like what I share with a human: rooms, people, scents and sights, similar perceptions shifted slightly like the turning of a kaleidoscope. A dog and I can share a mutual understanding: which foods taste good, which people are kind, which parks are the nicest. And when we disagree it seems just a matter of taste. Perhaps it is possible to share an understanding with a whale. The relationship between captive orcas and their trainers simultaneously demonstrates and destroys this possibility. Certainly the act of performing tricks only works if both parties—trainer and trainee—understand the intentions and outcomes of certain signals. But I think it’s safe to say there is little understanding of mutual circumstances, when one party is so far removed from the world it evolved to thrive in.

I have spent time trying to imagine what it must feel like for a sperm whale to dive down beyond the photic zone in pursuit of their prey, sensing the body of a squid in the dark below, or what it must feel like for a humpback to filter food through its baleen. The closest I have come to living whales is one hundred meters from two humpbacks on a whale watching tour near Vancouver, and several orcas at a show in a marine park, both simultaneously thrilling and saddening experiences. But during the time when I was writing this essay, I began to dream about whales. I found myself swimming in cold waters at night, surrounded by pods of orcas, their black and white bodies smoothly and soundlessly breaking the dark surface of the sea. I was filled with a certainty of their neutral intentions towards me, and with the same sad thrill I had experienced awake. They had no interest in touching me, and I didn't dare touch them. They were untouchable, and could not be followed.

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'Whale falls,' the bodies of dead whales that have fallen 1000 or more metres to the ocean floor, create some of the deep-sea's most diverse ecological communities (Smith and Baco 311). Normally, the sea floor receives a slow and steady shower of 'marine snow,' organic material composed of dead animals and plants falling from the photic zone and providing a valuable source of nutrients to life in the nutrient-poor aphotic zones. The carcass of a whale, having sunk to the abyssal sea floor, contains an amount of carbon roughly equivalent to 100 to 200 years worth of marine snow (312). The carcass then goes through three stages: during the "mobile-scavenger stage," the whale's flesh is removed by scavengers; during the "enrichment opportunist stage," the whale's bones and the sediments its body has enriched are "colonised" by "polychaetes and crustaceans;" and during the "sulphophilic stage," the whale's skeleton is populated by a diverse range of life forms, including chemoautotrophic⁴ ones, taking advantage of its sulphide emissions (311). Depending on the specific environment, the first stage can last for years, and the last for decades. Though this

⁴ Chemoautotrophs are organisms that derive their energy from "chemical reactions" that are "used to synthesize complex organic compounds from carbon dioxide" ("chemoautotrophy"). The life forms referenced above utilize sulphide emissions for this process. They can be compared to photoautotrophic organisms, such as plants, which "use light as an energy source" ("photoautotroph").

might seem like an inconsistent and rare occurrence, whale falls are frequent and close enough to each other to allow “faunal dispersal between adjacent whale falls (332)” which would allow “macrofaunal species to specialise on these habitat islands” (311).

How many whale falls have humans been directly responsible for? Until the 20th century, whaling was an inefficient sport: “two whales might be killed for every one retrieved and tried out” (Roman 58). And the whales we have killed have left their biological imprint on human environments in turn. At the Basque Whaling Station in Red Bay, Labrador, where the Basques processed their kills, “the soil around the ruined try-works where blubber was tried-out” is still greasy with whale oil, even 400 years later (53). Near an 800-year-old Thule settlement in the Arctic, geologist Marianne Douglas “has found evidence that the nutrient-rich by-products of the whale hunt had leached into a freshwater pond,” with algal blooms occurring to this day (34).

When whale bodies ‘fall’ into human habitats, we scavenge them as well, historically for food and useful materials, and now for knowledge. In the past, English and Scottish royalty had rights of ownership over stranded whales, and the same is still true, “for the benefit of science rather than the consumption of kings” (Roman 50). We pick clean, and grow knowledge from, their bones. We populate their skeletons with thoughts, assumptions, and questions, and populate our books with their bodies. In the National Museum, Moby is placed within a different kind of ecosystem, a cultural one, where biology meets anthropology meets archaeology. The museum material around him feeds off his presence and expels new meaning, while he feeds on that material as well. And literally, what new ecosystems do his bones now inhabit? What new terrestrial microbes occupy their porous surfaces? Dustings of dead human skin cells and mites and organic matter tracked in on human feet now layer his curved jawbones, the nooks and crannies of his teeth.

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When Little Cats Wear Clothing

I must immediately make it clear from the start, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn't the *figure* of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the bedroom as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse our myths and religions, literature and fables. There are so many of them. (6)

- Jaques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*

In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway outlines the failings of Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the essay that resulted from a series of lectures he gave in the 1990s on the topic of the animal in the Western philosophical tradition. In the essay, Derrida describes a scene in which, while naked, he finds his "little cat" in the same room looking back at him, really looking, not as the mechanized animal of philosophy, but as an actual and specific cat capable of responding to his presence. This encounter is the genesis of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, but as Haraway notes, it plays a small part in the overall text.

She says that though Derrida "understood that actual animals look back at actual human beings," and "knew he was in the presence of someone, not of a machine reacting" (Haraway 19), he does not "seriously consider an alternative form of engagement either, one that risked knowing something more about cats and *how to look back*, perhaps even scientifically, biologically, and *therefore* also philosophically and intimately" (20). In a way, he is impeded in this by the very philosophical traditions that he is critiquing. Valuable though his reading of the Animal/Human divide in the philosophical canon was, says Haraway, "the cat was never heard from again" (20). He "failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning" (20).

But even if Derrida had felt this curiosity, there is the question of how to write about his cat. How can one write about such an interspecies interaction without falling into the traps of either the scientifically objective language of behaviourism or the equally objectifying tendency to use animals as symbols in art and mythology? Haraway notes that Derrida

criticizes those who observe and write about animals “but never meet their gaze,” and those who “engage animals only as literary and mythological figures,” while failing to locate those like primatologist Jane Goodall and anthropologist Barbara Smuts who have not “refused the risk of an intersecting gaze,” and consequently have “undone and redone themselves and their sciences” (Haraway 21). But there is also a danger in “making the subaltern speak,” and Derrida avoided this when he “identified the key question as being not whether the cat could ‘speak’ but whether it is possible to know what *respond* means” (20).

Where Derrida turned to the old question of animal suffering, Haraway offers a more promising set of questions he could have asked instead:

Can animals play? Or work? And even, can I learn to play with this cat? Can I, the philosopher, respond to an invitation or recognize one when it is offered? What if work and play, and not just pity, open up when the possibility of mutual response, without names, is taken seriously as an everyday practice available to philosophy and to science? What if a usable word for this is *joy*? And what if the question of how animals engage *one another’s gaze responsively* takes center stage for people? What if that is the query, *once its protocol is properly established*, whose form changes everything? My guess is that Derrida the man in the bathroom grasped all this, but Derrida the philosopher had no idea how to practice this sort of curiosity that morning with his highly visual cat. (22)

Haraway’s questions are exciting and illuminating, but I am particularly interested in her division between man and philosopher. She is dividing a world of lived experience from one of texts and ideas, but her use of the phrase “the man” in this context might mean both “the human” and “the animal.” She suggests that the human-animal body knows things that do not transfer well into the language of philosophy as we know it, and one of these things is how to engage responsively with another animal’s gaze. Ironically, it is the very language and tradition Derrida criticizes that, according to Haraway, places limitations on his thinking. But, for Haraway, work and play and joy, both enacted and examined, have the potential to change how we think about, write about, and most importantly interact with nonhuman animals. They can teach us “*how to look back*” (20).

Despite such limitations, Derrida's narrative invites readers to fill in the framework with their own specific animal encounters. While reading about Derrida's experience, I was remembering my own body encountering my own 'little cat' as she sat on my bed's white comforter, watching me stroll naked out of the bathroom on my way to the closet. She was looking at me "to see, without going to see, without touching yet, and without biting, although that threat remains on [her] lips or on the tip of the tongue" (4). I had those same inklings of philosophical conflict, of a confrontation with or attempted embrace of otherness, grounded in physical sensations. My instinctual feelings of nakedness and shame hung palpably between us: I felt the urge to cover or clothe myself, put a physical boundary between my body and her gaze. But more than those learned human instincts, I felt an animal vulnerability, as though hers were the eyes of a predator, and mine the body of her prey. Why else should she stare at me so intently, not casually glancing up from a nap in surprise at my presence as she sometimes did, but with intention: she crouched in a position from which she could easily pounce, following my movements with her head as if she had been waiting for me beyond the bathroom door. Being well acquainted with the capabilities of her claws, I could feel in her gaze their sinking into my arms, my breasts, my neck. But I could also feel the impossible softness of her fur against my skin. Despite anticipating the pierce of her claws, I was often drawn, in my naked vulnerability, to pick her up from the bed and cradle her against my chest, nuzzle my cheek against the rabbit-fur patches behind her ears, breathing my warm breath into her neck.

She had enormous startled eyes, marble-tabby markings, and a mischievous attitude; combined, these qualities made her greatly resemble Tom Kitten from Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Tom Kitten*, which is, appropriately, a story about being clothed, being naked, and being animal. She also resembled, my sister tells me, a cat from Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*—a novel in which a dead pet returns to life—but I have been too afraid to read it and confirm the similarity. The comparison could be drawn, apparently, by her habit of slipping silently into the bathroom while people were taking baths, and staring down at them from her perch on the closed toilet seat. Many a time I was surprised by her tiny head appearing next to mine as she jumped her front paws up against the rim of the tub, curious to see what I was up to. Sometimes she would leap onto the rim, and my body would tense in the hot water, too afraid to move lest she startle and slip in.

Her name was Ginsberg, after the beat poet Allen Ginsberg. The woman at the shelter joked that she was going to be a real ‘howler,’ referencing the poet’s most famous poem. She would wander from room to room, jumping onto bedside tables at four in the morning, knocking off books and pens with the bat of a paw. We used to joke that she was trying to pick them up, that she had inherited the creative sensibilities of her namesake and was frustrated by her lack of opposable thumbs. In reality, it was because she was hungry. As a kitten she had survived an infection—one that killed the sister she was brought into the shelter with—and its long-lasting results were a compromised digestive system and a difficulty in absorbing nutrients. No matter how much we fed her, she would mew up at us as if she was starving, twisting her thin body around and around our legs. Even then, I knew that our jokes about pens were anthropomorphic nonsense, entirely about me and the world I lived in, filled with books, underwritten with history, populated by ghosts. Books meant little to her; they were objects. They drew my attention away from her, and potentially to her, if she knocked enough of them to the floor. My world had little to do with her world, or the world we shared, living every day together in the same apartment, breathing the same air, feeling each other’s warm presence, looking out of windows at the same view.

In the poem “The Naming of Cats”—from *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*—T.S. Eliot writes that cats have three different names. First is “the name that the family use daily/...All of them sensible everyday names” (1). The second is “a name that’s peculiar, and more dignified./...Names that never belong to more than one cat” (Faber and Faber 2). Third is,

The name that no human research can discover—
 But THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess.
 When you notice a cat in profound meditation,
 The reason, I tell you, is always the same:
 His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation
 Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:
 His ineffable effable
 Effanineffable

Deep and inscrutable singular Name. (3)

If the cat knows his own name, why does he spend so much time contemplating it? Various illustrations of this passage offer interpretations: Axel Scheffler's drawing, in the 2009 edition of the book, shows a white and orange tabby cat vainly admiring himself in a mirror, lying with one paw cupped under his chin, and a large smile on his face. The illustration seems to interpret "profound meditation" and "contemplation" as vanity, but also cleverly draws out Eliot's use of the words "human research" with a reference to the infamous 'mirror test' which scientists have been using for decades to assess self-awareness in nonhuman animals. Clearly the cat here *does* recognize himself, and moreover he likes what he sees.

Edward Gorey's earlier 1982 illustrations of the same poem bring questions of representation and culture to the forefront. In a manner characteristic of most other illustrations in the book, the two accompanying "The Naming of Cats" contain depictions of artwork. In the first illustration, a cat sits with their back to the viewer on a round decorative rug in the foreground, while in the middle ground the cat's presumed human owners consult an enormous antique book entitled *Nomina Felium*. In the background hang two full-body portraits, not of the humans, but of cats standing in human formal dress, between which is a small shelf holding the stone bust of a cat. The humans are an elderly pair wearing old-fashioned evening dress. The man wears spats over his polished shoes, and his trousers are an affronting chequered pattern. The woman, whose white hair is pulled back in an elegant bun, wears a tent-like high-necked gown of a bold pattern. The illustration has the air of antiquated luxury, as if we are looking into the home of a wealthy aesthete throwing a dinner party in the 1930s. The question is: are the humans throwing the party, or is the cat?

In keeping with the poem's narrative, we could read the image as a pair of humans trying to decide what to name their cat, or trying to determine its secret name. But the image also seems to depict a pair of humans visiting a cat home—the portraits and bust on the wall are of cats, after all—and politely perusing a volume on the cat's family history. It is hard to decide whether the anthropocentric or feline-centric interpretation of the illustration is correct, so the viewer wavers between them in a way that is both humorous and significant. The

ambiguity of Gorey's illustration interrogates and unsettles our assumptions around species by means of a cultural role reversal.

Gorey's second illustration for "The Naming of Cats" shows a man from behind—possibly the same man from the previous illustration, though he is wearing different clothes—holding a small, delicate glass, and contemplating either the striped cat lying on a velvet footstool in front of him, or the Chinese painting of a tiger hanging on the wall behind. Again, there is a suggestion that the cat owns the painting, and is smug in the face of the man's admiration. The cat and the representation of a cat are tied together in the man's gaze, which is comparable to the viewer's gaze. Our reading of the situation—with either the human as owner, or the cat as owner—has great significance for how we view the nonhuman in the poem and illustrations. If the human is the owner, then he owns the cat as he owns the artwork, and a real cat is comparable to its representation in art. This speaks to the way that individual animals are often viewed as representations or symbols of their entire species, when in fact substituting a single cat for its whole species would be as inaccurate as doing so with a single human. But this reading doesn't work very well with the content of the poem, which insists that a cat can't be reduced to a name, and is in fact so individual that it needs three distinct names. If we instead read the cat as owner of both home and artwork, and the human as a guest, we enter a surreal world of inverted species hierarchies where cats are in control of their own representations.

The complexities of these illustrations indicate how multi-faceted the poem is, and how much potential it has for interrogating our assumptions around how species can be represented. It describes a cat's identity as being something so complex it is beyond expression (and the same, of course, could be said for human identities). A cat's name is both ineffable, or indescribable in words, and effable, or describable in words. Its ineffability may be the reason why humans, whose knowledge is expressed primarily through language, cannot discover the name. But in addition to being entirely beyond the reach of human knowledge, the name seems to fumble through the paws of the cat himself, who turns the thought of it over, and over, and over in his mind. It is ineffable: he can't grasp it. It is effable: he can. It is "effanineffable," tumbling and slipping through his mind. But the definition of "effable" must be different for the cat than for humans, because the cat cannot describe *anything* in words.

The word “effanineffable” takes on the quality of a cat trying to speak, all muted feline “fffs,” and the reader, who can speak, also gets lost in its spiral of sound and meaning. Both human and cat are left at a loss.

In comparison, naming my cat Ginsberg seems an issue both complex and mundane. Though Eliot’s poem brings up issues of anthropomorphism and how humans construct identities around nonhuman animals, we are not meant to take it literally. If anything, it is an act of anthropomorphism itself, playing on human conceptions of cats as aloof and mysterious. But who are we to say that cats don’t have names of their own, existing in a language other than human? Cetologists have speculated that cetaceans—whales, dolphins, and porpoises—may have distinct names for individuals within their pods and social groups (Safina 313). Perhaps cats have some sense of individual identity that we have yet to discover.

I must return to *The Tale of Tom Kitten*, which is concerned less with the identity created by names, and more with identity created by clothing. The story, by Beatrix Potter, follows Tom Kitten and his sisters Mittens and Moppet, whose mother Mrs. Tabitha Twitchett is having friends over to tea. Afraid that her rowdy children will make a bad impression on her guests, she undertakes to clean and dress them, though they would much rather be playing on the dusty doorstep. She scrubs their faces, brushes their fur, and combs their tails and whiskers in the most un-catlike manner possible. Instead of washing, brushing, and combing them with her tongue, the illustrations show her doing so with the entirely human objects of a washcloth, a brush, and a comb. The closest we see to her behaving like a cat is in the illustration in which she holds the comb, where she is pictured licking her paw as if about to start grooming herself. However, this posture is actually the result of Tom Kitten scratching her in protest to being cleaned and dressed: he sits with one paw reaching out towards his mother, claws extended. Like a seamstress who has pricked her finger, she has lifted her paw to her mouth to soothe the wound. Tom’s displeasure is even worse, however, when she begins to dress them in human clothing. Mittens and Moppet are put into “clean pinafores and tuckers;” Tom looks on in catlike horror—back arched, fur on end, tail doubled in size—as his mother pulls out “all sorts of elegant uncomfortable clothes” from a chest of drawers (Potter 151). If we could see his face, he would no doubt be spitting and hissing. His outfit consists of a tiny pair of blue

trousers, a matching blue jacket, and a straw hat with a blue ribbon. Because he has grown “very fat,” “several buttons burst off” and his mother sews them back on in distress (151).

The kittens are then “unwisely turned . . . out into the garden” by their mother, who yells after them: “now keep your frock clean, children! You must walk on your hind legs. Keep away from the dirty ash-pit, and from Sally Henny Penny, and from the pig-stye and the Puddle-Ducks” (151–152). It seems that they must walk on their hind legs not only to keep their frocks clean, but also because it is the respectable way to behave, on par with keeping away from questionable company. We see the kittens standing stiffly in front of the house, their front paws held up as if they don’t know what to do with them, so upright in their posture they seem on the verge of toppling over. Indeed, they are so unused to wearing clothes that “presently they trod upon their pinafores and fell on their noses,” covering the fabric in green smears (152). What follows is a slow shedding of clothing as the kittens climb to the top of the garden wall: the girls turn their pinafores “back to front” so they can climb up the rocks on all fours, while Tom, “unable to jump while walking upon his hind legs in trousers” is seen “shedding buttons left and right,” his belly protruding from the clothes as they fall off (153). The very attempt to follow their mother’s instructions, by walking in their hind legs, or turning their pinafores around, results in the undoing of her efforts. By the time Tom finally reached the top of the wall, “he was all in pieces” and his sisters “tried to pull him together,” meaning they tried to put his clothes back on—a phrasing which oddly conflates Tom’s body with his clothing (153). It is as if he is not truly whole without his clothes on: he is Humpty Dumpty and they cannot put him back together again.

When Moppet’s “white tucker” has fallen into the middle of the road, and Tom’s hat and buttons followed, the Puddle-Duck family appear walking down the road and stop to stare “up at the kittens. They had very small eyes and looked surprised” (154). The ducks put on the clothes that have fallen, and the mirthful kittens tumble down into the road, losing the rest of their clothes in the process.

Come! Mr. Drake Puddle-Duck,” said Moppet— “Come and help us to dress him!
Come and button up Tom!

Mr. Drake Puddle-Duck advanced in a slow sideways manner, and picked up the various articles.

But he put them on himself! They fitted him even worse than Tom Kitten.

“It’s a very fine morning!” said Mr. Drake Puddle-Duck. (155)

The tone in which the Puddle-Ducks are described is noticeably different than that used to describe the cats. While the cats are quite anthropomorphized, Potter focuses on the ducks’ physical features and ways of moving in a way that emphasizes their animality. It is very accurate to say that ducks have “small eyes” and move in “a slow sideways manner” when hesitant, and when combined with the illustrations these descriptions capture duckishness brilliantly. But they are distant from the reader in a way the cats aren’t. They “look surprised” rather than ‘are surprised.’ They also do not speak to each other or the kittens, communicating silently through gesture until they have put the clothing on. It is only when they have donned such human clothing that they, like the anthropomorphized cats, speak. But the delay gives Mr. Drake Puddle-Duck’s declaration an air of mimicry rather than sincerity. Tom, notably, does not speak in the book, a point to which I will return below.

When Mrs. Tabitha Twitchit finds her kittens on the garden wall with no clothes on, “she pulled them off the wall, smacked them, and took them back to the house,” saying, “my friends will arrive in a minute, and you are not fit to be seen; I am affronted” (157). It is difficult to tell whether she is affronted by their behaviour—that they are associating with those she looks down on—or that they have lost their good clothes so carelessly, or that they are naked for all the world to see. Unlike their mother, the kittens have no conception of nakedness. She sends them upstairs, where they are shown wreaking havoc in the bedroom, climbing the bed curtains and tossing around their mother’s clothes. Tom all the while wears his mother’s blue bonnet. The story concludes with a note about the Puddle-Ducks, who have gone into a pond where “the clothes all came off directly, because there were no buttons” and “they have been looking for them ever since” (158). The illustration shows three ducks swimming, two with their heads underwater and tails in the air. There is an air of a Kipling-

esque “Just So” story about this ending, which seems to suggest that we always see ducks with their tails in the air because there are sunken pinafores at the bottoms of ponds.

Clearly, *The Tale of Tom Kitten* is a text preoccupied with notions of clothing and nakedness, and unlikely though the comparison might be, I see an overlap of interest between Potter’s story and Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Derrida is interested in notions of nakedness and shame in relation to humans and animals. Encountering his little cat, he says, “I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am*—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment” (Derrida 3–4), and adds, “It is as if I were ashamed, therefore, naked in front of this cat, but also ashamed for being ashamed” (4). Animals, Derrida suggests, could not experience this; “naked without knowing it, animals would not, in truth, be naked” (5). We believe nudity to be “proper to man, that is to say foreign to animals, naked as they are, or so it is thought, without the slightest consciousness of being so” (4). The animals in Beatrix Potter’s works are a not quite human, and not quite animal, but a combination of both who wear clothing and nakedness in equal measure, and are therefore ideal sites for exploring and unsettling notions of nudity and shame. Though humans and animals do not literally confront each other, as in Derrida’s essay, Potter’s preoccupation with clothing also raises questions of identity, and moreover raises the question of the animal that Derrida would say the western philosophical tradition has failed to properly address.

Derrida asks, “ashamed of what and naked before whom? Ashamed of being as naked as a beast” (4). Tom Kitten is this ‘beast,’ and his mother, perhaps, is asking the question. But Tom lives in a world that complicates the idea of animal nakedness and non-nakedness. Many children’s books depict animals wearing clothing; it is considered the height of anthropomorphism, along with depicting animals speaking human language. But Potter is interested not just in clothing, but also in the acts of dressing and undressing. Additionally, her characters are perpetually dirtying and laundering and mending clothing—the best example being Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, a hedgehog washerwoman—in a way that emphasizes the impermanence of such objects and the fragility of the identities they signify. Her animal characters seldom fit their clothing as they should, and like Tom Kitten and his sisters climbing over the garden wall, often seem to be bursting at the seams and losing clothing left

and right. Thus we are confronted again and again with the question of animal nakedness, which as Derrida suggests is also a question of human nakedness.

At the very beginning of the story, Potter shows the three kittens playing with flowers on the dusty doorstep of their house, and says, “they had dear little fur coats of their own” (Potter 149). Potter is playing on the two meanings of the word ‘coat,’ which when applied to an animal means their fur, and when applied to humans means an item of clothing. Of course, when we call the fur of an animal its ‘coat,’ we are not so far off from the human meaning. We reference a legacy in which an animal’s coat becomes a human’s coat: it can be skinned off to become an object separable from the animal body as well as the human body. Potter is obviously not talking about skinning kittens, but by talking about their coats as separate from their bodies—capable of being removed, belonging to them in the sense of an object possessed rather than an innate part of the body—she raises the question of nakedness. If they are already ‘clothed’ in their natural coats, when they are not wearing pinafores and trousers, why does their mother have them put on additional clothing, and what is she ashamed of her guests seeing when they arrive for tea?

The kind of clothing Mrs. Tabitha Twitchett dresses the kittens in is significant. She is not putting them in clothing made for a cat’s body, but clothing made for humans. Why would clothing for four-legged animals be made in a two-legged style? Mrs. Tabitha Twitchett herself wears a Victorian human-style dress and walks on two legs, just as she encourages her children to do, while her children wear the gender-specific children’s clothing of that era. It is as if by inheriting a human shame in nakedness, she must also treat such shame in the human way, by wearing human clothing. Or is it in fact the wearing of human clothing that has manifested a human shame of nakedness? Regardless, the shame is clearly learned—an education that parallels both domestication and parenting. As in her other stories, such as *Peter Rabbit*, Potter depicts a mother teaching her children the social rules they will be required to follow as adults. The categories of ‘human child’ and ‘animal’ are conceptually inseparable in the text. Does Tom loathe wearing clothing because he is a child, and thus unused to it, or an animal and thus unused to it? Just as children must learn social roles, animals must be tamed. On the one hand, children are like little animals to be trained in the ways of adult society, and on the other, pets—who are infantilized animals—also have rules to be followed for existing

in human society. Tom has no conception of nakedness because he has not yet learned that he can be naked, while as an animal he may never learn. Similarly, the kittens must learn to transition from walking on four legs to walking on two, which parallels a human child's transition from crawling to walking, and the awkwardness of a wild animal's transition into domestication. So, the story is about a mother raising her children, and a young child beginning to grow up, but it is also a story about the domestication of animals.

Of course, cats are already domesticated animals, and have been since ancient times. But Potter's anthropomorphism—with cats speaking and wearing clothes and throwing tea parties—can be read as domestication made literal. Domestication draws humans and nonhuman animals into a sphere of mutual interest, with both species sharing concerns in the hopes of benefiting from the relationship. Accordingly, Mrs. Tabitha Twitchett has human concerns and aspirations. She wants to keep up appearances in front of her friends, and she wants to teach her naughty children how to behave according to the rules of their society. Potter is clearly making social commentary on the figure of the self-conscious housewife, but Mrs. Tabitha Twitchett can also be read as a comment on anthropomorphism in children's literature: with her litter of rowdy kittens, Mrs. Tabitha Twitchett can no more keep up appearances than a cat can pretend to be human.

Manifesting these tensions, *The Tale of Tom Kitten* is a text of thresholds. The book opens in a doorway, where the kittens play unclothed. A distinction is soon made between the house, where the kittens are stuffed into their best clothing, and the garden, where clothing begins to disintegrate off their bodies. The garden wall plays a similar role, being the boundary between the cultivated domestic and rambling countryside, and more importantly a boundary between those of Mrs. Tabitha Twitchett's class, and those of the Puddleduck's, who don't wear clothes and barely speak. It is only when the kittens tumble down from the wall into the road that they lose the last of their clothing, and though the ducks don the kitten's clothing, it is a parody of class and domestication rather than an effective transformation. As soon as they do what ducks are naturally inclined to do—go for a swim in a pond—the clothing slips with ease from their backs and is lost in the water. When Mrs. Tabitha Twitchett finds her children naked on the garden wall for everyone to see, and drags them back into the house in shame, they seem to bring a wild incivility back with them, destroying the neat

domestic order of their mother's bedroom and disturbing her guests with "extraordinary noises overhead." Just as the wilderness of the garden and countryside dismantled the domestic façade of clothing from the kittens' bodies, the kittens then dismantle the domestic with their wildness.

It is no mistake that we never hear Tom speak in the book. Perhaps his silence is a symptom of his youth: it creates the feeling that he is younger than his sisters, who attempt to take care of him by repeatedly trying to put his clothes back on. But given the characters' feline natures, it makes little sense for Tom to be younger than his sisters, if they are meant to be of the same litter. His silence, then, could also be read as an indicator of his animality, much like Mr. Drake Puddle-Duck's initial silence. Tom refuses language like he refuses clothing. But more than anything, there is a gendered air to Tom Kitten's wordlessness and behaviour, especially in comparison to his sisters. Tom's sisters are docile while their mother dresses them, whereas Tom is defiant and physically violent, resisting with scratches. While his sisters make an effort to keep their clothing neat and clean by turning their pinafores around, Tom makes no such effort, barrelling through the garden with buttons flying this way and that. His sisters take responsibility for trying to dress him again, as his mother did at the beginning of the text. One of the most notable gender differences is the kittens' names. A 'mitten' is an article of clothing, one that a woman would most likely knit in that era, while the name 'Moppet' echoes the word 'mop,' an object and activity that would likewise have been associated with women. Tom Kitten, on the other hand, is going to grow up to be a Tom Cat, and we already see traces of a tomcat's boisterousness in his personality. These conservative gender expectations, though troubling, are not surprising within Potter's work and the time in which she was writing. And yet in refusing clothing, one of gender's greatest indicators, the kittens are rejecting at least for a short while the associated social rules. Tom wearing his mother's bonnet at the end of the tale is, in particular, an upheaval of gender norms.

One important question is how the reader views these animal characters. When Jeremy Fisher is almost eaten by a trout, and we see him hopping home shoeless in a tattered mackintosh, do we see a being half-naked, or a frog's body revealed in its true state, incapable of nakedness and therefore unremarkably un-naked to the human eye? When the Puddle-Ducks put on the kittens' clothing, and we see them as clothed, do we read their previous lack

of clothing as nakedness? Does anthropomorphism leave its trace? Once clothed, is nakedness inevitable? Personally, I find their clothed-ness is awkward to look at, like actors wearing ill-fitting stage clothes, and when they swim their clothes away it is like watching the stage makeup washing off. I see them, with something like relief, as they have always been.

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Parrot Talk

As I write these essays, I am often visited by a pigeon or two, fluttering onto my windowsill to gobble up the bird food I sprinkle there, or to shelter from the rain, or simply to survey the garden area from on high. At least (excepting the obvious food gobbling) I think that is why they visit my windowsill. They arrive bedraggled, grey feathers matted and clumped by the rain, papery pink skin shivering around their thin necks. They murmur and coo and grumble each other off the sill and into the air, iridescent coats inflating into ruffs around their tiny heads. This mild territorial behaviour is indistinguishable for me from the mating display, which I have also seen performed, and successfully too, on my windowsill.

They turn their orange eyes to the panes, watching me as I work, startling every time I shift postures too suddenly. When I get up they fly away with a familiar wing-beat clamour, unless I am getting up to scatter food on the windowsill, leaning down to a particular spot on the floor behind the door where I keep the bags of sunflower seeds and mealworms and mysterious protein pellets. They remain on the sill even as I pull open the window and reach out a handful of treats. Sometimes, having left the window open a little, I will hear a curious beak tapping on the pane, and see an eye looking down into the corner, and an eager head beaking into the room. I do not open the window more than a crack.

A part of me wants to let them into the flat. Their orange eyes are familiar to me. Birds make for good company and I have, for years, missed the companionship of parrots.

*

Ruxton was a Blue-fronted Amazon, a type of parrot native to South America. They are small as parrots go, covered almost entirely in vibrant green feathers the colour of the leaves of a tropical plant, with streaks of yellow and bright red beneath their wings. They usually have yellow faces, with, above their grey-black beaks, the patch of turquoise after which they are named. Ruxton matched this description, but was so much more than her exotic, jewel-like appearance. When I held out a hand to her, she would growl softly in displeasure before stubbornly stepping onto the perch of my fingers, like a queen stepping down from her

throne. She was surprisingly heavy, despite her hollow bird bones, because decades of easy living—eating nuts all days and getting no exercise but crawling to perch on the top of her cage—had left her overweight with a fatty liver: x-rays from the vet showed us this enlarged organ, along with her little berry-shaped heart. She loved to eat spicy peppers, and would stand on one leg, holding a jalapeño or red chilli in the other, crunching her sharp beak through the flesh and rolling the seeds around her mouth with a tiny grey tongue. The food would smear over her beak, and she would clean it off with a foot, rattling her claws. When I held her up close to my face, her feathers smelled of dust, her breath of dried fruit.

Unlike dogs and cats and other pets I have had, parrots are not domesticated. All her life, Ruxton had a small metal band around one of her legs, indicating that she was wild-caught for the exotic pet market, rather than bred in captivity for the same. There was no way for us to know in what jungle she was born, or what places she lived in on her way to the Canadian prairies. Blue-fronted Amazons can live almost as long as humans, granted they are in good health, and barring any predatory disaster; there was no way for us to know how old she was, but I knew she was older than me. Before my sister and I were born, my parents adopted Ruxton from a serial hobbyist, whose recent interest in parrot keeping had finally waned. Along with her they adopted Pepper, an African Grey parrot, and the two quickly became bonded companions.

African Greys are notoriously sensitive, but companionship, according to Braitman, is very important for the psychological and physical well-being of all parrots, and the two birds thrived in each other's company (Braitman 116). African Greys are, as their name suggests, grey in color, but there is nothing dull about their appearance. Their feathers are lighter at the edges, giving them a subtle scaled look. They have a suede-textured mask around their eyes as though they have been dusting themselves with white powder, and their tail feathers are red as my reddest lipstick. Over all other parrots, they are famous for their ability to mimic human speech, but they are also notoriously delicate and easily stressed. Wild-caught or bred in captivity, and even with the best of owners, parrots of all kinds cannot thrive in a human home in the way they would thrive in their natural environments.

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One of the earliest mentions of parrots in Western literature is by Aristotle, who says of “the Indian bird” that it “is said to be human-tongued (and it becomes even more outrageous after drinking wine)” (qtd. in Boehrer 4). As Boehrer notes, “this observation about wine is echoed for centuries to come” in subsequent texts, though it has little founding in reality (4). It seems to be an extension of the comparison to humans, whose tongues do indeed become “outrageous” after drinking alcohol. But to say that the parrot becomes “even more” outrageous after drinking is to suggest that it was already outrageous for being “human-tongued.” Does Aristotle mean that it is outrageous for a bird to possess, or mimic, human qualities, or that humans are outrageous, and parrots become so by associating with them?

Boehrer, a parrot owner himself, notes how unrealistic it is to suggest that parrots like drinking wine, going so far as to outline the experiment he performed with his own parrots, offering them a variety of different wines, all of which they declined to drink. He says that, “parrots may eat fermented fruit in the wild, and in past centuries have been fed a mixture of wine-soaked bread called “parrot soup,” but when given a choice, they don’t seem given to drink” (4). While I appreciate Boehrer’s emphasis on the parrots’ own natural inclinations, I think he underestimates certain species’ taste for fermented fruit in the wild.

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My mother has an unlimited empathy for animals, and a great unquestioning belief in the capabilities and value history has denied them. In Australia, every time we saw a kangaroo dead on the side of the road, she would pull over and examine the body, checking to see if it was female, and if so, whether there was a joey still alive in her pouch, to be taken to the wildlife park for care. During certain times of year, the berries of a particular kind of tree would grow and ripen and fall to the ground where they would decay and ferment. Lorikeets, small rainbow-coloured parrots, would eat the fermented fruit and become intoxicated, often leading to vulnerability and injury. She would nurse them through their avian hangovers until they were ready to party again. Sulphur-crested cockatoos, corellas, and gallahs gathered in flocks to spread their yellow and pink and red plumes in the bush behind our house, and my

mother had wooden sign designed to hang by the front door, on which the words “Cockatoo’s Rest” arched over the image of a sulphur-crested on a sky-blue background.

At this point in my life, these were the only parrots I had known, wild and abundant, though when my sister and I were babies our home was filled with birds: a mourning dove named Sunshine would sometimes perch on our twin cots, and Ruxton and Pepper’s calls echoed in the large log house. I had forgotten all this, as infants do, when my family moved to Australia. By the time we moved back to Canada, Pepper had died, but Ruxton was still alive and was eventually returned to us. She was so different from her wild counterparts, positively domestic. But not domesticated: I knew what she was missing.

Later we would adopt Chewy, a sulphur-crested cockatoo identical to those that used to perch in the trees behind our house in Darwin. Like those birds, Chewy was tall and lean, with an enormous grey beak and powerfully clawed grey feet. She had the beautiful yellow crest the birds are so well known for, which she would fan out when in a state of excited emotion, both positive and negative. But unlike those wild birds, Chewy was bred in captivity, and had spent her whole life living in cages with nothing more than shiny bobbles to distract her and nourish her active mind. When we adopted her from a family who could no longer handle her loud outbursts and destructive behaviour—of which the name they had given her was a clear indicator—she was already a handful.

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Parrot beaks are not the beaks of birds I see around me on a daily basis, the gentle beaks of songbirds and pigeons, the strong but comparatively dull beaks of seagulls and corvids. Picture the great curved beak of a macaw, the small lower beak nestled into the large upper beak, like a pair of crustacean claws. Aesthetically, they are beautiful, and when our birds would eat nuts and seeds the oils would polish their beaks into a shine. Physically they are sharp, and terrifying to anyone who has ever been bitten by one. I have been bitten by mice, rabbits, cats, and dogs. An infected cat bite once caused my finger to swell up to three times its normal size; a puppy bit my upper lip and my whole mouth was full of blood for hours. But to be bitten by a parrot is like being cut by a set of tin-snippers: they wound down to the bone.

The whole time my family had parrots, we also had pet cats. This might seem like irresponsible pet ownership, but cats, like parrots, are smart enough to know their limits, and are perfectly capable of judging the effect of a large sharp beak. Pepper was particularly fearless of the cats. Stealthily, he would climb down from the top of his cage, onto the back of a nearby chair, and down a chair leg until the cat's tail was in reach, just waiting for a hearty nip. Though the cat didn't appreciate being terrorized by a bird, it was a nice role reversal to the typical species narrative.

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Beanie was a troubled African Grey who came to us almost entirely bald. He suffered from feather picking, a very common avian disorder, although many other animals do it to, including humans, though with hair rather than feathers. It's hard to say specifically what causes feather picking, but like stereotypic behaviour it seems to be influenced by environment. Braitman says,

Avian veterinarians will diagnose feather-picking disorder if the plucking is unrelated to other medical conditions like allergies. Parrot owners, avian vets, and breeders claim that birds pluck when bored, frustrated, and stressed. It can also be related to sexual behaviour or premature weaning, a way of seeking attention, a reaction to overcrowding, a sign of separation anxiety, or a reaction to a change in the bird's routine—virtually anything potentially upsetting to parrots. (106).

And like stereotypic behaviour in zoos, the solution is often environmental enrichment. Phoebe Greene Linden, a parrot expert, suggests that, “enriching parrots' environments and helping them learn new behaviours is best” for treating feather picking (qt. in Braitman 106).

No doubt moving into a new environment provided an incredible amount of stress for Beanie. Though his condition improved after a time living with us, possibly aided by the companionship of Ruxton, he never fully recovered from it, and would often have recurrences of feather picking. As Braitman suggests, it is not always environment that causes mental

distress in animals. Like humans, they can simply be prone to certain mental conditions as a result of genetic heritage, past experiences, or personality. Perhaps Beanie was, like me, prone to anxiety for no apparent reason; or perhaps his experience being bred into captivity was responsible. He often spooked at no discernable trigger, but just because we couldn't discern one doesn't mean it wasn't there. He once got frightened and fluttered from his perch into an open fish tank, screeching as he beat the water with his wings. He would allow no one to get him out except my father, to whom he was attached, and who scooped him out with one hand before wrapping him in a towel. He sat shivering on his perch for the rest of the day, as we fussed about keeping him warm.

*

The most remarkable thing about parrots, for humans, is their ability for mimicry. We love to exclaim upon the intelligence of a creature spouting human words, though a parrot's intelligence is hardly limited to saying 'pretty Polly.' As Paul Carter says, "We persist in thinking that parrots merely mimic us, when their mimicry is a way of telling us that we are mimics" (8).

Many of our parrots could talk. Ruxton could say "hello" in the gravelly voice of an old Hollywood starlet. Beanie could say, "peek-a-boo, I love you, birds don't talk but I do!" in a charming whistle-toned voice. I knew the birds couldn't understand what they were saying, and that is the fascination of parroting, whether an actual parrot is doing it, or a human being. Ruxton didn't just say hello; she had her own unique inflection, so the word came out like a song: "hell-ooo-ah!" A dip down in the middle, and a perky extra syllable added at the end. She didn't understand the meaning of the word, or even that it was a word, or what a word is, but she understood sound and rhythm. In fact, her 'hello' was almost always preceded by a set series of clicks and followed by a modest wolf whistle. They were sound phrases, linked together by memory and habit, but separable into parts. Similarly, Beanie's 'peek-a-boo' statement was a complete phrase. They seemed to take pleasure in this singing; Ruxton's pupils would dilate in her orange eyes, just as they did when I offered her a choice morsel of food: a slice of yellow pepper, or a pomegranate split in half and glistening.

Chewy had a similar sense of rhythm. Though she never mimicked human speech, she did have the cockatoo dance ability displayed in many a well-loved YouTube video, side-stepping along her perch while bobbing her head, crest fully fanned out. Such displays can sometimes be a sign of stereotypic behaviour, a coping mechanism used when an animal is distressed. But as Chewy only ever danced in accompaniment to music, or us humans clapping and singing and dancing, it is safe to say that it was a display not of distress, but of enjoyment or, dare we say, fun.

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Of the 350 species of parrots that biologists have catalogued, one third

are now threatened with extinction, and many have already ceased to exist. Less than two centuries ago, parrots inhabited North America in vast numbers. Today the continent's indigenous parrots are gone. In the meantime, exotic parrot species have been imported to North America from elsewhere. Now these birds, too, are increasingly threatened in their homelands. (Boehrer xi).

I can't even imagine a parrot native to North America. What did they look like? What resemblance did they have to the birds that currently populate the continent, and what resemblance did they have to the exotic birds that took their place in our minds?

Boehrer also writes of the parrot–human historical relationship that “it is the story of an ongoing process of acquisition, played out on both the material and intellectual levels” (x). One doesn't need a history lesson to guess who is acquiring whom in the situation. Like most exotic pets, parrots are frequently bought by people who think of them as collector's items, or clever toys that can do neat tricks. And when such people find that their bird—who needs physical, intellectual, and emotional stimulation just as humans do—is not the object they had hoped for, the bird is passed on to a new owner, and a new owner, possibly until the end of its long life.

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Ruxton had a large cage set in front of an expanse of sliding glass doors so that she could look out over the backyard, watching the many wild birds that came to feed on the deck and at the feeders my mother had hung from trees. These were not the birds of South America, but of Southern Ontario: fat brown sparrows, vibrant red cardinals with little pointed crests, raucous blue jays with their piercing shrieks, and chickadees calling ‘chick-a-dee-dee-dee-dee.’ Unsurprisingly, Ruxton had a great interest in these birds, especially when they came close to the window.

She did not spend her days in the cage, but there is only so much freedom a captive parrot can have. Every morning her cage would be uncovered, the door to it opened, and she would crawl, using her beak in combination with her clawed feet, to perch on top of the cage. There she would sit, being fed occasional treats, the focus of small social attentions, until it was time for her to be put to bed again, and the tattered old blankets, ridden with holes chewed by bored parrots—which had, for longer than memory, been used for this purpose—were thrown over the cage to block out light and draughts. Repeat.

Alternatively, she had a parrot stand, a raised perch with a food and water bowl at both sides and a circular tray below to catch droppings and food. In the summer, my mother would sometimes carry her out into the backyard and place her on a low hanging branch of a particular tree. There, she would disappear from view, like a chameleon, her green and yellow body vanishing in the rustling leaves and dappled light. For the most part she was easy to find again, dozing in the same comfortable spot she was placed on hours before. But in one of her contrary or energetic moods, she would over the course of a few hours climb to the top of the tree and remain there stubbornly, despite any enticing treats one might beckon her with. She was difficult to spot, hidden amongst leaves and branches. The colouring that had evolved to perfection in the Amazon served her almost as well in the comparatively mild woodlands of Southern Ontario. No doubt the opportunity provided her dormant instincts the chance to kick in and find the ideal spot to avoid predators. But a glimpse of her red wing feathers amongst the green would give her location away to our human eyes, and my mother would get the contraption used for cleaning debris off the pool—an extendable pole to which various nets

and brushes could be attached, one serving well as a temporary parrot perch—and use it to retrieve Ruxton from the tree tops.

This is not responsible pet ownership, clearly, but Ruxton had her wings clipped and therefore couldn't fly away. Wing clipping involved taking her to a vet trained in avian care to have some flight feathers on each wing trimmed so that she could only flutter and glide short distances. There is something quite sad about the necessity of this, and the procedure was always a traumatic experience for her. It took at least two trained professionals to perform it, not because it was technically complicated to trim the feathers, but because it was so hard to keep her calm enough to perform it quickly and efficiently. In an examination room at the vet's office, the lights would be turned off, and a blanket or towel thrown over her. Through the fabric, an assistant would hold her gently around the neck in order to immobilize her beak, which at this point would be trying to bite anything in reach, while the vet would stretch out the wings and clip the selected feathers. Fortunately this was not a procedure that needed repeating often, but it was the price that Ruxton had to pay for even the small freedom of climbing a tree.

As the sad legacy of centuries of trade in exotic, undomesticated animals, she could never be returned to the wild. She clearly enjoyed her tree, just as she enjoyed the food we provided, and perhaps even our company, as we did hers. What, if anything, was the alternative?

*

Boehrer says that “parrots today are more familiar in the home and more endangered in the world, more coveted and yet more taken for granted than ever before” (x). In the sense that when we hear ‘parrot’ we are more likely to think about a captive pet parrot than a wild one, and that those who support the exotic pet trade take for granted an endless supply of animals which they are in fact driving to extinction, this statement may be true. And it is true that my familiarity with parrots, the understanding and intimacy that comes from sharing space with another creature, has happened primarily in a home environment, with captive pets rather than wild birds. But it is a familiarity with specific birds, individuals of different species, all unlike

each other in body and personality, and unlike their wild brethren by virtue of their captivity. But I must ask, how familiar am I really with parrots, or with any species of animal?

*

Watching a parrot bathe was a joyous experience, especially when that parrot was Ruxton. Standing on her water bowl, she would plunge her beak and head into the water and toss droplets back over her shoulders, rustling her wings to distribute them down over her tail. Emitting little squawks and chirps of delight, she would puff up her feathers and double in size. Sometimes we would take the hint to assist her, and get the designated spray bottle of water out from under the sink. It was such a pleasure to watch her and imagine she was bathing in the rain. What I loved most though, was that it was her whim, her desire, rather than the urging of us humans or anyone else, that led her to waddle foot over foot to perch on her water bowl. It was a special event. You had to wait for it.

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The Bat Enclosure

At the Tiergarten Schönbrunn in Vienna, which holds the honour of being the world's oldest zoo, there is a 'rainforest house,' a huge glass structure enclosing a simulated rainforest environment. Visitors can stroll along pathways between ferns fluttering with birds and ponds in the shallow depths of which lurk tropical creatures. Pushing aside curtains of moist black plastic, you can enter a cave housing a small colony of bats, dark except for a few red safety lights. In his famous essay on the philosophy of consciousness, "What Is It Like to be a Bat?" Thomas Nagel says, "even without the benefits of philosophical reflection, anyone who has spent some time in an enclosed space with an excited bat knows what it is to encounter a fundamentally *alien* form of life," and that is what you will experience here, to begin with (438). Only the curtains prevent the bats from entering the brightness of the wider enclosure: no glass, nets, or wires lie between you and them. Their bodies flit freely around your body, close enough for you to mistake a brush of air against your cheek for the touch of a tiny wing. First, you will fight the impulse to swat them away in a panic as you would a spider, the old superstition that bats can get caught in human hair hovering in the back of your mind. Second, instinct will tell you to remain completely still. When you begin to walk, you will move at an inhumanly slow pace, unable to believe they won't fly into you. It is a trust you must learn, on that minute-long walk: the putting of faith into the workings of a body so unlike your own you can hardly fathom it. Yet the instinct of self-preservation that you are unlearning is what keeps the bats from touching you. And that is the marvel of the place, and of the bats: walking faster and faster through your own underestimations of their finely tuned senses, and knowing yourself to be in safe wings.

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The Tiergarten Schönbrunn may well be the world's oldest zoo, but it depends on your definition of the word. Humans have been collecting animals for non-utilitarian purposes for at least 5000 years, and have been keeping wild animals for the purpose of domestication for much longer than that (Kisling, v). In his book *Morality's Progress*, Dale Jamieson details the morbid precursors of the zoo in classical antiquity, where Roman rulers "kept animals in order to have living fodder for their games," and amassed diverse collections as indications of status,

which they would sometimes slaughter as a sign of wealth and power (166). But zoos as we know them developed in the 18th and 19th centuries (Kisling 1), with zoological gardens—focusing on ecology and education—emerging from a tradition of menageries, which were primarily about recreation and entertainment (viii). The menagerie at Schönbrunn, established in 1752 (Strehlow 84), was an example of this transition (83), though its name did not change from Menagerie Schönbrunn to Tiergarten Schönbrunn until 1924. Today, its history is still evident. The old menagerie buildings are persevered and put to good use, if not their original use:

Within the old menagerie, protected now as a memorial, [the zoo's director] revived the earlier Schönbrunn methods for keeping large cats. The public now walks through the former cages and looks out on large outdoor enclosures enclosed with a net and landscaped as a natural habitat. Mandrills still occupy the former elephant house, while elephants and smaller monkey species have new houses. (87)

There is something quite satisfying about the inversion of humans walking through the former cages while the cats live in a 'natural' environment. But regardless of how far we have come in minimizing the suffering of captive animals, they are still captive.

The question is implied: what of these histories of violence, power, science, and education, linger in the operation of modern zoos? Animals, particularly endangered ones such as giant pandas, are still used as tools in diplomatic relations between countries, and there is no denying the power of these animals to draw crowds and money into the institutions that house them. While writing this I have watched buses pass by café windows sporting enormous advertisements for the Edinburgh Zoo: "Trek to China" they say, next to a close up of a panda eating bamboo. The zoo's pandas—a female, Tian Tian, and a male, Yang Guang—are on a ten-year loan from China. They are the only giant pandas in the UK. An adult ticket to the zoo costs £16.77, or £18.50 with a donation to the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, but the pandas are so popular that you must book a viewing slot ahead of time to see them. The zoo's website describes the features of the pandas' housing:

The outdoor enclosures feature tree trunks for the pandas to scratch against and climb; large wooden climbing frames and tree houses; caves and ponds. The indoor enclosures, where they often choose to sleep, include raised wooden platforms and hammocks. (“Giant Panda Exhibit”)

But keeping and displaying wild animals in captivity—even vulnerable species like the Giant Panda in state-of-the-art environments—has moral implications. There would not be so many arguments in defense of zoos if their existence did not raise a host of ethical questions.

*

My first encounters with bats were not with those echolocating marvels in the Tiergarten Schönbrunn, but with fruit bats, who with their plump furry bodies and familiar snouts have earned the name of ‘flying fox.’ With the exception of one genus—*Rousettus*, who live in caves—Pteropodidae is the only family of bat who doesn’t echolocate, using instead their large, shining eyes to navigate (Neuweiler 4): bananas and berries hardly require the same sensitive tools to detect as the tiny zipping insects that many other bats eat. Yet with their wide, rubbery wings stretched out in flight, or hanging upside down with their clawed appendages grasping at leaves and branches, they possess the same lure of oddity that makes all bats so mesmerizing. As a child, my mother would call my sister and me out of our bedroom at night to watch the fruit bats eating pieces of fruit she had pinned to a clothesline strung between our veranda and the banana tree. A flashlight beam would shudder over leathery snouts slick with fruit juices, over firm furred bellies, over tented wings that held our fascination like swathes of silk draped over a seamstress’s arm.

During the day we would see them, hanging dead from the power lines like broken umbrellas, or rotting leaves, the tips of their two wings having by chance touched two swinging wires at once, perhaps in a storm, their senses overwhelmed.

Not long after we moved to Australia we visited a wildlife park. Though we had all seen fruit bats flying about at night, my mother had not come to know them as intimately as she would later, feeding them off the veranda of our new house. At the park, we walked through a large enclosure hung with countless fruit bats. Unable to resist the desire to feed one,

she held a piece of fruit up to a bat. When it showed no interest, she tried lifting it “right side up.” Naturally, the bat bit her, which resulted in a hospital visit for vaccinations and a lesson learned. The “right side” is different for bats than for humans.

*

In his essay “Against Zoos,” Jamieson deconstructs four supposed benefits of zoos: “amusement, education, opportunities for scientific research, and help in preserving species” (168). Amusement, he says, cannot justify the suffering animals undergo while in zoo captivity. This includes not only physical suffering—though that is no doubt a problem in certain cases—but also psychological suffering, which of course has physical manifestations. In her book *Animal Madness*, Laurel Braitman argues that mental illness is not limited to humans alone, and that many other species of animal may suffer from the same mental illnesses that afflict humans, as well as ones that don’t. Though she suggests that not all mental illness in animals is caused by human influence on the animal via both interaction and environment, there is no doubt that environments of captivity both exacerbate and cause mental health issues in many cases.

Many animals kept in captivity, particularly research laboratories and zoos, exhibit what is called ‘stereotypic behaviour,’ which can be defined as “a repetitive, invariant behaviour pattern with no obvious goal or function,” and which is considered to be “an indication of poor psychological well-being” in the animals that display it (Philbin 19). This behaviour is not often seen in animals living in the wild, and is thus considered to be abnormal behaviour caused by the animal’s environment in captivity, relating to factors that include “cage size, housing type (individual vs. pairing or groups), stress, and lack of environmental complexity” (Philbin 23). It should also be noted that stereotypic behaviour is very prevalent in captive domesticated animals as well as wild captive animals, particularly agricultural ungulates such as horse, cows, and cattle (Bergeron 19). Braitman notes that, “while plenty of domestic creatures develop stereotypic behaviours, they are particularly common in zoos, aquariums, circuses, and large pig, fur, and poultry farms” (94). Though the inhumane conditions of factory farms that lead pigs to “gnaw on one another’s tails” (94) might seem a far cry from the conditions in well-funded zoos that seek to replicate an animal’s natural

environment, the behaviour is so prevalent in zoos that it has earned the nickname “zoochosis,” according to Nanna Paskesen’s documentary of the same name (“Zoochosis”). Bears and big cats may pace their enclosures relentlessly, while elephants rhythmically sway and march their legs (Braitman 94). Captive gorillas commonly regurgitate and reingest their food (97), while cetaceans kept in marine parks often swim their enclosures again and again in a specific pattern. Dolphins, specifically, seem prone to compulsive masturbation and head-ramming behaviour, where they hit their heads against the sides of their tanks (98).

In fact, humans can develop stereotypies as well, including “ritualized and repetitive movements that tend to get worse with stress, anxiety, or exhaustion, such as rocking, crossing and uncrossing one’s legs, certain sequences of touching oneself, or marching in place” (Braitman 93-94). When performed to the exclusion of other behaviours, these “funhouse-mirror versions of normal activities” (94) are in all animals a coping mechanism for stress. But because such behaviour is so influenced by environment, it is of particular concern for zoos, where all of those factors of housing size and type, and environmental complexity, must be taken into account in creating enclosures for various species.

Most zoos work hard to prevent stereotypic behaviour in their animals. No doubt most keepers working with such animals genuinely care about their psychological wellbeing, but it is also bad for business to have regurgitating gorillas and masturbating dolphins in view of the public. On the other hand, much of the zoo-going public is not aware that certain behaviours are symptoms of psychological distress, and might think an elephant swaying on the spot is ‘dancing’ when really they are mentally unwell. Captive wombats sometimes “lie on their backs and wave their paws in the air as if they’re doing an odd little back paddle to nowhere” (94). It might sound cute, but it’s stereotypic behaviour. Unable to read certain animal gestures, which inevitably vary from human gestures, we perform dangerous and anthropomorphic readings of their behaviour.

*

In the bat house at the London Zoo, my sister and I stood side-by-side, not speaking but playing out identical memories. Before us, behind a pane of glass, dozens of fruit bats

hung from a wire grid ceiling, nibbling on watermelon and getting into tousles, swatting each other with the tiny claws at the top of their wings. Behind us, two women led a group of school children into the exhibit. As the children gathered in front of the glass, one of the women retreated to the back wall, making gestures and sounds of repulsion. Disgusting. Horrible creatures. She was smiling slightly as she said this, and there was a laugh in her voice, which gave the scene an air of performance. She was playing the woman who shrieks and leaps onto a chair at the sight of a mouse, pulling her skirts up around her ankles. The other woman promptly ushered the children back out of the building, and her colleague followed. But the woman's response had baffled and infuriated me. These bats were not even of the grotesque, hairless, blood-sucking variety. How could these adorable furry creatures, winged darlings of YouTube's cute-baby-animal community, inspire such horror in the woman? How dare she poison the minds of her impressionable wards against these innocent animals? How could she show such little respect to her fellow earth-dwellers? I was sure that each and every child in her class would grow up in ignorance of environmentalism, never once recycling a milk carton, thinking global warming a fad. My sister nodded in agreement with my whispered ranting while the bats, indifferent, continued to fight with each other over melon.

*

What good are the informational placards, plastered with child-friendly graphics and easy to swallow 'interesting facts,' if the adults who take children to zoos are teaching them a different narrative? And to what extent is the narrative of necessity that most zoos present a false one, designed to justify the existence of an institution that need not exist, except as a moneymaking endeavour?

One of the primary arguments for zoos is that they educate people—particularly children—about wildlife and conservation. In *Why Do We Go to the Zoo?: Communication, Animals, and the Cultural-Historical Experience of Zoos*, Erik Garrett suggests that zoos provide a “child–animal bond as the places for ‘wild’ encounters with animals and nature disappear” (8). He says, “the more the natural habitats of animals are threatened in the wilderness, the more we need zoos to provide the education and give us the connections to care for particular species and ultimately decrease the threat of global extinction” (91). This

argument certainly mirrors the narratives that most zoos present about themselves. Both the London Zoo and Edinburgh Zoo websites have sections dedicated to their education and conservation initiatives. But I am sceptical that zoos fully achieve such educational goals, or indeed that education and conservation are their top priority. Beneath the modern zoo, I see something of its profiteering origins, and unchallenged problematic narratives of the way humans and nonhuman animals relate to each other.

*

It is surprising that something so rare as the vampire bat has dominated our vision of the entire Chiropteran order. Excluding Megachiroptera, or Flying Foxes, there are 782 species of Microptera, or true bats. Only three of these are vampire bats, all native to Central and South America (Neuweiler 4). *Diphylla* and *Daemus* are rare species of vampire who feed on avian blood, while the more common *Desmodus rotundus* feeds only on mammal blood (109). Despite their small size, their uniqueness magnifies them in our imaginations and obscures those bats more interested in flower nectar than human blood, though to be clear these bats are more likely to feed on cattle than anything else. Though Bram Stoker's *Dracula* might be the most obvious modern influence on our negative perceptions of chiropterans, many cultures, both historic and current, associate bats with darkness and death (Werness 31). The Maya associated vampire bats with the sacrifice of bloodletting rituals and with the underworld, because of the dark caves they live in (31). Homer also associated them with the underworld by comparing the souls of the dead to bats, while Christian symbolism often gives Satan bat wings (32). Goya's 1799 *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* links bats "with the irrational and with spiritual darkness" (32): the print depicts a sleeping man behind whom cats lurk, owls loom, and bats flutter. I might add that all these animals are associated with women—particularly witches. But positive associations sometimes go hand in hand with these negative ones. Bats' Mayan associations with sacrifice and the underworld are not necessarily bad; rather, they symbolically "link the sacred and material realms" (31).

*

The second supposed benefit of zoos that Jamieson re-evaluates is education. Zoos, he argues, do not fulfill the educational function we believe they do, or that they themselves present (169). Garrett argues that they create a “child-animal bond” (8), but exactly what kind of bond do zoos encourage or create between children and animals? One of the reasons we think of zoos as learning experiences for children is, perhaps, that the animals there are often as simplified and idealized as those in picture books. Similarly, Garrett believes that individual zoo animals “stand as representatives for their entire species” in our imaginations, serving as “ambassadors” for their brethren struggling in the wild (91). Though I agree that zoo animals are presented in this way, I fail to see how it is a good thing. Not only is it inaccurate to allow an individual—especially one living in an atypical captive environment—to be the exemplar for their entire species, but also it problematically objectifies that individual. If we see a type rather than an individual, we are already impeded from having a genuine encounter with a nonhuman animal.

The woman balking in the bat house is not alone. Jamieson notes that most “zoo-goers express the usual prejudices about animals” (169). In other words, those of us who find vultures or hyenas creepy will leave the zoo with the same feelings, uneducated about the how and why such animals behave the way they do, unable to see beyond their stereotypical associations with death and decay. Those who think only of Dracula when they see a bat will leave with the association intact. The bats that so frightened the woman at the London Zoo are critically endangered Rodrigues fruit bats, which the zoo is breeding as part of a conservation programme to prevent their extinction. The London Zoo website notes that a survey in 1974 of the small island Rodrigues, to which the bats are native, found fewer than 100 bats left (“Fruit Bat Forest”). There is nothing vampiric about the Rodrigues fruit bat, who lives on fruit and is probably not capable of even digesting blood. In fact, flying foxes in general do not even eat the pulp of fruit; they only drink the juices, and spit out the fibres (Neuweiler, 113). In comparison to humans, who as a species are largely responsible—because of deforestation—for the Rodrigues bat’s near extinction, they are nothing to be frightened of.

And do zoos not, as Jamieson argues, “teach us a false sense of our place in the natural order”? He says, “The means of confinement mark a difference between humans and animals. They are there at our pleasure, to be used for our purposes” (175). Zoos do little to help us

overcome the assumptions that go hand in hand with the species barrier. In fact, they reinforce this barrier, by literally erecting barriers between humans and nonhuman species, and between those species and each other. Nothing could be more artificial or farther from the way animals genuinely interact with each other and behave even individually in ‘the wild.’ Yet there is something very true about the bars of those cages, those panes of glass. We are so accustomed to the line we have drawn between animals and humans that such barriers are almost invisible. Yet they physically confront us: we touch them; they keep us out as much as they keep the animals in.

But historically this barrier was not so clearly defined, or its delineation lay elsewhere, and it was not unusual to see human beings in museum exhibits. On the grounds of racism, sexism, and other prejudices, certain groups of people were marginalized from the rest of humanity through a discourse of animality so literal that such people ended up in zoos, sometimes alongside animals (Putman). The “practice of exhibiting indigenous peoples was widespread and commonly accepted” during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where such “specimens,” as these people were commonly called, were put on display “for the amusement and edification of their Western audiences” (Putnam 56). Looking back, we are rightly horrified that these individuals could be denied their humanity, and the associated rights, to such an extent. But as the great divide between human and animal shifts, we should be similarly horrified by the suffering inflicted upon our closest genetic relatives in the animal kingdom, and by those vulnerable to the consequences of our curiosity and pleasure-driven whims. In an attempt to highlight similar issues, particularly an “awareness of Great Ape conservation,” the Adelaide Zoo ran the Human Zoo Project in 2007. The project saw humans spending “a week in an outdoor enclosure that previously housed orangutans,” where they became aware of the suitability of the environment for both physical and mental wellbeing (Litchfield 162). Such an endeavour, though not seeming particularly sensitive to its namesake or Australia’s colonial history, does interrogate our assumptions about zoos and how we interact with animals in such spaces.

If zoos are not creating a genuine child-animal bond, as Garrett suggests, or even helping us overcome our prejudices about certain species, how can we justify their existence? Is there something about being in the presence of a real animal that can justify the existence of

zoos over similar educational tools such as nature documentaries? Do we feel more empathy for the creature we can see, and smell, and hear, or for the one embedded in the narrative of a documentary? If the purpose of zoos is really education and conservation, these are the questions we need to be asking.

*

When preparing for a meal, *Desmodus rotundus*, the most common species of vampire bat, might land on the ground near its sleeping prey to avoid detection. If it is threatened by “defensive reflexes,” such as a swishing bovine tail, it can move quickly, running and hopping “supported on [its] wrists and legs” until it finds a “highly vascularized” sweet spot to sink its teeth into (Neuweiler 109). Its sharp teeth might shear away hair before it licks the area in preparation. Then the bite, nicking away a piece of skin and spitting it out. The bat’s tongue is rough, so as it licks the wound, blood keeps coming, pooling into the wound through open capillaries. Unbeknownst to the bat, its saliva contains anticoagulants, which could soon make it an ideal subject for medical experimentation, but which now help to keep the blood flowing up through the grooves in the underside of its tongue and down its throat (111). If it is lucky, the bat might drink half its body weight in blood. For less lucky bats, who cannot find a meal, members of their colony will readily regurgitate some blood for them.

As someone who struggles with an iron deficiency, I am not as repulsed by this vision as I could be. I am no stranger to craving blood, whether in the form of a rare steak or even the taste of a paper-cut on the tip of my finger, though my vegetarian diet means this is a craving I do not indulge. I stick instead to a regime of iron supplements, swallowing tiny pills that contain 14mg of iron. A vampire’s daily intake of bovine blood contains about 6.1mg, “800 times the daily iron consumption in humans” (Neuweiler 111), from a meal of approximately 15g of blood, half the bat’s body weight. A human consuming the equivalent amount of iron for their body size would no doubt be quite ill—even my small supplements give me nausea and stomach pains—but “some as yet unknown mechanism” in the bat’s body helps it to retain most of the iron in its intestines, so that it only absorbs about 4.2ug a day (111). It is likely that I don’t absorb all 14mg of the iron in my supplements due to interactions with other vitamins in the food I eat, but vampire bats feed exclusively on blood.

For those wondering what might happen to a human victim of a vampire bat, a comparison: a human donating blood with the American Red Cross will give about one pint from the ten to twelve in their body, and need about eight weeks in between donations for their body to replace the absent plasma and red cells (“Donation FAQs”). In comparison, 15g seem negligible.

*

The most relevant of the benefits of zoos that Jamieson examines is conservation. There is no doubting the necessity of conservation, but how necessary are zoos to conservation efforts? Perhaps not very, Jamieson suggests. Most scientific research funded by zoos takes place outside of zoos, and could thus be funded by a different source; and most captive breeding programs for endangered species take place outside of zoos, while zoos don’t breed only endangered species (168). Many of the animals we see in zoos are not endangered at all. The conservation efforts highlighted by the London and Edinburgh zoos on their websites are mostly undertaken away from the zoos by the zoological societies each is affiliated with. Jamieson also adds that there is the moral question of preserving species solely in captivity that cannot exist on their own in a natural capacity (168). If there is not—or soon won’t be—a ‘natural’ environment for endangered species to return to, can we still ethically justify keeping them in captivity, or are we only doing so to assuage our guilt as members of the species responsible for their extinctions?

The conservation narratives that zoos present also reaffirm the troubling boundary between humans and ‘nature,’ between ‘artificial’ and ‘wild.’ Despite, or perhaps because of, their attempts to replicate ‘natural’ environments so closely in their enclosures, the contrast between animals in zoo captivity and animals ‘in the wild’ is always before us: the more closely an enclosure seems to resemble the real thing, the more aware we are of what it’s not. We are presented with the conundrum of the wild-captive animal: if the animal was not wild, it would not need to be kept behind bars, but if it were truly wild, it would not be living in a zoo.

*

In Glasgow, during the warmer months, a walk along the Kelvin River in the evening will show you tiny forms fluttering beneath bridges. They can be easily mistaken for birds by a distracted mind, but look closer and you will see that their flight is too irregular. They seem to jerk back and forth spontaneously, like kites caught in crosswinds. Their bodies are too colorless against the sky, too insubstantial, as if made from the tufty heads of weeds tossed into the air. These silent and unassuming shadows are bats. A keen eye can see the webbing of their wings, but not much more. Perhaps this elusiveness is, in part, the source of their eerie reputation, the way they seem to exist in halves: half visible, half tangible, half present, like phantoms from a different plane of reality. This impression can only be heightened by a moment's reflection on the nature of these bats, who are so different from the fruit bats I grew up with.

Small-eyed and swathed in shadow, they seem to experience and inhabit our world dully, clumsily, partially. But to think this way is to think with our human bodies in our human world, when we could be using our human bodies to think alongside bat bodies in a bat's world. The overlap of our two life-worlds would be an example of what phenomenologist Husserl called 'intersubjectivity,' where two subjective perceptions meet (Abram 38). It may be the projection of human limitations onto bats that has given them their reputation for dimness and chaos: meeting them always in twilight and night, when our comparatively poor senses are dulled by darkness, we imbue them with blindness because we cannot see them, and with silence because we cannot hear them. In fact, they are anything but.

In the late 18th century, the Bishop of Padua, Lazzaro Spallanzani, released a group of bats into his candlelit study. From the ceiling of the room hung wires at the ends of which were tiny bells. Extinguishing the last of the candles, he could hear no ringing bells. Unlike the owls he had been testing previously, who would not even fly in total darkness, the bats continued to avoid the wires with ease. He took a red-hot needle and blinded each bat, yet their navigation was unimpeded. Only when he blocked their ears did they become disoriented, filling the room with tinkling chimes (Neuweiler 140). But the room was filled with another sound, one that Spallanzani could not hear. In the laboratory of G.W. Pierce at Harvard

University in 1938, the world's first ultrasonic microphone revealed this perceived silence to be in fact a cacophony of sound: the bats in his lab were emitting noises above human hearing (140). Shortly after, in 1943, zoologist Sven Dijkgraf "fitted the bats with small muzzles that prevented them from emanating these sounds," after which they became disoriented and unable to navigate (141). It was determined that bats use these sounds and their echoes to perceive the world around them.

As I walk along the river, senses grasping after those elusive chiropterans, what are their senses grasping after? I imagine the bats were aware of me long before I glimpsed them out of the corner of my eye. I imagine one bat, sounding in pursuit of a single tiny insect, in a single tiny moment, the insect eclipsing entirely the human moving along beneath.

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Zoochosis. Directed by Nanna Paskesen, 2014. Film.

Bird's Work

Grok

Look out
from this indoor hush.

A raven is tossing sound
 off a gabled roof.

The silence
as each *grok* slips
 from beak-tip
into air

feels like your hands' own
emptiness.

 Black arc
from below
 follows like a thought.

Two birds meet at point
of origin.

This is confirmation,
not revelation.

Don't pretend.
You knew what it meant
all along:

your name being called
from another room.

Night Noises

In the hallway, a four-legged animal
sweeps the floorboards,
clawed rhythm twitching
your fingertips.

In the roof, a dripping,
the bubble at a baby's mouth.
Your tongue unsticks
from its dog-ridged palate.

Rain is new silence.
Lawns flood. You are dirt
three feet down, waiting for water.

Earth Worm

wriggling awry,
rathe before the rains, dry sidewalk
prickling membranous skin,
segments shrinking slow progress
to the promise of moisture,
of grass growing up as it twists
down, a funnel for soil.

the blackbird has not seen it yet,
shower a time away, ground piercing
golden beak whistling in treetops;
an eye on the sky.

the human stoops to touch,
fingers pinch harder than bird's beak,
salt cutting through pores,
length all awrithe, then release.
a long fall to the still damp
hedge-gathered leaf muck,
camouflaged, eating back into earth,
soon to be flushed out by storm.

Root

Pitter pat the long way up through forest branches;
monkish leaves unhand the crystal rains
then weigh another shower till their bodies bow
again, unworthy, prostrate to the sky.

Linger, linger long the flood on thirsty mouths
unused to drinking, whatever sucks with wooden lips
the peaty cloth to which it holds, unknown to light

yet knowing of that god who feeds and starves
in verdurous depths, where flowers sway their skirts
at inverted creatures dancing round their feet.

Holy the unseen light, holy the storm,
but home is the cloistered dark
where what's mortal dwells in blind stillness,
or churning an earthy work.

Bitumen

Beneath ice, the night river carves
a darkness through sandstone, shale,
and forest, winter-heavy, buckles
to its knees.

Like a pair of dogs let off
our leashes, we gallop rings
into the fine new snow,
throats exposed, lungs packed
with pain.

Handled to gleaming, swollen
with sky, the elsewheres
have risen and burst
in our narrow brains.

We breathe out solid light,
trip sprawling on backs
wool-coated, limbs slipping
for hold. This moment is

too tender. Our hands
are full: white powder,
black sand.

Night Driving in Saskatchewan

Time to go now.

The surface of an untouched drink startles and spills
its brim, the table rocks and settles and drips
liquid onto empty chairs.

His fingers work closed the buttons of her winter coat,
asking her to dare it. Something in her hard
as a door fitting into its frame, hungry
as the windblown coyote shadows
flushing out prey in the stubble fields.

The high heels of her boots compress sand
into ice, a glacial path across the parking lot.
The truck is a silence into which she is set. His hands
work the dash in the dark.

Dim the headlights. Turn up the heat.
Don't fight the illusion the highway is slipping
out from underneath, or spinning
away like a dancer's baton.
Something in him stunned
in the blizzard's hold.

Make use of casual dread and lean
your head out the open window.
Tell me, can you see the yellow lines,
can you see the shoulder. She sees snow

rushing away from her like river rapids;
her hair whips up in the night.

Wheels grind onto gravel smooth
as a pick slips along the v of a horse's hoof
or a boot slips out of stirrup.

Flax

You dream of a barn: flax barrels full
as ships in port, cargo an echo of copper froth
in holds of wooden shadow.

Blue fields gone,
the door a square of yellow flowers
gouged with green

casting grainy scents over machines
dormant with canola longings, vinyl seats
not yet eight decades worn down.

Light enough now, you walk the rafters,
posturing a swimmer on a diving board,
hearing your father's warning,

a form of enactment:
flax barrels full, flax barrels blue,
again and again, a quick descent
into the easy-slipping sea.

Harvest

On the docks, sifting the brine
from a westerly breeze, a forest grows fresh
from the whaling ship's last planting.
Stiff fronds and brittle stalks rise
like palm trees on tropical esplanades,
shadowing men bundled against sea and sleet.

Barrels are seeds of light
neatly lined yet jangling the mind
like a purseful of coins.

Soon bone will press bone again,
baleen to spine and sternum:
oceanic intimacies occur in the drawing room.
A corseted woman becomes a whale,
straining tea, licking tidbits from her teeth.
Her clothing is flensed from her at night
by the light of a spermaceti candle,
and in the morning her body is a barrel
rolled carefully ashore.

This was what the floorboards spoke of:

wide, heavy furniture; rows of shoes
placed by the door; toeprint bruises
only wood can feel. Dancing without pattern
we have skittered daylight over polish,
tread it into joints. We have done the same
with shadow, but only later will we wash
from our feet traces of forest: birdsong,
moss, and mushroom gills, the trembling spines
of small animals. Tree memories will green
our dreams. Our waking mouths will taste
of sap, our fingernails resemble amber.
New sun ringing in our ears, we will drop
our muddy ankles over the sides of the bed
to find them clean, and dreams forgotten,
and the floorboards cold.

Houseplants

The green parts of us are watching houseplants dance.
Shy raising arms, roots' secret toeing
where the stage is dark.

The window is an auditorium of trees
bound in resonance with cuttings,
with pollard essences, looking in
at visions of their mythology.

The green parts of us are struck
like tuning forks. We feel it as a tickle
at the backs of our white skulls.

The prayer plant, unhinging
a mantis leg, turns on me
its red under-leaf. The cactus shuts
its flower against the mister's rain.

If they had eyes we would be watched askant
or not at all.

Wild World

Wordless, and wordlessly, the dog bounds
an exclamation point upon the yard,
trails the arbitrary fence-line of the boundless
world it punctuates. Digging down
it bends its belly to the dirt and comes
up clean of what the day was a moment
before: a useless fence is a forgotten one,
and a dog's life faces unknowingly forward.

Avid life grows feathered and furred,
or verdurous within the wood's hot atmosphere,
then rancidly decays. There is matter that moves
and matter that doesn't: a dog knows the bones
and the sinew it finds, revealed, for what they are,
and rolls upon them with its living back.

Following the feeling of the sun
upon its coat, or of cloud-shade, tree-shade, falling
on the grassy ground, it makes a path according to
sensation and appetite, along concrete walkways,
up the painted wooden stairs
into the house's clear new moment where,
standing in the doorway, I watch
and am passed irreverently.

Snorting, sneezing, the dog gnashes its teeth,
flicks its tongue, in the particular atmosphere of dust
and scent it accumulates and wears like an aura,
tapping and trotting, lying long and matted,
on the cool tile floor of the kitchen. Ears twitch
to meaning; mouth anticipates, and happily,

the morsel flung and taken up by dripping teeth.
It offers nothing in return, though its tail fills the silence
with a sweeping sound. This voice is noise; listen now:
the wild world speaks.

Inhabitable Space

So this is why buildings seem larger
from the outside.

The rules of reality forbid me to inhabit ceilings
and cupboards and especially the blocked-up fireplaces
where pigeons have no doubt succumbed
to the slow burn of decay.

To live where spiders do
you must be a weaver, predisposed
to patterning others into stupor,
but who has the patience.

And when packed with people a house
seems even bigger, but a dog fills up a room.
This is why I bark across the flat at you
when I get lonely, and why you bare
your teeth at parties.

Most of all I'd like to ghost
the space between the door-handle
and the door, or in a pinching shoe
that someone puts on every day.

Green Thumb

If my thumbs are green
they are the silver green of moulds,
mildews, colonising the inner sides
of avocado shells, dregs
of peppermint tea.

It is an inability
to reach high bathroom ceilings,
penetrate grouting and paint
with cleaning product
or muscle power.

Spores quick; design subtle:
their growth needs no encouragement.

My nose is green with their tickle,
eyes green with their sting;
my lungs may well be sprouting
frills and fuzz, lobes turned heavy
to living terrariums.

My houseplants may be withered brown,
but no one can say
I am not a good host.

Berry Picking

We attempt the journey one last time,
driving through the dry August city
and out to the strawberry fields by the river.

We inhabit a living memory: the overflowing
greenhouses, the children's park,
the sandy shoals of the Saskatchewan

visible in the distance, exist
as we recall them. And so will
the strawberry fields.

The plastic pails you've used for years
have come alive again to their purpose.
Yellow and white and full of promising

shadow, they sit at my feet. It seems impossible
that the fields could be closed to us,
that the first loss has already happened.

We are already on the windy hill
rattling Saskatoon berry bushes,
We are kneeling in the straw.

Aren't they especially sweet this year.
Our hands are stained with their ripeness.
Our lips are red and sated and silent.

You move slowly along the tidy rows
in your summer cotton. Bent back.

Blue sky. Lifting your hand and

lifting it again, to your mouth.

This has happened and is happening
and will happen one last time.

Tradition

Standing in the oven light, I am compelled
to perform scenes witnessed and imagined,
played out on countertops and wooden tables,
stovetops, sink-basins, in cellars and barns,

compelled by what these hands remember,
to re-enact your forms of making:

stuffing and rolling and tucking and kneading,
de-veining leaves of sour cabbage
or patterning the tops of pies
with small sharp coring knives.

The heat grows so intense I must open
the doors on winter, bathe my greasy limbs
in white billows of air.

I am not myself. I am possessed
by body-memory and busyness
high strung along our overlapping
lives like power lines.

The endurance requires sacrifice.
In the dining room our chair sits empty
and we are alone with our work,
together, never quite believing its taste
or matching the honest art
of our mothers.

Taste

It began with mushrooms,
those swellings of soil, the pleasure
of thumbing their black origins
off bulbs and stems.

Beetroots shadowed by kitchen taps,
a sinkful of hard midnight mouths
in washing water. Large palms
of gritty chard pressed in my own:

the darkening of my tastes.
Spinning the lid of the yeast extract jar.
Oily fingertips of someone who handles
bike chains and car parts.

Coffee grounds in their metal sieves,
panning for gold, digging for worms.
Lips, tongue, rubbed smooth,
stomachfuls of mud.

Lights out. Pantry empty.
Having eaten my way to the bottom
of the coal cellar, I listen, as if at a door,
fingers curled, mouth still watering.

Field

I have been bared by gleaning
and fallow overlong.

No knowable seed this time,
just those hacked up, shat out
by antelope and bird.

More than a stubble fit for mice:
a tall and tangled shelter
calling to every cow that ever
broke its fence,
every bastard puppy
fit for drowning,
all barn-cats
gone clawless and blind.

But still my mice,
my brown, my silver,
my wheat-coloured mice,
who've chosen me
over blue-flowered flax
and even rows of corn.

Let wild hooves aerate
and summer storms
moisten me,
winter storms ice
and blanket me,
wind ripple and
winnow my chaff

from grain.

Let combine never reap me
with a blade.

dog-talk

I am making my mark on history,
pissing against the corner
of this rubbish bin,
a gravelled yellow puddle
to be sidestepped by passersby.
other things humans must step
around: cars in traffic jams,
national monuments, each other.
I need not change my course
for anything. The Dog stops
for no man, gnawing his bone
by the fireside of human narrative.
I leap up into cars, and let them
carry me, and the vented breeze
is pleasant, and the cool bowl of water
on my path always meets me.

In the Shade

Beneath the dusty verdure we shelter in shadow.

It is a god's hard word, salt brine and sun
hammering the sea into a flat golden shield.

And we are soft in it, womanly all, dreaming of rain
and yet held in the brittle stasis of heat
that frames this eternal summer.

The breezes can stir nothing but our coverings.

We turn and turn in our own cool tenderness,

figs for a drowsy god to pluck,

small vessels of still water

muddied by the hands of time. We wait,

as on the hills the cattle sway their russet pates.

Metamorphosis

Before we were trees, we were humans, and before that dogs, slobbering, swallowing, readying our mouths for poetry. *Tell me.* Paws calloused thick as wood; fur grass-coarse; pleasure here, and here, and here, in the rootless running ground-parallel spine. This same almost-wordlessness, a forward leaning hunger. *And then.* We stood up and put on shoes, took them off, put on clothes, took them off. We talked and talked and made open-handed gestures, like this. Put down pens, picked them up. The dog-joy, sometimes, but only when ground-parallel, only when *can't speak, put your words in my mouth.* Yes. Tongues sap-thickened, webbed woollen by spider's work. Lichen, fern, blackberry bramble. Pith, teeth, ankle bone. Tail-wag, woof woof woof, won't you dance with me tonight. Urging forward into silence. *And now* we are trees, upright in resonance with lightning strikes, tall buildings, each other, the things we built when we were human. Now other bodies gesture on us. Wagtail, robin, the jackdaw *haw haw haw!* laughing, straying from your hair; the wind *hshhh shk shk shk* our leaves like wings. *Again* bramble, breastbone, beak. *My words in your mouth.* Two trees readying ourselves for flight.

Under the Hunting Moon

Like a fox on the midnight streets,
feet bantering with the silent pavement,
coughs out its bark and listens
for a similar sickness

from down the bloodless river banks
beneath the bridge.

Like a fox on the midnight streets,
in the roughness of its body, carries off,
as if to bury it, a rigid
nut-shaped heart.

A hunger spins in me like a compass.

The needle spins, it catches, it must
be torn out, like the hook inside a fish
bleeding red into the bottom of a boat.

I wish it would name the thing it turns to
in a language I could understand,
the way we used to talk when we were
satisfied, and not buoyed up to the eyes
by emptiness.

I am moved by this animal feeling to shy
from the scratching of keys at the door,
to nibble off my itches and wounds,
to hoard a troubled solitude, to bear it

while the old knowledge strains me lean
as the tautened string of an empty bow.

I remember things I should not know.

How the fire was warm but there was something yet
of starlight in it.

How in sleep we gathered in the world and weighed
our bodies down with it.

How at the turn of every month, emerging
from their homes worn hollow by sleep, were
what we would call animals, newly wet
with darkness and forgetful of the moon,
saying

*This blessed night,
light sheds a different shade of fear,
death takes a form and a name.*

Eyes and mouths splitting open
with the ripeness of its gift, saying

*Last night
I did not know my name. Belly or claw, artery, tooth,
which are you given this night? Which hand do you lift
to this violent prayer?*

Made wild by the sight of their day-shy bodies,
saying

*Carriers of life,
let us knock vessels in this dark forest.
these, our hunting hours, open
their leafy arms and mossy legs
to receive us.*

Saying

*Oh darkest rock,
fullest earth. Silver home,
you are holy tonight.*

And our minds would wrench free of their moorings,
dirty themselves with singing the strange hymn-like
battle cries amongst the fighting beasts.

I remember things I should not know

When the old knowledge strains me lean
As the tautened string of an empty bow.

Like the last mad bird singing out the evening
Wears its tune like a fading beacon, spinning
an amber thread through the streets till the dark
shuts over its gothic arch.

Like the last mad bird singing out the evening,
in its madness, draws the morning on.

I am moved by this animal feeling to say

Somewhere the long grasses bow

and rise and beat together like hearts,
and insects grate their legs into a sound
like the mind makes when it is emptying
and filling up with what it's not.

Somewhere we are thoughtless as archers,
sights spanning rivers, slipping easy arrows
between our fingers, and the sky holds no resistance,
and our arms call out quick quick quick
in the one true language, calling out

we are

*just bliss, and bodies ravening this life like a fire
burning a long mellow grief through time.*

Parabola

Swift, your sickle wings sheer down
the thoughts of those who pass below you,
your shriek tunes the new crop
to grow in resonance with bird-being,
bird-feeling of weight and winds.

Walking where there is open air
I ring, or following streets' long
shadow lines carry the weight
of your black silhouette,

strain my neck to keep in sight of you,
seek higher ground.

You summon me
without intention.

Children bathing
naked as river-reeds down
by the pebbled shore see you twinned,
cannot tell sky from water,
water from sky.

Dogs turn corners
knowing what is around them,
shake their sunlit heads to off
your influence, when you lose them
the pleasures of ground trails and dust.

Maybe there is no way
on which I can meet you.

Maybe we are met
already, path-crossed,
divergent.

Bird's Work

All day long the swallow flies a path known to itself,
the curling end of which I cannot see
as it dies there in the far off field
and turns a resurrection from the same.

Above my head the other end, or the beginning,
hidden also, echoes life in the rafters
The tin roof rings with small cries,
little longings, which the swallow works to fill.

Formless

Handfuls of mud in carriageway rafters
churning rust and rotten wood, beaks
straight and pale as rodent bones,
creaking want into heat,
into shadow.

The swallow who mothers you
flashes her cream and berry-juice breast,
flies off to blacken forked tail,
crescent wings against blue sky.

Dry grass and blood-feather,
droppings and down, skulls,
five or more, un-fusing
flight from clay.

Dust

Time shrinks or expands to fill the volume of its container.

Flying insects and border collies, buoyed up with the same dusty stuff,
tumble light through the tough-stalked yellow weeds
and webbed grasses that thicken the fence-line country.

Shortened by tall trees and open spaces
I watch the world from two feet off the ground,
wiping the grit from my eyes.

Smaller than the dog dragging its silty paws
along the shoreline of a slough, fuller
than the tick on its ankle.

The Centipede

Always the undergrowth hides it,
there, not there, everywhere,
from the sun and from me,
except when night sets a snare for it,
the pool a big blue gloved hand to catch it scurrying
over the smooth rounded rim.

For days it makes slow circulations
in that other world, dreaming
of soil underleg, and of darkness,

or perhaps there is no notice taken
of the difference between air and water.

Dissection

Dead fish pulled from a round white pail,
drained, bedded on a blue-matted metal tray,
'self-healing' for scalpel work, exacto knives.

This is no place for precision. Deformities,
asymmetries, organs rubbery as cottage cheese,
floods of preservation fluid wetting gloves,

table laminate, textbook pages: no wonder
the incomprehensible diagrams. No locating
the liver, let alone uncasing the brain.

It's the eye holds you together. You have seen it
watching you from dinner plates, tossed up
on lake shores, calling you to pierce

its cloudy depths, spill algae visions, sensations of swimming
at speed down current, dimensionless light, hungering after

grit in this unpeeled stomach. If such things
could be released by this dull blade,
or the pain in your own eye allow it.

Amphibian

I feel your skin burning where the tips
of my dry fingers touch you, green
as wet season's new leaf blood,
river froth underbelly skimmed
to murky shallows.

Day-silent,

harbinger of porch-light, moth-beat,
like a scientist I want to detain
and de-toe you, glean
what your translucent body hides,
release you like a thief, trade-secrets
intact. When the grasshopper's serrated legs protrude
from your toothless mouth, I will pluck them
like flowering weeds.

Amphibian.

A spawny sound. Easy adhesion,
digestive lethargy, no trace
of the twig-like bones that propel you
abruptly out of my hands
towards moon-filmy water

and equilibrium,

to slop your awkward limbs
through the elemental membrane
and disappear.

Bass Rock

fog is feathers, guga down,
white clamour dampened,
distance folded shut.

rock-dark children
lose thought of land,
wash themselves white
to black wingtip:
sharp bodies
cutting trails of air

rise
to paddle dawn-slick sea,
heads yellow-blushed
and dripping.

around them we
slip shelf and
plummet, through
sky and salt,
to break
beak, skull,
on grey water.

Gull-talk

sun not risen and gabble already, down chimney pots,
from atop black rubbish bins. breeze is a wing path
to ocean, as darkness drains away
down gutters.

plethoras of swallow-whole fish
school in shallows near wavebreak
on the bay's flat shore.

below:

flap flap soar, each one moon-fogged
in plant speckled water.

above:

beaked pieces of sea-surface thrash,
glimmer down gullet, settle calm
in the boat of my stomach.

Coyote

You might as well be wearing clothes.
Admiring a high-backed chair you cannot sit on,
lacking only thumbs for wearing tarnished rings,
you flash a lacy ear and rusty shank,
loping over threadbare rugs
spread underpaw like nets:
reflections glass-front cabinets
cannot catch.

Hat stands, table legs, start showing tree;
woollen coats smell of damp fields;
sounding a moth-wing rustle, silk scarves
shed a scaly dust. I understand your interest
in rows of leather books and shoes.

We hold each other's eyes,
the space between us shuttled and stretched
like the darkness between subway cars.

The sharpness of your teeth earns you
the door.

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