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The Vertigo of the Beast:
Thinking Animals in Literature

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Submission for the degree of Ph.D., Critical Theory

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Summary

This thesis begins with the claim that the most productive and stimulating manner of addressing the question of the animal is through an engagement with the writings of Jacques Derrida. In particular, it picks up on his comment in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* that “thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry.” As such, the thesis explores the specific ways in which the resources of literature can be used in order to address what is possibly the most pressing ethical task of modern humanity. One of the central questions of the thesis concerns how what Derrida calls carnophallogocentrism can be confronted by literature. Through readings of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* and the poetry and short stories of D.H. Lawrence, I explore how literature is uniquely placed to offer a sense of the radical otherness of nonhuman animals. In perhaps a contradictory manner, I also examine how literary resources can be used to evoke a sense of pity for nonhumans. There are two further important, and connected, areas of enquiry. The first relates to the position of man who is constructed in opposition to nonhuman animals and is given the right to put nonhumans to death. As such, I study how a variety of texts, chiefly J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*, reveal the fragility of some of the chief notions of humanism and give way to what has been theorised as posthumanism. The second engages with what Derrida calls “eating well.” This is a question which receives its most thorough investigation through a reading of Margaret Atwood’s dystopian *Maddaddam* trilogy.

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Introduction

Reading Animals Alongside Derrida

“In the far corner of the kill room are two doors, one for workers and one for pigs.”¹ In a scene oddly reminiscent of the alternate destinations of Jacques Lacan’s “urinary segregation,” Jonathan Safran Foer describes a situation which is reproduced everywhere globally—a scene rendered invisible in its ubiquity. Whereas what lies behind Lacan’s “Ladies” and “Gentlemen” signs are versions of essentially the same thing, the two doors of the kill room lead to two very different fates, fates which cut to the core of a relationship between human and nonhuman animals which is marked out by a difference which begins in language and which extends in a startlingly violent manner into the physical world. This relationship concerns the different roles of the players in the kill room where some are killers and others are killed.

Anticipating the swish of the slaughterer’s blade, I will start with a broad swipe of my own. There is an ethical failing, so vast and so central to the human being that, in its enormity, it has become invisible, watched over by a denial that has led to a monstrous forgetting. In some important ways, this ethical aberration is so foundational that the tools of thinking find themselves incapable of assisting us in even broaching this lurking anomaly. I am referring simply to the treatment of nonhuman living beings at the hands of human beings. Without dirtying our fingers in the messy details, I am talking of the organised breeding, growing and slaughter of untold billions of living beings annually, of the legions of nonhuman animals made to suffer in the service of the so-called human being. Since this problem concerns a failure of thinking, and specifically a failure of traditional philosophy, we are left in need of another approach. The best hope that we have of thinking this problem, of rendering a justice that will not wait to nonhuman animals, resides firstly in a careful reading of literature and starts from the apprehension that, from the beginning, human understanding of nonhumans has been mediated by literature. The hope recalls that the kind of thinking required by us is the illogical, surprising, strange and magical sort that resides within literature. Secondly, this project must engage with the insights and strategies of deconstruction, a mode of thinking which is alert to the violence of anthropocentrism and is therefore uniquely sensitive to the properties of language and literature which open towards a thinking of nonhuman animals.

¹ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2009).

After Derrida

Writing of the problem of where to begin in the light of the singularity of the individual, Samuel Weber quotes the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce who notes that “You start out from the situation in which you find yourself,”² and this seeming platitudinous comment will guide the opening stages of this study. We begin, then, to borrow a useful phrase from Nicholas Royle, *after Derrida*.³ Perhaps the most obvious reason that Jacques Derrida is fundamental to this project lies in the crucial intervention made to the field of animal studies by his book *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. All of the major concerns of the pages which follow are responses to this extraordinary text and include questions of sacrifice, autobiography, pity, the face, response, genetic manipulation, consumption and representation of nonhuman animals. In short, the main aim of this project is to see what happens when you read literature after *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. Following Derrida, we will be reading passages from Genesis, considering the figure of genocide and engaging with the shortcomings and violences of the metaphysical tradition, especially in the writings of Heidegger. Of additional relevance are a number of Derrida’s other texts and interviews which engage directly with nonhuman animals: *The Beast and the Sovereign*, “On Violence Towards Animals,” and “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject.” Finally, beyond Derrida’s explicit engagement with nonhuman animals, we find in deconstruction a concern which is essential to this project as we attempt to read animal others. This is a sensitivity to otherness, an appreciation of the difficulty of discussing others without committing unintentional violence and a deep concern for the ethical imperatives inherent to this task.

To be after Derrida is to seek to present textual readings which operate in the manner of Derrida, to search for and to try to catch up with a Derrida who always seems to remain a few steps ahead. Following Derrida, we will be mindful of the violence which inheres in being after—from the chase and the hunt and to the inevitable kill. We will recall certain irreversible orders with regards humans and other animals, trying to remind ourselves who came first and therefore who is after who. We also, at the start, should, hopefully without despairing, point out the almost impossible difficulty of our task which is neatly encapsulated in the title of what will be the guiding text of this study. The French title of Derrida’s text *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (*L’animal que donc je suis*) contains a pun which threatens to stop us in our tracks. For while the reference to Descartes reminds us that humans are (also) animals, “*je suis*,” which means both “I am” and “I follow” underlines not merely that chasing, killing, maiming, torturing etc. nonhuman animals is something that humans *do*, but rather that that is something

² Samuel Weber, “Once and for All,” *Grey Room*, no. 20 (Summer 2005): 106.

³ Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

that humans *are*. It points out that the pursuit of the animal is a property of the human as we know him and has been, since time immemorial.

Let's pause here, because things are already getting away from us. We must be a little clearer in terms of exactly what it is that we are pursuing and why already we find ourselves nudging against the limits of language. Certainly, it is not "the animal" that we are after. This inadmissible *bêtise*, or asinine term that would lump together every type of nonhuman animal into a vast catch-all menagerie, streaming endlessly through the wrong door of the kill room, will not do. As Timothy Morton asserts, "we should drop the disastrous term *animal*."⁴ We must insist, minimally, on the plural term, "animals." Yet, common usage of this term, which is often used to indicate *nonhuman* animals only, remains problematic. We could do worse, then, than to pursue the *animot*, Derrida's portmanteau neologism⁵ which insists on the *plurality* of animals (*animaux*), focuses our attention on the fact that what we are dealing with here is precisely a problem of *words* (*les mots*) and which, rather than attempting to give words, or language to nonhuman animals, encourages "a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than privation."⁶

How will this *animot* help us? First of all, the word stresses the importance of words. The point is not merely that the word "animal," with its incumbent violences, is just a word, but that the problem of the animal is a problem of words—words which tell stories about animals, words which give names to animals and words which struggle to represent animals. The word *animot*, as David Wills notes, "jars in aural French"⁷ and Derrida notes its tendency to "damage French ears."⁸ This, surely, is the point. The word is an interruption, a demand to pause and wonder about precisely what we mean when we use the word "animal." It is also apparent that we are struggling here with a French term, and this is partly because there is, necessarily, no satisfactory translation. We could improvise with something like "animal-words," "animalexis," "biologos." Alternatively, Marie-Dominique Garnier locates a possible translation in a translation of Husserl: "linguistic flesh"⁹ and when Nicholas Royle writes of "wordlife,"¹⁰ we feel that he may be offering an oblique translation of *animot*. Yet, none of these inventions successfully inhabit the meanings of Derrida's terms and thus we are alerted to the impossibility

⁴ Timothy Morton, "Thinking Ecology: The Mesh, The Strange Stranger, and the Beautiful Soul," *Collapse* 6 (2010): 275.

⁵ Lynn Turner notes that Helene Cixous' use of the French term predates that of Derrida appearing in *La* in 1976. See Lynn Turner, "When Species Kiss: Some Recent Correspondence Between Animots," *Humanimalia* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 60–86.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. Marie-Louise Mallet and David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 37, translator's note 35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹ Marie-Dominique Garnier, "Love of the Löwe," in *The Animal Question in Deconstruction*, ed. Lynn Turner (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 38.

¹⁰ Nicholas Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 186.

of translation where, as we shall see, writing about animals is always, and in advance, a failed translation. We will thus be concerned with the formidable difficulties of representing animals in language, whilst maintaining that literature provides our best shot at doing this. This question of representation will receive its fullest exploration in Chapter Five, which focusses on D.H. Lawrence's writing. Finally, the *animot* demands a new thinking, which Derrida calls "fabulous and chimerical." While both of these terms relate to literature, they also stress the strangeness of the task ahead. We are alerted to the limits and inadequacies of rationality and challenged to invent a new manner of contemplation.

This Awful Tale of Genesis

Derrida calls for a fabulous thinking, but decries fables: "We know the history of fabulization and how it remains an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication" (37). Derrida has the likes of La Fontaine in mind (whose fables are discussed in *The Beast and the Sovereign*¹¹), but the opening words of *The Animal that Therefore I Am* ("In the beginning") indicate that his starting point will be Genesis.

As an ur-myth, describing the nature of the relationship between man on the one hand and all other animals on the other, Derrida has cause to describe this biblical fable as "this awful tale of Genesis."¹² The narrative plainly describes an injustice turning on the word "after," for "man is in both senses of the word *after* the animal."¹³ He has been created last of all, after all the other animals, a relative latecomer to the story of creation, yet he will also come after the animal; naming, chasing, persecuting, hunting, subjecting. The moment when man, before the creation of woman, uses words to subject all of animality to his domination, is an instance *par excellence* of what Derrida will later on in the text call *carnophallogocentrism*. This is the tendency of Western culture to believe in the power of language to fix the position of objects in the world, whilst endorsing the meat-eating male as the primary agent of this practice. This is literature's great moment of anthropocentrism—one animal (man) is allowed to impose his will on all others. From this point on, man (the image of God) becomes the measure of what is worthy, placing himself at the centre of his own world. He will henceforth progress wilfully blinkered, as Heidegger notes, "as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself,"¹⁴ or (we could add) deficient versions of himself in the form of nonhuman animals.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹² Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1977), 27.

It seems clear that we are still experiencing the consequences of this awful tale. In the following chapter, which focusses on J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, we will examine the need for a re-writing of Genesis and bear witness to the resilience of this fable. Our starting point, we shall have to recall, is outside of Eden. But before we move on, I would like to home in on one important detail. Derrida sees Adam as a poet. This moment of the naming of the animals, an act which, as we shall see, has enormous consequences, is an act of literature. The importance of literature to this question of the animal is underlined both by the literary status of the text in which the naming occurs, and also the literary nature of this writing within writing, this poetry within poetry. Poetry, deriving from *poesia*, creation, positions Adam as God's co-creator. Adam is God's image on earth, and his colleague, able to carry on the work of creation using, just as God does, speech acts to change the world. Once more, we see that "thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry."¹⁵ We shall return to consider the modalities of such a poetic thinking.

I hope, by now, that we can see the problematic nature of the "after." It is on this point that a certain "chimerical" thinking will help. In a sense, chimerical thinking is deconstruction, which operates in ways which defy the logic and rationality of traditional criticism and which does not balk at the impossible. Chimerical thinking is to think the Chimera, which is itself a fantastic assemblage of animals and a fearsome monstrosity, at once threatening and demonstrative of the interconnectedness of animal life. We will also be taking the chimerical as a dream-like and fantastic thinking. Most challenging is the notion that chimerical thinking might be a call to think the thoughts of the chimera—an attempt at the impossible habitation of an utterly other consciousness.

Derrida seems to advocate for a chimerical thinking of "being-after": "I am inasmuch as I am *after* [après] the animal' or 'I am inasmuch as I am *alongside* [auprès] the animal.'"¹⁶ In other words, Derrida wants to re-configure the being of the human from an animal which is out to get all others, to an animal which grasps its fundamental interconnectedness with other animals. This is an interconnectedness which resonates strongly with the notion of "becoming-animal" as expounded by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Becoming-animal has nothing to do with imitation or of acting like an animal. Rather the theory is highly sensitive to the complex interactions and interdependence between different species. It suggests that the subjectivity of the individual is bound up in a complex set of relations with any number of other individuals. This is the case in the famous example of the wasp and the orchid where a pollinating wasp becomes a part of an orchid's reproductive system leading to "a becoming-wasp of the orchid

¹⁵ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

and a becoming-orchid of the wasp.”¹⁷ The theory emphasises that living beings within an ecosystem are connected in a non-hierarchical rhizome-like web of interactions, a web which no animal, not even the human, can escape. As Claire Colebrook notes, “becoming-animal is the power, not to conquer what is other than the self, but to transform oneself in perceiving difference,”¹⁸ but in a slight amendment to her presentation of becoming-animal, I suggest that becoming-animal is not something which one does, or could set out to do. Rather, to borrow a notion from deconstruction, becoming-animal is the inescapable fact of simply *what happens*. Becoming-animal attests to the fact that we find ourselves alongside nonhuman animals, bound in an inescapable web to all manner of nonhuman animal life. Our interest will be in literature which is able to attest to this relationship and to help us think about it in a more critical and responsible way. We shall see later in the introduction how this sort of becoming is evident in Nicholas Royle’s novel *Quilt*, and will explore it further in Chapter Two as part of a detailed reading of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*.

The Worst Cases of Genocide

In order to more fully explore the situation from which we are starting out, we must face one of the most unflinching and controversial moments of *The Animal that Therefore I Am* which looks at the real effects of carnophallogocentrism. Derrida writes in the strongest possible terms about the cruelty and violence of the modern industrial treatment of the animal:

No one can deny seriously any more, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves; in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence, which some would compare to the worst cases of genocide. (26)

Aware of the risks of causing offence with these comments, Derrida insists that “one should neither abuse the figure of genocide nor too quickly consider it explained away” (26). Yet, not content to let the subject rest with a single mention, he goes on to note how the comparison to genocide is even to understate the violence of the meat industry:

As if, for example, instead of throwing a people into ovens and gas chambers (let’s say Nazi) doctors and geneticists had decided to organize the overproduction and overgeneration of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals by means of artificial insemination, so that, being continually more numerous and better fed, they could be destined in always increasing numbers for the same hell, that of the imposition of genetic experimentation, or extermination by gas or by fire. (26)

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 10.

¹⁸ Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 133.

Of course Derrida is not the only person to make such analogies,¹⁹ which are often dismissed as gratuitous or polemical, but given the rigour, depth and thoughtfulness of his oeuvre, it is a comparison which we must take seriously. Matthew Calarco, reflecting on the force of anthropocentrism, suggests the strategic importance of this connection: “Perhaps the issue of violence toward animals can provoke thought in this philosophical context *only if* it is compared with the worst forms of inter-human violence.”²⁰

J.M. Coetzee is another serious writer who explores this analogy in *The Lives of Animals* (1999) and elsewhere. In this rich little text (first presented as a lecture at Princeton University) the fictional writer Elizabeth Costello presents a series of lectures at the fictional Appleton College during which she states:

Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.²¹

By embedding this lecture deep in a series of fictional frames, Coetzee is able to anticipate responses to this claim. Abraham Stern, the fictional poet listening to the lecture sends the following note to Costello:

You took over for your own purposes the familiar comparison between the murdered Jews of Europe and slaughtered cattle. The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say. That is a trick with words which I will not accept. You misunderstand the nature of likeness; I would even say you misunderstand wilfully, to the point of blasphemy. Man is made in the likeness of God but God does not have the likeness of man. If Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way.

Stern’s reply is a typical response to the Holocaust analogy in that it rejects “*any* comparison between inter-human violence and inter-species violence on the grounds that such comparisons denigrate human suffering.”²² In doing so, Stern highlights the operations of the religious inflections of anthropocentrism. He can admit no comparison between human and nonhuman animals since there is a difference in kind. Humans are different from animals as God is different from humans. To make the comparison is to commit blasphemy. (Here, we should remind ourselves of Derrida’s blasphemous reprimand of a God who “doesn’t know what he

¹⁹ See, for example Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002).

²⁰ Matthew Calarco, “Thinking through Animals: Reflections on the Ethical and Political Stakes of the Question of the Animal in Derrida,” ed. Neil Badmington, *Oxford Literary Review* 29 (2007): 8.

²¹ J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 21.

²² Calarco, “Thinking through Animals: Reflections on the Ethical and Political Stakes of the Question of the Animal in Derrida,” 8.

wants with respect to the animal,”²³ and recall the strategic importance attached to the figure of blasphemy by Donna Haraway in “A Cyborg Manifesto.”²⁴ Let us note that a serious discourse on nonhuman animals would be one which holds God to account.) Of course, the more pressing concern for Stern must surely be that Costello is accusing him of behaving like a Nazi. More than this, the statements of Derrida and Costello render all those who partake of mass-produced meat and its many by-products Nazis. This is surely inadmissible.

Stern insists that Costello’s comparison is a “trick with words.” As a poet, Stern is aware of the power of words but will not acknowledge the legitimacy of Costello’s or, presumably, Derrida’s claims. To put this into a slightly different context, Stern, we assume, will be familiar with Wilfred Owen’s famous first line from “Anthem for Doomed Youth:” “What passing bells for these who die as cattle,” where poetry has canonised the possibility of men being treated as cattle by specifically foregoing the religious rites owing to their passing. The traditional reading of this line understands that it is sacrilegious for men to die as cattle whilst maintaining an asymmetry which does not quibble with cattle dying as cattle. Yet the other objectionable features of the deaths of World War One soldiers—the dizzyingly high numbers, the senselessness, the way in which the war led to a new realisation of the brutality of the human—could equally be applied to the deaths of the cattle in a manner which would lead to a different reading. This is no trick with words but rather a holding of poetry to account in terms of the readings that it invites.

Jean-Luc Nancy’s 1989 interview with Derrida gives an additional reason as to why the animal cannot be subject to genocide. This is because the death of the nonhuman animal is prescribed and necessary—that humans would be nowhere without it. This is due to what Derrida calls a “sacrificial structure [...] a place left open [...] for a noncriminal putting to death [of the nonhuman animal].”²⁵ Hence the act of murder simply does not apply to nonhuman animals and the injunction of “thou shalt not kill” does not refer to the living in general, but only to humans. Furthermore, this sacrifice is necessary and inescapable since it defines the contours of the modern human—it is indeed the very cornerstone of humanism. Derrida’s reference to “thou shalt not kill,” as well as his strategic deployment of a critical comparison with the holocaust signals an insistence that the question of the animal, or more specifically, the question of man’s treatment of nonhuman animals in general, belongs to the field of ethics.

²³ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 17.

²⁴ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and the Socialist-Feminist in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” in *Points...: Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. Peter Connor and Avital Ronell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 278.

Derrida follows Levinas in understanding the ethical interaction through the “epiphany of the face.”²⁶ Although, for Levinas, the epiphany of the face remains limited to human beings, as if only humans have faces, Derrida acknowledges the unjustifiable anthropocentrism in this removal of the animal from ethical consideration. The asymmetrical nature of this epiphany of the face means that an individual has unlimited responsibility towards the other whilst demanding nothing in return. This relationship therefore exceeds the realms of the calculable and the rational. Cary Wolfe notes of ethics that it is “the very fact that it exceeds all reason, all contractual and reciprocal obligation [...] that *makes* it ethical.”²⁷ Once again, we are confronted with the inadequacy of rational thought to the task ahead. In a sense, there is no way to theorise a human relationship with nonhumans. It is not possible to list or to restrict the nature of ethical treatment of animals to a set of bullet points or a manifesto. Of course, once an ethical relation to the nonhuman animal is opened up, the most minimal of an infinite obligation would be that “thou shalt not make him suffer, which is sometimes worse than death, thou shalt not do him harm, thou shalt not eat him, not even a little bit, and so forth.”²⁸ Matthew Calarco further elaborates on the consequences, stressing that “animals might call upon and obligate me in ways that I cannot fully anticipate,” adding that “the question of the animal is thus a question deriving from an animal who faces me, an interruption deriving from a singular ‘animal,’ an animal whom I face and by whom I am faced and who calls my mode of existence into question.”²⁹ The question of the human-animal face to face relation is one of the concerns of in Chapter Three which presents a reading of Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy. In addition, in Chapter Five we explore the epiphany of the face in the poetry of D.H. Lawrence.

The Strategic Importance of Realism

Let’s pause for breath. 1. The absolute and absolutely pervasive division between humans on the one hand and all other animals on the other is without basis and extremely harmful to human and nonhuman animal life. 2. There is an ethical responsibility on the part of humans, towards nonhumans. (On this point, Wolfe points out the “jarring juxtapositions” of the current situation where in 2008, the “Spanish Parliament approved resolutions to grant basic rights to Great Apes” but where more animals are bred and killed for food than ever before,³⁰ and in conditions which, as Derrida reminds us, must surely be “judged monstrous.”³¹ 3. This ethical

²⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (London: Kluwer, 1969), 199.

²⁷ Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 16.

²⁸ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 279.

²⁹ Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 5.

³⁰ Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 11.

³¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 26.

responsibility has something to do with a face to face interaction between humans and animals, although, as we shall see, it is not limited to the face to face. 4. The realm that we find ourselves in exceeds reason. That is, its demands cannot be met by reason and are *de facto* not reasonable. Thinking, in this domain, becomes shaky. 5. Literature and the literary representation of nonhuman animals are of fundamental importance to the future of human-animal relations.

On this last point, we will turn to a curious comment that Derrida makes about the industrialised treatment of animals. “Everybody knows,” he writes “what terrifying and intolerable pictures a realist painting could give to the industrial, mechanical, chemical, hormonal, and genetic violence to which man has been submitting animal life for the past two centuries.”³² The question is not about knowledge. People already know. It is about representation, and in this sense the genre of realism is invoked by Derrida as being able to represent certain scenes which would terrify the viewer, perhaps giving her occasion to avert her gaze. The realist depiction of real practices could not be tolerated. Indeed, these practices are only tolerated owing to their removal from sight—a fact incidentally confirmed by Elisabeth Roudinesco who, when interviewing Derrida, is faced with his question: “But if, every day, there passed before your eyes, slowly, without giving you time to be distracted, a truck filled with calves leaving the stable on its way to the slaughterhouse, would you be unable to eat meat for a long time?” Her answer seems startlingly inadequate, but perhaps honest: “I would move away.”³³

Before exploring the strategic importance of realism, I want to consider the removal of the slaughterhouse from public view, an act whose considerations are not limited to taste. To illustrate the point, we turn to a telling moment in Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). Although citizens are omnivorous, slaughtering is kept at arm’s length as we see in the description of meat:

But first the filthiness and odour thereof is clean washed away in the running river without the city, in places appointed meet for the same purpose. From thence the beasts be brought in killed and clean washed by the hands of their bondmen. For they permit not their free citizens to accustom themselves to the killing of beasts, through the use whereof they think clemency, the gentlest affection of our nature, by little and little to decay and perish.³⁴

Citizens of Utopia are doubly immunised from the slaughterhouses which are located outside of the city and are operated by slaves. We understand that not being accustomed to killing relates both to carrying out the physical act and watching the slaughter for both of these forms of knowledge are said to erode human clemency—compassion, forgiveness, leniency and mercy.

³² Ibid.

³³ Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, “Violence Against Animals,” in *For What Tomorrow...: A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 72.

³⁴ Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Ralph Robinson (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 74–5.

The suggestion is that human clemency is reduced by the act of putting animals to death and also by witnessing this spectacle. We infer that if citizens watch nonhuman animals being slaughtered, it will remove their clemency towards one another, leading to a more violent society.

The location of the slaughterhouses rehearses a set of familiar tropes with regard to the animal body. Primarily, it is an attempt to prevent the contamination of the polis. The filth, or the sin of the killing, is said to be washed away in the river after which the remaining meat, free from blood, is allowed to enter the city. The bodies of the animals are transformed from bloody displays of clemency-reducing violence—a task performed by the human hands of the bondsmen. The animal can only enter the polis as meat, thus enforcing the classical exclusion of nonhuman animals from the political. Yet the selection of the word “clemency” interests us in that it concerns a responsibility of power. Clemency occurs where people choose not to exercise the power which they have and points to a benevolent inaction or passivity. The architects of Utopia wish to protect this supposedly natural facet of the human, an act that can only be achieved through a complete separation from the slaughterhouse. It is here that we find a contradiction that goes to the heart of the human. For on the one hand, as we have seen, the human must eat meat to be fully human, yet on the other hand, the human who is to remain fully human by retaining his clemency cannot be exposed to the killing of animals. Furthermore, and in light of what we have said about the ethical relationship between humans and nonhumans, can we be sure that this clemency is exclusively and strictly directed towards other humans?

With this in mind, what is to be gained by the realistic rendering of the slaughterhouse? Derrida tells us that the picture would be “terrifying and intolerable” and the above discussion indicates that the real thing at least would gradually blunt our capacity for clemency. For Derrida, the issue turns on the concept of disavowal. Just as the Utopians know where their meat comes from, so do we. Both parties simply prefer not to think about it and behave instead as though slaughterhouses do not exist. If, on the other hand, we were regularly exposed to the terrors of the slaughterhouse, either we would lose our clemency, or be forced to end the slaughter. What both Derrida and the Utopians agree on is that the human capacity for pity would not be able to bear exposure to the slaughterhouse and it is here, it seems to me, that literature has a vital role to play.

One of literature’s more harrowing representations of the slaughterhouse appears in Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle* (1906), a piece of unashamed Socialist propaganda which narrates the appalling effects of the meat industry on its workers in turn-of-the-century Chicago, the city which was home to the world’s largest and most sophisticated set of slaughterhouses and meat-processing plants. There is no denying that the novel is primarily concerned with the fates of its

human characters rather than the animals which we encounter in various states of dismemberment, yet there are moments which powerfully attest to human responses on exposure to the slaughterhouse.

Before we are granted our first realistic image of the slaughterhouse, we are told that the “one gleam” of humour in the meatpacking district is the endlessly repeated joke: “They use everything about the hog except the squeal.” If this witticism notes the total nature of the rendering process, something which we discuss below, it also attests to an unwanted by-product which the industry would rather ignore but to which the human workers seem compelled repeatedly to make reference. Although the meat industry has no use for the squeal of the hog, literature cannot ignore it. As we step, once again, into the kill room, the primary feature of the presentation of slaughter is the squeal:

At the same instant the car was assailed by a most terrifying shriek; the visitors started in alarm, the women turned pale and shrank back. [...] The uproar was appalling, perilous to the eardrums; one feared there was too much sound for the room to hold—that the walls must give way or the ceiling crack. There were high squeals and low squeals, grunts, and wails of agony; there would come a momentary lull, and then a fresh outburst, louder than ever, surging up to a deafening climax. It was too much for some of the visitors—the men would look at each other, laughing nervously, and the women would stand with hands clenched, and the blood rushing to their faces, and the tears starting in their eyes.³⁵

This scene plays witness to the suffering of hogs prior to slaughter, a suffering which, in its excess, is greeted with nervous laughter or tears. That the squeal takes centre stage suggests that the realist depiction of the slaughterhouse demands a response which is cut off in advance by the Utopia-like concealing of the abattoir. The scream, in short, cannot be ignored. This is not because it renders the hogs human-like, or that it reminds us of human suffering—we note that the screams are not described in human terms, but are specifically animal “squeals, grunts and wails of agony”—but because there is something in the intensity of the “agony” which it attests to which cannot be ignored. The appalling uproar is so excessive that it threatens to tear down the whole edifice of the slaughterhouse. The walls that keep the sound in, that shield the public and which facilitate the killing must give way once these deafening shrieks of agony are avowed. Particularly telling is the nervous laughter of the men. In contrast to the tears of the women, it represents the necessary and uncomfortable disavowal of animal suffering.

Ignoring the screams, which simply do not figure, the industry is described in its efficiency as “porkmaking by applied mathematics,” a phrase which emphasises the calculating nature of a process which therefore fails to aspire in any way to the ethical relation outlined above. Despite this mechanistic approach, we see effects of the face to face encounter:

³⁵ Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36–7.

And yet somehow the most matter-of-fact person could not help thinking of the hogs; they were so innocent, they came so very trustingly; and they were so very human in their protests—and so perfectly within their rights! They had done nothing to deserve it; and it was adding insult to injury, as the thing was done here, swinging them up in this cold-blooded, impersonal way, without a pretence of apology, without the homage of a tear. (37)

The homage of a tear reminds us of the religious rites specifically denied to nonhuman animals by Abraham Stern in *The Lives of Animals*. It suggests, to quote from Owen again, that “holy glimmers of goodbyes” are called for even in the slaughterhouse. Indeed, the narrator is moved to consider whether there might be a “heaven for hogs, where they were requited for all this suffering” (29). In short, it seems that the horrors of the slaughterhouse, like the horrors of World War One, call for something that can add dignity to the mass deaths. This dignity would accord with the demands of the *animot* in that it requires the recognition of the individuality of the hogs. “Each one of these hogs was a separate creature,” writes Sinclair. “And each of them had an individuality of his own, a will of his own, a hope and a heart’s desire; each was full of self-confidence, of self-importance, and a sense of dignity” (37). The narrator’s attempts at evoking pity are, however, limited by a tendency to anthropomorphise the pigs. Aside from running the risk of creating an absurd and humorous image of humanoid pigs, this suggests, in a self-defeating manner, that it is only really humans who are worthy of receiving pity. It attests to the powerful nature of a humanist discourse which strictly forbids an ethical consideration of nonhumans and stands as a warning to us of the formidably difficult task of adequately addressing the fact of nonhuman animal suffering.

The final point to make about *The Jungle* concerns history. The novel was the result of Sinclair’s journalistic assignment to report on the working conditions in Chicago. The significance of the assignment was that the Chicago meatpacking operation was the world’s first modern meat processing facility in terms of its size and also in terms of the infrastructure in operation. We are told in the novel that there were “two hundred and fifty miles of [rail road] track within the yard” (35) which allowed for the mass transportation of animals and animal products in and out of the yards. Similarly, the animals were “disassembled” for the first time using production lines. As such, Chicago represented the marriage of industrial techniques to animal slaughter and meat processing. This experience of modernity is of interest to Derrida. We have seen above that he refers to the “violence to which man has been submitting animal life for the past two centuries,” a phrase which alerts us to the specifically modern nature of the question before us. Additionally, he stresses that

It is all too evident that in the course of the last two centuries these traditional forms of treatment of the animal have been turned upside down by the joint developments of zoological, ethological, biological, and genetic forms of *knowledge*,

which remain inseparable from *techniques* of intervention *into* their object, from the transformation of the actual object, and from the milieu and world of their object, namely, the living animal.³⁶

Again, we are returned to the question of knowledge. In this case, Derrida urges us to consider how scientific knowledge has led humans to transform nonhuman animals in terms of genetic manipulation such that the animal before us has been fundamentally changed.

The extraordinary changes to human-animal relations over the past two centuries have led, in Derrida's analysis, to a situation which is untenable. He comments that the question of what is becoming of so-called animal life "will become massively unavoidable."³⁷ And in response, in his essay "Mole," Royle poses the question once more: "What is the time of the 'massively unavoidable'?" this time adding a second and more pressing question: "Has it come?"³⁸ The rapid expansion of the field of animal studies and the increasing attention paid to the "question of the animal" in academia; the choice of millions of people across the world to be vegetarians or vegans; the growing visibility of "animal welfare" groups; the beginnings of "Animal Welfare" legislation—all signal a move towards a serious consideration of human ethical responsibility towards nonhuman animal life.

The promise of realism is that it can create an urgent and unavoidable call for an appraisal of our ethical responsibilities towards nonhuman animals. Yet the promise and responsibility of literature and criticism extend far beyond the possibilities of the genre of realism. Another clue which points towards the connected nature of literature and animals is found in Derrida's short and beautiful text "Che Cos'è La Poesia?" where one answer to the question "What is this thing that is poetry?" is a hedgehog: "the animal thrown onto the road, absolute, solitary, rolled up in a ball, *next to (it)self*" [Derrida's emphasis].³⁹ The importance of poetry to the question of the animal is explored by Royle in "Poetry, Animality, Derrida," where he draws out the significance, among other things, of the wound, the word, the name and the apocalypse. He draws our attention to perhaps the most intractable problem concerning justice towards nonhuman animals—that of language itself. We have already seen how language is the tool that man uses to name and hence to subject animal life. Language use is, of course, one of the traits that have traditionally been denied to the nonhuman animal, thus marking the absolute distinction between humans and animals. (Wolfe, incidentally, notes how these dubious goalposts are constantly shifting: "first it was possession of a soul, then 'reason,' then tool use,

³⁶ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 25.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and The New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006), 106.

³⁸ Nicholas Royle, "Mole," in *The Animal Question in Deconstruction*, ed. Lynn Turner (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 181.

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Che Cos'è La Poesia?," in *Points...: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Élisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf (California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 289.

then tool *making*, then altruism, then language, then the production of linguistic *novelty*, and so on.”⁴⁰) The poem is, however, a “thing beyond languages,” which “does not hold still within names, nor even within words.”⁴¹ This sense of movement is vital to deconstruction which, from the beginning, has understood a ceaseless motion of meaning and relationships which can never be held down. This is a fundamental quality of language which, as Derrida explores in “Plato’s Pharmacy,” emerges in Plato’s *Phaedrus* as Socrates’ claim that “*logos* is a *zoon*.”⁴² Like a rolled up hedgehog, the poem does not hold still, it wriggles around and makes language wriggle around. Royle emphasises the “dangerous, inflammatory, catastrophic”⁴³ nature of Derrida’s text in that it presents poetry as the form which is best suited to the task of thinking about the nonhuman animal, a thinking which “begins with a radical disarming of everything that is ‘proper to man.’”⁴⁴ As such, the proper name would no longer stick. The weapon used by Adam to subject the animal would no longer hold. It calls for a constant re-thinking of the animal, starting with the name “animal” itself which henceforth must be thought of as the “*animot*.”

Derrida’s little text on poetry is published in both French and English, with the translation, face to face with the original, one side responding to the other. This format already insists upon the inadequacy or impossibility of translation and Derrida adds that poetry finds itself “venturing toward the language of the other in view of an impossible or denied translation, necessary but desired like a death.”⁴⁵ The translation and hence the interpretation or understanding of a poem never rests. There is no final reading of the language of the other, and in the motif of the poem-hedgehog, there is no final reading of the animal other. The animal is untranslatable, veering about, never holding still, never surrendering to a final reading. The animal, like the poem, demands translation, insists upon a ceaseless reading and activates a response, but one which remains necessarily inadequate. This is an aspect of language which we will return to in Chapter Five with regard to the writing of D.H. Lawrence.

Elisabeth Costello explores this connection during her initial lecture. She claims that “there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination.”⁴⁶ To illustrate this thought, she notes how she has

⁴⁰ Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanism*, 2.

⁴¹ Derrida, “Che Cos’è La Poesia?,” 293.

⁴² Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁴³ Nicholas Royle, “Poetry, Animality, Derrida,” in *A Companion to Derrida*, ed. Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2014), 531.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Derrida, “Che Cos’è La Poesia?,” 291. We should note that “*traduire*,” the French word for “to translate,” also translates as “to bring to justice.”

⁴⁶ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 35.

successfully thought her way into the life of Marian Bloom from *Ulysses* in her (doubly, triply even, fictional) novel *The House on Eccles Street*:

If I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life.⁴⁷

Once again, this claim focuses our attention on the importance of thinking as the first act towards the ethical treatment of nonhuman animals, and the kind of thinking insisted upon is literary, the magical thinking which is, to borrow a well-known expression of Derrida's, like deconstruction, "an experience of the impossible."⁴⁸ If there is something unconvincing about Costello's claim, we should note that it also involves a re-thinking of knowledge itself. Thomas Nagel thinks that we can't know what it is like to be a bat⁴⁹ since his notion of knowing is very different from what Costello is suggesting. What is clear in her claim is that knowing is not concerned with the objective or verifiable but is a sort of knowing that knows its uniqueness. As Derrida suggests in "Circumfession" with the recurring phrase "it only happens to me,"⁵⁰ each thought is personal, singular and untranslatable, but this is not to negate the force (and specifically, the *ethical* force) of such thoughts. Costello does not wish to know for knowing's sake, but speaks instead of the "sympathetic imagination," where "sympathy has everything to do with the subject and little to do with the object."⁵¹

In short, what interests Costello is the connection between knowledge and pity whereby pity becomes vital to an ethical relation to the nonhuman animal and is produced or felt as a result of a kind of literary or magical thinking. Perhaps more than anything else, Derrida points to the crucial importance of the experience of compassion or pity—a subject that we will analyse more carefully in our discussion of *Moby-Dick* in Chapter Two. Since the suffering of animals at the hand of man is undeniable, the response to this suffering is the remaining question. With a choice between disavowal and affirmation of suffering, within pity rests an inescapable obligation towards the nonhuman animal:

War is waged over the matter of pity. This war is probably ageless but, and here is my hypothesis, it is passing through a critical phase. We are passing through that phase, and it passes through us. To think the war we find ourselves waging is not only a duty, a responsibility, an obligation, it is also a necessity, a constraint that, like it or not, directly or indirectly, no one can escape. Henceforth more than ever. And I say "to think" this war, because I believe it concerns what we call "thinking."

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, trans. Mary Quaintance (London: Routledge, 2002), 243.

⁴⁹ T. Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat," *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435–50.

⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession," in *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 305.

⁵¹ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 34–5.

The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there.⁵²

Determining the Being of Animals

Yoni Giraffe

The giraffe has a long neck.
He can see a bus before it sets out
and the sun before it rises.

Everything that we see, the giraffe sees before us.
He also has an expression on his face which says
How lovely it is to be such a tall animal.

The giraffe has a long neck.
He sees clouds at the end of the world
and declares: "Friends, in one month's time, it's going to rain here."

From the height of the giraffe, everyone seems short
and our biggest problems
are just little dots for the giraffe.

This is my attempt to translate a poem from the classic Israeli children's album, *The Sixteenth Lamb*. Set between musical brackets, with near deadpan narration by the poet, Jonathan Geffen, this absurd meditation on the giraffe forms a dreamy interlude between songs. The poem points rather beautifully to the difference in viewpoints between humans and giraffes where even the sun is no longer a strict measure of time. If, for the human, seeing is knowledge, then the giraffe knows better having got there first. Whatever we see, the giraffe has already seen, including the clouds of the encroaching apocalypse.

"Seeing rain" in fact relates to another animal with a long neck. As Tim Birkhead in his book *Bird Sense* describes, flamingos have a mysterious ability to "see" rain which they "can sense [...] falling hundreds of kilometres away."⁵³ He notes that flamingos can even judge quantities of rain which have fallen and that humans have no idea how they know this. The seeming absurdity of the poem relates, then, to an even more extraordinary reality. Additionally, Geffen's reference to the end of the world in this children's poem reminds us of Derrida's comment that when returning the gaze of a nonhuman animal, he is "like a child ready for the apocalypse."⁵⁴ Just as human concerns are made insignificant at the end of the poem, so Derrida notes that in the vertiginous moments of coming face to face with nonhuman animals, everything that guarantees the stability and fixity of man is shaken. We will explore this

⁵² Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 29.

⁵³ Tim Birkhead, *Bird Sense: What It's Like to Be a Bird* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 204.

⁵⁴ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 12.

reference to childlikeness in detail in Chapter Five with relation to the writing of D.H. Lawrence. There, we will examine how the onset of maturity and specifically of sexual maturity requires the violent severing of childish human-animal border crossings.

This difference of sensory perception in *Yoni Giraffe* relates to the work of horse and dog trainer, poet and philosopher Vicki Hearne. Wolfe quotes from Hearne's book *Adam's Task* which discusses the differing touch sensitivities of horse and rider: "every muscle twitch of the rider will be like a loud symphony to the horse." Hearne continues that in the case of an inexperienced rider, "the horse cannot escape knowledge of a certain sort of the rider, albeit a knowledge that mostly makes no sense, and the rider cannot escape knowing that the horse knows the rider in ways the rider cannot fathom."⁵⁵ She thus draws out a necessary incompatibility of knowledge between species where each must remain to some degree mysterious to the other. This incompatibility is evoked in the final stanza of Geffen's poem where the giraffe's elevated viewpoint has a decentring effect on the human whose concerns shrink to little dots. That the giraffe cannot fathom the concerns of the human is not expressed as a lack or an inability, rather the disappearing dot-like ellipses of human concerns become simple irrelevances. The poem therefore goes some way towards Derrida's insistence that the ethical relationship "*allows me to see and be seen through the eyes of the other.*"⁵⁶ The end of the poem calls for an impossible thought which seeks to know what the problems of Yoni Giraffe might be whilst underlining that this will always remain beyond the lowly gaze of the human.

Yoni Giraffe's world is different from, even incompatible with, "our" world. Differences in world-views between humans and nonhumans are famously schematised by Heidegger who states that "the stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man is world-forming."⁵⁷ We turn now to Heidegger since he is the philosopher whom Derrida most rigorously challenges in terms of his anthropocentrism. Derrida does this in the fourth chapter of *The Animal that Therefore I Am* and also in the essay "Heidegger's Hand." This debate with Heidegger has an important place in the present study and is explored in detail with relation to Philip Roth's novel *American Pastoral* in Chapter Four.

Heidegger's thinking concerning nonhuman animals is often found to be problematic since, for the most part, it seems that he is not really interested in nonhumans. As Calarco observes, for Heidegger "*determining the being of animals is never considered, in itself, a pressing task.*"⁵⁸ In

⁵⁵ Vicki Hearne, quoted in Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanism*, 4.

⁵⁶ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 12.

⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995), 176.

⁵⁸ Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*, 29.

the case of the above quotation, Derrida reminds us that “the propositions concerning the ‘poor in world’ animal are advanced within a far more vast problematic that is not that of the animal.”⁵⁹ In other words, it is “man” or “world” which are Heidegger’s concerns and hence we see that he typically begins from an anthropocentric position which neatly divides animals into humans and the rest. This is to repeat a gesture which characterises metaphysics. For example, René Descartes’ statement that reason is “the only thing that makes us human and distinguishes us from brute beasts”⁶⁰ is found inside brackets—there is no attempt to prove the statement, rather this human-animal division is an unexamined premise of his discourse. Heidegger’s famous propositions cast the animal into the state of privation. The animal is *a priori* deprived of the world and is therefore, as Derrida comments, “enclosed in a captivation,”⁶¹ which posits the animal as always already imprisoned, captive in its own being.

Thinking about the *animot* requires, as we have seen, “acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, and as something other than a privation.”⁶² Rather than concluding that, since nonhuman animals do not use words as such, they are deprived of the world, we ought to consider nonhuman perception of the world as: 1. Radically different from human perception. 2. In many ways attuned to details and nuance to which humans are doomed to remain oblivious. 3. A poetic act of world-formation which challenges human poetry to emulate its strangeness and difference. We are unlikely to dispute, however, the proposition that “man is world-forming.” This notion has already been explored in the context of Adam, the first poet where a primary function of poetry would be the formation of the world. This is its danger and its chance, the risk and responsibility. Of course, what we cannot so easily discount is that the animal also forms worlds of its own, worlds that humans, concerned with their little dots, would struggle to comprehend.

Heidegger illustrates his theses concerning nonhuman animality with the example of a lizard on a rock. He distinguishes the lizard from the rock beneath it in as much as he allows the lizard to have its own relation to the rock below and the sun above, whereas the stone is entirely without relation. Yet the rock for the lizard is not a rock *as such*. By this, Heidegger means that the rock for the lizard is not the same as a rock for a human inasmuch as a lizard would be unable to “inquire into its mineralogical constitution,” or ask “questions of astrophysics”⁶³ of the sun. From this, he concludes that for the lizard, the rock is a rock, but it’s a rock crossed out. A ~~rock~~. For although the lizard “has its *own relation* to the rock, to the sun [...] yet it is not known to

⁵⁹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 144.

⁶⁰ René Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method*, trans. Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

⁶¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 156.

⁶² Ibid., 48.

⁶³ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics : World, Finitude, Solitude*, 197.

the lizard *as* a rock.”⁶⁴ What remains unexplained is why what Heidegger means when he thinks about a rock is more rock-like than what the lizard thinks about the hot flat thing that he likes to sit on in the sun, or, if you like, in the ~~sun~~. A further complication arises when Heidegger writes of the lizard basking in the sun:

The lizard basks in the sun [*Sie sonnt sich in der Sonne*]. At least this is how we describe what it is doing, although it is doubtful whether it really comports itself in the same way as we do when we lie out in the sun, i.e., whether the sun is accessible to it *as* sun, whether the lizard is capable of experiencing the rock *as* rock.⁶⁵

We could translate the first sentence more literally as “The lizard suns itself in the sun.” Heidegger is doubtful, however, that what a lizard does when lying in the sun is the same as what a human does when lying in the sun. This far, I am willing to go with Heidegger. What is it, however, that bothers Heidegger about saying that a lizard basks in the sun? Following the German more closely, it could be the self-reflexivity of the lizard sunning *itself*. This is a formulation that implies a conscious relation with the self. Alternatively, the English translation brings out a different aspect of the lizard’s being with the word “basks.” Deriving from the Old Norse word “*bathask*” meaning to bathe oneself, basking in the sun implies sunbathing—the pleasure of laying one’s body in the warming rays of the sun. It would imply a kind of *joie de vivre* for the lizard, or even, in more Derridean terms, a *jouissance*. These are questions which we must return to in Chapter Five in our discussion of D.H. Lawrence’s moles. For the time being, however, we should look at Lawrence’s rendering of this Heideggerian scene:

Lizard

A lizard ran out on a rock and looked up, listening
no doubt to the sounding of the spheres.
And what a dandy fellow! the right toss of a chin for you
and swirl of a tail!

If men were as much men as lizards are lizards
they’d be worth looking at.⁶⁶

This briefest of poetic sketches presents a very different view of the lizard on the rock. This is a lizard intimately connected with the world, confidently looking up and with a profundity of aural acuity that allows him to tune in, not simply to the sounds of the local environs but to the “sounding of the spheres.” This antiquated phrase lends a depth and degree of insight into the world that would eclipse that of a listening human. We are presented with a wise lizard, sitting on a rock, acutely aware of the universe in its most ancient sense. Indeed, with the rich layering of alliterative l’s and s’s and the subtle assonance of “ran,” “out,” “doubt” and “sounding,” the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 198.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 197.

⁶⁶ D.H. Lawrence, *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), 437.

poem goes some way towards putting the reader in the place of the place of the lizard, calling for a sharpening of the senses. We note also the inclusion of a rather Derridean sounding “no doubt,” a phrase which has come, conversely, to signify a radical uncertainty and an ever-present doubt which must watch over thinking. Here, it indicates the very narrow ability of humans to know nonhuman animals, underlining, once more, the necessity of the poetry when considering lizards on rocks.

“And what a dandy fellow!” is a phrase which tells us far more about the narrator than about the lizard. The deliberate and exaggerated anthropomorphism draws our attention to the limits of human relations with nonhumans—as if we can only relate to the lizard as a sort of a male human, but more than this, the exuberance of the line expresses a human delight in the wonder and perhaps the majesty of the lizard. This delight in the appearance of the lizard is reflected in the following sentence which is itself no heavier than a pair of noun phrases. The “for you” at the end of line three suggests not that the lizard is there “for you,” but that he is there, if you should care to look, something which the narrator strongly recommends. The lizard is thus offered as a being for contemplation, not deprived of the world, but living fully in it, in a manner which an observant human would find instructive. We will be discussing the consequences of this “for you,” in Chapter Four where as part of our reading of Roth’s *American Pastoral*, we discuss what the glove-making protagonist means when, holding a piece of leather, he says “if you were to look at the animal.”

A Noncriminal Putting to Death

There are, Derrida notes in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, “certain pre-existing indices that allow us to understand and agree in saying ‘us’ today” (25). We have already seen that there is an open-ended and historically contingent list of properties said to be found in man and lacking in the animal. Derrida gives examples from this list as “speech or reason, the *logos*, history, laughing, mourning, burial, the gift, etc.,” before adding in brackets that this list “can never be limited to a single trait and it is never closed” (5). Derrida here calls attention to the deconstructible nature of this supposedly absolute distinction between man and beast, yet as we have also seen, it is enforced on a staggering scale through the perpetual sacrifice of the nonhuman animal.

As Wolfe notes in his landmark essay “In the Shadow of Wittgenstein’s Lion,” “‘humanity’ sustains itself [...] by means of the ‘carnivorous’ sacrificial structure that orders the relationship between the world ‘of spirit’ and the animal.”⁶⁷ It is not merely that the major human ethical

⁶⁷ Cary Wolfe, “In the Shadow of Wittgenstein’s Lion,” in *Zoontologies : The Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2003), 28.

injunctions, like “thou shalt not kill,” do not apply to nonhuman animals; the full force of this structure dictates that the nonhuman animal *must* be put to death if the category of “the human” or “humanity” is to sustain itself. This fact alone goes a long way towards accounting for the name of Wolfe’s field: “posthumanism.” Derrida insists most forcefully on this sacrificial structure in “Eating Well” where he stresses:

I am trying especially to underscore the *sacrificial* structure of the discourses to which I am referring. I don’t know if “sacrificial structure” is the most accurate expression. In any case, it is a matter of discerning a place left open, in the very structure of these discourses (which are also “cultures”) for a noncriminal putting to death. Such are the executions of ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the corpse. An operation as real as it is symbolic when the corpse is “animal” [...] a symbolic operation when the corpse is “human.”⁶⁸

Derrida here is referring specifically to the discourses of traditional Western philosophy. As we have seen, he wants to underline philosophy’s incapability of thinking about nonhuman animals.⁶⁹ This would be in part to blame philosophy for the excessive subjection of the animal as discussed above. Yet the re-framing of the question as a literary one does not exonerate literature from casting the animal as sacrificial victim. We have already looked at the actions of Adam the poet in Eden and Derrida reads Genesis as narrating not one but two original sins. Both are connected with the construction of humanity and both concern knowledge. They both involve nudity and shame. The second sin that Derrida has in mind is the fratricide that occurs between Cain and Abel.

The fratricide that results from it [God’s preference for Abel’s flesh offering over Cain’s vegetal submission] is marked as a sort of second original sin, in this case twice linked to blood, since the murder of Abel follows—as its consequence—the sacrifice of the animal that Abel had taken it upon himself to offer to God. What I am here venturing to call the second original sin is thus all the more linked to an apparition of the animal, as in the episode of the serpent, but this time it seems more serious and more consequential.⁷⁰

Remember, Derrida is angry at a God who “doesn’t know what he wants with respect to the animal.” Outside Eden, laid out before God is the choice that would determine man’s relationship with the animal. Abel makes an animal offering and Cain proffers the fruit of the ground. God accepts the animal sacrifice and refuses the plant offering. Animals are thus marked out as ripe for sacrifice even if at this point in the narrative, they are not yet good to

⁶⁸ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 278.

⁶⁹ On this point, Matthew Calarco notes that despite the worsening treatment of animals and the rise of animal rights discourses, a “hierarchy [placing humans above all other animals] seems to be presupposed by nearly every major thinker in recent Continental thought.” Calarco, “Thinking through Animals: Reflections on the Ethical and Political Stakes of the Question of the Animal in Derrida,” 8.

⁷⁰ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 42–3.

eat.⁷¹ Man's relationship with nonhuman animals is now more or less sealed. The animal is separated off from man as the creatures without knowledge, as the creatures who don't even know enough to know that they are naked. These animals—this animal—is subject to man's will and through the facility of sacrifice, become man's way of enforcing this difference and also of relating to God. Hence, as Derrida suggests, "the freedom accorded Adam or *Ish* to name the animals, was only a stage '*in order to see*,' in view of providing sacrificial flesh for offering to that God. One could say, much too hastily, that giving a name would also mean sacrificing the living to God."⁷² With even more haste, one could say that sacrificing sacrifice would not only entail moving to an uncharted posthumanism, but would also cut our ties with God, and traditional humanism, leaving us floating untethered in a world of our own invention.

The strategic value of this collection of myths is that they want to explain who man is, where he came from and what defines him. On this point Derrida is clear:

what is proper to man, his subjugating superiority over the animal, his very becoming-subject, his historicity, his emergence out of nature, his sociality, his access to knowledge and technics, all that, everything (in a nonfinite number of predicates) that is proper to man would derive from this originary fault, indeed, from this default in propriety, what is proper to man as default in propriety—and from the imperative necessity that finds in it its development and resilience.⁷³

In other words, at the heart of man as we know him is a fault, a fault that registers as a default in propriety—a lack of justice. This fault would concern naming, subjugating and sacrificing animals in the name of announcing a creature that will consider itself better than all the others. The sacrifice of the animal would no longer be something that man does, but rather a statement of *who he is*. It is the act which differentiates himself from the other animals and removes him from nature and into culture.

The most dramatic and pervasive consequence of this sacrificial economy is the literal consumption of nonhuman animals as meat and the consumption of animal products in clothing and other products. This is not just a problem for meat-eaters and the question is put succinctly by Derrida who asks:

The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the nonliving, man or animal, but since *one must* eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there's no other definition of the good [*du bien*], *how* for goodness' sake should one *eat well* [*bien manger*]?

⁷¹ Man is not permitted to eat animals until after the flood. We discuss the consequences of this in Chapter Three.

⁷² Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 42.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 45.

This will be one of the questions which will trouble us the most over the course of this study and we will look most closely at the question of eating well in Chapter Three where we read the Atwood trilogy. Whether we like it or not, we are held within a sacrificial economy, namely, carnophallogocentrism to which there is no outside. This is a situation sadly reflected upon by Lettie in D.H. Lawrence's first novel, *The White Peacock* (1911) on witnessing the drowning of a cat which has been caught in a trap intended for rabbits:

"Cyril," said Lettie quietly, "isn't it cruel?—isn't it awful?" I had nothing to say.

"Do you mean me?" asked George.

"Not you in particular—everything! If we move the blood rises in our heel-prints."

The human condition is neatly expressed in Lettie's final sentence. If we move, and it can hardly be a question of *if*, rather *when*, blood rises in our heel-prints. Rather than "footprints" or "footsteps" which, as Royle reminds us⁷⁴ does not refer specifically to the human animal, "heel-prints" seems precisely human. As we have already noted, one of our concerns will be the response to this feature of humanity. Lettie's quiet but insistent affirmation of the cruelty of the situation reveals her pity towards the dead cat and this is a gesture that we find also in Robert Burns' much quoted poem "To a Mouse." The occasion of this poem is the destruction of a field mouse's "housie" by the plough of the narrator who is gathering in the corn harvest. This is what happens outside of Eden, where fallen man is compelled to work the land. The scene rehearses the familiar situation of human nourishment causing animal death, even if the animal in question is not destined for consumption. As Derrida notes, "vegetarians, too, partake of animals."⁷⁵

The narrator's pity for the mouse condemned by the "murdr'ing" plough is expressed through a series of shared traits of "Nature's social union." Specifically, the mouse is described as an "earth-born companion / An' fellow-mortal." Hence the basis for the narrator's pity is a commonality with the individual mouse which sees him on the reciprocal level of companionship rather than in a hierarchical chain of dominion. The mouse's right to life is further confirmed by the affirmation of his mortality—a faculty for dying which validates life and opposes the Heideggerian insistence that animals have no access to death; that they "perish" rather than die as such.⁷⁶ The act of poetic imagination is to empathise with the mouse, turned out of its "cozie" house and into the "Winter's sleety dribble." The narrator knows that with no materials to build a new nest, the mouse will surely freeze to death.

⁷⁴ Royle, "Poetry, Animality, Derrida," 525.

⁷⁵ Derrida, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject," 282.

⁷⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 224.

The poem's final stanza, however, tells the mouse that "thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!" since the narrator has to live with a knowledge of his past and future which the mouse, touched only by the present, need not suffer from. Although this hasty judgement on the cognitive abilities of the mouse may not do it justice, it is important to note that this stanza does not attempt to negate the suffering of the mouse or feel for it any less. Indeed, the supposed difference in the experience of suffering between the narrator and the mouse demonstrates that the mouse's suffering does not simply operate as a metaphor for human suffering, but has validity and demands consideration in its own right. Indeed, as the most famous lines of the poem insist, it is the "best laid schemes o' Mice *an'* Men," which often go awry and this commonality calls for a reading of animal suffering *alongside* that of humans. What the poem stresses here is a commonality borne of "Nature's social union," and not the belittling devices of analogy or metaphor. Metaphor, then, will be a literary device of which this project remains sceptical. In Chapter Two, we will explore the importance of a non-metaphorical reading of Moby Dick.

Raymond Carver's short story "Nobody Said Anything" (1963)⁷⁷ addresses the story of Cain and Abel, which is reconfigured within the context of a fractious American family. The story begins with two argumentative brothers, the narrator and George. Feigning illness, the young narrator is excused from school and goes fishing instead. At Birch Creek, he meets a strange-looking rat-like boy who is trying to catch an unusually large Summer Steelhead, or Rainbow Trout. Together they catch and kill this fish only to discover that it is not the catch that they hoped for:

His sides were scarred, whitish welts as big as quarters and kind of puffy. There were nicks out of his head around his eyes and on his snout where I guess he had banged into the rocks and been in fights. But he was so skinny, too skinny for how long he was, and you could hardly see the pink stripe down his sides, and his belly was gray and slack instead of white and solid like it should have been. (12)

Undeterred by the fish's strange appearance, both boys strongly desire to take the fish home to show their parents. The rat-boy pronounces "I want to show him to my dad so bad" (11), as the fish is thrust into the position of sacrificial totem, ready to demonstrate, through its death, the skill and manliness of the boys where showing rather than eating is the proposed role and parental love is at stake. Deciding to cut the fish in half, the narrator is able to negotiate retention of the favoured front half.

He arrives home to find his mother and father arguing whilst a pan burns unnoticed on the hob. Finally persuading his parents to look at his catch, his mother exclaims "Oh, oh my God! What is it? A snake! What is it? Please, please take it out before I throw up," whilst his father screams

⁷⁷ Raymond Carver, "Nobody Said Anything," in *Where I'm Calling From: The Selected Stories* (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), 1–15.

“Take that goddam thing out of here! What in the hell is the matter with you? Take it the hell out of the kitchen and throw it in the goddam garbage!” (15). The sacrifice is, in the strongest terms, rejected. The token that is supposed to bring the son closer to the parents, to draw praise and favour to the youngest son results only in disgust, horror and verbal abuse. This rejection of the sacrifice occurs in a disturbed domestic space filled with hostility where the burning pan indicates the failure of cooking. The fish as sacrifice is rejected and is decidedly not good to eat. Indeed, if there is an opposite of *bien manger*, it is the disgust evoked by the mother when she threatens to vomit in response to the fish-head.

If the human is defined and structurally secured by the animal sacrifice, what happens when the sacrifice fails? In this respect, we could read this story as a failed coming of age. There are numerous clues as to the immaturity of the narrator, especially with regard to sex. Before he goes fishing, he hunts through his parents’ bedroom for clues about sexual intercourse, an act which remains mysterious to him whilst he is concerned about what he sees as his copious masturbation. Even his fantasies about sleeping with a woman who gives him a ride to Birch Creek end in strange failure: “She asks me if she can keep her sweater on and I say it’s okay with me. She keeps her pants on too” (5). In this sense, the story narrates a failure of sacrifice which reflects a failure to accede to adulthood, or a full status as human.

As is characteristic of Carver, the close of the story hints at revelation and in this case invites us to think the failed sacrifice otherwise. Banished from the house in order to dispose of the fish, the narrator looks once again at his catch:

I went back outside. I looked into the creel. What was there looked silver under the porch light. What was there filled the creel.
I lifted him out. I held him. I held that half of him. (15)

The sacrificial fish takes on a new form for the narrator. In a sense, both the boy and the fish have been rejected, and this causes a kind of coming together. The repeated phrase “what was there” suggests a new understanding of the dead and dismembered creature. Beyond the need to name or classify the half-fish, whose status even as a fish has been questioned by the boy’s mother, “what was there” makes no demands on the fish to take any particular form and therefore there can be no question of the fish failing to accede to any external standards. The final paragraph of the story sees the dead fish revered as though alive, transformed into something precious. He is given the pronoun usually reserved for humans, and the phrase “I held him” suggests a closeness which transcends all the disgust which has come before. There is a communion between the dead fish and its killer which hints at a radically different human-animal relationship in the light of the failure or the impossibility of sacrifice. Sacrifice will be one of the most important ideas of this study and is explored in almost all of its chapters.

Chapter One reads the first section of *Foe* as a rewriting of the Eden myth and explores Coetzee's presentation of the castaway as a Cain figure. Chapter Three asks what happens to the sacrificial animal in the light of genetic mutations. Chapter Four explores how Roth presents American pastoralism as a sacrificial discourse based on the death of the Thanksgiving turkey, and Chapter Five discusses numerous aspects of sacrifice in the writings of Lawrence.

Rendering Animals

As indicated by the title of his chapter on *Moby-Dick*, "Rendering the Whale," Philip Armstrong, in his important book *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, places particular stress on the word "render." Armstrong draws our attention to two senses of "render," firstly in the sense of "the industrial processes that render them [whales] into a consumable," and secondly in the "artistic rendering of the animal."⁷⁸ Hence this word which derives from the Latin term *reddere* (to give back, return, surrender, take revenge, declare, express) and which is scattered across a range of European languages, rather insists itself into this study bringing together in a single word both the ultimate destruction of the animal body, what the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes as "To process (the carcass or remains of an animal) in order to obtain fat, animal feed, etc." and the act of representation: "to express or represent."

It might seem that these two renderings work in opposite directions. Where one causes the animal to disappear as the carcass is dismembered until nothing remains, the other conjures the animal into existence using nothing but words. Yet the industrial rendering of animals only leads to the continual reappearance of the animal body everywhere and in a manner that demands to be read. In *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, Nicole Shukin notes that the "double entendre" of "rendering" "is deeply suggestive of the complicity of representational and material economies in the reproduction of (animal) capital."⁷⁹ In other words, she claims that the representation of the animal in modern capitalist societies and the rendering of animal bodies to grease the cogs of those same societies work towards the same end of rendering the animal as a commodity of capital. Importantly, she stresses that the act of industrial rendering is a historically contingent and specifically modern phenomenon whose genealogy she traces back to Napoleon's reorganisation of animal slaughter in France in 1806,⁸⁰ a date which reminds us once again of Derrida's focus on the past two centuries. One of her most striking examples concerns the appearance of the animal in film. The material appearance of the animal in film is also a simultaneous disappearance since it is in the form of a layer of

⁷⁸ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 104.

⁷⁹ Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 51.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

gelatine that the animal body appears on both camera and movie film. Shukin describes in fascinating detail how the Eastman Kodak company was so reliant on the animal rendering industry that it purchased a glue company in order to produce gelatine of suitable quality for film manufacture, whereby “Tightened micropolitical control over the raw diet as well as the cooked hides and bones of animals allowed Eastman to manage organic impurities in photographic gelatin, signaling the almost maniacal mastery over animal physiology that made the mimetics of photography and film possible.”⁸¹

Animal render is precisely what movie-goers are looking through but never seeing. Shukin’s analysis zooms in on one particular film, one of the first ever made, which records Thomas Edison’s public electrocution of an elephant who is put to death in order to demonstrate the apparent dangers of alternating current electricity. The animal is thus represented as that which one may put to death in a noncriminal manner, even for the entertainment of the public. In this instance, the animal here, one named Topsy, is made to appear only in the instance of his extermination, or material disappearance. Thus we can understand Shukin’s insistence that:

The rubric of rendering compels us to consider, instead, how the “honest labor” of mimesis—indeed, how the very idea of copying as an unmotivated, innocent faculty—itself becomes a fetishistic resource of capitalism.⁸²

This constellation of capitalism and animal rendering will be explored in detail in Chapter Two where we will see how Melville evokes the connection between economy, spermaceti and the ability to see. In Shukin’s vision, all animal rendering is subject to suspicion. Yet to return to our verb “to render” is to discover a range of unexplored meanings. According to the *O.E.D.*, to render is “to restore, return, give back.” It means “to give up or relinquish,” “to surrender,” even “to give oneself up.” A wide variety of things can be rendered, in the sense of being produced, including judgement, vomit, kisses and tears. To render is “to translate word for word,” “to bring about, to cause to be or become.” To render is to pay homage. To put it mildly, there is more than one way to render (to) an animal. Here’s an example. To return to Shukin, she notes that Kodak purchased the American Glue Company in order to produce gelatine of a regular and controlled quality: “to monitor for the undappled consistency of animal matter used in the production of photographic gelatin.”⁸³ The word “undappled” perhaps puts us in mind of Gerard Manley Hopkins who, in “Pied Beauty,” presents a markedly different rendering of the nonhuman animal:

Glory be to God for dappled things-
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow:

⁸¹ Ibid., 110.

⁸² Ibid., 51.

⁸³ Ibid., 109.

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
 And all trades, their gear and tackle trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
 He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
 Praise him.⁸⁴

A defining feature of industrial animal render is its homogeneity. It cloaks all difference by producing a sameness that eschews its individuated animal source. Animal render is allergic to the dapple since, as Shukin so clearly illustrates, it only becomes available as a product of the commoditised animal. Hopkins celebrates dappled things in a way which resists and condemns industrial rendering. The essence of dappled things, which include individual animals, species of animals and “natural” phenomena such as skies, lies in an individuality which cannot be reduced to the mass and the faceless and which resides in mystery. Indeed, the bracketed question “who knows how?” attests to the impossibility of a human mastery of these dappled things through certain knowledge. Rather the essence of pied beauty lies in an unknowability which forever leaves the human observer in a state of wonder. The lack of human knowledge about pied beauty is a problem for humans not only inasmuch as it indicates the limitations of human knowledge but also since it signals a world beyond the human world bringing up the awkward suggestion that perhaps it is we who are poor in world.

Hopkins renders this rare beauty with a suggestive patterning of language where the poem is dappled with alliterative groupings and punctuated with lists suggestive of the spots of the stipples. Indeed, the word “stipple” is not merely adjectival but is elevated by the preposition “in.” “In stipple,” like “in blossom” or “in bloom” suggests a flowering of rose-moles (the spotted markings on the sides of trout) opening to a kind of stippled state of being. That a major part of Hopkins’ linguistic inventiveness involves meddling with word classes is noted by Derrida in “‘Justices’” where he explores Hopkins’ use of “justice” as a verb.⁸⁵ The stipple, freckle and dapple are beautiful in their irregularity, in their unaccountability and their individuality. So even though the poem refers to trout and finches as mass entities, the irregularity of the dapple demands recognition of the individuality of each trout and finch. This opens towards one of Derrida’s most insistent demands, that to do justice to an animal—“to justice” an animal, as Hopkins might say— we must consider individual animals and, following Levinas, we understand that this face to face relation with the individual animal is characterised

⁸⁴ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 132.

⁸⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Justices,” trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry*, no. 31 (Spring 2005): 689–721.

by the returned gaze. As Derrida announces early on in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, to the question “How can an animal look you in the face? That will be one of our concerns.”⁸⁶

Let’s see what happens when an animal looks you in the face. Norman Mailer’s novel *Why are we in Vietnam* (1967) features a group of Texans hunting for grizzly bears. The novel’s anti-climax comes when D.J. comes face to face with the bear he has finally managed to shoot:

At twenty feet away. D.J.’s little cool began to evaporate. Yeah, that beast was huge and then huge again, and he was still alive—his eyes looked right at D.J.’s like wise old gorilla eyes, and then they turned gold brown and red like the sky seen through a ruby crystal ball, eyes were transparent, and D.J. looked in from his twenty feet away and took a step and took another step and another step and something in that grizzer’s eyes locked into his, a message, fellow, an intelligence of something very fine and very far away, just about as intelligent and wicked and merry as any sharp light D.J. had ever seen in any Texan’s eyes any time (or overseas around the world) those eyes were telling him something, singeing him, branding some part of D.J.’s future, and then the reflection of a shattering message from the shattered internal organs of that bear came twisting though his eyes in a gale of pain, and the head went up, and the bear now too weak to stand up, the jaws worked the pain.⁸⁷

This astonishing and lyrical rendering of the epiphany of the face narrates an all-too-late understanding of the ethical demands of a nonhuman animal. The reader views the scene through D.J.’s eyes and finds herself returning the gaze of a wounded animal. The experience of looking is, for the human, humbling and unnerving. Close-up and dying, the bear is recognised as a “fellow” animal, a realisation which confirms the mad injustice of the hunt. This moment exemplifies a crucial question for Derrida which he cites from Jeremy Bentham. The “first and decisive question” is “can they suffer?”⁸⁸ The importance of this question is that it makes no demands of the nonhuman animal before it can qualify for our pity. The animal does not need to exercise abstract thought, or make or use tools, or perform circus tricks in order to be deserving of pity, it just needs the undeniable capacity to suffer. Suffering is not a special ability, rather it is a passive activity, but one which makes serious demands of the human. Hence Derrida asks: “What is this nonpower at the heart of power?” The working of this power is profoundly felt by D.J. who feels the “branding” of the passive eyes of the Grizzly Bear. Like a farm animal, D.J. is branded, scarred indelibly, irreversibly marked out. In the “ruby crystal ball” of the bear’s eyes, D.J. sees that his future will have been profoundly affected by the knowledge imparted through the bear’s eyes; an undeniable knowledge of the horrible suffering of the bear. D.J. sees, up-close, the “gale of pain” he has caused and the vision is branded to his future. This is an example of what, in another context, Coetzee describes as the authority of the suffering body. This is an authority that is not given, rather “the suffering body *takes* this authority: that is its

⁸⁶ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 7.

⁸⁷ Norman Mailer, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (New York: Picador, 1967), 146.

⁸⁸ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 27.

power. To use other words, its power is undeniable.”⁸⁹ Here is the limit of disavowal—the reason that Roudinesco would “move away.”

One of the ethical advantages of the face to face interaction is that it insists on an individual knowledge. The experience happens between two individuals and its ethical demands arise from an undeniable immediacy and the demanding power of a gaze which belongs to a specific individual. As Derrida is at pains to point out in his exploration of the gaze of a nonhuman animal, the cat that he discusses in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* “does not appear here to represent, like an ambassador, the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race[...]. If I say ‘it is a real cat’ that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity.”⁹⁰ Returning the gaze of an animal, however, brings up some formidable questions.

Temple Grandin’s work focuses on the question of animal perception and is premised on the claim that her autism allows her to better understand what it is like to be an animal. Grandin’s accomplishments are indeed impressive. She reveals in “Thinking like Animals” (1998) that one third of all livestock handling facilities in America operate according to her designs with the intention of keeping animals calm before they are slaughtered.⁹¹ In terms of the perception of cattle, Grandin explains:

Many times I have observed cattle balking and refusing to move through a chute at a slaughter plant. They may balk at a jiggling gate, a shadow, a shiny reflection, or anything that appears to be out of place. A coffee cup dropped on the floor can make the cattle stop and turn back. But cattle will walk quietly into a slaughterhouse if the things they are afraid of are eliminated.⁹²

Grandin emphasises that cows are much more attuned to visual details that humans would not consciously see. So not only is the visual field of a cow fundamentally different from a human’s—covering nearly 360 degrees with blind spots at the front and back—but all sorts of perceptions might be different. She concentrates on factors which alarm cows such as a sudden change of lighting conditions, shadows, small objects on the floor or items of clothing hung on fences. This difference in perception speaks not only to questions which Heidegger presents about the different worlds of animals, but also raises ethical questions in terms of the face to face interaction. Rather than asking whether a cow has a face, we ought to ask what it could mean to return the gaze of a cow. We have already seen that the essence of the ethical relationship comes in its incalculability and asymmetry, and these are factors which are surely

⁸⁹ J.M. Coetzee, “Interview,” in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 248.

⁹⁰ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 9.

⁹¹ Temple Grandin, “Thinking Like Animals,” in *The Animal Ethics Reader*, ed. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler (London: Routledge, 2003), 184–86.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 184–5.

heightened when we cannot be sure what or even how a cow is seeing when she returns our gaze.

Further than this, in his discussion of Grandin's writings, Wolfe notes that the question of seeing and the visible returns us to one of our major themes: knowing. Quoting from Derrida's essay "Others are Secret Because they are Other,"⁹³ Wolfe writes:

To reframe the question of the visual in this way—to cut it loose from its indexical relation to the human, to reason, and to the representational mastery of space itself, and set it adrift within the generalized animal sensorium as “merely” the equal of the dog's sense of smell or the horse's sense of touch (and in some contexts, inferior to those)—is to appreciate more fully Derrida's observation that “a de-hierarchization of the senses displaces what we call the real, that which resists all appropriation.”⁹⁴

In other words, Grandin's comments on the superior seeing-power of cows displace the prevalent metaphor that seeing is knowing. Indeed in the light of some famous perception experiments in which humans routinely fail to see the obvious when distracted,⁹⁵ we could say that seeing represents a failure to know, or the ability to know just what we want to know. This unfavourable comparison to some animal sight causes the uncomfortable and radical displacement of the defining human characteristics of knowledge and reason.

But what if an animal doesn't have a face, or if it has a face that is not so easy to gaze into? What if it has a face which isn't going to return our gaze? Consider, as David Foster Wallace urges us to, the lobster. In his infamous essay, written for *Gourmet* magazine, as their reporter at the Maine Lobster Festival in August 2004, he notes that lobsters are “not nice to look at,”⁹⁶ yet the thrust of the article is concerned with the ethics of cooking and eating lobster: “Is it all right to boil a sentient creature alive just for our gustatory pleasure?” He focusses on questions of suffering and pity and produces an article which must have left a rather unpleasant taste for the organisers of the festival. Further limitations of the epiphany of the face concern the comments of Hearne who notes that sight is not the primary sense for all animals: we may return the gaze of a cat or a bear, but less so that of a mole or a bat. These questions suggest that, as Derrida points out, Levinas' ethical interaction is inherently anthropocentric and just as human rights cannot simply and unproblematically be expanded to encompass the rights of nonhuman animals, it seems that the face to face interaction is limited in such a way as to enact a violence

⁹³ Jacques Derrida, “Others Are Secret Because They Are Other,” in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 156.

⁹⁴ Cary Wolfe, “Learning from Temple Grandin: Animal Studies, Disability Studies, and Who Comes After the Subject,” in *What Is Posthumanism?* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 133–4.

⁹⁵ Grandin and Wolfe mention a number of experiments which record instances of what has been called “inattention blindness.”

⁹⁶ David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster,” in *Consider the Lobster: And Other Essays* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 235–54.

towards certain nonhuman animals. This would include animals that do not gaze as well as those with which it is difficult to form a relationship. Fish, for example.

To return, briefly, to Manley Hopkins' trout, what makes it irreducibly singular is not its face, but the sense of its markings being "in stipple." To the narrator, these markings are irreducibly beautiful and, as we have seen, marked by mystery. Let's consider the stipple in the light of a story cited by Grandin. Oliver Sacks' classic book *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*⁹⁷ narrates the tale of a medical student, who, having taken amphetamines and dreamt about being a dog, woke up with "super-heightened perceptions" including a powerful sense of smell and the ability to discern dozens of shades of colours which he had never before seen. Grandin surmises that "the most likely explanation is that he always had an ability to smell like a dog and see fifty different shades of brown, but he just didn't know it and couldn't access it." For the rest of us "Fifty shades of brown turn into just one unified colour: brown."⁹⁸ In other words, within the complex colouring of the stippled marking of a trout are many more colours than humans are able to discern. Indeed the "brinded cow" in the same poem must be precisely an example of an animal with fifty shades of brown rather than a mere "couple-colour." In this sense, the dapple, stipple, freckle etc., are all examples of a relative lack of human perception and serve to mark the limitations of what we can see and what we can know. They also mark a space where the human fails to discern the difference between individual animals. This is in marked contradistinction to trout themselves, who can, it seems, recognise and remember other individual trout.⁹⁹

Derrida repeatedly connects being caught in the gaze of a nonhuman animal to the experience of vertigo. What he names as "the vertigo of the beast"¹⁰⁰ is the dizziness caused by the recognition of nonhuman being—"the fact that there is being rather than nothing."¹⁰¹ The vertigo of the beast names the unsteadiness caused when the human-animal division is no longer an absolute abyss. It is a gaze into the "point of view of the absolute other"¹⁰² which causes the deep structures of carnophallogocentrism to spin. As I hope to demonstrate, the vertigo of the beast is best evoked by literature and is evoked most powerfully when the alterity of nonhuman animals is apparent and where the privileging structures of humanism come undone.

⁹⁷ Oliver W. Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*, 1st Touchstone ed (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

⁹⁸ Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson, *Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behaviour* (New York: Harvest, 2005), 65.

⁹⁹ Shannon L. White and Charles Gowan, "Brook Trout Use Individual Recognition and Transitive Inference to Determine Social Rank," *Behavioral Ecology* 24, no. 1 (January 2013): 63–69.

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 66.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 11.

I Am Not In Nor Of Them

The Wasps' Nest

Two aerial tigers,
 Striped in ebony and gold
 And resonantly, savagely a-hum,
 Have lately come
 To my mailbox's metal hold
 And thought
 With paper and with mud
 Therein to build
 Their insubstantial and their only home.
 Neither the sore displeasure
 Of the U.S. Mail
 Nor all my threats and warnings
 Will avail
 To turn them from their hummed devotions.
 And I think
 They know my strength,
 Can gauge
 The danger of their work:
 One blow could crush them
 And their nest; and I am not their friend.
 And yet they seem
 Too deeply and too fiercely occupied
 To bother to attend.
 Perhaps they sense
 I'll never deal the blow,
 For though I am not in nor of them
 Still I think I know
 What it is to live
 In an alien and gigantic universe, a stranger,
 Building the fragile citadels of love
 On the edge of danger.

James L. Rosenberg

Rosenberg's poem beautifully brings out the alongside nature of humans and wasps. We note the continuities between this and the Burns poem where both discuss the fragile nature of an animal "home" which comes into direct conflict with the human environment. The wasps and the narrator are not on friendly terms, indeed the poem does not evoke a pastoral harmony between man and nature, but rather an awkward sharing of space where both parties know "I am not their friend." The clash of worlds is perhaps best exemplified by the absurd and, to the wasps, incomprehensible "sore displeasure" of the U.S. Mail. One wonders whether an institution can exhibit the complex and rather delicate emotion of sore displeasure any more than a wasp can, whilst this language of diplomacy seems to represent an emotional appeal to the wasps to choose a different location for their nest. This would mirror the strategy of the

narrator who, equally absurdly, offers threats and warnings. These strategies reveal a reluctance to use force against the wasps, insisting on a negotiation where, presumably, none is possible.

Again, the strength of the wasps derives from their passivity, which is apparent in the depiction of their home, the oxymoronically fragile citadel of paper and mud. The narrator states that all it would take is a “blow” to kill the wasps and destroy their nest, a word which shows sensitivity both to the ease of the action as well as the inherent violence in such a simply accomplishable action. We note that all the words relating to power, such as “savage” and “fierce,” are directed internally where there is a sense that the wasps are not interested in the narrator but are absorbed in their own world of house-building. The poem ends with a double affirmation. Firstly, difference is affirmed. Importantly, it is not that the wasps are different from the narrator but that the narrator is different from the wasps: “I am not in nor of them.” The precise meanings of the prepositions “in” and “of” seem difficult to locate and instead they extend to a vast generality—as though there really is no commonality or connection between the wasps and the narrator. And of course the differences between the two parties are, to borrow a Derridean term, abyssal. Secondly, however, the narrator affirms a commonality based on a shared existence in an “alien and gigantic universe.” This is to reconfigure the notion of “world” from something which, as Heidegger suggests, is formed by man, to something which remains forever outside of man, something vast and incomprehensible, not subject to domination and ultimately, perhaps, unwelcoming. Rosenberg describes the world as something which cannot be domesticated and which thus renders narrator and wasps alike as “strangers.”

The narrator and wasps are strangers not just to each other, but also to the universe. They are decidedly, in any case, not at home. We should stress the strategic value of this word “stranger.” It resists normality, no longer is man the measure of all living things. He is just another stranger. Moreover, he is strange, wasps are strange, all living creatures are strange. This is their wonder and why we will never end the poetic task of translating animals into our languages. Timothy Morton multiplies the word, coining the term “strange strangers.” He states that “*all life forms are theorisable as ‘strange strangers,’*” adding that “The strange stranger is not only strange, but strangely so. They could be us. They are us.”¹⁰³ He places his term alongside Derrida’s notion of the *arrivant*—the guest who arrives without prior announcement or expectation and who places upon us impossible demands to offer hospitality. Our relation to the strange stranger is, therefore, an ethical one. The real guest, if there is such a thing, is the strangest one: the one which arrives without a horizon of expectation and which seeks refuge in our home or in our mailbox. As Derrida frequently insists, a letter must run the risk of never reaching its desired recipient and equally, we cannot programme in advance what might arrive in our mailbox.

¹⁰³ Morton, “Thinking Ecology: The Mesh, The Strange Stranger, and the Beautiful Soul,” 275.

Carver's story "Feathers," (1983) narrates the details of a dinner shared between two co-workers and their wives. The two other significant characters are an extraordinarily ugly baby and a peacock named Joey. Fran and Jack visit Bud and Olla to be greeted by a cry "that was too loud for a baby."¹⁰⁴ It turns out to have been produced by a peacock whose presence arrests the guests as they arrive: "'Goddamn,' I said. There was nothing else to say." The slightly awkward dinner party proceeds inside where, resting on top of the television is a cast of Olla's teeth before they were straightened: "the most crooked jaggedy teeth in the world." This strange artefact does little to make the evening any more comfortable and dinner proceeds uneventfully before the baby, called Harold, and Joey start wailing and are brought, one after the other into the dining room.

The ugly baby has the same effect as Joey had on first sight: "It was so ugly I couldn't say anything." The adult speechlessness is, however, prelude to a speechless and extraordinary interaction between the baby and the peacock who, on entering the house,

walked quickly around the table and went for the baby. It ran its long neck across the baby's legs. It pushed its beak in under the baby's pajama top and shook its stiff head back and forth. The baby laughed and kicked its feet. Scooting onto its back, the baby worked its way over Fran's knees and down onto the floor. The peacock kept pushing against the baby as if it was a game they were playing. Fran held the baby against her legs while the baby strained forward.

"I just don't believe this," she said.

"That peacock is crazy, that's what," Bud said. 'Damn bird doesn't know it's a bird, that's its major trouble."

[...]

Bud picked up the baby and swung him over his head until Harold shrieked. The peacock ruffled its feathers and watched.

Jack, who narrates the story, then comments: "That evening at Bud and Olla's was special. I knew it was special. I felt good about almost everything in my life." This baby-peacock interaction produces an epiphany for Jack and Fran who feel an overwhelming desire to have a child of their own. Amid the ugliness of the baby and the teeth and the strangeness of the peacock, the behaviour of the baby and the bird is a powerful demonstration of the effects of the alongside. We have seen that the presence of Joey and Harold strikes the guests dumb, a signal that they somehow escape the potentially domesticating effects of language and the relationship between the two is specifically pre-linguistic. Hence, the categorising imperatives of language no longer apply to a "bird that doesn't know it's a bird," where both Joey and Harold are

¹⁰⁴ Raymond Carver, "Feathers," in *Where I'm Calling From: The Selected Stories* (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), 275.

referred to with the non-speciesist pronoun “it.” Olla and Bud have been reluctant to let Joey into the house on account of their guests and, we assume, the expected standards of behaviour with regards to humans and nonhuman animals, whereas it becomes clear that this household has been transgressive from the start in terms of the sort of creature it welcomes in.

The Otherness of Nonhuman Animals

As opposed to the wasps in Rosenberg’s poem, who have “lately come,” to the mailbox, the snake in D.H. Lawrence’s poem “Snake” is the “first comer” at a drinking fountain. In his reading of the poem Derrida stresses this fact, noting that the narrator’s response to him is conditioned by having arrived second.¹⁰⁵ This sequence repeats the Edenic narrative where Derrida once again underlines that the animals are there first. With regards to Genesis, Derrida asks “Who will have been the first occupant, and therefore the master?”¹⁰⁶ This order remains true for the non-mythic version of events where nonhuman animal life dramatically predates that of homo sapiens. This is noted by Foster Wallace where he comments that lobsters “like most arthropods, date from the Jurassic period, biologically so much older than mammalia that they might as well be from another planet.”¹⁰⁷ This otherness of a cosmological order is also noted of cuttlefish in Les Murray’s poem where the first line calls them “Spacefarers past living planetfall.” Hence we see that the otherness of nonhuman animals registers in terms of time and space in radical ways. Put simply, the time of nonhuman animals is not human time and is not even of the order of human time. One could say that to look at certain nonhuman animals is to look back in time in a manner scarcely comprehensible.

Of course, looking at certain nonhuman animals, especially the ones which live under water, is difficult to achieve and a glance down at a lobster clattering about in a cooking pot hardly counts. What would it mean to offer hospitality to a radically other nonhuman sea creature? And how could this be achieved? Herein lies another of the unique opportunities of the literary space which is singly equipped to offer an answer to this question which drives, as Derrida observes, at the heart of hospitality:

Hospitality, therefore—if there is any—must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte, my other, not even my neighbour or my brother, perhaps an “animal.”¹⁰⁸

Nicholas Royle’s novel *Quilt* (2010) narrates the increasingly mad actions of a man grieving for his recently deceased father, one of which concerns the construction of a large aquarium

¹⁰⁵ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2009, 1:236–49.

¹⁰⁶ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 18.

¹⁰⁷ Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster,” 237.

¹⁰⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality,” in *Acts of Religion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002), 363.

housing four *motoro* rays in the front room of his dead father's house. Through the installation of this, and eventually two further aquariums, the novel considers the mad proposition of giving hospitality to a profoundly other form of nonhuman life. If, as Deleuze and Guattari claim, the pet is an Oedipal animal, brought into the home, domesticated and made a part of the family as a kind of adopted honorary human,¹⁰⁹ then the ray, in its strange otherworldliness, resists this domestication to the last. In this respect, the domestic space in the novel, the deceased father's house—thus never really the son's own—becomes increasingly subsumed by its otherworldly guests to the extent that the manta ray that we encounter in the novel's final pages "seemed, indeed, bigger than the house" (148). The home that the son has come to tidy, organise and eventually to sell is made unsaleable through the hospitality which is shown to the rays. The effect on its human inhabitant is, perhaps, even greater.

Foregrounding the impossibility of satisfactorily representing the rays, the novel bursts with intricate metaphors including: "animated pancakes," "half-hidden dark moons," "ghosts on a shopping spree in an empty mall," "underwater kite," "melted clocks," "happy-slapping ghosts," "underwater birds," "submarine bird," "robot frittata," "psychedelic beret," "miniature chubby Concordes," "water-filled white paper bags," "cloud-white cruise missile," "disembodied flamboyant cuff brandishing a rapier," "upside-down technician with an antenna that turns its body into a walkie-talkie," "a trapeze artist gathered at the end of its own tightrope," all of which confirm that:

They're Teflon: nothing sticks because in reality they are the cooks, the makers, somnifluent agents of provocation and alterity in a maddening game with invisible rules in operation before you set your eyes on them and being perpetually revised.¹¹⁰

The otherness of the rays constantly resists the domesticating effects of language which is left following haplessly in their wake. They are simultaneously the Teflon of the mundane and quotidian frying pan and the Teflon coating of a NASA spaceship, a real-life spacefarer. This fatal incompatibility between language and rays is hinted at as we are told that "Language wrecks the ray" but also that "The ray wrecks language" (33). We have already discussed the violent excesses which language has unleashed on nonhuman animals and hence, as the author comments in the novel's afterword, the novel "has to make trouble *in and with language*. It must meddle. The novelist has to aspire to a writing that figures and insists on strangeness, on what cannot be appropriated or turned over to the language police" (155). The novelist, like the ray, must meddle with language. This would include a relentless effort at representing the strangeness of the ray in a non-domesticating manner.

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 266.

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Royle, *Quilt* (Brighton: Myriad, 2010), 94.

The afterword also notes that the novel is concerned with speed and hence with time: “the novel has to work at new velocities, with new rhythms. It has to break up, interrupt, slow down and reroute unexpectedly” (157). This demand is partly concerned with disturbing an anthropocentrism which allows the human, at its own speed, to think only of itself, or only on its own terms. Meddling with language includes fiddling with time as part of the impossible task of presenting a time which would transcend the human. Watching the rays in their large aquarium is a distinctly relaxing activity:

There is the calm of water-lights, the shade and cool of this other world restfully alert to the eye, buried in time, the placid underworld and prehistoric clarity of sitting beside the great tank and watching. (77)

Part of the alterity of the ray tank is its otherworldliness expressed as an existence in another measure of time. Just as the rays bury themselves in the substrate at the bottom of the aquarium, so they are buried in time where watching them is like looking back in time. If history refers only to human history, then prehistory is what comes before and what cannot be concerned with the human. But what can we understand by the adjectival use of “prehistoric” in this phrase “prehistoric clarity”? In this sense, it is not the ray which is prehistoric, but the clarity of the view which one sees when sitting beside the tank. It suggests a viewpoint which transcends humanity or which is at least not contingent on humanity or human knowledge. Crucially, it takes us back beyond the past two centuries which have been so damaging for human-nonhuman relations. As above, a non-earthly kind of language is evoked. One ray, Mallarmé, is described as being “like a spaceship” (106) when he comes to rest on top of another, Hilary, in a suggestively amatory manoeuvre. This combination of space and time thought otherwise leads to an experience of the world as radically other and different from the world that we thought it was. It relates to Morton’s notion of strange strangeness. It is not the world that is strange so much as its inhabitants who are doomed to being eternal strangers, tragically out of time with the other animals that they find themselves living alongside.

This experience of *contretemps* is felt perhaps most keenly at the end of the second part of the novel where the face to face relationship with the ray is explicitly explored. Mallarmé’s manoeuvre becomes the subject of contemplation where the problem of human viewpoint is explicitly noted: “It’s so difficult not to project onto them what you are thinking and feeling” (106). This leads to “the realisation that people have such a ludicrously anthropomorphic ego-projective perception of everything. They can’t so much as glance at a fishtank without thinking of being them, inhabiting a watery world of swimming, floating, shimmying through the depth” (107), leading inevitably to the dismissive question: “what sort of a life it *that?*” (107). Again, we come up against a human inability to think what it might be like to be a ray, a question which only produces a thought which diminishes the ray to an inferior and ultimately

expendable life form. Yet the revelation of the face to face encounter with the ray-that-has-taken-over-your-home produces a

murky registration that in terms of the actual timeframe of life on the planet, half a hiccup ago you were a lungfish yourself. You were decidedly less imposing-looking, but you were not a dissimilar sort of creature yourself. At which point you dimly sense a sort of vast retelling, a turning shadow cast out over the waters in the flickering light of which the projection actually goes *the other way*, and the relatively aleatory antics of Mallarmé with Hilary, not different from how they would have been a couple of hundred million years ago, show us frankly what or who we are. (107)

This important passage elaborates on the meaning of “prehistoric clarity” by attempting to think the human relationship to the ray from a non-anthropocentric timeframe. Far from being without relation to the ray, we are presented with the thought that it wasn’t so very long ago that the creature that would evolve into the human was rather similar to the ray. From this new and almost impossible to think perspective, it is the returned gaze of the ray which tells humans who they are. This is the sort of thought that Bennett and Royle surely have in mind when they write: “In many ways, no doubt, the implications and consequences of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) are still sinking in.”¹¹¹ Perhaps the most compelling part of this quotation is the notion of a dimly sensed “vast retelling,” which seems to take in all of human mythology and history, starting from the beginning, and to demand a radically different understanding of this thing that is the human animal in what would have to amount to a complete re-writing of humanism and its many discourses. This task is a telling, a narrative task and therefore a literary one. It is a task of reading and writing which places an immense demand on literature and criticism. It is a kind of writing that, ultimately, would cause the human we know to disappear just like the grieving son in *Quilt* who, by the end of the novel, is nowhere to be seen, or perhaps has metamorphosed into a ray. It is a kind of reading and writing which would consider a new idea of hospitality and which would have to do what, as Derrida notes, the discourses of Western Philosophy notable fail to do, namely, to “*Sacrifice sacrifice*.”¹¹²

¹¹¹ Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, “Animals,” in *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 4th ed. (London: Longman, 2009), 152.

¹¹² Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 279.

Chapter One

The Mark of the Castaway; Writing the Human in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*

J.M. Coetzee's attentiveness to nonhuman animals is well recognised, with most criticism focussing on *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace* (both 1999).¹¹³ These works do not escape Derrida's attention who, in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, recommends them as "magnificent."¹¹⁴ In addition, however, Derrida mentions *Foe*, Coetzee's short novel published in 1986.¹¹⁵ For Derrida, *Foe* is significant in that it presents an extraordinary re-reading, or rather re-writing, of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, a text to which Derrida devotes much time in the second volume of the lecture series. As such, *Foe* is relevant to a number of Derrida's concerns, chiefly to the question of sovereignty which he reads as a concept surprisingly more suited to nonhuman animals than to humans. In this chapter, we shall be exploring *Foe* primarily in terms of the way in which it invites an understanding of the fragility of the construction of the human animal. The novel demonstrates how the human is constituted, as we have seen, in distinction to all other animals, and also how this human animal is subject always to a reliance on extra-human technologies, without which the human suffers the existential crisis of disappearing into the general ranks of "the animal." In particular, we see how narrative, starting from Genesis, is instrumental in the formation of the human. These concerns are framed within an exploration of the meaning and significance of autobiography, a question which addresses Derrida's suggestion that the human is an "autobiographical animal." I hope to develop a reading of *Foe* which questions a universal humanism based on a radical distinction from the nonhuman animal in general. The novel shows us that the autobiographical animal which Derrida speaks of is, ultimately, its own author—an animal which has invented itself through narrative and which must continue to tell its own story. It is an animal indistinguishable from an act of literature, open always to rereading and rewriting.

Foe begins as Susan Barton is washed ashore on Cruso's island. We read a first person account of her time on the island which appears as a rather underwhelming version of the island in

¹¹³ See, for example Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2008); Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J.M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. Bennington, Geoffrey, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 46.

¹¹⁵ J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (London: Penguin, 1987).

Robinson Crusoe. This wind-swept land is bereft of comforts and the Cruso that she finds there is a bitter stoic who spends his days constructing terraces—potential farmland which remains unplanted for his lack of seeds. As with *Robinson Crusoe*, Friday is present, but in Coetzee's version is missing his tongue, the removal of which remains a mystery at the end of the novel. The inmates are rescued from the island. Cruso, who is removed against his will, dies in transit, and Barton and Friday arrive in England. Part two comprises a series of letters from Barton to a writer, Daniel Foe, who, it seems, has agreed to write an account of Barton's story. Barton and Friday have moved into Foe's empty house, which the writer has fled, pursued by creditors. Meanwhile, a girl claiming to be called Susan Barton comes to the house, insisting that she is Barton's long lost daughter. It becomes clear that part one of the novel is an account written by Barton for the benefit of Foe. Barton and Foe meet in part three which is a first person account from Barton's perspective. The pair discuss the task of writing an account of her story and then sleep together. The final part of the novel appears to be set in a contemporary time frame and combines Defoe's historical house with the shipwreck which left Friday and Cruso stranded. The novel ends as a breathless stream erupts from the mouth of a shipwrecked Friday.

Coetzee's novel enfolds the canonical work of Defoe. Published 266 years after *Robinson Crusoe*, *Foe* comes after Defoe's text. It follows it, pursues it, makes it literary prey. Yet *Foe* also comes before *Robinson Crusoe*. It claims to offer an original and therefore more authentic version of Defoe's story, a device which creates strange back and forth oscillations. We know that Coetzee has been influenced by Defoe, yet Defoe is also strangely and impossibly influenced by Coetzee. *Robinson Crusoe* is put into play by a text which is both its ancestor and descendent. This impossible sequencing focusses our attention on writing itself, reminding readers that they are precisely that—people engaged in reading a fictional text. Critics have focussed on the postcolonial aspects of *Foe*, concentrating especially on the enigmatic rendition of Friday. Yet the equally puzzling—and, in some ways, posthuman—figure of Cruso has received relatively little attention.

Robinson Crusoe (1719), the novel to which *Foe* responds, presents a rich exploration of human-animal relations. Defoe's novel is populated with a menagerie of nonhuman animals including Crusoe's domesticated "family" of dogs and cats, his farmed livestock, raised in captivity, as well as the abundance of untamed "wildlife" on the island. Crusoe's very existence on the island is largely facilitated by his use of animals who are variously companions, pets, food and pests. Philip Armstrong pays close attention to the absolute mastery of nonhuman animal life exhibited and insisted upon by Crusoe. He notes how Crusoe bases his rights to command the island and its substantial animal life on a "Cartesian exultation of reason,"¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 13.

which establishes him as the sole rational animal on the island and thus as the natural ruler, lawmaker and executioner. Armstrong emphasises how Crusoe employs the discourse and practices of Enlightenment reason to violently subject nonhuman animal life on this island to his will, an exercise which is practised with the aid of his firearm, stores of gunpowder, and his knowledge and practice of European farming techniques. By subjecting animals to his rule, maintaining his use of language and fashioning clothing from goat skins, he is able to resist all threats to his own human status by confirming his position as fundamentally separate from nonhuman animals.

At the start of her essay on *Foe*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak quotes from Derrida's "The Ends of Man." Derrida writes that "Everything occurs as if the sign 'man' had no origin, no historical, cultural or linguistic limit."¹¹⁷ In other words, "man" is seen as a transcendental signified, outside of the influences of language and culture. Yet at the same time, it is often a basic assumption of critics that the primary threat to Crusoe, in his solitary existence, is the loss of his humanity. As Ian Watt insists, on reading *Robinson Crusoe*, "An inner voice continually suggests to us that the human isolation which individualism has fostered is painful and tends ultimately to a life of apathetic animality and mental derangement."¹¹⁸ This downward move towards "animality" is, Watt points out, corroborated by Defoe's source material where real-life castaways were "harassed by fear and dogged by ecological degradation, [...and] sank more and more to the level of animals, lost the use of speech, went mad, or died of inanition."¹¹⁹ The examples which Watt proceeds to cite are instructive:

One book which Defoe had almost certainly read, *The Voyages and Travels of J. Albert de Mandelslo*, tells of two such cases; of a Frenchman who, after only two years of solitude on Mauritius, tore his clothing to pieces in a fit of madness brought on by a diet of raw tortoise; and of a Dutch seaman on St. Helena who disinterred the body of a buried comrade and set out to sea in the coffin.

Watt's view of the human accords, perhaps surprisingly, with the academic field of posthumanism. His suggestion that an isolated human cannot maintain its humanity implies that the human relies on the outside in order to sustain itself and that the isolated human slips into animality. This supports an important claim of posthumanism that, as Cary Wolfe writes, the human "is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically 'not-human' and yet have nevertheless made

¹¹⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's Crusoe/Roxana," in *Consequences of Theory*, ed. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 155.

¹¹⁸ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel; Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 88.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

the human what it is.”¹²⁰ Wolfe has in mind a collection of prostheses including physical necessities such as shelter and clothing, practical assistance such as tools, and cultural artefacts such as language. In other words, and to return to Derrida’s statement, these are the historical, cultural and linguistic limits of man. The castaway thus becomes the test case of the human animal. Stripped of the material comforts of civilisation and divorced from the company of other humans, isolated individuals face fundamental challenges to their identities which threaten to expose the human as anything but “natural” and which ought also to reveal the structures which operate to maintain a division between humanity and animality. As we have seen, Armstrong reads Crusoe as an example of *animal rationale*. Watt, by contrast, sees him as “*homo economicus*,”¹²¹ where it is Crusoe’s adherence to the strictures of capitalism which allows him to maintain his humanity. Here, I argue that these questions surrounding the maintenance of humanity outside of society and, to a degree, divorced from technology are also concerns in *Foe*, but where Cruso is not permitted access to either the status of the rational animal, or to *homo economicus*.

Like a Dog

Barton’s narrative explores the “animalising” influence of the island. After only a short amount of time as a castaway, she has adopted habits which she explicitly deems animal-like. She reports that “When Friday set food before me I took it with dirty fingers and bolted it like a dog. I squatted in the garden heedless of who saw me” (35). The tools of civilised eating, cleanliness and the savouring of food have all disappeared. In short, food and eating have lost their cultural and symbolic significance for Barton who eats simply to stave off hunger. We have been told that the diet on the island consists of bitter lettuce, fish and birds’ eggs. We will see that without access to the full range of carnivorous options and therefore outside of the carnophallogocentric order, Barton lacks the meat in her diet which would secure her position as human.

Despite the apparently dehumanising effects of her diet, Barton considers her good fortune in not happening across an island “infested with lions and snakes, or on an island where rain never fell, or else on the island home of some foreign adventurer gone mad with solitude, naked, bestial, living on raw flesh” (25). The concerns of the castaway are thus articulated around the question of eating. As Barton here notes, the first priority of the castaway is to make sure that she is the one doing the eating rather than the one being eaten. This is a decidedly Robinsonian anxiety—Derrida notes of *Robinson Crusoe* that

¹²⁰ Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxv.

¹²¹ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel; Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, 63.

the great gesture, the great phantasmatic *gesta* of the book, which rules its whole vocabulary, its speech, its mouth, its tongue and its teeth, is that of eating and devouring, eating the other, that's all we ever hear about, the fear of being devoured by wild beasts or by savage cannibals, and the need to eat beasts, beasts that you hunt, that you raise or that you domesticate.¹²²

Her second priority concerns having the appropriate weather to grow food and the third concerns our now familiar question of the effects of solitude. Here, the bestial nature of the solitary human is described in terms of clothing and diet and reminds us of our real-life Frenchman, naked and eating raw tortoise, stranded on Mauritius. We note that the normally human-securing powers of carnivorous consumption are suspended when the flesh in question is uncooked. This follows the distinction underlined in the title of Claude Levi-Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked*¹²³ where the cooking of animal flesh is considered a "cultural" act, as opposed to the "natural" eating of raw meat. Raw flesh remains on the side of nature, stripped of its powers to differentiate between humans and animals and hence the castaway is dehumanised.

Not only does Barton eat like a dog, but defecates like one, that is, in the open, in plain view, with no apparent sense of shame. This lack of shame is also evident in that her only clothing (a petticoat) is "in tatters" (35). In this way, the narrative gestures towards one of Derrida's most important interventions in terms of the construction of the human animal. Derrida points out that shame is a quality traditionally reserved for humans. He connects this sense of shame with nudity whereby on being revealed in all its nakedness, the human animal is said to feel shame which the nonhuman animal does not experience. Indicating the somewhat paradoxical nature of this thought, he notes that only humans can be said to be naked. Animals "wouldn't be naked because they are naked."¹²⁴ Barton has already established her relative nakedness and this short section of text thus directs us to some of the fundamental elements which make a human human. We begin to see not only how these essential elements are supplementary to the human, but also how rapidly and easily they can fall away. Barton's experiences on the island, therefore, come to reflect the fears of critics like Watt and establish for the reader the rather delicate nature of the human animal who is, it would seem, only ever one shipwreck away from the dehumanising influence of the animal simile. In this sense, Coetzee's novel has the opposite effect of Defoe's. Rather than presenting the human as a resourceful animal, capable of using rationality to sustain itself, *Foe* presents the fragility of the human who is more like a dog than he would care to acknowledge.

¹²² Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2011, 2:55.

¹²³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: An Introduction to the Science of Mythology*, trans. Doreen Weightman and John Weightman (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

¹²⁴ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 5.

In his investigation of dogs in Coetzee's writing, Louis Tremain notes a critical tendency to treat the dogs in *Disgrace* as "the dog"—a sign that "stands in for something other than itself."¹²⁵ Tremain persuasively argues instead that David Lurie's encounters with dogs allow him to come to terms with his "embodied soul," by recognising the fact of his own animal body. The article suggests that part of Coetzee's wider project is to grapple with the shame of death where the solution comes in acknowledging the words of Lucy, Lurie's daughter, that "there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with the animals."¹²⁶ Tremain finds, therefore, something powerfully affirmative in the suggestion that Lucy will have to start her life again, from ground level, "like a dog." With this in mind, we suspect that Coetzee's enterprise is more radical than merely pointing out the fragility of the human. Barton's discourse, which, as we shall see, is articulated around an absolute human-animal division, is markedly anthropocentric where Coetzee is interested in noting the continuities between humans and their nonhuman others. Barton, in her naivety as a novice writer, exposes the anthropocentric tendencies of narrative which reduces nonhuman animals to mere similes and reproduces assumptions of human superiority over nonhumans. There is a powerful sense in which writing itself is implicated in producing her worries of becoming animal-like. We should recall that her island narrative is written *after she has left* the island and travelled to London. Barton can look back on her island existence and detect the animal-like aspects of her life. We pick up on these threads later, but for now, I would like to turn to Cruso, who neither wishes to leave the island, nor writes. Here we find an alternative and compelling reading of the castaway.

Barton is the newcomer to the island. She remains resolutely not-at-home during her stay and yearns to leave. She promotes a traditional humanism of the sort upheld by Watt and validated in *Robinson Crusoe*. Cruso, by contrast, claims to have been living there for fifteen years and has no desire to return to Europe. His adoption of island life rejects a Barton-esque view of isolation. He maintains what one could call his human dignity, but without using tools in a Robinsonian manner. He asserts to Barton that "We have a roof over our heads, made without saw or axe. We sleep, we eat, we live. We have no need of tools" (32). This underlines the difference in outlook between Coetzee's and Defoe's islanders. Where Crusoe makes use of tools from his wrecked ship to construct all manner of structures for comfort, safety and animal husbandry, Cruso makes little attempt at any of these. So while the former works tirelessly to exert his influence on the island and to replicate his European lifestyle, the latter develops the mentality of a castaway, telling Barton "I ask you to remember, not every man who bears the mark of the castaway is a castaway at heart" (33).

¹²⁵ Louis Tremain, "The Embodied Soul: Animal Being in the Work of J. M. Coetzee," *Contemporary Literature* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 605.

¹²⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 610.

Cruso the castaway may not be very friendly, but he is not mad, bestial or savage. As a castaway, he demonstrates how a human can remain, outside even of the forces of traditional humanism. The mark of the castaway is surely the mark of the exiled Cain. Cruso has eschewed Abel's role as producer of "livestock," and is instead a would-be Cain, a farmer of crops. Every day, Cruso toils away in the construction of terraces and walls, creating flat areas of land which he is preparing for agricultural use. Having nothing to plant, however, the terraces remain empty. Cruso states that "Clearing ground and piling stones is little enough, but it is better than sitting in idleness" (33). Barton later points the reader to consider how the text subtly reconfigures Genesis. She asks the non-responsive Friday:

Is the answer that our island was not a garden of desire, like that in which our first parents went naked and coupled as innocently as beasts? I believe your master would have had it be a garden of labour; but lacking a worthy object for his labours, descended to carrying stones, as ants carry grains of sand to and fro for want of better occupation. (86)

The terraces are a strategy against the Edenic pull of the island. We recall that it is the post-Edenic punishment of man to toil in the field and it is precisely this that Cruso does. Just as she is mistaken in reading a pointless futility to the highly organised activity of ants, Barton is wrong in her view of Cruso's work as a "descent" to the level of ants. On the contrary, the toil is part of Cruso's defence against losing his humanity and becoming "animal-like." Without wishing to put too much emphasis on the Cainitic narrative, we should note that it is characterised by its absence. Cain is banished and disappears from the biblical narrative. His is the story that is not written and that remains allergic to narrative. We should not be surprised that Barton does not know how to tell Cruso's story and that, as we shall see, in the end it remains untellable.

Michael K, the anti-hero of Coetzee's previous novel, *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), is a clear forebear of Cruso. Both characters desire to live outside of society—Cruso wants to remain an islander and K strives to escape the effects of civil war and to remain "out of all the [internment] camps at the same time"¹²⁷—and both characters adopt a minimal and simple lifestyle, eschewing technologies to a large extent. There are numerous striking parallels revolving around agriculture and eating which give us more of an idea of what Coetzee has in mind regarding Cruso. K finds his vocation in life as he scatters his mother's ashes on what he believes to be her childhood farm: "this was the beginning of his life as a cultivator" (59). The thought of making the farm bloom brings a "fit of exultation" and his "deepest pleasure" comes from watering his plants at sunset (59). Although he explicitly states that "he was not a prisoner

¹²⁷ J.M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K* (London: Vintage, 2004), 182.

or a castaway” (115), he aligns himself with Crusoe in confessing that he allows himself to believe that the deserted farm “was one of those islands without an owner” (61).

If K’s farm is like an uninhabited island, then the abandoned farmhouse is like Crusoe’s shipwreck filled, as it is, with various useful tools. Despite acknowledging that “there was nothing for which he could not imagine a use,” K takes only a few essential items which “should only be of wood and leather and gut, materials the insects would eat when one day he no longer needed them” (104). Just as Crusoe is a castaway at heart, K resolves to spend the rest of his life growing and eating vegetables on the farm. Both Crusoe and K cherish their status as lonely agriculturalists, working the soil in a no-man’s-land of isolation from civilisation. Neither man seeks to dominate or reign supreme, and through the small agricultural successes of K, we can see the pleasures of this kind of humble existence.

Eden, as Barton observes above, is a place where humans, devoid of clothing, assume the innocence of beasts. Yet even within Eden, man has dominion over nonhuman animals and the biblical narrative is instrumental in establishing an absolute divide between humans and nonhumans. The question of the treatment of nonhuman animals delineates a striking difference between *Robinson Crusoe* and *Foe*. As we have seen, in *Robinson Crusoe*, nonhuman animals have a hugely important role for the castaway. He adopts a “family” of pets comprised of cats, dogs and a parrot which he sits down to eat with. Crusoe develops an especially close relationship with Poll, the parrot whom he teaches to speak. Outside of these domestications, he traps and farms goats for milk, meat and clothes and uses his firearms to kill and scare off numerous other animals on the island. Armstrong notes that the distinction between the compassion and the callous violence which Crusoe displays towards nonhuman animals is based on an appreciation of docility which Defoe saw as a God-given feature of animals meant for human “use.” To these docile creatures, moral consideration is given. Yet this does not preclude killing them:

The first shot I made among these Creatures, I kill’d a She-Goat which had a little Kid by her when she gave Suck to, which griev’d me heartily; but when the Old one fell the Kid stood stock still by her till I came and took her up, and not only so, but when I carry’d the Old one with me upon my Shoulders, the Kid follow’d me quite to my Enclosure, upon which I laid down the Dam, and took the Kid in my Arms, and carry’d it over my Pale, in hopes to have bred it up tame, but it would not eat, so I was forc’d to kill it and eat it myself.¹²⁸

Here Defoe satirises Crusoe’s attempt at showing compassion to a baby goat. He finds himself “forc’d” to kill and eat an animal which he had wanted to domesticate. Of course, what is significant is that Crusoe initially eschews killing the kid alongside its mother. Reminiscent of

¹²⁸ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53–4.

the squeamishness of the biblical injunction against boiling a kid in its mother's milk,¹²⁹ Crusoe attempts to avoid the excessiveness of eating both mother and child. The outcome demonstrates Crusoe's boundless violence against animals where even attempted kindness ends in slaughter. Where Crusoe can only imagine the twin possibilities of domestication or consumption, we see that he cannot conceive of nonhuman animals outside of some kind of service to him, a notion which is encumbered with the necessary violences which we see enacted. This violence is, as we have seen, a necessary part of Crusoe's expression of sovereignty over the island.

Coetzee's Cruso has an altogether different relation with the nonhuman inhabitants of the island where violence against animals is restricted. Indeed, in contrast to Crusoe's preoccupation with eating and being eaten, Coetzee's Cruso shows no interest in food. As we have seen, the diet of the islanders is "lettuce, with fish and birds' eggs" (9). There are no goats to be trapped and farmed on this island and there is no gun with which to shoot and kill bird life. Here again, Michael K provides clues as to what is going on in *Foe*. On first arriving on the farm, he kills a goat—an experience which he finds deeply unsettling. On facing the dead goat the following morning, we are told that "He would have liked to bury the ewe somewhere and forget the episode; or else, best of all, to slap the creature on its haunch and see it scramble to its feet and trot off" (55). After this he kills and eats birds and reptiles, but gradually limits his diet to eating the vegetables which he grows on the farm. Eating a pumpkin that he has grown is nothing less than a euphoric experience:

The fragrance of the burning flesh rose into the sky. Speaking the words he had been taught, directing them no longer upward but to the earth on which he knelt, he prayed: "For what we are about to receive make us truly thankful." With two wire skewers he turned the strips, and in mid-act felt his heart suddenly flow over with thankfulness. [...] All that remains is to live here quietly for the rest of my life, eating the food that my own labour has made the earth to yield. All that remains is to be a tender of the soil. He lifted the first strip to his mouth. Beneath the crisply charred skin the flesh was soft and juicy. He chewed with tears of joy in his eyes. The best, he thought, the very best pumpkin I have tasted. For the first time since he had arrived in the country he found pleasure in eating. The aftertaste of the first slice left his mouth aching with sensual delight. He moved the grid off the coals and took a second slice. His teeth bit through the crust into the soft hot pulp. Such pumpkin, he thought, such pumpkin I could eat every day of my life and never want anything else. (113-4)

¹²⁹ This prohibition, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" appears three times in the Old Testament, see Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), Exodus, 23:19, 34:26 and Deuteronomy 14:21.

Koyok Yoshida describes the novel as “a story about one man’s sustenance,”¹³⁰ and argues that the above scene represents the cannibalistic ingestion of K’s mother whose ashes he has spread over the soil of the farm. But as Nadine Gordimer suggests in her review of the novel, K’s gardening more likely represents “the nature of civilised man versus the hunter, the nomad.”¹³¹ In this sense, K’s eating practices represent a rejection of carnivorousness in favour of vegetal sustenance. The pumpkin is repeatedly referred to in terms of animal flesh in a manner which underlines how meat has been substituted with vegetable. More powerfully, this scene, with the fragrance ascending to the heavens and its prayer, is precisely the scene of the Cainitic sacrificial offering. K demonstrates that the isolated human, outside of the bounds of social norms and rules can challenge the carnophallogocentric order. Equally, he demonstrates the deep fulfilment in so doing. For K, the corollary of this resistance is the steady deterioration of the absolute divide between himself and other animals. Instead of living in the farmhouse, he makes for himself a “burrow” and as the novel progresses, he is referred to as a “lizard,” an “insect,” “a squirrel or an ant or a bee,” as “sharklike,” as a “rat or a mouse” and finally as an “earthworm or a mole.” A doctor who treats him in part two of the novel says that “I cannot really think of him as a man” (135).

Just as *Foe* responds to the work of Daniel Defoe, so *The Life and Times of Michael K* is widely recognised as a response to the writing of Kafka. The final words of K. in Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925), uttered as a knife is twisted in his heart, are “like a dog!” This is followed by the closing sentence of the novel: “It was as if the shame would outlive him.”¹³² Although both of our Ks become like nonhuman animals, Coetzee seems to mean something very different from Kafka. For Kafka’s K., being killed like a dog is a mark of shame, yet Coetzee’s K never exhibits shame at his “animal” status. Similarly, Barton is retrospectively ashamed of being like a dog on the island, but Cruso adopts a more subtle position which rejects the sort of human sovereignty displayed by Robinson Crusoe without suffering this fundamentally altered position as a mark of shame. Indeed, it is the dignity of Cruso which, as we shall see, leaves the most marked impression on Susan Barton and, perhaps, on the reader.

Isolated Individuals

In his important essay “Oppressive Silence: J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and the politics of the canon” (1992), Derek Attridge argues that *Foe* is involved in questioning the Western canon which

¹³⁰ Kyoko Yoshida, “Eating (Dis)Order: From Metaphoric Cannibalism to Cannibalistic Metaphors,” in *J.M. Coetzee in Context and Theory*, ed. Elleke Boehmer, Katy Iddiols, and Robert Eaglestone (London ; New York: Continuum, 2009), 139.

¹³¹ Nadine Gordimer, “The Idea of Gardening,” *The New York Review of Books*, February 2, 1984, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1984/feb/02/the-idea-of-gardening/>.

¹³² Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Idris Parry (London: Penguin, 2000), 178.

itself “is complicit with a mode of literature—and of criticism—that dehistoricizes and dematerializes the acts of writing and reading while promoting a myth of transcendent human truths and values.”¹³³ Although Attridge focuses on how this criticism gives space for marginalised voices to be heard, we also see how a re-writing of the canon more broadly opens up a rewriting of the “transcendent” humanism which the canon seeks to promote. If Defoe’s *Crusoe* stands as the example of Western man, whether it be *homo economicus* or *animal rationale*, then Coetzee’s *Cruso* demonstrates how literature in particular has been complicit in suggesting, as Derrida puts it, that “man” has no origin. Attridge goes on to note that

the isolated individuals in *Foe* function [...] not as representatives of the motif of naked humanity granted universal insight on the stormy heath but as compelling subversions of this motif. They demonstrate that what we call “insights” are produced and conveyed by the narrativizing agencies of culture; experience in itself is insufficient to gain credit as knowledge or truth.¹³⁴

Attridge here stresses that it is narrative itself which is essential to the production of the human and that, separated from culture and its narratives, the isolated characters on the island necessarily struggle with their humanity. This returns us precisely to the worries of critics and characters alike, that life in isolation will have a radically dehumanising effect.

For Attridge at least, isolation from society and from other humans is most significantly an isolation from narrative and *Cruso*, the castaway at heart, absolutely rejects Barton’s suggestion that he make a written record of his life on this island. Although Barton “chiefly hoped to find” *Cruso*’s journal (16), her thorough searches for written records uncover nothing, not even “notches to indicate that he counted the years of his banishment or the cycles of the moon” (16). *Cruso*’s rejection of writing is complete, right down to mark making. And as Barton here demonstrates, even simple notches used to measure time would subject *Cruso* to a narrative which casts him as an exile, banished from a homeland. This is what *Cruso* resists. For his is the mentality of the castaway. As such, he is at home on the island. Any journal, such as Barton wishes to find, would subject him to the narratives of a humanism in which he has no interest. It would suggest a readership outside of the island and hence imply a life beyond the island. “Nothing I have forgotten” he tells her, “is worth remembering” (17). In resisting the narrativising agencies which Attridge refers to, *Cruso* is actively isolating himself from the last element which could pull him towards a traditional humanism.

Indeed, as Attridge also comments, *Foe* tirelessly draws the reader’s attention to the act of writing. He reflects on Coetzee’s “chiselled style” and the fact that each paragraph of parts one

¹³³ Derek Attridge, “Oppressive Silence: J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and the Politics of the Canon,” in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth Century “British” Literary Canons*, ed. Karen R Lawrence (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 217.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 219–220.

and two of the novel are contained inside quotation marks, remarking that *Foe* is a novel which refuses to let the reader forget that they are engrossed in written narrative. In addition, the reader can hardly forget that the whole novel is itself a re-writing of *Robinson Crusoe*. These features remind us that there is nothing neutral about narrative. They impress that narrative shapes its subjects and plotlines towards established insights of humanism. Attridge goes on to comment that Cruso, who

shows none of the practical ingenuity or the spiritual intensity we expect from the figure of bourgeois resourcefulness with whom we are familiar, has, by his isolation from culture, lost touch with its founding narratives and its need for narrative.¹³⁵

In short, it appears that Cruso has ceased to be what Derrida calls the “autobiographical animal.” He refuses to write his story and even the few stories that he does tell about himself are inconsistent and thus fail to offer a coherent narrative account of his life before arriving on the island. His separation from narrative means that he does not view himself through the structural prisms of Western culture. His comment about forgetting is of course paradoxical. Since he cannot know what he has forgotten, he cannot know whether it is worth remembering or not. In this statement resides a wholesale rejection of writing as memory or as archive. And since, as Derrida reminds us in *Archive Fever*,¹³⁶ the archival forces of writing are directed towards the future rather than the past, we understand that Cruso’s rejection of writing is a rejection not only of civilisation on the island in the present time, but also in the future. For Cruso, there is no posterity. He anticipates no descendants and sets down no record for them. Nor is he interested in what a potential readership in the West might make of him.

Although critics have seen Friday as the unknowable human subject in the novel, there is a case for arguing that Cruso is an equally unknowable presence. For we have little to say about him that does not require us reading him through the prisms of narrative.¹³⁷ His terraces, for example, the barren pockets of potentially agricultural land, strike Barton as pointless. She comments that Cruso “might occupy his time as well in digging for gold, or digging graves first for himself and for Friday and then if he wished for all the castaways of the future history of the island, and for me too” (34). Rather than growing crops, she suggests that he may as well be planting corpses. It is not food or sustenance that he is able to produce, rather death. What is clear from her comments is that they must be *for* something but she cannot say what. The terraces resist interpretation since they encompass a Protestant work ethic which yields nothing. Cruso tells Barton that “we have nothing to plant, that is our misfortune” (33). What follows

¹³⁵ Ibid., 221.

¹³⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹³⁷ Once again, we should note that the narrative I have been attempting to read Cruso through—the story of Cain—is a narrative that does not exist.

gives us a strong indication of the function the terraces serve. Barton continues: “he looked at me with such sorry dignity I could have bit my tongue.” This face to face interaction produces Barton’s first feelings of pity towards the castaway. This pity comes in response to a sorry dignity which she sees for the first time in Cruso. Dignity, deriving from the Latin *dignitas* indicating value or worthiness, is the quality which is conferred on Cruso by his seemingly pointless toils.

If, as we have noted, the terraces echo the agricultural labours of Cain, and Cruso does not build pens for animal husbandry, then with his sorry expression, which sets him apart, Cruso confirms a human dignity, yet one outside of the remit of carnophallogocentrism. His dignity derives from a would-be agriculture that precludes the slaughter and consumption of nonhuman animals. He is human as an agriculturalist. In line with Derrida’s neologism, Cruso’s non-interest in eating animals should be read alongside his lack of interest in writing and narrative. Cruso does not understand himself through the narratives of Western culture and nor does he wish to add to these narratives with writings of his own. In this sense, we can read a certain posthumanism in his character and this is perhaps the reason that his story cannot be written. She realises, as we have seen above, that his story is untellable in the West. Worse than being a “deep disappointment” to a Western readership, there will be almost nothing to write about him. This lack of material, or lack of writability, is reflected in the fact that Cruso’s story is over within the first 45 pages of the novel. About Cruso, it seems, there is almost nothing to write. As Attridge observes, “All canons rest on exclusion; the voice they give to some can be heard only by virtue of the silence they impose on others. But it is not just a silencing by exclusion; it is a silencing by inclusion as well. Any voice we can hear is by that very fact purged of its uniqueness and alterity.”¹³⁸

The Absence of the Name and of the Word

As if to demonstrate the connections between writing and the human-animal division suggested by the term carnophallogocentrism, Barton exhibits an attitude throughout the novel which not only underlines an absolute division between human and nonhuman animals, but which also confirms her belief in the traditional set of depravations ascribed to nonhuman animal life. She describes Friday as being “like an animal wrapt entirely in itself” (70) and appears to base her musings on what she sees as his lack of language: “to live in silence is to live like the whales, great castles of flesh floating leagues apart one from another, or like the spiders, sitting alone at the heart of his web, which to him is the entire world” (59). Here, Barton seems to anticipate the

¹³⁸ Attridge, “Oppressive Silence: J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and the Politics of the Canon,” 226.

Heideggerian discourse on animality where the world of the nonhuman animal is radically restricted.¹³⁹ She muses:

Yet it is not the heart but the members of play that elevate us above the beasts: the fingers with which we touch the clavichord or the flute, the tongue with which we jest and lie and seduce. Lacking members of play what is there left for beasts to do when they are bored but sleep? (85)

This passage first reinforces and then undermines the Heideggerian discourse on nonhuman animality for although it rehearses arguments pertaining to the central role of the hand in elevating humans above animals, it then, almost as an afterthought, confers on animals the psychological state of boredom thus confirming a mental status which Heidegger would never allow but which of course he spends much time considering in the human animal.¹⁴⁰

Barton's animal similes continue even after she and Friday have left the island. Deprived of language, Friday is, in her mind, reduced to the level of an animal. Returning to her favoured "like a dog" simile, she writes that "Friday grows old before his time, like a dog locked up all its life" (55). This simile demonstrates a double depravation, both of language and freedom, which leads to an accelerated ageing and presumably an early death. Not exempt, herself, from the effects of premature ageing, she writes that "I talk to Friday as old women talk to cats, out of loneliness, till at last they are deemed to be witches, and shunned in the streets" (77). Equally, she describes her behaviour as analogous to that of animals where she notes that "I am chattering to myself as a magpie or an ape does, for the pleasure of hearing the noise I make" (57). She suggests that if the act does not communicate successfully, then it can be regarded as "chattering" and as essentially animal in nature. Thus, she shows once again that loneliness can lead to the removal of full human status. In this case, it is loneliness in the midst of civilisation which seems as potent as that which threatened on the island. Her previous comment suggests that civilisation has other modes of dealing with humans who stray from the traditional folds of recognisable humanity, and these members are "shunned in the streets" and labelled supernatural. Barton thus absolutely fails Derrida's provocation to think of "the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, and as something other than a privation."¹⁴¹ Although her view is introduced innocently enough, it is problematized by a number of factors in the novel.

Elisabeth Costello in Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* discusses nonhuman animals' lack of speech. She finds in their silence a form of resistance to human domination: "Animals have only their silence left with which to confront us. Generation after generation, heroically, our captives

¹³⁹ This connection between Barton and Heidegger is perhaps hinted at where, towards the start of second section of the novel, she quotes Heideggerian phraseology describing "lizards basking in the sun" (53).

¹⁴⁰ See Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics : World, Finitude, Solitude*.

¹⁴¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 48.

refuse to speak to us.”¹⁴² She is speaking here specifically of psychological experimentation on nonhuman animal subjects. Her suggestion is not that animals have no speech, but that human investigations into animal communication reveal nothing more than the limits of human powers. In other words, it is not animal privation so much as human privation that is the issue. This is an expression of what Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson describe as Coetzee’s “radical critique of language, [...] challenging our right to such things as epistemological certitude.”¹⁴³ Intriguingly, as *Foe* progresses, the scene of language switches to writing as at *Foe*’s suggestion, Barton starts to teach Friday to write. Foe insists that Friday is able to write in a comment which connects animality and sovereignty. “The waterskater,” he remarks, “that is an insect and dumb, traces the name of god on the surfaces of ponds, or so the Arabians say. None is so deprived that he cannot write” (144). We should not underestimate the radical nature of this comment which, at a stroke, confers the ability to write on all animals. We also detect a strong sense of just how alien this idea is to Western thought. Here, Foe presents a distinctly Derridean understanding of writing, suggesting that the radically expanded notion of the trace is the best way of conceptualising the written.¹⁴⁴ In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Derrida asks what his cat “might be suggesting or simply signifying in a language of mute traces, that is to say without words.”¹⁴⁵ Later in the same text, he is more explicit about the consequence of the trace which he states was deployed “quite deliberately, to cross the frontiers of anthropocentrism, the limits of a language confined to human words and discourse.”¹⁴⁶ In other words, language is neither confined to the written or spoken word, and nor is it confined to the human. This is an idea to which Coetzee seems finely attuned and which is explored in Friday’s encounters with writing.

Barton struggles to teach Friday to write. Exasperated, she asks herself “Was it possible for anyone, however benighted by a lifetime of dumb servitude, to be as stupid as Friday seemed?” (146). The two meanings of “dumb” come together in a manner which reminds us how a lack of speech is commonly equated with stupidity. In the following sentence, however, Barton asks “Could it be that somewhere within him he was laughing at my efforts to bring him nearer to a state of speech?” Looking into Friday’s eyes, she admits that she cannot know if she is being mocked or not—a state of affairs casts profound doubt on any assumptions as to Friday’s mental capacities. Eventually, Friday fills his slate with rows of “open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes” (147). Friday’s writing defies

¹⁴² Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 25.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Tremaine, “The Embodied Soul: Animal Being in the Work of J. M. Coetzee,” 587.

¹⁴⁴ This Derridean understanding of writing is clearly of interest to Coetzee. For example, in *Age of Iron* (1990), the narrator, Elizabeth Curran describes a homeless man spitting on the floor next to her feet: “His word, his kind of word, from his own mouth, warm at the instant when it left him. A word, undeniable, from a language before language” J.M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 8.

¹⁴⁵ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

interpretation.¹⁴⁷ Like the language of the nonhuman test subjects to which Costello refers, Friday's language resists decoding. Spivak asks "are those walking eyes rebuses, hieroglyphs, ideograms or is their secret that they hold no secret at all? Each scrupulous effort at decoding or deciphering will bring its own rewards; but there is a structural possibility that they are nothing. Even then it would be writing [...]"¹⁴⁸ This episode then debunks Barton's claims that Friday is without language and therefore animal-like, but the product of his seeming refusal to comply with her English lessons demonstrates that writing and language also exceed human efforts at understanding. As Spivak makes clear, Friday's marks *are* writing, but not all writing is readable.¹⁴⁹ Friday's eyes and feet present a pressing point about language which reinforces Foe's waterskater image. All animals can write, but not all animals can be read. Writing writes secrets which are destined to remain as such.

This said, we cannot assume Friday's marks to be arbitrary. Indeed what is stressed in the description is that the rows of feet are *human* feet, a feature which reminds us how important the figure of the foot is to *Robinson Crusoe*. The footprint in the sand is a key moment in the novel which sends Crusoe into a panic at the prospect of meeting another human, possibly one who wishes to eat him. The footprint has come to be seen as an irreducible symbol of the human and his importance and remains a potent and recognisable symbol even in isolation from the novel. We find it, for example, in the final chapter of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, "Footprint," which we will examine in Chapter Three. In *Foe*, Coetzee leaves only a trace of the footprint which is to appear in *Robinson Crusoe*. In a section where Barton laments the thinness of her story, she attests that "I saw no cannibals; and if they came after nightfall and fled before the dawn, they left no footprint behind" (54). By the time that Barton arrives on the island, Friday is already present. Coetzee, thus, erases the footprint from *Robinson Crusoe* and re-presents it as one of Defoe's fictional constructs. In this manner, one of *Robinson Crusoe*'s defining moments is consigned to the margins of *Foe*. The question which faces Crusoe is how to read this footprint—and this is precisely the question which Coetzee asks of his readers by making the footprint into a written sign.

The meaning of the footprint in *Robinson Crusoe*, however, is far from clear and this fact catches the attention of Derrida in the ninth session of *The Beast and the Sovereign* where he notes that Crusoe cannot be sure whether it is his own footprint or that of a stranger. In a line of inquiry which returns us to the question of writing, Derrida recalls that in his seminars, Jacques

¹⁴⁷ Jane Poyner discusses a number of alternative readings of the eyes and feet which touch upon slavery, escape and the power of sight. See Jane Poyner, *J.M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 104.

¹⁴⁸ Spivak, "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*," 171–2.

¹⁴⁹ There are interesting resonances between Spivak's account of Friday's writing and what we will find in the following chapter concerning the "hieroglyphical" marks on the skins of whales in *Moby Dick*.

Lacan claims that the footprint in *Robinson Crusoe* is not a “fully developed” sign until it has been erased.¹⁵⁰ Derrida links this claim to Lacan’s argument where he denies language to nonhuman animals on the basis that they are not able to erase their own traces—a claim which Derrida disputes at length in Chapter Three of *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. This issue takes us to the fundamental depravations ascribed to nonhuman animals who are thus denied access to “the signifier, the *logos* and truth, to the other.”¹⁵¹ At issue here is the question of what can be considered as language. If the footprint is a linguistic sign, then it follows that nonhuman animal tracks including scents should be considered as writing. This would constitute a serious breach of the human-animal divide and is indeed what Derrida argues in favour of. For Derrida, then, the question of the status of the footprint is closely connected to the question of whether one can say that nonhuman animals have language or whether, to use Heideggerian language, the animal is *zōon alogon*.¹⁵²

By transferring the footprint to Friday’s slate, Coetzee situates it firmly in the realm of writing. Yet it is a form of writing which is disturbing in its resistance to interpretation. Friday’s writing underlines that when traces, in a Derridean sense, are considered writing—and this encompasses traces of nonhuman origin—then our powers of reading are significantly diminished. The waterskater traces the name of God since this is surely the most unreadable name of all. When nonhumans write, the human capacity for writing is no longer a mark of dominance, but is a small pocket of relative comprehension in a sea of unreadable traces. Barton’s narrative ends as Friday composes what she calls “writing of a kind.” This is “rows and rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together” (152). Finally, we are offered writing as pure repetition where the orthographic symbol is as empty as a zero. Foe calls it a beginning whereas Spivak points out that, like a row of *omegas*, this may also signal the end. And what writing is, who can write and what it means are questions which remain for the reader to ponder.

The Autobiographical Animal

“The Autobiographical Animal” is the title which Derrida suggested for the conference at which he presented *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. This title is Derrida’s response to a philosophical tradition which, as we have seen, has ascribed a series of terms to the human animal, all of which serve to separate the human from the rest of animality. Of particular interest to us here have been *animal rationale* and *homo economicus*. The autobiographical animal is the animal which writes itself. This re-reading of man mutates the human, transforming it from an animal

¹⁵⁰ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2011, 2:236.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² We will return to this complex set of arguments in Chapter Three, focussing on nonhuman animals’ capacity to respond.

with exceptional qualities among animality to one which uses the prosthetic tools of language and discourse in order to *write itself* into existence. The term underlines the importance of narrative and literature in the construction of the human. Autobiography demands a thinking of the self, Derrida elaborates, where the autobiographical subject is one equipped to say “I think” as in “I think, therefore I am.”¹⁵³

As the title of his autobiographical text “Circumfession” underlines, Derrida insists on the confessional nature of autobiographical writing. In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, this aspect of autobiography is connected to the concepts of nudity and shame whereby the autobiographer would be saying: “I stake and engage my nudity without shame.” He adds:

One can well doubt whether this pledge, this wager, this desire or promise of nudity is possible. Nudity perhaps remains untenable. And can I finally show myself naked in the sight of what they call by the name of “animal”?¹⁵⁴

The subject of autobiography would appear naked and exposed. The autobiographer would be laid bare, without shame. Derrida observes that the human can never be laid bare, that there will always be a layer of shame obstructing full nudity. This shame, as we have seen, is fundamental to the human, without which the human ceases to be human. In effect, Derrida suggests that “true” autobiography cannot be written.

It is widely acknowledged that Coetzee’s most obviously autobiographical works, *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002) and *Summertime* (2009) blur the boundaries between fiction and autobiography¹⁵⁵ and demonstrate his desire to reveal and subvert commonly held assumptions about autobiography. One of these assumptions is notably theorised by Philippe Lejeune as the “autobiographical pact.” This is a contract which affirms the “identicalness” of the identities of the author, narrator and protagonist¹⁵⁶ in a manner which, as Laura Marcus sceptically observes, is supposed to “guarantee the non-fictive status of the autobiography to the reader.”¹⁵⁷ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note in relation to *Summertime* that “Lejeune’s concept of the autobiographical pact as the negotiated relationship of author reader and publisher is fractured”¹⁵⁸ through explicit interventions which make it impossible for the reader to believe in the truth of the autobiographical subject. In this case, Coetzee’s novel tells the story of a biographer who is researching his biography of the deceased John Coetzee. This structure makes

¹⁵³ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 89.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J.M. Coetzee* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁵⁶ Philippe Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Pact,” in *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 14.

¹⁵⁷ Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 191.

¹⁵⁸ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2. ed (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 15.

it very difficult for the reader to believe in the identicalness of the J.M. Coetzee whose name is on the cover, and the dead John Coetzee whose life is exposed inside.

Foe explicitly undermines the supposed autobiographical verisimilitude of *Robinson Crusoe*. As Dominic Head writes, *Foe* exposes “the authorial artifice ‘concealed’ in the autobiographical conceit” by presenting a more “plausible” version of the story.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the predicament of the autobiographer is made explicit. Barton’s desire to remain faithful to the so-called “autobiographical pact” is undermined by what she understands to be the demands of autobiography. She is aware of the sparseness of her story and asks Foe, “Are these enough strange circumstances to make a story of? How long before I am driven to make new and stranger circumstances?” (67). Cruso’s unheroic status reveals the incompatibility of truth and autobiography. His story cannot be written—it is inadmissible as autobiography. We are not surprised, therefore, when Foe suggests bolstering the plot with a series of his own inventions, including tools for Cruso as well as the threat of cannibals. This plays out Paul de Man’s claim in the essay “Autobiography as De-Facement,” where he notes that:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium?¹⁶⁰

This insight demonstrates how “the autobiographical animal” does not just write autobiography but is written by it. It complicates enormously the relationship between humans and literature whereby the formal or technical demands of autobiography become key in determining how man can be presented. In turn, this suggests that the way in which we think about ourselves as human has been structured, in advance, by literature. Tellingly, it is the use of tools which Foe imposes on his literary version of Cruso, an addition which, as we have seen, serves to separate him off from the nonhuman inhabitants of the island.

Barton explicitly notes that autobiography writes itself. She tells Foe that “It is as though animalcules of words lie dissolved in your ink-well, ready to be dipped up and flow from the pen and take form on the paper” (93). Her connecting of words and animals anticipates Derrida’s *animot*. Perhaps we could say that writing takes on a life of its own:

From downstairs to upstairs, from house to island, from girl to Friday: it seems necessary only to establish the poles, the here and the there, the now and the then—after that the words themselves do the journeying. I had not guessed it was so easy to be an author. (93)

¹⁵⁹ Dominic Head, *J.M. Coetzee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 114.

¹⁶⁰ Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement,” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 69.

Barton's animal words are able to fill in the blanks on their own once a framework has been established. Whilst autobiography ought to represent the irreducible singularity of a person and her experiences, Barton comments that narrative shapes autobiography in advance. The *animot*, in Barton's estimation, makes writing easy. Just as Descartes tells us that animals will always do the same thing—reacting rather than responding, so words, we are told, will simply fill in the blanks, forming narrative in a mechanical fashion. Yet we already know to distrust Barton's estimation of nonhuman animals and in seeming contradiction, she has previously used Crusoe's terraces as a simile for writing. She says to Friday:

You thought that carrying stones was the hardest of labours. But when you see me at Mr. Foe's desk making marks with the quill, think of each mark as a stone, and think of the paper as the island, and imagine that I must disperse the stones across the face of the island, and when that is done (was Cruso ever satisfied with your labours?) must pick them up again (which, in the figure, is scoring out the marks) and dispose them according to another scheme, and so forth, day after day. (87)

Now Barton the writer is like Cruso the builder of terraces. The labour of the writer is analogous to the labour of the agriculturalist, toiling in punishment for the faults of humanity. Just as Cruso must work in order to maintain his distinction from nonhuman animality, so Barton writes in order to achieve the same goal. Barton emphasises the Sisyphean nature of this task in that moving these stones is not simply difficult but also that it is recursive and never-ending. She is aware that she can never finish writing her autobiographical text just as Cruso has told her "It would be the work of many men and many lifetimes to clear the whole island" (33). Barton writes in marks just as the stones and terraces are marks. Both are monuments left behind for future comers and neither is complete. Indeed, it is the stone which de Man sees as crucial to the way in which autobiography operates through the figure of prosopopeia. The "speaking stone" of the tombstone on which an epitaph is inscribed is the "voiceless entity"¹⁶¹ which is given the power of speech by autobiography. If Cruso's stone terraces are to speak to future generations, then Barton's metaphor of constantly redistributing them over the island surely suggest the sort of de-facement¹⁶² to which de Man refers in his essay. Speaking stones also returns us to Michael K who, towards the end of the novel, is described as a stone passing "through the intestines of the war" (133). K is made to speak in as much as his story is told, but we are made aware that it is a story told by others where K's actual speech and thoughts are extremely minimal.

If Barton is already signalling the falsifying tendencies of the animal words of autobiography, then Foe is even more explicit about the fundamentally lost nature of the writer:

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁶² De Man is interested in how Wordsworth both promotes and undermines prosopopeia (where a writer "speaks" through another person or object) as appropriate to autobiography.

In a life of writing books, I have often, believe me, been lost in the maze of doubting. The trick I have learnt is to place a sign or marker in the ground where I stand, so that in my future wanderings, I shall have something to return to and not get more lost than I am. Having planted in, I press on; the more often I come back to the mark (which is a sign of my blindness and incapacity) the more certainly I know I am lost, yet the more I am heartened too, to have found my way back. (135-6)

Does this passage express the resigned reflections of Coetzee, a writer who has come to understand the limitations of his craft? It returns us to the theme of being marooned on an island, unable to find one's way back to the certainty of civilisation. The maze of doubting is the condition of writing which is not able to access truth and can only ever be fixed by markers of its own making. The writer is lost, writing is lost and the more it returns to its own marks, the more it is revealed as a discourse which constructs its own truths, without access to any external points of fixity.

Foe here is not commenting on writing so much as his "life of writing books." In a sense, we are given to understand what a writer's view of life is, in the light of the insights provided by a constant exposure to the effects of language. His metaphor sets out a circularity where comfort is attained by the return to the point of departure. Just like Robinson Crusoe, who attains happiness firstly by re-creating European civilisation on his island, and then who succeeds in literally finding his way back to Europe, writing wants to return to its points of departure. This point, however, does not signify. Like a sign in the Saussurean sense, this point is not a positive location, secure in itself, but is a negative space signifying lostness, a random point in a sea of other locations. The location tells of the autobiographical animal that it is blind and incapable. In contrast to the classical notions of humanity where sight equals knowledge and human capability is a given, the condition of the literary narrative simply refuses received ideas of the human. I repeat that Foe's observations are not restricted to his experiences as a writer but as are insights into what it means to be a human at the mercy of discourse, or what it means to be an autobiographical animal.

What are the constellations of these markers? For the autobiographical animal, what are the points in the ground which we must constantly return to? What are the points between which, in the words of Barton, "the words do the journeying"? We have seen how Attridge situates *Foe* in relation to the Western literary canon, noting that it stands both inside and outside the corpus of literature which forms a part of the autobiographical animal's writing of itself. We understand also that the novel draws on another important text of the autobiographical animal, namely, the Bible and specifically Genesis. These are two important points in the tangle of narrative that make autobiography impossible. Derrida asserts that "Above all, it was necessary to avoid fables." Is this what *Robinson Crusoe* has become? Is Coetzee able to successfully avoid the fabulous in his novel? Perhaps, in the end, this is the purpose of his animal-words. If a fable is

something that has become canonised and fixed in the popular psyche, then the ever-shifting animal-words are immune to this process. Derrida sees autobiography as containing the “preexisting indices that allow us to understand and agree in saying ‘us’ today.”¹⁶³ This history of the “I am” is one which finds one of its most powerful renditions in Defoe’s text which relays an unproblematic and violent mastery over nonhuman animality. Coetzee’s intervention meddles. Aware of the limitations when it comes to re-writing autobiography, at the very least, it underlines and emphasises the written and therefore crafted nature of autobiography.

Finally, we are returned to the question of sovereignty. It is often felt that *Robinson Crusoe* is a study in sovereignty, demonstrating how a European, through rigorous application of his rationality, can come to establish himself as sole ruler of a domain. Yet, in a more profound manner, Coetzee’s novel shows Cruso to be the truer sovereign. As Derrida notes in *Rogues*, “Unavowable silence, denegation: that is the always unapparent essence of sovereignty.”¹⁶⁴ The true sovereign can only be silent or risk subjection to the pre-existing laws, strategies and discourses of language. In our final quotation from the novel, Barton relates how Cruso would stand on the cliff tops in the evening “losing himself in contemplation of the wastes of water and sky.” Barton comments that:

One evening, seeing him as he stood on the Bluff with the sun behind him all red and purple, staring out to sea, his staff in his hand and his great conical hat on his head, I thought: He is truly a kingly figure; he is the true king of the island. (37)

In Barton’s estimation at least, here is Cruso at his greatest. Silent and passive and staring at the horizon, his comical hat becomes a kingly crown. Subject to nothing and to no one and standing alongside the island’s initial nonhuman inhabitants,¹⁶⁵ we are presented with a figure of the human as radically different from Defoe’s Crusoe as is possible. Coetzee’s Cruso has not ripped off his clothes, become bestial, or developed a taste for raw meat. Instead he has shown us the human otherwise. Cruso on the Bluff reminds us of Michael K, also at sunset, revelling in the satisfaction of his agriculture. Similarly, the moment echoes a passage in *Summertime* where Coetzee speaks to his cousin about the Baboon research of Eugène Marais:

Have you read the book by Eugène Marais about a year he spent observing a baboon troop? He writes that at nightfall, when the troop stopped foraging and watched the sun go down, he could detect in the eyes of the older baboons the stirrings of melancholy, the birth of a first awareness of their own mortality.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 25.

¹⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 100.

¹⁶⁵ We recall that the apes have “retreated to the cliff of what he called the North Bluff”.

¹⁶⁶ J.M. Coetzee, *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 96–7.

Standing on the bluff at sunset, contemplating his mortality like a melancholic baboon, Cruso embodies the castaway at heart. This moment demonstrates the non-calamitous possibilities of moving beyond carnophallogocentrism. It shows us a human otherwise, couched in mystery, on the edge of what is writable or indeed comprehensible. It contains echoes of satisfaction and self-awareness re-inscribed as an experience which extends beyond the human animal.

Chapter Two

Moby-Dick, or, the Whale, But Not Both

It is difficult to read *Moby-Dick* while maintaining a sense of the centrality and dominance of the human. This is not because Moby Dick destroys the *Pequod* or because Captain Ahab is killed. Rather, this decentring is realised through the radically inhuman space of the “harbourless immensities” of the ocean where men are transformed into “whalemen” and where knowledge usually produced by the human eye is persistently questioned, ironised or found lacking. In the course of this colossal book, whales are chased, caught, dissected, cooked, eaten, rendered down, categorised, made into sculptures, bookmarks and prosthetic limbs, inscribed in fables and presented in intimate anatomical detail, yet for all this, they remain elusive to the landsman reader whilst our whaleman narrator finds himself transformed by his exposure to Leviathan. In this chapter, we explore how Melville’s language produces this elusiveness and how acquiring firm knowledge of this huge creature is consistently problematized. Resisting the powerful temptation to read whales as metaphors or symbols for human activities, I argue that economic changes since the novel’s publication in 1852 allow us to read whales in a fundamentally different way from Melville’s contemporary audience. We begin with language and consider questions of autopsy, of seeing, law, and finally pity, in this attempt to read *Moby-Dick* in a cultural setting where the practice of whaling has been transformed from a fundamental part of the economy to an outlawed and vilified practice.

Read it If You Can

J. Hillis Miller identifies the command “Call me Ishmael” as the “‘Open sesame!’ that gives the reader access to all the rest of Melville’s huge work.”¹⁶⁷ However, before we have acceded to this demand and requested entry to Ali Baba’s cave which promises to reveal the secrets of Leviathan, whales have already been announced as animals which are lodged in the depths of literary imagination. Before Chapter One of the novel, in a section which therefore troubles, before we have begun, the start of this tome, are twelve pages of “extracts”¹⁶⁸ which cite the appearance of whales in, among others, the Bible, Shakespeare, Plutarch, Pliny, Milton, Pope, Montaigne and Spenser. These extracts are parenthetically introduced by a narrator (is it Ishmael?) who describes them—using language which takes us away from a human

¹⁶⁷ J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 39.

¹⁶⁸ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, Or, The Whale* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), xxxix–li.

perspective—as “higgledy-piggledy” and “affording a glancing bird’s eye view” of the literary history of whales. These descriptions indicate that the orderly or eye-level view of whales is not available and create the sense of whales, even in writing, as resistant to methodical description, totalising knowledge or subjection to the human eye. If, as I hope to show, Melville’s task is one of representation, the novel’s opening focuses our attention on the medium of representation, suggesting, from the start, that literature is to be our subject perhaps as much as whales.

Ishmael’s proposed system for the classification of whales detailed in “Cetology” underlines in parodic fashion the connection between literature and whales. Famously, it divides whales, according to their size, into the folio, octavo and duodecimo whale, whilst each individual species then forms a chapter of this volume. This is his response to the “utter confusion” (145) of the scientific classification of whales. The sperm whale is chapter one of book one, the folio. “Cetology” cuts to the heart of the problem of representation and speaks of the difficulty or impossibility of accurately or usefully categorising whales which Ishmael describes as “the classification of the constituents of a chaos” (145). As a task which comprises the ordering of chaos, the system shares its foundations with fiction, a fact which Ishmael gleefully exposes in the absurdity of his system. Yet much is at stake here also, since, as Ishmael rightly says, to classify is to “hook the nose of this leviathan” (147). He indicates that zoological knowledge is a discourse which exercises human power over the nonhuman whale and which comes before and facilitates the real-world hunting of the animal.

Ishmael engenders scepticism towards scientific knowledge which is just one instance of many in the novel where prevailing discourses are unwound. Carolyn Porter comments on “Cetology” that Ishmael inhabits both the discourse of the naturalist and that of political sovereignty and “uses one discourse to satirize another, so that the authorities whose voices he is parodying undermine each other.”¹⁶⁹ This instance forms one example from many occasions where, as Porter argues, Ishmael ventriloquises authoritative discourses in order both to subvert them and to borrow their authority. This is how Ishmael is able to narrate from an excentric position whilst speaking “with the full authority of the culture whose authority he is out to subvert.”¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, she adds that “he aims to undermine our most basic and fixed assumptions and beliefs, to destabilize our culturally inscribed patterns of perception, to decentre our rooted perspective as landmen. He ought to be a threat.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Carolyn Porter, “Call Me Ishmael, or How to Make Double-Talk Speak,” in *Herman Melville’s Moby-Dick*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 155.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

The threat in this instance concerns the impossibility of human mastery of the whale and this is a law which extends to the full 650 pages of *Moby-Dick*. In “Cetology,” Ishmael writes that “as yet, however, the sperm whale, scientific or poetic, lives not complete in any literature,” going on to state that “his is an unwritten life” (147). The chapter begins at the juncture between order and chaos: “Already we are boldly launched upon the deep; but soon we shall be lost in its unshored, harborless immensities” (145). This evocation of the sea reminds us of Coetzee’s emphasis on “lostness” in *Foe*. The ocean and its inhabitants are unknown to humans who are overwhelmed by its vastness. “Unshored” and “harborless” are both expressed in the negative, indicating the lack of any recognisable structures where we are going. The sea is alien, awash with currents that could pull us in any direction. Ishmael is warning the reader of being cast into a vastness where the knowledge of landsmen will be inadequate to the task of representing what is to be found, namely, Leviathan. If literature offers the best hope of representation, it is still hopelessly, laughably, inadequate. Even Ishmael’s famously whale-sized vocabulary,¹⁷² or what he calls “the weightiest words of the dictionary,” is unsuited to the task, as he seems to acknowledge when he reveals that to assist his writing he has purchased “a huge quarto edition of Johnson” (496). The quarto size of Johnson’s dictionary is the size which he specifically omits from his whale classification system since “the bookbinder’s Quarto volume in its diminished form does not preserve the shape of the Folio volume” (153). In this, we can read the essential mismatch between writing and nonhuman animals. It points towards a scepticism which Ishmael constantly foregrounds regarding the ability of language to properly represent whales which remain forever excessive, eluding the author and extending beyond the limits of literature. This mismatch is confirmed at the inevitable conclusion of the chapter where Ishmael announces that he has “kept his word” in presenting only an imperfect system. And in turn he opens this revelation out to the whole novel: “this whole book is but a draught—nay, but the draught of a draught” (157). The reader, in other words, is not permitted to forget the imperfections of literary cetology, a system of classification which produces knowledge while implicitly insisting on the mystery of whales.

Even the most basic representation of whales is impossible. Ishmael happily admits that “there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like” (289). The pun of “earthly” points to the land-based and thus limited remit of human vision and knowledge and Ishmael uses his authority as a whaleman—an intriguing term to which we shall return—to extensively mock the inadequacies of existing artistic representations of whales. For his part, he promises us

¹⁷² C. Merton Babcock, “The Vocabulary of *Moby Dick*,” *American Speech* 27, no. 2 (May 1952): 91–101.

something like the true form of the whale as he actually appears to the eye of the whaleman when in his own absolute body the whale is moored alongside the whale-ship so that he can be fairly stepped upon there. (285)

This is an offer which, whilst seeming to present the reader with the experience of a real whale, shows how Ishmael is aware of his limitations. The form of the whale may be approximately true, but it is only as he appears to a whaleman. On this point, it is worth recalling the words of John Stuart Mill who notes that “Whales are or are not fish, according to the purpose for which we are considering them”.¹⁷³ In other words, Ishmael’s knowledge of whales is conditioned by his role as a whaleman, and we should not be surprised by his insistence on describing the whale as a fish.¹⁷⁴ We are promised a real whale, no doubt, but also one which has been hunted and killed by the narrator. The “alongside,” rather than suggesting the sort of human-animal alongside relationship advocated by Derrida, draws the whale into comparison with the human object, the ship, to which it has been “moored.” It is impossible to have an “alongside” relationship with an animal that you have killed. Finally, although stepping on the body of the whale might suggest the firm and undeniable knowledge produced by touch—more on this later—we should note the definite strangeness of stepping on whales and recall that blood rises in our heel prints.

Philip Armstrong, in his majestic reading of *Moby-Dick*, notes that “the narrative, form and thematics of *Moby-Dick* are all driven by the question: what do whales mean?” He denies us any firm answers to this question and focuses on how whales “mean otherwise,” by which he suggests that they “trouble or escape human representation.”¹⁷⁵ This sort of unreadability is indeed something which seems to interest Melville in his wider *oeuvre* as highlighted by Gilles Deleuze in his essay “Bartleby; or, the Formula.”¹⁷⁶ Drawing on the linguistic notion of agrammaticality, Deleuze identifies in Melville the tendency to make language foreign to itself—something like creating the impression of a bad translation. He states that “Melville invents a foreign language that runs beneath English and carries it off: it is the OUTLANDISH or Deterritorialized, the language of the Whale.”¹⁷⁷ Deleuze’s text is light on examples of this outlandish language but we should note the effects of outlandishness which, as Nicholas Royle observes, “bespeaks death and mimicry, the uncertainly human and non-human animal.”¹⁷⁸ Perhaps an example of what Deleuze is thinking about occurs where Ahab addresses the

¹⁷³ John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive*, ed. J.M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 716.

¹⁷⁴ Ishmael defines a whale as “a spouting fish with a horizontal tail” in “Cetology.”

¹⁷⁵ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 101.

¹⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze, “Bartleby; Or, the Formula,” in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 68–90.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁷⁸ Nicholas Royle, “Even the Title: On the State of Narrative Theory Today,” *Narrative* 22, no. 1 (January 2014): 9.

decapitated head of a wordless whale. In this passage which is preoccupied with death, we see the nonhuman whale surpass the human in his most sovereign territory—that of knowledge:

“Speak, thou vast and venerable head,” muttered Ahab, “[...] speak, mighty head, and tell us the secret thing that is in thee. Of all divers, thou hast dived the deepest. That head upon which the upper sun now gleams, has moved amid this world’s foundations. Where unrecorded names and navies rust, and untold hopes and anchors rot; where in her murderous hold this frigate earth is ballasted with bones of millions of the drowned; there, in that awful water-land, there was thy most familiar home. [...] Thou saw’st the murdered mate when tossed by pirates from the midnight deck; for hours he fell into the deeper midnight of the insatiate maw; and his murderers still sailed on unharmed [...] O head! thou hast seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham, and not one syllable is thine!” (339-40)

Here Ahab underlines the wordless nature of the whale whilst conferring a vast and unfathomable knowledge of the profundities of the universe onto the dead animal. Ahab’s language is rich in its poetic diction and is replete with resounding alliterations and grandiose metaphor. His antiquated terms adds a foreign nature to the address while the scope of his references extends to the apocalyptic of the universal and the apostatic in a manner which threatens to destroy the foundation of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He portrays whales with a knowledge that transcends human death and which makes familiar the most unshored and harbourless spaces of the ocean. He suggests that whales have access to a transcendental and foundational knowledge, which language-based thought will always strive for but never attain. It is the wordless nature of the whale which demands of language a frame of reference which it will always fail to adequately express. In the search for the unrepresentable, Melville’s outlandish language forms a compelling example of what Derrida calls a thinking of the absence of the word “as something other than a privation.”

“The Prairie” ends with the famous challenge to readers concerning the brow of the whale: “I but put that brow before you. Read it if you can” (380). The unreadability of the whale is located directly on the body and is even rendered as an indecipherable language written on the skin. In “The Blanket” Ishmael observes that the skin of the whale is “obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array,” before adding: “Nor is this all. In some instances, to the quick, observant eye, those linear marks, as in a veritable engraving, but afford the ground for far other delineations. These are hieroglyphical” (333). In other words, he identifies a “mysterious” and indecipherable writing on the skin of the whale. This begins a series of chapters which take us into the body of the whale as part of an attempt to provide the reader with “something like the true form of the whale.” It is significant that this outer portion should be so unreadable. In the following section, we will examine the knowledge produced by these whale autopsies. In closing, it is perhaps intriguing to note that Ishmael describes the

whale's skin as divided into two layers, the outermost being an "infinitely thin transparent substance" (332). He tells us that "the marks do not seem to be impressed upon the isinglass substance above mentioned, but seem to be seen through it, as if they were engraved upon the body itself" (333). This puts us in mind of Freud's "mystic writing pad" where the lower layer is inscribed, but the upper layer remains clear for further writing.¹⁷⁹ (Ishmael refers to these hieroglyphics, commenting that "the mystic marked whale remains undecipherable" (333).) Following Freud's metaphor, it is tempting to read these marks as representing a whale unconscious, written on the body, utterly indecipherable to the human, but hinting at a rich and complex consciousness. The whale cannot be read any more easily than it can be represented. Yet, in preserving and underlining the limits of literature, whilst ironising a host of other discourses which claim to offer sound knowledge of the whale, Melville demonstrates literature's ability to know and expose its limits where, somewhat impossibly, the novel *Moby-Dick* remains forever less than its fictional creation Moby Dick. It adds another element to the sense of pursuing nonhuman animals—that of wanting to catch up, but never quite being able to.

Anatomical Feats

In "The Sperm Whale's Head—Contrasted View," Ishmael asks: "Where, I should like to know, will you obtain a better chance to study practical cetology than here?" If the metaphysical question of how to read whales is to remain unanswered, then perhaps we can be offered a more anatomico-scientific rendering of the whale. To this end, we are presented with a string of chapters detailing anatomical structures such as the skin, head, jaw, teeth, brain, spine, "case," eyes and ears of both the Sperm and Right whale. Practical cetology, then, comprises a whale-sized autopsy as the corpses of the whales are dismembered by the crew of the *Pequod*.

Derrida dissects the scene of autopsy in *The Beast and the Sovereign*. Session eleven of volume one considers the autopsy of an elephant, performed—and stress should be placed on this word—in front of King Louis XIV of France, also known as the Sun King. To start with, Derrida is plainly appalled by the scene of the royal autopsy. His pity lies with the elephant on the table and he allows himself some literary rhetoric in order that his audience might picture the scene:

imagine, just imagine, think about it, represent it—for all this is a representation—represent to yourselves the enormous, heavy, poor beast, dead or killed I know not how, dragged in from I know not where on its side or its back into a luxurious room, a beast no doubt bloody, among doctors, surgeons, or other armed butchers,

¹⁷⁹ Sigmund Freud, "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*, ed. Philip Rieff, trans. James Strachey (New York: Touchstone, 2008), 211–16.

impatient to show what they could do but just as impatient to see and give to be seen what they were going to see, trembling with lust for autopsy, ready to get to work, to get their hands, scalpels, axes, or knives onto the great defenseless body [...].¹⁸⁰

Derrida stresses the passivity of the “poor beast” in contrast to the impatient and violent actions of the doctors and surgeons. The surgeons, desperate to get stuck into the elephant, remind us of the surgical activities of Stubb in decapitating whales. Ishmael comments that “the beheading of the Sperm Whale is a scientific anatomical feat, upon which experienced whale surgeons very much pride themselves: and not without reason” (338). He proceeds to directly address the reader, asking “Do you not marvel, then, at Stubb’s boast, that he demanded but ten minutes to behead a sperm whale?” The word “feat” indicates the element of performance and the spectacular nature of Stubb’s act of dissection. Ishmael emphasises the difficulty and precision of the task by describing it as “scientific anatomical” and designating Stubb as a surgeon. Clearly we are supposed to be impressed and are put in mind of the legitimising language of the so-called “surgical strikes” during the operations of modern techno-scientific warfare. Derrida, however, conflates the supposedly distinct occupations of surgery and butchery in a manner which seeks to undermine this legitimacy and reminds us rather that the profession of surgery began in Europe with the “Barber-surgeons” who were less refined and respected than the modern day surgeon. Equally, Melville’s use of the term “behead” is more medieval-barbarous than scientific anatomical. Do we marvel at Stubb’s boast? As a technical achievement, perhaps we do, but we are drawn by Derrida to consider the excess of meaning which is produced as the whale’s body is sliced into.

Just as the body of the elephant is exposed to the Sun King, so the body of the whale is presented to the reader, piece by piece as the corpse is dismembered by the crew of the *Pequod*. Derrida points our attention to the word “autopsy,” which derives from Greek, meaning “to see with one’s own eyes.” In other words, autopsy is about seeing, first hand. It is about bringing to light the inner elements of anatomy which would otherwise remain shrouded in the darkness of the body. Derrida asks “What does autopsy mean and what does it set in motion, in the becoming-*what* of the who? In the becoming-object of a living being? That is, so often, in the becoming-dead of a *zōon*?”¹⁸¹ It is an obvious point, but one that science may be blind to. Before the autopsy can take place, an animal must be killed. There is no knowledge of the anatomy of an animal outside of its own death. The object of study is pre-defined as something that can be legitimately put to death, and as something subject to the laws of carnophallogocentrism. In this sense, the supposedly neutral body of scientific knowledge is tainted, in advance, by a violence which forms an impenetrable prerequisite.

¹⁸⁰ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2009, 1:284.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1:277.

Robert Zoellner, in his book *The Sea-Salt Mastodon*, offers a reading which seems to be entirely blind to the conditions of autopsy. He locates two competing whales in Ishmael's view—the conceptual whale and the perceptual whale, the latter being the whale of experience.¹⁸² This whale of experience concerns “another reality secreted in the vast interiorities of Leviathan.”¹⁸³ The thrust of this reading emphasises—and we note the apt use of “render”—how “having gone to extraordinary lengths to render the outer whale as juggernaut mass, Ishmael now goes to equal lengths to render the inner whale as *fragility, delicacy, rarity, and preciousness*.”¹⁸⁴ The result of this autopsy is “the redemptive discovery that cosmic brawn is but the obverse of cosmic fragility.”¹⁸⁵ Zoellner cites the following passage, identifying a contrast between a violent outside and a fragile inside:

The upper part, known as the Case, may be regarded as the great Heidelberg Tun of the Sperm Whale. And as that famous great tierce is mystically carved in front, so the whale's vast plaited forehead forms innumerable strange devices for the emblematical adornment of his wondrous tun. Moreover, as that of Heidelberg was always replenished with the most excellent of the wines of the Rhenish valleys, so the tun of the whale contains by far the most precious of all his oily vintages; namely, the highly-prized spermaceti, in its absolutely pure, limpid, and odoriferous state. (372)

Rather than marking a difference between the inside and the outside of the whale, the “cosmic fragility” of the whale corresponds to the fact that one only has access to the inside of the whale once it is dead. That he finds dead whales less of a threat is hardly remarkable. (In passing, we could note that Jonah, who finds himself in the unusual position of having access to the inside of a live whale, does not extol its delicate virtues, but rather describes, in a more Ahabian manner, as being in “the belly of the netherworld.”¹⁸⁶) In addition, the “rarity” and “preciousness” of the inside of the sperm whale is precisely the rarity and preciousness of the “highly-prized” spermaceti contained within the “case” of sperm whales. This economic value is repeatedly emphasised in the passage which is organised around the central metaphor of spermaceti being a fine wine. Ishmael's wonder can therefore be seen as economically motivated. That Zoellner describes this discovery of fragility as “redemptive” indicates, moreover, the classic effect of the sacrificial animal which dies in order to save the human. This moment of autopsy represents an absolute mastery over the animal which reasserts the sovereign position of the human.

¹⁸² Robert Zoellner, *The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby-Dick* (Berkely, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973), 150.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁸⁶ Book of Jonah 2:3.

In the context of autopsy, Derrida asks if “the beast and the sovereign” were “primarily an incitement, a provocation not only to know, but to know knowledge otherwise.”¹⁸⁷ This is surely part of the effect of *Moby-Dick*, which, as we have seen, uses literary strategies to persistently undercut traditional forms of knowledge connected to whales and cetology whilst failing to offer any firm alternatives. The chapters detailing the inner structures of sperm whales demonstrate a constant negotiation of knowledge whereby any scientific claim to an absolute mastery of whale anatomy is rendered impossible. For example, here we find a description of the whale’s brain:

The brain is at least twenty feet from his apparent forehead in life; it is hidden away behind its vast outworks, like the innermost citadel within the amplified fortifications of Quebec. So like a choice casket is it secreted in him, that I have known some whalers who peremptorily deny that the Sperm Whale has any other brain than that palpable semblance of one formed by the cubic-yards of his sperm magazine. Lying in strange folds, courses, and convolutions, to their apprehensions, it seems more in keeping with the idea of his general might to regard that mystic part of him as the seat of his intelligence. (381)

The precise anatomy of this most essential organ cannot be decided upon. Ishmael describes how some whalers confuse spermaceti with the brain whilst he himself goes on to claim that the brain extends down the spinal cord. The extended simile used to describe the fortified position of the brain further emphasises the literary nature of this account. The specific location of Quebec produces a degree of absurdity and humour which once again underlines the sovereign nature of the whale, the citadel being the official residence of monarch and his representative, the governor general of Canada. The “strange folds” of the convoluted spermaceti, imitating the folds of the brain are, Ishmael reveals, a perhaps more appropriate seat for the intelligence. As Descartes locates the seat of the human soul in the pineal gland, so it is the spermaceti which seems to best encompass the essence of the sperm whale. Not only does this suggestion override anatomical knowledge, but it insists on the convoluted nature of whales, where even autopsy does not produce any certain knowledge.

Curiosity Touching this Leviathan

In explaining why he has embarked on a whaling voyage, Ishmael enumerates his reasons where “chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself. Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity” (8). I have been trying to demonstrate how, in spite of—or, more likely, due to—Ishmael’s attempts at describing whales, the reader gets an impression of an animal which becomes curiousest and curiousest as the novel progresses. There is indeed a certain curiosity to the word “curious” which describes both

¹⁸⁷ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2009, 1:278.

strangeness and inquisitiveness so as to suggest that the strange is inherently interesting. In this sense, we can see the aesthetic importance of preserving the strangeness of nonhuman animals that we discussed in the introduction.

In the context of autopsy, Derrida places special emphasis on this word which he sees as a “fine verbal animal.”¹⁸⁸ He notes that “To be curious, *curiosus*, is to be both avid for knowledge—*curiositas*, curiosity, is primarily the desire to know, to see, and to inform oneself—but also to take care, to provide care (*cura*, treatment both domestic and therapeutic, hospital-based), to inspect with care, and to care for.”¹⁸⁹ As is consistent with his discourse on nonhuman animality, Derrida reads an ethical dimension into the word “curiosity.” He indicates that the desire for knowledge is governed by a responsibility to care for the object of study. This is to suggest that a balance is to be struck between two definitions of curious as recorded in the Collins dictionary, one being “eager to learn,” and the other “prying.” In this sense, Derrida notes the danger that the “desire to know” can “degenerate into indiscrete or unwholesome curiosity.”¹⁹⁰ In the context of autopsy, we imagine the butcher-surgeon prying open a carcass in order to satisfy his curiosity. Ishmael is overwhelmed by his curiosity and it comes with a warning: “it seems to me you had best not be too fastidious in your curiosity touching this Leviathan” (289).

Curiosity, as we see in the above quotation, is closely related to “touch” and “touching.” Indeed, if curiosity includes a responsibility of care, then touching comes with a similar set of responsibilities. The potential for damage as a result of the human touch is the primary risk suggested by the order “don’t touch.” Equally, touching allows for a closeness which can evince a bond of love and care. “Touching” is used in a variety of senses in *Moby-Dick*, one of which, as in the above quotation, is as a synonym for “concerning.” For example, elsewhere in the novel, hunters are advised not to be “over curious touching the precise nature of the whale spout.” Here, as above, Melville takes into account the metaphorical force of “touching” and adds: “It will not do for him to be peering into it, and putting his face in it” (408). We are advised, for our own safety, not to touch whales or at least to keep them at arm’s length. Another use of “touching” makes it an antidote to being all at sea in the outlandish “harbourless immensities” of the ocean and is the verb frequently used to describe the action of landing at a port. Touch then indicates a renewal of human contact with the land and with landsmen. Finally, the human touch, as it concerns whales, is a violent one and “untouched” is used as a synonym for “unharmful” during the hunting of a whale: “From this last vent no blood yet came, because

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 1:276.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 1:296.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

no vital part of him had thus far been struck. His life, as they significantly call it, was untouched” (391).

Touching, perhaps ironically, is often a barrier between humans and nonhuman animals. Whilst a nonviolent touching of whales is proscribed, touching is most usually reserved as an activity between humans. This follows a recognisable pattern of usage which Derrida notes in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*:

And concerning life, where the sense of touch is in question (let us come back to it), it is practically man only that comes into question, and especially the fingers of the human hand. The “animal” never seriously comes up, though it is a living being—not even the body proper of animals whose members or organs resemble hands, and even with fingers! And what about opportunities for so many handless animals to touch and be touched in countless ways!¹⁹¹

Derrida detects in touching, as in so many other places, the influence of anthropocentrism which cuts off the possibility of contact between humans and nonhumans. We find an example of the surprising violence of the human-animal touch in Nicholas Royle’s *Quilt* where so-called “touchpools” for rays attract the ire of the novel’s nameless grieving son. He describes touchpools as “having reduced the experience of seeing to one of touching, as if they were puppies to be stroked or rabbits to be placed in one’s lap.”¹⁹² Apart from the damage caused to the sensitive skin of the rays and the concomitant “barbarity” of removing most of the tail in order to prevent stings, the son rails against the domesticating effects of touch. The human-animal touch is, here, an act of mastery which operates in one direction. The human touches but does not submit to touch.

Curiously, however, animal touch is a possibility which Ishmael is alert to. In “The Tail,” he confides that “I cannot demonstrate it, but it seems to me, that in the whale the sense of touch is concentrated in the tail; for in this respect there is a delicacy in it only equalled by the daintiness of the elephant’s trunk” (412). This comment seems to challenge the anthropocentrism which denies touch to nonhuman animals. It plays, however, on a familiar and anthropocentric trope which compares elephant trunks to human hands whilst clearly privileging the latter. This is confirmed when Ishmael announces that “the more I consider this mighty tail, the more do I deplore my inability to express it. At times there are gestures in it, which, though they would well grace the hand of man, remain wholly inexplicable” (414). Here again, the human hand remains elevated above the tail of the whale. Yet what Ishmael is alert to and what the reader must face, is the lack of human understanding of the meanings of these “gestures.” The paragraph concludes with the following passage:

¹⁹¹ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 168.

¹⁹² Royle, *Quilt*, 74.

In an extensive herd, so remarkable, occasionally, are these mystic gestures, that I have heard hunters who have declared them akin to Free-Mason signs and symbols; that the whale, indeed, by these methods intelligently conversed with the world. Nor are there wanting other motions of the whale in his general body, full of strangeness, and unaccountable to his most experienced assailant. Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face. (414)

In the end, despite the violent attempts of human “assailants” to pry them open, whales remain untouched. The actions of dissection, which have been extensively detailed, are revealed as pitifully ineffective. So while human touch is characterised as inflicting ineffective violence, the touch of the whale demonstrates a subtlety and enigma which inspires nothing less than awe. Far from being, as Heidegger would claim, “without world,” Ishmael suspects that whales communicate intelligently with the world—a world which is closed to human cognition. Ishmael’s reference to Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai elevates the whale to a God-like status.¹⁹³ It brings out what Derrida calls “divinanimality”¹⁹⁴—a neologism which describes the absolute otherness of nonhuman animals. As such, it is extremely apt that Ishmael evokes this reference to otherness just as he denies that the whale has a face—we shall return to this.

A Hideous and Intolerable Allegory

D.H. Lawrence’s singular essay on *Moby-Dick* begins with the following ventures:

A hunt. The last great hunt.

For what?

For Moby Dick, the huge white sperm whale: who is old, hoary, monstrous, and swims alone; who is unspeakably terrible in his wrath, having so often been attacked; and snow-white.

Of course he is a symbol.

Of what?

I doubt if even Melville knew exactly. That's the best of it.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ “Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen.” Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*. Genesis 33:23.

¹⁹⁴ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 132.

¹⁹⁵ D.H. Lawrence, “Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*,” in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, ed. Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey, and John Worthen, The Cambridge Edition of the Letters and Works of D.H. Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 133.

Despite the almost pained pleas of Ishmael, readers of *Moby-Dick* have consistently attempted to read the eponymous whale as a symbol or metaphor. As Armstrong makes clear: “Critical replies to this [question of what whales mean] have mostly concentrated upon reading cetaceans as a screen for the projection of human meanings.”¹⁹⁶ In “Affidavit,” where Ishmael details a number of historical whales and whale attacks on whaling boats, he writes:

So ignorant are most landmen of some of the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some hints touching the plain facts, historical and otherwise, of the fishery, they might scout at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory. (289)

This chapter is one of a number which reflects Melville’s in-depth research into the history of whaling, the effect of which is to produce an extraordinary emphasis on verisimilitude. This is somewhat reminiscent of Derrida’s strenuous efforts to convince us that he is discussing a real and singular cat in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. (“I must immediately make it clear, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn’t the *figure* of a cat” [Derrida’s italics].¹⁹⁷) This point is crucial for Derrida whose entire discourse on animals insists upon singular, real animals. Hence for Derrida, as we have seen “above all, it was necessary to avoid fables.”¹⁹⁸ Derrida is clearly sensitive to the tendency of readers to understand literary animals in strictly human terms and this, perhaps unsurprisingly, has been the fate of Moby Dick. Yet, as Lawrence suggests above, the best readings of the novel are those which underline our inability to pin Moby Dick down to a particular symbolic meaning.

Akira Lippit presents a compelling account of this phenomenon in *Electric Animal*. He develops a theory of “animetaphor”:

One might posit provisionally that the animal functions not only as an exemplary metaphor but, within the scope of rhetorical language, as an originary metaphor. One finds a fantastic transversality at work between the animal and the metaphor—the animal is already a metaphor, the metaphor an animal. Together they transport to language, breathe into language, the vitality of another life, another expression: animal and metaphor, a metaphor made flesh, a living metaphor that is by definition not a metaphor, antimetaphor—“animetaphor.”¹⁹⁹

Lippit describes the animetaphor as the “unconscious of language,” existing within as a “foreign presence.” He goes on to explain: “because the animal is said to lack the capacity for language, its function in language can only appear as an other expression, as a metaphor that originates

¹⁹⁶ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 101.

¹⁹⁷ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 6.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹⁹ Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 165.

elsewhere, is transferred from elsewhere.”²⁰⁰ In other words, the animal cannot appear in language as itself since it has no proper place within language which would have been fenced off, in advance, as strictly human territory. Lippit’s analysis, which might be reformulated in a Derridean manner as “no animals without metaphor, no metaphor without animals,” reads a fructifying relationship between the animal and language where the former breathes life into the latter.

This theory goes some way towards explaining the dominant critical tendency which refuses to read Moby Dick as an animal and points towards a central problem in literature’s ability to represent nonhuman animals. In the light of what we have been discussing, this problem calls for a reading practice which seeks to overcome the effects of the animetaphoricity and which attempts to understand what it would mean to read animals as animals. Lippit develops his reading of the effects of animetaphors in a manner which intersects with many aspects of *Moby-Dick*, not least the vexed question of consumption. He explains that since animals cannot be properly represented by language, if an animal does enter the world, then it is through incorporation:

When the metaphoricity of the metaphor collapses, the concept becomes a metonymic thing that can be eaten. The animetaphor is, in this sense, never absorbed, sublated, or introjected into world but rather incorporated as a limit, an absolutely singular and cryptonymic idiom. The animetaphoric figure is consumed literally rather than figuratively. Derrida has added to this term, “animetaphorality.” At the edges of the mouth where the metaphor has ceased, one senses, perhaps tastes, the end of the world as such.²⁰¹

This process would appear to explain the unease felt by landsmen on contemplating the consumption of the whale. We should recall that the rendering of the whale guaranteed a radically insubstantial being from the point of view of landsmen. Whales were caught at sea and processed fully on the whaling vessels which were specially equipped to dismember and boil down the whale oil. The carcass was cast back into the sea. Empty ships were sent out which returned three years later filled with barrels of whale oil. In all this, the body of the whale remained invisible and certainly not edible. Yet the tale of “Stubbs’ Supper”—the chapter in which the second mate consumes a whale steak, and which we shall turn to later—causes the collapse of the animetaphor as the reader imagines the whale steak in a very real form on the plate. What Lippit suggests concerns the indigestibility of such a whale steak. If the whale is introjected, it remains within the body in its complete state like a sort of reverse Jonah. It cannot

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 166.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 170.

be processed and represents, as Freud sees it, a pathological state in which the death of the whale cannot be properly overcome.²⁰²

So the problem with Stubbs' supper is that it interrupts a symbolic reading of the whale in *Moby-Dick* and insists on a direct and intimate encounter with something specifically substantial. The whale steak has not undergone the pleasantly anonymising processes of modern meat. It has not been packaged and presented, but is, as Ishmael provocatively puts it, "a newly murdered thing of the sea" (326-7). It connects the body of the human with the body of the whale in a manner which is entirely unpalatable but which Ishmael is extremely keen to thrust into the reader's face by way of insisting upon what whaling is about—namely the killing of whales. Critics, it seems, have been consistently resistant to this meal—refusing to partake of the whale as a dish: after all, the whale as a metaphor is vastly more palatable. But if this project has a purpose, it would be for the rather prosaic reading of animals *as animals*. This non-metaphorical reading of Melville is mooted in fact by Deleuze in "Bartleby; Or the Formula," which starts with the bold assertion that "'Bartleby' is neither a metaphor for the writer nor the symbol of anything whatsoever,"²⁰³ and proceeds to call for a literal reading of the text. I am hereby calling for a similarly literal reading of *Moby-Dick*.

Revisiting our Deleuze quotation from above and reading on a little, we find a striking similarity between the effects of animetaphors and the sort of writing which Deleuze understands *Moby-Dick* to constitute:

Melville invents a foreign language that runs beneath English and carries it off: it is the OUTLANDISH or Deterritorialized, the language of the Whale. Whence the interest of studies of *Moby-Dick* that are based on Numbers and Letters, and their cryptic meaning, to set free at least a skeleton of the inhuman or superhuman originary language. It is as if three operations were linked together: a certain treatment of language; the result of this treatment, which tends to constitute an original language within language; and the effect, which is to sweep up language in its entirety, sending it into flight, pushing it to its very limit in order to discover its Outside, silence or music.²⁰⁴

Once again, we see the structure of the crypt where a foreign, "inhuman" entity is contained within language which threatens to push language beyond its limits. In addition, this effect is linked to the wider theory of deterritorialization which occurs—as we have seen in the introduction—as a part of any relationship of "becoming." Here, Deleuze presents "deterritorialized" as a synonym of "outlandish." The ocean is an inhuman space which pushes

²⁰² See Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XIV, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (London: Vintage, 2001), 237–58.

²⁰³ Deleuze, "Bartleby; Or, the Formula," 68.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

the human characters of the novel outside of the norms of anthropocentrism. It is relevant, as Royle notes, that “One of the peculiarities of the “outlandish,” then, lies in its potential for unsettling or dissolving the distinction between human and non-human animals or (correspondingly) between human and non-human space or environment.”²⁰⁵ Ahab acknowledges his deterritorialized state as he confides in Starbuck towards the end of the novel that “out of those forty years I have not spent three ashore” (590). It is the space where Deleuze and Guattari understand Ahab to enter into a becoming relationship with Moby Dick, where he becomes what Ishmael refers to as a “whaleman”:

Moby-Dick in its entirety is one of the greatest masterpieces of becoming; Captain Ahab has an irresistible becoming-whale, but one that bypasses the pack or the school, operating directly through a monstrous alliance with the Unique, the Leviathan, Moby Dick.²⁰⁶

Deleuze and Guattari stress the unique nature of the “individual” with which one enters into alliance when becoming-animal. So despite the rather general sounding use of the word “animal,” they display an important sensitivity to the fact that animals are singular and that a meaningful relationship with a nonhuman animal comes with the prerequisite of acknowledging this particular animal and not the animal in general. Equally, a pet, or what Deleuze calls the “Oedipalized animal,” will not do. Hence Deleuze’s seemingly unnecessary emphasis that “Ahab’s Moby-Dick is not like the little cat or dog owned by an elderly woman who honors and cherishes it.”²⁰⁷ In other words becoming-animal is not comfortable or easy. It cannot rely on pre-existing human notions of psychology: “human tenderness is as foreign to it as human classifications.”²⁰⁸ Hence Melville’s mocking of cetological classification and hence, perhaps, the necessity for the violence which characterises the relationship between Ahab and Moby Dick.

In his essay, “The Scene of Writing,” Rodolphe Gasché observes that, in terms of the order of knowledge of whales, Moby Dick “shatters the whole system” of whale. Describing him as “the pure movement of deviation,” Gasché notes that Moby Dick exhibits singularity in his colour and size such that “with him Cetology as a systematized exhibition of the whale is unshored, spread out again into harbourless immensities.”²⁰⁹ This comment sends us back to the title of the novel which now reads as an either/or: *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*, but not both. The general singular whale is a convenient object of study, but as soon as we move to a specific whale, the system necessarily collapses. This effect underlines both the fragility and violence of cetology.

²⁰⁵ Royle, “Even the Title: On the State of Narrative Theory Today,” 10.

²⁰⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 243.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 244–5.

²⁰⁹ Rodolphe Gasché, “The Scene of Writing: A Deferred Outset,” *Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies* 1 (1977): 156.

It is theorised by Andrew Benjamin in *Of Jews and Animals* where he writes that philosophy traditionally refers to animality as something unchanging and essential: “What this means is that the animal is only included in terms that account either for generation or classification. That inclusion is itself connected to the related exclusion of a possible recalcitrant animality.”²¹⁰ In other words, once an animal becomes singular, or badly behaved, the whole system of classification collapses. Since the position of the human is secured against the unchanging nature of the animal, it is not just cetology which collapses, but in a vertigo-inducing movement, all of animal classification, including humans, is swept away. As Deleuze notes, there is a “Whalers’ Law, which says that any healthy whale encountered must be hunted, without choosing one over another.”²¹¹ It is the breaking of the law which results in the failure of the voyage and the sinking of the *Pequod*. It threatens the economic system which the voyage is supposed to support and ultimately, it threatens human life, not just through the death of the crew but also as the sovereign creature with the power of life and death over all others.

We see that Deleuze and Guattari appreciate the impossibility of deriving final meanings from relationships of becoming:

What counts for a great novelist—Melville, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, or Musil—is that things remain enigmatic yet nonarbitrary: in short, new logic, definitely a logic, but one that grasps the innermost depths of life and death without leading us back to reason. The novelist has the eye of a prophet, not the gaze of a psychologist.²¹²

We cannot know for sure, or finally, what *Moby-Dick* means. The relationship between Ahab and Moby Dick can never be reduced to a final answer or a fixed set of points. It remains forever outlandish in a manner which brushes against the limits of human knowledge. It reveals the edges of logic and reason and can be said to transform or to shake logic. If the novelist is the prophet, then we are returned once again to predictions of the end of the world. Remember that Derrida, with no little enigma of his own, announces that during moments of nakedness, exposed in front of an animal, he is “like a child ready for the apocalypse.”²¹³ Read through the frame of Deleuze’s novel-as-prophet, we start to see the apocalyptic effects of an appreciation of the sorts of relationships which humans can enter into with nonhumans. The end of the world, in a Heideggerian sense, is the end of a world as realised and formed by the “world forming” human. In this sense, literary works like *Moby-Dick* are world forming in that they displace the rational human who is said to inhabit the world, sovereign in his reason.

²¹⁰ Andrew E. Benjamin, *Of Jews and Animals*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 78.

²¹¹ Deleuze, “Bartleby; Or, the Formula,” 79.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 82.

²¹³ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 12.

Yet for all this talk of alliance through becoming whale, to the point “where he can no longer be distinguished from Moby Dick, and strikes himself in striking the whale,”²¹⁴ we must not lose sight of the fact that it is precisely with the goal of striking (and killing) Moby Dick that Ahab’s becoming-whale operates. This is the point where Deleuze’s theory of becoming deviates from Derrida’s discourse on animality. As we have seen, Derrida’s insistence on the singular animal is tied to the ethical imperative not to harm in any way the animal with which one enters into the face to face relationship. On the contrary, Ahab’s entire “alliance” with the white whale is premised on Moby Dick’s death.

Having reached the ethical limits of Deleuze’s theory of becoming, we turn to Maurice Blanchot’s reading of *Moby-Dick* which draws the novel into comparison with *The Odyssey*. Like Deleuze, he sees Ahab and Moby Dick as engaged in a transformative relationship:

Ahab and the whale are engaged in a drama, what we can call a metaphysical drama, using the word loosely, and the Sirens and Ulysses are engaged in the same struggle. Each wants to be everything, wants to be the absolute world, which would make it impossible for him to coexist with the other absolute world, and yet the greatest desire of each is for this coexistence and this encounter. To bring Ahab and the whale, the Sirens and Ulysses together in one space—this is the secret wish which turns Ulysses into Homer and Ahab into Melville, and makes the world that results from this union into the greatest, most terrible, and most beautiful of all possible worlds: a book, alas, only a book.²¹⁵

Blanchot detects a secret desire beyond Ahab’s wish to destroy Moby Dick, that is for the encounter itself with Moby Dick. He has already noted how the novel is structured in advance by this encounter which “seems to be happening long before the book begins.”²¹⁶ In other words, there can be no book without the coming together of Ahab and Moby Dick. It is not so much the attempted destruction of Moby Dick as the meeting of the two. This encounter is described as “coexistence” and is reminiscent of Derrida’s demand for an “alongside” relationship between humans and nonhumans. The resulting world of such a union is “the greatest, most terrible, and most beautiful of all possible worlds.” So we see that the whole book is structured by the desire for this greatest of all possible worlds, this messianic space which can only be brought about by and in literature.

But Pity there was None

Throughout the novel, we are repeatedly faced with the fact that our knowledge of whales—and this is the best, or most accurate knowledge that there is—is derived from the whaling industry.

²¹⁴ Deleuze, “Bartleby; Or, the Formula,” 78.

²¹⁵ Maurice Blanchot, “The Song of the Sirens,” in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, ed. George Quasha, trans. Linda Davis, Paul Auster, and Robert Lamberton (New York: Station Hill, 1999), 448.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Now, we might, with justification, complain that the biases of the whaleman towards, or against, whales would compromise any kind of knowledge which he might have to impart to the reader. This is, no doubt, true. It seems, for example, that although Ishmael is constantly at pains to express the mighty and majestic nature of whales, part of his purpose is to transfer this might onto the whaleman who, in his own might and bravery, is able to take on and defeat whales. In this sense, the mightier the whale, the mightier the whaleman. As Armstrong puts it: “a descriptive emphasis on the gruesomeness of the whale’s death serves to demonstrate not concern for the suffering of the animal, but romanticized admiration for the dangers faced by whalers, as heroic crusaders in an industry crucial to national and global prosperity.”²¹⁷

But in another, perhaps more important sense, there is no incidental nature to the sort of knowledge produced by Ishmael, for his relationship to whales is the same as that of his contemporary reader. Narrating the death of an old and incapacitated whale, he tells us:

But pity there was none. For all his old age, and his one arm, and his blind eyes, he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all. (391)

Ishmael makes clear that capitalist America of the 1850s is premised on the deaths of whales. Indeed, it was whale fat which literally greased the cogs of the American economy. The pity evoked by the highly anthropomorphic depiction of the whale and with the word “murder,” is forcefully and justifiably undercut by the assertion that any such pity would be simple hypocrisy. Ishmael is not just defending the violent and unsavoury actions of whalers, but asserting, correctly, that in 1850s America, everyone was a whaler. He is implicitly noting that carnophallogocentric order of things whereby blood rises in all of our heel prints. Indeed, it brings into focus an urgent reading of his often quoted statement that “All men live enveloped in whale-lines” (306).

Published in 1851 at the height of the “Golden Age” of the American whaling industry, the novel narrates a context where there was no escape from the killing of whales. Such was the wide-ranging use of whale oil, those wishing to keep their hands clean would find that even “soap was made from the trash at the bottom of the [rendering] tank.”²¹⁸ In their impressive history of whaling, Davis, Gallman and Gleiter inform us that “Whale oils were used in a widening array of industries, as softening and cleansing agents, and as constituents of cosmetics, of medicines, and of various other chemicals. The most important new use was the

²¹⁷ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 106.

²¹⁸ Lance Edwin Davis, Robert E. Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling, 1816-1906* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 343.

lubrication of industrial machinery. In the years down to 1850, this component of demand grew faster than any other.”²¹⁹ As Ishmael hints above, the oil from sperm whales was particularly prized for its light-giving qualities. Davis et. al. go on to note that

Until the 1830s the products of the sperm whale were used chiefly as illuminants. Although the rich could afford spermaceti candles and sperm oil lamps, the largest lighting demand came from the public sector. Sperm oil was used in lighthouses and city streetlights because of the brightness with which it burned.²²⁰

In the years before electric or gas lighting, it was sperm whales which afforded artificial lighting during the hours of darkness. To render whales was not only to transform them bodily from the unrepresentable leviathans of the sea to the eminently countable and sellable barrels of oil on the land, it was also to drench society in whale oil in such a way as to make discourses of peace and non-violence impossible. With this in mind, Ishmael seems to bring up an ethical concern for whales only to immediately dismiss it. There is, however, a sense in which the ethics of whaling is a question which is never far beneath the surface of the text and it seems to be a subject which cannot easily be dismissed. In Melville’s time, ethical concern for whales is deeply hypocritical, but for the contemporary reader, the ethical question is differently realised.

To digress briefly, the degree to which the status of the whale has changed since the “Golden Age” of whaling could hardly be greater. In 1931, “The Convention on the Regulation of Whaling”²²¹ was signed, a treaty deemed by the UK Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries as “one of the minor, if not one of the major miracles of human achievement.”²²² This convention underwent multiple amendments throughout the twentieth century under the auspices of the International Whaling Commission which set annual quotas for whale fishing, and in 1982 an indefinite moratorium on commercial whaling was declared. It is therefore a shared acknowledgement that 1. Whales are in danger of being hunted to extinction and 2. Whales are worth saving that has brought about an international agreement which, since it necessarily operates at a super-state level, limiting the actions of individual states, acts to compromise and ultimately to spoil the sovereign nature of signatory nations. Thus we find that the majestic or sovereign nature of the whale, the animal of “superior excellence,” acts as a competing and contaminating sovereignty to that of nation states. It is a sovereignty which begins in literature and extends into the world acting, finally, as the saving grace of whales. It seems, indeed, a legitimate question to ask to what extent the novel *Moby-Dick* has contributed to the international moratorium on whaling. There is little doubt that the

²¹⁹ Ibid., 342.

²²⁰ Ibid., 344.

²²¹ Alexander Gillespie, *Whaling Diplomacy: Defining Issues in International Environmental Law* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2005), 4.

²²² Mr. G.R.H Nugent MP. Quoted in *ibid.*

novel remains widely read, and it seems a prerequisite of any book on whaling, no matter how technical, legalistic, or historical, to make at least one reference to Melville or the *Pequod*. It is entirely possible that the majesty bestowed on the whale through the novel has contributed to these bold and international attempts to prevent its total destruction.

It is not too much to say, however, that for Melville's contemporary reader, seeing, especially at night, was intimately connected with the death of whales and this is a fact with ethical ramifications which Ishmael is acutely aware of. To return to autopsy, Derrida repeatedly stresses its optical nature. Autopsy is, he writes, "a primarily *optical* experience that aims to touch with the eye what falls under the hand, under the scalpel."²²³ He is interested in how Louis XIV, the so-called Sun King, is said to produce light and that therefore the light which exposes the body of the elephant emanates from the king himself. As a metaphor for knowledge, Derrida notes how since the light comes from the king, then everything that is unveiled about the elephant is known in advance and comes from the king himself. As part of an arrangement which does not escape the attention of Melville, in the sub-deck blubber room of the *Pequod*, the dismembered whale is illuminated by its own light. Before dismemberment has begun, the whale is consumed in a rather direct way by the second mate, Stubb, who instructs the ship's cook to prepare a steak for him. It is this steak which is eaten by the light of whale oil, an ethical circumstance which is deemed deserving of a chapter in its own right. The chapter, entitled "The Whale as a Dish" begins: "That mortal man should feed upon the creature that feeds his lamp, and, like Stubb, eat him by his own light, as you may say; this seems so outlandish a thing that one must needs go a little into the history and philosophy of it" (325). Outlandish: strange, odd, grotesque, foreign, uncivilized, at sea. Also excessive, over the top, too much, overdone.

The chapter details historical and cultural situations in which whale meat and oil have been consumed, noting that in the present time, whale meat tends not to be eaten owing to its "exceeding richness" (326). In other words, the unctuousness of the whale which makes it highly sought after in commercial terms, also renders it inedible. The chapter forms a stout defence of the actions of Stubb, who has consumed a rather overcooked whalesteak in the previous chapter. Ishmael never explains the nature of Stubb's outlandishness. We can assume that the objection would be to an excessiveness in the consumption of the whale whereby, in a closed economy, the body of the whale would be doubly consumed, firstly by the flame of the oil lamp and secondly by Stubb himself. The objection seems to mirror the biblical injunction

²²³ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2009, 1:277.

against boiling a kid in its mother's milk²²⁴ and this comparison lands us squarely in the realm of ethics.

We are reminded of Picasso's *Guernica*. The black and white world of violence and suffering is illuminated by a single light bulb hanging at the top of the painting. The bulb creates an intense claustrophobia, shining on a godless world of manmade violence. Equally, the artificial light of the whale lamp conditions everything seen below deck on the *Pequod* as well as back on American streets after dark. In an ironic twist, it is the bright whale light shining from lighthouses which keeps the whaling ships safe at night. There is nothing to be seen outside of the death of whales and if seeing is knowing, then knowledge is conditioned by the death of the whale. Ishmael is keenly aware of the ethics of this situation. Killing whales is, he knows, an ethical issue, but he refuses to give way to sentimentality which would lead to hypocritical ethical demands. "The Whale as a Dish" ends in a cutting satirical tone. Speaking of the abhorrence with which "landsmen" regard the eating of whalemeat, and reconsidering his initial explanation, Ishmael rages:

It is not, perhaps, entirely because the whale is so excessively unctuous that landsmen seem to regard the eating of him with abhorrence; that appears to result, in some way, from the consideration before mentioned: i.e. that a man should eat a newly murdered thing of the sea, and eat it too by its own light. But no doubt the first man that ever murdered an ox was regarded as a murderer; perhaps he was hung; and if he had been put on his trial by oxen, he certainly would have been; and he certainly deserved it if any murderer does. Go to the meat-market of a Saturday night and see the crowds of live bipeds staring up at the long rows of dead quadrupeds. Does not that sight take a tooth out of the cannibal's jaw? Cannibals? who is not a cannibal? I tell you it will be more tolerable for the Fejee that salted down a lean missionary in his cellar against a coming famine; it will be more tolerable for that provident Fejee, I say, in the day of judgment, than for thee, civilized and enlightened gourmand, who nailest geese to the ground and featest on their bloated livers in thy paté-de-foie-gras. (326-7)

Through biting satire, Ishmael is commenting on a trope in thinking still very much evident today. In 2014 we witnessed, for example, widespread uproar when Copenhagen Zoo decided to euthanize and perform a public autopsy on a giraffe name Marius before feeding the resulting meat to the lions. It would appear that people who unflinchingly accept and invest in the meat industry which slaughters billions of nameless animals each year strongly opposed the killing of a single animal perhaps because it had a name, or, in the age of the globalised media, a face. In this case, the zoo performed a public autopsy with a spokesman telling the press: "I'm actually

²²⁴ See note 129 above.

proud because I think we have given children a huge understanding of the anatomy of a giraffe that they wouldn't have had from watching a giraffe in a photo.”²²⁵

In “The Grand Armada,” we see the effects of this sentimentalising of whales. In tranquil seas, the whalers are greeted with the sight of a new born whale still attached to its mother by the umbilical cord. The cows and calves approach Ishmael's boat: “Like household dogs they came snuffling round us, right up to our gunwales, and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them. Queequeg patted their foreheads; Starbuck scratched their backs with his lance; but fearful of the consequences, for the time refrained from darting it” (423). Armstrong comments that

the attitude to whales evinced here might best be compared with the conceit, common enough today, that sentimentalizes newborn lambs or calves, while at the same time accepting with equanimity that both are products or by-products of the industrial farming of meat and dairy commodities.²²⁶

The whalers are able both to enjoy the company of and even interact in a friendly manner with the young whales. Yet as the words “for the time” indicates, this does not in any way dislodge the intention to kill these animals. It does not engage with an ethics which would question the wider killing of whales. We note that it is with the lance that Starbuck scratches the whales' backs—a reminder of the real purpose of the voyage. The simile here is one of domestication, the sort of animal which Deleuze and Guattari decry as “oedipal,” that strange category of nonhuman animal which escapes, for the most part, being put to death but which is only accepted on the terms of humans.

Zoellner reads this chapter as a part of a process of “humanizing” whales where Ishmael and the reader encounter “the Social Whale, secretly leading a domestic life much like man's.”²²⁷ This reading fails to take into account that, for Ishmael, the episode represents merely a hiatus in the killing and in no way dents the thrust of the novel which presents a robust defence of whaling. Furthermore, the clear implication of this reading is that nonhuman animals are only deserving of human compassion once they have been seen as having human qualities or as being in some way human-like. This anthropocentric tendency would therefore refuse pity to an animal which was radically dissimilar to the human. It is certainly true that Ishmael does draw comparisons between humans and whales in this section, but as we have noted above, he refuses to be drawn into a hypocrisy which would allow him to pity the whales. Despite the shortcomings of Zoellner's reading, it does offer confirmation that once economics have ended the consumption

²²⁵ “Giraffe Killed despite Campaign,” *BBC News*, accessed June 23, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26098935>.

²²⁶ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 110.

²²⁷ Zoellner, *The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby-Dick*, 180.

of whale products, *Moby-Dick* opens the experience of pity towards whales in a manner which Ishmael clearly does not intend.

Armstrong's answer to the oedipal reading of whales focuses on agency. He recalls how chapter by chapter, different bodily parts of the whale are detailed in a manner designed to lend authenticity to the final a deliberate act of "revenge" perpetrated by Moby Dick who sets out to and succeeds in destroying the *Pequod*. Furthermore, the various active parts of the whale's body "fractures the orthodox nineteenth-century model of agency into a profusion of agentive effects."²²⁸ Armstrong correctly notes how agency is traditionally reserved for humans and therefore how threatening the notion of animal agency is.

The problem with this reading is the exceptional nature of Moby Dick. The orthodoxy among the whaling community is that he is best left alone, with the clear indication that if he does possess agency, then the pack whales do not. Moreover, if agency is a human characteristic, then Armstrong's discourse on nonhumans still relies on a certain anthropocentrism which grants status to an animal once it accedes adequately to a human characteristic. In broaching this question, Derrida turns to Jeremy Bentham: "'Can they suffer?' asks Bentham, simply yet so profoundly." He locates in this question a "nonpower at the heart of power," which amounts to asking "can they *not be able*?" In other words, for Derrida, there is no question of making certain demands of nonhuman animals before they are afforded an ethical consideration. We are not searching for intelligence, language, ability or agency, but instead the question of the animal is dramatically reframed around the question of suffering, a question which leaves "no room for doubt," since "No one can deny the suffering, fear, or panic, the terror or fright that can seize certain animals and that we humans can witness."²²⁹

There is no question that *Moby-Dick* bears witness to the suffering of whales. There are numerous passages that narrate the pain felt by the hunted whales and moments even when crewmen other than Ishmael acknowledge the suffering of whales:

It was his death stroke. For, by this time, so spent was he by loss of blood, that he helplessly rolled away from the wreck he had made; lay panting on his side, impotently flapped with his stumped fin, then over and over slowly revolved like a waning world; turned up the white secrets of his belly; lay like a log, and died. (392)

Armstrong is correct in that Ishmael's presentation of the suffering of whales encapsulates the "mid-nineteenth century utilitarian view of compassion for non-humans."²³⁰ As we have seen, the economy of 1850s America was such that any compassion for whales was immediately made ironic by the operations of carnophallogocentrism. Ishmael demands of his mid-

²²⁸ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 119.

²²⁹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 27–8.

²³⁰ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 109.

nineteenth century readers that they see and understand, and accept, the suffering which is caused by the whaling industry. Importantly, he does not deny that whales suffer nor does he spare the reader that suffering. In this way, he moves beyond a Cartesian understanding of whales and, if Derrida is correct, plants a literary timebomb. The acknowledgement of suffering does not lead unequivocally to compassion, or, say, a demand for “animal rights.” As he writes, “War is waged over the matter of pity.”²³¹ The appropriate response to pity is contested and historically conditioned. Derrida goes on: “This war is probably ageless but, and here is my hypothesis, it is passing through a critical phase.” In other words, the pity evoked by Melville’s depiction of the dying whales has a different meaning for mid-nineteenth century readers from contemporary readers, especially of non-whaling nations. We witness, for example, how the British government has changed its view. From being a fully-fledged whaling nation at the start of the twentieth century, it commented in 1982 that “if the existing methods [of killing whales] cannot be improved then whales should not be killed at all.”²³² Whilst there is no ethical complaint against killing whales in general, there is a problem with inflicting suffering which is deemed in some way excessive. We note, then, that the discourse on suffering changes when economic conditions change. The “critical phase” which Derrida refers to comes at a time when, in the West at least, it is possible to consume in such a way as to massively restrict consumption of animal-derived products. Just as Derrida suggests that animals are currently treated in a manner which will surely have been “judged monstrous” by past generations, in reading *Moby-Dick* we look back at the whaling industry and experience pity in a manner which was impossible at the time of writing.

In “The Prairie,” Ishmael considers the science of physiognomy, a science which he notes is not restricted to the study of the human head—Johann Kaspar Lavater, the eighteenth century physiognomist, he tells us, studies “the faces of horses, birds, serpents, and fish” (378), and this is indeed true. There is an important significance in the recognition that nonhuman animals have faces at all, and we could note in passing that where Lavater’s illustrations draw comparisons between human and nonhuman faces, then there is a significant breach of the human-animal divide. Yet in line with what we have seen elsewhere, Ishmael declares that the whale has no face and that its features remain unreadable. He identifies the key feature, however, to be the brow in which he notes Lavater’s “mark of genius,” a “semi-crescentic depression in the forehead’s middle” (379). As with many of Ishmael’s observations, this is to be taken with a pinch of salt, not least because he is surely mocking what he calls the “semi-science” of physiognomy. Yet expanding on the “genius” of the whale, Ishmael diverts from physiognomy to make a striking comment about passivity:

²³¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 29.

²³² Quoted in Gillespie, *Whaling Diplomacy: Defining Issues in International Environmental Law*, note 213 p173.

But how? Genius in the Sperm Whale? Has the Sperm Whale ever written a book, spoken a speech? No, his great genius is declared in his doing nothing particular to prove it. It is moreover declared in his pyramidal silence. (380)

Here, a lack of speech is not seen as a deficiency, but rather as the mute declaration of genius. To put it, once again, in Derridean terms, it is surely, “acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, and as something other than a privation.”²³³ Zoellner’s reading of Melville’s repeated references to whales as pyramids shows how they combine “the berg-stolid indifference of stone, of tree, of water, and of wind” with “the simultaneous hint [...] of intelligence and artifice.”²³⁴ He demonstrates how the symbol of the pyramid signifies both the solidity and permanence of the natural world, combined with a sense of purpose and even knowing. This reading presents the whale in a non-anthropocentric manner. The “pyramidal silence” of the whale marks an utter indifference to humanity where human measures of genius are simply irrelevant in forming a judgement of the whale.

Although it is true that *Moby Dick* demonstrates considerable agency, and agency which is threatening both literally to real humans, and threatening, more generally, to the concept of the human as the animal uniquely capable of intelligent thought and revenge, it is the passivity of the whale which emerges in a more profound manner in the novel. This opens the way for an alternative reading of the newborn calves with their mothers:

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy. (424-5)

The peaceful scene of serene whales demonstrating both calm, and the sort of pleasure which one might be tempted to call *jouissance*, affects Ishmael in a manner which affords him eternal joy. The incident does not change his attitude to whaling—as we have seen, for mid-nineteenth-century America, this was scarcely possible—but it seems to offer a rare and brief glimpse of the activity of whales which has no relation to the gaze of the human. We note how the “mute calm” once again refers to the silence of whales whilst the inscrutability of the creatures underlines a human inability to interpret or to properly know them.

As we have seen, Ishmael often refers to himself as a “whaleman.” It is a term which seems to belong to the vocabulary of Deleuzian becoming, evoking a sort of half-man, half-whale quasi-

²³³ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 48.

²³⁴ Zoellner, *The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby-Dick*, 82.

mermaid assemblage. It suggests that to encounter whales is to change in one's humanity and to become an animal which is distinct from the landsman. Finally, we ask, is *Moby-Dick* a provocation to become whalemens? This would be a process whereby in encountering whales, we come to know ourselves differently. Part of this would be a new experience of pity, an experience which would operate alongside a new knowledge of the human, no longer as an animal secured in his sovereign position by animality with which he has no relation, but as an animal located alongside other animals, placed in a complex and delicate set of interrelations. The effect of this kind of reading of *Moby-Dick* is to unshore the human, pushing him out into the harbourless immensities of a literary evocation of a thoroughly alien and unknowable being.

Tel-Aviv Jaffa, July-August 2014.

Chapter Three

From Apocalypse to Posthuman in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy

"I apologize for my excursion into fiction. I must sometimes say things that are not transparently honest. But it is for the greater good."

Spoken by Adam One in Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*.

The splice is a figure which powerfully suggests itself in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013)²³⁵. It can be seen in the hybridity of the gene-spliced "bioforms" which populate the novels, in the unholy mix of money, power, religion and science which circulates in the economy of the pre-apocalyptic world, and it operates through the dizzying cocktail of genres served up by Atwood as she navigates between the conventions of satire, cyberpunk, romance, speculative fiction, bildungsroman and whodunit. Form and content are stitched together in a manner which explores the effects of transgressions, not least of which is the border-crossing when the human-animal boundary is breeched. These multiple splices point towards a future where human categories and forms of knowledge will come under threat, primarily as the effect of scientific knowledge under unrestrained capitalism. In this sense, most critics have taken the novels for a set of warnings about the calamitous path humanity is heading down. J. Brooks Bouson, a leading Atwood critic, notes that Atwood "believes in the transformative—and ethical—potential of imaginative literature."²³⁶ It does indeed seem likely that the novels are written in order to bring about what is referred to above as "the greater good." What we explore in this chapter, then, is how this greater good points towards the positive imaginative effects of a posthumanism which we will read through Jacques Derrida's notions of "eating well."

Most critics focus on Atwood's novels as satire. In J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (1999), fictional novelist Elizabeth Costello suggests that satire is often interpreted with the use of deductive reasoning in order to arrive directly at intentions of the author. Discussing the accepted reading of Jonathan Swift's "Modest Proposal," she notes:

²³⁵ Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Virago, 2004); Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (London: Virago, 2010); Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam* (London: Virago, 2014).

²³⁶ J. Brooks Bouson, "'We're Using Up the Earth. It's Almost Gone:' A Return to the Post-Apocalyptic Future in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46, no. 1 (2011): 23.

On “A Modest Proposal” the consensus is that Swift does not mean what he says, or seems to say. He says, or seems to say, that Irish families could make a living by raising babies for the table of their English masters. But he can’t mean that, we say, because we all know that it is atrocious to kill and eat human babies. Yet, come to think of it, we go on, the English are already in a sense killing human babies, by letting them starve. So, come to think of it, the English are already atrocious.

That is the orthodox reading, more or less. But why, I ask myself, the vehemence with which it is stuffed down the throats of young readers? Thus shall you read Swift, their teachers say, thus and in no other way. If it is atrocious to kill and eat human babies, why is it not atrocious to kill and eat piglets? If you want Swift to be a dark ironist rather than a facile pamphleteer, you might examine the premises that make his fable so easy to digest.²³⁷

Costello points to the premises behind the accepted reading of Swift’s satire which reject the consumption of human babies whilst permitting the eating of nonhuman animals. Her critique points to a fundamental critical understanding of what is good and what is not good to eat. The premises that Costello recommends for examination may, she implies, be just as violent as the putative target of the satire. In a single gesture, Costello brings both author and critic under scrutiny for the parts that they play in an unacknowledged and violent discourse of humanism—a humanism which, as we have seen, in Derrida’s terms, is premised on “a noncriminal putting to death” of the other.²³⁸

A similar set of interpretative concerns surround the first novel in Atwood’s trilogy, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), in which the scene is set for a Swiftian satire, with an epigraph from *Gulliver’s Travels*. The satire in this case describes an apocalyptic future where almost all of humanity is destroyed in a deliberately bioengineered plague. As with “A Modest Proposal,” the dominant reading turns on the question of the human where numerous critics understand the novel as an authorial call for a return to the human subject, in defiance of a bleakly “posthuman” future. The novel and its reception also concern the question of eating, a problem which is explored in terms of who gets to eat whom and how subjects themselves are produced, maintained or threatened through the inevitable process of eating and being eaten. As with the Swift, the orthodox reading of the text tends towards a certain critical conservatism which re-affirms humanist notions which are themselves premised on a hidden yet pervasive violence.

The overwhelming weight of critical response to *Oryx and Crake* sees the novel as a more or less explicit authorial call for a return to the human. Stephen Dunning, for example, describes a “darkly comic critique of our triumphant scientific modernity” which mourns the loss of religious narrative. For him, the novel suggests “we cannot do without such [religious] tales, not at least, if we wish to remain even marginally human.” He concludes that we “have Atwood to

²³⁷ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 56.

²³⁸ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 278.

thank for reminding us of our proper place.”²³⁹ Similarly, Chung-Hao Ku affirms humanism, arguing that the end of the novel “is a moment for the reconstruction of ‘humanity’ through mutuality, communication, and communion.”²⁴⁰ J. Brooks Bouson argues that Atwood’s intention is to warn us about the perils of “blindly entering a catastrophic posthuman future,”²⁴¹ whilst Danette DiMarco claims that the novel plots the failures of a global community “having lost its humanity by repeatedly violating and consuming life for personal and collective gain.”²⁴²

There is no doubt that Atwood explores and troubles the questions of what is proper to the human. She notes in relation to *Oryx and Crake* that one of the functions of speculative fiction is to “explore the nature and limits of what it means to be human in graphic ways, by pushing the envelope as far as it will go.”²⁴³ This is not, however, necessarily to champion the human nor is it to construct a defence of humanism. Rather than reading the novel as a warning about the catastrophic effects of posthumanism, I propose to start from an understanding of the human as already posthuman, where the human subject is both constituted and threatened by the consumption of the other. On the one hand, this is to follow Cary Wolfe who, as we have seen, understands humans as “prosthetic” creatures who owe their existence to radically nonhuman technologies.²⁴⁴ On the other hand, we should recall the reservations of Neil Badmington who notes that “traces of humanism find their way into even the most apocalyptic accounts of the posthumanist condition.”²⁴⁵ In other words, we should not lose sight of the difficulties, if not impossibilities, of writing outside of humanism.

If we understand the human to be a product of the discourse of humanism, then one of the functions of the novels is to underline the limitations and inadequacies of this discourse. This is a problem which has been articulated in technological terms as humanism’s “limitations in addressing whatever may emerge from the multiple interfaces between organic and inorganic, material and virtual, cultural and natural worlds.”²⁴⁶ Moreover, in a more Derridean vein, Valeria Mosca notes of the first two novels in the sequence that “They are not so much tales about the end of humanity as tales about what is beyond traditional human boundaries—the

²³⁹ Stephen Dunning, “Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*: The Terror of the Therapeutic,” *Canadian Literature*, no. 186 (Autumn 2005): 99.

²⁴⁰ Chung-Hao Ku, “Of Monster and Man: Transgenics and Transgression in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 32, no. 1 (January 2006): 130.

²⁴¹ J. Brooks Bouson, “‘It’s Game Over Forever’: Atwood’s Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, no. 39 (2004): 154.

²⁴² Danette DiMarco, “Going Wendigo: The Emergence of the Iconic Monster in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and Antonia Bird’s *Ravenous*,” *College Literature* 38, no. 4 (2011): 137.

²⁴³ Margaret Atwood, “*The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* ‘In Context,’” *PMLA* 119, no. 3 (May 2004): 515.

²⁴⁴ Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, xxv.

²⁴⁵ Neil Badmington, “Theorizing Posthumanism,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 53 (Winter 2003): 12.

²⁴⁶ Helena Pedersen, “Is ‘the Posthuman’ Educable? On the Convergence of Educational Philosophy, Animal Studies, and Posthumanist Theory,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 31, no. 2 (2010): 242.

ends of humanity.”²⁴⁷ I hope, therefore, to show that in spite of the prevalent humanist readings of *Oryx and Crake*, a reading of the novel firstly in conjunction with Derrida’s notion of “eating well,” and secondly alongside the counterpart novels *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013), reveals a productive and vital exploration of the welcome effects of a posthumanist discourse on the politics of eating.

Eating Well

The trilogy of novels is articulated around a central apocalyptic plot feature—named in the second book as “The Waterless Flood.” This manifests as a lethal virus forming a global pandemic leading to the rapid deaths of almost all humans. It turns out that the eponymous Crake has engineered this virus as part of his plan to replace humanity—having concluded that humans are, by their nature, irredeemably violent and destructive—with a new race of genetically engineered transhumans²⁴⁸ called Crakers. Set in what one critic calls “a twenty-minutes-into-the future satire of our present,”²⁴⁹ the pre-apocalyptic sections of the novels describe a Western society where corporations govern and biotechnology is pervasive. After the waterless flood, the survivors are primarily members of an eco-religious cult called the God’s Gardeners whose theology manages to correctly predict the apocalypse and to prepare its members for post-societal survival. The first two novels occupy more or less the same time-span whilst the third pushes furthest into the future, setting up the possibility of sustained human and transhuman communities after the waterless flood. The novels are populated with genetically engineered life-forms, including pigs designed to produce organs for human xenotransplantation and headless chickens for the mass production of food.

The “earliest complete memory” of Jimmy—the protagonist of *Oryx and Crake* who refers to himself as “Snowman” after the flood and finally comes to be known to the Crakers as “Snowman-the-Jimmy”—evokes the mass-incineration of cows and sheep in the UK after the BSE and foot and mouth epidemics of the 1990s and 2001:

The bonfire was an enormous pile of cows and sheep and pigs.[...] It was like the barbecue in the backyard when his father cooked things but a lot stronger, and mixed in with it was a gas-station smell, and the odour of burning hair.

Jimmy knew what burning hair smelled like because he’d cut off some of his own

²⁴⁷ Valeria Mosca, “Crossing Human Boundaries: Apocalypse and Posthumanism in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*,” *Other Modernities*, no. 9 (May 2013): 49.

²⁴⁸ I am using this term as defined by Cary Wolfe who describes transhumans as intellectually, physically and emotionally enhanced humans, free from disease and suffering and with an extended lifespan.

²⁴⁹ Gerry Canavan, “Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*,” *Literature Interpretation Theory* 23, no. 2 (2012): 142.

hair with the manicure scissors and set fire to it with his mother's cigarette lighter.
(OC 18)

The scene rehearses what is later referred to as “the doctrine of unintended consequences” (OC 267), in this case, the catastrophic outcomes of industrialised animal production. Jimmy's childish viewpoint stresses not only the connection between the incineration of the animals and the cooking of them on the family barbecue, but also the continuities between human and nonhuman animals. Burning hair, in this case, smells the same. In short, the naïve Jimmy has difficulty with the question of what is good to eat now that the “things” his father cooked have appeared as cows and sheep and pigs. Through an identification with the burning animals, he feels a sense of shame at having not rescued them: “he thought he could see the animals looking at him reproachfully out of their burning eyes” (20). This memory suggests a primal scene for young Jimmy in as much as it is the laying bare of the violence behind the “steaks and sausages” on his father's barbeque. It reveals to him a world where nonhuman animals are routinely destroyed in service of what we shall see below is the putative wellbeing of mankind. The pyre marks for Jimmy a moment of separation between human and nonhuman animals and teaches him that his compassion for the burning animals is misplaced. It is the moment when Jimmy enters into the symbolic order of a carnivorous world. Conversely, for the reader, it lays bare the usually disavowed violence of human treatment of nonhumans. Of course, for the contemporary reader, the pyre marks the starting point: we have already arrived at the mass incineration of cows, sheep and pigs. What remains in the novels is to explore what might be in store if, in Atwood's words, we “continue down the road we're already on.”²⁵⁰ In this sense, the novels are concerned with our contemporary condition. The effect of the satire is to offer an exaggerated version of our own world where, to put it mildly, we do not eat well.

The title of the Derrida interview, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” suggests an equivalence between consumption and the production of the subject, a formulation which could, perhaps, be crassly restated as “you are what you eat.” Here, Derrida reiterates that the human subject is constituted by a “sacrificial structure,” a “place left open [...] for a noncriminal putting to death” of the nonhuman animal.²⁵¹ In Derrida's analysis, eating meat does more than nourish the body; indeed, the symbolic meaning of carnivorousness is essential to the construction of the human.

The ideal subject, the human male, is inextricably linked to nonhuman animal slaughter and is produced not just through the real world practices of slaughter and ingestion, but also through the day to day effects of language. Hence, Derrida understands the discourses of humanism to

²⁵⁰ Margaret Atwood, “Writing *Oryx and Crake*,” in *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing 1970–2005* (London: Virago, 2005), 322.

²⁵¹ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 278.

be ordered by the effects of carnophallogocentrism. With this in mind, we should understand the human not as an animal which chooses to consume meat or which has the option of so doing. Rather, the human must eat meat and is constituted by this very act. As Derrida explains:

The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the nonliving, man or animal, but since one *must eat* in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there's no other definition of the good [*du bien*], *how* for goodness' sake should one *eat well* [*bien manger*]? And what does this imply? What is eating? How is this metonymy of introjection to be regulated?²⁵²

Non-carnivorosity, if there is such a thing, is to put the human at risk. Hence we are not surprised to find in Carol J. Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat* the claim that "a mythology permeates all classes that meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity,"²⁵³ and this is a connection which Atwood is, of course, alert to. In *The Edible Woman* (1976), her first published novel, she writes a scene where Marian, the central character, is unable to eat a steak whilst her fiancé, Peter, eats his with relish, declaring "A good meal always makes you feel a little more human."²⁵⁴ From the start, Atwood has shown herself to be a writer sensitive to the political, philosophical and ethical consequences of consumption, of carnophallogocentrism, which becomes one of her primary concerns in the *MaddAddam* trilogy.

The world of the novels divides into pre- and post-apocalyptic timeframes. Before the waterless flood, unimpeded capitalism has created a social schism between the moneyed suburban compounds with private security, funded by giant technology and pharmaceutical companies, and the pleeblands which are lawless enclaves for the poor, dominated by gang rivalries, surveillance and disease. Atwood describes a society of total consumption which itself nibbles away at all taboos of eating. That nothing is sacred in the pleeblands is signified by the "carbon garboil dumpsters." These devices turn garbage into oil—"slaughterhouse refuse, old vegetables, restaurant tossout, even plastic bottles," but are not choosy about what constitutes garbage. "Officially you couldn't put in human corpses," (*YF* 91) but we quickly come to realise that official laws count for little in the remorselessly pragmatic pleeblands. Human corpses can be found alongside nonhuman animal body parts from slaughterhouses where molecular composition counts for more than human exceptionalism.

That nothing is off the menu is demonstrated by two food outlets which are positioned at opposing ends of the dining spectrum. "Rarity" is a restaurant chain whose name ostensibly pertains to the underdone nature of the meat but which also indicates that "in the private banquet

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 282.

²⁵³ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 48.

²⁵⁴ Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (St Ives: Virago, 2010), 186.

rooms—key-club entry, bouncer-enforced—you could eat endangered species” (*YF* 37). The narrator goes on to stress that money is the only consideration which is relevant to this trade: “Technically, the endangered trade was illegal—there were high fines for it—but it was very lucrative.” Conversely, we are introduced to the SecretBurgers chain. “The secret of SecretBurgers was that no one knew what sort of animal protein was actually in them” (*YF* 40). This fast food chain, serving up the equivalent of cat food to paying customers attests to the all-consuming nature of the economy of the novel. Humans, it seems, degrade themselves by consuming this indeterminate animal protein which proves that any meat is better than none at all. As with the carbon garboil, Atwood’s satire hints at cannibalism: “The meat grinders weren’t 100 per cent efficient; you might find a swatch of cat fur in your burger or a fragment of mouse tail. Was there a human fingernail, once?” Read together, these two outlets chart a society that eats its way to total environmental destruction before literally consuming itself. These food outlets, no doubt, operate as metaphors for a total consumerism, yet the specificity of the orality and ingestion demands to be read on its own terms.

The total consumption of untrammelled capitalism eventually gives way to the implosion of carnophallogocentric humanism as the waterless flood renders all humans, one way or another, food. But this is not to read the apocalyptic flood as a total break from what comes before. What Atwood adeptly describes is how humans are already consumed by the might of an all-powerful capitalism which sees a male-dominated, technologically-driven society eating away at the borders of the female subject. One striking example of this explores how the borders of the human body are made ambiguous through supplementation. “Biofilm Bodysuits” are a kind of whole-body prophylactic used in the sex trade. The upmarket strip club “Tails and Scales” dresses its dancers in bodysuits designed to give them a human-animal hybrid appearance. They are pictured outside the club as “beautiful girls covered completely with shining green scales, like lizards, except for the hair” (*YF* 90). Ren, a stripper in the club, describes the feeling of wearing one of these bodysuits:

you could feel the pleasant suction as their layers of living cells bonded with your skin, and then the warm, tickly feeling as they started to breathe. Nothing in but oxygen, nothing out but your natural excretions, said the labels. (*YF* 396)

These suits protect the women, or “valuable assets” as their manager describes them, from infection whilst making them consumable as “the cleanest dirty girls in town” (*YF* 8). They also flirt with the exoticism of human-animal hybridity, dressed up as a sexually desirable and eminently consumable product. In the bodies of the “scalies,” Atwood deftly presents an assemblage of capitalism, biotechnology, human-animal hybridity and sexual desire whereby patriarchal capitalism has reimagined and reengineered the female form to create a body both exotic and alluring, offering pleasures of prostitution without the drawbacks of infection. For

the scalies, skin, which Julia Kristeva describes as “the essential if not initial boundary of biological and psychic individuation,”²⁵⁵ is no longer the boundary of the body. Hence the sex trade strips the female of her individuation by compromising her identity as a human, both by dressing her up as a nonhuman, and by blurring her physical boundaries in the name of protection.

One must eat, but how to eat well? One thing we can be sure of is that the pre-apocalyptic world of the *MaddAddam* trilogy is a *tour de force* in how not to eat well. At the level of language, Atwood demonstrates to us the continuities between eating animals and consuming one another as the brutalities of the pleeblands conspire to render humans food. Before the apocalypse strikes, we are shown how consumer society makes its supposed consumers into food. When Toby’s mother becomes an unwitting victim of a pharmaceutical company, the effect on her father is described in terms of his being devoured. Coming home for her mother’s funeral, Toby finds her father to be “a wreck; humiliation, pain, and failure had eaten away at him until there was almost nothing left” (*YF* 32). Similarly, reflecting on when Toby herself became the sexual prey of her boss at SecretBurgers, she notes that “she was lucky she hadn’t ended up fucked into a purée and battered to a pulp and poured out onto a vacant lot” (*YF* 123-4). With the onset of the apocalyptic pandemic, Atwood suggestively describes the victims as being turned into foodstuffs. When Crake’s Uncle Pete dies, it is “like watching pink sorbet on a barbeque— instant meltdown” (*OC* 297). When Zeb’s father figure dies, “he simply dissolved, [...] they’ve never seen anything like it. Raspberry mousse is what they said” (*M* 373-4). Later he is described as being “in the form of soup stock” (*M* 385).

This sense that humans have become food is made less symbolic and more literal after the flood when the reader is given a constant sense that humans are now decidedly back on the menu. Observing that survival depends on his ability to walk, Jimmy notes that “if he can’t walk, he’s rat food” (*OC* 270). On the highways, humans are consumed on a mass scale by vultures (See *YF* 386). Indeed, in setting the scene for the final showdown of the trilogy, it is the calls of the birds which establish who is likely to be eating whom:

Peach-coloured haze in the east. Day is breaking, so cool and delicate at first, the sun not yet a hot spotlight. The crows are abroad, signalling to one another. Caw! Cawcaw! Caw! What are they saying? Look out! Look out! Or maybe: Party time soon! Where there are wars, there will be crows, the carrion-fanciers. And ravens too, the warbirds, the eyeball gourmands. And vultures, the holy birds of yore, old connoisseurs of rot. (*M* 413)

²⁵⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 101.

This third-person narrative maintains a healthy scepticism towards the meaning of the birds' call, suggestive of the limits of human cognition. At the same time, the rich lexicon of human gastronomy is transferred to the birds who now become the gourmands, the connoisseurs. The ridiculousness of describing the birds with these particularly human-centred nouns tends to undermine the supposed richness and sophistication of a human culture of eating well which, no doubt, finds its apogee in the Rarity restaurants mentioned above. At the same time, we are asked who the true connoisseurs are now. Who are the ones which can be said to know? Certainly, we do not know what the crows are cawing about, but the possibility that it might be "party time soon" shows the birds' ability to read human behaviour as they circle overhead.

Audacious Manipulations of the Genome

The privatisation of law enforcement appears to have given rise to the complete deregulation of genetic experimentation. In the pre-apocalyptic world, genesplicing is performed both in the interests of technoscientific companies seeking to create profitable new forms of life and also as an out of hours hobby for power-crazed scientists. This "fooling around" sees the creation of a "cane toad with a prehensile tail," the snat, "an unfortunate blend of snake and rat" and the rakunk, a blend of skunk and racoon (*OC* 57). The latter is given to young Jimmy by his father as a pet. In creating these splices, the scientists report that "it made you feel like God." The prevailing attitude towards nonhuman life is one of utter irreverence, where the genetic makeup of nonhumans has become the ultimate plaything of humans with too much time on their hands. In short, the treatment of the genome could hardly be more audacious. This is to pick up on a phrase used by Derrida who expresses outrage at contemporary treatment of nonhuman animals, stressing:

the industrialization of what can be called the production for consumption of animal meat, artificial insemination on a massive scale, more and more audacious manipulations of the genome, the reduction of the animal not only to production and overactive reproduction (hormones, genetic crossbreeding, cloning, etc.) of meat for consumption, but also of all sorts of other end products, and all of that in the service of a certain being and the putative human well-being of man.²⁵⁶

Audacity, with its blend of daring and "unrestrained by, or setting at defiance, the principles of decorum and morality" (*OED*), inspires both awe and revulsion and through these genespliced creations, Atwood manages to evoke both amazement at the technical accomplishment and an astonished sense of revulsion.

Probably the novels' most audacious manipulation of the genome is the ChickieNob:

²⁵⁶ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 25.

What they were looking at was a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing.

“What the hell is it?” said Jimmy.

“Those are chickens,” said Crake. “Chicken parts. Just the breasts, on this one. They’ve got ones that specialize in drumsticks too, twelve to a growth unit.”

“But there aren’t any heads,” said Jimmy. He grasped the concept—he’d grown up with *sus multiorganifer*,²⁵⁷ after all—but this thing was going too far. At least the pigeons of his childhood hadn’t lacked heads.

“That’s the head in the middle,” said the woman. “There’s a mouth opening at the top, they dump the nutrients in there. No eyes or beak or anything, they don’t need those.”

“This is horrible,” said Jimmy. The thing was a nightmare. It was like an animal-protein tuber. (OC 237-8)

Insatiable human carnivorousness demands ChickieNobs. Jimmy is told that “you get chicken breasts in two weeks—that’s a three-week improvement on the most efficient low-light, high-density chicken farming operation so far devised” (OC 238). A rapidly growing human population set on consuming more meat than ever before is the true driving force behind the ChickieNob. In this sense, the ChickieNob is a direct descendant of the high-density chicken farming operations which provide the 106.4m tonnes of poultry produced globally in 2013.²⁵⁸ As Samantha Noll comments, “chickens grown for modern consumption bear more resemblance to Atwood’s chicken than to the traditional barnyard chicken.”²⁵⁹ As is well documented, these modern “high-density” methods of raising chickens involve dangerously high growth-rates which commonly cause the chickens leg deformities, organ failure and heart attacks. In addition, “debeaking” of birds prevents them from pecking one another whilst disease and death is rife. In short, everything is done to produce meat as cheaply and quickly as possible whilst pretending that there are no grounds to make any ethical or compassionate consideration for the chickens themselves. If this is in doubt, then the case is proved by the fact that unwanted baby chickens (that is all male chicks in the egg industry) are either suffocated or ground up alive, shortly after birth. The ChickieNob therefore realises the human fantasy of an utterly passive nonhuman animal with the sole function of providing animal proteins for human consumption. It is the ultimate domestication.

²⁵⁷ See below for a discussion of *sus multiorganifer*, otherwise known as “pigeons.”

²⁵⁸ Christine Chemnitz and Stanka Becheva, eds., *Meat Atlas: Facts and Figures about the Animals We Eat* (Ahrensfelde, Germany: Heinrich Böll Foundation and Friends of the Earth Europe, 2014), 10, http://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/meat_atlas2014_kommentierbar.pdf.

²⁵⁹ Samantha Noll, “Broiler Chickens and a Critique of the Epistemic Foundations of Animal Modification,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 26 (2013): 274.

The ChickieNob reflects genetic modification so audacious as to create a radical indeterminacy in terms of what Jimmy sees before him, the result of which is something profoundly disgusting. Disgust is evoked not only in the peculiar mix of lexical choices: “bulblike,” “stippled whitish-yellow skin,” “thick fleshy tubes,” but also stems from a radical indeterminacy in terms of the subject that we have before us. Ironically, “stippled” seems to evoke the Gerard Manley Hopkins poem, “Pied Beauty,” which we discussed in the introduction. Rather than presenting the variable and incalculable beauty of nature, here the term conjures an already featherless skin which has been produced under a regime of utter control and uniformity.

In “Economimesis,” Derrida notes that the disgusting is the “in-sensible and un-intelligible, irrepresentable and unnameable, the absolute other of the system.”²⁶⁰ In other words, language is never able to fully represent the disgusting, nor can the disgusting adequately be named. Accordingly, we witness the inability of language to properly refer to the ChickieNobs. It is not clear even if the ChickieNob is singular or plural, so whilst Jimmy refers to it as “it,” Crake calls them “chickens,” immediately correcting himself with “chicken parts.” Even when a name is given, things do not become much clearer. Crake tells Jimmy: “ChickieNobs they’re thinking of calling the stuff.” The term “stuff,” however, undercuts any notion of a single entity and the name itself comes to refer to the “animal” itself, the meatstuff and a chain of restaurants. The animal status of the ChickieNob is also far from certain. Jimmy’s initial thought is that “It would be like eating a large wart” (*OC* 239) and in *The Year of the Flood*, Ren, a vegetarian, is persuaded to eat half of her ChickieNobs on the basis that they “were really vegetables because they grew on stems and didn’t have faces” (154). A scientist expresses that opinion that “the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain” (*OC* 172), and in the chaos of the flood, a news reporter comments that “*What we’ve just seen is a crazed mob of God’s Gardeners, liberating a ChickieNobs production facility. Brad, this is hilarious, those ChickieNob things can’t even walk! (Laughter.)*” (*OC* 397). The preferred way, then, of referring to the ChickieNobs is with the word “thing” which is used even in conjunction with the given name of the creature. “Thing” points to a discomfort with using the official name and maintains a permanently alien sense to the creation. So despite what I refer to above as the ultimate domestication, there is a disturbing element whereby the ChickieNob resists domestication, retaining an outside status, refusing to assume the position of an everyday object.

This state of banishment would be typical of the disgusting as Sianne Ngai comments in her assessment of disgust: “disgust finds its object intolerable and demands its exclusion.”²⁶¹ Hence, ironically enough for a foodstuff, the ChickieNob can never be accepted or even tolerated. Martha Nassbaum observes that “the core elements of disgust are reminders of

²⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Economimesis,” trans. R Klein, *Diacritics* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 22.

²⁶¹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 336–7.

mortality and animality, seen as pollutants to the human.”²⁶² She argues that disgust arises in part from humanity’s disavowal of its inherent animality in that humans are disgusted by the things that connect their own bodies to the bodies of animals and to death and decay. Disgust, in this sense, can be read as a form of identification with the disgusting object—an identification which is simultaneously disavowed. Disgust is a form of denial—a rejection of two truths that we prefer to deny: One, that we are animals, and two, that we die. Meat, a portion of dead animal, would seem to be disgusting *par excellence*. We should not be surprised that meat and animal slaughter is hidden from view in Western societies, nor should we wonder at the public’s complicity in this state of affairs. The disavowal of the cruelty and suffering inflicted by the meat industry is the same disavowal of human animality.

Excluded, but required, meat occupies the position of what, in *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva describes as the abject. Indeed, her very first example is an edible animal product—the skin which forms on the surface of milk. “Food loathing,” she explains, “is perhaps the most elementary and archaic form of abjection.”²⁶³ For Kristeva, the abject is that which must be rejected and vomited out in order to separate the self from the other. In this sense, we can read Jimmy’s rejection of the ChickieNob alongside Derrida’s assertion that the animal is sacrificed in order to fix human subjectivity. And just as Derrida insists that we consume our other, Kristeva argues that the abject never entirely goes away. “From its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master.”²⁶⁴ The challenge of the abject is to the symbolic order, or to what we have so far been calling carnophallogocentrism. The abject refuses to be situated in the language-ordered world of objects but instead, and in a manner reminiscent of the white whale, threatens the whole system in its troubling unclassifiability. Reflecting on the ChickieNob, Jimmy later asks himself: “Why is it he feels some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed? How much is too much, how far is too far?” (OC 242). On this point, one critic asks “What kind of lines, though, is difficult to tell; are they religious dogmas on the sacred nature of life? Moral paradigms? Humanitarian concerns about the exploitation of other species? Or are they aesthetic objections to bioengineering projects that some may well perceive as disgusting?”²⁶⁵ There can be no doubt that his objections are, in part, aesthetic, but what is truly unsettling about ChickieNobs is that they threaten humans in their supposed exceptional status among animals.

²⁶² Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 99.

²⁶³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Mosca, “Crossing Human Boundaries: Apocalypse and Posthumanism in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*,” 41–2.

Kristeva continues that “the abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal.”²⁶⁶ In one sense, the ChickieNob could hardly be any less human-like. Yet, alternately, this *reductio ad absurdum* rendition of an animal reveals, in all its stark truth, the material nature of the animal—a collection of cells. The same logic that allows human corpses to be processed into carbon garboil and which permits the consumption of human flesh in branches of SecretBurgers operates here. It is a logic which gathers up all animals into a single and undifferentiated group. It operates in precisely the opposite direction to a Derridean understanding of animal life which would seek to understand and highlight differences. If a chicken ChickieNob is possible, then why not a human one? If the thing really feels no pain and the scientists have really “removed all the brain functions that had nothing to do with digestion, assimilation, and growth,” then why not make a human-meat-producing ChickieNob? Indeed, the pigoons, with their incorporated human DNA, are lurking around the corner, a few pages away.

Of course, as Crake confidently predicts, the ChickieNob enterprise is a financial success. “Those kids are going to clean up” (OC 238), he comments, neatly describing the sanitising effects of commerce. Jimmy soon forgets his qualms about the transgressions of the ChickieNobs, and grows used to “their bland tofulike consistency and their inoffensive flavour” (OC 344). For the reader, each further mention of ChickieNobs conjures up the nightmarish vision of the animal-protein tuber and it is only with an intense taste of irony that we read about their inoffensive flavour. Yet this is not to read Jimmy as simply a hypocrite who forgets about his objections once he can stop looking at the “live” ChickieNob. For the disgust that he feels fulfils a vital role: “abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.”²⁶⁷ In finding the ChickieNob revolting, Jimmy makes himself a little more human. He affirms the edges of culture and baulks at the unacceptable. Like Elisabeth Roudinesco, he prefers not to look at the spectacle of meat production, yet he is happy to consume animal proteins. This is to follow the logic of a humanism which establishes human exceptionalism through an exclusive capacity for pity, and which drives this division home through the consumption of nonhumans. There is no easy way to read ChickieNobs. The reader is repelled, yet simultaneously protected by this repulsion as we view this nightmarish other of the cultured human.

God’s Gardeners

In an unexpected narrative departure from *Oryx and Crake*, it is members of the eco-religious cult, the God’s Gardeners, who provide the focus for the last two novels in the trilogy. Atwood thus, in a move which wrong-footed many critics of *Oryx and Crake*, brings this marginal

²⁶⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

organisation, worthy only of a handful of references in the first novel, centre stage. In his review of *The Year of the Flood*, Fredric Jameson describes this “view from below” as “the most reliable vantage point from which to gauge and map a society,”²⁶⁸ and certainly we are invited to sympathise and identify with this fringe group more than we do with the inhabitants of the compounds. The God’s Gardeners follow what appears to be a version of Protestantism which has accepted the insights of evolutionary science. This group, existing on the fringes of the impoverished pleeblands, eschews consumer culture and attempts to limit the harm done to nonhuman life by growing its own food on a rooftop garden and following vegetarian diets. The reader is presented with a mindset where the killing and eating of animals is thoroughly abhorrent in a manner which, to borrow a term from Russian Formalism, defamiliarises the eating of meat. This is a viewpoint which prevails throughout the second and third novels of the trilogy and which provokes the reader into reappraising the question of eating well.

Through a series of first person perspectives, the consumption of animal proteins is presented as something extraordinary and deeply unsettling in a manner which reinscribes the violence of carnivorousness. Ever pragmatic, the normally vegetarian God’s Gardeners learn to eat animal proteins—a practice which they reserve for times of emergency. The younger members of the group are taught how to kill, skin, cook and consume a rabbit by Zeb, their “Urban Bloodshed Limitation” teacher:

“This is what you’ll have to do if the worst comes to the worst,” said Zeb. He handed me a chunk. I put it in my mouth. I found I could chew and swallow if I kept repeating in my head, “It’s really bean paste, it’s really bean paste...” I counted to a hundred and then it was down.

But I had the taste of rabbit in my mouth. It felt like I’d eaten a nosebleed. (YF 169)

In this scene, disgust is re-inscribed as a response to all consumption of meat and suggests that eating well does not sit comfortably with carnivorousness. In recalling the skinning of the rabbit, Ren records that “it still makes me feel sick to think about that part.” She describes the “too blue” veins of the rabbit as well as its “glistening sinews” (YF 168). Once again, the response to the unveiled production of meat combines disgust and revulsion whilst the nosebleed simile emphasises the continuities between humans and nonhumans. Yet, that meat is placed in the mouths of the God’s Gardeners (and they eat ever increasing amounts after the flood) serves to undercut any kind of purity of eating. Donna Haraway notes in her reading of Derrida that there is no getting away from the economy of carnivorousness where “outside Eden, eating means also killing, directly or indirectly, and killing well is an obligation akin to

²⁶⁸ Fredric Jameson, “Then You Are Them,” *London Review of Books* 31, no. 17 (September 10, 2009): 7.

eating well.”²⁶⁹ The God’s Gardeners, whose rooftop garden is appropriately named “Edencliff,” acknowledge that their notions of eating well rely on certain material conditions which could easily be swept away, yet, despite the impossibility of eating perfectly, they demonstrate that there are better and worse ways of eating. To return to Haraway, they show that “ethical veganism, for example, enacts a necessary truth, as well as bears crucial witness to the extremity of the brutality in our ‘normal’ relations with other animals.”²⁷⁰

The ethical stance of the God’s Gardeners connects to an intriguing re-reading of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Each section of *The Year of the Flood* begins with a sermon from the leader of the God’s Gardeners, Adam One, and it is here that the group’s theology is expounded to the reader. There is little doubt that a certain amount of ironic humour is poked at the earnest sermonising of Adam One and some of his readings border on the absurd, yet it would be a mistake to consider these sermons merely as amusing interludes. Adam interrogates many of the same areas as Derrida in his re-reading of the Bible. He notes that the naming of animals is “the first moment of human language” when “Adam claims his human soul.” He goes on “To Name is—we hope—to greet; to draw another towards oneself” (YF 15). In other words, he seeks to reinterpret Adam’s first speech act as a moment of connection and responsibility rather than of subjection and dominance. He speaks also of the flood, commenting on the aftermath of the annihilation:

Then God says a noteworthy thing. He says, “And the fear of you”—that is, Man—“and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air ... into your hand are they delivered.” Genesis 9:2. This is not God telling Man that he has a right to destroy all the Animals, as some claim. Instead it is a warning to God’s beloved Creatures: *Beware of Man in his evil heart.* (YF 109)

Adam proceeds to note that in making a covenant with nonhuman animals, God implicitly suggests that “Animals are not senseless matter, not mere chunks of meat. No; they have living Souls, or God could not have made a Covenant with them.” Before the biblical flood, man had been vegetarian, vegan even. It is only after the flood that, in the verse following Adam’s above quotation, God tells man that “Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.” Adam appears to be stressing that it is a part of man’s evil, a fact which God now accepts, that sees him as an eater of meat. A similar argument is made by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*:

In order to understand, after that first dietary apportionment, the introduction of meat diet, one must assume a cataclysm—for instance, a violation of divine rule and subsequent punishment. It is indeed only *after the Flood* that authorization is granted to eat “every moving thing that liveth” (Genesis 9:3). Far from being a

²⁶⁹ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 309.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

reward, such permission is accompanied by an acknowledgment of essential evil, and it includes a negative, incriminating connotation with respect to man: “For the imagination of man’s heart is evil” (Genesis 8:21). As if there had been an acknowledgment of a *bent toward murder* essential to human beings and the authorization for a meat diet was the recognition of that ineradicable “death drive,” seen here under its most primordial or archaic aspect—devouring.²⁷¹

These readings understand the carnivorous act as a symptom of an essential human disposition towards evil. In allowing humans to consume meat, God resigns himself to the evil of his creation and, as Kristeva goes on to explain, abandons the division whereby animal flesh is the preserve of God. Instead, bloodless flesh is now for man whilst blood is “destined for God.”²⁷² Adam One, in line with Kristeva, re-ascribes an originary violence in the consumption of meat. This analysis takes us beyond an economy of sacrifice since eating animals does not just produce the human subject, but produces it specifically as fallen, postdiluvian and evil.

Sus Multiorganifer

One of the most prominent life-forms created by biotechnology in the novels is *sus multiorganifer* or what are more usually referred to as pigoons—pig balloons, on account of their inflated size. These animals are designed to grow genetically human organs such as brain tissue, hearts, livers and kidneys “that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses” (OC 25). These pigs represent the fantasy of growing new organs to order, sidestepping the messiness of organ donation with its attendant risks of infection. The priorities of carnophallogocentrism are absolutely clear here. Whilst prolonging human life is the intended outcome of the project, the pigs themselves become hollowed-out shells, receptacles for the growth of human organs, living test tubes, or as they are referred to in *Oryx and Crake* “knock-out hosts.” The pigs play host to the organs and are taken hostage by their owners who most certainly have plans for them later. Rather than being destined for processing in a factory, as the modern pig is, the pigoon is made into a factory itself, where the genetically human product is manufactured, nurtured by its body, living, like the incorporated other, as an alien imposter, whose existence spells death. The Pigoon is the monstrous descendant of the OncoMouse, which has been explored in fascinating detail by Donna Haraway, most notably in the 1997 book

*Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse*TM.²⁷³ The

²⁷¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 96.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse*TM: *Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

OncoMouse is also a creature genetically engineered for death, in defence of what Derrida calls, “the putative human well-being of man.”²⁷⁴

In 2000, Jean-Luc Nancy published *L’Intrus* or, *The Intruder*, a short piece meditating on the heart transplant which he had undergone. Aware of the pace of technological change, he writes:

Less than twenty years before, transplants were not done, and certainly not with recourse to cyclosporine, which protects against rejection of the grafted organ. Twenty years hence, it is certain to be a matter of another kind of transplant, by other means.²⁷⁵

Indeed, the transplant presented through the pigeons is of another kind and through other means. It circumvents the ethical relationship between the “donor” and receiver of the transplanted organ. Nancy notes that

A notion of solidarity, if not fraternity, between “donor” and receiver was greatly emphasized, with the aim of promoting organ donation. And no one can doubt that this gift has become an elementary obligation of humanity (in the two senses of the word).²⁷⁶

Of course, for the pigeon, the fact of obligation entirely erases any sense of the “gift” of organ donation. Another novel which explores the ethics of transplantation and technology is Kazuo Ishiguro’s 2006 novel *Never Let Me Go* which tells the story of a group of human clones produced in order to “donate” their organs to “normal” humans.²⁷⁷ We can read these clones as literary cousins of the pigeons and here again the sense of gift and obligation which Nancy refers to is ironised. Just as readers of Ishiguro’s novel are made to see the violent injustices of the regime of enforced donations, we understand that there is no notion of solidarity or of fraternity between the pigeons and any future human recipient. Significantly, however, it is not just the organ donator who is compromised by this relationship. As Nancy writes of transplantation, “man becomes what he is: the most terrifying and troubling technician.”²⁷⁸ In this sense, we see how the technology of organ transplantation can threaten the human which it is designed to protect. In this sense, the moral status of the human in Ishiguro’s novel is badly compromised as the reader comes to identify with the clones who eventually succumb to their pre-destined death. Yet for all this, the novel never really escapes the confines of a humanism which values the lives of the clones as humans. Atwood’s trilogy, on the other hand, follows a more radical path with the pigeons—one which disturbs the human-animal division and which in some ways leads readers to reconsider their attitudes towards nonhuman animals.

²⁷⁴ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 25.

²⁷⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, “L’Intrus,” trans. Susan Hanson, *The New Centennial Review* 2, no. 3 (2002): 2.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷⁷ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).

²⁷⁸ Nancy, “L’Intrus,” 13.

Pigeons are creatures destined for consumption, although the route of incorporation is not oral. Despite this, the continuities between breeding animals for meat and for their organs see the pigeons introduced in the context of eating. Jimmy, as a child, is brought up on the OrganInc compound where the running joke is that the research pigeons are being served up in the staff restaurant:

“Pigeon pie again,” they would say. “Pigeon pancakes, pigeon popcorn. Come on, Jimmy, eat up!” This would upset Jimmy; he was confused about who should be allowed to eat what. He didn’t want to eat a pigeon because he thought of the pigeons as creatures much like himself. Neither he nor they had a lot of say in what was going on. (OC 27)

The consumption of the pigeon is something that the human finds difficult to stomach. Jimmy’s confusion once more turns on the question of who, or what, is good to eat. As with the pyre of infected animals, he is troubled by the continuities between himself and the animals. Yet these concerns are not limited to Jimmy. The excessive nature of the taunts directed at Jimmy, “pigeon pancakes, pigeon popcorn,” suggests a certain insecurity on the part of the taunters. These nonsense names, made even more comic by a juvenile alliteration, reveal a desire to neutralise the feared reality of consuming the pigeons. These fears are also evident in the promotional material produced by OrganInc: “to set the queasy at ease, it was claimed that none of the defunct pigeons ended up as bacon and sausages: no one would want to eat an animal whose cells were identical to at least some of their own” (27). What is made explicit here is that eating is a practice framed by taboos, the most powerful of which prohibits cannibalism. Eating well is beset by risks whereby the pigeon poses the risk that the human might inadvertently eat himself.

It might be tempting to read the pigeon as a figure designed to warn us of a disastrous future where, through the misadventures of bioengineering, humans return to the savage status of the uncivilised cannibal. Yet it is the viewpoint of the young Jimmy which opens the way for another reading—a different manner of ingesting the pigeon. Both of the unmistakably ethical responses which Jimmy experiences with regards to his eating of the other come in response to face to face interactions with other animals. It is the dead animals “looking at him reproachfully” and the pigeons who “glanced up at him as if they saw him, really saw him, and might have plans for him later” (30), that cause Jimmy shame and confusion in terms of his treatment of them. This reaction, what in Levinasian terms we would call “the epiphany of the face,”²⁷⁹ connects the eating of the monstrous pigeons with the consumption of cows, sheep and pigs.

²⁷⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199 Although Levinas himself stops short of granting nonhuman animals faces, Derrida insists on the face to face nature of a human-animal interaction.

The economy of eating is dramatically complicated in the aftermath of the Waterless Flood, for the pigeons, who, at the start of *Oryx and Crake* “might have plans” for Jimmy, turn out to be a mortal threat, both to him in *Oryx and Crake*, and to Toby in *The Year of the Flood*. These enlarged pigs stand as a phenomenal literary creation which consistently evade and trouble the traditional human-animal dichotomy. As Jimmy endures a frightening face-off with a group of pigeons, the reader is presented with a nonhuman life form which demonstrably overreaches the traditional limits imposed on nonhuman animals. Jimmy soon realises that:

Those beasts are smart enough to fake a retreat, then lurk around the next corner. They'd bowl him over, trample him, then rip him open, munch up the organs first. (OC 276)

This scene takes us beyond simple reversals, for although it is now Jimmy's organs which are at stake, the more pressing critical concern is the concept of pretence, which we touched on in Chapter One and which is explored in some detail in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. Here, Derrida questions Lacan's claim that nonhuman animals are characterised by an inability to pretend to pretend. (Lacan maintains that nonhuman animals are only capable of a simple pretence whereby they can pretend, but not lie.) Derrida points out that the act of pretending is always doubled, indistinguishable from pretending to pretend and this is tacitly acknowledged by Jimmy (who now refers to himself as Snowman) in that he can't know if the pigeons have faked their retreat and are lying in wait, have really retreated, or have faked a fake retreat. He reflects that “He knows their tastes. A brainy and omnivorous animal, the pigeon” (276). He knows their tastes *because* they are brainy and omnivorous animals, just like him: “some of them may even have human neocortex tissue growing in their crafty wicked heads.” This scene marks a transgression of the limits normally imposed on nonhuman animals since it testifies that “the animal takes the other into account.”²⁸⁰ The animal, at this point, becomes a distinctly human-like subject with both a knowledge of the self and the other. Once Snowman understands this, he reimagines himself from the pigeon point of view, rendering himself “a delicious meat pie, just waiting to be opened up” (314). Giving up, it seems, on the all-powerful benefits of human exceptionalism, he soon wishes for “a burrow of his own. A burrow, a shell, some pincers.” This possibly faked retreat, then, realises the pigeons as a serious material threat to Snowman's life whilst dismissing conventional modes of thinking about nonhuman animals to the extent that the pigeons must be read as an epistemological threat to the privileged being of man.

Pigeons also overstep the traditional limits of nonhuman animality in their practicing of burial and mourning. In *The Year of the Flood*, Toby, another survivor of the flood, shoots a pigeon

²⁸⁰ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 134.

dead from her rooftop hideout. On returning to the corpse some days later, she finds that it has been scattered with ferns and rose petals:

Usually they'd just eat a dead pig, the same way they'd eat anything else. But they haven't been eating this one.

Could the pigs have been having a funeral? Could they be bringing memorial bouquets? She finds this idea truly frightening. (394)

Pigeons have a politics of eating. Not only are fellow pigeons off the menu, but, one could say (to borrow the theory of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*) that they symbolically consume their dead through the work of mourning.²⁸¹ Pigeons thus affirm Derrida's claim in *Aporias* that "one can say that animals have a very significant relation to death, to murder and to war (hence, to borders), to mourning and to hospitality, and so forth."²⁸² Yet Toby finds the burial-mourning rituals of pigeons profoundly alarming. This episode demonstrates a mismatch between the metaphysical construction of the animal as a being entirely distinct from the human, and the material reality of the areas of similarity and connection. For Toby, this is a vertiginous moment to which her response is one of fear. This is a "true" fear arising from the need for a profound reappraisal of the relative positions of humans and pigeons.

Pigeons, finally, challenge the human subject most powerfully because they are evil. Although a knowledge of good and evil is traditionally reserved for the human, the pigeons' capacity for evil is noted by Toby and explored through the sin of revenge. On discovering that the pigeons have returned to destroy her garden and food supply, her thoughts are given in free indirect speech: "They've dug under the fence, then gone on a rampage. Surely it was less of a feeding frenzy than an act of revenge." The offending pigs are still in view, "they've been watching for her: it's as if they want to witness her dismay" (*YF* 383). Not only are the pigs seen as capable of revenge for its own sake, but are said to take pleasure in its spectacle. If Toby exhibits doubt as to the motivations of the pigeons at this point, after a parallel episode in which she shoots a human from her rooftop, she is more certain. Gone are the qualifications of "surely" and "as if," instead, seemingly with access to their "crafty wicked heads," she thinks: "They'll want revenge, it's only human. They'll be vindictive, like the pigs" (421). Here, the point that a knowledge of evil is no longer an effective test for distinguishing between humans and animals is made explicitly. The example of the pigs' behaviour renders the phrase "it's only human" so ironic as to be entirely redundant. "Only human" can no longer apply only to humans and it is no longer only humans who are only human. It is now that we can see the extent to which

²⁸¹ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

²⁸² Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 76.

Atwood's concerns deviate from those of Ishiguro. By creating human clones as the knockout hosts for the growth of organs, Ishiguro's novel affirms humanism in a way that Atwood's does not. The clones are, after all, identical to humans and much of the novel is concerned with demonstrating their capacity for individuality, artistic expression and love—supposedly uniquely human qualities. Atwood, on the other hand, presents the pigoons as undeniably unhuman, uncanny and unsettling in a manner which directly challenges the putative uniqueness of the human animal.

MaddAddam, the final novel in the trilogy, sees an expanded role for the pigoons who develop a complex set of relationships with the surviving humans after the flood. Perhaps the most significant change concerns the revelation that, with the use of Crakers as translators, the humans are able to speak with the pigoons. This ability to communicate allows the two species to codify their practices of eating well. The pigoons agree not to kill or eat the humans or their vegetables and the humans agree not to eat the pigoons. This agreement is the upshot of a joint pigoon-human mission to capture two mutual enemy humans. After the mission, there is a discussion with the pigoons concerning the corpses of two humans killed in the fighting which Toby records in her diary:

Following a short discussion, the Pigoons understood that we did not wish to eat Adam and Jimmy, nor would we wish the Pigoons to do that. And they concurred. Their rules in such matters appear complex: dead farrow are eaten by pregnant mothers to provide more protein for growing infants, but adults, and especially adults of note, are contributed to the general ecosystem. All other species are, however, up for grabs. (*M* 455)

By the end of the trilogy, it is the pigoons who have undergone the most remarkable metamorphosis, at least from the point of view of the human characters and, presumably, the reader. From being imprisoned test animals, conceived as empty albeit living shells for the growth and harvesting of human organs, they move through being perceived as crafty and wicked, revenge-seeking yet funeral-holding thoroughly uncanny beasts, to being a species understood as complex and sophisticated with cultural practices and indeed practices of eating well comparable to that of humans. By the close of *MaddAddam*, the pigoons and humans (as well as the Crakers) are living alongside one another with sufficient mutual understanding that the pigoons and humans are no longer a threat to one another. Of course the pigoons have not changed in any crucial manner. What has changed is a human appreciation of the pigoon, a change which occurs primarily through the ability to communicate with the pigoons.

Of course it is not coincidental that the one nonhuman species which the humans enter into a meaningful relationship with is an animal remarkably close to the human. So close, in fact, that there are parts of them which are, genetically at least, human—we are often reminded how the

pigeons have human neocortex in their brains. Pigeons, in this sense, represent a most literal anthropomorphism. Consequently, this pigeon-friendly resolution to the novels rehearses, once again, the priorities of an anthropocentrism which prizes human characteristics over all others. The pigeons are respected because they are smart and because they respect their dead etc. Moreover, it is their explicit capabilities for language communication which enables the human-pigeon pact to be made. Despite this, the story of the pigeons presents a narrative of gradual unveiling which, by the end, has exposed both the complexities of the pigeons and the wilful failure of the humans to appreciate this subtlety and sophistication. As we have seen, it appears that evidence of the pigeons' intelligence was staring us in the face all along. Jimmy sees it when, as a child, he returns the gaze of pigeons which "glanced up at him as if they saw him, really saw him, and might have plans for him later" (30). Atwood implies that all you really need to do is look in order to start to understand your ethical obligations towards nonhuman animals. The young Jimmy instinctively feels that there is more to the pigeons than what the corporations would have of them—as "knockout hosts" for the all-important human biological material.

Of course what is finally revealed about the pigeons is their capacity for language, an ability which is perhaps foreshadowed by Jimmy's obsessive memories of Alex the parrot, a famous African Grey parrot who was the principal research subject of Dr. Irene Pepperberg and who demonstrated remarkable linguistic and cognitive abilities until his unexpected death in 2007. Watching old CD-ROMs in his school library, Jimmy views videos of Alex: "He liked the part where Alex invented a new word—cork-nut, for almond" (OC 61). Jimmy adopts this neologism as a term of mild abuse: "*Cork-nut*, he'd say to anyone who pissed him off. Anyone who wasn't a girl. No one but him and Alex the parrot knew exactly what cork-nut meant, so it was pretty demolishing" (OC 67). "Cork-nut" is significant in that it displays Alex's ability to creatively generate words rather than just repeat what his researchers say in a rote manner. It demonstrates a linguistic creativity generally thought to be the sole reserve of humans. By adopting his term, Jimmy enters into an alliance with Alex. He accepts Alex's ability to make words and perhaps even his ability to change language. Pepperberg's research is testament to what you can find if you were only to look in the right way—she adapted methods designed to teach humans in order to communicate with Alex. What her research shows, and what Jimmy seems to appreciate, is that a human-animal relationship, where the human is genuinely committed to the nonhuman, has results which are unpredictable and deeply challenging to accepted ideas concerning humans and nonhumans. This change in relationship was strikingly evident in that a number of newspapers printed an obituary for Alex. Indeed the entire obituary page of *The Economist* magazine of September 22nd 2007 was devoted to Alex the parrot.

Crakers: The Ends of Man

The Crakers are the transhumans meticulously bioengineered by Crake, as a kind of human 2.0, designed to go forth and multiply once his virus has wiped out humanity. They are recognisably human, but with a number of features spliced into their DNA from other animals. Physically, they appear “perfect [...], their naked bodies like a fourteen-year-old’s comic-book rendition of how bodies ought to be” (*M 20*), their skins secrete an insect-repelling citrusy scent, their eyes are luminescent, their urine deters wild animals. Females indicate sexual readiness when their abdomens turn blue. Males respond with their “bright blue and unnaturally large penises [...] wagging from side to side like the tails of friendly dogs” (*M 20*). They can purr in order to accelerate the healing process and they have no need for clothes. In addition, in an attempt to remove what Crake sees as hard-wired human evils, they have no concept of killing or war, jealousy, racism or sexual rivalry and adhere to a herbivorous diet. Like rabbits, they produce and eat caecotrophs. Hence they exhibit hybridity which brings them into genetic alliance with cats, rabbits, citrus fruit, crabs, baboons, octopuses, penguins and silverfish. Nothing disgusts or alarms the Crakers more than the eating of animal flesh. As with many of the novels’ engineered bioforms, the Crakers are vehicles for Atwood’s satirical flourishes, but their eating habits and eventual destination move Atwood’s novel towards an affirmation of posthumanism.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman/Jimmy finds himself monstrous in comparison to the perfect forms of the Crakers. Tellingly, his monstrousness revolves around his diet:

If things had gone as Crake wanted, there would be no more such killing—no more human predation—but he’d reckoned without Snowman and his beastly appetites. Snowman can’t live on clover. The people would never eat a fish themselves, but they have to bring him one a week because he’s told them Crake has decreed it. They’ve accepted Snowman’s monstrousness, they’ve known from the beginning he was a separate order of being, so they weren’t surprised by this. [...]

The people keep their distance and avert their eyes while he crams handfuls of fishiness into his mouth and sucks out the eyes and cheeks, groaning with pleasure. Perhaps it’s like hearing a lion gorge itself, at the zoo, back when there were zoos, back when there were lions—a rending and crunching, a horrible gobbling and gulping—and, like those long-gone zoo visitors, the Crakers can’t help peeking. The spectacle of depravity is of interest even to them, it seems, purified by chlorophyll though they are. (*OC 116-7*)

The carnivorousness which, before the flood, is a function of humanism now renders Snowman beastly. The spectacle of meat consumption, removed from the rarefied surroundings of *Rarity* and stripped of its cultural context returns us once again to the realm of the disgusting. The eyes of the Crakers are averted as Snowman, resplendent in his abominations, sucks on the eyes of the fish whilst the onomatopoeic rending, crunching, gobbling and gulping emphasises the unseemly sounds which grate the Crakers’ ears. At the expense of his human dignity, Snowman

emits shameful groans of pleasure as he abases himself in front of the Crakers. The narrative structure shows Snowman perceiving himself as the object of interest of the voyeuristic gaze of the Crakers—a level of self-awareness which ought to be a celebration of the complexities of the human mind, but which instead is complicit in a process of stripping away his defining human characteristic—separation from animality. And herein lies the end of man.

In “The Ends of Man,” Derrida notes how western metaphysics is structured by humanism evident in the use of the word “we.” He states that “there is an uninterrupted metaphysical familiarity with that which, so naturally, links the *we* of the philosopher to ‘we men,’ to the *we* in the horizon of humanity.”²⁸³ Memorably, he notes that Heidegger’s term *dasein*, “though not man, is nevertheless *nothing other* than man.”²⁸⁴ In other words, philosophy will only ever have really been interested in man which is understood as an end in itself. In this sense, philosophy finds itself incapable of thinking beyond man, or of thinking the end of humanism as anything other than the apocalypse: “What is difficult to think today is an end of man [...] which would not be a teleology in the first person plural.”²⁸⁵ The important point here, as Neil Badmington underlines, is that “Because every aspect of Western thought is touched in some way by the legacy of humanism, any claim to be writing the end of ‘Man’ is bound to be written in the language of ‘Man’.”²⁸⁶ Posthumanism, then, does not signal a break from humanism so much as a contamination, and it is precisely this which plays out at the end of the trilogy.

With the death of Toby, the narration of the closing section of *MaddAddam* is taken over by Blackbeard, one of the Crakers. With this gesture, Atwood subtly suggests the possibility of posthuman narrative whilst the closing moments of the novel point towards a generation of posthumans. Having had intercourse with the Crakers, three of the humans give birth to what the Blackbeard terms “Craker hybrids” (M 458). These infants represent the future for the human race and they demonstrate that, as Derrida notes, even the apocalypse “gives itself over, by calculation, to the incalculable, to chance and luck.”²⁸⁷ In other words, the careful scientific calculations of Crake cannot eliminate the chance of what comes after the apocalypse. This chance is closely connected to the agency of surviving animal life. If the Crakers represent the

²⁸³ Jacques Derrida, “The Ends of Man,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 116.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁸⁶ Neil Badmington, “Pod Almighty!; Or, Humanism, Posthumanism, and the Strange Case of Invasion of the Body Snatchers,” *Textual Practice* 15, no. 1 (2001): 13.

²⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now: Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 404.

engineered break from humanity, these hybrid children are emblematic of posthumanism since, as Badmington puts it, humanism is something for which “there is no pure outside.”²⁸⁸

As it must, the future remains monstrously unknowable. Of the neonates, the humans ask themselves “Will they have built-in insect repellent, or the unique vocal structures that enable purring and Craker singing? Will they share the Craker sexual cycles?” (*M* 462). The future for humankind is left as a string of questions which leave in uncertainty both physiological and cultural characteristics of the race to come, but Blackbeard emphatically describes a yet to be born child as a “thing of hope” (474). This returns us to those critics who read *Oryx and Crake* as a warning about the dangers of posthumanism. Atwood herself writes: “If you’re going to do gene-splicing, you’re going down a very strange path indeed. If you’re going to do it on humans, what you have to ask yourself is, do you want the human race to remain human?”²⁸⁹ This question seems to be premised on an essentialist notion of the human, a meaning or set of meanings rooted, in the human genome. It is seemingly at odds with the close of the novel where, despite the fact that the human genome looks to be forever melded with the genetic modifications envisaged by Crake, the tone of the ending is far from despairing.

Indeed, as I hope we have seen, one of the most powerful effects of the trilogy is to render the notion of “remaining human” highly problematic. Through the exploration of the effects of eating well, or otherwise, what it means or what it is to be human comes dramatically unravelled. Whilst, as Calarco observes, “the question of eating well cannot be decided once and for all,”²⁹⁰ the God’s Gardeners reveal the critical and ethical importance of a certain posthumanism in that they demonstrate that carnophallogocentrism can be resisted. Their narratives serve to reinscribe an essentially ethical disgust into the consumption of animal proteins. This is a disgust that has—as in the case of the ChickieNobs—been negated through the effects of consumer capitalism. It is the focus on the God’s Gardeners which signals a crucial move from the first novel to the second and presents an opening from the apocalyptic to the posthuman. In *Oryx and Crake*, with the onset of Crake’s engineered virus, the disgust that has been disavowed through the mass-consumption of fast foodstuffs finds cathartic release, as humanity collectively vomits up all that it has consumed in a global wave of apocalyptic nausea. Yet, in the end, Atwood seeks a narrative which is not apocalyptic. The ends of the trilogy are many. Each novel has an end, none of which are final and as we see above, there is nothing certain about the future of humanity at the close of *MaddAddam*. In untying some of the knots

²⁸⁸ Badmington, “Pod Almighty!; Or, Humanism, Posthumanism, and the Strange Case of Invasion of the Body Snatchers,” 13.

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Bouson, “‘It’s Game Over Forever’: Atwood’s Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*,” 140.

²⁹⁰ Matthew Calarco, “Deconstruction Is Not Vegetarianism: Humanism, Subjectivity, and Animal Ethics,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 37, no. 2 (2004): 195.

of humanism, Atwood opens the way for a future, ironically enough (for an apocalyptic trilogy), in which human appetites for eating well present a hopeful outlook for mankind.

Chapter Four

American Pastoral's Crisis of Humanism: Hands, Gloves and one Colossal Turkey

Questions concerning nonhuman animals are in no way central to Philip Roth's 1997 novel *American Pastoral*. The book is by no means an obvious place to explore literature's relation to animality for this is not one of Roth's explicit concerns as a writer. Yet for an author like Roth, who seeks to interrogate the human condition and who is interested, in *American Pastoral*, in testing the limits of rational behaviour, there is an inevitability that nonhuman animals will make an appearance, for, as we have seen, it is precisely humans' animal others which guard the borders of the human. We have noted how this sacrificed animal is violently erased from the stories that humans tell about themselves, but, like the abject ChickieNobs of the previous chapter, these beasts, which must be killed over and over again, haunt the human and can reappear in uncanny ways. This is especially the case when, as in *American Pastoral*, the human subject is shaken from his comfortable position of autonomous subjecthood.

Having uncritically absorbed the conformist capitalist logic of white middle class America as a teenager, Seymour "Swede" Levov, the novel's unfortunate hero, is set up for precisely such a catastrophic fall. The high school sporting hero becomes the successful businessman as the Swede moves from his immigrant Jewish background and embarks on an "isomorphism to the WASP world."²⁹¹ Exploring aspects of the novel which relate to familiar territory for Roth, critics have concentrated on questions of Jewishness, America and American history and democracy in their readings.²⁹² Yet running alongside the politico-cultural upheaval explored in the novel, the 1960s and 70s saw a theoretical shift described by Cary Wolfe as a "crisis of humanism,"²⁹³ whereby the traditional concept of the human as the rational, sovereign individual became decreasingly tenable. This is a crisis which lurks beneath the more obvious false ideologies held by the Swede. It is not just his Jewishness, or his deluded notions of America which leave him unprepared for and unable to cope with the catastrophic events which

²⁹¹ Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (London: Vintage, 1998), 89.

²⁹² See, for example Derek Parker Royal, "Reimagining the Ethnic Subject in Roth's *American Pastoral*," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 20 (2001): 1–16; Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, "Mourning the 'Greatest Generation': Myth and History in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 51, no. 1 (2005): 1–24; Aimee Pozorski, "*American Pastoral* and the Traumatic Ideals of Democracy," *Philip Roth Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009): 75–92.

²⁹³ Cary Wolfe, "Introduction," in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), x.

befall him, but in a more profound manner, it is the Swede's mistaken notions of the human which lead to his undoing. The tenets of humanism (and here we should not overlook the Latin root of tenet—"he holds") are explicitly the things around which the Swede has built his life and success. It is, in other words, extremely apt that he has made it his business to make from the dead skins of animals clothing for the human hand. In this chapter, we will explore firstly how a rejection of humanism is foregrounded by Zuckerman, the novel's narrator, and then proceed, in a discussion which will pass through colossal turkeys and Jainism, to look at how Heidegger's discourse on hands is uncannily echoed and unwittingly deconstructed by the Swede.

Getting it Wrong

The Swede's story only properly gets going after a lengthy framing section in which Zuckerman, Roth's alter-ego and the narrator of the novel, describes his childhood devotion to the Swede and details a dinner that they shared, at the Swede's request, as older men. This dinner proves to be a great disappointment to Zuckerman who finds himself profoundly bored by the bland "unobjectionableness" of the Swede, discovering of his childhood hero that "all that rose to the surface was more surface" (23). Although the Swede has asked to meet Zuckerman in order to help him write about his dead father who has "suffered because of the shocks that befell his loved ones" (18), no details of these shocks are forthcoming and Zuckerman takes the Swede to be "the embodiment of nothing" (39). This conclusion is immediately followed with the intriguing statement: "I was wrong. Never more mistaken about anyone in my life."

This is not merely a stock literary device designed to keep us hooked on the narrative. The mistaken interpretation of the Swede opens into a crucial and somewhat critically overlooked area of the novel which concerns the nature of the human. Indeed, if I am correct, it is the first hint at Zuckerman's conception of the human as an animal radically different from the traditional notion of the *animal rationale*. This idea of the mistaken human is one which comes to dominate the novel and it seems that the narrative frame is set up primarily with the purpose of explicitly introducing this theme of mistake, error and human mutual unintelligibility. For Zuckerman, a novelist and our narrator, nothing could be of more significance than getting people right, yet he stresses, in a wonderfully lyrical passage, his and everybody else's inability to do this. His meditation on wrongness is worth quoting at length:

You fight your superficiality, your shallowness, so as to come at people without unreal expectations, without an overload of bias or hope or arrogance, as untanklike as you can be, sans cannons and machine guns and steel plating half a foot thick; you come at them unmenacingly on your own ten toes instead of tearing up the turf with your caterpillar treads, take them on with an open mind, as equals,

man to man as we used to say, and yet you never fail to get them wrong. You might as well have the brain of a tank. You get them wrong before you meet them, while you're anticipating meeting them; you get them wrong while you're with them; and then you go home to tell somebody else about the meeting and you get them all wrong again. Since the same generally goes for them with you, the whole thing is really a dazzling illusion, empty of all perception, an astonishing farce of misperception. (35)

Zuckerman's extended metaphor here opposes an uncomprehending mechanical militarism to the organic and bare human, with mind, brain and exposed toes. It suggests that the unarmed man, free from all technical prostheses, would be the ideal tool for understanding the other. Yet within this metaphor, the failure of this would-be naked human to get the other right is recognised. Zuckerman strongly suggests that genuine or accurate understanding is impossible. By implication then, the unarmed human is also impossible—try as you might to walk on your own ten toes, there will always be a contamination of caterpillar treads. The passage goes on, however, to affirm this state of affairs:

The fact remains that getting people right is not what living is all about anyway. It is getting them wrong that is living. It is getting them wrong and wrong and wrong and then, on careful consideration, getting them wrong again. That's how we know we're alive: we're wrong. (35)

The human condition, according to this thesis, would be one of perpetual error. In more Cartesian terms, Zuckerman insists that "I'm wrong, therefore I am." Wrongness provides a proof of existence and is converted, if not into a positive attribute, then at least to one which need not be resisted. In this way, Zuckerman gives up on the peaceful, naked human and accepts instead the human with the brain of a tank. This passage is crucial to understanding the novel as a whole. As Parker Royal has importantly pointed out, "Almost everything that we know about the Swede's life—the details surrounding Merry's bombing, her flight and disappearance, the family's attempts to cope with her actions, and the Swede's finding her years later as a follower of Jainism—is, as far as we know, the product of Zuckerman's imagination."²⁹⁴ What is made clear in the narrative is that Zuckerman is not just telling the story of the Swede's life, but is also actively inventing it, or as Zuckerman puts it, he "dreamed a realistic chronicle" (89). On this point, Ben Railton correctly directs our attention to the connection between realism and the role of the "novelist-narrator,"²⁹⁵ but does not emphasise how the opening section of the novel undermines the credibility of that narrator. Before we, as readers, even properly embark on the story, we are told in paradoxical fashion that "anything more I wanted to know, I'd have to

²⁹⁴ Derek Parker Royal, "Pastoral Dreams and National Identity in *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist*," in *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author* (London: Praeger, 2005), 199.

²⁹⁵ Ben Railton, "Novelist-Narrators of the American Dream: The (Meta-)Realistic Chronicles of Cather, Fitzgerald, Roth, and Díaz," *American Literary Realism* 43, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 136.

make up” (74). The wrongness of the characterisation is again affirmed with the imagined response of Jerry, the Swede’s brother, to reading the text:

Nothing bears the slightest resemblance to... here, for instance, giving my brother a mind, awareness. The guy responds with consciousness to his loss. But my brother is a guy with cognitive problems—this is nowhere like the mind he had. This is the mind he didn’t have. (75)

We are told, explicitly, that the text we are reading is wrong. Not only is it a fabrication, but according to the (also fabricated) response of the Swede’s brother, it also gets the Swede’s very character fundamentally wrong—his mind is the wrong mind. This fabricated response to a fabricated story firmly locates the text within the framework of the “dazzling illusion.” Yet for all this, Zuckerman refuses to give up on the legitimacy of the text, arguing that his fictional version of the Swede is just as valid as Jerry’s understanding of his brother: “whether that meant my conception of the Swede was any more fallacious than the conception held by Jerry... Who can know?” (77). The novel is framed with a device which explicitly demonstrates the rather disappointing limits of the rational human. Careful consideration does not bring truth, rather it provides another wrong answer. The human condition is characterised by wrongness—the human is wrong to its core.

In this sense, the only kind of knowledge that it is possible to have relates to minutiae where a knowledge of the specific prohibits authority with regard to broader topics. Hence in *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), Zuckerman famously stresses the specificity of his knowledge:

I am not an authority on Israel. I’m an authority on Newark. Not even on Newark. On the Weequahic section of Newark. If the truth be known, not even on the whole of the Weequahic section. I don’t even go below Bergen Street.²⁹⁶

This is mirrored by the Swede who is an expert on gloves, but as his brother, Jerry, viciously claims, has no idea about anything else:

You think you know what a man is? You have no idea what a man is. You think you know what a daughter is? You have no idea what a daughter is. You think you know what this country is? You have no idea what this country is. You have a false image of everything. All you know is what a fucking glove is. (276)

According to Jerry’s somewhat deranged rant down the telephone at his suffering brother, the Swede has no conception of other humans, including even members of his own family. Sadly, for all its violent aggression, there is some truth to Jerry’s diatribe. During the meal that the Swede attends immediately after this rather one-way conversation, the Swede discovers some

²⁹⁶ Philip Roth, *The Anatomy Lesson* (London: Vintage, 1995), 97.

catastrophic facts: that his wife is having an affair with his neighbour and that his one-time mistress harboured his fugitive daughter.

A word that keeps appearing in the novel is astonishment. We have encountered the word above in Zuckerman's judgement of human knowledge as an "astonishing farce of misperception" and Zuckerman ends a speech about his high school reunion by emphasising his astonishment at having grown old.²⁹⁷ It seems that he wishes to impress astonishment as a condition of being human and we are not surprised to see the word reappear at the dinner as the Swede finally is forced to face his own profound wrongness concerning other humans:

That people were manifold creatures didn't come as a surprise to the Swede, even if it was a bit of a shock to realize it anew when someone let you down. What was astonishing to him was how people seemed to run out of their own being, run out of whatever the stuff was that made them who they were and, drained of themselves, turn into the sort of people they would once have felt sorry for. It was as though while their lives were rich and full they were secretly sick of themselves and couldn't wait to dispose of their sanity and their health and all sense of proportion so as to get down to that other self, the true self, who was a wholly deluded fuckup. It was as though being in tune with life was an accident that might sometimes befall the fortunate young but was otherwise something for which human beings lacked any real affinity. How odd. And how odd it made him seem to himself to think that he who had always felt blessed to be numbered among the countless unembattled normal ones might, in fact, be the abnormality, a stranger from real life because of his being so sturdily rooted. (327)

Here, Zuckerman opens up a gap between someone's "being" and their "true self." If their being is the cultured, civilised and rational person, then the true self, free of proportion and sanity is a "wholly deluded fuckup." This condenses the vision of the human which Zuckerman works through for much of the novel. It is not merely the Swede's deluded version of humanity, but is something closer to the conclusions that the novelist narrator has come to about mankind. He depicts man as a being dramatically inferior to the ideals of a rational humanism. Indeed, one could say that for Zuckerman, the human is opposed even to the doctrines of humanism—is secretly sick of them and cannot wait to vomit up the accepted norms which constitute "life." Perhaps most perplexing is the stress on delusion. If humans are inherently delusional then all insights, including the above one, are rendered suspect, if not ultimately useless. This position negates rational thought and fatally undermines knowledge.

²⁹⁷ "It's astonishing that everything so immediately visible in our lives as classmates we still remember so precisely. The intensity of feeling that we have seeing one another today is also astonishing. But most astonishing is that we are nearing the age that our grandparents were when we first went off to be freshmen at the annex on February 1, 1946. What is astonishing is that we, who had no idea how anything was going to turn out, now know exactly what happened. That the results are in for the class of January 1950—the unanswerable questions answered, the future revealed – is that not astonishing? To have lived—and in this country, and in our time, and as who we were. Astonishing." (44)

In a philosophical sense, this outlook undermines traditional conceptions of the human as the *animal rationale*. Taking Heidegger's account of the human, although he is critical of classical humanism, he maintains a strict dividing line between humans and all other animals. As we have seen, this division operates around an animal's access to the world. Matthew Calarco describes what is for Heidegger the crucial difference between human and nonhuman animals:

Heidegger does believe that plants and animals have access to other beings around them; he denies, however, that plants or animals are able to access these other entities *in their being*, or *as such*, in the way that human beings with the language and the world are able to do.²⁹⁸

American Pastoral, in its pursuit of wrongness, of the dazzling illusion, of astonishment and of the human fuckup powerfully refutes this conception of the human. Humans, as we have seen, do not have access to other entities in their being. On the contrary, we only know that we are alive because we are wrong. With this wrongness in mind, we now proceed to explore the necessary steps that Zuckerman takes in his demolition of traditional humanism. We will continue to read the novel alongside Heidegger's explanations of humanism and will examine, one by one, the structures and narratives of the human which unravel before the Swede's eyes.

The American Pastoral *Par Excellence*

Growing up in Newark in the 1950s, the Swede's adolescence sees him transformed from the specificities of his individuality and his community into the embodiment of both the ideal American and the ideal human. He is revered by his local Jewish community primarily due to his difference from them and is marked out by his tall frame, blond hair and by his exceptional capabilities as a sportsman. Emphasising delusion, the narrator, Zuckerman, who grew up alongside him, recalls: "Through the Swede, the neighbourhood entered a fantasy about itself and about the world [...] our families could forget the way things actually work and make an athletic performance the repository of all their hopes" (4). David Gooblar notes that the Swede is so exceptional as to appear "as a *sui generis* Adam, born with the looks, the confidence, the grace to appear untouched by all outside contingency,"²⁹⁹ and this is a fantasy version of himself which the Swede readily adopts. He lives out the community's dream by marrying Dawn Dwyer, the beauty queen Miss New Jersey, following his father as a successful businessman and moving out of Jewish Weequahic to the affluent neighbourhood of Old Rimrock. This process leads him to a profound love of his country, whereby "he lived in America the way he lived inside his own skin" (213). Gary Johnson observes this connection

²⁹⁸ Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*, 50.

²⁹⁹ David Gooblar, "The American Experience: *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*," in *The Major Phases of Philip Roth* (London: Continuum, 2011), 146.

between the country and the human and comments that, “Zuckerman is dazzled by the Swede’s physical gifts, his grace and his natural style, all of which characterize the Swede not only as an athlete but also as a kind of ideal human.”³⁰⁰ In this sense, the novel becomes an exploration of the idealising humanism that the Swede has absorbed from his adolescence. In advance, this ideology would be limited by the naivety of youth and premised on an impossible separation from his community and from “all outside contingency.” The Swede’s pursuit of a perfect life through a combination of assimilation and the general auspices of the American Dream is, however, blown apart when his daughter, Merry, plants a bomb at the local post office in protest at the Vietnam War. She kills a local doctor and is not seen by her father for another five years. Although he does manage to contact her eventually, their meeting is disastrous. By the end of the novel, the Swede finds himself in a world he cannot understand, permanently estranged from his terrorist daughter and on the cusp of divorce from his adulterous wife. He has witnessed the riotous social decline of Newark, where his factory is located, and is about to move his business away from America.

In contrast to the wrongness and illogic that Zuckerman sees as being fundamental to human life, the Swede, until his daughter’s bomb, organises his life by the rational strictures of American Pastoralism. Clearly, it is a distinctly American discourse of capitalist endeavour and self-authorship which the Swede subscribes to and his adoption of American national mythology often sees him looking ridiculous—not least when he regularly imagines himself as Johnny Appleseed, flinging out handfuls of seed as he walks home from the grocery store. The mechanics of this invention are elucidated most explicitly in a short and extraordinary anecdotal aside which names the Thanksgiving dinner as “the American Pastoral par excellence” (402). The narrator describes the festival as:

The neutral dereligionized ground of Thanksgiving, when everybody gets to eat the same thing, nobody sneaking off to eat funny stuff—no kugel, no gefilte fish, no bitter herbs, just one colossal turkey for two hundred and fifty million people. One colossal turkey feeds all. (402)

The festival is premised on the erasure of cultural difference whereby all can come together as American, without the contamination of other identities, like being Jewish. It calls for

A moratorium on funny foods and funny ways and religious exclusivity, a moratorium on the three thousand year old nostalgia of the Jews, a moratorium on Christ and the cross and the crucifixion for the Christians, when everyone in New Jersey and everywhere else can be more passive about their irrationalities than they are the rest of the year. A moratorium on all the grievances and resentments, and not only for the Dwyers and the Levovs but for everyone in America who is

³⁰⁰ Gary Johnson, “The Presence of Allegory: The Case of Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*,” *Narrative* 12, no. 3 (2004): 240.

suspicious of everyone else. It is the American Pastoral par excellence and it lasts twenty four hours. (402)

Thanksgiving calls on Americans to be more passive about their irrationalities, it calls for decorum and has a mollifying influence on the population. It calls for a general sameness whereby religious and cultural difference can be erased or at least temporarily suspended. Thanksgiving represents what the Swede has been trying to do with his whole life—to suspend his Jewishness and his essential human irrationality to become an American. This is not an ideological Americanness, nor an outwardly stated nationalism: it is neutral and it is the American Pastoral *par excellence*.

Yet as Parker Royal notes of this scene, “Roth presents the issue of assimilation and ethnic identity without ultimately resolving the problem.”³⁰¹ What is stressed in this passage is the strained construction of this American Pastoral *par excellence*. The entire event of the Thanksgiving dinner rests on multiple moratoriums—of funny foods, of religious exclusivity and nostalgia, of irrationalities, of grievances and resentments. Indeed “normal life” would have to be suspended in order to attain the American Pastoral which is presented not as an ideal of American life, rather a radical interruption of American life. This vastly difficult and agonised, fleetingly brief and yet crucial moment of the realisation of the American Pastoral is facilitated by the epic gravitational pull of what Roth twice refers to as one colossal turkey. The turkey is the symbol around which a nation of radically different people can coalesce and meld into one continuous mass of Americanness. The vision of the single colossal turkey stands as a unifying symbol—something that everyone can agree on. To partake of the turkey is to confirm an essential American identity which is above all neutral. The absolutely inclusive nature of the festival sees all American citizens placed in a single group which is defined by its consumption, not of a variety of different or individuated animals, but of a single, monolithic turkey.

If we were to consider this colossal turkey as literally as possible, we would discover that the turkeys killed annually in the US for Thanksgiving would give rise to a colossal turkey of around 164 meters in length and 600,000 tonnes in weight. This colossus would be about 5.5 times longer than the Colossus in Rhodes and would weigh the same as 2884 Statues of Liberty. It would most likely be about the same size as the Colosseum in Rome.³⁰² The colossal turkey represents 46 million individual turkeys.³⁰³ It is worth remembering also that 99% of these turkeys are reared on factory farms which means that they never see daylight, are conceived

³⁰¹ Parker Royal, “Reimagining the Ethnic Subject in Roth’s *American Pastoral*,” 12.

³⁰² This is based on an average turkey weight of 28.2 pounds and length of 16 inches. See the United States Department of Agriculture. Ellen Dougherty and Krissy Young, “USDA Reports an Increase in the Average Weight of a Turkey,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, November 15, 2005, http://www.nass.usda.gov/Newsroom/2005/11_15_2005.asp.

³⁰³ National Turkey Federation, “Turkey History and Trivia,” *National Turkey Federation [US]*, 2012, <http://www.eatturkey.com/consumer/history/history.html>.

through artificial insemination and may have been sent through the mail to the farm. Their rapid growth rate means that they are incapable of walking normally, and only survive to slaughter due to a heavy regimen of antibiotics. *En route* to the slaughterhouse, after just 10-17 weeks of life, they have a 10-15% chance of suffocating. On arriving, they will be hung upside down alive and killed in an “electrical bath” or may still be alive when boiled as part of the feather removal process.³⁰⁴ The colossal turkey, it seems clear, also represents a colossal violence, the enacting of which is crucial to and inseparable from the establishment of the American Pastoral. The colossal turkey thus attests to a colossal suffering which resides at the very heart of the American Pastoral.

As if to underline the point, one of the more absurd features of the Swede’s life out in Old Rimrock is the herd of cattle which Dawn, his wife, raises. This enterprise is an exercise in creating a sense of a traditional pastoral lifestyle in which the cows are rendered a living backdrop to the Swede’s all too idyllic lifestyle. That the herd is lossmaking is reflective most likely of an era in which the non-intensive grazing of a small herd of cows is economically unviable. Back at the disastrous dinner which seals the Swede’s fate, he reminisces in a distinctly poetic manner about the herd of cows, recalling that “in another time, on an evening like this one, Dawn’s herd would be silhouetted against the flamboyance of the late summer sunset” (327-8). Feeling old and full of distrust for his newly unveiled guests, “It would give him comfort, he thought, it would help him right then if, of all things, he knew that resting out in the pasture beyond their dinner table was Dawn’s herd, with Count, the big bull, protecting them” (357). As a part of his pastoral dream, the herd of cows bring security to the Swede operating in much the same way as the Thanksgiving turkey. Count, the prize bull for whom he yearns, is the same bull that, years ago, he encouraged Dawn to send to slaughter: “he kept saying, ‘You’ve got to do this,’ and so they did” (201). If this is a case of wanting to have your bull and eat it, then it emphasises the conditions of carnophallogocentrism which demands sacrifice even when farming is little more than a costly pastime.

Thus, the key operation of the American Pastoral is the classic humanist trope as identified by Derrida, whereby the identity of the human is premised on the death of the nonhuman animal. Following the logic of carnophallogocentrism, the colossal turkey becomes the “carnivorous sacrifice”³⁰⁵ whose death facilitates the construction of an American identity. This sacrificial structure is not only “essential to the structure of subjectivity,” but is also “the basis of our culture.”³⁰⁶ We are led to conclude, therefore, that the claim of the American Pastoral is not limited to a definition of the ideal American, but also extends to defining the ideal human where

³⁰⁴ Details taken from Safran Foer, *Eating Animals*, 86–92.

³⁰⁵ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 279.

³⁰⁶ Derrida, “Force of Law,” 247.

the ideology of American Pastoralism would be absolutely intertwined with the ideology of humanism. American Pastoralism, at its core, is an ideology based on a fundamental human exceptionalism which relies on the establishment of an absolute schism between human and all other animal life and which is enforced by the putting to death of the nonhuman animal. This is the thread which can be traced throughout the novel and which in a subtle manner traces the Swede's construction of himself as the ideal human—the exceptional animal, the purveyor of handiwork and the reasonable rationalist.

The Inner Digit on the Hand of Man

If Melville's Ishmael is a whaleman, then Roth's Swede is a gloveman. Newark Maid, the company founded by his father, Lou Levov, produces handmade leather gloves and, having worked his way through all of the departments of the factory, the Swede duly takes over as company manager. In this section, we join him giving a tour of his factory to a young woman who announces herself as Rita Cohen and who claims to be writing a thesis on the leather industry. The leather industry, the Swede explains to her, is “awful work. Said to be the oldest industry of which relics have been found anywhere. Six-thousand-year-old relics of tanning found somewhere—Turkey, I believe. First clothing was just skins that were tanned by smoking them” (123). With these introductory words, the Swede traces a direct lineage between the earliest of human handiwork and himself. In this way, he casts himself as a direct inheritor of an ancient trade in a move which imbues his work with legitimacy and importance. He presents tanning as an industry intimately connected to the most fundamental of human needs—for clothing and for protection, not merely from the elements, but from the shame of human nakedness. The wearing of animal skins, and therefore of course the deaths of nonhuman animals, has been essential in the development of humanity. There would be no human without leather, and in this sense the Swede is able to insert himself into a narrative of uninterrupted human industry, both traditional and indispensable.

Yet the acknowledgement that leather work is “awful work” indicates an underside to the refined product that is the handmade Newark Maid glove. “Awful work” evokes the kind of unpleasant working conditions depicted in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and hints that the process of converting an animal's skin into leather—the opposite, perhaps, of rendering—takes its toll on the human workers. Like the slaughterhouses in Thomas More's *Utopia*, ancient tanneries were located outside of the city confines. Furthermore, although there is scant reference to it in the novel, we should consider the provenance of leather. Elizabeth Costello, we recall, chastises herself on account of her leather shoes and purse, reminding her interlocutor and the reader of the connections between eating meat and wearing leather. With this in mind,

the “awful” work of the leather industry resonates with Derrida’s comments on the “awful” tale of Genesis. In short, what I am suggesting here is that what is behind the Swede’s image of himself as a successful human being is the death of nonhuman animals. Of course, the animal, in all this, usually remains hidden, yet during the tour of the factory we witness the dramatic breakdown of the Swede’s calm and rational edifice at the same time as he begins to explicitly discuss the animal nature of his gloves.

Significantly, there is a moment early on in the novel which does expose the connections between animals and leather. This brief and comic episode from Zuckerman’s childhood involves Jerry’s—the Swede’s younger brother—unfortunate Valentine gift of a homemade hamster-skin coat. We are told that it takes Jerry three months “to transform an improbable idea into nutty reality” (33), and involves him “finagling” 175 hamster skins from his high school biology department. Erroneously attempting to cure the skins in the sun, he succeeds in creating a “malodorous” garment, more like a piece of armour than a coat. The result of this gift is that “the girl was so revolted when she opened the box, so insulted and horrified, that she never spoke to Jerry again” (34). Jerry’s humiliation is only deepened when his father responds by giving him a lecture on the correct methods of curing leather: “you must dry a skin in the shade. You don’t want them sunburned, damn it!” Zuckerman muses that “it could well have been that very day when Jerry swore to himself never to go near his father’s business” (33). What upsets the “chubby girl with bad skin” is that “she thought he had gone out and hunted and killed all those tiny beasts and then sent them to her because of her blemished skin.” Jerry’s attempt at curing leather fails inasmuch as it fails to disguise the animal nature of the skins. What the girl sees when she looks at the coat is precisely what is in front of her, namely 175 dead hamsters. What is interesting is that had she been presented with a pair of Jerry’s father’s gloves, there is no way that she could have responded in the same way. Her concern is precisely the ethical concern that firstly objects to the killing of the hamsters and secondly reads her skin alongside the hamster skins. We have seen above how Jerry’s character is used to reveal to the Swede his lack of knowledge, and in this case his actions reveal just what a leather product actually is. Having turned his back on gloves and leather, Jerry becomes a cardiac surgeon, a profession for which, I imagine, one must have a good pair of hands.

To return to Rita Cohen’s visit, during the tour, the normally reluctant Swede becomes increasingly effusive about his trade and his factory, going into what Parker Royal describes as “surprising detail”³⁰⁷ about the manufacture of gloves. The climactic final speech of the tour reveals the Swede’s philosophy concerning the importance of gloves:

³⁰⁷ Parker Royal, “Reimagining the Ethnic Subject in Roth’s *American Pastoral*,” 10.

Monkeys, gorillas, they have brains and we have a brain, but they don't have this thing, the thumb. They can't move it opposite the way we do. The inner digit on the hand of man, that might be the distinguishing physical feature between ourselves and the rest of the animals. And the glove protects that inner digit. The ladies' glove, the welder's glove, the rubber glove, the baseball glove et cetera. This is the root of humanity, the opposable thumb. It enables us to make tools and build cities and everything else. More than the brain. Maybe some other animals have bigger brains in proportion to their bodies than we have. I don't know. But the hand itself is an intricate thing. It moves. There is no other part of a human being that is clothed that is such a complex moving structure. (131)

The Swede claims that the glove is an exceptional item of clothing in that it covers an exceptional anatomical feature. The glove is important because the hand is important, featuring, as it does, the opposable thumb. According to the Swede, the opposable thumb is a uniquely human feature which sets humanity apart from the rest of animality. Of course, the Swede here is indulging in a fantasy about the human. Humans are not the only animals to have opposable thumbs. Although there are varying degrees of opposability among primates, Old World monkeys, great apes and humans all have opposable thumbs.³⁰⁸ The Swede values the hand over the brain as the human's chief organ and notes that the hand "enables us to make tools and build cities and everything else." The syntax leaves open an ambiguity as to whether he means that that hand enables humans to build everything else, or whether the hand simply enables everything else. Either way, the Swede places the hand at the root of humanity. In his vision it would be the organ that enables humanity to build itself.

The Swede's emphasis on the hand places him alongside Heidegger whose thinking concerning the hand demonstrates marked similarities:

The hand is a peculiar thing. In the common view, the hand is part of our bodily organism. But the hand's essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp. Apes, too, have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands. The hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs—paws, claws, or fangs—different by an abyss of essence. Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and can be handy in achieving works of handicraft.³⁰⁹

There are, of course, differences between the claims of Heidegger and the Swede. Whilst the Swede tends to see the hand as something which produces the human through its anatomical specificities, Heidegger sees the human, a thinking subject, as the only being capable of producing the hand. For Heidegger, the hand is exclusive to humans, not because of the opposability of the thumbs, rather because the human subject is the only one that can think, and hence can grasp (also in the sense of comprehend—deriving from the Latin root *comprehendere*

³⁰⁸ Friderun Ankel-Simons, *Primate Anatomy: An Introduction*, 3rd edition (London: Elsevier, 2007), 346.

³⁰⁹ Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, trans. J. Glenn Gray and Fred D. Weick (London: Harper & Row, 1968), 16.

from which we also have the word “prehensile”) and the only one who can achieve works of handicraft—making gloves for example. Yet Heidegger and the Swede both identify the hand as the feature which distinguishes between humans and all other animals. They both deny hands to all nonhuman species and Heidegger deploys his customary metaphor of the abyss to distinguish between humans and nonhumans. The Swede’s pursuit of the ideal human is premised, we could say, on a Heideggerian notion of humanism.

As we have already seen, Heidegger wants humans to be more than just animals in possession of a hand. Rather the human, for Heidegger, is an animal which uses its hand to produce handicraft. At the same time, this handicraft should be read as a metaphor for thought which is something also reserved exclusively for the human. Hence “thinking guides and sustains every gesture of the hand.”³¹⁰ Heidegger characterises thinking as cabinet-making and writes that “Perhaps thinking, too, is just something like building a cabinet. At any rate, it is a craft, a ‘handicraft.’”³¹¹ In this way, Heidegger makes an explicit connection between thinking and making with the hands, both as exclusively human activities. Although the Swede is not a cabinet-maker, he is deeply involved in the handicraft of glove-making. Indeed, in the course of the tour of his glove factory, we come to understand the great importance that he attributes to the various skills involved in manufacturing gloves. Above all, everything is made by hand. He reveres manu-facturing as something which, in its etymological sense, is an activity of the hand and as the man-ager³¹² of the factory his role encompasses the metaphorical if not the literal place of handiwork. He makes frequent reference to the hands of his workers: “A cutter’s working hand was proudly callused from cutting with his big, heavy shears,” the sewer “has to go through a three or four month training process, has to have finger dexterity, has to have patience” (127). Every part of the glove is made by hand and the gradual loss of this tradition is marked throughout the book. The Swede tells Rita that “in the days when my father first opened a glove shop, the people were in it for life—Harry’s the last of them. This cutting room is the last one in the hemisphere [...] nobody cuts gloves this way anymore, not in this county” (127). Here the Swede links his ideals of American identity with his ideals concerning the human. The Swede mourns not just the decline in American manufacturing—“the era’s shift from a production to a consumption-based economy and the resultant transformation it wrought within the international division of labour”³¹³—but also the loss of a certain conception of the human—the human who is defined in his being by his handiwork.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

³¹¹ Ibid., 16.

³¹² The verb “manage” derives from the Italian *maneggiare* (meaning to be able to use skilfully, to manage, to direct or exercise a horse) which itself derives from the classical Latin *manus* meaning hand.

³¹³ Clare Sigrist-Sutton, “Mistaking Merry: Tearing off the Veil in *American Pastoral*,” *Philip Roth Studies* 6, no. 1 (2010): 48.

One of the chief criticisms levelled at Heidegger by Derrida in “Heidegger’s Hand” is his unsubstantiated yet absolute and therefore dogmatic distinction between human and nonhuman animal life. As we have seen, Heidegger denies possession of the hand to any living being other than the human. Ultimately, it is used to define the human alone as “that which has the hand, and thus thought, speech or language, and the opening to the gift.”³¹⁴ Heidegger, it turns out, is basing his exploration of the hand on a traditional metaphysical distinction, tracing back to Descartes which, as we have seen, posits absolute difference between so called humans and animals. Derrida’s primary objection is that to enforce a system which divides all of animal life into two neat groups represents a violent and regressive mode of humanist thought. The suggestion here is that through privileging humans as the only animals capable of thought, Heidegger’s philosophy is structured by the inherent humanism of Descartes’ “I think therefore I am.” He argues that such a division is unsustainable and essentially deconstructible. The animal can never be absolutely excluded and what we witness, in the space of the Swede’s tour of his factory, is the ghostly return of nonhuman animals.

Mimicking the hands of the wearer, the glove already seems to be a haunted form. We see the effects of this ghostliness in the factory’s “laying off table,” with its hazardous row of heated brass hands which are used to press the gloves:

The hands were dangerously hot and they were shiny and they stuck up from the table in a row, thin looking as hands that had been flattened in a mangle and then amputated, beautifully amputated hands afloat in space like the souls of the dead. (122)

Yet it is not only human hands which haunt the glove since the animals killed for their skins haunt the thoughts and words of the Swede:

“Anyway, this skin”—he’d taken it back from her and was stroking it with the side of a thumb as you might stroke a cat to get the purr going—“is called a cabretta in the industry’s terminology. Small sheep, little sheep.” (120)

At the very moment that he wants to affirm the absolute distinction of humanity from animality we find a contamination. Not just in the virtual resurrection of the animal as the Swede absentmindedly strokes the skin, but the comparison between human and animal skins:

“This is leather. But you can still see the animal. If you were to look at the animal,” he said, “here it is—the head, the butt, the front legs, the hind legs, and here’s the back where the leather is harder and thicker, as it is over our own backbones...” (129)

³¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Heidegger’s Hand (Geschlecht II),” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, trans. John P. Leavy, Jr. and Elizabeth Rottenberg, vol. II (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 41.

The Swede also resurrects the animal with reference to the skill of the glovemaker in producing identical gloves. He explains that “No two skins are alike. The skins come in all different according to each animal’s diet and age” (127). The haunting revitalises the animal bodies which are so crucial to the manufacture of the gloves and to the manufacture of the human whilst their deathly state attests to a fundamental violence inherent in the Swede’s humanism which would normally be effaced by the identical gloves. The Swede strips away linguistic edifices which would ordinarily block compassion for the animals and substitutes the industrial terminology of “cabretta” for a plainer and more appealing “small sheep, little sheep.” The absolute difference between the human and the animal previously stated is erased where the human and animal backbones are compared. The comparison comes dangerously close to bringing up the idea of making gloves from human skin and points to a macabre hidden inside to the clothing of the intricate moving structure that is the thumb. Ultimately, it comes down to looking. The Swede’s explanations do not comprise an unveiling for everything is already on display. He tells us that you can still see the animal “if you were to look at the animal.” This rather odd comment points to a failure to see what is really there in front of your eyes when looking at a pair of leather gloves. We have seen in the introduction how Nicole Shukin’s analysis reveals that to look at film is to look, quite literally, through the rendered bodies of animals. Filmgoers can hardly be expected to know this, but with the glove, looking and not seeing is surely an example of the sort of disavowal of animal suffering that Derrida discusses in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*.

The tour of the glove factory is haunted by two further parties. The Swede becomes increasingly aware that the words he is using are his father’s: “It could have been his father talking to her. For all he knew, every word of every sentence uttered by him he had heard from his father’s mouth before he finished grade school” (121). Furthermore, Rita takes on the place of Merry, his daughter: “Rita Cohen, homely little thing that she was, had begun to remind him of Merry before her repugnance had set in and she began to become their enemy” (124). Hence as the tour progresses, the Swede gradually relinquishes his rational control of the situation. In mourning for his missing daughter, he succumbs to the seduction of a fantasy which allows him to disappear into his father and into his past relationship with Merry. We are told that “The Swede was giving into the ordinary human wish to live once again in the past—to spend a self-deluding harmless few moments back in the wholesome striving of the past” (122). The fundamental humanness of the Swede’s response is what Zuckerman stresses. In line with what we have seen above, he claims that the Swede is acting as an ordinary human in deluding himself and furthermore, the Swede’s response is elevated to the level of the universal when the narrator notes that “when someone is suffering as the Swede was suffering, asking him to be

undeluded by a momentary uplifting, however dubious its rationale, is asking an awful lot” (125).

It is here that Zuckerman returns to his notion of the human who is decidedly not the rational subject of Enlightenment humanism, but rather a self-deluding animal. For a brief period, the Swede suspends himself as the rational, successful American human and enjoys the irrational fantasy firstly of becoming his father and secondly of being in the presence of his daughter before their relationship disintegrated. Although this is presented as a lapse in the character of the Swede, the giving into a weakness, it is also described as “ordinary human.” Zuckerman’s explicit view understands the human to be governed by a single logic, the logic of the delusion, or the logic of illogic, and he invites us to understand the essence of the human as a self-deluding animal. It is at this moment that his leather gloves revert to being little sheep as the trappings of the Swede’s self-fashioning as a human begin to come undone at the seams.

Do Something! Anything!

The Swede’s armoured edifice as the *animal rationale* fails him absolutely when he finally meets his daughter, five years after the post office bombing. By this time, Merry is living in a squalid rented room and has become a Jain:

She wore a veil to do no harm to the microscopic organisms that dwell in the air we breathe. She did not bathe because she revered all life including the vermin. She did not wash, she said, so as “to do no harm to the water.” (232)

In the light of the appalling state of his daughter, the Swede appreciates the need to act but finds himself utterly impotent. “He remained the reasonable father. The reasonable father of someone mad” (244). Through the Swede’s eyes, we witness an unfolding dynamic of madness versus rationality with emphasis on the inadequacy of the latter. The Swede commands himself to “Do something! Anything! In the name of everything reasonable, stop being reasonable” but instead can only berate himself as “reasonable, reasonable, responsible, responsible” (251). In the face of perceived madness, the Swede’s reason fails him absolutely. Directly addressing the limits of this reasonable behaviour, the Swede realises that the reasonable response is to stop being reasonable. The blind spot of the Swede’s rationality is underlined here in as much as once reason is applied to itself, it implodes. This plays out Wolfe’s criticism of Enlightenment rationality which he sees as the flawed philosophical basis of modern humanism. He contends that rationality “is not, as it were, rational enough, because it stops short of applying its own protocols and commitments to *itself*” [Wolfe’s emphasis].³¹⁵ This moment distils what appears to be Zuckerman’s central critique of the Swede’s reasonableness. It has meant that the Swede

³¹⁵ Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, xx.

has not acted as an effective parent partly because it is a rationale which, in the end, must call for its own destruction. As such, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the distinction between the mad and the rational. Even the reasonable father of something mad now realises how similar he is to his daughter: “No, he wasn’t a Jain, thought the Swede, but he might as well have been—he was just as pathetically and naively nonviolent” (252).

Merry’s role is defined early on in the novel as encompassing the antithesis of her father’s ideology—she represents the counterpastoral to the Swede’s Pastoral by becoming “the daughter who transports him out of the longed-for American Pastoral and into everything that is its antithesis and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the counterpastoral—into the indigenous American berserk” (86). The Swede traces the origin of his daughter’s rebellion back to a fascination which she developed as a ten or eleven year old for the self-immolation of Buddhist monks in South Vietnam. Thinking back to the immolations, the Swede “is sure he has unearthed the reason for what happened” (152). He describes Vietnam as “an alien, unimaginable backdrop for a ghastly TV spectacle that had embedded itself in her impressionable mind when she was eleven years old” (157). As the Swede sees it, these scenes sow the seeds of the counterpastoral, through their alien setting but also through their inversion of the sacrificial rites at the heart of the American Pastoral. For here, in transgression of the edict of the colossal turkey, the human is not just the sacrificer, but also the sacrifice itself.

The radically foreign and counter-humanistic nature of the self-immolations is mirrored in Merry’s adoption of Jainism. The Swede discovers that his daughter has taken a series of vows and lives in abject squalor. Most significantly, she has renounced the killing all living things including microbes and plant matter. She has stopped washing and become skinny. In the Swede’s view, the emaciated person he sees before him is “a travestied mock-up of a human being” (239). The Swede struggles to identify his daughter as a human. This must in part stem from the squalor of her living conditions and dramatic change in appearance, but more profoundly, I would argue that Merry, as the antithesis of everything the Swede believes in and stands for, has moved herself out of the boundaries which the Swede deems essential both in order to qualify as an American and also as a human. So whilst Zuckerman insists that the Swede’s rationalism and his Americanism be read together—he describes the Swede’s systematic and logical characteristics as “a list as long as the U.S. constitution” (256)—in contrast, Merry has adopted a foreign and illogical religion, a point underlined when the Swede asks his daughter how many Jains there are in America. When she says that she does not know, he asks “Are you the only one?” (245). In his mind, Merry has achieved a position of utter exception by becoming America’s sole follower of an Indian doctrine.

Yet it is not merely Merry's irrationalism that renders her a mockery of a human, it is also her stated relation to nonhuman life. Whilst the Swede's notion of the human is premised on an absolute exceptionalism, Merry now exhibits a philosophy which refuses to make absolute and monolithic distinctions between humans and nonhumans. She claims that "There are souls [...] imprisoned in every form of matter; the lower the form of life, the greater is the pain to the soul imprisoned there" (232). In short, she is at odds with the Swede's belief that humans are the only animals truly worthy of ethical consideration, and by removing herself from this pedestal of humanism she removes herself from the category of human as understood by her father. The most potent symbol of her rejection of the Swede's understanding of the human is the veil that she wears over her mouth to prevent the inadvertent consumption of microbes. This veil symbolises her removal from the Thanksgiving table and proclaims a lack of subjection to the colossal turkey. It obscures her identity literally and also confirms that she no longer conforms to the Swede's definition of an American or of a human. Enraged, her father rips it off her face and prises her mouth open, apparently to ascertain the real identity of his daughter. This act of unveiling has contradictory effects. Firstly, it is the answer to the rational demand to stop being rational. As he rips the veil off and wrenches his daughter's mouth open, the Swede realises that he is "disregarding a guideline he has never before overstepped—the injunction against violence. It was the end of all understanding" (265). Yet, the act is not without its revelation. As the odour of his unwashed daughter reaches him, he smells "a human being and not a building, a mad human being who grubs about for pleasure in its own shit" (265). Ultimately, it is the material stench of his daughter that restores her, in her father's eyes, to the status of human, albeit a mad one. Yet what follows complicates this revelation. The Swede is so revolted by this human stench that it causes him to vomit while crying out "Who are you!" (266). The revelation of the removal of the veils is summed up as "This was his daughter and she was unknowable" (266). The Swede viscerally understands Merry to be human and also understands that he cannot understand her—Zuckerman's insight precisely. With the clear transgression of his humanist ideology, the Swede has no tools with which to comprehend his daughter who now represents very clearly the limits of American Pastoralism.

We detect a wry authorial intervention in the final line of the novel which, in the wake of the collapse of the Swede's life, asks, innocently enough, "What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?" (423). In theory, the Swede does everything right, yet in his unerring earnestness receives a series of "terrible shocks." The reprehensible thing about the Swede is how unrepensible he is. He is punished for his lack of critical cynicism—the way in which he believes what he is told, whether it is by his father, his community or his country. Merry, his tormentor, shows him the limits of his ideology and punishes him for holding it so dear. Lurking underneath this argument is a question which I do not believe Roth to be concerned with, but it

seems that a key difference between the Swede and Merry concerns incompatible definitions of the human. We have seen that the Swede believes the human to be an exceptional animal which is set apart by the possession of a hand and hence by the ability to think or to reason. On the other hand, Merry's counterpastoral visions see her alternatively as a terrorist murderer of human life and then as the fanatical preserver of all life. In these contrasting roles, she comes to occupy diverging counterpoints to the Swede's notion of American Pastoralism. Mark Shechner describes Merry not as an aberration, rather as "her own father's Jewish unconscious; she is the return of the repressed."³¹⁶ Whilst there may not be anything essentially Jewish in her actions, we can certainly see her as representing what the Swede has had to repress in order to establish his notion of human exceptionalism. An identity based on the sacrificial rites surrounding the colossal turkey would first of all prohibit the killing of all human life, and secondly demand the right to kill nonhuman life. These are the strictures which Merry abrogates in her various counterpastoral roles, firstly by killing Dr Fred Conlon and then by renouncing her right to harm even water.

Merry does not provide answers or viable alternatives to her father's American Pastoralism. Her character does not present the face of the liberal values which are said to have transformed American society in the 1960s and 70s and her various ideologies cannot be read as desirable realities or as formed critiques. Instead, Merry's counterpastoral role inverts and reflects back the unexamined American Pastoralism of her father in terms of how it constructs the meanings surrounding being American and being human. The importance of Merry's character resides in that she successfully erases American Pastoralism's illusion of neutrality. Instead, she emphasises the violence of this ideology organised, as it is, around carnivorous sacrifice. In this way, the novel highlights the violence which stands at the heart of the Swede's notion of American Pastoralism. Finally, the novel reinscribes the essence of the human outside of the ideology of rationalism. The actions which are specifically denoted as human are, as we have seen, the ones which fall outside of the rational, and the narratorial authority of Zuckerman is lent to the notion that there is a necessary irrationalism which watches over human attempts at understanding. The novel does not then merely question the naïve ideology of the Swede as an American, but is indeed underpinned by a much more profound and far-reaching exploration of the shortcomings, and inherent violence, of his conception of what it means to be human.

³¹⁶ Mark Shechner, "Roth's American Trilogy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, ed. Timothy Parrish (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 147.

Chapter Five

Hesitant Sacrifice in D.H. Lawrence

We saw in the introduction that Gerald Manley Hopkins' description of a "brinded cow" in "Pied Beauty" demonstrates how literature can be sensitive to the differences in sensory perception between humans and other animals. Similarly, in the 1917 essay "The Reality of Peace," D.H. Lawrence uses an older form of the word "brinded" when discussing a snake:

The brindled, slim adder, as she lifts her delicate head attentively in the spring sunshine—for they say she is deaf—suddenly throws open the world of unchanging, pure perfection to our startled breast. In our whole understanding, when sense and spirit and mind are consummated into pure unison, then we are free in a world of the absolute.³¹⁷

Here we see a surprising account of sensory perception where the adder—said to be deaf—brings forth in the human viewer an extraordinary epiphany which combines sense, spirit and mind in a manner which permits access to another world, a world beyond the Heideggerian concerns of who is world forming or world-impooverished. This human-animal encounter leads to a startling world of what Lawrence calls the absolute. This experience is borne of an attentiveness to attentiveness. Just as the lizard on the rock—which we also considered in the introduction—is attuned to the "sounding of the spheres" of the universe at large, so the apparently deaf adder demonstrates an attention to the world which brings about a new and expanded sense of the universe for Lawrence.

Lawrence's writing on nonhuman animals is, in a sense, all about looking. Just as we saw in the previous chapter how the Swede tells Rita Cohen what she would see "if you were to look at the animal," we feel the attentive and discriminating eye of Lawrence drawn to nonhuman animals in a manner which does not shy away from the face to face ethical encounter. This chapter will begin by establishing and exploring the discerning attention paid to nonhuman animals by Lawrence and we will concentrate in particular on how his poetry evokes a sense of a human inability to properly know nonhumans. Lawrence frequently reads this human insufficiency as resulting in a clumsiness and even violence to human-animal relationships. Following this, we will be drawn to the theme of sacrificial relations between humans and nonhumans. This time, we will see how sacrifice is connected to sexual desire and has results which are harmful both to humans and nonhumans. Ultimately, we will see how Lawrence's account of sacrifice marks a

³¹⁷ D.H. Lawrence, "The Reality of Peace (ii)," *The English Review*, June 1917, 521.

decisive break from anthropocentrism and we will find in Lawrence some important strategies for representing nonhuman animals in a nonviolent manner.

Although the above quotation seems to insist on an all-seeing epiphany of the encounter with an adder, in the poetry collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923) Lawrence repeatedly creates a sense of the human impoverishment of knowledge when considering nonhumans. This is evoked perhaps most explicitly in the poem “Fish,” which bursts with excitement at the contemplation of a fish, most obviously in the single-lined stanza “To be a fish!”,³¹⁸ yet which admits that “watching closer,” “I had made a mistake, I didn’t know him.” This lack of human knowledge is immediately underlined in the flowing stanzas:

I didn’t know his God,
I didn’t know his God.

Which is perhaps the last admission that life has to wring out of us.

For Lawrence, knowing is exacting in a manner which demands nothing short of a metaphysical account of what it is to be a fish. The narrator understands that to know a fish is to know what commands, compels, excites or motivates it and he bluntly states that this information lies beyond human cognition. The decentring power of this deficiency in the human is acknowledged in the claim that this is that last thing that man will ever admit to.

Lawrence combines a sense of awe and wonder with a powerful impression of a human inability to properly know nonhuman animals. Often he displays great affection for the beings he writes about. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is the animals which are presented as pets to which the poet seems most attached. Most prominent in this category are the tortoises which feature in six poems from the collection. As with “Fish,” the poet displays a kind of wishful affinity with his tortoises. In a similar manner to “Fish,” we find the line: “To be a tortoise!” This line, of course, underlines that the poet is precisely not a tortoise and will never be one. Despite the fact that the tortoises are pets, the strangeness and otherness of these animals is foregrounded in a manner which resists their domestication. There is much to say about this sequence of tortoise poems, but we will limit ourselves to Lawrence’s comments on the tortoises’ faces.

In “Baby Tortoise,” the animal’s “beak mouth” is described as “like some iron door.” This evokes the strangeness and what is later described as the “indomitable” nature of the tortoise. The word “iron” suggests strength, sovereignty and even the non-animal. In this way, Lawrence’s metaphor does not reduce the tortoise to a familiar “animal” typology, but rather emphasises difference. Eventually, the tortoise opens its “impervious mouth” but in a manner

³¹⁸ D.H. Lawrence, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers: Poems* (New Hampshire: David R. Godine Publisher, 2008), 108.

which remains elusive. It could be a yawn of indifference or perhaps it expresses a state of “wonder at the world.” The mouth then closes: “Then close the wedge of your little mountain front, / Your face, baby tortoise.” The stone of “mountain” reinforces the solid and non-animal qualities of “iron” and the final line of the stanza: “Your face, baby tortoise,” is decidedly obscure. It is addressed to the tortoise, but what is the poet saying? The poet appears to address a tortoise, but might as well be speaking to a mountain. In saying “your face,” is the narrator simply explaining what he means by “little mountain”? Even if this is our reading, the oxymoron “little mountain” once again points to the impossibility of representing these strange creatures in words. But perhaps the final line of the stanza is an exclamation, a cry of wonder. Your face, baby tortoise—you have a face, here it is in front of mine, tiny yet powerful and I am in awe of it. Your face, baby tortoise, how can I possibly put into words the extraordinary thing that is your face?

Of course, we have discussed elsewhere the significance of the face to face relation in terms of ethics, as well as Derrida’s insistence that one cannot deny, as Levinas tries to, that nonhuman animals have faces. In this sense, we can read an extra layer of meaning into the phrase “your face.” This exclamation perhaps registers the weight of the ethical responsibility which comes on recognition of the face of the other. In Levinasian terms, this is the face which calls me into doubt and questions my very being. It is the face which makes impossible demands of me—demands which I can in no way foresee or anticipate. “Your face” records the astounding fact that I have unmeasurable responsibilities towards this baby tortoise including the imperative “Thou shalt not kill” which, as Derrida notes, is for Levinas “the first commandment, not the sixth.”³¹⁹ To read Lawrence, then, is to be made aware of our responsibilities towards nonhuman animals, or as Royle puts it: reading Lawrence “entails a newly critical sensitivity to anthropocentrism, and a heightened apprehension of the [...] responsibility to otherness.”³²⁰

To return to “Fish,” we see that one of the consequences of not being able to know the fish is that the traditional dominance of humankind is diminished: “And my heart accused itself / Thinking: I am not the measure of creation. / This is beyond me, this fish” (111). Here the seat of thought is the heart rather than the brain, and this sort of emotional thinking admonishes the poet for considering man to be the measure of all living things. The fish is beyond the poet both in the sense of being other to him and also as something quite unthinkable. From this point onwards, it becomes clear that, in one sense, the poem, which is supposed to be about a fish, has failed. At best, it becomes an account of the inability of poetry to describe fish.

³¹⁹ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2009, 1:237.

³²⁰ Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature*, 200.

Indeed, the violent and destructive nature of this fish narrative is underlined in the following stanza: “the gold-and-green pure lacquer-mucus comes off in my hand, / And the red-gold mirror-eye stares and dies.” This attempt at capturing the fish becomes merely an exercise in destruction whereby the hand of man, the organ which, as we have seen, is the alleged mark of human exceptionalism, becomes a clumsy means of accidental destruction. This is a point which is brought out a few lines later as the narrator describes himself in relation to the dead fish:

He outstarts me.
And I, a many-fingered horror of daylight to him,
Have made him die. (112)

Here, the hand is presented as a monstrosity, a horrific mutation which is primarily destructive. The neologism “outstarts” seems to evoke the fact that the fish, comes before the narrator, rehearsing the idea from “Snake” that the fish is the “first comer.” The “start” of “outstart” also suggests surprise and shock at the revelation to be found in the dead fish in his hand. The fish becomes a startling reminder that the mastery supposedly exhibited through an activity like fishing is undone once we look properly at the dead animal in our grasp. As we note above, in its inability to properly represent the fish, the poem is an account of failure. We could say then, of the poem’s disjointed nature, of its irregular stanzas, lack of rhyme, lack of obvious poetic rhythm and its stop-start jerky motions that these elements reinforce the failure of the poem—that they demonstrate the inability of a poem to neatly capture the essence of a fish, or of this particular fish. Alternatively, this slippery cascade of stanzas could be seen as the poem’s fishiness whereby the form of the poem represents the unpredictable and unclassifiable movements and being of the fish in its underwater world.

What I hope to show here is Lawrence’s sensitivity to how the poetic aspects of the language of literature can go some way to representing nonhuman animal life. At the same time, he is deeply aware of its limitations. Significantly, in “Fish,” the fish is dead. It has been killed by the speaker, both, it seems to me, as a fisherman and as a poet. This brings us to the main question of this chapter. Lawrence’s fiction repeatedly returns to the moment of animal sacrifice. We have seen how Derrida stresses the function of the sacrifice as essential to the construction of the human, yet, in some ways, the sacrifice of the fish has the opposite effect, dethroning the human as the “measure of creation.” Lawrence, in this way, takes us beyond sacrifice. Our final example from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* concerns an animal that the narrator explicitly does not like. The poem “Bat” ends with the single-line stanza “Not for me!” and is followed by the poem “Man and Bat,” an account of the speaker attempting to get rid of “a disgusting bat” which has flown into his room. As with Rosenberg’s wasp poem which we read in the introduction, there is no need for humans and nonhumans to be friends or to coexist in deep harmony. Here, the narrator’s repugnance is seemingly candid and entirely valid. Yet when

finally faced with an exhausted bat, squatting on the floor, the narrator asks: “What then? / Hit him and kill him and throw him away?” (122) which is answered in the following stanza: “Nay, / I didn't create him.” The poem suggests that humans have ethical responsibilities towards nonhuman animals which are not dependent on love or affection and which can exceed the sacrificial economy.

Two years after the publication of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, Lawrence explores the implication of animal sacrifice with regards to porcupines. “Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine” (1925) begins with the announcement that the unfortunate Mexican porcupine finds itself the object of a rare moment of international agreement: “Everyone says porcupines should be killed; the Indians, Mexicans, Americans all say the same.”³²¹ Yet despite the absolutely sanctioned nature of the putting to death of the porcupine, when Lawrence meets one in the flesh, he hesitates. Lawrence refuses his duty to kill the porcupine since “the dislike of killing him was greater than the dislike of him,” (349) and thus, within a few lines, Lawrence establishes a clear difference between a theoretically sanctioned killing in the plural and the physical realisation of this in the singular. Porcupines should be killed, but this particular porcupine can, perhaps, be spared. The “things” should be killed, but not “him.”

The reason that porcupines must be killed, Lawrence tells us, is that they gnaw on and cause the death of pine trees. Yet what occasions the death of the eponymous porcupine is Lawrence’s traumatic encounter with a dog who has suffered an unfortunate encounter with a porcupine and ended up with a face full of quills. Lawrence struggles to pull the quills out for a number of torturous hours before eventually giving up, leaving eight or nine quills deeply embedded in the dog’s chin. After this incident, and now with greater resolve, Lawrence shoots the next porcupine he sees concluding that “Things like the porcupine, one must be able to shoot them, if they get in one’s way” (353). It remains unclear exactly how the porcupine thing has got in Lawrence’s way. This shooting then gives way to a lengthy justification which can perhaps be summarised as “Life moves in circles of power and of vividness, and each circle of life only maintains its orbit upon the subjection of some lower circle. If the lower cycles of life are not *mastered*, there can be no higher cycle” (356). “Higher,” we are cryptically told, “strictly” means “more alive.”

Lawrence then illustrates his point with what he claims to be an indisputable set of hierarchies:

Life is more vivid in the dandelion than in the green fern, or than in a palm tree.
Life is more vivid in a snake than in a butterfly.
Life is more vivid in a wren than in an alligator.

³²¹ D.H. Lawrence, *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 349.

Life is more vivid in a cat than in an ostrich.
 Life is more vivid in the Mexican who drives the wagon than in the two horses in the wagon.
 Life is more vivid in me than in the Mexican who drives the wagon for me. (357)

And in case we might have any objections, it also turns out that “there is no escaping this law,” and that creatures in a lower cycle of existence “are relieved and *happy* to serve” [Lawrence’s italics] (362). On the face of it then, Lawrence presents us with a set of relations which demonstrates the continuities between anthropocentrism, speciesism and racism and thus seems both unimaginative and inadmissible. Commenting on this aspect of Lawrence’s thinking, John Carey notes that Lawrence is convinced of “his own inherent superiority to representatives of mass humanity, especially non-white mass humanity,”³²² and demonstrates how this vein of thought connects to an early twentieth century Modernist milieu which describes a eugenicist or even misanthropic thirst for extinction as an inflection of Nietzschean philosophy.

“Reflections,” however, represents an interruption of the sacrificial economy as described by Derrida. It does this in two ways. Firstly, the set of hierarchies listed above, unacceptable as it may be, breaches the human-animal divide. Lawrence’s sacrificial pecking-order does not balk at the deaths of humans which underlines the logic of sacrifice for which the human is always a potential sacrificial victim. Secondly, as the anecdotal beginning of the essay testifies, Lawrence experiences a “dislike of killing” the porcupine. In this hesitation we find a resistance to killing which is what we might call deeply human. Indeed, we wonder how we would judge Lawrence without this moment of hesitation—if he had killed the porcupine in what we might call cold blood. Does this hesitation not serve in some way to *humanise* the narrator of “Reflections”? And if so, would this not seem to point to a contradiction at the heart of the human? For, as we saw in the introduction in relation to More’s *Utopia*, the need to sacrifice and the need for humans to retain a sense of pity are in many ways incompatible drives. If the human is unwilling or unable to enforce the sacrificial hierarchy, then as Lawrence admits, it becomes more of a “tangle.” It is into this knotty web that we now step.

Second Best

“Second Best,” published relatively early in Lawrence’s career in 1912, is a short story which narrates the nascent relationship between two young lovers, a partnership which is negotiated through an exchange of dead and live animals. This perhaps surprising combination of sexual awakening and animal sacrifice is explained by Gerald Doherty who offers a compelling reading of species discourse in Lawrence’s 1915 novel, *The Rainbow*. He notes that

³²² John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 11.

Because sexuality has its roots in a finite embodiment, shared with the animals, it represents a highly sensitized, conflictual site, poised between an animal instinct, vital to erotic excitation, and the drive for transcendence over mere animal lust.³²³

In other words, sexual drives are dangerously contradictory for the human being. Sexual awakening poses a threat to the human in as much as it appears to be an “animal” drive—an instinct located in the body. At the same time, the transition from adolescent to sexually active adult requires a separation from a childish affinity with nonhuman animals. In this sense, there is a double need for the animal sacrifice which both marks the end of childhood and acts as protection against the animalising influences of embodied sexuality.

Two sisters, Anne and Frances, spot a mole emerging from near a rabbit hole. Both sisters see the mole independently, and while Frances, the older sister, resists the obligation to kill the “little pest,” Anne collects the creature up into her handkerchief to take it home to let her father or someone else kill it. However, being bitten by the mole, she kills it herself with her sister’s walking-cane. Leaving the scene with the dead mole, the sisters then happen upon Tom Smedley, a young farm worker whom the girls have been discussing. Tom has previously presented Anne with a live rabbit for her to tame and is now himself presented with the dead mole. They discuss killing moles, an act for which Frances expresses distaste, but which Tom nervously defends. The following day, Frances hunts and kills a mole which she presents to Tom in a gesture which is understood as the start of their relationship.

Before proceeding in our analysis of “Second Best,” we will pause to consider two possible approaches to the relationship between Frances, Tom and the moles. Sexual desire is a matter of great importance for Lawrence and the nature of sexual relations in his writing is a subject of detailed discussion and controversy. Leo Bersani devotes a chapter of his book *A Future for Astyanax* to the portrayal of desire in *Women in Love*. Reading Rupert Birkin as “Lawrence’s spokesperson,”³²⁴ Bersani describes “the ultimate Lawrentian goal” as “the death of desire.”³²⁵ In this reading, since desire indicates a lack or an absence, the only way to achieve wholeness or presence is the removal of this desire which is rooted in the physical individual. This is enacted by a kind of physical stillness leading to “an experience of peaceful, non-desiring fusion with the universe.” Although Bersani mentions the physical site of desire (the body), he does not describe, as Doherty does, bodily desire as a kind of animal desire. He comes closest to discussing the importance of nonhuman animals to Lawrence’s writing in his reading of the chapter “Rabbit” in which Gudrun is scratched by a rabbit named Bismarck. Bersani notes that

³²³ Gerald Doherty, “Violent Immolations: Species Discourse, Sacrifice, and the Lure of Transcendence in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 57, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 53.

³²⁴ Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 160.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

“the wound inflicted by the rabbit awakens in both characters an anticipatory sexual excitement,” but then contents himself with a psychoanalytic reading of the resulting wound on Gudrun as a “castrated vagina” which even he admits is a “psychologically more reductive interpretation.”³²⁶ The meaning of the rabbit himself is passed over by Bersani, but Doherty’s reading of the same episode pays much more attention to the manner in which the rabbit plays an important role in the engendering of sexual desire.

In Doherty’s reading of this scene, the “the prime means to erotic transcendence [...] is through torturing and killing off the animal body both in themselves and in others.”³²⁷ As we saw above, Doherty underlines how sexual desire threatens the human inasmuch as it is rooted in the animal body. Rather than concentrating on Gudrun’s wound, Doherty’s analysis focusses on the sadistic cruelty of Gerald against the rabbit who strikes it on the neck, causing it to scream “in the fear of death.”³²⁸ Doherty notes that the act of symbolically killing the rabbit is repeatedly described as “obscene,” and comments that the source of this obscenity is that both Gerald and Gudrun take a sadistic and erotic pleasure in the suffering of the rabbit. We find in Lawrence, therefore, a connection between sexual desire and animal cruelty which sees an expanded role for sacrifice in the carnophallogocentric economy. This insight will help to guide our reading of “Second Best.”

To return to the story, as with Lawrence and the porcupine, Frances’ initial response to the demand for the death of the mole is hesitation. She feels a duty to kill the pest but also experiences “a keen pity for the little creature.” We will follow Doherty in reading this pity as a childish identification with the mole which must be overcome if Frances is to successfully take her place in the carnophallogocentric order.

What is interesting about Lawrence is that despite the objectionableness of his stated views in “Reflections,” he presents a remarkably refined and powerful sense of the childish pity experienced by Frances. Pity, like the mole itself, is a response that springs forth, unbeckoned, perhaps unwelcomed, but which cannot easily be ignored. Derrida, as we know, affords pity a crucial role to his discussion of nonhuman animals. In *The Animal that Therefore I am*, he speaks of

the immense question of pathos and the pathological, precisely, that is, of suffering, pity, and compassion; and the place that has to be accorded to the interpretation of

³²⁶ Ibid., 167.

³²⁷ Gerald Doherty, “Women in Love: Sacrifice, Sadism, and the Discourse of Species,” in *Windows to the Sun: D.H. Lawrence’s “Thought-Adventures,”* ed. Earl Ingersoll and Virginia Hyde (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing, 2009), 83.

³²⁸ D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1999), 209.

this compassion, to the sharing of this suffering among the living, to the law, ethics, and politics that must be brought to bear upon this experience of compassion.³²⁹

Derrida notes that pity is *experienced*. Rather than being a considered position or intended ethical outlook, compassion simply arises on its own. As we have discussed in the introduction, this experience of pity falls outside of the bounds of traditional philosophy which tends towards dispassionate consideration of what it is content to call the animal. Therefore, as Derrida points out, the consequences of an acknowledgement of this pity would be enormous—they “would have to change even the very cornerstone [...] of the philosophical problematic of the animal.”³³⁰

As I argue in the introduction, literature is uniquely placed to produce or reproduce an essential pity for the mole who, in this story, is by far the most vigorous narrative entity. We have already seen how Frances thinks of the mole as a “little pest.”³³¹ This short phrase contains the tensions and ambiguities which concern her relationship with the mole. Her obligation to kill the mole is announced by the word “pest” which denotes a special category of the animal specifically antagonistic to the human. One is not merely permitted to kill a pest, but compelled. (We will be taking a closer look at pests later.) “Little,” on the other hand, resonates affection whereby, at worst, the mole is regarded as though it were a naughty child. This affection dominates the presentation of the mole. There is a profound otherness to the mole who is “nosing, shuffling hither and thither, flat, and dark as a shadow, shifting about, and as suddenly brisk, and as silent, like a very ghost of *joie de vivre*” (64). The mole is an energetic blaze of life, an unceasing jumble of unpredictable movement and fumbling curiosity. He is imbued with a sense of fun and pleasure which sets him in marked contradiction to the human characters encountered in the story. His *joie de vivre* is expressed as we see “the little brute paddling, snuffing, touching things to discover them, running in blindness, delighted to ecstasy by the sunlight and the hot, strange things that caressed its belly and its nose.” We are invited to enter the sensory world of the mole where sight does not feature but touch delights. This is a moment celebrating the dazzling vitality of what Doherty identifies as the animal body which, in its avowal, poses a threat to the Cartesian separations of classical humanism. It seems difficult not to see in the mole an embodiment of *jouissance*—a pleasure that would remain elusive to the human characters in the story, but one which must surely motivate Frances’ sexual awakening.

Discussing the effects of the word “pest,” Philip Armstrong notes that “once the animal becomes a pest—once it joins the category of those species competing with humans for resources, or threatening damage to human agricultural or domestic spatial arrangements—

³²⁹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 26.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

³³¹ D.H. Lawrence, “Second Best,” in *Selected Short Stories* (New York: Dover, 1993), 64.

agency is reconfigured as ferity.”³³² Lawrence, however, seems interested in neither agency nor ferity. The reader is not concerned with what the mole can do, rather how he behaves and feels. The mole’s ever-changing movements (“shuffling hither and thither,” “shifting about,” “suddenly brisk”) would announce him as what Nicholas Royle would call a “veerer,” where “*veering is what living creatures do*, human or otherwise.”³³³ In this sense, the shifting movements of the mole would be a feature which connect it, on an animal level, to the human characters of the story. Hence one feels pity for the veerer as one feels pity for a fellow human or for oneself. This is the opening to what Royle describes as “a kind of ethics of veering.”³³⁴ We are reminded, perhaps, of Derrida’s words in the interview “Violence Against Animals,” where he notes “We know what animal suffering is, we feel it ourselves.”³³⁵ We have more veering animals, waiting to cross our path later, but for now, suffice to note that the mole in “Second Best” is established in such a way as to bring our attention to the ethical demands which nonhuman animals make on humans.

Anne traps the mole under her foot and Frances can see “the struggling, swimming movement of the little pink hands of the brute, the twisting and twitching of its pointed nose, as it wrestled under the sole of the boot” (64). Again, pity is evoked as we are given a keen sense of how out of place the mole is. The “swimming” movement seems to doubly impress how incapable the mole is of dealing with the situation, how all at sea he might be said to be. And in contrast to his otherness, the mole is said to have hands rather than paws or claws. We are thus invited to identify with the mole as a fellow animal rather than just as a pest to be killed. Of course, as we have seen in the previous chapter, nonhuman hands occupy a critical place in the philosophy of nonhuman animals and this moment in the story provocatively contradicts Heidegger’s dogmatic and commonly held assertion that only humans can be said to have hands.

For Sigmund Freud, Frances’ feelings of pity would be ultimately infantile. As Maud Ellmann notes in *The Nets of Modernism*, Freud claims that a child “can see no difference between his own nature and that of animals [...]. Not until he is grown up does he become so far estranged from animals as to use their names in vilification for human beings.”³³⁶ The narrative dramatically enacts a coming of age for Frances who, through her transactions with the moles, becomes an adult human. This occurs in parallel to her relinquishing her childish attachments to the unattainable (and now engaged) Jimmy, in favour of the realistic and “second best” Tom.

³³² Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 35.

³³³ Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature*, 3.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

³³⁵ Derrida and Roudinesco, “Violence Against Animals.”

³³⁶ Quoted in Maud Ellmann, *The Nets of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 64.

Anne tries to contain the mole in her handkerchief in order to take it home, but in doing so is bitten. In a “sudden decision of wrath,” she kills the mole with her sister’s walking cane. Frances is initially shocked but then “suddenly became calm; in that moment, grown-up.” This marks the instant of her symbolic transition into adulthood. She moves from pitying the live mole, to warning her sister about staining her skirt with his blood—a comment which engages with the importance of female beauty while evoking the beginning of sexual activity. This comes as Anne asserts that moles are “vicious little nuisances.” The effect of her acceptance of the mole’s death is profound on Frances:

“I suppose they have to be killed,” she said, and a certain rather dreary indifference succeeded to her grief. The twinkling crab-apples, the glitter of brilliant willows now seemed to her trifling, scarcely worth the notice. Something had died in her, so that things lost their poignancy. She was calm, indifference overlying her quiet sadness. (66)

With the acceptance of the death of the mole, something dies in Frances. This spiritual death affects her perception of the world. The sensual enjoyment of her surroundings which was previously so intense in the mole is deadened in Frances to the extent that she barely notices the bright beauty of the natural world. For Freud of course, sight would be the primary sense, but here Lawrence seems to suggest that entry into the symbolic order of the adult world has a kind of blinding influence which dulls both an appreciation of beauty for its own sake and also the feeling of pity. In stark contrast to the *jouissance* of the mole, Frances is made indifferent.

In the wake of the mole’s death, Frances is changed. As she approaches Tom Smedley, he notes that “Somehow, this morning, she affected him more than usual” (66). Frances exudes a sexual attraction which has been engendered, as in the Bismarck scene, by the death of a nonhuman animal. Achieving the second best requires entering the sacrificial economy and therefore the following day, she presents Tom with a dead mole. The mole demonstrates that Frances accepts the order of a world in which humans kill nonhuman animals which they deem to be pests. It attests also to the importance of the disavowal of pity which arises spontaneously on the face to face interaction with the nonhuman animal. If Frances is to marry and not lose yet another potential husband, this is the attitude that she must take. It is, she realises, what is demanded of her and she is prepared to make the sacrifice. In short, she submits to carnophallogocentrism.

Ultimately for her, this new understanding is a kind of death. In response to Tom’s rather pragmatic suggestion that they should tell Frances’ mother about their relationship, comes the final line of the story: “‘Yes,’ she replied, in a dead voice. But there was a thrill of pleasure in this death” (68). Frances’ entry into the relationship with Tom is to submit—to patriarchy and to the generally subservient role of wife. This is the death that occurs in her, a death that is underlined in contrast to her younger sister Anne who “was in her unvexed teens; men were like

big dogs to her” (62). The pleasure in this death is perhaps the pleasure of submission which Lawrence, as we have seen, suggests ought to leave her “relieved and happy to serve.”

St. Mawr

We noted that the special category reserved for both the Mexican porcupine in “Reflections” and the mole in “Second Best” is that of the pest. We have seen that on the one hand, Lawrence explicitly subscribes to a sacrificial regime which demands the death of animals which get in one’s way. On the other hand, he hesitates to kill pests and, to follow his own terminology, he recognises that life can be more vivid in nonhumans than in certain humans.

Published in the same year as “Reflections,” this tangling of the sacrificial schema is evident once again in the novel *St. Mawr* (1925). St. Mawr (a horse) is purchased by Lou (Lady Carrington), after seeing him in Hyde Park. He is, however, very difficult to control and following a riding accident in which Rico, Lou’s husband, is injured, there is a general call for his death. Resisting these calls, and society in general, Lou and her mother Mrs. Witt whisk him away to their ranch in Texas before themselves moving to *Las Chivas*, a small Mexican ranch, where, it seems, they intend to remain. The novel follows a familiar Lawrentian theme—that of the disappointing nature of a humanity which has become ignoble as a result of modern industrial society. The central characters, Lou and her mother Mrs Witt, are presented as misfits in search of the “real world.” Mrs Witt, we are told loved “real men,” but “never met any,”³³⁷ and the pair of them feel at home neither in Europe or America. Lou is “like a sort of gipsy, who is at home anywhere and nowhere” (21). The novel narrates a set of movements which take the pair further and further from human society until they are left almost alone on an isolated ranch in Mexico. In this tale, St. Mawr is the creature whose presence catalyses their rejection of society, catapulting them into an obscurity outside of modern human society. The central moment in this transition is the non-sacrifice of St. Mawr himself.

Like the mole in “Second Best,” St. Mawr is a dynamic life force, this time to the extent that, from the outset, he displaces human characters from their proper superiority. When he is purchased, Lou notes of the stablehand that “If we buy St. Mawr we get the man thrown in” (33). Similarly, as Armstrong notes, at the point he enters the novel, St. Mawr has already transgressed the sacrificial structure having caused the deaths of two humans, smashing the skull of his former owner’s son against a tree and crushing a groom against the side of a stall.³³⁸ Although Jeff Wallace detects in the novel the sense that “to live might in part be

³³⁷ D.H. Lawrence, “St. Mawr,” in *St. Mawr and Other Stories*, ed. Brian Finney (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 24.

³³⁸ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 145.

mechanical,”³³⁹ I will be focussing on how the horse is also afforded characteristics normally reserved for humans, chief among these being vindictiveness. He is described as capable of deep thought whereby “in his big black eyes there was a lurking afterthought” and “somewhere deep in his animal consciousness lived a dangerous, half-revealed resentment, a diffused sense of hostility” (28).

Armstrong points out that part of St. Mawr’s function is to reveal the domesticated nature of Lou’s husband, Rico, and hence of modern man. In contrast to St. Mawr’s “nobility,” Lou pities him as “Poor old Rico, going on like an amiable machine from day to day” (94). The human has become the animal-machine and the animal is the deep-thinking and independent being. Indeed, the limits of what can be said about the cognitive abilities of nonhumans are reached where we are told of the horse that “he took no notice of her. He would never ‘respond’” (64). St. Mawr’s detached aloofness affords him the status of an individual who is the master of his own will. On the other hand, the scare quotes around “respond” serve to reinscribe the limits imposed on animality by traditional humanism. As we discussed in detail in Chapter Three, Derrida draws our attention to the fact that the power of response has been systematically denied to nonhuman animals and here it seems that the narrator feels compelled to add quotation marks as if to say that response is, of course, ultimately impossible for a mere horse. At the same time, however, there is the suggestion that “respond” is indeed the best word for what St. Mawr refuses to do, and in this way, its inadmissibility is highlighted and undermined. In this second reading, the Cartesian understanding of the nonhuman animal is disturbed. As such, St. Mawr is no longer subject to the laws of sacrifice and although Lou knows that Rico would never wish to own St. Mawr, in buying him Lou consciously decides that in the battle between Rico and St. Mawr, “she was prepared to sacrifice Rico” (35). St. Mawr, as a more vital life-force, comes to supersede the emasculated Rico and appears to inhabit what Lawrence would call a higher cycle of existence.

After an incident in which, on seeing a snake, St. Mawr rears up and lands on top of Rico, breaking his ribs and ankle, demands are made for the horse’s death. Dean Vyner and Mrs. Vyner, who come to call on Lady Carrington, become scapegoats for the views of wider society as their arguments are mocked. The latter states “One hates to have to destroy a fine-looking animal. But I would sacrifice a dozen rather than have our Rico limping” (88)—a view which she attempts to back up in a circular and somewhat emotional manner: “Don’t you think he ought to be put away? He seems to me the incarnation of cruelty. His neigh. It goes through me like knives. Cruel! Cruel! Oh, I think he should be put away” (87). Her husband asserts that “A vicious horse is worse than a vicious man—except that you are free to put him six feet

³³⁹ Jeff Wallace, *D.H. Lawrence, Science and the Posthuman* (Houndmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 140.

underground, and end his vice finally, by your own act” (87). Vyner relies heavily on the human-animal divide here, drawing on the legal right to put the nonhuman animal to death, whilst ignoring that calling for the death of a vicious man would be inadmissible. His argument is indeed complicated by his use of the word “vicious” where he draws on a meaning of the word usually reserved for humans. St. Mawr is not said to be vicious in the sense of “inclined to be savage or dangerous” which, as the OED informs us, usually refers to animals, especially horses. Instead he makes it clear that he means that St. Mawr is vicious in the sense of having vices and therefore “acting contrary to moral principles.” St. Mawr’s crime is not the possession of some kind of unpleasant animal nature, but is instead a moral failing which is best dealt with by execution. This is the double bind that prevents St. Mawr from being sacrificed, for the human-animal divide would demand that he can only be sacrificed as an animal, but such is his status that the only justification for sacrificing him requires a consideration of his morality on a level usually reserved for humans.

Lou and her mother’s refusal to sacrifice St. Mawr leave them socially isolated. Lou realises that she and her mother are destined to become deeply “unpopular” and that she now feels a “hatred” (117) for her fellow man. As the pair leave England, Mrs. Witt develops a death wish announcing that she has “come home to die” (133), whilst her daughter “wanted to be still: only that, to be very, very still, and recover her own soul” (137). In their search for ideal man, they give up on modern humanity, retiring to the remote ranch of *Las Chivas* (The Goats), isolated in the Mexican mountains. Here we can see the contrast between *St. Mawr* and “Second Best.” Where the killing of the mole leads to the integration into society, the non-killing of St. Mawr leads to an almost absolute exile.

What is most striking about the ranch is the non-anthropocentric nature of the environment:

The landscape lived, and lived as the world of the gods, unsullied and unconcerned. The great circling landscape lived its own life, sumptuous and uncaring. Man did not exist for it. (146)

Rather than being a space, like Hyde Park, under man’s control and existing for his benefit, where troublesome animals are prohibited by the police from appearing, *Las Chivas* features “a vast and unrelenting will of the swarming lower life, working forever against man’s attempt at a higher life, a further created being” (150). The swarming lower life in this case is in the form of rats. As Mrs. Witt arrives at the ranch she notices one of the many rats which inhabit *Las Chivas*:

On one of the roof-planks a pack rat was sitting erect like an old Indian keeping watch on a pueblo roof. He showed his white belly, and folded his hands and lifted his big ears for all the world like an old immobile Indian.

“Isn’t it for all the world as if he were the real boss of the place, Louise?” (152)

The swarm of rats have made the ranch almost uninhabitable for humans. When asked why he doesn’t shoot the rat, the Mexican peasant showing them the ranch replies that it is “Not worth a shell!” (152). And here, at the other end of the spectrum, we have another unsacrificable animal—unkillable in its swarming nature.

One could say, perhaps a little too quickly, that Lou has forsworn human company in favour of that of rats. Certainly, she has rejected the sacrificial imperative and is content to live alongside these swarming pack rats. Maud Ellmann writes of the significance of rats to modernity. Just as we understood Margaret Atwood’s *ChickieNobs* to be an example of the abject, so Ellmann writes that “the rat implies that civilisation is founded on that which it excludes: on excess, excrement, exteriority.”³⁴⁰ Where there is civilisation, there are rats which thrive in cities, existing parasitically on human waste, whilst being feared and hated as bringers of filth and disease. Although the city seeks to exclude the rat, just as it excludes all non-domesticated nonhuman animal life, the rats on *Las Chivas* are simply a part of the ranch, existing out in the open.

Ellmann goes on to argue that “rats augur the breakdown of barriers, whether semantic, geographical, corporeal, or architectural.”³⁴¹ In this case, we can see that the barrier broken by the rats of *Las Chivas* is none other than the human-animal barrier which is breached by the necessary abandonment of the sacrificial economy. Their presence is linked also to the abandonment of sexual desire in Lou who likens living on the ranch to being a Vestal Virgin. She sees the Virgins as “symbolic of herself, of woman weary of the embrace of incompetent men, weary, weary, weary of all that, turning to the unseen gods, the unseen spirits, the hidden fire, and devoting herself to that, and that alone” (138-9). Significantly, the incompetent men are strongly associated with rats. She thinks of her servant as “a sexual rat in the great barn-yard of man’s habitat, looking for female rats!” (137) and of society men as “grovelling and ratty” (153). In short, she sacrifices a world of metaphorical rat-men and flees to a world of real rats.

Is the novel, then, a tale of female sexual liberation? In her devastating evaluation of sexual politics in *Lawrence*, Kate Millett makes frequent references to the domestication of women as though they were animals. She notes how in *Women in Love*, Gerald’s abuse of a female horse allows Birkin to compare “the mare mastered to the woman mastered,”³⁴² and later comments on how Ursula (with her wild-animal name) is made “tame” by Birkin.³⁴³ By contrast, Lou transcends her humanness, whereby only her “top layers” are human, within which “lay the

³⁴⁰ Ellmann, *The Nets of Modernism*, 15.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁴² Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 263.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 264.

successive inner sanctuaries of herself. And these were inviolable” (139). Ironically, the closest that Lou comes to finding her ideal man is in the form of St. Mawr and her final dismissal of society could easily be read as a powerful critique of patriarchy in its utter failure to produce a partner who can satisfy Lou’s desire. Indeed, the endings of “Second Best,” and *St. Mawr* can be seen to demonstrate the inadequacies of patriarchy for women as desiring creatures. The two options offered are either to choose to be second best—to submit, subscribing to the demands of a sacrificial economy, or to resist but to leave, rejecting sacrifice, but also resigning oneself to utter solitude. In both of these texts, close attention is paid to the nonhuman animals which, in different ways, occupy the readers’ attention more than the human characters do. In both cases, the fates of the humans are tied to that of the nonhumans. By contrast, our final story moves beyond questions of sacrifice in what is an unusual and important representation of nonhuman animals.

England, My England

Finally, we turn to the short story “England, My England” (1915), a tale in which snakes occupy a intriguingly indeterminate position, slithering over the fringes of the narrative, threatening to invade, to strike and to announce themselves, but ultimately, and crucially, remaining elusive. Published a decade before *St. Mawr*, and two years after “Second Best,” the story does not engage directly with animal sacrifice. Instead, it demonstrates a fascinating sensitivity to nonhuman animal life which operates just below the surface of the narrative. The story confirms Lawrence as a writer whose engagement with nonhuman animals is profound in a way which critics of the story have failed to notice.

The story focuses on Egbert, a father and husband who lives with his wife Winifred and two daughters in Crockham Cottage, a home provided by his wife’s father which is situated in “a scooped out little hollow among the snake-infested commons.”³⁴⁴ Egbert’s idealised and passionate marriage soon cools with the arrival of his two children. His continued refusal to work and thus the family’s ever greater dependence on his father-in-law is a source of resentment for his wife. The severe knee injury inflicted on his eldest daughter who falls onto Egbert’s scythe accelerates the terminal decline in the relationship between Egbert and Winifred which eventually leads Egbert to join the British Army in World War I. The story ends as he dies on the battlefield.

The garden in which the accident takes place forms a kind of precarious border between the dangerous and untamed wild of the commons and the civilised space of the house. Egbert works to keep the plants in order, but cannot prevent the infiltration of snakes into the long grass, a

³⁴⁴ D.H. Lawrence, *England, My England* (London: Sovereign, 2013), 7.

fact that we are alerted to at the start of the story as his spoiled daughter announces “if you don’t come quick, nurse, I shall run out there to where there are snakes” (7). If the reader is in danger of forgetting this line, its significance is underlined as it is repeated word for word 12 pages later. As such, the snakes provide a threatening because largely invisible presence in the story. The elusive nature of the snakes is what makes this serpent-centric reading of the story risky. Although the repeated threat of running to the undefined space of “where there are snakes” establishes an expectation that snakes will feature in the story, this does not happen. Instead, they remain peripheral to the narrative and play a very limited role in the plot. If we are expecting a snake to injure the child, then we are surprised to find that it is a man-made tool which inflicts the fateful blow. Humans and snakes live in separate worlds in a manner which reminds us of Andrew Benjamin’s thesis that human and nonhuman animals are “without relation.”³⁴⁵ As such, there are very few further references to snakes in the story. This lack of focus on the snakes is, however, precisely what is interesting in their presentation and allows Lawrence to represent them without reducing them to function as a literary element designed purely to appear in relation to the human characters.

There is scant critical attention paid to the snakes and where they are mentioned, readings are straightforward and symbolic. Charlotte Goodman, for example, dismisses the snakes as “natural phenomena” which merely realise the function of “foreshadowing the fall”³⁴⁶ for Egbert and Winifred. This is to read Egbert’s garden as Eden which, as we shall see, is not entirely justified. The story ought, however, to be read alongside several other snakes which find their way into Lawrence’s oeuvre. As we noted in the introduction, there is the Sicilian snake in the poem “Snake” (*Birds, Beasts and Flowers* 1923) which recounts the actions and thoughts of the narrator on discovering a “yellow-brown” (and thus poisonous) snake drinking from his water-trough. This is another moment of officially sanctioned sacrifice: “The voice of my education said to me / He must be killed,” which is followed by a now familiar hesitation: “But I must confess how I liked him.” The hesitation is resolved as the narrator throws a log at the snake as it withdraws from the water-trough. This act, which Derrida, in the 2001-3 seminar series *The Beast and the Sovereign*, describes as “aborted murder,”³⁴⁷ is immediately followed by shame and regret. In this sense, the reaction of the narrator plays out the contradictions of behaving according to the rules of the sacrificial economy and behaving in an ethical manner. Indeed, as Derrida is keen to point out, “Lawrence if you will, the one to whom this thing happens in some sense, awakens to the ethics, to the ‘Thou shall not kill,’ in a scene of

³⁴⁵ See Benjamin, *Of Jews and Animals*. See also the discussion of this book in Chapter Two.

³⁴⁶ Charlotte Goodman, “Henry James, D.H. Lawrence, and the Victimized Child,” *Modern Language Studies* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1979): 45.

³⁴⁷ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2009, 1:243.

hospitality, before the first comer, the snake, who can perhaps be threatening.”³⁴⁸ The suspension of sacrifice—an acceptance of the demands of hospitality—opens out to a new relationship with the snake which begins to encompass ethical concerns. Furthermore, as Derrida notes elsewhere, this leads to a new understanding of the snake which is no longer understood as a “figure of the forces of evil.”³⁴⁹ He adds that “Only a certain poetics can inflect differently a dominant interpretation.” In other words, this poem allows for a radical reconsideration of snakes in literature whereby they are no longer subject to being read as symbolic of pure evil.

A poisonous snake crawls over the borders of the short story “Sun” (1925). Also set in Sicily, a “gold-brown” snake appears as a mother and child sunbathe naked. This time, as the snake turns to go, the mother says: “Yes! Let it go. It likes to be alone.”³⁵⁰ She feels that “the snake was part of the place, along with her and the child” (28). The scene presents a flattening out of hierarchy whereby the snake is viewed alongside the human animals present. This would be in line with Derrida’s suggestion in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, that, in a reconfiguration of Descartes, “‘I am inasmuch as I am *after* [après] the animal’ or ‘I am inasmuch as I am *alongside* [auprès] the animal.’”³⁵¹ This being alongside the snake is connected also with the nakedness of the human characters. Derrida of course reflects on the significance of nakedness in the same text which turns on the encounter between a naked Derrida and his cat. In a real sense, the nakedness of the humans makes the scene all the more a “fight to the death”³⁵² than in “Snake.” The scene, in the end, is a testament to passivity. Neither the mother nor the child acts against the snake, and in turn, the snake retreats not in “undignified haste” as in the poem, but instead “the slow, easing length of the creature drew itself apathetic out of sight” (27). Again, Eden is reconfigured. Here, the naked humans, in the absence of male adults, acknowledge the other worldly existence of the snake while feeling no need to exercise mastery.

In both of these scenes, the snake is not sacrificed. In the first case, the aborted sacrifice is associated with shame and in the second, where naked human stand before the snake, without shame, leaving the snake alone is clearly preferable to any kind of interference. In both cases, the snake more or less explicitly comes before the humans and this is something which Derrida emphasises as being crucial to the ethical nature of the encounter. The fact of the snake being the “first comer” is marked even more profoundly in “England, My England.” Close to the start of the story, we are told

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 1:244.

³⁴⁹ Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, 5.

³⁵⁰ D.H. Lawrence, “Sun,” in *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 27.

³⁵¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 10.

³⁵² Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2009, 1:240.

Strange how the savage England lingers in patches: as here, amid these shaggy gorse commons, and marshy, snake infested places near the foot of the South Downs. The spirit of the place lingering on primeval, as when the Saxons came, so long ago. (7)

The snakes are first comers in a profound historical sense, having existed even before the Anglo-Saxon invasion which would eventually bring about the England of the title. The fragility and transience of the house and its garden are emphasised in comparison to the eternal nature of the marshy, snake-infested places which surround it and which threaten to reassert themselves. In this sense, despite the almost ghostly presence of the snakes in the story, they have more permanence than the house, the garden or its inhabitants. Moreover, what is striking across all three texts involving snakes is that the threat of the snake is never realised. Most powerfully, in the two prose pieces, the deadly snakes act as a kind of empty foreshadowing for an event which never takes place. In both texts, the presence of the snakes strongly suggests that a child will be bitten by a snake, but in neither text does this happen. Instead, the snakes are a presence unto themselves, remaining withdrawn from interaction with humans. They do not conform to the traditional literary symbolism of evil but instead, and in marked contrast to St. Mawr, slide away from any definitive meaning, hiding in the long grasses as a lurking presence. Ultimately, they are an unrevealed entity which the literary work does not contain or domesticate. We spend much of the story waiting for something to happen with a snake, and it is only as we near the end of the story that we begin to realise that the snakes are not about to show themselves.

The impact that the snakes have on the inhabitants of Crockham is profound:

Crockham had changed their blood: the sense of the snakes that lived and slept even in their own garden, in the sun, so that he, going forward with the spade, would see a curious coiled brownish pile on the black soil, which suddenly would start up, hiss, and dazzle rapidly away, hissing. (10)

The snakes here, which impossibly transform between inanimate coiled piles and a rapid dazzle of ethereal hissing, are said to infect the very blood of Egbert and Winifred. The elusive nature of the snakes is reflected in the syntax here. The sentence snakes around for three lines, before ending without deploying a main verb to the noun “sense.” The rapid movement of the snake is described in the word “dazzle.” Here, once again, we see Lawrence stretching the limits of language, in this case using a word primarily associated with sight and spectacle to denote action. It suggests the limits of sight—we cannot properly see that which dazzles, and before we can take in what is before us the snake has disappeared with an onomatopoeic hiss.

Just as the snakes infiltrate the blood of the couple, so they infect the story, cropping up unexpectedly and without warning:

One day Winifred heard the strangest scream from the flower-bed under the low window of the living room: ah, the strangest scream, like the very soul of the dark past crying aloud. She ran out, and saw a long brown snake on the flower-bed, and in its flat mouth the one hind leg of a frog was striving to escape, and screaming its strange, tiny, bellowing scream. She looked at the snake, and from its sullen flat head it looked at her, obstinately. She gave a cry, and it released the frog and slid angrily away. (10)

Again, we see the snakes connected with the ancient past—to a time that precedes and in many ways supersedes the present. This time relates to Egbert who himself has eyes “that had a touch of the Viking in them” (7) and whose blood is said to be of ancient stock. Egbert, with his Anglo-Saxon name, is therefore of a kind with the marshes, and snakes, with the screams of the frogs and the Saxons. He is, in this sense, a man out of time with his own life: “the past had such a hold over him, whilst in the present he was all amateurish and sketchy” (11). As such, the story, in a similar way to *St. Mawr*, is about modernity and Lawrence’s feeling that industrialism is in some ways directly opposed to what it means to be human. This is indeed Weldon Thornton’s reading who describes the story as being about whether the “norm of human experience [is] joy or duty.”³⁵³ The closest he comes to commenting on the snakes is in his observation that that “modern Western culture is founded on [...] its control over the forces of nature”³⁵⁴ In this rather binary reading, this is to place the snakes on the side of Egbert, pitched against his father-in-law. Although it is true that the past is more “real” than the present and as far as Egbert is concerned, the ancient snakes have a deeper and richer permanence than humanity, we should hesitate to read Egbert as simply aligned with the snakes.

The representation of the snakes in this story goes a long way towards successfully representing nonhuman animals in a manner which eludes anthropocentrism. It is their peripheral nature, their magical presence, their timelessness and otherworldliness that sees them escape the dominance of man. As we have seen, it is the snakes who get under the skin of the humans rather than the other way around:

The sense of frustration and futility, like some slow, torpid snake, slowly bit right through his heart. Futility, futility: the horrible marsh-poison went through his veins and killed him. (26)

It is the marsh and its poisonous snakes which infect Egbert without requiring any biting. The marsh is a much greater power than civilisation, and once Winifred and the children have stopped visiting Crockham this power, whose poison seems to flow directly from the snakes, is reasserted in a profoundly negative manner:

³⁵³ Weldon Thornton, “England, My England,” in *D.H. Lawrence: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne, 1993), 43.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

No sound of Winifred from the dark inside of the cottage: no sound of children's voices from the air, from the common, from the near distance. No sound, nothing but the old dark marsh-venomous atmosphere of the place. (26)

We are struck by Lawrence's compound adjective "marsh-venomous." As with the word "*pharmakon*," which is so important to Derrida's reading of Plato,³⁵⁵ so "venom" is a word for poison which also has a contradictory meaning. It derives from the Latin *venenum*, which means both poison and drug, potion, charm or seduction. We read, therefore, in the snakes' venom a dangerous seduction which draws Egbert away from human company.

As he becomes estranged from his wife, so Egbert's sexual relations change from an expression of passion to the fulfilment of matrimonial duty. An extension of this breakdown in intimate human relations is Egbert's avoidance of all human sympathy:

Always moving on—from place to place, friend to friend: and always swinging away from sympathy. As soon as sympathy, like a soft hand, was reached out to touch him, away he swerved, instinctively, as a harmless snake swerves and swerves and swerves away from an outstretched hand.

By this point it is clear that this is a "becoming-snake" narrative. The perverse reconfiguration of Eden is competed when, instead of asserting difference and domination over the snake, Egbert identifies with the snakes to the extent that he shuns the warmth and comfort of human company. Significantly, his becoming-snake is characterised by swerving, which is of course a close synonym of veering. That Egbert and the snakes both swerve is an example of what Royle means when he writes that "veering is what living creatures do, human or otherwise."³⁵⁶ This swerving is at once a recognition of Egbert's commonality with the snakes and a rejection of human exceptionalism. Egbert swerves from soft, outstretched hands of human sympathy. Eventually, it is Egbert who is sacrificed on the battlefields of WWI. At the suggestion of his father-in-law, he volunteers to fight in a war in which he has no interest and is killed by a shell. Once Egbert recognises his commonality with the snakes and shuns a human society which insists on the human-animal divide, he becomes subject to the sacrificial economy which will not tolerate subversion.

In the end, it is the snakes in their non-presence which are the most powerful and evocative element in the text. As the "first comers" to the England of the title, they reflect a timeless and indifferent nonhuman animal presence which is not subject to the human timescale of the events of the story. Equally, the snakes elude a traditional Judeo-Christian tradition which posits the snake as a straightforward symbol of evil. Rather than crying out, as in "Fish," that the narrator

³⁵⁵ See Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy."

³⁵⁶ Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature*, 3.

does not know the God of the snakes, this story subtly demonstrates this lack of knowledge through never attempting to offer anything approaching a totalising knowledge of the snakes.

In this chapter we have seen Lawrence explore how sacrifice produces humans as adult, desiring beings and although he explicitly advocates a sacrificial economy in “Reflections,” we have noted hesitation and resistance to the sacrifice of individual animals. In this selection of texts, he demonstrates the difficulties and perhaps the impossibilities of resisting the sacrificial economy in a practical way. We have seen various responses to a hesitation to sacrifice which have resulted variously in self-imposed exile, submission—which Lawrence counts as spiritual death—and identification with nonhuman animals, which also results in death. In this sense, this collection of texts demonstrates some of the formidable difficulties which posthumanism presents.

Conclusion

“Eating Well” (in Tel Aviv)

Towards the end of “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” Derrida makes the following observation:

In our countries, who would stand any chance of becoming a *chef d'Etat* (a head of State), and of thereby acceding “to the head,” by publicly, and therefore exemplarily, declaring him—or herself to be a vegetarian? The *chef* must be an eater of flesh.³⁵⁷

Similarly, in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, he notes how an essential element of the French presidential election campaign involves a visit the Salon of Agriculture to “stroke the cows’ rear end [...] and walk around candidly, candidately among the stands, their mouths full of foie grass, beer, presidential *pâté de champagne* [...]”³⁵⁸ Such displays of sovereignty over nonhuman animals are not peculiar to French politics and we can see a similar endorsement of carnophallogocentrism in the annual ritual whereby the American president issues an official pardon to a Thanksgiving turkey—a sort of reverse sacrifice which in turn sanctions the deaths of all other turkeys.

Although British elections do not feature an event as codified as the French visits to the Salon of Agriculture, we are unsurprised to find David Cameron kissing a lamb on Easter Sunday, four weeks before the 2015 UK general election. Tweeting four pictures of the encounter, he writes “A break from campaigning on Easter Sunday to try my hand at feeding a newborn lamb at Dean Lane Farm, Oxfordshire.” Of course, the notion that this is a break from campaigning is transparently ludicrous and commentators were quick to point out the irony of the fox hunting-supporting Prime Minister publicly caring for an animal which he would ordinarily eat. In the light of Derrida’s above comments, this piece of political theatre is precisely reinforcing Cameron as an “eater of flesh.” Lambs are traditionally consumed in Britain on Easter Sunday and by visiting a farm, the Prime Minister affirms this status quo while presenting a pastoral image of meat production.

³⁵⁷ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 281.

³⁵⁸ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2009, 1:284–5.

So far, so unremarkable. But Derrida remarks, as we have noted in the introduction, that the question of pity towards nonhuman animals is “passing through a critical phase.” What might the symptoms of this phase look like?

In the Israeli general election of 2009, the largest share of votes went to the *Kadima* party, led by Tzipi Livi, an experienced politician who also happens to be a vegetarian. Although she failed to successfully form a coalition and therefore never became the head of state, contrary to Derrida’s suggestion, she certainly, as a vegetarian, had a chance of becoming the *chef d’Etat*. In addition, we should note that the current president of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, although appointed rather than elected, is also vegetarian. He has stated on a number of occasions that this is an ideological decision made in the 1960s in response to visiting a slaughterhouse.

Coupled with the Israeli willingness to stomach vegetarian heads of state is the extraordinary growth in the number of vegetarians and vegans in the country. In 2010, 2.6% of the population were vegetarian or vegan. By January 2014, 8% of Israelis reported being vegetarian and 5% vegan, making Israel the country with the world’s highest rate of vegans per capita.³⁵⁹ Tel Aviv currently has 18 vegan restaurants which compares with just two in London.³⁶⁰ The last series of *Big Brother* in Israel was won by a vegan activist who appeared on the show with the specific agenda of promoting veganism—four of the housemates became vegan during the course of the series. Finally, the Hebrew-subtitled version of Gary Yourovski’s YouTube lecture which promotes veganism has been viewed more than a million times.³⁶¹ Given that there are only seven million proficient Hebrew speakers in the world, this is a remarkable statistic.

Of course it is possible that this upsurge in veganism will prove to be a fad. There is a degree to which veganism is an expression of fashion rather than a concern for animal welfare—on this question, we take with a certain scepticism, for example, singer Beyoncé and her celebrity husband Jay Z’s much publicised (and derided) 22 day vegan stint at the end of 2013. Despite the undoubtedly fashionable aspect of veganism in Israel, four years into the trend, it shows no signs of abating. In addition, we should note that this change is firmly rooted in a concern for the welfare of nonhuman animals. The arguments for veganism are not couched in terms of health or environmental benefits. Rather the diet is advocated as the only way to eat in a manner which attempts to do justice to nonhuman animals. As such, following Matthew Calarco, we can say that whatever it is that is happening in Israel in general and in Tel Aviv specifically is a response to the pressing need to do what Derrida calls “eating well.” In “Deconstruction is not

³⁵⁹ “Are Israelis Going Vegan? - National,” *Haaretz.com*, accessed April 29, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/.premium-1.621105>.

³⁶⁰ According to Trip Advisor there are 17,752 restaurants in London compared with 1,104 in Tel Aviv.

³⁶¹ גארי יורופסקי - הפעם - החשובה שתשמעו אי פעם [The Most Important Lecture That You Will Ever Hear - Gary Yourovski], 2011, <https://youtu.be/omweihtaYwI>.

Vegetarianism,” Calarco asks: “Is there any doubt that a vegetarian diet is, in general (which is to say *typically* but not *always*), and in the context of contemporary western culture, a more respectful way of relating to other animals than meat eating?”³⁶² As we saw in Chapter Three, he notes that the question of “eating well” always remains open, but stresses that this is not to say that there are no better or worse ways to eat. Indeed, he argues also that “carnophallogocentrism can at least be partially resisted by switching to a vegetarian diet.” Is what we are witnessing in Israel the start of a radical engagement with the politics and ethics of eating well? Is it the beginning of a new era in human-animal relations? Clearly it is too soon to say and it would be foolish to underestimate the deep-rooted force of carnophallogocentrism, but if an era of posthumanism which heralds the ends of man is coming, then where better to start than in the Holy Land?

Strategic anthropomorphism

In the course of this study, we have repeatedly stated Derrida’s claim that this “critical phase” in human-animal relations involves changes in both knowledge and thinking. In its strongest and most evocative expression, he states of the human-animal face to face encounter that “thinking perhaps begins there.”³⁶³ I have noted above that what I perceive to be the basis of the growth in veganism in Israel is a radical transformation in the way that people think about nonhumans. Derrida suggests that the metaphysical tradition of philosophical thought is incapable of doing justice to nonhuman animals and it is a key contention of this thesis that literary writing opens a way towards a more ethical thinking on nonhuman animals. In the space I have remaining, I would like to restate the ethical force of literary writing and to suggest how the rich resources of deconstruction can be employed in moving towards a new thinking where the human-animal division can be no longer be unthinkingly maintained.

A Considerable Speck.

(Microscopic)

A speck that would have been beneath my sight
 On any but a paper sheet so white
 Set off across what I had written there.
 And I had idly poised my pen in air
 To stop it with a period of ink
 When something strange about it made me think,
 This was no dust speck by my breathing blown,

³⁶² Calarco, “Deconstruction Is Not Vegetarianism,” 196.

³⁶³ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 29.

But unmistakably a living mite
 With inclinations it could call its own.
 It paused as with suspicion of my pen,
 And then came racing wildly on again
 To where my manuscript was not yet dry;
 Then paused again and either drank or smelt--
 With loathing, for again it turned to fly.
 Plainly with an intelligence I dealt.
 It seemed too tiny to have room for feet,
 Yet must have had a set of them complete
 To express how much it didn't want to die.
 It ran with terror and with cunning crept.
 It faltered: I could see it hesitate;
 Then in the middle of the open sheet
 Cower down in desperation to accept
 Whatever I accorded it of fate.
 I have none of the tenderer-than-thou
 Collectivistic regimenting love
 With which the modern world is being swept.
 But this poor microscopic item now!
 Since it was nothing I knew evil of
 I let it lie there till I hope it slept.

I have a mind myself and recognize
 Mind when I meet with it in any guise
 No one can know how glad I am to find
 On any sheet the least display of mind.³⁶⁴

This poem by Robert Frost, first published in 1939, makes powerful connections between writing and nonhuman animal life. As the parenthetical subtitle suggests, Frost evokes an extremely tiny animal as his subject matter, magnifying the mite to the status of muse. The poem is all about inversions of scale whereby the reader's gaze shrinks down to the Alice-in-Wonderland viewpoint of the tiny animal as it races wildly across a page of freshly written verse.

The life and death power of writing is vividly portrayed as the "period of ink," the smallest typographic character is all it would take to put a stop to the life of this mite. Meanwhile, for its part, the mite has a deep suspicion of the poet's pen. It justifiably flees from the deadly pen which is both writing implement and weapon, but equally understands with "loathing," the danger in the wet ink of the written word. The poet recognises the powerful and potentially harmful nature of writing which, as a traditional source of anthropocentrism, is liable to ignore or overlook animals such as the mite. What we do not have is the not yet dry manuscript on which the mite appears. Instead, the now dry ink tells a different story into which the mite has

³⁶⁴ Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Henry Holt, 2002), 357.

been inscribed. The mite is the occasion for writing the poem and has called it into being alongside the poet. We are tempted to hear in “mite” the homophone “might” which seems to play out in both of its meanings. This would be an example of what Derrida calls, in relation to the writing of Hélène Cixous, “the mighty power of the *might*”.³⁶⁵ The strength of the mite is demonstrated in its vigour of activity. Rather like the mole in D.H. Lawrence’s “Second Best,” the energy of the little animal is what inspires the poet.

The other “might” concerns the properties which the mite might have. The first thing that the narrator notices about the mite is its strangeness and this reminds us of Timothy Morton’s notion of nonhumans as “strange strangers.”³⁶⁶ In a sense, this is all that can be said definitively of the mite—that it is strange, irreducibly so—but Frost goes on to imagine what characteristics this animal might have. The narrator takes a decidedly maximalist approach in his interpretation of the actions of the mite and uses a range of actions and emotions usually reserved for humans—the mite has “inclinations” and “intelligence,” it feels “terror” and “desperation,” it uses “cunning” and it “hesitates.” In this sense, the poem exhibits what we could think of as a *strategic anthropomorphism*. This is similar in many ways to what we saw in Lawrence’s Lizard poem in the introduction. Strategic anthropomorphism is first of all anthropomorphism which calls attention to itself. Plainly, the reader is not expected to believe that the thought processes of the mite and its emotions are accurately represented in the poem. In this way, the violent tendencies of anthropomorphism, which typically attempts to a) reduce the strangeness of nonhumans and b) suggest that only human emotions or capabilities are valid, are contained.

The narrator explicitly takes pity on the mite even though there is no way to know what it is like to be a mite. It seems difficult to argue with the assumption that the movements of the mite are an expression of “how much it didn’t want to die,” but beyond this, everything attributed to the mite is pure speculation. I have argued that a part of doing justice to nonhuman animals is to pay attention to their strangeness, their difference from human animals. I have stressed the importance and difficulty of evoking wildness and resisting the domesticating instincts of language. Yet alongside this need for strangeness is the question of pity. If it is true that it is easier for humans to feel pity for other humans, then there is a strategic value to a certain anthropomorphism in descriptions of nonhuman animals. This would have to be an anthropomorphism which is presented as such. As Jeff Wallace notes: “if we are like them, they are like us; to the extent that we are animal, they are human. Anthropomorphism in this light is less a ‘mistake’ than an expanded acknowledgement of material kinship.”³⁶⁷ In this case, it is clear to readers that the range of emotions and desires attributed to the mite is highly

³⁶⁵ Jacques Derrida, *H.C. For Life, That Is to Say...*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 79.

³⁶⁶ Morton, “Thinking Ecology: The Mesh, The Strange Stranger, and the Beautiful Soul.”

³⁶⁷ Wallace, *D.H. Lawrence, Science and the Posthuman*, 135.

speculative—we are not seriously expected to accept, for example, the “desperation” of the mite, but here is an example of where literature is licensed to speculate in a manner which philosophy is not. Frost does not have to justify his use of the word nor, presumably, would he be able to. Yet its effect unmistakably draws us towards the narrator’s explicit conclusion that the mite has “mind” and as such deserves to live. This is a conclusion which, if taken seriously, would fundamentally change the way in which humans think about nonhumans.

Respect for alterity

At the other end of the scale to strategic anthropomorphism is writing which evokes the otherness of nonhumans. This essential task connects powerfully to the ethical work of deconstruction. In his book *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, Simon Critchley gives an important account of how deconstruction relates to ethics. Defining ethics in terms of “respect for alterity,”³⁶⁸ his analysis focuses on the manner in which deconstruction demands a careful attention to otherness. Critchley observes how thinking itself, at least in a philosophical sense, fails to do justice to otherness. “The very activity of thinking,” he writes, “which lies at the basis of epistemological, ontological, and veridical comprehension, is the reduction of plurality to unity and alterity to sameness.”³⁶⁹ This shines a powerful light on Derrida’s claim that the philosophical tradition has failed in its attempts to think nonhuman animals. He goes on to note that “To think philosophically is to comprehend—*comprendre, comprehendere, begreifen*, to include, to seize, to grasp—and master the other, thereby reducing its alterity.”³⁷⁰ This returns us precisely to the question of the human hand. It is clear that the violence of this organ is not limited to the fact that it is denied—as we have seen in so many places—to nonhumans, but also in that to grasp is to master. Through Critchley’s analysis, we can see now what is ethical about deconstructive thinking. Through its focus on contradictions, impossibilities and internal instability, the human grasp on the other is loosened. Critchley writes that deconstructive reading operates in what he calls a “double-handed” manner in which a “traditional” reading of a text is followed by one which operates outside of the consensus.

To return to the Frost poem, with Critchley’s account of deconstruction in mind, we can re-read the poem and discover, in contrast to a certain domesticating force, a testament to otherness. In fact, we can see an explicit focus on otherness in terms of the narrator who claims at the end of the poem that “No one can know how glad I am to find / On any sheet the least display of mind.” He asserts the singularity and essential unknowability of his mind. And if his mind is an

³⁶⁸ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd ed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 12.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

analogue for the mind of the mite, then we can infer that this is equally unknowable. Indeed, a closer reading reveals a persistent scepticism for the claims made about the speck. This undermining of the mastery of the narrator stems from the poem's subtitle "(Microscopic)" which underlines that the narrator cannot really see the thing that he is writing about. We note that the anthropomorphic gestures are undercut by phrases like "as with" and "either" which serve to indicate the speaker's lack of knowledge about the mind which he is seeking to describe. Indeed in resolution, the narrator can only "hope" that the mite sleeps, whereas really he has no idea what it is doing.

In the most explicit declaration of intent, the narrator denies an affiliation with the "modern" trend for "collectivistic regimenting love." Regimenting is precisely what deconstruction, in Critchley's understanding, attempts to avoid. A regimenting love would be no love at all whereas what Frost presents here is an ethical love in that it concerns an interaction with a singular other living being. Indeed nowhere is this more powerfully felt than in the word which rhymes with the "tenderer-than-thou" love which the narrator eschews. This word is "now!" and it comes at the end of a peculiar grammatical formulation: "But this poor microscopic item now!" This exclamation recalls the same sort of emotion as we saw in Lawrence's line "To be a fish!" The "But" interrupts the narrator's derision for universal love and concentrates us on the matter which is pressing now. The matter which is, we could say, at hand. This is the ethical moment of the poem since the moment of ethics is always now. What, we are asked, are you going to do right now that you have this creature in front of you entirely at your mercy? Frost's response to this "now" involves a doubled passivity. He leaves the creature alone and in doing so he hopes that it sleeps. Thus at this moment of non-intervention, the narrator also abandons all claims to know the mite or what it is doing. The poem ultimately leaves the creature in its unknowable strangeness.

The poem, in the end, answers a question which we posed in the introduction about the limits of the face to face relationship which is the basis of ethics. We asked if this could extend to a nonhuman animal which did not have a face and in this instance, we see very clearly that it can. The narrator cannot see any legs, let alone the face of this mite, yet manages, through the use of strategic anthropomorphism as well as a careful preservation of strangeness, to evoke pity for this microscopic creature in a manner which threatens the foundations of the way in which humans like to think about themselves.

Carnivorous panic

With the end in sight, let us return to one of the texts with which we began. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* has been discussed in great detail by a number of very distinguished thinkers,³⁷¹ yet, in closing, I would like to add a small comment on what the text has to say about what distinguished thinkers say. We turn to the scene where Elisabeth Costello is invited to a dinner at Appleton College as part of the celebrations surrounding her award.

What follows is, in some ways, a comedy of manners as the characters discuss the question of eating animals. But what makes this a particularly compelling set piece is that Coetzee demonstrates just how impossible such a discussion actually is. Since, as Derrida points out, there is no outside to carnophallogocentrism, it is not possible to have a dispassionate view of the question of eating animals. Everyone has to eat and therefore the question is always decided in advance. Coetzee demonstrates how academic discourse has supplied resources for discussing this question which are fallacious and even ridiculous in their justification of eating animals. This reaches its height as one of the speakers notes that it is impossible to "explain to a bug that you are not going to step on it." In a passage which includes the text's title, he goes on to argue that

In the lives of animals, things, good or bad, just happen. So vegetarianism is a very odd transaction, when you come to think of it, with the beneficiaries unaware that they are being benefited. And with no hope of ever becoming aware. Because they live in a vacuum of consciousness.³⁷²

This Cartesian statement is so filled with false premises and lazy conclusions that it borders on the absurd, yet the words are spoken by a senior academic in a move which casts serious doubts of the ability of the academy to think through the ethics of encounters with nonhuman animals.

There are more bad arguments to be found in Derrida's encounter with Elisabeth Roudinesco during the interview entitled "Violence against Animals." In response to Derrida's concern about the suffering of nonhuman animals in circuses, laboratories and slaughterhouses, Roudinesco poses the following question:

But how is it possible to reconcile this desire to reduce animal suffering with the necessity for industrial organization in raising and slaughtering animals, which makes it possible to prevent so many humans from starving?³⁷³

³⁷¹ See, for example Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J.M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy* as well as the critical essays included in the Princeton edition of Coetzee's text, previously cited.

³⁷² Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 44.

³⁷³ Derrida and Roudinesco, "Violence Against Animals," 71.

It is difficult to know quite what to make of this question. Derrida politely notes that “the consumption of meat has never been a biological necessity,” but of course the idea that it is necessary to eat meat in order to prevent starvation is utter nonsense. Given the extraordinary inefficiencies of meat production, one could say instead that the reverse is true—it is necessary to stop eating meat in order to prevent starvation.

These examples raise the question of what it is that prompts highly educated and knowledgeable people to utter such asinine comments in the defence of meat consumption. I would like to argue that these panicked responses derive from a kind of cognitive dissonance which arises from a fundamental paradox at the heart of humanism. I am calling this “carnivorous panic.” I have alluded to this paradox several times already and it derives from the second of three traumas which Derrida, borrowing from Freud, lists as having profoundly challenged the superiority of the human order. The first trauma is the Copernican and the third is the Freudian. The second is the Darwinian, a revolution in thinking which removes the scientific basis for an absolute human-animal distinction.³⁷⁴ After Darwin, it is not possible for humans to be both compassionate and to put animals to death unnecessarily. Yet these are the contradictory demands of traditional humanism and they surely leave the human as what Derrida calls “that animal at unease with itself.”³⁷⁵ We have examined this contradiction in terms of the location of the slaughterhouses in More’s *Utopia* and it appears once again in Lawrence’s “Reflections.” It is these powerful and incompatible requirements that lead to the creation of bizarre formulations such as the collocation “humane killing.” There seems no coincidence here that the synonym for “sympathetic” is a word so closely and obviously related to the word “human.” Precisely in this phrase we see the contrary forces which operate through the term “human” which demands both pity for and the death of the other. As humans, we need to think of ourselves as sympathetic, compassionate animals, and this need creates an intellectual demand to square compassion with the realities of the carnophallogocentric order.

Neil Badmington notes that “The writing of the posthumanist condition should not seek to fashion ‘scriptural tombs’ for humanism, but must, rather, take the form of a critical practice that occurs *inside* humanism, consisting not of the wake but the working-through of humanist discourse.”³⁷⁶ This is what the theorising of carnivorous panic ought to do in that it consists of a working through of the internal contradictions of humanism. Additionally, I am clearly drawing

³⁷⁴ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2009, 1:131. Freud refers to these “major blows” in his “Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis.”

³⁷⁵ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 3.

³⁷⁶ Badmington, “Theorizing Posthumanism,” 22.

on Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's theory of "homosocial panic."³⁷⁷ Sedgwick observes that sexual desire between men is stimulated as a result of social conditions which cause them to spend large amounts of time in close proximity to one another. Our analysis of the face to face encounter suggests that, in a similar way, a close the proximity to the animals which we eat is likely to trigger carnivorous panic. In this sense, we understand the convenience of not having to meet the animals which we kill. Equally, as Roudinesco attests, we prefer not to witness acts of slaughter.³⁷⁸ With this in mind, we will end with one last visit to the slaughterhouse. We saw how in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, the male witnesses in the slaughterhouse conceal their panic by "laughing nervously," an act which uses laughter—supposedly the reserve of human animals only—as way of filling the gap which no words can adequately bridge. In Patrick McCabe's powerful and disturbing novel *The Butcher Boy* (1992), we clearly see the competing discourses of compassion and carnivorousness and are given a glimpse of the madness which lies beyond this panicked response.

On being told by his teacher that the slaughterhouse is "the only place you'll be any good for," Francis Brady asks for a job at Mr. Leddy's abattoir. As the boy is shown around, Mr. Leddy asks him what he thinks of a particular piglet. "O he's lovely" he replies, which is Leddy's cue to kill the pig with a bolt gun. The episode is narrated from Francis' viewpoint:

He was as pink as a baby's bottom and he said to me with his big eyes: I'm not a big pig yet I don't understand anything. Please—will you not let any harm come to me? And his front trotters dangling over Leddy's tattoo it was a snaked sword. Isn't he lovely says Leddy again he sure is he sure is and next thing what has he in his hand only a gun not a real gun it was a captive bolt pistol and what does he do only stick it into the baby pig's head and bid-dunk!, right into his skull goes the bolt and such a squeal. Then down on the concrete plop and not a squeak out of him all you could see was him saying you said you'd mind me and you didn't. Then Leddy looks at me haw haw haw and all this as much as to say whaddya think John Wayne huh betcha didn't expect that! Huh! he says, huh? He was all excited and the bottom lip was starting to go I knew he wasn't as tough as he let on, all he was saying was don't try any of your tricks on me Brady, just the same as the master. But it was a good one all the same. What d'you think now, eh? he says. Very good, top marks Mr Leddy, top marks from the Shooting Piglets University. Or I could say why oh why did you have to do such a terrible thing to him he never harmed anyone in his whole life you're a cruel cruel man Mr Leddy! and throw myself down on top of the poor little dead little baby pig lying there with his mouth open.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ See Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³⁷⁸ We recall from the introduction that when Derrida asks her what she would do if faced with animal slaughter, she replies "I would move away." (See note 33.)

³⁷⁹ Patrick McCabe, *The Butcher Boy* (London: Picador, 2015), 135.

McCabe's use of an ambiguous narratorial voice allows him to convey the complexities and contradictions which accompany this act of violence. Francis, the narrator, is suffering from severe mental illness. His alcoholic and abusive father has driven his mother to suicide and he has been molested by a priest in a correctional school which he was sent to after breaking into his neighbour's house. He is immature, naïve, paranoid and violent. Yet he also exhibits a sharp perceptive understanding of adult characters. The disorderly nature of the narrative with its unusual syntax and minimal punctuation gives a direct and authentic feel to the voice which, due to the ex-centric nature of Francis, creates a sense in which an unsayable truth is being told.

Leddy deliberately evokes a sense of affection and pity for the piglet which sets the scene for his theatrical killing. It is clear that his act will have the biggest impact if he can make Francis empathise with the pig. Francis understands that this killing is a macho act of pseudo-bravery whereby Leddy is attempting to assert his dominance over his future employee. Of course the only thing that constitutes bravery in the killing of this defenceless and passive beast is the overcoming of one's sense of pity. For all his bravado, however, the wavering lip of the slaughterman leads Francis to understand immediately that Leddy "wasn't as tough as he let on." In other words, in the conflict between pity and the need for the animal sacrifice, Leddy is unable to completely subdue his ethical impulses. Like the male observers of slaughter in *The Jungle*, Leddy has no words for his act. He laughs at first and then produces a "huh" sound twice. He wants to project a masterly manliness, but is overtaken by a version of what we have been calling carnivorous panic. That is that the impulse to pity—that he himself has evoked for the "lovely" piglet—clashes with his attempt to enter fully into the sacrificial economy in a manner which renders him speechless and foolish-looking.

If Leddy ultimately panics in his attempt at looking tough, Francis' response is all the more chilling in a manner which demonstrates his ability to put his ethical impulses to one side. Francis' first response to the piglet is the Levinasian ethical response to the face to face encounter. Looking the piglet in the eyes, he feels them telegraphing the ethical demand for protection. The piglet "says" to Francis "will you not let any harm come to me?" This demand remains even after the pig has been killed as the piglet silently demands: "you said you'd mind me and you didn't." With heavy irony, Francis wonders whether to congratulate Leddy or to throw himself onto the dead pig. In what follows, however, Francis, whose main aim is to get a job, demonstrates his suitability for employment at the abattoir—much to the surprise of Leddy—by killing another piglet with the bolt gun. He calmly subverts Leddy's previous attempts to evoke pity, telling him "It wouldn't be fair on this little fellow to leave him all alone now that his poor old friend is gone," and he tells himself that the killing is necessary in that he needs the job. After he has killed the piglet, he claims inwardly not to know what all Leddy's "huffing and puffing was about." For Francis, although there is no panic and he is able to set

aside his feelings of pity and guilt, it becomes clear that this lack of carnivorous panic is a facet of his psycho-pathology. Towards the end of the novel, Francis uses the same bolt gun to kill his neighbour Mrs. Nugent and uses her blood to write “PIGS” on her bedroom wall.

Carnivorous panic plays out the unravelling of the human. It is the moment when the ethical impulse and the carnophallogocentric order collide, dangerously unhinging the human, exposing the weaknesses of discourses which traditionally play a part in differentiating humans from nonhumans. As we saw above, the rationality of the “rational animal” fails during carnivorous panic which inspires foolish argument or the wordlessness of nervous laughter. Carnivorous panic is the response which arises when the un-faceable is encountered. Derrida notes in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* that the relationship between humans and nonhumans—especially the ones that they eat—is characterised by disavowal.³⁸⁰ But when this disavowal is impossible, or when it needs to be justified, then panic ensues. In a manner which connects with posthumanism, this panic is, however, also an opportunity to move beyond carnophallogocentrism. I would suggest that it allows an opening to a kind of madness which is essential in the challenge of countering carnophallogocentrism. Francis’ mad response is to kill a piglet and then to kill a human. His actions demonstrate to the reader the continuities between human and nonhuman animals and the ease with which the rules of sacrifice can cross this boundary. Francis’ transgression brings up some uncomfortable questions for the carnivorous reader who must somehow justify the killing of the piglet whilst absolutely abhorring the killing of Mrs. Nugent.

On the other hand, Francis’ internal narrative presents the reader with another mad response to the death of the piglet. He suggests, presumably with derision, that he could throw himself “down on top of the poor little dead little baby pig.” This would be an expression of pity which mirrors the well-known act of Friedrich Nietzsche in Turin who reputedly threw himself onto a horse which was being cruelly whipped. Referring to this episode, Derrida stresses the madness inherent in this act and comments that Nietzsche was:

mad enough to cry in conjunction with [*auprès de*] an animal, under the gaze of, or cheek by jowl with a horse. Sometimes I think I see him call that horse as a witness, and primarily in order to call it as a witness to his compassion, I think I see him take its head in his hands.³⁸¹

After this event, Nietzsche was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Even if untrue, we understand the appeal of this story—what better way to prove your madness than to sympathise with a nonhuman animal? Derrida imagines the scene in a manner which gives it the quality of a literary moment and as many have pointed out, this act has its literary precedent in Fyodor

³⁸⁰ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 26.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) in which Raskolnikov dreams that he is a child witnessing the cruel flogging to death of a horse at the hands of drunken peasants.³⁸² The vivid and disturbing dream culminates as the young Raskolnikov throws himself on the horse which has suffered horrendous abuse:

But the poor boy is beside himself. With a shout he tears through the crowd to the gray horse, throws his arms around her dead, bleeding muzzle, and kisses it, kisses her eyes and mouth . . . Then he suddenly jumps up and in a frenzy flies at Mikolka with his little fists. At this moment his father, who has been chasing after him all the while, finally seizes him and carries him out of the crowd.

"Come along, come along now!" he says to him. "Let's go home!"

"Papa! What did they . . . kill . . . the poor horse for!" he sobs, but his breath fails, and the words burst like cries from his straining chest.³⁸³

Raskolnikov's father has no explanation for his child since the killing is needless and cruel. All the boy has is his impotent rage which threatens to overcome even his ability to speak.

Alongside strategic anthropomorphism and respect for alterity, madness is a powerful resource which attests to the vertigo of the beast. Mid-way through her lecture, Elisabeth Costello's son's wife comments that "she is rambling," that "she's lost her thread."³⁸⁴ But perhaps this disordered lack of rationality is the condition of saying what has to be said. The text ends as Costello reveals her mad thoughts to her son regarding visiting his house and her abhorrence at the meat which they routinely consume. She asks herself if she is dreaming.

Yet I'm not dreaming. I look into your eyes, into Norma's, into the children's, and I see only kindness, human-kindness. Calm down, I tell myself, you are making a mountain out of a molehill. This is life. Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can't you? *Why can't you?*³⁸⁵

Costello recognises the madness inherent to her inability to rationalise the killing of nonhuman animals. Yet this is a madness which powerfully subverts and contaminates the "normality" of what she terms "life." If Raskolnikov's ethics can only be realised in a dream, the question of whether or not Costello is dreaming in the real world becomes central to her interpretation of what she sees. If the reader empathises with this pitiful and weeping old lady, there is also the risk that we will identify with her mad thoughts. What, we might ask, is the difference between "kindness" and "human kindness" and in what way does madness patrol the borders of this distinction?

³⁸² See, for example, David Farrell Krell, *Derrida and Our Animal Others: Derrida's Final Seminar, "The Beast and the Sovereign"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 97.

³⁸³ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Larissa Volokhonsky and Richard Pevear (London: Vintage, 1993), 58–9.

³⁸⁴ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 31.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

These literary moments of madness, typically involving human characters as children or at the end of their lives, offer a glimpse of what lies beyond the carnophallogocentric order. They offer an experience of pity and compassion which takes seriously the sort of ethical treatment of the other which Levinas demands and which deconstruction enacts. The task ahead is the development of a literary criticism which, drawing on deconstruction's sensitivity towards nonhuman animals combined with its deep engagement with ethics, develops in readers an awareness of our connections with and responsibilities for the multitudes of other animals which we find ourselves living alongside. To return to Derrida's remark about the human as living in a condition of unease, he also talks of a promise: "we would therefore be in passage toward surrendering to the promise of that animal at unease with itself."³⁸⁶ The promise of the human is precisely this ethical engagement with nonhumans and a vital way of realising it is, as I hope I have shown, through an appreciation of the singular and powerful resources of literature.

³⁸⁶ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 3.

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