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**ANIMALS, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE ZOOPOETICS
OF AMERICAN MODERNISM**

A Dissertation in

English

by

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses a striking paradox of American modernity: the historical disappearance of wildlife from the natural environment and the simultaneous proliferation of animal forms across the cultural landscape—in literature, in visual and material culture, and in popular scientific writings during the half-century of dramatic change from 1890 to 1940. Across these venues the figure of the “vanishing animal” emerges as a dominant trope, as modern extinctions and the explosion of machine culture combine to frame animals within a spectral logic—disappearing, but more visible than ever. The first half of this dissertation examines the extensive technological, ideological, and representational apparatus through which animals and animal life are rendered in modern American culture, while the second half explores a significant, if surprising, correlative phenomenon whereby the modernized figure of the animal returns to haunt, and in fact disrupt, the very technics that facilitated its emergence in the first place.

Chapter One addresses the popular genre of the “realistic” wild animal story and the hunting narratives of Theodore Roosevelt, and identifies the figure of the vanishing animal as a significant trope linking a number of prominent Americans at the turn of the century. Chapter Two focuses more explicitly on the elaborate *techné* through which animals become nostalgia-laden images of the primitive, by examining Ernest Hemingway’s *Death in the Afternoon* in the context of modern taxidermy, wildlife photography, and early nature films. Chapter Three shifts directions in order to explore the “primitive” behind, or within, modern technologies of communication. This chapter addresses the modern reconfiguration of “the animal” and its relation to both language

and subjectivity through an examination of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Chapter Four continues this investigation of the animal's haunting presence within modernist cultural and aesthetic productions through a discussion of Val Lewton's classic 1942 film, *Cat People*. By employing the deconstructive notion of "spectrality" to read the zoopoetics of modernist texts, my goal is to open up cultural texts to their nonhuman other; and in turn, to open up the larger nonhuman world to the force of the figurative—letting *zoon* inform both our *logos* and our *poesis*, and indeed, vice versa.

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Introduction

Any attempt to render the cultural significance of animals and animal life in American modernism runs up against a strange paradox. Just as animals begin to disappear from the natural environment, animal forms simultaneously become a ubiquitous presence across the cultural landscape – in literature, in visual and material culture, and in post-Darwinian scientific and popular scientific writings. Modern American literature abounds with animals. London, Steinbeck, Austin, Moore, Faulkner, Hemingway, Wright: all feature prominent animal figures. Expanding the literary scope to include turn-of-the-century African American folktales and Native American trickster tales, one could add Harris’s “Uncle Remus” stories, the folktales in Hurston’s *Mules and Men* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and the writings of early Native American authors, Zitkala-Ša, Mourning Dove, and Charles Eastman. Within visual and material culture, there is a virtual explosion of animal forms: in early wildlife photography, safari/nature cinema, and Disney animation; in children’s toys and picture books; in circuses and Wild West shows; and in zoos and natural history dioramas. Within science, the turn of the century witnessed a tremendous surge of scientific and popular scientific interest in animal psychology, and then, of course, there was (and still is) the enormous controversy over Darwinism.

This dissertation is a study of the relations between “the animal” and modern American technologies of representation. Its starting point is the observation that, in modernity, it becomes increasingly impossible to separate the meaning of animals and of

animal life from the distinctly modern systems of representation through which we apprehend them. Across many venues the figure of the “vanishing animal” emerges as a dominant trope, as modern extinctions, exterminations, and the explosive growth of machine culture combine to frame animals within a spectral logic – disappearing, but more visible than ever. Rendered spectral, animals are transfigured throughout American culture into modernity’s “primitive” Other, nostalgic objects of premodern enchantment, vitality, and innocence. In the early twentieth century, “wildlife” becomes a privileged symbol of American national identity and origins, and a vicarious source of primitive regeneration. Yet, animals do not embody “the primitive” in any simple or straightforward way; rather, an extensive technical and ideological apparatus is required in order to construct them as such. This dissertation aims, in part, to expose this apparatus, and to trace the complex social, cultural, political, and technological networks “behind” the construction of wildlife in modern America. At the same time, it is precisely because the animal is figured as spectral that its presence returns – particularly in the realm of literary and visual aesthetics – to haunt modern communication technologies and representational forms.¹ A second major aim of this dissertation then, is to examine the animal’s uncanny – and destabilizing – presence within modern technics.

Two sources in particular have proven indispensable to this project. The first is John Berger’s famous 1977 essay, “Why Look at Animals?” – significant for being the first widely read study to assess the modern disappearance of animals in terms of its broader cultural implications. Berger argues that, in the process of capitalism’s rise to dominance, “real” animals have disappeared, only to resurface everywhere in the form of

mass produced “images.” Though he cites Disney toys, photographs, and family pets as illustrations of the “cultural marginalization” of animals in modernity, his primary emphasis is on the modern zoo. “Public zoos,” he notes, “came into existence at the beginning of the period which was to see the disappearance of animals from daily life. The zoo to which people go to meet animals, to observe them, to see them, is, in fact, a monument to the impossibility of such encounters” (19). Berger argues that animals, having for time immemorial existed at the center of “man’s world” as a sacred source of meaning and identity, have in the last two hundred years been relegated to the outer margins of human life. Thus, at the zoo, “the view is always wrong”: “However you look at these animals, even if the animal is up against the bars, less than a foot from you, looking outwards in the public direction, *you are looking at something that has been rendered absolutely marginal*” (21, 22, emphasis in original). Zoos, Berger concludes, are a monument to a historic and “irredeemable” loss: “Looking at each animal, the unaccompanied zoo visitor is alone. As for the crowds, they belong to a species which has at last been isolated” (26).

Berger’s thesis is shot through with a problematic nostalgia for premodern days, when humans allegedly enjoyed direct and deeply meaningful encounters with animals.² Nonetheless, his study has been foundational to the rapidly growing body of recent scholarship devoted to cultural animal studies and modern human-animal relations.³ It also serves as the launching point for the second indispensable source of this project, Akira Mizuta Lippit’s *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (2000). As Lippit points out, Berger’s thesis is significant in suggesting a break in the sustained rhetoric of sacrifice that has long dominated Western attitudes to the animal world. Going back to

Aristotle, Lippit notes, “the effort to define the human being has usually required a preliminary gesture of exclusion: a rhetorical animal sacrifice. The presence of the animal must first be extinguished for the human being to appear” (8). Given the unique proximity of animals to human being, it has long been taken as an implicit given that, in order to posit the human, it is first necessary to eliminate or otherwise overcome the animal. In this light, Berger’s characterization of the modern zoo visitor as “alone” and “isolated” suggests a fundamental reversal, such that, “it is now the human world that suffers from the exclusion of animals, whereas before, it was precisely the removal of animals that allowed human beings to establish their autonomy” (17). This reversal, Lippit notes, finds vivid expression in Carl Jung’s essay “Approaching the Unconscious,” in which the author writes, “As scientific understanding has grown, so our world has become dehumanized. Man feels himself no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional ‘unconscious identity’ with natural phenomena. . . . No voices speak to man from stones, plants, and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear” (qtd in Lippit 17). What emerges from both Berger’s and Jung’s accounts is a mourning or melancholia that is a “crucial feature of modernity” (17).

In the modern context, animals take on an entirely different meaning than they have had in the past. Taking his cue from Berger, Lippit points out that “Modernity sustains . . . the disappearance of animals as a constant state. That is . . . animals never *entirely* vanish. Rather, they exist in a state of *perpetual vanishing*” (1). Lippit proposes the notion of the *spectral* animal to account for a peculiar phenomenon of modernity in which animals, “[o]nce considered a metonymy of nature,” are replaced by the amazingly productive *figure* of the animal, which in turn comes to play a “crucial role in the

articulation of new forms of communication, transmission, and exchange” (2). Having largely disappeared from sight, animals in modernity reappear as “emblems of the new industrial environment” – as “ghosts” haunting the “idioms and histories of numerous technological innovations” (187).⁴ “With the Darwinian revolution, Freudian psychoanalysis, and the advances of the optical and technological media,” Lippit notes, “animals symbolized not only new structures of thought but also the process by which those new thoughts were transported. Animals – and their capacity for instinctive, almost telepathic communication – put into question the primacy of human language and consciousness as optimal modes of communication” (2).

Lippit develops his thesis through a wide-ranging reflection on animal discourse in psychoanalysis, philosophy, critical theory, and early-twentieth-century media and technology. In his final chapter, he speculates on the role of “the animal” in the genealogy of film, positing a striking discursive “alliance between animals and cinema.” Though he does not attend to the American context per se, Lippit’s groundbreaking thesis and his notion of the spectral animal have much to offer modern American literary and cultural criticism in particular. The proliferation of animal forms across the cultural landscape (as I’ve indicated above) is an especially salient characteristic of modern American culture. Moreover, the disappearance of nature, and more specifically, of wildlife, is a dominant theme in early twentieth century American life. As one prominent naturalist put it in 1913: “nowhere is Nature being destroyed so rapidly as in the United States” (Hornaday, *Vanishing Wildlife* vii). Indeed, increasing public alarm over the threat of widespread species extinction at the turn into the twentieth century drove the

United States to develop the first State-sponsored wildlife conservation legislation (see Chapter One).

The prospect of approaching early twentieth century American culture vis-à-vis the figure of the spectral animal is thus a promising one insofar as it seems to cohere with certain widespread phenomena of the period. At the same time, this reconfigured notion of animality provides the conceptual means for a productive reframing of the relationship between “animal” and “modernism” (broadly conceived). Images of the degenerate, instinct-driven protagonists of Naturalist fictions have long dominated our conception of “the animal” in late nineteenth and early twentieth century American literary culture. Frank Norris’s Zola-inspired novels *McTeague* (1899) and *Vandover and the Brute* (1914, posthumous) exemplify the Naturalist depiction of man’s animal nature. In Naturalism’s Darwinian narrative of degeneration, the animal in focus is a beast lurking deep within the human psyche, ever threatening to surface. Yet this overwhelming emphasis on the animal as a symbol of human degeneration and raw primitivism fails to account for the many other ways in which the figure of the animal signifies in American modernity. Consider, for instance, Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild*. Here is a classic Naturalist text – a prototypical instance of the animal figured as a regressive-primitivist symbol. Yet, the Naturalist reading neglects, for instance, the novella’s curious commingling of animal and machine imagery, as in the following passage: “When Thornton passed a caressing hand along [Buck’s] back, a snapping and crackling followed the hand, each hair discharging its pent magnetism at the contact. Every part, brain and body, nerve tissue and fiber, was keyed to the most exquisite pitch; and

between all the parts there was a perfect equilibrium or adjustment” (68). As Cecilia Tichi has suggested, excerpts such as this one suggest the extent to which *The Call of the Wild* exemplifies the “covert assimilation of machine values in fiction” (31). Striking in this regard is the unselfconscious ease with which London merges organic and inorganic imagery, thus reflecting the degree to which American subjectivity at the turn of the century had come to be framed by technology.

Following Tichi, Mark Seltzer in *Bodies and Machines* reads London’s novella as an affirmation of “the anti-biological and technological making of men,” which he sees as central to the Naturalist text (167-68). Buck, Seltzer argues, is subjected to an increasing regime of systematic management – “the Taylorization of bodies and interiors” (168) – in his transplanted life of toilsome trace and trail in the Arctic.⁵ Thus, when we read of his transformation into the “dominant primordial beast,” we are to attribute it not to his keen survival instincts, but rather to Buck’s thoroughgoing subjection to disciplinary management. Tichi’s and Seltzer’s work have paved the way for scholarship that is significantly more attuned to the discursive intersections between Nature and Culture. Not surprisingly, a good deal of this critical work has focused on the site of the human body.⁶ And rightly so – as Tim Armstrong has suggested, a central paradox of modernity, embodied in the “therapeutic ethos” that emerged in the late-nineteenth century, is the urgent call for “a return to the ‘natural’ body which could only be achieved by *technique*” (*Modernism* 66).⁷

And yet, despite vigorous interest in “natural” bodies, critics of modern culture have paid little attention to the disciplining of *animal* bodies in modernity – an oversight made all the more conspicuous in Seltzer’s insistence on reading Buck and his fellow sled

dogs as “men in furs.” Scholars have by and large ignored the indispensable role animals have played in the development of modern disciplinary techniques. Taylorism, for instance, and the broader technologization of the body in modernity, may be traced back to Eadward Muybridge’s gridwork studies of the horse in motion and Etienne-Jules Marey’s time-motion studies of animal bodies, both of which began in the 1870s.⁸ In addition to Taylorism, both Fordism and behaviorism may also be traced back to foundational experiments with animals. Henry Ford’s model of mass assembly-line production, in an ironic twist, replicated the technology of mass animal *dis*-assembly, as exhibited in the vertical abattoirs of Cincinnati and Chicago dating back to the 1850s (Shukin 154-55).⁹ Similarly, behaviorism, and the influential theory of “learning” that is associated with it, based much of its data on the behavior of laboratory rats.¹⁰

Animals, then, are not simply destroyed, or replaced, in modern “machine culture”; they are in fact subjected to a systematic process of technological co-optation, processing, and administration – as well as representation and reproduction. This applies not only to “domestic” creatures, but to “wildlife” as well. As Aldo Leopold notes in his 1933 treatise on *Game Management*, “Every head of wild life still alive in this country is already artificialized, in that its existence is conditioned by economic forces” (21). Not only is “every head of wild life” “conditioned by economic forces” – it is dependent for its survival on State-sponsored management techniques, such as the development and maintenance of wildlife refuges, systematic predator extermination, and the perpetual calculation and administration of species numbers – techniques first developed, notably, in the early part of the twentieth century (and institutionalized with the aid of Leopold’s book).¹¹ Moreover, to these “conditions,” one must also add the cultural and ideological

forces that went into forming the national wildlife preservation lobby in the first place (see Chapters One and Two).

My purpose in discussing the modern disciplining of animal bodies is finally to make the point that, while this dissertation is concerned largely with cultural representations of animals, these representations are hardly separable from the actual historical conditions of “real” animals in modernity. Insofar as the notion of *spectrality* complicates the conventional notions of presence and absence, real and imaginary, living and dead, it is a particularly useful concept for examining the cultural implications of animal disappearance – and indeed, animal “return” – in modernity.

Chapter One of the dissertation addresses the early twentieth-century construction of “wildlife” as an emergent national treasure and a privileged emblem of national origins. This chapter identifies the figure of the vanishing animal as a significant trope linking a number of prominent turn-of-the-century American anxieties – such as those related to “overcivilization,” the prospect of a lost frontier heritage, and national emasculation. The bulk of the chapter focuses on the enormously popular turn-of-the-century genre of “realistic” wild animal stories – a form of writing which combines elements of natural history with animal fiction in an attempt to faithfully represent the perspective of individual animal “personalities.” Though Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* would eventually give the genre international exposure, the wild animal story first became an American sensation through the writings of Ernest Thompson Seton, an early leader of the scouting movement and mainstream interpreter of American Indian culture. Through a close examination of Seton’s animal stories, I situate this genre within a

system of contemporaneous discourses including educational psychology, “salvage” ethnography, and the new science of animal psychology. To establish the range and importance of animal narratives during this period, I also discuss Theodore Roosevelt’s naturalist-historical account of the American hunter-hero in *The Wilderness Hunter* (1893). This chapter argues that, at a time when many thought America at risk of losing its life line to its primitive past, animal narratives became a particularly well-suited means of national subject formation and social engineering.

Extending the analysis of the first chapter, Chapter Two focuses more explicitly on the elaborate *techné* through which animals become nostalgia-laden images of the primitive in modernity. After surveying the mechanical, ideological, and administrative technics of modern wildlife photography, and the natural history museum diorama, this chapter addresses two of Ernest Hemingway’s major nonfiction writings of the 1930s, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935). Significantly, these texts also present Hemingway’s most extensive reflections on *writing*. My analysis demonstrates how Hemingway systematically links the figure of the animal to his aesthetic philosophy in a manner that, while invoking primitive rituals of sacrifice and of the hunt, is in fact strikingly modern in terms of its technique. In this respect, I consider Hemingway as a preeminent literary taxidermist. At the same time, a closer look at Hemingway’s animality discourse in “A Natural History of the Dead” (an interpolated story first published in *Death in the Afternoon*) reveals a much more sophisticated and complex treatment of animals and the unique representational problems that they pose. Thus, while Hemingway’s literary appropriation of animals is in many respects typically modern (that is, disciplinary and basically exploitative), his writing nonetheless

demonstrates a underspoken appreciation for the animal's inherent Otherness and its resistance to modern anthropocentrism.

My analysis of Hemingway's rather complex treatment of the animal signals a major transition in the dissertation. Having examined in the first two chapters the techné "behind" the modern primitive, Chapter Three shifts directions in order to explore the primitive behind, or within, modern technologies of communication, beginning with humanity's most fundamental technology: language. Specifically, this chapter examines the modern reconfiguration of "the animal" and its relation to both language and subjectivity, with respect to William Faulkner's novel, *As I Lay Dying* (1930). In the novel's provocative juxtaposition of human verbal expression with the inarticulate, though communicative, cries of animals, *As I Lay Dying* re-situates human language within a much larger continuum of signifying processes that are themselves a human. At the same time, the novel uncovers traces of animality embedded in the very heart of language through its pervasive and self-reflexive use of animal figures. Sensitized to *As I Lay Dying*'s "zoosemiotic" register, we find in Faulkner's novel a case study of the revealing, if sometimes startling, links between animality and new forms of communication, representation, and literary aesthetics that emerged in modernism.

My final chapter continues this investigation of the modern animal uncanny through an analysis of Val Lewton's classic 1942 horror film, *Cat People*. Gothic literary and filmic productions (like Naturalist fiction) tend to present "the animal" as the devolutionary counterpart to the human, a threatening beast lurking just beneath the civilized surface. In Val Lewton's *Cat People*, however, the animal's haunting quality derives from its spectral status. Indeed, the animal figure is essential to the film's

groundbreaking “diffusion” of the gothic, whereby horror and its attendant affects of fear, guilt, and desire circulate freely throughout a given environment in a process more akin to contagion or unconscious thought transmission. The film’s iconic caged beast in the heart of the urban metropolis, together with its self-reflexive treatment of cinema, highlight the central prominence of surveillance tropes in modernity’s engagement with animal being – tropes that the film repeatedly subverts through its strategic use of “dark patches” and its intimations of an invisible presence. Throughout *Cat People*, animality is locked into a discourse of visibility; the figure of the animal operates at the threshold of the visible and the invisible. As such, the animal is transposed from an object of hierarchical observation to a privileged sign of spectrality. In deferring the spectacle of beastly transformation (which its title seems to promise), the film upsets the linear narrative inherent in classical Hollywood horror metamorphoses and troubles the identity-logic upon which this narrative rests. By strategically fusing the animal and the spectral, *Cat People* portrays the human as inextricably haunted from within by the animal Other, while simultaneously subverting the camera’s (and thus modernity’s) presumed techno-visual dominance.

Notes

¹ Consider, for instance, Eadward Muybridge's proto-cinematic images of the horse in motion (1870s), Thomas Edison's one-minute film, "Electrocution of an Elephant" (1903), and Disney's *Steamboat Willie* (1928), which introduced Mickey Mouse in the first animated cartoon with synchronized sound.

² See Baker (*Picturing* 14) and Burt (26) for a critique of Berger's nostalgic impulse. For a critique of Berger's association of pet-keeping with bourgeois sentimentalism, see Baker (*Picturing*, 13-14). For a more nuanced account of pets in modern culture, see Mason.

³ The interdisciplinary field of "Animal Studies" surfaced within the social sciences in the early nineties and has become increasingly influential in the humanities, as reflected in the wealth of monographs and edited collections which have appeared in the past ten years or so: in literary studies (Malamud, Mason, Simons, and Wolfe), critical theory (Lippit, Wolfe, *Zoontologies*), cultural and visual art studies (Baker, *Picturing* and *Postmodern Animal*), philosophy (Acampora, Agamben, McKenna and Light), history (Fudge, Ritvo, Tester), and cultural geography (Wolch and Emel, eds.). In his Introduction to *Zoontologies*, an edited collection of animal-related essays, Cary Wolfe boldly declares the "question of the animal" to be "perhaps the central problematic for contemporary culture and theory" (ix). For a useful survey of recent developments in animal studies, see the Introduction chapter of Simmons and Armstrong's 2007 edited collection, *Knowing Animals*.

⁴ Lippit links the figure of the animal to the work of Muybridge, James Watt, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Walt Disney, and Erwin Shrodinger – each of whom, he notes, “found uses for animal spirits in developing their respective machines” (187).

⁵ Seltzer notes of *Call*: “Not merely does the toil of trace and trail transform ‘sullen brutes’ into ideal workers – ‘straining, eager, ambitious creatures’ . . . Bodily processes are identified with efficient machine processes, internal and external economies all in order and precisely coordinated” (168).

⁶ Mark Seltzer’s *Bodies and Machines* (1992) and Tim Armstrong’s *Modernism, Technology, and the Body* (1998) have been highly influential in the reframing of naturalism and modernism around the body, a project that has continued in such recent studies as Sara Danius’s *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (2002) and Carolyn Thomas de la Peña’s *The Body Electric: How Strange Machines Built the Modern American* (2003). Criticism targeted on the body may be seen as part of a broader reconsideration of technology’s role in the development of modernist art and culture. Early work in this field includes Ronald E. Martin’s *American Literature and the Universe of Force* (1981); Stephen Kern’s *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (1983); Friedrich A. Kittler’s *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (1985); Tichi’s *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America* (1987); and Anson Rabinbach’s *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (1992).

⁷ See Lears (47-58) on the “emergence of a therapeutic worldview” in late nineteenth century American culture.

⁸ On the Taylor-Muybridge/Marey connection, see Berger (11), Shukin (156), and Tichi (87). See Solnit for an American cultural-historical account of Muybridge and the “technological wild west.” Braun’s *Picturing Time* is an important recent study of Marey, and presents a particularly useful contrast between the two photographers’ work in Chapter 6. Jonathan Burt offers a distinctly animal-focused discussion of Muybridge’s and Marey’s work in his book *Animals in Film* (104-113 and passim).

⁹ Shukin suggests that, in identifying Ford’s Highland Park plant in Dearborn as North America’s “first example of assembly-line production,” historians have “quietly displaced from historical consciousness” the moving lines of vertical abattoirs upon which Ford based his own model (154). “The auto-assembly line, so often taken as representative of mass modernity, is thus mimetically premised upon an ulterior logistics of mass animal disassembly which it technologically replicates and advantageously forgets in a telling moment of historical amnesia” (155).

¹⁰ Notably, in each of these cases, the disciplining of nonhuman animal bodies necessarily precedes, and in fact prepares the way for, the disciplining of human bodies and persons. Behaviorism, along with a number of the key concepts in experimental psychology, owes much to early twentieth-century animal psychology, which, through the invention of the “laboratory experiment,” and of “learning” as a psychological category, rendered animals “organisms of convenience on which psychologists could script a variety of processes that were made ‘visible’ in ways that were not possible with

human beings” (Stam and Kalmanovitch 1135). Regarding the critical role that rodents have played in the development of behaviorist theories, Edward Chace Tolman once noted (in 1938) that “everything important in psychology (except such matters as the building of a super-ego, that is everything save such matters as involve society and words) can be investigated in essence through the continued experimental and theoretical analysis of the determiners of rat behavior at a choice-point in the maze” (qtd in Boakes 236). For more on the rodent’s role in behaviorism see Boakes (228-40). On the relation between animal psychology and Progressive-era education practices, Stam and Kalmanovitch suggest that, with its emphasis on “hierarchies of intelligence and adaptivity,” the theories and methodology of early twentieth-century animal psychology were “readily moved to the problems of the hierarchical environment of the classroom. For as animals were restrained and tested so was mass education a setting in which to regulate and adapt the child to the new industrial age” (1139). The invention of “learning” suggests behaviorism’s crucial relation to Progressive-era theories of education and the founding of American social science. See Mills on the linkages between experimental and social control in behaviorism.

¹¹ As Timothy Luke suggests, “Once modern power/knowledge formations are constituted the basis for industrial society’s economic development, they become the major factor behind all terrestrial life forms being able to survive physically. Thus, ecological knowledge about Nature’s power becomes a strategic technology that reinvests some animal bodies – their means of health, sites of subsistence, and ranges of habitation as fasteners for reassembling the whole space of human existence – with bio-historical

significance. Through new institutions like zoological parks, wildlife preserves, and bird sanctuaries, states start to reposition themselves within their newly historicized biophysical environments, which they find now are also filled with various animal bodies populating specially designated sites in a national faunapower regime” (32). See Chapter Two for more on wildlife management and “faunapower.”

Chapter One

Civilizing Beasts: Turn-of-the-Century Animal Stories and the Invention of American Wildlife

Though largely ignored by contemporary critics, “realistic” wild animal stories were one of the most widely read genres at the turn of the twentieth century.¹ These stories helped to ease national anxiety about the allegedly degenerating effects of modern urban life on white middle-class Americans. They accomplished this by encouraging readers – white males especially – to *identify* with the wild animal protagonists from whose perspective the stories were told. Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* (1903) is the best known example of the genre, though London’s book was by no means the most popular of its day. The stories of North American authors William J. Long, Charles G. D. Roberts, and most prominently, Ernest Thompson Seton, constituted a national literary phenomenon; Seton’s *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898), for instance, went through sixteen printings in four years. Insofar as they embodied American society’s changing views toward wildlife at the turn of the century, realistic animal stories may be situated historically alongside the emergence of the American bison as a national icon, and the first State-sponsored efforts to preserve and protect the nation’s indigenous animal life. More generally, however, turn-of-the-century wild animal stories expose the construction of American “wildlife” as a discursive object linking several broader, heterogeneous national discourses – from early twentieth century primitivism and colonialism, to

frontier nostalgia and the national masculinity crisis; from the back-to-nature movement to “salvage” ethnography and cultural nostalgia for America’s “vanishing races.”

This chapter begins with an account of the American bison’s emergence as a national icon, an event which was both instrumental to, and coextensive with, the historical invention of American wildlife. I attempt to situate this historical event within the vast network of discourses, and social and technological developments, that made it possible in the first place – and that in turn helped to make American wildlife a critical means of American subject formation in the early twentieth century. My purpose here (and throughout the first two chapters) is to highlight the vast discursive and technological apparatus entailed in what is often characterized as America’s “return to nature,” or more broadly, as modern American primitivism.

From the bison, I turn to the figure of Ernest Thompson Seton, to whom the bulk of the chapter is dedicated. Not only was Seton the most widely read author of turn-of-the-century animal stories, and thus a key facilitator in the national back-to-nature movement – he also served as a critical interpreter of American Indian culture and as an early leader of the international scouting movement. To an anxious, “overcivilized,” and dwindling white, post-frontier American mainstream culture, Seton became a tireless advocate for the “authentic” life, for the regeneration of the nation, and for the vigorous reassertion of American national identity.

My concluding section begins with a brief discussion of the early-twentieth-century “nature faker” controversy that grew up around Seton and his fellow animal story writers. Noting Theodore Roosevelt’s prominent role in the controversy, and in early

conservation efforts, I examine his frontier-hunting narrative, *The Wilderness Hunter* (1893), as a significant turn-of-the-century “animal story” in its own right. Though Roosevelt was an outspoken advocate of national regeneration, and though he too saw American wildlife as central to this endeavor, his rhetorical appropriation of wildlife bears a very different ideological stamp than that of Seton and popular animal story writers of the day. In contrasting Roosevelt with Seton, we are better able to see the breadth and complexity of functions that animal narratives served in early twentieth century American culture and politics.

I.

The birth of American Wildlife: The American Bison as case study

In 1913 the U.S. Treasury coined the “buffalo” nickel. The coin’s designer, James Earle Fraser, reported that, in his endeavor to “produce a coin which was truly American,” he could find “no motif within the bounties of the United States so distinctive as the American Buffalo” (qtd in Dary 279).²

The destruction of the American bison began in the 1840s, as increasing numbers of Euroamerican emigrants and their livestock began settling in the plains.³ From 1870 through 1883, bison were slaughtered by the millions at the hands of Euroamerican commercial hunters. Though a number of human and ecological factors contributed to the demise of the American bison, the concentrated period of slaughter in the 1870s and early 1880s was the most direct cause of their near extinction. This slaughter, in turn,

was driven by specific economic, ideological, and institutional factors, and was facilitated by the development of key technologies. For example, in the early 1870s American tanners developed a specific technique for transforming bison hides into leather. (This technique made bison hides a viable international commodity; they served, for instance, as a rich source of heavy leather, needed for the manufacture of industrial drive-belts.⁴) In 1872, the Sharp Rifle Manufacturing Company developed a powerful .50 caliber “buffalo gun,” whose long-range accuracy proved ideal for bison hunters. With rail lines into the Great Plains completed between the 1860s through the early 1880s, hides could now be transported with increasing ease from the West to the manufacturing plants in the East. As the bison populations were being decimated, cattle drivers moved in to take advantage of the fertile grasslands, and a new livestock economy linking Chicago and the Great Plains sprung up with surprising speed.⁵ The U.S. government supported this market-driven slaughter because they knew that bison extinction would serve as a handy means of forcing Indians to submit to the reservation system.⁶ At the time, most settlers, hunters, and ranchers were convinced of the providential inevitability of Euroamerican conquest; to them, replacing bison with domestic cattle, and Indians with “civilized” Anglo-saxons were both part of the larger mission of taming the American wilderness.⁷ “The civilization of the Indian is impossible while the buffalo remains upon the plains,” declared the U.S. Secretary of Interior, Columbus Delano in 1872 (qtd in Geist 69).

The same historical moment in which the American bison hovered on the verge of extinction, nostalgic bison imagery exploded across the American cultural landscape (Herman 241). The animal is depicted in dime novels, sculptures, and in scores of late-nineteenth century paintings, such as Albert Bierstadt’s famous work, “Last of the

Buffalo” (1889).⁸ In 1876, Dr. Brewster Higley composed the words, “Oh, give me a home where the Buffalo roam,” comprising the first line of a poem which would become the nation’s most familiar folk song, “Home on the Range.” Despite their near-extinct status, bison played a central role in the frontier theatrics of Buffalo Bill’s world-famous Wild West shows, which ran from the early 1880s through 1913. Other rodeo and theatrical companies staged “last buffalo hunts” with “real” Indians and bison (Isenberg 175). Beginning in the 1880s tourists could travel to Yellowstone National Park or the National Zoological Park refuge in Washington, D.C., to see bison among other living examples of the “vanishing races of the continent” (Horowitz 128). Alternatively, one could see an impressive diorama of taxidermic specimens at the Smithsonian National Museum. Firmly established as an icon in the national imagination, the bison appeared on an 1898 commemorative stamp, featuring an engraving of an Indian on horseback hunting a buffalo. In 1901, the bison appeared on the U.S. ten-dollar bill, between images of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Twelve years later, it would appear on the “buffalo nickel,” opposite a profile image of an American Indian.⁹

The near-extinction of the American bison coincided with the birth of American wildlife as a national discursive object. The whites who settled North America treated indigenous animal life as a source of food or clothing, as an obstacle to be removed before wilderness could be made into farms or pastureland, or as a threat to livestock, and at times, human life. Though a small portion of the colonial population found aesthetic or spiritual inspiration in the diversity and abundance of native fauna, most did not reflect upon wild animals outside the context of their immediate concerns for bodily and

agricultural sustenance.¹⁰ It was only after the awesome destruction of the American bison drew national attention to the broader and far-reaching depletion of indigenous animal life that Americans began to think of indigenous animals as a national “heritage” and a “precious legacy” to preserve.¹¹ This dynamic is a striking example of what Renato Rosaldo calls “imperialist nostalgia,” wherein colonial agents display a peculiar yearning “for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed” (69). Imperialist nostalgia, Rosaldo notes, “revolves around a paradox: A person kills somebody, and then mourns the victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to the intervention” (69-70). What makes this nostalgia so rhetorically powerful is that it “uses a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal [the colonial agent’s] complicity with often brutal domination” (70).

Beginning in the 1880s, sport hunters and nature lovers emerged as advocates, proclaiming the need for action to be taken at the national level to save American wildlife before it disappeared for good.¹² Their efforts paid off. In the 1880s, Yellowstone National Park and the National Zoological Park in Washington D.C. were established as the first national institutions charged with wildlife protection. In 1892 President Benjamin Harrison established Afognak Island, Alaska as a “forest and fish culture reservation,” in what was to be the first presidential proclamation setting aside public land for wildlife protection. The first piece of federal wildlife legislation – the Lacey Act – was passed in 1900. This act made interstate transport of animals killed in violation of state law a federal crime.¹³ In 1903 Theodore Roosevelt established by executive order

Pelican Island (Florida) as a “preserve and breeding ground for native birds,” making it the first official national wildlife refuge in the United States.

Many environmental historians have interpreted turn-of-the-century wildlife preservation efforts as the foundation of twentieth-century U.S. environmentalism.¹⁴ Such accounts dramatize the heroic efforts of certain individuals within a mythic, teleological narrative of progressive eco-centric enlightenment. These narratives are mythic precisely because they grant “wildlife” a pristine status when it is in fact a construction. Wildlife preservation is an idea that emerged through the convergence of a specific and heterogeneous set of historical circumstances, discourses, and social practices. That “wildlife” is a discursive invention is reflected most obviously in the fact that early preservation efforts were directed at certain species of wild animal life (namely, game animals and those with national symbolic import), while other species, like the wolf and coyote, were aggressively targeted for destruction.¹⁵ In this sense, “wildlife” as a construct has operated much like that other great American nature myth: “wilderness” – a concept which much recent scholarship has sought to critically historicize.¹⁶

Regarding wildlife preservation, the case of the bison is again emblematic. Though early preservationists almost surely saved the bison from extinction, this fact alone sheds relatively little light on the broader cultural significance of their actions.¹⁷ For this we might turn to the words of Ernest Thompson Seton; his 1906 *Scribner's Magazine* essay, “The American Bison or Buffalo,” is particularly illustrative of the major rhetorical tropes of early preservationist discourse. In the essay, Seton laments the passing of the great bison herds:

All the hungry regret that Sir Walter Scott felt over the departed glories of the feudal life is felt by every boy and young man of our country now when he hears of the Buffalo days and the stirring times of the by-gone wildest West. Why was it allowed? Why did not the Government act? And a hundred sad 'might have beens' spring forth from hearts that truly feel they lost a wonderful something when the butchers drawn from the dreeds of border towns were turned loose to wipe out the great herds that meant so much to all who love wilds and the primitive in life. ("American Bison" 402-403)

Here, Seton romanticizes the animal and the West that the animal was said to embody; he demonizes the bison hunters, contrasting their heartless butchery to the innocent and vigorous spirit of those who "love wilds." Seton's answer to the question, "Why was it allowed?" is particularly telling: "There is one answer – *the extermination was absolutely inevitable*. . . . [T]he Buffalo was incompatible with any degree of possession by white men and with the higher productivity of the soil. He had to go" (404). Though regretted, the destruction of the bison is partially redeemed by Seton's indirect reference to the livestock economy which would take its place. The bison's "fated" demise is again mourned and simultaneously redeemed in the following passage: "But there is a lasting monument [the buffalo] leaves behind. Who that knows the West has not seen the game trail grow into an Indian trail and the Indian trail into a pack trail, which again becomes a white man's road, and at last the pilot of the iron horse?"

Seton's essay spans twenty-one pages and presents a thoroughly researched, authoritative account of the history, morphology, and habits of the American bison,

complete with photographs, migration maps, an image of a taxidermic specimen, and the author's own studied illustrations. His account provides present-tense narratives of migration trips, seasonal life, and even day-in-the-life sketches in order to simulate for readers the life of the bison. Seton was a founding member of the American Bison Society (founded in 1905) and an outspoken and influential advocate for wildlife preservation at the turn of the century. Yet what stands out about his piece on the bison is its thoroughly backward-glancing perspective. "Many good men . . . have made practical efforts to utilize the Bison as a domestic animal," he notes, "But the Buffalo as a wild animal is gone. The great herds will never again be seen roaming the plains" (402). The piece is an elegiac performance whose intended effect is to construct an emotionally satisfying, patriotic, and historically redemptive image of the animal in the imagination of the reader. The essay's concluding reflections are fittingly sentimental and absurdly romantic. There Seton suggests that "the white man was not the first to follow the Buffalo's paths," noting that the Sioux Indians followed the bison in their migration from the Alleghenies to the Mississippi Valley and beyond. "They were following the Buffalo," he muses,

and followed them over the mountains by the paths the Buffalo themselves had made. They had followed them long and far. Will they still keep on, and do as many of their bravest wished to do, seek the herds no more on the vast Missourian plains, but over the borderland, in those perfect hunting-grounds where the mosquito, the smallpox, and the white man are unknown, and where alone will the Buffalo bands be seen, darkening the offing and 'making the earth one robe'? (405).

Images of American wildlife such as these were designed to shore up a particular vision of American identity that many middle- and upper-class whites felt was being threatened at the turn of the century. What early preservationists wanted to preserve was not so much indigenous animal life per se, but the identity that Americans had come to project upon it. Notably, the membership of the American Bison Society consisted mostly of Northeastern elites.¹⁸ Bison preservationists were heavily invested in the frontier myth and greatly admired the figure of the cowboy. Their specific “preservation” goal was to establish public herds that could “serve as places of historical and moral education” for urban American citizens nostalgic for the mythic West (Isenberg 167). Effectively domesticated, the American bison was transmuted into a source of potent regeneration for an America sapped by the forces of modernity. Though the thundering herds may have disappeared from the plains, the animal’s life was nonetheless fixed within the boundaries of national parks, zoos, taxidermic specimens, paintings, songs, stories, and national histories – the very currencies of American nationalism. The birth of wildlife as a national heritage coincided with the birth of the American subject as tamer and protector of its wild life.

II.

With the 1898 publication of Ernest Thompson Seton’s *Wild Animals I Have Known*, the wild animal story exploded onto the national scene, presenting itself as a new genre of nature writing which combined elements of natural history with animal fiction in an attempt to faithfully represent the perspective of individual animal “personalities.”

Much of the attraction to this new genre stemmed from the writers' insistence that their stories were *true* and that their animals were "real characters" (Seton 7). Contrasting the new wild animal story with the extremely popular, though "frankly humanised" late-nineteenth-century animal fictions like Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877), Margaret Marshall Saunders' *Beautiful Joe* (1893), and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), animal story writer Charles G. D. Roberts characterized practitioners of the new genre as "explorers of the unknown world" of "real animal psychology," serious writers who were "minutely scrupulous as to their natural history, and assiduous contributors to that science" (24).¹⁹

Wild animal stories were not popular with everyone, however. Outraged by the writers' claims to "scientific" authority, and alarmed at the widespread influence of the books on the nation's impressionable youth, John Burroughs, leading a small army of reputable naturalists and scientists, attacked the new animal story writers as self-serving proponents of "false notions of nature" (Burroughs, "Real" 137). Even President Roosevelt himself felt the matter of sufficient gravity to warrant an intervention. Accusing the writers of promoting "reckless untruth," and branding them "nature fakers," he publicly denounced their popular work as an "object of derision to every scientist worthy of the name" ("Nature Fakers" 430, 428). Throughout the popular press and among the nation's most powerful and educated circles, debates and accusations raged over questions concerning the difference between "natural and unnatural history," real and fictional animals. At the turn of the century, getting the animal right became a national preoccupation, as anxieties about "overcivilization" and the "degenerating" effects of urban life yielded calls for primitive regeneration and chants of "back to

nature.”²⁰ A notable product of turn-of-the-century anxieties, animal stories proliferated in unprecedented fashion and momentarily took on very high stakes indeed.

Nature’s children

In the fall of 1880, genetic psychologist and educator G. Stanley Hall conducted an examination of two hundred middle-class first graders from Boston, concerning their knowledge and awareness of nature and country life. What he found appalled him. Ninety percent of the students questioned had no concept of common trees like the elm or poplar, could not say where leather or cotton things came from, and had no idea of what a field of oats or wheat looked like. Nearly three-quarters of the children had no concept of strawberries, blueberries, or corn, or knew what a crow or bluebird was. And half of them admitted to knowing nothing about common farm animals like sheep or pigs, or having any idea that meat comes from animals, and wooden things from trees (Hall “Contents” 148-50).²¹ Hall published his findings in an 1891 issue of *The Pedagogical Seminary* under the title “The Contents of Children’s Minds on Entering School.” His conclusion was simple and direct: “As our methods of teaching grow more natural, we realize that city life is unnatural, and that those who grow up without knowing the country are defrauded of that without which childhood can never be completed or normal” (155-156). How else explain the common misconceptions that “[s]keins and spools of thread . . . grow on the sheep’s back or on bushes. . . . the cow says ‘bow-wow,’ the pig purrs or burrows, worms are [no different] from snakes”? (155). In short, as Hall would later declare in a *Boston Journal of Education* article entitled “Need of Nature

Study in Our Schools,” “Love of nature should be inculcated in the schools. It is not.” (334).

Much of the turn-of-the-century emphasis on nature education grew out of educators’ investment in Hall’s adaptation of the “recapitulation” theory, originally expounded by Ernst Haeckel. Hall adapted Haeckel’s theory – ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny – to his own discipline of genetic psychology, speculating that the individual human psyche in the process of its development must pass through, or recapitulate, all of the cultural epochs of human history. This is evident in the child, who

relives the history of the race in his acts, just as the scores of rudimentary organs in his body tell the story of its evolution from the lower forms of animal life from which he has inherited his every organ and tissue. . . . The all-dominant, but of course mainly unconscious, will of the child is to relive this past, as if his early ancestors were struggling in his soul and body to make their influences felt and their voice heard. (“Natural Activities” 444)

For the child to fully mature, in other words, he or she must be allowed to spontaneously relive all the stages of the human race. From Hall’s post-Darwin perspective, this meant harkening back to man’s distant ancestors, and proceeding first through the “animal” stages, then those of primitive man, all the way to the present civilized state of Western man. Why did children love to swim, he reasoned, if not because of their fishy ancestors? “The primeval activities of their prehistoric forebears,” Hall suggested in a 1904 essay on the “Natural Activities of Children,” “always impel the

young to fundamental activities such as lifting, digging, striking, throwing, running and leaping, swimming, pushing, pulling, climbing, rubbing or grinding, shouting” (446).

And it was precisely these activities that modern urban life discouraged, with its decadent “temptations,” “sedentary occupations” and “passive stimuli” (*Adolescence* I: xv). Indeed, “[n]ever has youth been exposed to such dangers of both perversion and arrest as in our own land and day,” Hall proclaimed in the preface to his major work, *Adolescence* (1904) (xv). Yet, “[r]udimentary organs of the soul now suppressed, perverted, or delayed,” he warned, would surely “crop out in menacing forms later” (x). Encouraging children, particularly boys, to indulge their primitive urges, Hall theorized that the “primeval activities of their prehistoric forebears” would serve to “innoculate” them against potentially hazardous eruptions down the road.²² Let a child weather a “mild” form of “ethical mumps and measles” now, and he or she will “be rendered immune to [them] later when they become far more dangerous” (*Adolescence* II: 452).

For Hall, the ideal means of inoculating the child was direct exposure to wild nature, “field, forest, hill, shore, the water, flowers, animals” – the very realm from which “modern conditions have kidnapped and transported him” (I: xi). Where direct exposure was not possible – an increasing reality in a rapidly industrializing nation – Hall strongly urged “reviv[ing] the ancestral experiences” via a “secondary and vicarious way”: books. Hall was particularly emphatic about the use of animal books. “To the young child,” he insisted, “there is no gap between his soul and that of animals” (II: 220); indeed, children “in their incomplete stage of development are nearer the animals in some respects than they are to adults” (221). Elsewhere he noted, “Love of animals is inborn. The child that has no pets is to be pitied. He must be dwarfed and stunted” (“Need” 335). Yet

facilitating this inherent kinship with animals – particularly for deprived urban youth – would require “not one but a series of animal books, one each on, e. g., the dog, cat, lion, the monkey, horse, snake, one each on several species of birds, fish, and insects” (II: 228). Moreover, these animal books, which Hall identified as “one of the greatest educational needs of the present time” should deal not with biology and anatomy, but with animal life, as expressed especially in “tales and fables, folk-lore, literature. . .myth, and poetry” – books “full of the spirit of the field naturalist, observer, and lover” (II: 228). Hall looked forward to a time when “animals will play a far larger educational role than has yet been conceived,” when they “will acquire a new and higher humanistic or culture value. . .comparable with their utility in the past” (228).

Playing the primitive: Ernest Thompson Seton

Hall’s strategic appropriation of the recapitulation theory may be seen as part of a broader turn-of-the-century response to anxieties about “the *depletion* of agency and virility in consumer and machine culture,” as Mark Seltzer puts it (149, emphasis in original). For many prominent educators and leaders of the time, the “craft of making men” became a critical national project (149). And since the path to the man went through the boy, national attention shifted to the latter and his penchant for the primitive. Though Hall met much resistance to his endorsement of institutionalized childhood savagery, his fellow recapitulation booster Ernest Thompson Seton would go on to establish an international movement based on the notion.²³

Hall, of course, was not the only educator endorsing the child-savage connection. In an 1889 address to the National Education Association, Francis Parker proclaimed “The child is a born naturalist” (480) or, more to the point, “the little child is born a savage. . . . Don’t you want to be an Indian, little boy, and put feathers in your hair? Wouldn’t you like to dig a hole and live in the ground, and wouldn’t you like to roam at will in the big woods? Certainly you would” (479). Hall’s theory provided scientific rigor to a familiar rhetorical association between children and Indians. Indeed, long before Hall articulated his recapitulation theory, Americans had perceived the two as pure embodiments of nature, simplicity, and authenticity. In short, the common image of the Indian as a child of nature, or of the child as a noble savage were mutually reinforcing at the turn of the century.²⁴ And lurking closely by was a third emblem of savagery, the wild animal – a hidden third component in the rhetorical triangle of the primitive.

Studying Indians, Studying Animals

Lewis Henry Morgan, often considered the founder of modern anthropological research, is well known for his extensive work on cultural evolution and the American Indian. What is not very well known is Morgan’s fascination with the beaver, and his testament to this fascination: a detailed study of *The American Beaver and His Works* (1868). Still regarded as an authoritative work on the subject, Morgan’s investigation of the behavior and technical accomplishments of the beaver offer some provocative notions about animal mentality and the boundaries of civilized life. Though Morgan held the conventional view that each species had been brought into the world fully-formed by God

at the creation, he bucked Cartesian logic in his speculation that mind – what he called “the thinking principle” – was given by the Creator to all species, if in varying quantity. Profoundly moved by the technical achievements of the beaver, Morgan reasoned that while civilized people differ from the animals, it is only in the degree to which “the thinking principle” has been developed in each individual species’ case. More controversially, Morgan speculated that the Creator may even have endowed beavers with a “moral sense.”²⁵

Morgan’s study of the American beaver suggests what seems at first to be a bizarre linkage between ethnographic studies on Indians and naturalist observations of animals. But in fact the connection was quite common in nineteenth-century anthropology (Michaelson 76-83). Late-nineteenth-century anthropologists generally conceived of culture according to an evolutionary paradigm, a chronological hierarchy marked by progressive stages: “savagery,” then “barbarism,” then “civilization.” Foundational texts like E. B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871) and Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877) assumed a progressive narrative of cultural evolution – one in which “primitive peoples” of the present age were considered living embodiments of an earlier, inferior time.²⁶ This status made the Indian a unique source of primitive regeneration to an increasingly effete and emasculated modern American populace.

“We have lived to see an unfortunate change,” declared Ernest Thompson Seton in a 1910 article for *Outlook Magazine*: modern American boys, once “robust, manly, self-reliant,” have been transformed into “a lot of flat-chested cigarette smokers, with shaky nerves and doubtful vitality” (“Boy Scouts” 630). “*Degeneracy* is the word,”

Seton concluded (630). Seton attributed this degeneration to a number of factors: urbanization, industrialization, the weakening of established forms of religion, a general detachment from the natural world, and decline of interest in athletics. What the boys of modern America needed most, he urged, were models—essentially, antimodern figures who embodied health, vitality, order, and those elusive qualities of “authenticity” and “real life.”²⁷ And for Seton, the most compelling antimodern figures were Indians and wild animals – two of nature’s most powerful emblems. In his invention of the Woodcraft Indians, a proto-Boy Scout organization, and his role as the preeminent writer of turn-of-the-century wild animal stories, Seton positioned himself as the most influential interpreter of both nature and Indian culture to Americans at the turn of the century.²⁸

Seton and the Woodcraft Indian Movement

Seton began the Woodcraft Indian movement as a means of “combating” the modern system which had rendered American boys nervous and lacking in virility. The movement began with the basic assumption that what boys needed most was restoration to the natural world, and woodcraft seemed the simplest way to achieve this. Soon after conceiving the idea of a national woodcraft movement in 1898 – the year his first book of animal stories, *Wild Animals I Have Known*, was published – Seton recognized the need for an “ideal figure,” a symbol to represent and to drive the movement (630). He knew exactly what he needed: “an ideal outdoor man who was heroic, clean, manly, brave, picturesque, master of woodcraft and scouting, and already well known” (630). After

sampling some possibilities (Robin Hood and King Arthur among them) Seton landed on his choice: the “ideal Indian” of Fenimore Cooper and Longfellow (630).

Given Seton’s criteria, one obvious possibility was the figure of the frontiersman, a favored model of authenticity for his contemporaries Theodore Roosevelt and Daniel Carter Beard. Roosevelt had enshrined the frontiersman firmly in his frontier mythology, and Beard would choose the pioneer as his model for the Sons of Daniel Boone, an organization which was set up in 1905 as a rival to Seton’s Woodcraft Indians. Like his contemporaries, Seton strongly advocated the “strenuous life” as an essential antidote to the disease of overcivilization; nonetheless, he despised the figure of the pioneer, whom he characterized as “without exception treacherous, murderous, worthless” (qtd in Anderson 135). Given his environmental concern for the wilderness and his confidence that “those live longest who live nearest the ground,” Seton opted instead for the figure of the Indian, the only one who met “all the requisites” (“Boy Scouts” 630). Notably, much of Seton’s knowledge about the American Indian had come from his extensive reading of the anthropologist-naturalist Lewis Henry Morgan (Wadland 319, Anderson 136).

Following Morgan’s evolutionary paradigm, Seton placed Indians and their way of life outside the temporal boundaries of modernity. This conceptual displacement was of tremendous strategic import. For, as Deloria suggests, only *outside* of modernity could the figure of the Indian function as the representative of authenticity and natural purity. Rendered as such, Indians “might be expropriated, not for critique . . . but as the underpinning of a new, specifically modern American identity” (103). In the Woodcraft Indians, founded in 1901, children were encouraged to imitate the figure of the Indian Other, to “play Indian,” even “think Indian.” Seton was an enthusiastic student of Hall’s

recapitulation theory; he too was convinced that children, in order to mature properly, must be encouraged to live out the instincts of their distant ancestors: “I know something of savages—of boys, I mean; it is precisely the same” (qtd in Deloria 107).²⁹ “Most boys love to play Indian,” Seton flatly stated in the opening pages of the Woodcraft manual, *How To Play Indian: Directions for Organizing a Tribe of Boy Indians and Making Their Teepees in the True Indian Style* (1903); “They want to know about all the interesting things the Indians did. . . . It adds great pleasure to [their] lives . . . when they know they can go right out . . . in the woods just as the Indians did and make all their own weapons in Indian style as well as rule themselves after the manner of a band of Redmen” (qtd in Deloria 107).

Seton’s Woodcraft Indians found a major publicity boost when the author was invited in 1902 to write a regular “boys’ department” for one of the most widely distributed periodicals in the country, the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. After devoting several issues’ worth of columns to outlining woodcraft fundamentals and Indian folk tradition, Seton hit on the notion of putting his woodcraft ideas together in the form of a novel directed at young boys. The novel, published serially in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* throughout 1903, was entitled *Two Little Savages: Being the Adventures of Two Boys Who Lived as Indians and What They Learned*. Chapter 8 of part 3, entitled “The Indian Drum” may be considered as a representative sample. The chapter begins “‘If you were real Injun you’d make a drum of that,’ said Caleb to Yan, as they came to a Basswood blown over by a recent storm” (320). Typical of the novel’s method and content, the chapter proceeds with detailed instructions (complete with illustrations) of how to build an authentic “injun” drum. Drum finished, the chapter concludes:

Caleb taught them a little Indian war chant, and they danced round to it as he drummed and sang, till their savage instincts seemed to revive. But above all it worked on Yan. As he pranced around in step his whole nature seemed to respond; he felt himself a part of the dance. It was in himself; it thrilled him through and through and sent his blood exulting. He would gladly have given up all the White-man's 'glorious gains' to live with the feeling called up by that Indian drum. (326)

Seton and the Wild Animal Story

By the time *Two Little Savages* was published as a bound volume at the end of 1903, sixty tribes of Woodcraft Indians had formed throughout the country. Meanwhile, Seton's first book of animal stories, *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898) continued to rack up sales. By 1902, it had already been through sixteen printings, with excerpts published in *Century Magazine* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* (Lutts *Stories* 238). Assisted somewhat by fellow Canadian Charles G. D. Roberts, whose *The Kindred of the Wild* was published in 1902, Seton had been instrumental in making the wild animal story one of the most popular forms of reading material in the new century. Not only were animal stories flying out of bookshops and filling pages of magazines, by the opening years of the new century they were also being used as nature study textbooks in schools across the nation.³⁰

Although critics of the genre focused their attention on the reputed inaccuracy of the representations and their "falseness" to nature, Charles G. D. Roberts, an articulate

spokesman for the genre, evokes an altogether different aspect of the wild animal story in his introduction to *Kindred of the Wild*. Having spent most of his introductory essay outlining and defending the scientific basis for his and Seton's depictions of wild animals, he concludes by drawing the reader's attention to what may be called the performative aspect of the genre:

The animal story, as we now have it, is a potent emancipator. It frees us for a little while from the world of shop-worn utilities, and from the mean tenement of self of which we do well to grow weary. It helps us to return to nature, without requiring that we at the same time return to barbarism. The clear and candid life to which it reinitiates us, far behind though it lies in the long upward march of being, holds for us this quality. (29)

Roberts' remarks here shift the emphasis from the representational aspect of the wild animal story to its affective dimension. In its attempt to render "the varying, elusive personalities which dwell back of the luminous brain windows of the dog, the horse, the deer" (24) the animal story also "frees" and "helps" its readers—"reinitiates" them into the "clear and candid life" of the species' distant past.

The realistic wild animal story appealed to the evolutionary past. For Seton, this appeal was heightened dramatically by Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis, which announced modern America's fundamental break from its frontier past. Though figures like Theodore Roosevelt and Daniel Carter Beard were intent on finding new means of perpetuating the American frontier experience, Seton's rhetorical investment in the Native American and in American wildlife (rather than the frontiersman) suggests that he understood the irreversibility of America's break with its past. Indeed, Seton's ideology,

in contrast with that of his peers, reveals a much deeper appreciation for the profound historical rupture that attended America's entrance into the modern world. He understood, moreover, that this rupture need not be a cause for lament, for those living in the modern world had a far more powerful source of regeneration at their disposal than the frontiersmen of yesterday; they now had the premodern – an Other so profoundly different from the modern as to exist wholly in the realm of the imagination. Any pure source of “authenticity” or “real life” would necessarily have to exist somewhere outside of modern American society—indeed, outside of the *temporality* of the modern American. Seton's investment in Lewis Henry Morgan's evolutionary scale of cultural development allowed him to imagine the American Indian as a figure existing entirely outside of modernity. No such theoretical framework was necessary to posit the wild animal as a figure existing wholly outside of modernity. In this sense, American wildlife presented itself to the modern American as *the* ideal figure of the pre- or anti-modern Other.

In order to identify with this Other, however, one must be able to project a personality onto it. Seton's insistence on the significance of the animal's perspective was indeed the driving motivation for writing his animal stories. For Seton, conventional natural history, with its emphasis on taxonomies and its dry cataloguing of behavioral instincts, had grown stale. He claimed as his theme the “real personality of the individual, and his views of life . . . rather than the ways of the race in general” (*Wild* 7-8). But Seton wasn't interested in just any animal individual – only those who “showed the stamp of heroism” (7). Drawing heavily on the theories of Ernst Haeckel, who

theorized that morality was an extension of instinct, Seton sought, and found in animals all “the virtues most admired in Man” (*Lives of the Hunted* 9). Though Seton’s fellow animal story writer Charles G. D. Roberts generally steered clear of “virtuous” animals, Seton virtually reveled in them, going so far as to publish a book entitled *The Natural History of the Ten Commandments* (1907) in which he argues that Mosaic laws, far from being “arbitrary” laws given only to man, are the basic laws of all highly developed animals.³¹ And in case his readers failed to make the connection, Seton took the occasion of his preface to *Lives of the Hunted* to provide a handy summary of some of his best-known animal characters and their respective virtue. Thus, “Lobo stands for Dignity and Love-constancy; Silverspot, for sagacity; Redruff, for Obedience; Bingo, for Fidelity” and so on (*Lives* 9).

Seton strived to base his animal representations on careful observation and on prominent scientific theories of the day. As Roberts puts it, the modern wild animal story is “a psychological romance constructed on a framework of natural science” (24). For scientists, serious inquiries into the animal mind had been given fresh impetus with Darwin, especially his *The Descent of Man* (1871) and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). In these two books Darwin argued that the mental difference between humans and the higher animals is one of degree and not of kind. His initial influence led to the emergence of a school of animal psychologists who, through personal observation and anecdotal evidence, and by extrapolating from human mental activity, sought to account for the mental processes of animals. With a highly reductive conceptual framework built on a crude dichotomy of instinct versus reason, many scientists made enthusiastic claims for animal thought. The self-styled physician-

naturalist W. Lauder Lindsay, for instance, in his popular study *Mind in the Lower Animals* (1880) credited even the lowest organisms with “advanced” mental faculties (Klopfer 20). According to Lindsay, Protozoa for instance may be seen as demonstrating a “whole series of mental phenomena” such as “will, purpose, choice, ingenuity, observation, [and] feeling” (qtd in Dunlap 21). Among Lindsay’s many radical conclusions, perhaps the most disturbing is his claim that certain human ethnicities are inferior to some animals species. He describes Eskimos, for instance, as “*beasts of prey*, without any other pleasure than eating. . . . [L]ike the vulture or the tiger. . . . [h]e eats only to sleep, and sleeps only as soon as possible to eat again” (qtd in Klopfer 20-21). In contrast,

Dogs or other animals that may be considered in their way civilised or humanised. . . exhibit a manifest superiority to whole races or classes of man, both civilised and savage, in the following respects, which include the *noblest of the human virtues*:

1. Heroism, patriotism, self-sacrifice.
2. Compassion or sympathy, charity, benevolence, forgiveness.
3. Love and adoration of a master.
4. Fidelity to trust, duty, or friendship. (qtd in Klopfer 21, emphasis in original)

Superior to certain human “races or classes of man” in moral and even religious faculties, Lindsay notes, dogs also purportedly understand language and the use of money, and appear to have ideas about time, music, number, and order (Dunlap 21).

Though Lindsay's *Mind in the Lower Animals* was widely read, the scientific community's inevitable backlash focused rather on George Romanes' *Animal Intelligence* (1882). A close friend and protégé of Darwin's, Romanes was concerned about popular accounts such as Lindsay's and the other "anecdote mongers" (qtd in Boakes 25). Fearful of their discrediting impact on the new science of comparative psychology, Romanes was in fact critical of such accounts and even more cautious than Darwin regarding the relative credibility of his sources. *Animal Intelligence* was written as an attempt to organize the available anecdotal evidence and to sift out only the credible sources from the vast amount of available material. For his role as the official (if not uncritical) advocate of the anecdotal method, Romanes' critics and successors came to see him "as the archetypal purveyor of anecdotes about animals" (Boakes 25).³²

Wild animal story writers were inspired by this science and used it to justify writing from the animal's perspective.³³ Seton's focus on the individual animal allowed him to make a powerful claim for animal rights. As he declares in the preface to *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898), "Since . . . animals are creatures with wants and feelings differing in degree only from our own, they surely have their rights" (12). And his portrayals of compelling animal heroes added significant rhetorical power to his case. And yet, Seton's animal heroes had another, and more urgent purpose – to regenerate modern American readers. As he would suggest in the preface to his *Lives of the Hunted* (1901): "My chief motive, my most earnest underlying wish, has been to stop the extermination of harmless wild animals; *not for their sakes, but for ours*, firmly believing that each of our native wild creatures is in itself a precious heritage that we have no right

to destroy or put beyond the reach of our children” (“On his Animal Stories” 47, my italics).

Seton’s animal stories construct the figure of the animal as an authentic Other which parallels his construction of the Indian Other. A brief look at one of his most popular stories, taken from his earliest collection, *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898) will serve to demonstrate this.

Wild Animals I Have Known effectively launched the popular new genre of the wild animal story. (The popularity of the book can hardly be disputed, even for today’s readers; it has remained continually in print since its publication more than one hundred years ago.) Seton’s first collection presents eight animal stories, or “personal histories,” each named after a particular animal hero, “Lobo, the King of Currumpaw,” “Silverspot, the Story of a Crow,” and so on. This act of naming his characters reflects Seton’s emphatic insistence on animal “individuality.” In contrast, Charles G. D. Roberts chose not to name most of his animal characters, and refrained from depicting them as heroes. Though Roberts’ books were also popular, turn-of-the-century readers overwhelmingly preferred Seton’s portrayals over his fellow Canadian’s.³⁴

One typical and very well-known Seton animal character is Lobo the wolf. Seton first published “The King of the Currumpaw: A Wolf Story” in 1894 to wide popular and critical acclaim. He later reissued the now classic wolf tale as the first story in *Wild Animals* (1898), under the title – revised to emphasize the wolf’s individuality – “Lobo: The King of Currumpaw.” The story is set in a cattle range in northern New Mexico, “a land of rich pastures and teeming flocks and herds, a land of rolling mesas and precious running waters” (15). For Seton, the East was essentially Europe reconstituted; the West,

however, was “true America” – an authentic space defined not by the pioneers but by the Indian traditions and the wildlife native to it (Wadland 317).

The first two of the story’s three sections read like a standard frontier piece. Most of the plot details the adventures of several white, virile, solitary ranchers in their attempts to kill a small wolf pack, who, for at least five years has exacted a “tribute from the Currumpaw ranchers to the extent, many said, of a cow each day” (17). The leader of the wolf pack, known as “Old Lobo” is a legend among the ranchers of the Currumpaw Valley, a “giant among wolves,” whose cunning and strength were said to be “in proportion to his size” (16). As dread of Lobo spreads, the price on his head continues to increase until “at last it reached \$1,000, an unparalleled wolf-bounty surely; many a good man has been hunted down for less” (21). Lobo is portrayed as an indomitable foe, one of unparalleled intelligence, power, and perception. Repeatedly, ranchers and rangers set out to capture or kill Lobo and his band, but each attempt, whether by rifle, trap, or poison, fails. At the beginning of the second section the narrator appears. A former wolf-hunter, now living a degenerate modern life “chained” to a “stool and desk,” the narrator, “much in need of a change” has enthusiastically taken up a friend’s invitation to come to New Mexico and try his hand at Lobo (25). Quickly realizing that his companions had “no traps large enough” for Lobo, he sets out with poison, only to find that “no combination of strychnine, arsenic, cyanide, or prussic acid” and “no manner of flesh” for bait serve to fool the “old king” who cleverly manages to lead his pack away from all danger: “Lobo’s habit of permitting the pack to eat only that which they themselves had killed, was in numerous cases their salvation, and the keenness of his

scent to detect the taint of human hands or the poison itself, completed their immunity” (26, 19).

Gradually, through a series of elaborate, though failed, attempts at capturing Lobo, the narrator begins to develop a bond with him until, “at length [I] came to know him more thoroughly than anyone else” (25). The narrator, who has now come to know Lobo intimately, detects his solitary weakness, a she-wolf named Blanca. The narrator’s account in the third and last section, of first isolating, then capturing and killing Blanca in order to lure Lobo to his death begins to undermine the story’s frontier myth veneer. On one level the narrator’s solution of getting to Lobo through his beloved mate demonstrates his superior cunning. Yet in the description of Blanca’s violent death the narrator begins to question his own motives. Having cleverly isolated Blanca from the rest of the pack and successfully trapped her, the narrator delivers a vivid, disturbing account: “Then followed the inevitable tragedy, the idea of which I shrank from afterward more than at the time. We threw a lasso over the neck of the doomed wolf, and strained our horses in opposed directions until the blood burst from her mouth, her eyes glazed, her limbs stiffened and then fell limp” (36).

Immediately after Blanca’s death the story begins to shift to Lobo’s perspective, shifting its focus to his mourning. “All that day we heard him wailing as he roamed in his quest [to find her]” (36). Having known only Lobo’s “diabolical cunning” and five-year ravage of the land, the reader is introduced to what can only be described as Lobo’s romantic side: “There was an unmistakable note of sorrow in it now. It was no longer the loud, defiant howl, but a long, plaintive wail; ‘Blanca! Blanca! he seemed to call. . . . At length he came to the spot where we had killed her, his heart-broken wailing was piteous

to hear. It was sadder than I could possibly have believed” (37). Though the narrator proceeds with his pursuit of Lobo (a process which involves the careful placement and setting of one hundred and thirty custom steel wolf-traps), he has shed his triumphalist pioneer/wolf-hunter mentality, and once Lobo is caught, the narrator cannot bring himself to kill him. Instead, he binds his feet and drags him to camp where, out of sympathy, he offers the wolf meat and water, “but he paid no heed. He lay calmly on his breast, and gazed with those steadfast yellow eyes away past me down through the gateway of the canon, over the open plains—his plains—nor moved a muscle when I touched him” (43). Drawing the reader’s attention to Lobo’s gaze, the narrator follows it past himself and to the plains—now acknowledged as the *wolf’s* plains. At the end of the story, the narrator encounters the dead body of Lobo:

A lion shorn of his strength, an eagle robbed of his freedom, or a dove bereft of his mate, all die, it is said, of a broken heart; and who will aver that this grim bandit could bear the three-fold brunt, heart-whole? This only I know, that when the morning dawned, he was lying there still in his position of calm repose, but his spirit was gone—the old king-wolf was dead. (44)

In his classic tale of Lobo, Seton reverses conventional late-nineteenth-century conceptions of the wolf as, at best, a varmint, vermin, or pest – at worst, a devil, ghoul, or a vicious and conniving predator.³⁵ Seton’s radical transvaluation of the wolf as a new romanticized figure of antimodern authenticity and male virility is comparable to London’s treatment of the wolf in *The Call of the Wild*.

Seton was heavily invested in animality, masculinity, and the discourse of civilization. However, he emphatically rejected a frontier mentality based on the violent subjugation of wilderness. Seton's model of primitive regeneration, conversely, relies on a vicarious experience through imitation or emulation. In the *Woodcraft Indians*, children were encouraged to "play like" and "think like" the Indian; and in reading his wild animal stories, children and adults alike were encouraged to emulate the animal heroes depicted therein. Lobo, Seton tells us, "stands for Dignity and Love-constancy" ("On His Animals" 46). In direct contrast to the portrayal of the frontier hunter posing over the carcass of the killed beast, or next to a stack of wolf pelts, the author shifts readers' focus in the last scene of "Lobo" from the body of the killed beast to its "spirit" or mind – the true source of manly regeneration.

Seton's critics accused him of "humanizing" his animals. Yet, as we have seen from the author's strategic construction of the Indian, Seton finds power not in the *same* but in radical difference – in the figure of the authentic Other who stands in opposition to the modern. Science, in the form of animal psychology, gave legitimacy to Seton's construction of animals as creature with "wants and feelings" and "rights" of their own (*Wild* 12). From his reading of Haeckel, he concluded that human ethics are merely an extension of the natural world. Lobo's faithfulness, then, is not for Seton a human projection, but rather a virtue endowed by nature. "[T]he most successful wild quadrupeds in America to-day are the Gray-wolves," Seton argues in *The Natural History of the Ten Commandments*. "Not only have they through strict monogamy eliminated much possibility of disease and given their young the advantage of two wise protectors, but they have even developed a spirit of chivalry; that is, the male shows consideration

for the female in the non-mating season on account of her sex” (27-28). And so, “at least partly due to these things . . . [w]olves defy all attempts to exterminate them” (28).

Seton, then, essentially turns the tables on the question of the extent to which animals are like us, asking instead, to what extent are *we* like the *animals*? That Seton’s animals were meant to be emulated (by children especially) is made explicit in a piece published in the July 1900 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal* in which Seton translates *Wild Animals I Have Known* into a play complete with animal costumes, music, and stage directions.

Seton was widely denounced for killing Lobo. To his critics, Seton responded, “In what frame of mind are my [readers] left with regard to the animal? Are their sympathies quickened toward the man who killed him, or toward the noble creature who, superior to every trial, died as he lived, dignified, fearless, and steadfast?” (*Lives of the Hunted* 12). In *Wild Animals I Have Known*, six of the eight “personal histories” ends in death. Indeed, Seton himself declared in the preface to his book that the “life of a wild animal *always has a tragic end*” (11, author’s emphasis). Why must this be? To answer this, we might briefly consider one of the more striking accounts of animal death in *Wild Animals*, the suicide of The Pacing Mustang. On one level, The Pacing Mustang’s death is easily accounted for as a fairly transparent symbolic act. In the face of eminent capture, and a subsequent life of domestication, the wild mustang would more readily choose death than to live a life foreign to his nature: “Up, up and on, above the sheerest cliff he dashed [from his captor] then sprang away into the vacant air, down—down—two hundred feet to fall, and land upon the rocks below, a lifeless wreck—but free” (222).

This basic symbolism may be extended however, if we consider that the Pacing Mustang's death also secures the animal in an authentic space located necessarily *outside* of modernity. Only in the inaccessible outside can the animal's authenticity be guarded. Though domestication brings the animal into the space of modernity, death via extinction allows, so to speak, the animal to remain in the authentic space of the Other, and so to remain a source of authentic regeneration. For all of Seton's sincere and outspoken concern for the extinction of wildlife, portraying their death ensured that his animal "personalities" would remain forever Other.

III.

Theodore Roosevelt's animal narratives and the serious adult game of regeneration

Despite Seton's enormous success in the genre, wild animals stories were not popular with everyone. Outraged by the writers' claims to "scientific" authority, and alarmed at the widespread influence of the books, John Burroughs, leading a small army of reputable naturalists and scientists, attacked the new animal story writers as self-serving proponents of "false notions of nature" (Burroughs "Real" 137). Even the President himself felt the matter of sufficient gravity to warrant an intervention. Accusing the writers of promoting "reckless untruth," and branding them "nature fakers," Roosevelt publicly denounced their popular work as an "object of derision to every scientist worthy of the name" ("Nature Fakers" 430, 428).

Moving beyond the simplistic narratives of Roosevelt the nature lover, and of Roosevelt the game butcher, I would like to suggest that Teddy's interest in animals, *and their representation*, was inextricably related to his well-documented preoccupations with manliness, civilization, and the strenuous life, matters which the President put at the top of his agenda.

In addition to being the nation's most notorious turn-of-the-century hunting enthusiast, Roosevelt was also a highly accomplished and respected naturalist.³⁶ Despite his official status as an amateur, he was considered an international expert on North American wildlife, and he did not hesitate to engage in technical debates with professional scientists, particularly over issues of animal classification.³⁷ It is no coincidence that Roosevelt's Boone and Crockett hunting club (founded in 1887) was instrumental in the establishment of the American Museum of Natural history (itself a key institutional player in the turn-of-the-century construction of American civilization and manhood).³⁸ Nor is it a coincidence that Roosevelt's reputation as an accomplished naturalist depended mainly on the cumulative pages of his autobiographical hunting/frontier trilogy: *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885), *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1888), and *The Wilderness Hunter* (1893).

In his hunting trilogy, Roosevelt officially establishes himself as a bona-fide naturalist. Though much more than this, the trilogy is on one level an extended autobiographical account of his formative hunting trips out west. The books are all written in first-person, but in each case the narrative moves deftly from the personal register to the more formal register of the historian or scientist, and back again. Using this technique, Roosevelt is able to move beyond the role of the quaint naturalist or the

backwoods hunter spinning lore of the chase. Indeed, as Richard Slotkin has suggested, the first two books of the trilogy, the “Western books,” were crucial to Roosevelt’s development of “the grand theme of frontier history as an American recapitulation of the ‘stages of civilization’” – a theme he would flesh out in systematic detail in *The Winning of the West* (1885-1894) (38, 42). At the same time, the vacillating movement from a first- to authorial third-person narrative allows Roosevelt to position himself as an authority on frontier life, the wilderness experience, and the nation’s wildlife, all of which were crucial to Roosevelt’s masculinist self-fashioning and his self-appointed role as an emissary of American civilization.³⁹

The Wilderness Hunter continues the double project of mythic frontier historiography and masculine self-fashioning begun in Roosevelt’s Western books. In *The Wilderness Hunter*, however, Roosevelt develops much more far-reaching claims for the importance of hunting and the wilderness hunter in American history. Given its direct relevance to our concerns in this chapter, it is worth looking at in closer detail. First, however, it is necessary to briefly contextualize Roosevelt’s narrative with respect to the cultural role of hunting at the turn of the century, and its relation to early conservation efforts, in which Roosevelt himself played a critical part.

Early twentieth century American ideas of wildlife, and nature more generally, are inextricably tied to the cultural meanings of hunting. Hunters – or “sportsmen” – were the first organized group to lobby for nature conservation in the United States. Historians have tended to identify concern for America’s vanishing forests as the main impetus behind the birth of the American conservation movement in the early twentieth century; however, wildlife was in fact the first “resource” to spur conservationists into

action (Reiger 3).⁴⁰ “From the 1870s on,” John Reiger notes, “sportsmen had been working for the restriction of commercial hunting and fishing, the adoption of a national fishculture program . . . the establishment of adequately protected game preserves, and the passage of new game laws and the better enforcement of old ones” (67). American conservationism is thus tied to the nineteenth century invention of the “American sportsman” and his distinct “code” of conduct. Early American “sportsmen” were middle- and upper-class nationalists who aimed to set themselves apart from lower-class “market” or “pot” hunters and fishermen by their strict adherence to a “sportsman’s code,” which dictated that one “practice proper etiquette in the field, give game a sporting chance, and possess an aesthetic appreciation of the whole environmental context of sport that included a commitment to its perpetuation” (Reiger 3).⁴¹ If their class consciousness and gentlemanly etiquette likened them to their Old World counterparts, American sportsmen forged a distinctly indigenous identity for themselves by fusing a studied interest in American natural history with patriotic devotion to the American hunter-hero.

Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Natty Bumppo, Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill Cody: the nineteenth century saw the hunter-hero emerge as an iconic figure of American identity – the courageous, industrious, fiercely independent man, whose virtues were rooted in the American wilderness and whose “native” temperament made him a compelling alternative to the farmer as a figure around which to construct a usable past.⁴² To many urban Americans – severed from the farm, confronted by the disorienting forces of modernization, and in need of a more radical connection to their nation’s land and its past – the figure of the hunter-hero presented itself as a perfect solution. The construction of the hunter-hero as the model of American identity and citizenship found its most visible

and charismatic spokesperson in Roosevelt. Despite his strong primitivist inclinations, and his idealization of the rugged frontier life, Roosevelt was very much a man of the modern age; in addressing the crisis of diminishing game life in America, he was entirely pragmatic. Indeed, though “game laws rigidly enforced” and State-controlled wildlife refuges seem antithetical to the hearty individualism of the freedom-loving hunter, Roosevelt did not hesitate to compromise certain indulgences in order to combat the larger threat posed by unchecked market and subsistence hunting on the one hand, and the over-civilizing effects of machine culture on the other. Progressive-era sportsmen by and large were willing and able to enlist the federal government in its campaign to save game life, and thus save hunting as a national pastime. Against great odds, Roosevelt and his Progressive-era allies were able to sustain the mythic status of the American hunter-hero through a government-sanctioned agenda devoted to conservation. Their actions have had lasting effects on the discursive role Nature has played in American national identity.

The first chapter of Roosevelt’s *The Wilderness Hunter* presents the entire book in miniature. Roosevelt begins with an assertion about the size and quality of the American wilderness. “Nature here is generally on a larger scale than in the Old-World home of our race” (5). And not only is there more of it, but the American wilderness, Roosevelt is careful to point out, has a “character distinctly its own,” with animals “which have no Old-World representatives” (5).⁴³ The implicit claim Roosevelt makes here in his first chapter, and develops throughout the book, runs as follows: a unique wilderness makes for a unique nation, and thus, a distinct national hero figure – the American wilderness

hunter. As he moves into his discussion of America's first wilderness hunter figure, Daniel Boone, "the archetype of the American hunter," the evolutionary subtext of Roosevelt's narrative becomes more explicit: "Boone and his fellow-hunters were the heralds of the oncoming civilization" (6).

In its basic assumptions, Roosevelt's narrative is consistent with nineteenth-century landscape painters' construction of a "national iconography" – a consistent use of pictorial tropes linking "the uniqueness of the American landscape and fauna" with "the historic mission to bring democratic rule to the entire North American continent, the taming of the wilderness, and the conversion of the heathen" (Madsen 94, 95).⁴⁴ For Roosevelt, nearly everything could be explained in the discursive terms of civilization – and hunting, far from an exception to this rule, offered the perfect demonstration of it.⁴⁵ Though critics at the time saw him as a thoughtless butcher of animals, Roosevelt argued vigorously and often that hunting played an essential role in the health of the American nation and civilization itself. As he and George Bird Grinnell state in their introduction to *American Big-Game Hunting: The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club*:

Hunting big game in the wilderness is, above all things, a sport for vigorous and masterful people. The rifle-bearing hunter . . . must be sound of body and firm of mind, and must possess energy, resolution, manliness, self-reliance, and capacity for hardy self-help. In short, the big-game hunter must possess qualities without which no race can do its life-work well; and these are the very qualities which it is the purpose of this Club, so far as may be, to develop and foster. (14-15)

Hunting is portrayed here as the ultimate test of the individual. And, as Roosevelt would go on to argue in his famous 1899 men's club speech, "The Strenuous Life": "As it is with the individual, so it is with the nation" (4). Establishing this discursive linkage between hunting and the health of the nation is Roosevelt's chief agenda in *The Wilderness Hunter*. His method? Script a history of the American nation in which the central heroes, the ambassadors and architects of national civilization are themselves hunters.

Thus, in Roosevelt's myth of America it all goes back to Daniel Boone, the archetypal American hunter. From this origin-point, Roosevelt's narrative charts the progression of other American hunter-heroes, Davy Crockett, Sam Houston, Kit Carson – restless figures who would strike out west, making "ready the way" of civilization, then settle down only to grow restless again and move "onward into the yet unbroken wilds where the game dwelt and the red tribes marched" (6). "In every work of exploration," Roosevelt notes, "and in all the earlier battles with the original lords of the western and southwestern lands . . . the adventurous hunters played the leading part" (7) – until finally, in the years directly following the Civil War, "the life of these hunters, taken as a class, entered on its final stage" (10). Having led the settling of the land west all the way to the Pacific coast, the adventurous hunter was forced to rely on trapping for his subsistence – beavers at first, then buffalo. Because of its vast numbers, great size, and the market value of its hide, the bison became the chief "beast of chase" (11), and were slaughtered by the hundreds of thousands. By the mid-1880s, however, "the last buffalo herd was destroyed" (11). Not only was the buffalo gone, the land had been settled and the "last formidable Indian war" fought – the frontier, "had come to an end; it had

vanished” (12). And with it vanished that “distinctive class,” “the old race of wilderness hunters, the men who spent all their days in the lonely wilds, and who killed game as their sole means of livelihood” (12).

At this point in the text, Roosevelt’s mini-history of the American wilderness hunter comes to an end, and the narrative shifts seamlessly into a consideration of American big game animals. The narrative transition is facilitated by a brief consideration of a peculiar class of post-Civil War hunters, not exactly wilderness hunters, but “mighty” nonetheless – the Indian fighters, whose faithful position at little posts scattered across the land obliged them to hunt “not only as a sport, but also as the only means of keeping the posts and the expeditionary trains in meat” (13). Among this transient group of Indian fighters, Roosevelt singles out Generals Custer, Miles, and Crook, all of whom were also “keen and successful followers of the chase” (13). Roosevelt’s brief consideration of the Indian fighter-hunters deftly conflates the hunting and killing of animals with the hunting and killing of Indians, two activities which, in the post-Civil War era, tacitly merged in the minds of many Americans as necessary actions in the on-rolling cause of civilization. Because of the Indian’s role as a victim in both the post-Civil War Indian fights *and* the extermination of buffalo, the figure of the Indian becomes a rhetorical hinge for Roosevelt’s narrative, allowing the smooth transition from one discourse (hunting) to another (natural history).

Notably, however, Roosevelt does not mention the Indian in his brief treatment of the bison in Chapter One. Rather, he begins his historical sketch of the animal, the “largest and most important to man,” by evoking the “first white settlers” of Virginia who found the buffalo roaming “in herds of enormous, of incredible magnitude” (14). In

conclusion, Roosevelt laments the near-extinction of the bison noting “he is truly a grand and noble beast,” whose loss is “as keenly regretted by the lover of nature and of wild life as by the hunter” (14). With his description of the bison, Roosevelt’s narrative shifts into naturalist mode, and he proceeds with a discussion of the various species of American big game, in size order from biggest (bison) to smallest (wolf).

Beginning with Chapter Two, Roosevelt’s narrative becomes a procession of chapter-length discussions of each species, repeating the brief survey of Chapter One, but this time in order from least to most dangerous, beginning with the blacktail deer and ending with the grizzly and the cougar.⁴⁶ In both cases, the animals are arranged in a hierarchical fashion and ranked according to the degree to which they thrill or challenge their hunter adversary. In his chapter “Hunting the Grisly,” TR suggests that

[w]hile danger ought never to be needlessly incurred, it is yet true that the keenest zest in sport comes from its presence, and from the consequent exercise of the qualities necessary to overcome it. The most thrilling moments of an American hunter’s life are those in which, with every sense on the alert, and with nerves strung to the highest point, he is following alone into the heart of its forest fastness the fresh and bloody footprints of an angered grisly; and no other triumph of American hunting can compare with the victory to be thus gained. (308)

Roosevelt’s Boone and Crockett Club, one of the first organizations of its kind, developed a system for efficiently documenting and advertising the names of those hunters who had bagged the largest, fastest, and most of each species (Watts 176). Indeed, “No one shall be eligible for Regular Membership,” the Club’s constitution

stated, “who shall not have killed with the rifle, in fair chase, by still hunting. . .at least one adult male individual of each of three of the various species of American large game” (qtd in Cutright 173). Donna Haraway’s discussion of the criteria for taxidermy sample selection at the American Museum of Natural History offers a useful gloss on Roosevelt’s animal hierarchies. “There existed” she notes “an image of an animal which was somehow *the* gorilla or *the* elephant incarnate. That particular tone of perfection could only be heard in the male mode. It was a compound of physical and spiritual quality judged truthfully by the artist-scientist in the fullness of direct experience.” Though perfection was “marked by exact quantitative measurement,” it was marked “even more by virile vitality known by the hunter-scientist from visual communion” (41).

In the preface to *The Wilderness Hunter* Roosevelt makes his basic case for the central importance of the hunting life in America:

In hunting, the finding and killing of the game is after all but a part of the whole. The free, self-reliant, adventurous life, with its rugged and stalwart democracy.... all these unite to give to the career of the wilderness hunter its peculiar charm. The chase is among the best of all national pastimes; it cultivates that vigorous manliness for the lack of which in a nation, as in an individual, the possession of no other qualities can possibly atone. (xv)

The manly virtues gained through hunting are the very ones Roosevelt would go on to endorse in his articulation of the “strenuous life” – virtues without which “true national greatness” would be impossible to achieve (“Strenuous” 21). In the last chapter, Roosevelt delivers the practical proposal toward which the entire book has led:

We need, in the interest of the community at large, a rigid system of game laws rigidly enforced, and it is not only admissible, but one may almost say necessary, to establish, under the control of the State, great national forest reserves, which shall also be breeding grounds for and nurseries for wild game. . . . One of the chief attractions of the life of the wilderness is its rugged and stalwart democracy; there every man stands for what he actually is, and can show himself to be. (449)

And to clinch his case, he adds one last pantheon: the “leaders among our statesmen and soldiers [who] have sought strength and pleasure in the chase and kindred vigorous pastimes” (455) – namely Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, Webster, and Henry Clay. Saving “the greatest of Americans” for last, Roosevelt ends this sketch with an elaborate and moving portrait of George Washington the fox-hunter and “representative of all that is best in our national life.” Were it not for his great fondness for hunting, Roosevelt remarks, he could “never have been what he was” (457).

Upon leaving the White House in 1909 Roosevelt would make an eleven-month safari in East Africa, acting as head of an expedition sponsored by the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. In his accounts of the safari, Roosevelt took pains to emphasize the scientific nature of the trip. “We shall collect birds and mammals for the National Museum at Washington,” he informed the public, “and nothing will be shot unless for food, or for preservation as a specimen. . . . There will be no wanton destruction whatever” (“Scientific” 91). Throughout his career Roosevelt frequently had to fend off accusations that he was a “game butcher.” How could he convince people of

the *civilizing* power of hunting if so many associated his practice of it with barbarism?

One of his chief strategies was to fuse the primitive act of hunting with the civilized act of representation – whether through photographs, taxidermy, or written accounts.

Hunting done right thus becomes a serious adult game of regeneration through recapitulation, best demonstrated by the figure of the hunter-naturalist. In Roosevelt's account, the civilizing moment in history occurred when "real observers of nature grew up, men who went into the wilderness to find out the truth" ("Nature Fakers" 427).

Having hunted down the truth in the savage drama of the chase, the civilized hunter-naturalist pauses to document the occasion, snapping photographs, collecting specimens to send back to the museum, and making mental notes for memoirs to be written down later. These crucial acts of representation provide an appropriate distance between the hunter and the thrilling act of the kill – ensuring his status as both regenerated *and* civilized.

Notes

¹ Exceptions to this include Ralph H. Lutts's 1990 study, *The Nature Fakers*, and his anthology, *The Wild Animal Story* (1998). See also Dunlap.

² The term "buffalo" is a misnomer for bison. The term may have been derived from the French word for cattle, *boeuf*, a term used by early explorers. Technically, the name "buffalo" should be reserved for the Cape buffalo of South Africa and the water buffalo of Asia (Callenbach 3).

³ For my account of the destruction of the American bison, I've drawn largely on Isenberg (esp. 130-43), Dary (69-120), and Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (214-23).

⁴ American Bison hides were also purchased, for instance, by the British for use in making leather for army accoutrements (Dary 94).

⁵ See Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (213-18) on the link between bison destruction and the emergence of the new livestock economy.

⁶ Andrew Smits has argued that the U.S. army was mainly responsible for the mass destruction of the bison, but Isenberg counters that General Sherman's army merely "declined to enforce treaty provisions banning the hunters from Indian territory and provided the civilian hunters with protection and sometimes ammunition. In other words, Sherman commended the hunters but he did not command them" (129).

⁷ Isenberg notes that, according to the neo-Lamarckian view which dominated popular and academic understanding of evolution in the 1870s, "the process leading from bison to cattle paralleled the replacement of Indians by Euroamericans" (153). It should be noted

that, while Euroamerican actions were the most direct and far-reaching, Native American hunters, as well as drought, blizzards, wolf predation and other environmental factors also factored significantly in the bison's demise (Isenberg 129).

⁸ For a history of the bison's role in American culture and folklore, see Geist, and Dary (275-85). Eadward Muybridge captured chronophotographic images of a bison in motion and printed them in 1887. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Muybridge's proto-cinematic photos of animals in motion.

⁹ Beginning in the early twentieth century, these two figures – the Native American and the bison (or native wildlife more generally) – became central to middle- and upper-class white articulations of Americanness in the United States. Faced with the disorienting social and political realities marking America's entrance into the twentieth century, white male Americans in particular sought in these “vanishing races” key symbols and mythologies upon which a nostalgic, “authentic” national identity could be constructed. American Indians and American bison were frequently conflated, and the trope of the “vanishing buffalo” was often used in coordination with that of the “vanishing Indian”; in popular culture, the two were rhetorically interchangeable – as is evidenced in the “buffalo head” nickel. Nonetheless, the two figures were distinct, and though similar deep-seated anxieties and ambivalences characterized both, the specific discursive networks and social practices surrounding each were necessarily different. For useful accounts of the American Indian's role in constructions of American identity, see Deloria, Huhndorf, and Bergland.

¹⁰ See Gray (25-47) for a history of human-wildlife relations in North America.

¹¹ The other iconic figure of wildlife extinction in turn-of-the-century America is, of course, the passenger pigeon. The last wild passenger pigeon was killed in 1900.

¹² For a general history of wildlife protection in America, see Dunlap, Mighetto, and Reiger.

¹³ For a history of wildlife conservation law, see Fischman and Tober.

¹⁴ See for instance, Trefethan, Mighetto, and Reiger.

¹⁵ For histories of wolf extermination in American history, see Lopez 137-199, and Coleman.

¹⁶ William Cronon has been a leading figure in this effort; his essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," along with his anthology of essays, *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (1995), have been seminal works in revisionary environmental history. See also DeLuca on "the corporate roots of environmentalism"; Mazel on the construction of American literary environmentalism; and Grusin on the creation of America's national park system.

¹⁷ Moreover, Isenberg suggests that the contradictory ideals embodied in the preservationists' frontier mentality imposed limitations on the healthy return of the bison (167).

¹⁸ Among the more prominent members of the Society were William Temple Hornaday (president), Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, the artist Frederic Remington, and Andrew Carnegie. See Dary (236-40) and Isenberg (168-73) for a brief history of the Society.

¹⁹ The turn into the twentieth century witnessed a remarkable surge of American popular and scientific interest in the subjective lives of animals – thanks in large part to the increasing acceptance of evolution theory. Do they reason? Have they emotions, like us? Can they “speak”? Debates over such questions circulated throughout the pages of popular American periodicals, including both generalist magazines like the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s*, *Century Magazine*, *McClure’s* – as well as scientific and semi-popular scientific magazines like *Science*, *Scientific American*, and *Popular Science Monthly*.

²⁰ For more on the “back to nature” movement, see Schmitt, and Nash, 141-160.

²¹ See also Schmitt 77-78.

²² See Bederman’s discussion of Hall in *Manliness and Civilization*, especially 97-98.

²³ This excerpt from an 1899 *Chicago Evening Post* nicely sums up the resistance to Hall’s ideas: “The idea among the uncivilized peoples of the world to-day is that boys and men should fight. . . . To these people we send missionaries. . . . [A]nd just as we are beginning to congratulate ourselves on reclaiming some men from barbarism Dr. Hall gets up and advises us to teach our sons to do what we have been endeavoring to teach the savages to avoid” (qtd in Bederman 78). Theodore Roosevelt, on the other hand, was a strong advocate of Hall’s theories and expressed his commendation in a personal letter dated Nov. 29, 1899: “I must write you to thank you for your sound common sense, decency and manliness in what you advocate for the education of children. Oversentimentality, oversoftness, in fact, washiness and mushiness are the great dangers of this age and of this people. Unless we keep the barbarian virtues, gaining the civilized

ones will be of little avail” (*Letters* II: 1391). Regarding Seton, many foundational ideas of his Woodcraft Indians would serve as a basis for the establishment of the Boy Scouts, of which, along with Robert Baden-Powell, Seton was cofounder.

²⁴ See Deloria 106.

²⁵ My account of Morgan draws on Ingold, 86-90; and Michaelson 79-81.

²⁶ In the first decades of the twentieth century, Franz Boas would challenge the evolutionary paradigm of culture, shifting anthropologists’ focus to the more recent, knowable past.

²⁷ See Lears on turn-of-the-century antimodernism. Lears characterizes antimodernism as a “common current of restiveness, a common perception of modern culture’s evasions and shortcomings” linking such disparate figures as Henry Adams, Ezra Pound, Georges Sorel, and Sigmund Freud, along with a small army of popularizers including “simple-lifers, militarists, mind-curists, [and] mystics” (5). “Whether they focused on premodern character or on more recent models,” Lears notes, “all these disparate pilgrims sought ‘authentic’ alternatives to the apparent unreality of modern existence. . . . Exploring the sources of antimodernism in *fin-de-siècle* cultural ferment, one uncovers social and psychic tensions which still persist and still promote unfulfilled longings for ‘real life’” (5). For more on “authenticity” in turn-of-the-century culture, see Orvell.

²⁸ For Seton’s influence as an interpreter of Indian culture, see Anderson, 129-150, and Elliott, 95-127.

²⁹ For Hall’s influence on Seton, see Wadland 335-339, and Anderson 130.

³⁰ For the use of Wild Animal Stories in the schools see Lutts *Nature*, 102, 111-112, 127, and 137.

³¹ See Dunlap, “Realistic” for more on the difference between Roberts and Seton, particularly regarding the issue of animals and morality.

³² My account of the Romanes controversy relies on Boakes (24-26). For more information on the early history of comparative psychology, see also Richards, Rollin, and Walker. For more recent scientific accounts on the animal mind, see Bekoff, Dawkins, Griffin, and Hauser.

³³ For more about science and the realistic animal story writers see Dunlap, “Realistic”; and Wadland 165-297.

³⁴ As one critic puts it, “Roberts sold his stories; Seton became an icon” (Dunlap “Realistic” 58).

³⁵ Most directly, wolves were seen as a threat to livestock, and for a country that wanted beef, wolf extermination was a necessary project. This explanation, however, does not go very far in explaining the aggression and zeal with which extermination was performed, particularly in the late decades of the nineteenth century, when wolf eradication reached its peak. As Barry Lopez points out, “A lot of people didn’t just kill wolves; they tortured them. They set wolves on fire and tore their jaws out and cut their Achilles tendons and turned dogs loose on them. They poisoned them . . . on such a scale that *millions* of other animals . . . were killed incidentally in the process” (139). In the period between 1865 and 1885, just before Seton wrote his wolf story, cattlemen killed wolves “with almost pathological dedication” (Lopez 139). Though the basic dilemma of

livestock protection accounts for some portion of this, a great deal of the dedication which drove wolf killing may be attributable to the volatile intersection of certain very powerful and widely circulating turn-of-the-century discourses: animality, on the one hand, and the closely related discourses of masculinity, civilization, and the frontier on the other. For more about wolf extermination in American history, see Lopez 137-199, and Coleman.

³⁶ See Cutright on Roosevelt's interest in natural history and conservation. Roosevelt began collecting animal specimens as a young boy. He went on to study natural history at Harvard, developing a particular interest in birds. His first publication was a leaflet entitled *The Summer Birds of the Adirondacks in Franklin County, N.Y.*, published when Roosevelt was nineteen years old (Cutright 102).

³⁷ In an 1897 issue of *Science*, for instance, Roosevelt took C. Hart Merriam (the head of the U.S. Biological Survey) to task for his claim that there were eleven distinct species of North American coyotes. Roosevelt's beef with Merriam dealt mainly with the latter's use of terminology. "If one man chooses to consider as species what other men generally agree in treating merely as varieties it is unfortunate . . . because it confuses matters. . . . Moreover, it is a pity where it can be avoided, to use the word so that it has entirely different weights in different cases" ("Layman's 686). To illustrate his point, Roosevelt suggests an analogy. "There are differences between the mammalian faunas of northern North America and northern Eurasia, but they are utterly trivial as compared with the differences which divide the fauna of both regions from the fauna of either South America or Australia, or indeed of South Africa." Roosevelt continues by pointing out

that, to suggest through one's nomenclature that these differences are of equal importance in the four cases "is as misleading as it would be to describe the ethnology of the United States in terms that would imply that the New Englanders, the Kentuckians, the Indians, and the Negroes formed four divisions of about even rank. There are differences between the New Englanders and the Kentuckians; but no one would dream of distinguishing the two by terms that would imply that they were as widely separated as either is from the Indians or Negroes" ("Layman's 686). However alarming (to twenty-first-century readers) his choice of analogies, Roosevelt's train of thought here certainly demonstrates both a nuanced appreciation for, and striking rhetorical facility with, taxonomical thinking.

³⁸ For more on the American Museum of Natural History, see Haraway's seminal essay "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in The Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936," reprinted in *Primate Visions*, 26-58.

³⁹ See Bederman (170-215), and Watts for more on Roosevelt and masculinity.

⁴⁰ In terms of the notorious rift between preservationists and conservationists, *preservationism* first emerged in connection with the land, while *conservationism* was rooted largely in hunters' concern for conserving game species. Only when preservationism became a global matter did it become associated with endangered species (Epstein 36-37). See Epstein on the emergence of global endangered species protection. And for more on the role of hunters in the emergence of American nature conservation, see Reiger and Trefethen (69-90). For a recent, and significantly nuanced

discussion of the often caricatured conservationist-preservationist split, see Miller (“John Muir”).

⁴¹ For more on sportsman class-consciousness, see Reiger (6-7; 29-34; 38-40) and Herman (138; 246-49). While Reiger identifies the nineteenth century American sportsman as upper-class, Herman argues for their distinctly middle-class sensibility, which, he says, distinguished them from the European sportsmen.

⁴² See Slotkin (32-36) on the “hunter” and “farmer” as dialectical figures of American mythology and ideology. Though the idea would have struck our colonial forebears as strange at best, by the late nineteenth century, Americans had come to see themselves as a “hunting people” (Herman 4, 1). Images of frontier hunters first appeared in popular literature, art, and even currency, during and shortly after the Revolution. Only in the mid-1800s, however, did American “worship of the hunter” become most intense – a passion registered in the fact that nineteenth-century printing presses churned out tales of hunters by the thousands in an effort to “slake an unquenchable public thirst” (5, 2). See Herman for a definitive cultural history of hunting in America.

⁴³ Roosevelt’s statements in this regard echo Thomas Jefferson’s remarks about native fauna in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, where Jefferson systematically demonstrated the quality of American animal life in relation to European animal life, positing the indigenous fauna as a distinct source of national pride. Jefferson’s meticulous comparative analysis of species size, number, and diversity was a direct response to allegations of New World degeneracy made by the Comte de Buffon and like-minded Europeans. Far from “feeble,” “tractable,” and “timid,” as Buffon contended (Kastner

122-23), the bears and mountain lions which flourished in the North American wilderness proved formidable foes to the early settlers, and the seemingly infinite bounty of antelope, elk, white-tailed deer, whales and seals proved a rich source of aesthetic, material, and economic consumption.

⁴⁴ See also Angela Miller's recent essay, "The Fate of Wilderness in American Landscape Art: The Dilemmas of 'Nature's Nation.'" For more on nineteenth-century landscape painting and national iconography, see Merchant "Reinventing Eden" (147-150).

⁴⁵ Watts and Slotkin discuss Roosevelt's tendency to entwine racial, masculine, and national trajectories with that of civilization itself. Watts notes that, "In Roosevelt's mind, the civilization-savagery dichotomy metaphorically encompassed almost all the others, since every arena of life contained contending forces that advanced or retarded civilization" (Watts 34).

⁴⁶ Slotkin comments on the similar organizational logic of the Western books in *Gunfighter Nation*, 41.

Chapter Two

Vanishing Animals and the Modern Technics of Nostalgia

The top prizes in the photography and forestry divisions at the Paris Exposition of 1900 were awarded to George Shiras III for his “Midnight series” photographs taken of animals at night. The photo series featured unprecedented flash-lit images of wild animals in their nocturnal habitats. Using a new flash bulb technology which he had invented for this purpose, Shiras was able to capture on print the disappearing wildlife of North America in its most intimate settings.¹ Most of the images are of river-wading bucks, does, and fawns of the then-endangered North American white-tailed deer species, photographed from a boat specially rigged for nighttime wildlife photography. Visitors to Shiras’s prize-winning exhibit could admire the wonders of modern technological ingenuity while simultaneously mourning the irreparable environmental damage and loss of wildlife that modern techno-scientific advances and colonial expansion have inevitably entailed. One typical photo in the series depicts an unsuspecting buck as it emerges from a reedbed on its way to the river for a drink – its head up and alert, its flash-blinded eyes directed at the camera. In many of the shots, the light from the flash reflects off of the animal bodies giving them a luminous appearance, their ghostlike forms set in sharp relief against the dark backdrop; the resulting “spectral” effect is enhanced further by the shimmering, doubled images of animal bodies reflected in the water beneath them.

The unwitting spectral effect created by these photos is telling: it speaks to the seemingly irreconcilable juxtaposition of *the animal* and *the modern*.² Shiras was well aware of the dangers modernity posed to North American animal species; he was an early advocate of wildlife preservation and a passionate proselytizer for camera-hunting as a means of slowing what man in the early twentieth century sensed was inevitable – the imminent closure of the “Age of Mammals.” The late-nineteenth and twentieth-century phenomenon of camera-hunting may be seen as a function of modern nostalgia for “lost” Nature, figured as the authentic, organic counterpart to civilization and its smothering artifice. A paradox attends Shiras’s nighttime photos of wildlife: what Shiras has captured and frozen for millions of spectators to see is not so much the beauty and innocence of Nature, made all the more accessible and enjoyable by the stunning powers of modern technology – but rather, the historic relocation of animals into a receding past.³

Modern forms of memory and representation have contributed to the evolution of the modern animal into a “lost object,” a vanishing form of life to be mourned and remembered.⁴ This is especially so in America, where the mnemonic function of animals is reflected throughout early twentieth century national “origin” narratives. Wildlife, for instance, plays a critical role in the frontier myth, one of America’s dominant origin stories. In making vanishing animals (such as the bison and the white-tailed deer) central to national origin narratives, writers, artists, photographers, museum administrators, and so on were able to exploit the powerful rhetorical parallels between *human* origin stories and our own *national* origin myths. Consider, for instance, the important role of horse-culture, rodeo, and staged bison hunts in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. Boasting of its use of “living animals,” the Wild West show dramatized at once man’s conquest over

wild nature *and* the making of the modern “indigenous” American.⁵ The show achieved this by constructing a nostalgic view of the past that could in turn be visually “possessed” by the spectators. In the Show, both Indians and animals were transformed into living symbols, while their “real,” historical counterparts became anachronistic figures steadily giving way to a modern age of progress, technology, and capital.⁶

In the previous chapter, I focused on the key role that animal narratives and images played in American subject formation at the turn of the century. As we saw in the examples of the bison, Ernest Thompson Seton’s realistic animal stories, and Theodore Roosevelt’s hunting narratives, animals in modern America are subjected to an extensive discursive, ideological, and technological apparatus through which they are transmuted into nostalgic emblems of the primitive. In this chapter I extend my analysis of this transmutation process, shifting my focus to the various *techné*, or representational technologies, through which animals are “reproduced” in modernity. This investigation takes us from Shiras’s wildlife photography through the hyperreal art and science of animal taxidermy to the biopolitical realm of wildlife management. From there my analysis segues to the figure of Ernest Hemingway, whose idiosyncratic aesthetics of the “clean kill,” I argue, sets his nonfiction works, *Death in the Afternoon* (about the Spanish bullfight) and *Green Hills of Africa* (about safari hunting), on a “techno-primitivist” par with taxidermy and other prominent modern technologies of animal reproduction. The chapter concludes with a close analysis of Hemingway’s “A Natural History of the Dead” – a peculiar story lodged almost inexplicably within the depths of his bullfighting book. What makes this story of particular interest to my larger analysis is that it complicates

Hemingway's seemingly straightforward appropriation of the animal as a figure of primitive regeneration. What begins to surface in my concluding examination of Hemingway is an animal figure that is, in some significant sense, resistant to modern techniques of representation – thus setting the stage for a major transition as the dissertation moves into Chapter Three.

In his 1928 book, *Trails of the Hunted*, James L. Clark, a naturalist at the American Museum of Natural History, urged his readers: “Now is the time to become acquainted with those interesting and appealing creatures which have inhabited the earth for so many thousands of years. . . . Before many years have passed, the animals will be gone” (14). Clark’s hope was that “before the end of the Age of Mammals has been reached, a fairly adequate record of most animals [would] be preserved in museums, in motion pictures, and in books” (15). Clark’s desire to archive what he feared to be the last remaining vestiges of animal life resonated with many early-twentieth-century Americans. Increasingly, even sportsmen began trading in rifles for cameras in hopes of salvaging, if not the quarry, then at least the memory of the chase.⁷

Clark’s premonitory reference to “the end of the Age of Mammals” reflected a common sentiment among early twentieth century naturalists. In a 1922 article in the *Journal of Mammology*, Henry Fairfield Osborn, the prominent paleontologist and world-wide expert on prehistoric animal life, argued that moderns were witnessing the “closing of the Age of Mammals.”⁸ To urge upon his readers the significance of this passing, Osborn located the beginning of the Age of Mammals at three million years ago. “Out of very small and primitive progenitors,” he noted, “there evolved over the entire globe –

land, sea, and air – a teeming mammalian life.” “Mammalian perfection,” he continued, had actually “reached its climax at the close of Pliocene time, about 400,000 years ago” when mammals comprised “twenty-four orders, one hundred sixty-six families, three thousand genera, fifteen thousand species, and [their] varieties of races.” It is during this period of mammalian perfection “400,000 years ago” where Osborn begins his survey of “the story of civilization and extinction” (220). Beginning with early man’s struggle for food, Osborn traces man’s evolutionary uses of animals: furs and skins for clothing, oil and fat for light, animal compounds for fertilizer, and the clearing of land for agriculture. He concludes his survey with recent personal observations in America, noting that “as a young fossil hunter, in 1877, game animals were still universal.” Nonetheless, by the early 1900s, Europe, North American, Asia and finally Africa had all “eliminated their wild animals” – and through similar causes: “the food supply, fur supply, industry and art, agriculture, deforestation, and as a final blow but in a minor degree, sport” (224).

Beginning with Georges Cuvier in the 18th century, modern paleontology was responsible for making Westerners aware of the vast prehistoric life that preceded man’s appearance on the earth. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, paleontology became an important enterprise in America. The American Museum of Natural History helped disseminate paleontological findings to the broader American public, and Osborn, the “father of American paleontology,” had a major hand in this. Osborn was hired by the Museum in 1891, and acted as its president from 1908 to 1933, a period marking the Museum’s “zenith of fame and influence” (Preston *Dinosaurs in the Attic* 64). For American museum goers newly educated in the vast *prehistory* of animal life, the *modern* vanishing of wildlife took on even greater significance. Of course, as wildlife

disappeared, recreational activities like hunting and bird watching would themselves be threatened, as would nature appreciation more broadly. However, this most recent turn in “the story of civilization and extinction” signified something much larger: the irrevocable eclipse of the Age of Mammals by the Age of Man. This imminent eclipse in turn threatened to obscure Man’s origins. Animals served as the link between Man and his origins; without them, Man would have no direct connection to his primitive past.

James Clark’s desire to collect “a fairly adequate record of most animals” before the Age of Mammals came to its irrevocable end was echoed by several naturalists of the day. Reflecting on the tragic destruction of wildlife in Africa, Carl E. Akeley, the renowned taxidermist, photographer, and cinematographer, noted that, “There is just one relieving circumstance in this doleful prospect: what man seems bent upon destroying with his gun can at least be rescued from complete oblivion and given the illusion of reality through the camera operated by the right kind of individual” (“Martin Johnson” 285). The archiving of vanishing animal life was a project close to Akeley’s heart. Like many safari hunters and wildlife photographers of his day, Akeley looked to Africa as the last place to experience primitive nature in the modernized world.

Having personally witnessed the disturbing rapidity with which African wildlife was being destroyed by the aggressive agriculture, herding, mining, and development brought about by European colonialism, Akeley dedicated himself to preserving Africa’s prehistoric nature before it disappeared for good. In 1909 Akeley was commissioned to construct an epic diorama display of African wildlife for the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). Akeley was the perfect individual to carry out the task.

Credited for bringing the museum diorama into its maturity, Akeley pioneered the art and technology of the “habitat group,” in which an animal group is presented in a “naturalistic” setting complete with detailed flora of the animal group’s native habitat.⁹ By the time Akeley joined the AMNH he was a seasoned African expeditionist, having participated in the first American museum-sponsored African expedition in 1896, and a second in 1905-07 with the Field Museum in Chicago (Alvey 26, 28). Over the span of seventeen years and three African expeditions, Akeley grew increasingly anxious regarding the urgency of his work on the Great Hall of Africa. In 1926, during his last trip to Africa, Akeley wrote to Henry Osborn, the Museum’s director, “I have not appreciated the absolute necessity of carrying on the African Hall, if it is ever to be done. . . . *The old conditions, the story of which we want to tell, are now gone, and in another decade the men who knew them will all be gone*” (qtd in Preston 84, Akeley’s emphasis). Akeley figured that to do the “old conditions” justice, he would need to take modern taxidermy and the habitat group to a new level. Though in terms of its technique, taxidermy had been nearly perfected by 1910, Akeley found many dioramas still woefully unrealistic. In contrast, he “wanted to create habitat groups on a huge scale, and he wanted them to be bursting with vitality and spontaneity, to be esthetically beautiful as well as scientifically accurate” (Preston 81).

Though Akeley would not live to see it, the enormous Akeley Hall of African Mammals was opened in 1936 to much fanfare, and remains today one of the most famous and extraordinary halls of any museum in the world.¹⁰ William Leigh, an artist who was responsible for the background paintings in the African Hall, noted in 1938 that the dioramas were “a page of history that will survive, perhaps after much of this animal

life has been wiped out – a record of something which never can be again – a document of inestimable value” (qtd in Davis, *Museums and the Natural Environment*). Certainly in terms of its genre, the nature diorama, the Hall is without peer. Akeley’s obsessive desire to represent, and thus preserve, African wildlife in as realistic a manner as possible is itself a notable historical phenomenon; what is of equal significance, however, is the elaborate technological apparatus that Akeley engaged for this purpose.

First, Akeley revolutionized the technique behind modern taxidermy. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hunters would simply bring their kills to the nearest upholsterer, who would then sew the animal skin together and stuff it with cotton or straw. Akeley’s inventive approach was to “model a lifelike form of the animal's body in clay, make a mold of the sculpture, create a lightweight cloth and papier-mâché cast from the mold, and then stretch the skin over the cast” (Alvey 25).¹¹ Akeley also employed stereoscopic photography as a means of achieving greater accuracy in his taxidermic reproductions for the African Hall exhibit. Using this photography, he would get shots of the entire animal, along with details of various body parts. The stereo view allowed Akeley to document the subtle contours and musculature of his specimens, which in turn aided his modeling of the sculptured understructure of the skin mount.¹² Not only did Akeley make radical improvements to the art and craft of animal taxidermy, he may be credited as among the first to have implemented the sophisticated technique of dioramic habitat groups.¹³ The process and technology behind dioramas was extensive indeed; the making of a single taxidermic group involved, in Akeley’s words, “the collecting of specimens and data, the modeling of the animals, the construction of the manikins, the painting of the background, the production of the accessories – all this preparation will

take months and years. . . .” (qtd in Asma 242). To grasp the sheer volume of labor, capital, and bloodshed required for just one of these steps, the “collecting of specimens and data” – one might note that the National Museum’s 1909 expedition to Africa, led by Theodore Roosevelt, brought home 5,013 mammals, 4,453 birds, and 2,322 reptiles and amphibians (Davis 71).

The hyperreal art and science of taxidermy embodies a series of flagrant contradictions. It simulates life through death – often sacrificing one of a few remaining individual animals in order to create a memorial to its species; it manufactures “nature” through extensive technical artifice; and, it evokes premodern “nature” through patently modern technologies.¹⁴ Mark Seltzer characterizes modern taxidermy as “the naturalist form of representation par excellence” (241). The “trompe l’oeil technology of taxidermy,” he notes, embodies an “illusionist disconnection between outmoded surface and technologized interior,” thus posing “the natural person and natural body as something like a façade or mask: the mask of the techno-primitive” (241).¹⁵ Seltzer defines *techno-primitivism* as “a simulated primitivism mediated through and through by technologies of reproduction” (81). Seltzer’s notion of techno-primitivism illuminates not only the peculiar logic embodied in the taxidermic specimen, but the more general function of the natural history museum in modern Western society. Indeed, the AMNH’s African Hall is a perfect illustration of how natural history museums facilitate the ordering and preservation of premodern, pre-capitalist, pre-industrial nature through an elaborate disciplinary and technological framework, which in turn allows Western museum goers to remember or visually “possess,” and thus connect with, their origins.¹⁶

Taking my cue from Seltzer, I would suggest that in order to properly conceive the uncanny status of the animal in modernity, we must trace its refraction through a vast techno-primitive matrix that renders it both an archaic, anachronistic object of desire and remembrance, *and* a modern disciplined life form par excellence (as evidenced in the critical role animals played in the development of Behaviorism and of Taylorism and the broader technologization of the body in modernity). Through the elaborate *techne* of the natural history museum, wildlife photography, early nature films, and indeed modern zoos, animals become nostalgia-laden images of the primitive.

To appreciate how this process was brought to bear on “real” animals, we might consider the emergence of modern game management. Game management (or, wildlife management, as it would later be called) emerged alongside of broader Progressive-era conservation practices geared for the aesthetic, recreational, and economic growth of the nation. Though its emergence is often treated within the context of histories of American conservation, from a different angle, wildlife management may be seen as a logical expansion of modern biopolitical regulation techniques from the human to the nonhuman realm.¹⁷ The practice of game management on public lands first began during Theodore Roosevelt’s administration (largely as an attempt to produce sustainable deer numbers across the country), but modern techniques were not systematized until the appearance of Aldo Leopold’s *Game Management* in 1933. Leopold’s book took the principles behind Gifford Pinchot’s forestry program and adapted them for game species: “Both scientists and sportsmen now see that effective conservation requires, in addition to public sentiment and laws, a deliberate and purposeful manipulation of the environment—the same kind of manipulation as is employed in forestry” (21). Leopold, however, unlike

Pinchot, focused less on the economic value of game “resources” and more on their social and cultural value. “Game management,” he stated, “is the art of making land produce sustained annual crops of wild game for recreational use” (3). Just what Leopold meant by “recreational use” is made apparent in his 1943 essay “Wildlife in American Culture,” where he remarks that “there are cultural values in the sports, customs, and experiences which renew contacts with wild things” (3). “First,” he notes, “there is value in any experience which reminds us of our distinctive national origins and evolution, i.e., which stimulates awareness of American history. Such awareness is ‘nationalism’ in its best sense. . . . For example: a boy scout has tanned a coonskin cap, and goes Daniel-Booneing in the willow thicket below the tracks. He is re-enacting American history” (3). Later, he links the modern “code of sportsmanship” to a “distinctively American tradition of self-reliance, hardihood, woodcraft, and marksmanship” (4).

What early wildlife management offered Americans – Americans of a certain persuasion that is – was an opportunity to return to America’s frontier origins. That this opportunity was itself made possible by the very techno-scientific matrix that was driving them into primitive Nature in the first place was a contradiction not lost on Leopold. Indeed, Leopold admitted that some Americans “might shy at this prospect of a man-made game crop as at something artificial and therefore repugnant.” In response, he simply pointed out that “Every head of wild life still alive in this country is already artificialized, in that its existence is conditioned by economic forces” (21). This is not to say that Leopold was a strict pragmatist in outlook. He was in fact highly sensitive to the idealistic, or “aesthetic,” dimension of the modern hunt, and this dimension was carefully factored into his management calculus. What scientific game management strives for, he

notes, is “not merely a *supply* of game, in the strictly quantitative sense”; rather, the “conservation movement seeks . . . to maintain values in which *quality* and distribution matter quite as much as quantity” (392). Thus, one of Leopold’s guiding “theorems” was that “The recreational value of a head of game is inverse to the artificiality of its origin, and hence in a broad way to the intensiveness of the system of game management which produced it” (394). In short, “a game policy should seek a happy medium between the evident necessity of some management, and the esthetic desideratum of not too much” (394).

Timothy Luke, following Foucault, has described wildlife management as a means of deploying “the biopower of many wild animals as ‘faunapower’ resources that might preserve and enrich human life” (“Pleasures” 5). How does wildlife management relate to “the objective of disciplining the body and that of regulating populations” (Foucault, *History* 146)? As the excerpts from Leopold suggest, the historical emergence of wildlife management went hand in hand with that of the sportsman’s code (see Chapter One). The sportsman’s code, with its “odd moral credo of aesthetic richness and ascetic restraint in the moment of making the kill,” may be seen as a “new disciplinary ritua[l] for enjoying the pleasures of blood sports, which focused upon creating far more ethical forms of human predation in the wild to tame human behavior in society” (Luke “Pleasures” 8, 5) – a means of simultaneously disciplining the wildlife out there and the wild life within human society.

The peculiar techno-primitivist logic underlying game management, wildlife photography, taxidermy, and so on finds its literary analogue in Ernest Hemingway’s

modernist poetics of the “clean kill.” No modern writer embodies so fully the passion for the chase, a spectatorial emphasis on the “real thing,” and primitivist nostalgia for authentic, preindustrial Nature so much as Hemingway does, particularly in his major nonfiction writings of the 1930s, *Death in the Afternoon* (about the Spanish bullfight) and *Green Hills of Africa* (a safari memoir). In these texts Hemingway theorizes and attempts to enact a ritual rebirth of modern American culture that, in his view, has turned degenerate. Hemingway dramatizes this rebirth through a restaging of man’s ritual sacrifice of animal life – first in the bullfight, then in the hunt.

Writing about animals – and their death – allowed Hemingway to write meaningfully about violent death during an age characterized by the mass mechanized slaughter of human life. A central dilemma – if not *the* central dilemma – that Hemingway is attempting to work through in his major non-fiction writing of the 1930s (and arguably, much of his career) is this: how does one write of death, the “most fundamental thing,” when modern existence, with its decadence on the one hand, and its mass mechanized slaughter on the other, has rendered death virtually un-representable?¹⁸ Animals, moreover, served as ideal specimens for Hemingway’s characteristic emphasis on writing “truly.”¹⁹ Finally, in evoking animal sacrifice as his central object and metaphor, Hemingway is able to link his own writing with the *originary* scene of “writing” – the birth of culture itself. Hemingway wants to reclaim the sacred function of art as the central ritual separating humans from other animals, particularly in the face of what he perceived to be the profound forces of *dehumanization* unleashed by modernity.

It is significant that Hemingway introduces his book on bullfighting by situating his personal interest in the *Corrida* within the context of his vocational development as a writer. He cites his journalistic ambition of learning to “put down what really happened in action” as his primary motivation for going to Spain to see his first bullfight.²⁰ “I was trying to learn to write,” he explains, reflecting on his apprentice days, “commencing with the simplest things, and one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental is violent death” (2). Hemingway identifies the bullfight as the “only place where you could see life and death, *i.e.*, violent life and death now that the wars were over” (2). This statement evokes not only Hemingway’s equation of modernity with violence, but an emphasis on *seeing* as indispensable to “true” understanding.²¹ In order to clearly represent the fundamental things, the most concentrated moments of life and death, one must first look directly upon the thing itself, and without flinching. If the “very simple things were to be made permanent . . . it could not be done with any shutting of the eyes” (3).

Hemingway’s emphasis on visual apprehension squares directly with what Robert Scholes calls the “imagistic” school of composition in America. Based in the model of naturalist Louis Agassiz, and famously codified in Ezra Pound’s *ABC of Reading*, the imagistic notion of composition involves a “system that privileges the eye, the gaze, and assumes the power of an innocent eye: no names, no studying, no learning – the eye engendering the word” (Scholes 654). Though Pound was instrumental in Hemingway’s development as a writer, perhaps even more influential in this regard was Theodore Roosevelt. Hemingway’s obsession with manliness, his passion for the outdoor life, particularly big-game hunting, and his devotion to the strenuous life echo, and indeed

were greatly inspired by Roosevelt's example.²² Much less acknowledged, however, is the striking rhetorical correspondence between Roosevelt's natural history writing, especially his frontier histories and safari literature, and Hemingway's distinct prose style, with its emphasis on the unflinching gaze and the "true sentence."²³ Indeed, only a slight shift of focus is required to refashion Hemingway-the-Poundian-modernist as Hemingway-the-natural-historian, who, like his predecessor Roosevelt, may be seen as furthering an American rhetorical tradition of writing based in the austere Agassizian method of discovery through intense observation.²⁴

This modernism-natural history confluence is evident in Hemingway's *double* purpose in writing about the bullfight: "I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt . . . was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced" (2). Though Hemingway confesses that he was not "equipped" to write anything significant about the bullfight until five years after he first witnessed one for himself, he notes that he saw, upon his earliest visits to the bullring, "the definite action which would give me the feeling of life and death that I was working for" (3). What is striking here is the fundamental connection Hemingway establishes between the bullfight and his stated intentions as a would-be writer. His explicit point is that the bullfight, with its unique juxtaposition of intense feeling and "definite action" – that is, an eminently observable and scientifically dissectible series of physical movements – presents an ideal educational study for the modern(ist) writer. In its ritual staging of violent death, the bullfight presents the essence of modern life in the shape of an aesthetic object, one in which the attentive audience member might discover precisely that which Agassiz's

students were trained to seek out: the elusive “relation between form or structure and function or essential effect” (qtd in Cooper 4).²⁵

Writing about violent animal death gave Hemingway an opportunity to address what he thought needed to be addressed for modern writing to justify itself. Bullfighting and big-game – at their best – also provided Hemingway with a metaphor for writing truly in the notion of the “clean kill.” “Killing cleanly,” Hemingway notes in *Death in the Afternoon*, “and in a way which gives you aesthetic pleasure and pride has always been one of the greatest enjoyments of a part of the human race” (233). *Green Hills of Africa*, which considers the “aesthetic pleasure and pride” of the hunt, echoes this notion of “killing cleanly.” In an unusual moment of the text, Hemingway finds himself reflecting on “how a bull elk must feel if you break a shoulder and he gets away,” and resolves “that I would only shoot as long as I could kill cleanly” (148). Elsewhere in the book, he notes “In shooting large animals there is no reason ever to miss if you have a clear shot and can shoot and know where to shoot. . . .” (56). Of course, ability is only part of what is required for “real killing” (*Death* 232). As Hemingway states in his reflection on the ideal matador: “A great killer must love to kill; unless he feels it is the best thing he can do, unless he is conscious of its dignity and feels that it is its own reward, he will be incapable of the abnegation that is necessary in real killing. The truly great killer must have a sense of honor and a sense of glory far beyond that of the ordinary bullfighter. In other words he must be a simpler man” (232).

Hemingway’s aesthetics of the “clean kill” resonates significantly with the modern sportsman’s code; in fact, the two function as structural analogues in Hemingway. The sportsman’s code revolves around the peculiar coupling of aesthetic

appreciation and severe self-restraint regarding the kill. As hunters became more and more convinced of the necessity of federal regulation in sustaining vanishing game populations, they began incorporating self-regulation into the very culture of the chase, thus internalizing the disciplinary rituals now required for the hunt to survive in America.²⁶ Thanks to his father, Hemingway absorbed the sportsman's code at a very young age; his contempt for undisciplined shooting habits is evident in the traumatic event surrounding the gut-shot lion in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber."

Like modern day big-game hunters, Hemingway aestheticizes the violent killing of an animal. Indeed, for Hemingway, the only way to make violent death meaningful again, and worthy as an object of ritual and art, is to go through the animal, so to speak. Modern warfare has dehumanized man – or, as he states in "A Natural History of the Dead," "most men [in war] die like animals, not men." In order to reclaim man's dignity, Hemingway must reassert man's transcendence over the animal – he must, in other words, sacrifice the animal. But to do so, the animal must first be figured as a sacred object, whose ritual death is inherently meaningful. Hemingway is all too aware that animal sacrifice in the religious sense is an impossibility in the modern world. And despite appearances, Hemingway doubts even the aesthetic power of modern animal sacrifice. *Death in the Afternoon* is full of references to the degenerate state of the modern bullfight. The bullfighters' techniques are over-specialized; the bulls are bred down to be less dangerous and easier to kill. Likewise, despite the pleasure he derives on safari, his uneasiness with its "devolution" into crude car-hunting is palpable in both "The Short Happy Life" and *Green Hills of Africa*.

But Hemingway is a writer first and foremost, and as the self-reflexive nature of both *Death in the Afternoon* and *Green Hills of Africa* suggests, his concern is not so much with the *act* of the kill, but with its *representation*. That is to say, Hemingway *reads* the kill and then inscribes it in his books. His position as reader and writer gives him a privileged vantage point from which to perceive the “proper” aesthetic value of the animal’s violent killing in the hunt and the bullfight. As Margot Norris remarks, “*Death in the Afternoon* represents neither the existential event that transpires in the ring nor its unmediated (open, unconditioned, true) perception by the trained or untrained spectator.” Rather, Hemingway’s account provides a “pretext” through which “to read and interpret the spectacle” (201). As a result, the “spectator’s attention and affect is diverted from the materiality of the violence to its abstract significance” (202). Norris’s point is borne out, for instance, in what is Hemingway’s primary “thesis” of *Death in the Afternoon* – namely that, in order to appreciate the bullfight, one must see it as a tragedy in the strictly aesthetic sense of the word. As he explains in the beginning of the book, if the modern Christian moralist and the “animalarian” (one who sentimentally identifies him- or herself with animals) are repulsed by the horse goring, it is because they fail to see the death of the horse properly – that is, in its relation to the bullfight’s central dramatic event: the killing of the bull. “The tragedy is all centred in the bull and in the man” (6), Hemingway declares; and in the light of this most serious event, the unfortunate horse disembowelings are but “strange and burlesque visceral accidents.” Occurring as they do *before* the tragic slaying of the bull, according to the structural dictates of the fight, the horses enact a comic-ironic prefiguring of the real drama to come.

I believe that the tragedy of the bullfight is so well ordered and so strongly disciplined by ritual that a person feeling the whole tragedy cannot separate the minor comic-tragedy of the horse so as to feel it emotionally. If they sense the meaning and end of the whole thing even when they know nothing about it; feel that this thing they do not understand is going on, the business of the horses is nothing more than an incident. If they get no feeling of the whole tragedy naturally they will react emotionally to the most picturesque incident. (8-9)

Grasped as both tragedy and ritual, the bullfight is experienced as an aesthetic event, in which each aspect is given particular weight and meaning as it relates to the whole.

Hemingway's synecdochic emphasis here on seeing the whole through the part relates directly to his famous iceberg theory of writing, which he presents later in the book:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing. (192)

Hemingway's role as a writer places him at one remove from the hunter and the bullfighter. He *inscribes* the hunt and the bullfight, and is thus equipped to see the whole for the parts, and so, to dictate the "true" aesthetic value of the kill. Near the end of

Death in the Afternoon, he notes, “Let those who want to save the world if you can get to see it clear and as a whole. Then any part you make will represent the whole if it’s made truly” (278). Similarly, regarding *Green Hills of Africa*, the frequent self-reflexive references to writing, and indeed the overall structure and rhetoric points to Hemingway’s primary interest in *writing* about the hunt. It is for this reason that he is able to accept “losing” to Karl at the end when he fails to win the biggest kudu.

Hemingway even frames the book to this effect, stating in his Foreword: “The writer has attempted to write an absolutely true book to see whether the shape of a country and the pattern of a month’s action can, if truly presented, compete with a work of the imagination.”

The “primitivism” of Hemingway’s texts resides not so much in his thematic interest in the primordial encounter between man and beast, but rather in his endeavor to re-enact the birth of culture itself in the artistic act of *representation* – the act that, for Hemingway, truly separates man from beast.

At first glance, then, Hemingway seems to fit squarely into the techno-primitivist logic that I have been tracing throughout this chapter. Confronted by the smothering effects of overcivilization, the disenchantment of modern life, and the brutal dehumanization wrought by modern warfare, Hemingway turns nostalgically to Nature and to ancient rituals of animal sacrifice. This move is a distinctively modern one; big-game hunting and modern bullfighting are hardly acts of animal sacrifice in the primitive, or religious sense. One is a colonial enterprise *par excellence*, involving a vast amount of capital and automobility, while the other (as Hemingway himself points out) is facilitated

by the systematic “breeding down” of the animal species. Moreover, even *writing* about these acts – which is, after all, what Hemingway is most interested in – is itself a modern phenomenon, and Hemingway’s books certainly indulge the conventions both of the bullfight guide, and of modern safari (or adventure) literature.

At the same time, however, Hemingway’s appropriation of the animal as a distinctly modern figure of primitive regeneration is not without its internal conflicts. That is, Hemingway’s engagement with the animal is not purely exploitative, or even entirely anthropocentric. A closer analysis of *Death in the Afternoon*, and particularly of the strange section entitled “A Natural History of the Dead,” exposes “the animal” as an essentially problematic figure in Hemingway’s text. In short, the figure of the animal haunts Hemingway’s project of modern regeneration and the distinctly modern representational aesthetic he employs to achieve it.

Hemingway’s aesthetic interest in “bloodsports” like hunting, fishing, and the bullfight is often chalked up as a function of his machismo: manly subject matter for a manly writer. But this overly simplistic reading fails to account for the frequency with which Hemingway’s reflections on the writing act occur in specifically animal-centered narratives. The author’s most self-reflexive texts – those in which he thematizes writing or invites parallels between a protagonist and the figure of “the writer” – almost all deal with animals in some significant fashion. This applies not only to *Death in the Afternoon* and *Green Hills of Africa*, which are largely about writing, but also texts like the aborted “On Writing,” a fragment omitted from his 1924 story, “Big Two-Hearted River,” containing Nick Adams’s reflections on the literary life as he fishes for trout. Add to

these his posthumously published novel *Garden of Eden* (1986), which features a writer-protagonist named David Bourne whose own reflections on writing are freely interspersed with the text of an African hunting story he is composing.²⁷ One of the most provocative and puzzling instances of the writer-animal link in Hemingway occurs in his story “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (1936), where yet another writer-protagonist is juxtaposed with the figure of an animal – in this case, the iconic “dried and frozen carcass of a leopard” found near the summit of the titular mountain, as described in the story’s famously elusive epigraph. Across these texts one notices a fascination not simply with animals, but with animal death. Hemingway’s thematic linking of writing and animal death is key to understanding his strategic employment of the figure of the animal in *Death in the Afternoon*. Also key is Hemingway’s use of animal discourse in the strange, but crucial, interpolated story, “A Natural History of the Dead.”

“A Natural History of the Dead” is framed within one of the “Author”’s periodic tongue-in-cheek exchanges with the Old Lady.²⁸ Ostensibly “dropped into” the larger text as a mere diversion – a break from Hemingway’s meticulously detailed study of the bullfight – the piece has frequently been read as emblematic of *Death in the Afternoon*’s alleged flaws (Weber 53).²⁹ It is structurally disjointed, comprised of two awkwardly juxtaposed sections, the first a mock-natural-history essay presented by a sardonic first person narrator, and the second, a brief fictional sketch of a violent argument between a military doctor and an officer over what to do with a severely wounded soldier.

Hemingway’s title “A Natural History of the Dead” announces the satiric mode of the writing, and suggests two unsettling assumptions of the piece to follow: that human death may be examined with the same detached scrutiny that the naturalist applies to

objects in a forest or field, and second, that the conventional idealization of what we call “Natural” in fact proves to be a sham when applied to the actual circumstances of dying men, particularly in modern war. Noting the “charming and sound accounts” of naturalists W. H. Hudson, the Reverend Gilbert White, and Bishop Stanley, Hemingway asks in his opening paragraph, “Can we not hope to furnish the reader with a few rational and interesting facts about the dead? I hope so” (134). Notching up the satire, Hemingway continues, “With a disposition to wonder and adore in like manner, as Bishop Stanley says, can no branch of Natural History be studied without increasing that faith, hope and love which we also, every one of us, need in our journey through the wilderness of life? Let us therefore see what inspiration we may derive from the dead” (134). Hemingway then unleashes a barrage of sadistically detailed scenes of human slaughter on the reader. Recounting an experience in which he was sent to collect the dead at the site of a munition factory which had exploded near Milan, Hemingway flatly states his surprise “that the human body should be blown into pieces which exploded along no anatomical lines, but rather divided as capriciously as the fragmentation in the burst of a high explosive shell” (137). Stressing his naturalist-minded goal “to obtain accuracy of observation,” Hemingway proceeds with detailed accounts of color change and bloating in the corpses, the smell of a battlefield in hot weather, and bodies with “a half-pint of maggots working where their mouths have been” (140). Hemingway sums up his treatment of battlefield victims in one striking sentence: “The first thing that you found about the dead was that, hit badly enough, they died like animals” (138). This observation is particularly noteworthy, placed as it is within a book which posits the

violent death of an animal as a tragic, sacred event worthy of the highest art. I'll return to this point shortly.

Lest we think that Hemingway's remarks apply only to the "unnatural" death of soldiers on a battlefield, he suddenly switches his tack, calling into question the very notion of a so-called "natural death": "The only natural death I've ever seen . . . was death from Spanish influenza. In this you drown in mucus, choking, and how you know the patient's dead is; at the end he shits the bed full" (139). At this point, Hemingway shifts his satiric attack from pious naturalists to the figure of the "self-called Humanist," whose own effete idealism renders him even less equipped than the naturalist to deal honestly with the "animal" aspects of human existence. Singling out T.S. Eliot, though he no doubt has in mind the literary critics Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and Seward Collins as well (Beegel 35), Hemingway's remarks grow increasingly more malicious: "I want to see the death of any self-called Humanist . . . and watch the noble exits that they make" (139).

Though his jabs at the Humanist take on a more derisive tone, his point, nonetheless, is the same in both cases: neither the old-school naturalist nor the modern Humanist is equipped to deal honestly with the "animal" aspects of human life, especially death on the battlefield – precisely those "fundamental things" that modern experience forces the writer to confront.

The second part of "A Natural History of the Dead" – the fictional sketch – reads much like a vintage Hemingway short story. The sketch opens with a description of a make-shift "dead-house" dug into a mountainside, and with the introduction of a man who, though still alive, has spent the last day-and-a-half in the company of the dead.

Though we are never given his name, we do get a careful description of his head, “broken as a flower-pot may be broken, although it was all held together by membranes and a skillfully applied bandage now soaked and hardened” (141). The skeletal plot turns on a violent argument between an officer and a military doctor over what to do with the dying soldier. Rejecting the officer’s aggressive pleas on behalf of the dying soldier, the doctor insists on keeping the near-dead soldier within the dead-house, rather than moving him out with the other wounded, and refuses to end his suffering with a morphine overdose. The argument devolves into a brute power struggle when the officer unleashes a string of obscenities – “F—k yourself. F—k your mother. F—k your sister” – and the doctor tosses iodine in the eyes of the officer, and then stands over him exulting “I am the boss” (143). The story concludes when a stretcher-bearer interrupts the two feuding men to inform the doctor that the badly injured soldier has in fact died.

Much of the satiric force of “A Natural History of the Dead,” as its title suggests, turns on the question of what “natural” means. What we call “natural,” Hemingway suggests, is hardly that – which is to say that death as we now know it in the modern world, shatters all the notions of order, meaningfulness, and divine design that “natural” used to imply. In order to wrench the reader’s notion of human death from the axis of a God-sanctioned natural order, Hemingway resorts to the post-Darwinian discourse of animality: “most men die like animals, not men” (139). Here “animal” functions as a sign of conspicuous absence, of a complete evacuation of dignity, meaning, and sense, leaving only suffering: “Others would die like cats, a skull broken in and iron in the brain, they lie alive two days like cats that crawl into the coal bin with a bullet in the brain and will not die until you cut their heads off” (139). The only dignity entailed in

human death, it seems, is that which comes from facing its horror head-on, without self-deceptive, idealistic appeals to higher meaning. As Frederic Henry famously puts it in *A Farewell to Arms*, “Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates” (185). Hemingway is concerned primarily with the experience of death, and with its truthful *representation* rather than its meaning *per se*.³⁰

Hemingway’s persistent preoccupation with death’s representation surfaces with the narrator’s intrusive reference to Goya: “[The doctor] looked at the man twice; once in daylight, once with a flashlight. That too would have made a good etching for Goya, the visit with the flashlight, I mean. After looking at him the second time the doctor believed the stretcher-bearers when they said the soldier was still alive” (141). The narrator’s interruption here marks the only intrusion in the brief third-person sketch. Temporarily breaking the fictional frame of the sketch, the reference picks up an earlier thread from the first part of “A Natural History of the Dead”:

[The dead mules] seemed a fitting enough sight in the mountains where one was accustomed to their presence and looked less incongruous there than they did later, at Smyrna, where the Greeks broke the legs of all their baggage animals and pushed them off the quay into the shallow water to drown. The numbers of broken-legged mules and horses drowning in the shallow water called for a Goya to depict them. Although, speaking literally, one can hardly say that they called for a Goya since there has only been one Goya, long dead, and it is extremely doubtful if these

animals, were they able to call, would call for pictorial representation of their plight but, more likely, would, if they were articulate, call for some one to alleviate their condition.

Old Lady: You wrote about those mules before.

Author: I know it and I'm sorry. Stop interrupting. ... (135)

The metafictional, frame-breaking effect of Hemingway's Goya fixation is further enhanced by the fact that this allusion is itself an echo of a still earlier reference, in the opening pages of *Death in the Afternoon*, where Hemingway first lays out his theory of the writer's relationship to violent death:

I was trying to learn to write commencing with the simplest things, and one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental is violent death. . . . I had read many books in which, when the author tried to convey [violent death], he only produced a blur, and I decided that this was because either the author had never seen it clearly or at the moment of it, he had physically or mentally shut his eyes. . . . [I]f these very simple things [i.e., execution by firing squad or hanging] were to be made permanent, as, say, Goya tried to make them in *Los Desastros de la Guerra*, it could not be done with any shutting of the eyes. (2-3)

Through these accumulated references, Goya is established as a model for how the artist or writer ought to approach the representation of death – without “any shutting of the eyes” as it were. Hemingway's reliance on a visual artist as his ideal standard of artistic representation, coupled with his natural history-inspired emphasis on objective accuracy, together reflect Hemingway's affinity for visual apprehension, a fitting mode

for grasping the “real thing,” “what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced” (2). Yet, Hemingway’s singular preference for Goya, an artist whose work blends realism with fantasy, suggests a much more complicated notion of representation than what is implied in his remarks about writing, or in the austerity and immediacy of his prose.

Hemingway’s references to Goya are part of the extended and surprisingly complex reflections on representation which pervade *Death in the Afternoon*. We see this in the reference to the “broken-legged mules and horses drowning in the shallow water” at Smyrna, which, according to Hemingway, “called for a Goya to depict them.” When Hemingway immediately proceeds to undermine his own assertion – “speaking literally, one can hardly say that they called for a Goya” – he exposes the inherent contradictions, the irreducible tensions, of the assumptions propping up his notion of the “real thing” and its representation. In other words, here Hemingway problematizes the entire project of making the experience “come true on paper” (63). It is notable that Hemingway lingers here, over an animal, whose intrinsic *inarticulation* coupled with the severity of its plight, begs the question not only of its *desire* to be represented, as Hemingway remarks, but, what is more to the point here, its very representability. Indeed, as the Old Lady herself points out, this is not the first time Hemingway has invoked the image of the mules; they appear in the book’s opening chapter, where Hemingway is attempting to explain what is the “greatest difficulty” for the writer: putting down “what really happened in action” (2): “I had just come from the Near East, where the Greeks broke the legs of their baggage and transport animals and drove and shoved them off the quay into the shallow water when they abandoned the city of Smyrna. . . . I was trying to write then and I found the

greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt . . . was to put down what really happened in action” (2). The image of the mules drowning in the shallow water takes on an archetypal significance for Hemingway – a snapshot image of the senseless violence of war. Indeed, the image first appeared in the short story “On the Quai at Smyrna”:

The Greeks were nice chaps too. When they evacuated they had all their baggage animals they couldn't take off with them so they just broke their forelegs and dumped them into the shallow water. All those mules with their forelegs broken pushed over into the shallow water. It was all a pleasant business. My word yes a most pleasant business. (*In Our Time* 11-12)

If men in war die “like animals,” it is fitting that Hemingway should use this particular image as a recurrent motif. Yet what it signifies ultimately – and this is precisely the reason why Hemingway chooses to focus on the image of the animal – is the unrepresentability of violent death, and indeed war itself. The image of the mules concludes “On the Quai at Smyrna,” a profoundly disorienting story which Hemingway uses to introduce readers to the fragmentary war stories of *In Our Time*. The most jarring aspect of this excerpt, of course, is the narrator’s sarcastic tone, which registers the impossibility of direct transmission: the representation of such events requires mediation, even distortion. The sarcasm provides the narrator with the most basic means of traction on a series of horrifying, disjointed, and senseless events utterly lacking in narrative coherence. Indeed, the story is more a confusing jumble of impressions – screaming voices silenced by a searchlight, an offended Turkish official, mothers clinging to dead

babies – almost entirely devoid of a plot, save for the event of an evacuation. Amounting to a sort of “anti-novel,” the fragmentary form of *In Our Time*, with its disassociated stories and inexplicable interleaving vignettes reflects Hemingway’s sense of the “absolute dislocating nature” of war, its sheer defiance of conventional narrative (Barloon 14).

In its invocation of the drowning mules, as well as its naturalistic descriptions of horrifying death and its bitter sarcasm, “A Natural History of the Dead” recalls “On the Quai at Smyrna.” Both deal centrally with the unrepresentability of war and the senseless slaughter which is its most conspicuous feature. In this sense, the former’s function in *Death in the Afternoon* is as an essential counterpoint to the bullfighting narrative.³¹

Notes

¹ Seventy-four of Shiras's wildlife photographs were later published in the July 1906 issue of *The National Geographic Magazine*. In the article that accompanied the photos, Shiras makes an impassioned case for camera hunting as a substitute for rifle hunting, and briefly explains the process behind his invented art of nighttime wildlife photography. Shiras also notes that he was "the first to attempt flashlight pictures of wild game, and for the first fifteen years was the sole occupant of this attractive field of photography" (Shiras, "Photographing" 389). The 1906 issue was a huge success and is now considered "one of the most significant" ever published by *National Geographic*. Shiras would go on to publish nine illustrated articles in the *National Geographic*; and due to a very enthusiastic reader response, the magazine published pictorial supplements of two of his prize winning deer-at-night photos in the July 1913 and August 1921 issues. Shiras's famed 1906 issue caught the attention of President Roosevelt, who in turn urged Shiras to write a book on his experience as a wildlife photographer, which he would go on to do in 1935 in the two-volume *Hunting Wild Game with Camera and Flashlight*. Shiras's "midnight series" enjoyed such success in Paris that he presented them at the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904, where he received the grand prize for wildlife photography. Shiras was a US congressman from 1903-1905, and an early advocate for wildlife preservation. Shiras also made significant improvements to the trip-wire technology that early wildlife photographers used in getting animals to photograph themselves. For more on Shiras, see Edward W. Nelson's Foreword to Shiras's *Hunting Wildlife with Camera*

and Flashlight (v-xviii). For more on Shiras's contribution to photographic technology, see Shiras (*Hunting Wildlife*) and Guggisberg (37-42).

² Commenting on the difference between sun and flashlight effects, Shiras notes: "In some details night flashlight pictures produce opposite light effects from those taken by day. These are so characteristic that flashlight pictures may usually be distinguished at a glance. In the night pictures the white underparts stand out brilliantly; in those taken by day such areas are darkened by the shadow of the body. Another peculiarity of night pictures is that the surface of water shows dark or black, and reflected images of trees or animals are pale or whitish. In daylight pictures the water is pale and the reflected image dark" (*Hunting Wildlife I*, 70).

³ Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* famously evokes the spectrality of photography. For Barthes, photography entails a unique "superimposition" of reality and the past (76). Moreover, each photograph, Barthes notes, "always contains this imperious sign of my future death" (97). See also Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, where she has this to say about safari hunting: "One situation where people are switching from bullets to film is the photographic safari that is replacing the gun safari in East Africa. . . . Guns have metamorphosed into cameras in this earnest comedy, the ecology safari, because nature has ceased to be what it always had been – what people needed protection from. Now nature – tamed, endangered, mortal – needs to be protected from people. When we are afraid, we shoot. But when we are nostalgic, we take pictures" (15).

My reference to the modern relocation of animals into a receding past draws from John Berger's essay, "Why Look at Animals?" Commenting on Buffon and the changed

status of human-animal relations in the wake of Descartes, Berger notes: “What man has to do in order to transcend the animal, to transcend the mechanical within himself, and what his unique spirituality leads to, is often anguish. And so, by comparison and despite the model of the machine, the animal seems to him to enjoy a kind of innocence. The animal has been emptied of experience and secrets, and this new invented ‘innocence’ begins to provoke in man a kind of nostalgia. For the first time, animals are placed in a *receding past*” (10, emphasis in original). Berger goes on to illustrate his point by directly quoting Buffon’s writings on the beaver: “To the same degree as man has raised himself above the state of nature, animals have fallen below it: conquered and turned into slaves, or treated as rebels and scattered by force, their societies have faded away, their industry has become unproductive, their tentative arts have disappeared; each species has lost its general qualities, all of them retaining only their distinct capacities, developed in some by example, imitation, education, and in others, by fear and necessity during the constant watch for survival. What visions and plans can these soulless slaves have, these relics of the past without power?” (qtd in Berger 10).

⁴ My argument in this chapter extends both Berger’s thesis in “Why Look at Animals?” and Lippit’s in *Electric Animal*, while focusing specifically on the American context (which is largely ignored by both scholars). Indeed, early twentieth-century American culture presents very fertile ground for exploring in greater detail the particular historical circumstances underlying Berger’s and Lippit’s more theoretically oriented work, as well as the cultural implications thereof.

⁵ Wild West programs from 1886 on stated that the object of the show was to “PICTURE TO THE EYE, by the aid of historical characters and living animals, a series of animated scenes of episodes . . . of the wonderful pioneer and frontier life of the Wild West of America” (qtd in Slotkin, “Buffalo Bill” 65). The show re-enacted different “Epochs” of American history, beginning with the “Primeval Forest” period when only “the Indian and Wild Beasts” roamed the land, and moving on to depict the settlement of the Great Plains, a grand “Buffalo Hunt,” and several displays of trick riding and roping interspersed between scenes.

⁶ See Huhndorf (19-78) on the “Americanization” of Indians in turn-of-the-century culture.

⁷ In his Introduction to A. G. Wallihan’s *Camera Shots at Big Game*, Roosevelt himself noted that, “More and more, as it becomes necessary to preserve the game, let us hope that the camera will largely supplant the rifle.” “The shot is, after all,” he continued, “only a small part of the free life of the wilderness. The chief attractions lie in the physical hardihood for which the life calls, the sense of limitless freedom which it brings, and the remoteness and wild charm and beauty of primitive nature. All of this we get exactly as much in hunting with the camera as in hunting with the rifle” (5).

⁸ Osborn’s book, *The Age of Mammals in Europe, Asia, and North America* (1910), presented the most thoroughly researched account of prehistorical animal life to date and was lauded by one reviewer as “one of the most notable books on evolution” since Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (Grant, “Age of Mammals”). Similarly, Theodore Roosevelt

cited Osborn's *Men of the Old Stone Age* (1914) as the "most important book on the evolution of man since Darwin's *Descent of Man*" ("How Old is Man," 113).

⁹ For a recent assessment of Akeley's taxidermic work and his contributions to modern cinematography, see Alvey.

¹⁰ Akeley's African Hall has received its sharpest critique from Donna Haraway in *Primate Visions*, where she connects the Hall to the ideologies of race, gender, and species central to turn-of-the-century America.

¹¹ For more on Akeley's technique and its contrast to previous modes of taxidermy, see Alvey (24-25) and Asma, *Stuffed Animals* (8-10, 241-42).

¹² Akeley also invented a motion picture camera; patented in 1915, the Akeley Motion Picture Camera featured, among other new features, a freewheeling, gyroscopic tripod head that allowed for steady and fluid, pan and tilt shots. Akeley's camera was a major contribution to documentary and expedition filmmaking. See Alvey for more on the Akeley Camera (32-35).

¹³ Credit for the early development of dioramas also goes to Frank Chapman, curator of ornithology at the AMNH and William T. Hornaday at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

¹⁴ For more on the contradictions of taxidermy, see Haraway's "Teddy-Bear Patriarchy" and Luke's *Museum Politics* (100-147).

¹⁵ "The natural skin surface conceals an elaborate mechanical infrastructure" (Seltzer, *Serial Killers* 241). Seltzer develops his notion of techno-primitivism as a means of articulating the relays between serial killing and what he calls the body-machine complex

(see Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines*): "The intent here is to trace the links between the problem of serial murder and the more general problem of the body in 'machine culture': to trace, that is, the forms of repetitive and addictive violence produced, or solicited, by the styles of production and reproduction that make up machine culture" (*Serial* 63). In modern techno-primitivism, "the call of the wild represents not the antidote to machine culture but its realization" (81).

¹⁶ See Haraway and Luke (*Museum Pieces*, 100-147) for more on the cultural and ideological functions of the AMNH. Luke, for instance, suggests that nature is "not simply discovered on the American Museum's many scientific expeditions. Instead, it also is manufactured meticulously out of an endless series of methodical measurements and disciplinary decisions" (*Museum* 110). Regarding the "preservation" function of museums in general, Scott McQuire points out that a "prohibition against historical loss saturates the logic of the museum. The possibility of loss – whether loss of knowledge, of species, of culture, of the past in general – remains anathema to the ideology of progress" (123). The nostalgic logic of "preservation" necessarily attends modern notions of progress.

For Americans visiting the AMNH the fact that Akeley's African Hall is purportedly *about* Africa makes little difference in this respect. Indeed, as Donna Haraway points out, Akeley's African Hall has much more to say about the early-twentieth-century American politics of eugenics, about degeneration anxieties, and about ideologies of gender and race, than it does about Africa. On this note, Luke's analysis of the biopolitics of the AMNH evaluates how the museum's "permanent displays mediate

aesthetic and epistemic authority to define certain natural and historical realities such that they assure all who visit that their life ‘is as it should be’ in ‘the American way of life.’” (“Museum” 101).

¹⁷ See Rutherford for a discussion of Foucault’s notion of biopower as it relates to the environment.

¹⁸ See Norris on *A Farewell to Arms* and its self-reflexive treatment of war and the special challenges it poses to writers (“Novel as Lies”).

¹⁹ Regarding Hemingway’s obsessive interest in writing “truly” and the timing of his nonfiction turn in the 1930s, it is significant that *Death in the Afternoon*, published in 1932, appeared at the front end of the vast “documentary literature” movement of the 1930s and early 40s, which included such publications as Sherwood Anderson’s *Puzzled America* (1935), Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mules and Men* (1935), Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell’s *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), and Richard Wright’s *Twelve Million Black Voices* (1941). With its strongly journalistic bent, its nearly one-hundred pages of photographs, and its self-reflexive treatment of factual representation, *Death in the Afternoon* bears a strong general resemblance to what is perhaps the most famous product of 1930s-era documentarism, James Agee and Walker Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). This juxtaposition of *Death in the Afternoon* with *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is indeed a useful one for suggesting both the striking similarities and important differences between Hemingway and other 1930s trailblazers of literary nonfiction. Agee and Evans, like most of their journalistic contemporaries, were expressly concerned with Depression-era social and political life in the United

States, particularly as experienced by the nation's disenfranchised: blacks, American Indians, migrant workers, tenant farmers, and immigrants. Hemingway's interest in the Spanish bullfight could hardly be more displaced from the severe poverty of Agee's Southern white tenant farmers, or for that matter, the vigorously politicized subject matter of the most prominent American writers of the 1930s. This contrast is only more starkly reinforced in Hemingway's second major book of nonfiction, *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), a highly stylized and personal account of Hemingway's experience big-game hunting in East Africa, and his two major African short stories, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936) and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936). For more on the 1930s documentarism see Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*. For more on the self-reflexive tendencies of 1930s documentary literature see Staub, *Voices of Persuasion: Politics of Representation in 1930s America*.

²⁰ Hemingway attended his first bullfight in 1923.

²¹ As Philip Young has observed, "Hemingway's world is ultimately a world at war – war either in the literal sense of armed and calculated conflict, or figuratively as marked everywhere with violence, potential or present, and a general hostility" (*Ernest Hemingway* 243).

²² For more on Hemingway's boyhood and adolescent fascination with Roosevelt, see Reynolds (27-31).

²³ A central strategy in Hemingway's project of getting down to elemental truths, and thus purifying modern language of frivolity, is carried out through the figure of the animal. Hemingway's project resonates with Theodore Roosevelt's earlier project of

purifying the nation, particularly its men and boys, from the taint of what he called “nature faking” – spread by William J. Long and Jack London, and other “preposterous writers of ‘unnatural’ history” (qtd in Lutts *Nature* 101). Hemingway too was obsessively committed to rooting out inauthenticity; he notes in *Green Hills of Africa*, for instance, that a writer must possess both discipline and “an absolute conscience as unchanging as the standard meter in Paris, to prevent faking” (27).

²⁴ Clark and Beegel both discuss the Hemingway-Roosevelt-Agassiz natural history triangle. Agassiz became a national model of both scientific and humanistic pedagogy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See, for instance, Cooper’s *Louis Agassiz as Teacher*, originally published in 1917. Perhaps, as Scholes’s discussion of the Pound-Agassiz connection suggests, the two figures may not be all that different to begin with. Indeed, Suzanne Clark has gone so far as to argue that Hemingway’s appropriation of natural history writing methods represents a “hidden confluence of realist and modernist traditions in American literature,” one that synthesizes both the concrete, objective style and empirical approach of the naturalists, *and* the Symbolist principle, a la Mallarmé, of painting “not the thing, but the effect it produces.” (58)

²⁵ It begs mentioning here that this phrase comes directly from Lane Cooper, an early twentieth-century English professor at Cornell University who recommended Agassiz’s method of teaching to those in the humanities. “Most persons do not, in fact, discern the close, though not obvious, relation between investigation in biology or zoology and the observation and comparison of those organic forms which we call forms of literature and works of art. Yet the notion that a poem or a speech should possess the organic structure,

as it were, of a living creature is basic in the thought of the great literary critics of all time” (Cooper, 2)

²⁶ See Luke (“Pleasures”) for more on the biopolitics of wildlife conservation and its relation to the culture of hunting.

²⁷ “On Writing” and *Garden of Eden* both point to what we might call a strong, if repressed, metafictional streak in Hemingway. The prospect of exploring Hemingway as a metafictional writer has expanded tremendously in the last fifteen years. See, for instance, Jones, “Mimesis and Metafiction in Hemingway’s *The Garden of Eden*”; Stetler and Locklin, “‘A Natural History of the Dead’ as Metafiction”; Dewberry, “Hemingway’s Journalism and the Realist Dilemma”; Tavernier-Courbin, “Fact and Fiction in *A Moveable Feast*.”

²⁸ Hemingway went on to later extract, revise slightly, and republish “A Natural History of the Dead” as a “story” in *Winner Take Nothing* (1933).

²⁹ Ronald Weber characterizes *Death in the Afternoon*’s dialogue sections in general, and particularly “A Natural History of the Dead,” as arbitrary, “aimless,” and “strained” (53). To critics of *Death in the Afternoon*, “A Natural History” is also incurably self-indulgent, with its excessive profanity (“F—k,” four times) and graphic descriptions of violent death delivered with almost sadistic amusement by Hemingway’s narrator-figure. What’s more, in its playful satirizing of nineteenth-century naturalists and its thinly veiled jabs at Hemingway’s contemporaries, namely T. S. Eliot and the “Humanists,” the piece is one of the most concentrated episodes of vocational one-upmanship in a book (and career) characterized by them.

Many critics of *Death in the Afternoon* (and by extension, “A Natural History”) subscribe to a more general assessment of Hemingway’s writing of the 1930s, which, according to this view, suffered a “ ‘fall’ into rhetoric,” a “failure or crisis of style . . . after which Hemingway’s work could only parody its former glory” (Strychacz 8). Thomas Strychacz has recently challenged this widespread view of Hemingway’s so-called decline in 1930s. Citing the inadequacies of the “time honored assessments” of Hemingway’s style as “tough, emotionally restrained, laconic concision,” Strychacz attempts to shift readers’ attention to the “rich rhetorical performances” of Hemingway’s fiction, making a compelling case for the writer’s complex, perceptive, and strikingly prescient “theatres of masculinity” (8). Strychacz’s groundbreaking analyses of Hemingway’s pervasive “rhetoricity” not only shed light on the author’s engagements with the performativity of gender, but, along with much recent scholarship focusing on the metatextual elements of Hemingway’s writing, encourage new readings of his complex relation to authorship and his interest in the performativity of the literary act.

³⁰ Notably, the dying man in the brief fictional sketch remains unconscious throughout, rendering his death a matter of experiential import only to the stretcher-bearers, the officer, and the doctor.

³¹ In this light, Hemingway’s early reference to the drowned baggage animals at Smyrna in the beginning of *Death in the Afternoon* serves not only to situate its author as recently returned from the war-torn Near East but also to contrast the “pointless” mistreatment and destruction of horses in a war context with the ritualized violence surrounding their function in the Spanish bullfight (Vondrak 259).



Chapter Three

The Modern Magnetic Animal: *As I Lay Dying* and the Uncanny Zoology of Modernism

Logos is a zoon.

- Jacques Derrida

6. Except

7. A body is not square like a crosstie

8. Animal Magnetism

- Cash Bundren

The first two chapters of this dissertation have examined the elaborate system of discourses and representational forms through which animals are figured as modernity's "primitive" Other – nostalgic objects of premodern enchantment, vitality, and innocence. As I have argued, modern technologies of representation construct wildlife as a vanishing object to be at once mourned and possessed. This logic is a deceptively benign correlative of the modern impulse to expel all things "animal" (wild, irrational) from the ever-expanding human domain. And yet it is precisely because the animal is figured as a spectral object that its presence returns to haunt modern communication technologies and representational forms, thus disrupting the anthropocentrism of modern technics. Thematically, the dissertation addresses both sides of this double logic, proceeding from

the technological reconstruction of animal life in the first two chapters to the animal's uncanny haunting of modern technologies, beginning with this chapter's extended analysis of *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner's modernist novel par excellence, and continuing with the next chapter's examination of Val Lewton's 1942 film, *Cat People*.

As I Lay Dying is a zoosemiotic tour de force.¹ Throughout the novel, characters use animal *signs* – analogies, similes, metaphors – to convey meanings and affects: Peabody likens Anse to a “dipped rooster” (44), Darl declares Jewel's mother a horse (95). Typical of such analogies is Vardaman's extraordinary statement concerning his dead mother and the fish he has just caught: “And tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him” (67). At the same time, “real” animals (horses, cows, geese, mules) are continually *signaling* their presence through a multitude of groans and snuffings, lows and cries, and moans “almost human” (149). In the fictional world of *As I Lay Dying*, animal *signs* and *signals* proliferate – and indeed, get crossed throughout – producing a vast network of animal currencies both natural and cultural, material and figurative.

Animals in *As I Lay Dying* expose the limitations of *logos*, and the insufficiency of a philosophical tradition, going back to Aristotle, that aims to secure the purity and privilege of the (human) subject. *As I Lay Dying* re-situates language within a continuum of signifying processes that are *ahuman*; through its pervasive and self-reflexive zoosemiotics, the novel reveals traces of animality embedded in (human) language – in everyday speech, and in literary language. The novel performs a reconfiguration of “the animal” and its relation to both language and subjectivity – as first urged by Darwin, who likened language to the natural life of a species, and then by Freudian psychoanalysis,

with its interest in unconscious modes of communication.² Addressing the animal's changed status in modernity, Akira Mizuta Lippit argues that, at about the same time animals began to vanish in large numbers from humanity's habitat, they came to symbolize "not only new structures of thought but also the process by which those new thoughts were transported. Animals – and their capacity for instinctive, almost telepathic communication – put into question the primacy of human language and consciousness as optimal modes of communication" (2).³ Modernity reconceives the bodily domain of living animality in terms of electro-magnetic forces in flux, of uncanny communication and transference.

Lippit develops his thesis through a wide-ranging reflection on animal discourse in psychoanalysis, philosophy, critical theory, and early-twentieth-century media and technology. Though he addresses the writings of Lewis Carroll, Franz Kafka, and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Lippit's analysis of the animal in modernity merits specific consideration within an American literary context. Read against the cultural-historical backdrop evoked by Lippit, animals in *As I Lay Dying* assume a striking presence alongside the novel's gothic-inflected experiments with clairvoyant and posthumous narration. Cash's reference to "animal magnetism" as the chief rationale for building Addie's coffin on a bevel mobilizes central preoccupations of the novel under the sign of the animal. Sensitized to *As I Lay Dying*'s zoosemiotic register, we find in Faulkner's novel a case study of the revealing, if sometimes startling, links between animality and new forms of communication, representation, and literary aesthetics that emerged in modernism.

I.

Essential to *As I Lay Dying*'s status as a central modernist text is its impressive rhetorical complexity and extensive use of figurative language.⁴ If metaphor is the “figure of figures” in *As I Lay Dying* (Bleikasten 39), the animal is the novel's figure *par excellence*.⁵ Throughout *As I Lay Dying*, characters exchange attributes with their nonhuman counterparts. Animals take on human characteristics: a buzzard is referred to as “a old baldheaded man” (119); a horse is described as “moaning and groaning like a natural man” (155). At the same time, characters are likened to animals. Early in the novel, Jewel describes his neighbors hovering around Addie “like buzzards” (15). In the span of one chapter, Tull describes Vardaman variously as an owl (70), a steer (73), and twice, a “drowned puppy” (69, 70). Anse is also repeatedly compared to animals; having just witnessed Addie's last breath, he is described leaning above her bed in the twilight, “his hand awkward as a claw” (52) as he attempts to smooth the quilt, “his humped silhouette partaking of that owl-like quality of awry-feathered, disgruntled outrage within which lurks a wisdom too profound or too inert for even thought” (49).

Animal imagery in *As I Lay Dying*, as these examples suggest, is frequently invoked to convey affects and states “too profound...for even thought.” In the backwater world of the novel, animals operate as ordinary metaphors, the most “natural” means of making sense out of the surrounding chaos.⁶ This is best illustrated in Vardaman's famous declaration, “My mother is a fish.” Readers often take Vardaman's statement as a perfectly normal response – given his age, environment, and upbringing – to the traumatic event of his mother's death. Through a somewhat crude process of

transference, the explanation goes, Vardaman naturally merges the horrific and incomprehensible event of his mother's death with the eminently *familiar* (though itself quite dramatic), contemporaneous event of his catching and eating the big fish.⁷ Vardaman's "Cooked and et" thus becomes a formula for linguistic or symbolic comprehension, a means of coping with loss.⁸

Vardaman's choice of a fish as a privileged symbol for his mother is hardly innocent, however. Doreen Fowler suggests that as an emblem of the "fluid, chaotic world of matter," Vardaman's fish is made to stand in for "the elemental threat that is identified with the mother" (55, 54); Vardaman's "slaying of the fish ritually reenacts the renunciation of the first other and the emergence of the speaking subject" (55). In this respect, *As I Lay Dying* retells a "dominant myth of our culture" – that of matricide – in which the mother's displacement, her figurative death, is constructed as "a crucial step in the formation of subjectivity" (50, 55).⁹

One notes that the slightest shift of focus – from the significance of the maternal body to that of the animal – exposes a second "dominant myth of our culture" embedded within Vardaman's uttering "my mother is a fish." Vardaman's ritualistic slaughter and ingestion suggests that the matricidal imperative is made possible by a more fundamental imperative at work in the formation of the (human) subject – namely, the sacrifice of animal life.¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, addressing the "sacrificial" logic of "the Subject," identifies a "place left open, in the very structure of" Western discourses of subjectivity "for a noncriminal putting to death [of non-human creatures]. 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' . . ." ("Eating" 112).¹¹ Derrida's comments urge

us to attend to the *animal* content of Vardaman's fish – which, needless to say, is usually the first thing to go in our reading of the text.¹² Though we are apt to see right past it (or through it), the eating motif which is central to Vardaman's allusion to the fish dramatizes a widespread, though largely unconscious, sacrificial logic by which “real” animals are turned into figures of speech, while emptied of their material substance – reduced, that is, to *mere* signs and symbols.¹³ Indeed, what is striking about Vardaman's account is the animal's seemingly preternatural capacity, viewed from a human perspective, to bridge material and figurative registers. It is this capacity which renders the animal a convenient and productive means of subject-constituting interiorization.

The animal is not simply disposed of, or *consumed* in *As I Lay Dying*, however; it haunts the text – a non-human analogue to Addie's cryptic presence. The Bundrens struggle throughout to achieve an introjection of Addie – that is, a “healthy” verbal interiorization of their mourned object. Despite their efforts, Addie haunts the text as an unassimilated – that is, incorporated, or encrypted – presence.¹⁴ The psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok note that incorporation occurs when a mourner refuses to “‘swallow’ a loss,” and instead “fantasize[s] swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing” (126).¹⁵ The symbolic resonance between mourning and eating is reflected in Vardaman's formula for grieving his dead mother: “cooked and et.” Like Addie, the figure of the animal (the fish) may be said to haunt the text as an Other whose signs and signals defy simple consumption. If resistance to consumption – to full comprehension or internalization of – the Other is a major trope of the novel, the Other's disturbing ability to influence the self is a second, intimately related one.

As I Lay Dying insists on the social-empirical realm with which its modernist aesthetic exists in tension.¹⁶ Translating this tension into the terminology of species difference, as the novel encourages us to do, we might say that the novel consistently opens itself to the non-linguistic, or perhaps more-than, or not-quite, linguistic – a body language or “animal magnetism”– which informs language itself.

Many critics have attested that *As I Lay Dying* exemplifies its controversy over language – the wranglings over its relative powers and limitations – through the characters of Darl and Addie. Darl, often characterized as a poet figure, desires to inhabit a realm of pure language, an ideal reality in which signifier and signified are eternally fused. Addie, in contrast, contemns language, claiming “words are no good” and “dnt ever fit even what they are trying to say at” (171). Contrasting *words*, which “go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless,” with *doing* which “goes straight along the earth, clinging to it,” Addie bitterly denounces “sin” and “love” and “fear” as “just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words” (173-74). The critics’ familiar contrast of Darl and Addie brushes over all sorts of contradictions. Addie, for instance, belies her claims in giving voice to them – through a narration that is linguistically agile and rhetorically adept. One strategy by which Addie expresses her grievance about language’s inadequacy is to speak of language in terms of the non-human world: “I knew that . . . we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching. . . .” (172). Later, Addie declares words to be “just the gaps in people’s lacks, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are

pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother” (174). In both instances, Addie uses animal metaphors to illustrate the ineffectuality of language, its failure to convey what it intends.

Addie’s two illustrations are, however, distinct in that the analogy to the wild geese refers to an actual experience she has recounted earlier: “In the early spring it was worst. Sometimes I thought that I could not bear it, lying in bed at night, with the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the wild darkness, and during the day it would seem as though I couldn’t wait for the last one to go so I could go down to the spring” (170). Addie’s repeated use of the word “wild” indicates that what makes these cries so unsettling is that they have their source in the pre-linguistic “wild darkness” with which she longs to commune. Reflecting on her affair with the Reverend Whitfield, Addie says, “I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the dark land talking of God’s love and His beauty and His sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds. . . .” (174). Though she evokes the “cries of the geese” as a trope for words which only “fumble at the deeds like orphans,” the “real” cries of the geese going north do convey something to Addie. They signal the coming of spring – the season in which, Addie confesses, “it was worst.” Coming from out of the wild and voiceless darkness, the sounds of the honking geese, in their uncanny proximity to speech, mock the ineffectuality of language, its powerlessness to “fit,” to capture and preserve, what the “dark land” and “terrible blood, the red bitter flood boiling through the land” say in their voicelessness (174). An affective force which manages to “say at” something, the wild cries of the geese become, in Addie’s transmutation of them

into metaphor, a powerful vehicle for conveying the bitterness, hatred, and loss that drive her contempt of language.

Addie's account of the geese is resonant with an animal proverb that Freud alludes to in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: "'What,' asks the proverb, 'do geese dream of? . . . Of Maize.' The whole theory that dreams are wish-fulfillments is contained in these two phrases" (132). Akira Mizuta Lippit, in his gloss of the proverb, suggests that Freud's "recourse to animality here suggests a point of contact between the deepest recesses of memory and the animal world" (164).¹⁷ Noting that "the space between the unconscious and the animal's dream is traversed, in Freud's account, by . . . metaphor," Lippit suggests that the animal in this case (as in the case of Addie's geese, I might add) is "intertwined with the trope, serving as its vehicle and substance" (164, 165). Taking his cue from Freud's scattered references to animality, Lippit goes on to speculate about the figure of the animal in the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious and in the "origin of the metaphor": "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." Within this scenario, Lippit notes, "one finds a fantastic transversality at work between the animal and the metaphor" – such that "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'" (165).¹⁸ Nodding toward Freud's Darwin-inflected theory of species regression and Abraham and Torok's notion of incorporation, Lippit suggests that "The genealogy of language, like that of the dream, returns to a place

outside *logos*. The animal brings to language something that is not part of language and remains within language as a foreign presence.” That is to say, given the animal’s alleged lack of language, “its function in language can only appear as an other expression, as a metaphor that originates elsewhere, is transferred from elsewhere” (166).

We might conclude, following Lippit, that the animetaphor both invigorates language and enables language to convey that which it could not otherwise. Language is “infested” with the other-than-human; linguistic communication is afforded by capacities not distinctly human. Simultaneously, the animetaphor haunts language, exposing at every turn the basic limitations of language, its inevitable failure to seize hold of the desired object. In this sense, the animetaphor, as Lippit notes, may be seen as “the unconscious of language, of *logos*” (165).

Addie’s animetaphoric reference to the cries of the wild geese directs our attention to the proliferation of animal *signals* in *As I Lay Dying*. Instances of animal communication occur in critical moments in the text, particularly those in which a central character’s identity and self-coherence are at stake. We see this in Darl’s description of the drowning mules in the river-fording scene, in Dewey Dell’s conversation with the cow, in Vardaman’s barn encounter with the horse, and in Jewel’s interactions with his horse.

Darl’s facility with language presents an impressive case for language’s power to form and order the “ceaseless and myriad” disorder of life. Yet just as Addie relies on language to convey her own disdain for language’s inadequacies, Darl’s narration betrays a sense of language’s limitations. The river crossing is the central dramatic event of the

novel, rendered epic through Darl's highly wrought language:

Before us the thick dark current runs. It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls traveling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive waked for a moment of lazy alertness out of and into light slumber again. (141)

Darl's narration evinces both an acute attentiveness to the world around him and an extreme aesthetic detachment – the latter signaled by Darl's theatrical diction and archaic syntax, and the aloof projection of “profound significance” onto the scene before him. The paradoxical effect of distant-nearness is achieved in part by Darl's promiscuously figurative style in which people and objects undergo frequent metamorphosis. One of Darl's central strategies in depicting the scene is to zoomorphize his surroundings. Thus, the river becomes a horse, and the log, a goat; animal signs are employed to communicate an impression of vitality and dynamism, and to evoke epic significance.

Darl also is keenly sensitive to the body language of animals, their communicative signaling. This is particularly true of his descriptions of Jewel's horse. On several occasions Darl records the horse's reaction to the unfolding circumstances. “Jewel sits the horse at the off rear wheel. The horse is trembling, its eye rolling wild and baby-blue in its long pink face, its breathing stertorous like groaning” (142). Later, he notes the “horse trembling quietly and steadily between [Jewel's] knees” (143). In still another passage, Darl describes the horse “setting its feet down with gingerly splashings,

trembling, breathing harshly” (144). This minute attention to the horse’s body language anticipates Darl’s momentous descriptions of the mules as they are pulled under the surface of the flooding river. The first account, which I reproduce in the context of the substantial paragraph that it concludes, occurs just as Cash is about to drive the mule-drawn wagon carrying Addie’s coffin into the surging water:

The river itself is not a hundred yards across, and pa and Vernon and Vardaman and Dewey Dell are the only things in sight not of that single monotony of desolation leaning with that terrific quality a little from right to left, as though we had reached the place where the motion of the wasted world accelerates just before the final precipice. Yet they appear dwarfed. It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between. The mules stand, their fore quarters already sloped a little, their rumps high. They too are breathing now with a deep groaning sound; looking back once, their gaze sweeps across us with in their eyes a wild, sad, profound and despairing quality as though they had already seen in the thick water the shape of the disaster which they could not speak and we could not see. (146-47)

Here we see Darl’s remarkable powers of artifice on full display as the extreme urgency and acute terror of the scene are conveyed in a language that shuttles between the lavishly figurative and the starkly literal – language that is by turns philosophic,

sublime, banal, and pathetic. Darl's sudden reference to the mules in this passage plunges us from what is an intense contemplation of the *quality* of terror evoked by the unfolding events, to the brute materiality of the scene, as evoked by animal bodies – the rumps of the mules, and their heavy breathing and deep groans. In order to represent the full force of the unfolding events Darl is compelled to turn to the voiceless body language of animals, whose wordless “gaze” is made to convey the exact “shape of the disaster” confronting the Bundren family.

Later in the text Darl describes the scene just as one mule goes under: “The head of one mule appears, its eyes wide; it looks back at us for an instant, making a sound almost human. The head vanishes again” (149). What distinguishes Darl's language from the animals' “almost human” cry is a contrastive degree of control. Darl's narratorial voice demonstrates exquisite control, while the animals signal their fear without restraint – that is, without the mediating self-consciousness necessary for reflection. The mule's cry, in its corporeal immediacy, its disturbing *inarticulateness*, derives from the other side of language; it is a language of the body rather than the mind.¹⁹ The mule introduces an immediate force of affect into an otherwise detached, almost contemplative, representation of catastrophe. Although unpossessed of language, the animal communicates something essential to the scene.

The mule's cry evokes Edmund Burke's discussion on “The Cries of Animals” in relation to the sublime. According to Burke, “animals in pain or danger” are said to be “capable of conveying great ideas,” because “the natural cries of all animals, even of those animals with whom we have not been acquainted, never fail to make themselves sufficiently understood; this cannot be said of language. The modifications of sound,

which may be productive of the sublime, are almost infinite” (84-85). Burke speculates that the “modulations of sound” in the animal cry likely “carry some connection with the nature of the things they represent, and are not merely arbitrary” (84). What distinguishes the animal cry from human language is, in Burke’s account, the immediacy of the relation between sound and referent.

Twice Darl shifts from his familiar mode of abstract reflection to the immediacy of the animal’s body language. In both of Darl’s descriptions of the mules, the animals are poised upon an instant, one of Faulkner’s signature freeze-frames that seem to occur outside of time, a moment pregnant with the sublime. As Burke notes, the “passion” which is evoked by the “great and sublime in *nature*” is “astonishment,” wherein all the soul’s “motions are suspended, with some degree of horror” (57, emphasis in original). Astonishment, the “effect of the sublime in its highest degree,” crowds out all other thoughts from the mind, rendering any attempt of the mind to “reason on that object which employs it” utterly futile (57). What’s more, Burke notes, “far from being produced” by our “reasonings,” astonishment “anticipates [them], and hurries us on by an irresistible force” (57). Burke’s discussion of astonishment is strikingly apropos to this section of *As I Lay Dying*. Preceding our “reasonings” and our deliberate considerations, and conveyed by those “modulations of sounds” most closely attuned to the environment, the experience of the sublime, in Burke’s account, has its source in that register we call “animal.” The horse’s “breathing stertorous like groaning” and “gingerly splashings,” the mule’s fleeting gaze and “sound almost human”: the bodies and voices of animals do what Darl’s language cannot do – communicate the astonishment which defies linguistic comprehension.

All of this *body* language is rendered through verbal signifiers of course: a fact which the novel's modernist aesthetic hardly suppresses. What Darl's and Addie's striking allusions to animal communication serve to remind us of, however, is language's zoological genealogy. The *inarticulate*, yet communicative power of an animal cry is directly apposite to the novel's problematizing of both real and fictional speech, its disarticulation of "voice" and personal identity – as seen, for instance, in Dewey Dell's conversation with a cow.²⁰

Dewey Dell can barely contain herself in the face of her crises. Her drama plays along two axes, one of self-coherence and disintegration, the other, revelation and concealment. We see this in the fourteenth section of the novel, Dewey Dell's second narration, in which she curses Dr. Peabody and converses with a cow. Dewey Dell is particularly sensitive to body language, and knows what wealth of information is communicated without words: "God gave women a sign," she notes, "when something has happened bad" (58).²¹ What she fears most is that she might inadvertently disclose the secret of her pregnancy. Though she desires to "feel it" inside of her (58), to "not be alone," she reasons that, "If I were not alone, everybody would know it" (59): her own body language would betray her in the sign of a swollen belly. Dewey Dell's paranoia is no doubt justified by her past experience with Darl, with whom she often communicates in silence – at times even against her will.

Dewey Dell's transparency – her unwitting *scrutability* – is linked to her association with the natural world: like the book of nature, she is "there" to be read. Thus her affinity with the Bundrens' cow, whose company she seeks in her most desperate moments. Anxious to escape the intolerable presence of Dr. Peabody, the one man who

“could do everything for me if he just knowed it” (63), Dewey Dell retreats to the barn, ostensibly to milk the animal. “I go fast. The cow lows at the foot of the bluff. She nuzzles at me, snuffing, blowing her breath in a sweet, hot blast, through my dress, against my hot nakedness, moaning. ‘You got to wait a little while. Then I’ll tend to you’” (61). Dewey Dell’s corporeal affinity with the cow is made manifest throughout the section by the heightened sensuousness of description. Her intentions in the barn are not primarily chore-related; on the verge of both psychological and emotional disintegration, she flies to the barn as an act of urgent self-maintenance. “Then I pass the stall. I have almost passed it. I listen to it saying for a long time before it can say the word and the listening part is afraid that there may not be time to say it. I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible. Lafe. Lafe. ‘Lafe’ Lafe. Lafe” (61-62). In uttering his name, Dewey Dell fantasizes Lafe’s presence in the barn – as if speaking the name aloud would call forth his body. Dewey Dell’s desperation, her struggle alone to hide and bear her secret, is juxtaposed with the cow’s desperate need to be milked, relieved of its own burden. Similarly juxtaposed is Dewey Dell’s urgent confession – her utterance of Lafe’s name – and the cow’s irrepressible lowing. Dewey Dell’s uttering of the name is critically distinct from her merely thinking the name, a fact poignantly established when she discovers Vardaman in the barn a moment later and accuses him of “sneaking” (and thus, perhaps, discovering her secret): “My hands shake him, hard. Maybe I couldn’t stop them. I didn’t know they could shake so hard” (62). The utterance of Lafe’s name exemplifies Dewey Dell’s two-sided dilemma: the overwhelming difficulty of bearing her secret, made plain by the desperate eruption of the name Lafe from within Dewey Dell’s

interior world into the “outside” world; and her desperate fear of being found out in spite of herself. The vocalization then, at least from Dewey Dell’s perspective, has unintended consequences. Once words are spoken, put *out there*, the speaker risks losing control of their intended meaning; they become, as it were, wild. Though Darl’s exquisitely controlled language highlights the unrestrained and disturbingly inarticulate communication of the mule’s cry, the presence of the lowing cow here seems to perform the opposite function in exposing both the lack of control and the affective immediacy of Dewey Dell’s speech.

Indeed, untamed meanings and consequences follow from the voicing of Dewey Dell’s innermost thoughts, embodied in a single syllable, “Lafe.” While the spoken name hardly amounts to a full confession of her pregnant state, it is likely that the sound of her voice – its phenomenal quality – might communicate to anyone listening something more of her distress. Dewey Dell’s exchange with the cow evokes Derrida’s remarks in *Of Grammatology* on the relation between inarticulate cries and authentic (human) speech. Within the dominant metaphysical framework, speech

produces a signifier which seems not to fall into the world, outside the ideality of the signified, but to remain sheltered—even at the moment that it attains the audiophonic system of the other—within the pure interiority of auto-affection. . . . Within so-called ‘living’ speech, the spatial exteriority of the signifier seems absolutely reduced. It is in the context of this possibility that one must pose the problem of the cry—of that which one has always excluded, pushing it into the area of animality or of

madness, like the myth of the inarticulate cry—and the problem of speech (voice) within the history of life. (166)

The problem of speech within the history of life is the assumed “absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning” (OG 12). Such phonocentrism requires the “absolute effacement of the signifier” (20) in order to secure a one-to-one correspondence between mind and voice – as if words (and *not* sounds) were the only thing transmitted in speech. In fact, however, it is impossible to say precisely where inarticulate *sounds* end and spoken *words* begin. As Derrida might put it, the cow’s irrepressible moaning supplements Dewey Dell’s speech, insofar as it exposes the essential function of inarticulate “body language” in communication. Dewey Dell *does* therefore share an affinity with the cow, but not (or, not merely) in the sense indicated by those who claim that she *represents* “the natural.” Moreover, Dewey Dell’s affinity with the “animal” is not unique to her; her language, like that of Darl and Addie – indeed, of the novel itself – is supplemented by the inarticulate cries of the animal.²² This supplementary function of the animal voice is signaled by the cow’s impatient lowing, its demand to be “tended to” by Dewey Dell, and similarly, by the reader.

II.

Darwin and Freud exposed traces of animal life lingering in the human body and psyche; the modern human subject finds himself inhabited by his most other Other. The animal, having long served as an antithetical counterpoint to the Western metaphysics of

speech, becomes in the modern era a privileged being in the development of new modes of communication, and, ironically, in the articulation of a destabilized modern subject. The animal also comes to play a critical role in the emergence of distinctly modernist technologies and forms of representation – from Eadward Muybridge’s and Étienne-Jules Marey’s proto-cinematic images of animals in motion, to Edison’s one-minute film, “Electrocution of an Elephant” (1903), to early Disney animation. In late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century culture, animals, particularly horses, become emblems of pure motion, and are appropriated by the modern fascination with dynamism, movement, change, and the broad emergence of philosophies of process and progress – *even as* animals disappear from modernity’s newly urbanized landscape.

Faulkner’s treatment of animal life, as is evident in his depiction of Jewel’s horse, helps to illuminate this broader field of zoologically oriented modernist representational forms. Jewel’s horse, in addition to being the central animal figure in the text, is also the most compelling – or magnetic – of the novel’s animal forms. Faulkner’s experimental prose depictions of the horse in motion call to mind the wider modernist fascination with representing horses – whose motile, indeed spectral, forms simultaneously embody both the new and the rapidly vanishing, an age in flux. Jewel’s horse urges us to consider the question of the animal and its relation to *As I Lay Dying*’s modernist representational strategies. This relation is perhaps best illustrated in the novel’s use of “animal magnetism” as a means of representing human interiority and the uncanny bonds that connect members of the Bundren family. Here again, animal figuration takes center stage; but, it is a figuration that respects the anti-figural force of animal life.

Dewey Dell's interaction with the cow is preceded in the novel by an unsettling, almost unreadable encounter between Vardaman and Jewel's horse. Having run to the barn in search of a stick with which to drive away Dr. Peabody's team of horses, Vardaman comes upon the horse: "Then I can breathe again, in the warm smelling. I enter the stall, trying to touch him, and then I can cry then I vomit the crying. As soon as he gets through kicking I can and then I can cry, the crying can" (54). In parallel fashion to Dewey Dell, Vardaman lets it all out in the presence of an animal. Pausing briefly to touch the horse, Vardaman describes how the "life in him runs under the skin, under my hand, running through the splotches, smelling up into my nose where the sickness is beginning to cry, vomiting the crying, and then I can breathe, vomiting it. It makes a lot of noise. I can smell the life running up from under my hands, up my arms, and then I can leave the stall" (54). In what amounts to a fleeting encounter with the horse (which is for the reader significantly obfuscated by Vardaman's frantic narration), Vardaman experiences a profound, affective recharge, a magnetic transference of "life" from the horse to the child, thus allowing him to go on about his business of driving off Peabody's team.

Such accounts, however, do nothing to prepare the reader for Vardaman's next encounter with the horse. Having retreated once again to the barn after his retaliatory strike on Peabody's team, a calmer Vardaman, now crying quietly, "feeling and hearing [his] tears," rests near the horse, hiding from Dewey Dell's calls.

It is dark. I can hear wood, silence: I know them. But not living sounds, not even him [i.e., the horse]. It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components—snuffings

and stampings; smells of cooling flesh and ammoniac hair; an illusion of a co-ordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an *is* different from my *is*. I see him dissolve—legs, a rolling eye, a gaudy splotching like cold flames—and float upon the dark in fading solution; all one yet neither; all either yet none. I can see hearing coil toward him, caressing, shaping his hard shape—fetlock, hip, shoulder and head; smell and sound. I am not afraid.

(56-57)

In Vardaman's concentrated attempt to capture, to re-present, the horse's essence, its "*is*," the horse shatters into "an unrelated scattering of components." This passage exaggerates language's essential tendency to spatialize, or break the world into discrete and manageable pieces. Similar to Darl's strained attempt to represent the drama of the river passage, Vardaman's attempt to articulate the horse's essence seems to fail utterly. The most notable aspect of this episode is the "unnaturalness" of Vardaman's language – a textual anomaly apt to confuse or frustrate readers, even more so than Darl's clairvoyance or even Addie's posthumous narration. Stephen Ross notes that Vardaman's language in this episode implies a radical disjunction between Vardaman-the-character and Vardaman-the-narrator, and so poses a daring challenge to the metaphysics of consciousness which tends to govern our reading of "interior" narration ("Voice' in Narrative Texts" 303-04). In this respect, the episode signals a deconstruction of public and private that links up with the novel's unsettling Gothic elements. Vardaman's encounter with the horse resonates strikingly with mesmeric phenomena. His reference to the horse's "life . . . run[ning] under the skin, under my

hand” recalls Mesmer’s practice of manipulating vital “animal” fluids through the passing of hands along the body of patients in a magnetic state. If the magnetic transmission of “life” from horse to human represents a form of non-linguistic communication, I would suggest that the potentially unsettling manner of Vardaman’s presentation (in the passage quoted above) derives from the text’s own striving for a means of literary transmission gesturing beyond language itself to the realm of “life.”

Faulkner famously declared that “The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that 100 years later when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life” (Faulkner, *Lion* 253). This remark, given by Faulkner in a 1956 interview, has taken on a sort of timeless, aphoristic status in Faulkner studies – and this despite the all-too-modern representational techniques which he employed in attempting to “arrest motion” in his texts. Consider, for instance, Faulkner’s famed descriptions of horses in motion. From “Carcassonne” and “Spotted Horses” to *Flags in the Dust* and *The Reivers*, the most conspicuous feature of Faulkner’s horses is their locomotion. Horses become the embodiment, the very form of motion itself. Faulkner’s descriptions of horses are often attempts to inscribe, or register through written prose, the energy, quality, and sensation of motion – or rather, as Faulkner would have it, *life* at its most basic.²³ Darl’s description of Jewel’s horse evokes a fascination with motion, and the urgent challenge modernists confronted in representing it:

Moving that quick his coat, bunching, tongues swirling like so many flames. With tossing mane and tail and rolling eye the horse makes another short curvetting rush and stops again, feet bunched, watching

Jewel. . . . Save for Jewel's legs they are like two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun.

When Jewel can almost touch him, the horse stands on his hind legs and slashes down at Jewel. Then Jewel is enclosed by a glittering maze of hooves as by an illusion of wings; among them, beneath the upreared chest, he moves with the flashing limberness of a snake. For an instant before the jerk comes onto his arms he sees his whole body earth-free, horizontal, whipping snake-limber, until he finds the horse's nostrils and touches earth again. . . . They stand in rigid terrific hiatus, the horse trembling and groaning. Then Jewel is on the horse's back. He flows upward in a stooping swirl like the lash of a whip, his body in midair shaped to the horse. For another moment the horse stands spraddled, with lowered head, before it bursts into motion. (12-13)

In the text's relentless grammatical transformation of action into substantives, Jewel and the horse are submerged in a tangled syntax of verbals, as movement – motion itself – becomes the *object* of the description.²⁴ Faulkner's unique attempt at rendering the horse-in-motion simulates a filmic-animation effect, which is achieved through a constant, sudden halting and restarting of the action. The passage is a literary analogue to a number of key modernist visual studies of equine form – from Muybridge's famous 1870s chronophotographic images of the "Horse in Motion," to Edgar Degas's studies of racehorses and his sculpture, *Horse Trotting, the Feet not Touching the Ground*, and to Futurist paintings such as Umberto Boccioni's *The City Rises* (1910) and *Elasticity* (1912), and Carlo Carrà's *Horse and Rider* (1912).²⁵ In modernity the horse becomes –

however paradoxically – a key agent in the development of new representational technologies and techniques.

As these remarks suggest, *As I Lay Dying*'s critical engagement with animals extends beyond questions of content to questions of form. Indeed, in shifting our attention from the *what* of the novel's representation to its *how*, we are merely following through on *As I Lay Dying*'s elaboration of the animal's critical role in communicative transmission. The best illustration of the relationship between the novel's animal discourse and its modernist form is in its use of "animal magnetism" as a "technique and metaphor" for representing characters' thoughts and Bundren family bonds (Franklin 34).²⁶

Magnetic bonds seem to proliferate among the Bundrens.²⁷ Darl and Dewey Dell often speak without words, as when Darl learns of his sister's pregnancy:

He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us [i.e., Dewey Dell and Lafe in the woods]. But he said he did know and I said 'Are you going to tell pa are you going to kill him?' without the words I said it and he said 'Why?' without the words. And that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows. (27)

Far from extraordinary, wordless communication is often the norm. Addie says that while Anse had a word for "Love," "Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him" (172). Similarly Darl describes an exchange which takes place during the river-crossing episode between himself and Cash in which "he and I look at one another with long

probing looks, looks that plunge unimpeded through one another's eyes and into the ultimate secret place where for an instant Cash and Darl crouch flagrant and unabashed in all the old terror and the old foreboding, alert and secret and without shame" (142).

Darl is a special case, however. His uncanny knowledge of others' minds, his ability to predict future events, like the timing of his mother's death, and his awareness of events occurring miles away, suggest the occult.²⁸ But even Cash – the most sensible, pragmatic, and *modern* of the Bundrens – betrays a predilection for the paranormal. His connection to paranormal powers, it seems, is through "animal" life. The ninth point – the linchpin, as it were – in his list of thirteen reasons for building Addie's coffin on a bevel states: "The animal magnetism of a dead body makes the stress come slanting, so the seams and joints of a coffin are made on the bevel" (83).²⁹ Cash's "animal magnetism" recalls the popularity which pseudo-sciences like mesmerism and phrenology enjoyed in the United States in the nineteenth century, particularly in rural areas – and at the same time, links *As I Lay Dying* to a broad turn-of-the-century fascination with paranormal phenomena and the subconscious self.³⁰ It is precisely this odd commingling of the gothic (or spiritualist) and scientific which characterizes the general turn-of-the-century fascination with bodily, cultural, and communicative transmission.³¹ Cash's heart's desire is to own a graphophone, a machine invented to reproduce at will music as "natural as a music-band" (235). Cash's wonder at the marvel of modern musical transportability – "I have seen them that shuts up like a hand-grip, with a handle and all, so a fellow can carry it with him wherever he wants" (259) – belies the fears and anxieties that accompanied the uncanny collapse of distance experienced in "tele-phenomena" of all kinds at the

turn-of-the-century, from hypnotism and experiments in thought transference, to the possibility of contact with the dead.³²

Indeed, telepathic communication, clairvoyance, and contact with the dead through Addie's posthumous narration – all are evoked in Faulkner's novel; its modernist aesthetic experiment is curiously occultist in its form and perhaps its inspiration. *As I Lay Dying* channels these unsettling metamorphoses of proximity and distance through animal signs and signals. "Animal magnetism" serves as a ready metaphor for the manner in which, throughout the novel, distances – between here and there, self and other, physical and psychical, life and death, human and non-human – are collapsed into disturbing intimacies; in which once inaccessible or blocked information is rendered communicable.³³ Mesmerists "commonly claimed that communication consisted in the transfer of vital [animate or 'animal'] fluids between two bodies, that people's minds and souls touched each other (immaterially) in mysterious ways" (Winter 119). Though Freud was explicitly critical of telepathy, he was also fascinated by the telepathic process and by professional telepaths' physical explanation of thought transference, a mechanism of transmission which both Freud and other turn-of-the-century theorizers of telepathy saw as "atavistic remnants from an earlier evolutionary state" (Thurschwell 125).³⁴ "It is a familiar fact that we do not know how the common purpose comes about in the great insect communities: possibly," Freud suggests, "it is done by means of a direct psychical transference" akin to telepathy. "One is led to a suspicion," he continues, "that this is the original, archaic method of communication between individuals" ("Dreams and Occultism" 55). Similarly, the British physicist William Barrett speculated that "habits of ants and bees seem to indicate the possession of a mode of communication unknown to

us. If our domestic animals are in any degree open to thought-transference, may we not get into somewhat closer communication with them?" (qtd in Thurschwell 26-27). Given the phrase's etymology and its historical link to the psychoanalytic practice of hypnosis, "animal magnetism" signals the animal's haunting presence in Faulkner's text.³⁵ At the same time, *As I Lay Dying* employs animal magnetism as a mode of communication in its own right – as a distinctly modernist representational technique.

Notes

¹ “Zoosemiotics” was coined by the American semiologist Thomas A. Sebeok in 1963, and was “proposed for the discipline, within which the science of signs intersects with ethology, devoted to the scientific study of signaling behavior in and across animal species” (“The Word ‘Zoosemiotics’” 178). Elaborating further on the term, Sebeok notes that it was “intended as a mediating concept for reconciling [the] two seemingly antithetical spheres of discourse, ethology and semiotics: the former, anchored in the realm of Nature, embracing the totality of the multifarious phenomena of animal behavior on the one hand, the second, rooted in the matrix of Culture, traditionally held by many to comprise exclusively man’s signifying competence on the other” (“Zoosemiotics” 86). The possibility of extending semiotics to the animal world was established, at least theoretically, by Charles Sanders Peirce, who famously declared, “the entire universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs.” I’m adapting the term “zoosemiotics” somewhat to accommodate both the scientific study of animal signals and the semiotics of the literary animal. Faulkner himself famously called *As I Lay Dying* a “tour de force.”

² Darwin explicitly addresses language in Chapter 3 of *The Descent of Man* (1871). Though he concedes that the “habitual use of articulate language” is “peculiar to man” (82), Darwin nonetheless emphasizes throughout his account the continuity between human language and the “inarticulate cries” of the “lower animals”: “I cannot doubt that language owes its origin to the imitation and modification of various natural sounds, the

voices of other animals, and man's own instinctive cries, aided by signs and gestures" (84). Elaborating further, Darwin speculates that "we can trace the formation of many words further back than that of species, for we can perceive how they actually arose from the imitation of various sounds" (87-88). Finally, he notes that, "Languages, like organic beings, can be classed in groups under groups; and they can be classed either naturally according to descent, or artificially by other characters. Dominant languages and dialects spread widely and lead to the gradual extinction of other tongues. A language, like a species, when once extinct, never, as Sir C. Lyell remarks, reappears. The same language never has two birth-places. Distinct languages may be crossed or blended together. We see variability in every tongue, and new words are continually cropping up. . . ." (88).

³ In addition to Darwinian evolution and Freudian psychoanalysis, Lippit cites advances in the optical and technological media as sites in which the figure of the animal comes to serve as a critical, if surprising, role. "As they disappeared [in the nineteenth century], animals became increasingly the subjects of a nostalgic curiosity. . . . Once considered a metonymy of nature, animals came to be seen as emblems of the new, industrial environment. . . . The idioms and histories of numerous technological innovations from the steam engine to quantum mechanics bear the traces of an incorporated animality. James Watt and later Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Walt Disney, and Erwin Schrödinger, among other key figures in the industrial and aesthetic shifts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, found uses for animal spirits in developing their respective machines, creating in the process a series of fantastic hybrids.

Cinema, communication, transportation, and electricity drew from the actual and fantasmatic resources of dead animals” (Lippit 187).

⁴ The most extensive consideration of figurative discourse in the novel is Patrick O’Donnell’s “The Spectral Road: Metaphors of Transference in Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*.” O’Donnell suggests that metaphors in *As I Lay Dying* “form a network of correspondences and cross-references that gives the novel the texture of a systematic world, a world wherein journeys – like metaphorical language – lead toward certain ultimacies of desire, purpose, and expression” (61).

⁵ André Bleikasten identifies metaphor as “consubstantial with the vision and art” of Faulkner. “Of all the demons which presided over Faulkner’s work,” he notes, “the demon of analogy was without doubt one of the most intrusive, and in [*As I Lay Dying*] his presence is as strongly felt as in any other” (39).

⁶ In his essay, “Why Look at Animals?,” John Berger speculates that “The parallelism of their similar/dissimilar lives allowed animals to provoke some of the first questions and offer answers. The first subject matter for painting was animal. Probably the first paint was animal blood. Prior to that, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal” (5). Since Claude Lévi-Strauss famously declared animals “good to think with,” anthropologists have had much to say about the nearly ubiquitous phenomenon of the animal-as-metaphor, particularly in so-called primitive societies. Anthropologist Roy Willis, for instance, notes that the “apparent universality of animals as images of the profoundest symbolic significance [seems based] in the fact that ‘the animal’ is both within us, as part of our enduring biological heritage as human beings, and also by

definition, outside and beyond human society” (9). For a recent survey of animals in anthropological thought, see Mullin.

⁷This is, for instance, Cleanth Brooks’s rationale in *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (147, 399).

⁸ Joseph Urgo designates Vardaman “the author-figure” of the novel because of the youngest Bundren’s insistence that “his figuration [i.e., “my mother is a fish”] is real – as real an alternative as any to the literal, or to what often passes in fiction as realistic” (12). Essential to Vardaman’s “discovery of the figurative,” Urgo reasons, is an appropriative act by which the universe is “transformed” from “something mysterious and ‘out there’ to something in which the human mind is ‘at home.’ . . . [T]o depict one thing as if it were another thing . . . is to digest it, as it were, and to make the problematic object a part of one’s self” (21). Through the (meta-psycho-) physical act of interiorization, Vardaman’s mother is rendered “not dead”; she is transformed into a “part of him now, and a part of everyone else she knew” (Urgo 20).

⁹ And yet, as Deborah Clarke points out, insofar as Addie’s body and her maternal influence remain at once present *and* absent throughout the Bundrens’ journey, Addie presents “a formidable challenge to the family that must repudiate it” (39).

¹⁰ Cary Wolfe has commented extensively on the fundamental role which the institution of speciesism has played in Western discourses of subjectivity. In his recent book, *Animal Rites*, he asks provocatively: “For what does it mean when the aspiration of *human* freedom, extended to all, regardless of race or class or gender, has as its material condition of possibility absolute control over the lives of *nonhuman* others? If our work

is characterized in no small part by its duty to be socially responsive to the ‘new social movements’ (civil rights, feminism, gay and lesbian rights, and so on), then how must our work itself change when the other to which it tries to do justice is no longer human?” (7, emphasis in original).

¹¹ Commenting on the “sacrificial structure” of Western metaphysics, in which Man is instituted in the carnivorous act, Derrida notes: “Authority and autonomy . . . are, through this schema, attributed to the man (*homo* and *vir*) rather than to the woman, and to the woman rather than to the animal. And of course to the adult rather than to the child. The virile strength of the adult male, the father, the husband, or brother. . . belongs to the schema that dominates the concept of subject. The subject does not want just to master and possess nature actively. In our cultures, he accepts sacrifice and eats flesh” (“Eating” 114).

¹² Sacrificial, or “carno-phallogocentric,” cultures, according to Derrida, install “the virile figure at the determinative center of the subject” and rely upon an impossibly strict distinction between “real” and “symbolic” sacrifice (“Eating” 114). This latter point is illustrated in Derrida’s suggestion that “Thou shalt not kill” has “never been understood within the Judeo-Christian tradition . . . as ‘Thou shalt not put to death the living in general’” (113). Though “symbolic” sacrifice is performed at will in the case of both human- and non-human animals, “real” sacrifice is permitted only in the case of the latter. Humans may be consumed, in other words, in any number of *symbolic* ways – interpreted, conceptualized, made objects of thought, and so forth – but must never be consumed literally. On this note, Derrida is careful to emphasize that carno-

phallogocentric discourse entails the abjection not only of animals, but of those humans perceived as *not* being characterized by a vigorous, carnivorous appetite (namely women, celibates, homosexuals, and vegetarians) (“‘Eating’” 114).

¹³ This reduction of animals to mere signs, symbols, or concepts is of course almost universally taken for granted in literary, philosophical, and anthropological discourses. For a critique of the Western philosophical tradition’s reduction of animals (as in, all living beings not recognized as “Man”) to the catch-all concept “animal” (uttered in the general singular), see Derrida (“The Animal”).

¹⁴ Following Sandor Ferenczi, Abraham and Torok posit introjection as the process by which the mourned object is signified and displaced by language – a process which finds its model in the infant who learns to fill the emptiness of the mouth with words in the absence of the mother’s breast (127). In contrast, incorporation, which Abraham and Torok develop from Freud’s reflections on melancholia and “abnormal” forms of mourning, denotes “the refusal to introject loss” (127); incorporation, that is, “results from those losses that for some reason cannot be acknowledged as such” (130). When the mourner fails to assimilate the loved object through language, then those “words that cannot be uttered, the scenes that cannot be recalled, the tears that cannot be shed – everything will be swallowed along with the trauma that led to the loss. Swallowed and preserved” (130). This incorporation of the lost object through an “inexpressible mourning” “erects a secret tomb inside the subject” (130). Thus “encrypted” within the subject, the lost object, or *other*, remains in the ego as an inassimilable foreign body.

¹⁵ “The crucial move away from introjection (clearly rendered impossible) to incorporation is made when *words* fail to fill the subject’s void and hence an imaginary thing is inserted into the mouth in their place” (Abraham and Torok 128-29, emphasis in original)

¹⁶ See Matthews for a dialectical approach to the relationship between modernization and modernism in *As I Lay Dying*.

¹⁷ Freud held that the origins of dream wishes are revealed in regression, in the sense of both a regression to the dreamer’s childhood *and* a regression to the childhood of the human race.

¹⁸ For more on Lippit’s notion of the “animetaphor,” see his *Electric Animal* (162-97).

¹⁹ This is not to suggest an insentience on the part of the mules – indeed, quite the contrary; the mule’s cry here suggests that sentience, and the communicative means through which it is expressed, is by no means necessarily tied to (human) language.

²⁰ For a seminal discussion of the novel’s disarticulation of voice and personal identity, see Ross’s “‘Voice’ in Narrative Texts,” and his study, *Fiction’s Inexhaustible Voice* (111-29). See more on Ross below, note 22.

²¹ For a useful discussion of Dewey Dell’s “prediscursive semiotic non-language,” see Clarke (41-45). Clarke alludes to a division between “body language and symbolic discourse” in the novel, but does not address animals or animality per se (42).

²² One might interject here that given Dewey Dell’s identity as a woman, and the stereotypical association of her character with the natural realm, her “conversation” with the cow serves only to perpetuate a patriarchal linking of women with sub-human

animals. While this argument is convincing so far as it goes, in making gender *the* critical axis in discussing this episode, one risks neglecting the issue of species distinction, which is, I would argue, just as central to the novel's textual operations.

On a separate note, I would like to suggest that my analysis of what I am calling here the "(body) language of the animal" in the novel serves as a critical supplement to Ross's foundational work on voice in *As I Lay Dying* (and in Faulkner's writing more generally). Though Ross goes far in challenging conventional notions of fictional voice which are based on a metaphysics of consciousness or personal identity, his own conception of voice is nonetheless resolutely *human* to the core. For instance, in his analysis of "phenomenal voice" in Faulkner's writing, Ross states, "And because *phenomenal* voice exists outside of particular speech acts, residing in the world as object or event, it disseminates human presence throughout the world, infusing objects, places, sights, and sounds with implications of humanness" (*Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice* 20). Ross's assertion of the humanness of voice appears motivated, at least in part, by what he acknowledges as a common complaint about poststructuralism – namely that it "has dissipated too thoroughly the idea of author or speaker into a rarified, humanless atmosphere where the structures and binary oppositions of literary discourse precipitate voicelessly like crystals in solution" (9). Ross thus strives to maintain the *humanness* of voice while still doing justice to the Derridean deconstruction of voice as the "value of presence." However, I would argue that, in attending to Faulkner's animal voices we in fact gain a much richer and more vital notion of both (fictional) voice and language, even if we are obliged to give up the notion of a purely human voice.

²³ Throughout Faulkner's writing horses are the archetypal symbols of "the wild," of uncontainable vitality – the embodiment of male fantasies of life without fences, rules, or women. In the service of the literary, these horses come to signify ideas of mythic proportion: creation, destruction, life, death, chaos, loss. For recent criticism on horses in Faulkner, see Potts.

²⁴ The text's tendency to objectify motion reaches its stylistic culmination in Darl's "frozen moments," represented in the quoted passage above by such expressions as the "tableau savage" and "rigid terrific hiatus." These "frozen moments" are found all throughout Faulkner's fiction. See Zink for an early study of this trope in Faulkner. The author's fondness for the Keatsian Urn helps to explain the frequency of "frozen moments" in the Faulknerian oeuvre. Richard Adams notes that what attracted Faulkner to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (which he quotes directly in *Sartoris* and *Go Down, Moses*, and to which he gives the nod in his many allusions to urns, vases, statues, and friezes) is the "contrast it contains between an aspect of speed or intense effort, representing motion, and an opposing aspect of impediment or countering force that stops the motion or slows it so much that it seems to stop" (12). The "frozen moment" analogue in *As I Lay Dying*, however, is the "Greek frieze," which Darl alludes to in his account of Jewel's struggle with Gillespie in the episode of the burning barn: "They are like two figures in a Greek frieze, isolated out of all reality by the red glare" (221).

²⁵ Faulkner's kinetic horses may thus be situated in a modern discursive genealogy of equine locomotion. Etienne-Jules Marey (the inventor of chronophotography), for instance, was fascinated by ancient Greek renderings of the horse, particularly in the

Parthenon frieze. In an 1878 lecture on equine locomotion, Marey declared his reverence for ancient Greek artists in their rendering of the horse in mid-gallop. In studying the frieze, Marey's initial observation was that Phidias had "indeed correctly portrayed a galloping steed in his Parthenon frieze." Marey's rather startling conclusion was that, "in the epoch of Phidias, the science of the horse's gait was already possessed by artists" (Marey qtd in Rabinbach, 111). Though Marey's later, fuller investigation of the frieze resulted in the retracting of his initial claim, his discussion of Phidias was reactivated by Henri Bergson in the latter's critique of the "cinematographical method": "Of the gallop of a horse our eye perceives chiefly a characteristic, essential or rather schematic attitude, a form that appears to radiate over a whole period and so fill up a time of gallop. It is this attitude that sculpture has fixed on the frieze of the Parthenon. But instantaneous photography isolates any moment; it puts them all in the same rank, and thus the gallop of a horse spreads out for it into as many successive attitudes as it wishes, instead of massing itself into a single attitude, which is supposed to flash out in a privileged moment and to illuminate a whole period" (Bergson 332). Weighed in Bergsonian scales, the gallop of the Greek frieze is the clear victor in the challenge of representing time in its true form, as duration; if Marey's chronophotography marked an improvement in mimetic excellence, it was only insofar as it rendered the illusion of objective time with the greatest precision hitherto.

The horse's role in the development of modernist representational techniques is also seen in the horse-turning-machine form of Raymond Duchamp-Villon's statue, *Horse* (1914). Duchamp-Villon's statue shares much in common with the Futurists.

While they famously celebrated the modern transition to automobile culture, in their paintings and theoretical writings the Futurists often resorted to animal metaphors to convey their frenzied obsession with motion, and the image of the horse, in particular, is privileged in much Futurist art. In their “Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto,” they declare: “The gesture which we would reproduce on canvas shall no longer be a fixed *moment* in universal dynamism. It shall simply be the *dynamic sensation* itself. Indeed all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. . . . [M]oving objects constantly multiply themselves; their form changes like rapid vibrations, in their mad career. Thus a running horse has not four legs, but twenty, and their movements are triangular” (Boccioni et al., 150).

²⁶ When asked once about Darl’s uncanny ability to narrate far-away events, Faulkner responded, “It may not be so, but it’s nice to think that there is some compensation for madness. That maybe the madman does see more than the sane man. That the world is more moving to him. That he is more perceptive. He has something of clairvoyance, maybe, a capacity for telepathy. Anyway, nobody can dispute it and that was a very good way, I thought, a very effective way to tell what was happening back there at home” (*Faulkner in the University* 113). Regarding the magnetic bonds shared by the family, it is important to note that these bonds are by no means limited to humans in the novel, as suggested by my discussion of Vardaman and the horse. Jewel shares an intense bond with his horse, onto whom he transfers the grief, frustration, anger, and desire elicited by Addie’s death. Jewel’s posture towards the horse oscillates wildly between domination,

identification, and fierce devotion; in many ways Jewel's relation to this animal embodies the novel's traumatic dialectic of intimacy and distance, intrusion and severance.

²⁷ Though many critics have discussed instances of wordless communication in the novel, Rosemary Franklin's 1966 essay, "Animal Magnetism in *As I Lay Dying*," is the only analysis I am aware of that addresses this phenomenon in terms of "magnetic bonds."

²⁸ Upon "discovering" that Jewel's father is not Anse, Darl states, "And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day" (136).

²⁹ See Franklin for a detailed explanation of Cash's reference to animal magnetism, "the key that unlocks the puzzle of [his] thirteen points" (24).

³⁰ For the dissemination of "practical" phrenology in the nineteenth-century United States, see Davies (30-45). Publishers, supported in their efforts by traveling phrenologists, commonly targeted uneducated audiences in their mass-production of inexpensive almanac-like manuals dealing with the "practical" applications of phrenology in areas such as mesmerism, temperance, and female anatomy, and in more general practices like agriculture, horticulture, and architecture (Davies 55). Though magnetism and phrenology each represented its own distinct theories and practices, the two "sciences" often complemented one another in practice (traveling phrenologists were often magnetizers), and the "practical" applications of both were appropriated and freely mingled by the general population. Many phrenological practitioners sought to bring together aspects of both under the heading "phrenomagnetism," in an attempt to complement what many considered to be the overly materialistic and mechanistic tenor of phrenology with the spiritualism of magnetism. (Davies 134). See Davies (126-134) for

more on “phrenomagnetism.” See Winter for a detailed history of mesmerism in Victorian England.

³¹ Thurschwell identifies a turn-of-the-century network of “real and fantasized connections . . . between the occult world, innovative technologies of communication and intimate bonds between people” (2-3). Thurschwell’s study reflects the important cultural-historical role that psychical research has played in recent studies of modernism. This development is registered, for instance, in Tim Armstrong’s *Modernism* (115-134).

³² “Telepathy,” Roger Luckhurst suggests, “is the product of ambivalent modernity: spooky experiences of distance and relation, of traumatic severances and equally disturbing intimacies” (276). Nicholas Royle notes that telepathy is “historically linked to numerous other tele-phenomena,” and is “necessarily related to other nineteenth-century forms of communication from a distance through new and often invisible channels, including the railway, telegraphy, photography, the telephone and gramophone” (5).

³³ In psychoanalytic texts, Lippit notes, transference is “precisely the modality in which language is circumvented for a more expedient connection between drives, points, thoughts or instincts. It is, in fact, the mode of communication that philosophy accords the animal” (24).

³⁴ In a 1933 essay entitled “Dreams and Occultism,” Freud urges his readers to “have kindlier thoughts on the objective possibility of thought-transference and at the same time of telepathy as well” (54). The substantial connections between Freudian psychoanalysis

and spiritualism are well documented. See Luckhurst (270-76) and Thurschwell (115-50).

³⁵ The reflections on hypnosis put forward in Freud and Josef Breuer's 1895 *Studies on Hysteria* may be traced directly back to Anton Franz Mesmer's experiments in "animal magnetism." See Lippit (110-111) and Thurschwell (6-7, 40-41).

Chapter Four

Gothic Animal: Val Lewton's *Cat People* (1942)

Animals in modernity are framed within a spectral logic: disappearing but more visible than ever. In Heideggerian terms, modern technologies and forms of representation may be said to “enframe” vanishing wildlife – rendering it a cultural object to be administered, reproduced, and exploited at will. And yet, because the animal is figured as a spectral object in modernity, its presence returns to haunt modern technologies of representation – in effect, destabilizing the frame, and thus disrupting the fundamental anthropocentrism of modern technics. In my last chapter, I addressed ways in which the figure of the animal comes to haunt modern technologies of communication, and indeed language itself. This chapter focuses on a similar phenomenon whereby the animal comes to haunt modern visual technologies of representation and related ocularcentric forms of subjectivity, such as modern cinema.

It is fitting that we should turn, in this last chapter, to the visual realm of cinema. Heidegger's reference to “enframing” resonates with what is perhaps *the* modern technology of representation par excellence: the camera – a device whose very function is to literally frame the world. Photographic and cinematic technology have done more than any other form of media in transforming animals into privileged objects of observation, into images and spectacles for our consumption. It is fitting, as well, that we should turn to the Gothic, in the form of Val Lewton's 1942 horror-suspense classic, *Cat People*. If the notion of the spectral animal presents a new way of thinking about animal discourse

in modernity, it also suggests a rather different take on the overlap between animality and the Gothic – an important intervention, given the significant cultural role that the Gothic has played in articulating the connections (and disruptions) between the human and animal realms.

A new brand of horror

We tossed away the horror formula right from the beginning. No grisly stuff for us. No mask-like faces hardly human, with gnashing teeth and hair standing on end. No creaking physical manifestations. No horror piled on horror.

--Val Lewton, interview with
the *Los Angeles Times*

Producer Val Lewton is generally credited for inventing a new style of American horror, one characterized by narrative ambiguity, suggestion, and an emphasis on atmosphere over the monster-in-your-face tactics of mainstream horror blockbusters. Lewton was hired in 1942 by the fledgling RKO Pictures to make short, cheap horror “programmers” in the vein of Universal Studios’ enormously profitable monster movies of the 1930s.¹ He went on to create a body of commercially successful and strikingly innovative horror films, a few of which have taken their place among the most notable

films of American cinema.² Chief among Lewton's cinematic innovations is his emphasis on impersonal forces and the often unsettling ways in which they circulate through a given environment. In sharp contrast to classic horror pictures like *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), and *The Wolfman* (1941), Lewton and his production unit created highly unorthodox films in which, as Robin Wood suggests, "the concept of the Monster becomes diffused through[out] . . . no longer identified with a single figure" (77). Wood's suggestion of a "diffused" horror, and of a Gothicized world in which "no one escapes contamination" (77), corresponds with Lewton's much-touted fondness for "atmosphere." For instance, in an influential early assessment of Lewton's work, film critic Manny Farber praised the producer for his ability "to tell a story about people that isn't dominated by the activity, weight, size, and pace of the human figure" (49). Singling out *The Leopard Man* (1943) as a case in point, Farber notes how, in this film, "[a]ll the psychological effects – fear and so on – [are] transformed . . . into nonhuman components of the picture" (50).

Farber's comments gesture towards what we might call a non-anthropocentric aesthetic in which "human beings and 'things' are [treated as] interchangeable and almost synonymous" (Farber 49), and in which impersonal – often supernatural – forces move about freely. In such a world, horror and its attendant affects are diffused and de-personalized, as the emphasis shifts from human individuals *per se*, to the relational bonds connecting humans, objects, and environments. In his de-centering of the individualized monster onto which, traditionally, all of society's repressed fears, guilt, and desire are projected in a ritual act of abjection, Lewton directs the viewer's attention to the ways in which fear, guilt, and desire circulate through a given environment via

processes more akin to “contamination” or contagion. Given the war-time context of his films, it is not surprising to find horror itself transposed, through Lewton’s “unorthodox artistry” (Farber 47), from the realm of the static, personal, and containable to that of the dynamic, impersonal, and mobile.

This transposition of horror is reflected in Lewton’s reworking of the classic Gothic tale of degenerative metamorphosis in his first film, *Cat People* (1942), directed by Jacques Tourneur. From Rouben Mamoulian’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) and Erle C. Kenton’s *Island of Lost Souls* (1933), to George Waggner’s *The Wolf Man* (1941), early Hollywood horror films produced countless narratives of devolutionary anxiety, embodied in the central, abject figure of the hybrid human-animal. Glancing at its title, one would likely assume Lewton’s *Cat People* to be of the same ilk. Indeed, this is precisely what RKO counted on when they assigned Lewton the title; the devolutionary monster narrative was enormously popular among early American horror audiences. Yet, in significant ways, *Cat People* fails to live up to its title. The film presents the story of a Serbian-American woman who, due to a family curse, turns into a panther when jealous or sexually aroused. The audience, however, never actually gets to *see* her transformation and is left wondering throughout most of the picture whether she is in fact a cat-woman or simply the victim of a troubled psyche. In its playful reconstruction of the human-animal hybrid, *Cat People* signifies a break in the standard treatment of degenerative human-animal metamorphoses, a narrative whose cultural roots may be traced back to the British fin-de-siècle literary Gothic tradition. What’s more, as the semantic slippage between “Cat People” and the film’s plot line suggests, the animal signifier is itself transformed in the film from a symbol of abjection to a privileged figure

of multiplicity and mobility, and thus a key player in Lewton's experimental "diffused" brand of horror.

In its treatment of what we might call, after Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the becoming-animal of the human, *Cat People* presents an alternative way to conceptualize the relationship between human and animal worlds. In contrast to the linear logic inherent in both the human devolutionary narrative and that of psychoanalytic regression, the film suggests a conception of human-animal relations that is based rather on the logic of alliance or symbiosis – of communication between heterogeneous bodies, and the transformative exchange of human and animal characteristics. No longer locked into its assigned position further down the evolutionary ladder from the human, the animal is mobilized as a figure of change, of movement across boundaries. In *Cat People*, the figure of the animal affords thematic and stylistic "lines of escape," in Deleuze and Guattari's words, out of established genre conventions and standardized modes of representation. Throughout the film, the animal is presented as a vanishing creature, a figure whose tenuous link to the physical environment renders it a potentially versatile, mobile image – an ideal figure of nonverbal affect transmission on the one hand, and of a disturbing indeterminacy, on the other.

In the following analysis I argue that *Cat People's* iconic caged beast in the heart of the urban metropolis, together with its self-reflexive treatment of cinema, highlight the central prominence of surveillance tropes in modernity's engagement with animal being – tropes that the film repeatedly subverts through its strategic use of "dark patches" and its intimations of an invisible presence. Throughout *Cat People*, animality is locked into a

discourse of visibility; the figure of the animal operates at the threshold of the visible and the invisible. As such the animal is transposed from an object of spectatorial observation to a privileged sign of spectrality, a presence signaling a fundamental absence. In deferring the spectacle of beastly transformation (which its title seems to promise), the film upsets the linear narrative inherent in classical Hollywood horror metamorphoses and troubles the identity-logic upon which this narrative rests. By strategically fusing the animal and the spectral, *Cat People* portrays the human as inextricably haunted from within by the animal Other, while simultaneously subverting the camera's (and thus modernity's) presumed techno-visual dominance.

I address these claims through an analysis of the film's relation to the classic Hollywood horror films of the 1930s and early 40s, its pervasive logic of the trace, and its generic affiliation with "the fantastic" as theorized by Tzvetan Todorov. My analysis concludes with a discussion of the film's engagement with psychoanalytic discourse and the film's self-critical use of tracking as a central trope. In both instances, *Cat People* undermines dominant identity-logic in favor of a more radical notion of the human subject's animal-haunted interior.

Cat People evokes a monster that, strictly speaking, never appears. In this regard the film reflects Lewton's famed method of horror by indirection. Indeed, the film's title is patently ironic. In its luridness and banality, it conjures up the very "horror formula" which Lewton publicly disdained – a formula the producer associated with beastly figures "hardly human," the iconic, abject degenerates of Hollywood's mainstream Gothic revival. Barbara Creed has argued that the "central ideological project of the popular

horror film” is “purification of the abject” (14). Popular horror is, in Creed’s reading, a fundamentally conservative genre, one aimed at containment. The conventional horror film “attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject . . . in order finally to eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and non-human” (14). And yet, as Lewton himself maintained, a horror easily dismissed is not really horror at all. In Lewton’s words, “You can’t keep up horror that’s long sustained. It becomes something to laugh at” (qtd in Siegel 31). When animality surfaces only to be (re)inscribed on “mask-like faces hardly human, with gnashing teeth and hair standing on end” – it is perforce ejected from the realm of the human, and the threat is neutralized. *Cat People* manages to sustain its horror by never showing the hybrid monster lingering in its title; in this sense, the film stages a confrontation with monstrosity that never quite happens – that is deferred indefinitely. Central to *Cat People* is a thematic and stylistic emphasis on tracking. The presence of animality is thus *re-established* as a trace, the suggestion of a presence, and the viewer – like the characters, and the camera itself – are positioned as human/animal trackers. In *Cat People*, this is manifested in the film’s/viewer’s confounded desire (never fully realized) to *see* Irena Dubrovna’s transformation into a panther.³

Lewton’s thematic and stylistic interest in traces and tracking no doubt relates to the producer’s affinity for suggestion and his signature emphasis on absence.⁴ In this sense, Lewton’s use of traces is directly linked to his interest in the spectral, or the supernatural more generally – an interest which makes its most explicit, early appearance in his second film, *I Walked With a Zombie*.⁵ The figure of the animal in establishing this aesthetic is far from an arbitrary one, as is suggested by its prominent role in two of

Lewton's first three films – *Cat People* and *The Leopard Man* (1943). In both of these films, the animal becomes a spectral presence, manifested in fleeting images and traces. Indeed, the animal provides the link between *tracking* as a distinct mode of knowledge, a specifically modern technique of identification – and the supernatural *traces* which haunt Lewton's films.

Metamorphic subjects in classic Hollywood horror

In order to appreciate Lewton's twist on becoming animal, we must first consider the dominant horror conventions of the 1930s and 40s. By virtue of its title, *Cat People* evokes a distinct trope of modern Gothic culture, the narrative of degeneration – a trope that may be traced back to Hollywood's inaugural horror pictures of the early 1930s, and beyond that, to late-nineteenth-century British writers of “abhuman” fiction, including William Hope Hodgson and Arthur Machen. This section briefly surveys the figure of the degenerative hybrid in the modern Gothic imagination.

Horror cinema, like its close cousin, science-fiction, is a film genre teeming with morphic bodies. Transformational bodies have long been a central currency of the Hollywood horror film, as seen in classic figures like the vampire and the werewolf, in the gross “atomic” mutations of the 1950s, and in the late-century body horror of David Cronenberg.⁶ What makes these transformational bodies so worthy of the “horror” treatment is the inherent instability of their “human” form; morphic bodies are always *only* more-or-less human. Hollywood Horror's fascination with the not-quite-human

dates back to the genre's inception in the early 1930s. Indeed, the genre itself owes its strange birth to human-animal hybrids. Consider, for instance, the shape-shifting vampire of Tod Browning's *Dracula* (Universal, 1931), or the simian rendering of Mr. Hyde in Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Paramount, 1931). Other memorable hybrids of horror's inaugural years include the mutilated "hen woman" of Browning's *Freaks* (MGM, 1932), and the deformed, laboratory-bred "manimals" of Erle C. Kent's *Island of Lost Souls* (Paramount, 1932). By their central presence in such films, human-animal hybrid characters became iconic emblems of the genre – a status confirmed by the "second wave" success of Universal's *The Wolfman* (George Waggner, 1941) and its sequels.⁷ Given the controversial prominence of Evolution theory, which spiked in America with the "Scopes Monkey Trial" of 1925, and the popular dissemination of Freudian psychoanalysis between the wars – the human-animal hybrid presented itself as a powerful, readymade figure of cultural abjection, and thus, an apt vehicle for Hollywood's enormously profitable revival of the Gothic in twentieth-century America.⁸

Depictions of animal-human metamorphoses in early horror cinema may be traced back in the Anglo-American imagination to the British *fin-de-siècle* Gothic tradition, and its fascination with what Kelly Hurley (seizing on a suggestive expression from William Hope Hodgson) has called the "abhuman." Focusing on the writings of Hodgson, Arthur Machen, H. G. Wells, and other end-of-century Gothic writers, Hurley surveys the nearly ubiquitous trope of the "abhuman subject" – "a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (3-4). According to Hurley, whose work draws considerably on Julia Kristeva's notion of

the abject, the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic is characterized by a fundamental ambivalence.

“[C]onvulsed by nostalgia for the ‘fully human’ subject whose undoing it accomplishes so resolutely, and yet aroused by the prospect of a monstrous becoming,” end-of-century Gothic writers generated “an astonishing range of morphic possibilities,” including “slug-men, snake-women, ape-men, beast-people, octopus-seal-men, beetle-women, dog-men, fungus-people” (4).

Like the late-nineteenth century British “revival of the Gothic,” Hollywood’s own Gothic revival of the 1930s and early 1940s drew much of its energy – and its massive profits – from the seemingly inexhaustible spectacle of hybrid bodies: vampires, werewolves, “manimals,” Jekyll-Hydes, and ape men. Not surprisingly, the films which effectively defined classic Hollywood horror – *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Island of Lost Souls* – were themselves adaptations of nineteenth-century British Gothic fiction, and indeed bear traces of what Hurley identifies as the latter’s “thorough imbrication” with late-nineteenth-century biological and sociomedical discourses, including Evolutionism, criminal anthropology, degeneration theory, sexology, and pre-Freudian psychology.⁹ A brief glance back at Hollywood horror’s beginnings in the early 1930s reveals just how central the figure of the human-animal hybrid was to the emergent film genre. This is strikingly illustrated in Rouben Mamoulian’s acclaimed 1931 film adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in which the alter-ego figure of Hyde (played by Oscar-winning Frederic March) is made to appear significantly more simian than his novel counterpart through his extraordinary physical agility, and an elaborate make-up ensemble featuring widened nostrils, darkened skin tones, and tufts of artificial hair. Noted cinematographer Karl Struss, who worked on the film, betrays Mamoulian’s rather

heavy-handed efforts to animalize Hyde in the following reflection: “I thought they made a very bad mistake; the change from Jekyll should have been largely a psychological one, with subtle changes only in the makeup. But they foolishly changed the hair and put false teeth in, and made him look like a monkey. That was terrible” (qtd in Praver 95).

Also notable among early horror films is Kenton’s *Island of Lost Souls*, a film remake of H. G. Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896). “With plastic surgery, blood transfusions, gland extracts, with x-ray baths . . . with these I have wiped out hundreds of thousands of years of evolution.” So proclaims Dr Moreau (Charles Laughton), a mad vivisectionist who manipulates the evolutionary process, producing a small island colony of beast-men. Through excruciating surgical procedures performed in the “house of pain,” Dr. Moreau’s exotic jungle laboratory, the scientist physically transforms wild animals into grotesque, “abhuman” creatures, many of whose species characteristics have been rendered unidentifiable through extensive deformation. Fully conscious of, and tortured by, their degraded status as beings neither fully human nor animal, the beast-men eventually revolt against their “creator.” In the film’s climactic scene, a mob of enraged, disfigured creatures close in upon Moreau, chanting: “You made us *things!* Not men! Not beasts! Part men, part beasts, *Things!*” Here the audience is given disturbingly close-up shots of grossly misshapen, hair-covered flesh, as the creatures, one after another, rush the camera (and the viewer) in desperate pursuit of their maker.¹⁰

Taking their cue from horror classics like *Dr Jekyll* and *Island of Lost Souls*, B-monster movies of the 1940s generated a number of variations on the mad-scientist/ ape-man formula. Blending sensationalist horror and crude science fiction, these films all hinged on the provocative notion of turning humans into apes or vice versa through

transplant operations of one dubious sort or another. Typical films of this sort are Paramount's *The Monster and the Girl* (1941), about a scientist who puts the brain of an innocent, executed man into the body of a gorilla, and Poverty Row classic *The Ape Man* (1943), featuring Bela Lugosi as a scientist who transforms himself, through gorilla spinal fluid injections into a creature who is part-man, part-ape. Edward Dmytryk's 1943 camp classic *Captive Wild Woman* presents an interesting twist on the theme in its creation of a female hybrid – a jungle ape who is transformed into the speechless and highly eroticized Paula Dupree through human sex hormone injections conducted by noted endocrinologist Dr. Sigmund Walters. The central plot tension emerges when Paula, who is found to have mysterious telepathic power over lions and tigers, is made assistant to circus animal trainer Fred Mason. Paula quickly falls in love with her new boss, and is pitched into a jealous rage upon meeting his fiancée. Paula's jealousy triggers an excessive amount of animal secretions, and she begins reverting to her former state, as her skin turns noticeably dark. Advertisements for the film highlighted the eroticized primitivism embodied in the mute Paula Dupree, describing her as a “shockingly savage Gorilla Girl” (Mank 202). In its overt identification of female sexuality with animality, *Captive Wild Woman* recalls Lota the Panther Woman of *Island of Lost Souls*, who also reverts to her former animal state when sexually aroused by the marooned Edward Parker. The fact that Lota has no character equivalent in Wells's novel (from which it is adapted), highlights the film's deliberate exploitation of what Barbara Creed calls the “monstrous-feminine,” an abject figure which “crosses or threatens to cross” the border between “normal and abnormal sexual desire” (11). In a rather sophisticated twist on this convention, *Cat People* would evoke the “monstrous-

feminine,” only to ultimately expose and subvert the would-be male gaze of the camera/viewer.

Captive Wild Woman presents a striking illustration of Hollywood horror’s strong tendency to code the metamorphic body in terms of both sexual perversion and racial otherness. The film’s juxtaposition of the laboratory (where species traits are manipulated) with trainer Fred Mason’s wild animal act, suggests an obvious morale: society must tame, or incarcerate, its “animalistic” tendencies – or risk degeneration. In *Island of Lost Souls*, Dr. Moreau, frustrated by Lota’s animal reversion, vows: “this time I’ll burn out all the animal in her. . . . I’ll make her completely human.” The metamorphic subject as racialized, sexualized primitive is present from horror’s very beginnings, as witnessed in Mamoulian’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.¹¹ Mamoulian’s overt racializing of the filmic Mr. Hyde is augmented by the character’s frenzied sexual appetite – a combination which, for an American audience, strongly identifies the figure with the myth of the black rapist.¹²

The technological apparatus of cinema, with its unmediated sensory impact, allowed for an entirely new medium of abhuman spectacle – one characterized by a much greater degree of visceral disturbance. Unique to filmic representations of bestial metamorphosis is the visual experience of transformation they offer, an experience heightened by rapid advancements in the areas of make-up techniques and cinematographic technology. No doubt, for a 1930s viewing audience, the most exciting moments of Mamoulian’s version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* would have been the transformation scenes, which, as one critic notes, were managed by the director “with

great technical virtuosity” (Prawer 93). Cultural historian David J. Skal describes them as follows:

The transformation scenes were ingeniously filmed, and relied on the manipulation of color filters that would be undetectable in the black-and-white film. The first signs of Hyde’s distorted features – wrinkles lines, enlarged nostrils, etc. – were painted directly on March’s face in red makeup. Photographed through a compensating red filter, the makeup was invisible to the camera. As the filter changed from red to blue, monstrous details seemed to erupt from the actor’s face. (142)

Considered in this context, the most striking aspect of Lewton’s *Cat People* may well be the technical virtuosity with which it *hides* its transformation. *Cat People* is certainly an anomaly in this regard. Like so many of its predecessors in the horror genre, it is a film about human-animal metamorphosis; and yet it denies its viewers the gratification of a transformation scene. To understand the significance of this strategic denial, we must recall that the metamorphic subjects in classical Hollywood horror are, like the devolutionary “abhuman” subjects of the British *fin-de-siècle* from which they are descended, abject subjects. As Hurley notes, “Whereas the Darwinian narrative was a non-telic one, governed by natural processes that worked in no particular direction and towards no particular end, the nineteenth-century imagination was preoccupied with the prospect of the reversal of evolution, insofar as this was understood as a synonym for ‘progress’” (10). The metamorphic subjects of Hollywood horror are visual emblems of the threat implied by the so-called “reversal of evolution.” In neglecting to show the transformation scene, and thus deferring the viewer’s gratification, the film upsets the

linear logic inherent in the metamorphic transformations of classical Hollywood horror, thus troubling the logic of identity all the more. As such, *Cat People* invokes a viewerly response characterized not by voyeuristic primitivism or abject revulsion, but rather by the unsettling experience of uncertainty itself.

***Cat People*: The first ordinary horror film**

Cat People has been credited as the first “major supernatural horror film” to feature ordinary characters in a contemporary, urban American setting (Newman 65). Lewton disdained what he called “run-of-the-mill weird” horror films featuring “European nobles of dark antecedents, mad scientists, man-created monsters” – characters who were “very remote from the audiences’ experiences.” Chief among Lewton’s genre-defying innovations was to put, in his words, “normal people – engaged in normal occupations” in contact with “the strange, the weird, and the occult” (qtd in Newman 65). *Cat People* is thus notable for its unprecedented attempt to inject the supernatural directly into what would be viewed by 1940s Americans as a distinctly modern, realistic setting. Lewton’s self-appointed task, it seems, was to *modernize* horror, to make terror more credible for American audiences – a task aided in no small part by the country’s increasing immersion in the Second World War. Lewton never made a secret of his distaste for conventional horror; in fact, much of what we might point to as innovative in *Cat People* and his later films emerges out of his attempt to creatively circumvent the “horror formula” – often through oblique references to the supernatural. “The effect,” notes film critic Kim Newman, “was to sidestep the

audience's cynicism: the world of the story is established as identical with the world of the audience . . . and the supernatural is thus the more terrifying." Newman cites this approach as the "dominant mode of contemporary horror," noting how recent authors like Stephen King have effectively rendered "werewolf-up-a-tree gothics somewhat quaint" (65).

Given this background, it is not without significance that Lewton was in fact assigned his titles by a film production company anxious to tap into what had become, by the early 1940s, a proven market for "werewolf-up-a-tree gothics."¹³ Upon hearing of his first assignment with RKO Pictures, the audience-tested, and highly exploitable title "Cat People," Lewton is reported to have remarked to his scriptwriter DeWitt Bodeen, "There's no helping it – we're stuck with that title. If you want to get out now, I won't hold it against you" (Bodeen, qtd in Newman 9). Urged to create a film that would fit the title, the well-read Lewton set about tracking down everything he could find relating to cat people in literature. Lewton was no stranger to the territory; in the July 1930 issue of *Weird Tales* magazine, he published a folkloric "were beast" story called "The Bagheeta," about an Arthurian youth who is commissioned to kill a panther woman in the mythological forests of Eastern Europe. Among his American sources, Lewton also consulted Ambrose Bierce's "The Eyes of a Panther" (1892), a story which adapts the rich legacy of cat-human, shape-shifting lore to the drama of the American frontier. Lewton, it turns out, came very close to filming a loose adaptation of Algernon Blackwood's short story "Ancient Sorceries." The proposed adaptation, explains Edmund Bansak, was "set to open in a snowbound Balkan village recently occupied by a Nazi Panzer division. By day the village inhabitants are docile and cooperative; by night

they become carnivorous beasts who reduce German soldiers to shredded uniforms. After the slaughter, a girl flees the village, travels to New York, and falls in love” (123). As this description suggests, Lewton’s original storyline, inspired by Blackwood, makes an explicit connection between supernatural folklore and the all-too-realistic modern terrors of war. Lewton, however, was concerned with presenting characters with whom American viewers could relate, and ultimately decided to eliminate the exotic setting of the Blackwood-inspired draft. He then transplanted the film to New York, and in an effort to downplay the mythological-folkloric aspects of his sources, opted instead for a more ambiguous treatment of the supernatural.

Cat People derives its horror from what it does not show, from the suggestion of a presence which lingers but never fully appears, a presence hovering on the threshold of both life and death, of the real and the imaginary. Lewton himself is quoted as remarking “If you make the screen dark enough, the mind’s eye will read anything into it you want! We’re great ones for dark patches” (qtd in Siegel 32). J. P. Telotte suggests that, in *Cat People* and other Lewton productions, “the ominous and ubiquitous dark patches . . . shoulder a heavy structural and thematic weight.” According to Telotte’s Jungian analysis, “the absence marked by those dark patches speaks of a fundamental – and disturbing – relationship between man and his world: it signals a black hole or vacant meaning in the physical realm which, in spite of man’s natural desire to fill it with consciousness and significance, persistently and troublingly remains open” (22). Telotte’s allusion to a “black hole . . . in the physical realm” evokes Lewton’s consistent interest in phenomena which defy the alleged mastery of human vision – or, what Donna

Haraway has called the “conquering gaze from nowhere” (*Simians* 188).¹⁴ Throughout modernity, the human’s preeminent sense of sight – associated with the power of reason and the mastery of nature – has worked to secure human transcendence. Lewton’s contribution to horror cinema was to emphasize the unseen, to threaten that supposed transcendence with an invisible presence. In *Cat People*, this presence is signaled by the figure of the animal, which is transposed from a spectatorial body, or imperial object par excellence, to a privileged sign of spectrality, a fleeting presence.

In terms of its plot, *Cat People* is a variation on the twentieth-century werewolf narrative, introduced by Universal Pictures’ 1935 production, *Werewolf of London*, and then canonized in the popular imagination by Universal’s 1941 box-office smash, *The Wolf Man*. *Cat People* opens at the Central Park zoo, where the fashion artist Irena Dubrovna, a Serbian immigrant, meets Ollie, a self-described “good plain Americano.” Ollie is intrigued by Irena’s Serbian heritage, and particularly the stories of her village’s cursed past involving witches, cat people, and the Serbian King John’s triumph over the oppressive Marmelukes. A brief courtship ensues and the couple is soon married. Tensions arise when the two fail to consummate their marriage because of Irena’s fears that she might turn into a cat if sexually aroused – a carryover from her village’s cursed past. Ollie dismisses Irena’s fears as being based in mere fairy tales, and eventually sends her to a psychiatrist named Dr. Judd. Irena, convinced that her problem is spiritual rather than psychological, resists Dr. Judd’s treatment. When Ollie begins to fall for a co-worker named Alice, Irena’s jealousy apparently triggers her metamorphosis into a cat, though the audience never actually sees the transformation. Alice begins to suspect that

Irena is stalking her in the form of a predatory cat, and expresses her fears to Dr. Judd. Ollie, advised by Dr. Judd, decides to have his wife “put away for observation and restraint,” but fails to carry through with the arrangement when Irena refuses to show herself. In the film’s penultimate scene, Ollie and Alice are confronted by the shadowy figure of a panther in their drafting office, which they barely manage to scare off by waving a t-square/cross. Irena, returning home, finds Dr. Judd in her apartment. After Judd moves in to kiss Irena, he is attacked by a panther and is killed. Irena, apparently wounded in the scuffle by Judd’s cane-sword, escapes to the zoo, where she frees a caged panther and collapses, dead. The film’s final image is of Ollie and Alice standing over an amorphous black body, which could be either a human or animal form.

Zoo animals

The film opens with a close-up image of a panther pacing behind the bars of its cage in the Central Park zoo. As the camera tracks back from the panther, the shot reveals a second enclosure which surrounds the animal cage, a short railing behind which a small crowd of smiling, middle-class couples stroll about to the carnival-like sounds of an organ grinder. The double enclosure created by the cage and railing, which together separate the panther from its human spectators, immediately establishes the film’s preoccupation with borders and boundaries, and, by extension, the possibility of transgression. Just outside the railing stands the fashion artist, Irena, who is apparently attempting to sketch the caged panther, but in frustration, tears from the sketchbook her most recent effort and tosses it toward a trashcan. The paper wad misses the can and falls

at the feet of Ollie, who, leisurely nursing a soda, calls Irena's attention to a nearby sign which reads: "Let no one say, and say it to your shame, that all was beauty here, until you came." The flirtatious Ollie interrupts Irena's next attempt to toss out her work and disposes of it himself with a self-satisfied smile. Before packing up her things, Irena rips out one last failed sketch, tears it down the middle and lets it drop to the ground. Ollie, gesturing at the discarded sketch, playfully lectures Irena with a wagging finger: "Let no one say, and say it to your shame..." After the two characters stroll off, the innocuous tone of the opening scene is belied by the camera, which, independent of the characters, follows the torn paper as it's blown by the wind until it rests face up, revealing the disturbing image of a panther impaled by a sword through its torso. The image is far from the naturalistic depiction of the animal the viewer is likely to expect. Indeed, the disconnect between the actual panther in the cage and that in the image is significant. In Irena's sketched image, the panther, pierced through by the proverbial phallic sword, assumes an alert, defensive posture. Its body is twisted, its paw are up, claws out, and its jaw is open in a roar. This image is a dominant motif in the film. The image's analogue in the film is the statue of Serbian King John on horseback triumphantly raising a sword upon which a dead cat hangs – the centerpiece of Irena's apartment. The pierced cat of the statue is, as Irena will later explain to Ollie, "not really a cat. It's meant to represent the evil ways into which my village had once fallen." A careful viewer may have identified Irena's sketch with the statue of King John, which appears as the backdrop to the film's opening epigraph:

Even as fog continues to lie in the valleys, so does ancient sin cling to the low places, the depressions in the world consciousness.

*The Anatomy of Atavism –**Dr. Louis Judd*

Superimposed in this fashion, the epigraph and the statue together establish a link between animality and repressed evil in the human psyche – a connection whose main spokesperson in the film is the psychiatrist Dr. Judd. Like the cat depicted in the statue of King John, the panther in Irena's sketch is "not really a cat" (despite her use of the live zoo model), but a figurative representation of her interior state – a representation that she hides from the unsuspecting Ollie, but which the roving camera tantalizingly lays bare for the audience.

Irena's depiction of the cat strongly resembles another dominant cat image of the film, an Henri Rousseau-inspired art-deco jungle scene which appears on a screen in Irena's apartment. The scene features a highly stylized black panther on the prowl, its mouth open in a roar and its eyes shifting in pursuit of its prey. In addition to being a prominent decorative prop in Irena's apartment, the image is the backdrop for the film's opening credits. In this framing capacity (similar to the image of the King John statue and epigraph) the image informs the viewer's reading of the zoo panther. Through the zoo animal's visual-semiotic association with the screen image, Irena's sketch, and the statue of King John, the literal animal is rendered virtually absent, erased, no longer a body, but a sign. In this regard, the animal's status as a zoo animal is altogether fitting, and serves only to reinforce its spectral identity.

The zoo is a crucial signifying space in *Cat People*. The Central Park zoo setting comprises both the opening and closing shots of the film; and, second to Irena's

apartment (a space strongly associated with an animal cage), it is the most frequented space in the film, appearing in at least eight scenes.¹⁵ A simple, historical rationale for this is the sheer popularity of zoos in the early 1940s. Like Hollywood films, zoos offered relatively inexpensive recreation during the Depression and World War II. In the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration funneled millions of dollars into urban zoo construction projects (Hanson 4). Given Lewton's explicit interest in the ordinary – in “normal people – engaged in normal occupations” – the zoo, disarming by virtue of its familiarity, is a particularly apt choice of settings.

Despite their popular association with diversion and recreation, however, zoos are far from neutral in terms of their cultural and ideological implications. Zoos are one of the central cultural symbols of imposed order and containment in modern Western society. According to cultural anthropologist Paul Bouissac, “any zoo can be considered a sort of pedagogical discourse that contributes to a general system for interpreting the animal world. In this respect, it is a replica of the current zoological myths of the contextual [sic] culture” (115). Accordingly, modern western zoos tend to present “an evolutionary perspective that stresses specific differences along a hierarchical scale leading to the final, radical gap between animals and humans” (115). Indeed, a common criticism of zoos is that they are merely sites for demonstrating colonial power, or for exhibiting imperialism. Bob Mullan and Gary Marvin locate zoos among other “major social institutions in which living creatures are forcibly contained and controlled” (31). Prisons, mental asylums, and zoos, they note, all “share the characteristic that they demonstrate power relations” (31). In this sense, zoos are in fact “about humans, for zoos tell us stories of human power, the exercise of control and domination” (44-45).¹⁶ Zoos

facilitate this by establishing the human in the magisterial role of the spectator and the animal as the exhibited object. This is borne out in Foucault's analysis of modern surveillance practices and their relation to early menageries: "The Panopticon," he notes, "is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man" (*Discipline* 203).

The ideology of zoos, and the marginalization of the animals which are housed therein, are vividly evoked in the minimalistic zoo setting of *Cat People*, where three bare, box-like cages set up on a raised concrete slab serve to highlight the animal's total isolation from its natural habitat. Stripped of its natural surroundings – of that which, under normal circumstances serves to hide it from our view – the animal is rendered absolutely visible. In this way the zoo is a perfect illustration of the Foucaultian link between containment, with its connotations of mastery and control, and surveillance.¹⁷ "Visibility," Foucault states in his analysis of Bentham's Panopticon, "is a trap." Like the early menageries, the Panopticon established a spatial configuration in which "each actor" is "perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (200); thus, "one finds" in both the Panopticon and the menagerie, "a similar concern with individualizing observation, with characterization and classification, with the analytical arrangement of space" (203). I shall return to this theme of identification, and the film's related treatment of "tracking" below. Suffice it here to say that Foucault's analysis of visibility and containment in menageries is borne out by Mullan and Marvin's work on the cultural history of zoos. "The traditional menagerie," they note,

established a rigid separation between animals and humans while allowing the humans the closest visual experience of the animals. The notion that an animal was entitled to some sort of privacy, that it could absent itself

from the human gaze, was totally alien to this sort of exhibition. It was on display, the public had paid to see it and therefore it should be visible. (70)

In its austere minimalism, the zoo set in *Cat People* is a throwback to traditional menageries; as such, it functions as a remarkably efficient visual index of the film's primary themes.¹⁸

Transgressive animals

Given the zoo's association with visual mastery, the most striking characteristic of the zoo panther in *Cat People* is not its objectification, but rather its elusiveness; despite its visible containment, we fear its imminent escape. In *Cat People* the animal is a figure of transgression. Returning to Irena's discarded sketch of the panther, it is useful to note how the symbolic significance of the image is further enhanced by its identification with litter – or, what social anthropologist Mary Douglas calls “matter out of place” (35). According to Douglas, dirt (including litter and so on) “is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (35). The opening scene establishes a strong association between animals and the ideologically fraught act of classification. Animals in *Cat People* are privileged markers of categories and spaces, as we see in both the figure of the caged zoo animal and in the discarded image of the panther. In both cases, the animal marks a space of wildness contained within, or framed, by a civilized (and civilizing) surrounding space – the greater urban setting on the one hand, and Irena's outward restraint (signaled by her

sharp, professional dress and social modesty), on the other. Yet Irena's discarded drawing never makes it into the trashcan. However, the full dramatic import of Irena's social transgression is made manifest only in the camera's lingering attention to the wind-blown sketch, once the couple has wandered off. The camera lingers in order to disclose, both for itself and the viewing audience, precisely that which Irena would not reveal to her new friend and potential mate. The close-up shot of the sword-pierced animal heightens not only the scandal of the image itself, but also the scandal of its disclosure by the camera, thus calling attention to the invasive tendency of cinema itself. The fact that the image is torn half-way down the middle – rendering it a ruptured representation – only enhances the self-reflexive quality of the scene.¹⁹ Irena's sketched image of the pierced animal visually discloses the troubled state of her soul (rendering that which is interior, exterior), but *only* as a result of the camera's prying "eye." On two different levels, the figure of the animal is marked as scandalous.

The animal is also rendered, in this opening scene, as a privileged figure of communication, of "special" revelation. This correlates with the animal's association with transgression, or movement across borders. In *Cat People*, the animal signals the threat of escape. This threat is manifested throughout the film, long before Irena's release of the panther from its cage in the closing scene. On two occasions, the zookeeper leaves the key in the cage lock – a lapse of judgment which the zookeeper himself acknowledges but casually dismisses: "Oh, I'm always forgettin' it. T'aint no worry in it. Nobody'd want to steal one of them critters." On the first occasion Irena returns the key, under the watchful eye of Dr. Judd, who has come to the zoo in order to

track down his truant patient. Confronting Irena, Judd delivers a classic Freudian interpretation of the scenario:

JUDD. You resist temptation admirably.

IRENA. Temptation?

JUDD. The, uh, key.

IRENA. Well, why would I want it?

JUDD. For many reasons. There is in some cases a psychic need to loose evil upon the world. And all of us carry within us a desire for death. You fear the panther, yet you're drawn to him, again and again. Couldn't you turn to him as an instrument of death?

According to Judd's Freudian analysis (to which I will return later), the zoo animal is both a symbol of repressed desires, those of both Irena and humans generally – and a physical threat to life. Indeed, the savage threat embodied in the caged animal is played up repeatedly in the film by close-up shots of its roaring and hissing (timed, always, to coincide with some spoken reference by a character to its ferocity or malice).

Cat People presents boundaries and borders only to call attention to the threat of their transgression. This motif is reflected in the film's exploitation of the animal as a conventional symbol of savagery. However, this particular deployment of naturalistic animal symbolism denotes only *one* function, one reading of animals in the film. Notably, this reading is in fact strenuously resisted by the film itself – explicitly by Irena, and implicitly in the film's evoking of the supernatural through the figure of the spectral animal. As suggested by the zookeeper's remarks concerning the beast which is at once "like a leopard, but not a leopard," the animal is a far more elusive figure than any one-

dimensional allegorical-symbolic reading (such as that presented by Dr. Judd) would allow.

Fantastic animals

One of the most curious exchanges in *Cat People* occurs between Irena and the Central Park zookeeper. Irena, in one of her frequent visits to the zoo panther, has just remarked on the creature's beauty. She's quickly rebuked and corrected by the zookeeper: "No, he ain't beautiful. He's an evil critter, ma'am. You read your bible, *Revelations*. Where the book's talkin' about the worst beast of them all. It says 'And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard. . . . Yes Ma'am. *Like* a leopard, but *not* a leopard. I guess that fits this feller.'" The scene is a brief one, just over one minute long. But while the zoo-keeper's remarks might seem like mere melodrama – fanatical rhetoric designed to play up the animal's symbolic connection to evil – they suggest a fitting entry point for a consideration of the film's treatment of animality. Most striking about the zookeeper's remarks is the way in which they place the creature in a liminal position between being and non-being. Eschewing altogether the taxonomical precision associated with zoology (the discourse most appropriate for zoos), the zookeeper insists on the creature's seemingly intrinsic ambiguity – as if the black panther pacing behind the bars of the cage were the embodiment of the very tension implied by figurative language, that between identity and difference.²⁰ Indeed, according to the zookeeper, it is the creature's ambiguity, its mere *likeness* to a leopard, that makes it so menacing. The

zookeeper's remarks resonate with the film's overall treatment of the animal as a figure of spectrality.

On one level, the zookeeper's remarks about the black panther address the creature's taxonomical relation to the leopard; in this way, they amount to the rather banal observation that the black panther is *like* the leopard in the sense that both animals are of the same genus. At the same time, the comment may also function as an *ontological* characterization; that is, the status of the "evil critter" is somehow only *like* that of a real animal. In fact, the designation "panther" is in fact never spoken or referenced (for instance, on a sign or label) within the zoo setting of the film. What's more, though it remains on the periphery of the screen, the animal in the cage directly adjacent to the black panther's is (as anyone can clearly see) a leopard – a fact which only serves to emphasize the zookeeper's rather affected use of figurative description.

A spectral animal haunts the world of *Cat People*. The central image of the zoo panther attests to the peculiar status of the wild animal (in the film and in modernity more generally) as a creature which exists *in absentia*. Like Berger's zoo spectator, we the viewers of *Cat People* fear that what we are looking at, that which stands directly before us, has somehow already vanished, escaped our mastery. In his appropriation of this creature, Lewton hit on an ingenious vehicle for the surprising reappearance of the supernatural in the contemporary urban world. *Cat People*, through the figure of the spectral animal, reasserts the fantastic – not as a throwback to premodern folklore, but as a phenomenon with its own distinctly modern inflections. As Lewton's unorthodox approach to horror suggests, the notion of a modern fantastic is itself transgressive. In

order to appreciate the implications of Lewton's engagement with the fantastic, it will be useful to consider classic American horror's treatment of the supernatural, particularly as it relates to the trope of metamorphosis.

Classic horror metamorphoses are generally either supernatural or "natural" in type. *Dracula* and *The Wolf Man* are two well-known examples of the former, while *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Island of Lost Souls*, and Hollywood's spate of 1940s Ape-Men pictures offer case studies of the latter. In films depicting "natural" metamorphoses – often cross-listed in both horror and science-fiction genres – the explanation for the transformation is always framed in terms of a recognizably "scientific" discourse (gland grafts, spinal fluid transfusions, brain transplants and the like), and is thus rendered "natural" within the fictional world projected by the film. In either case, however, whether supernatural or natural, the metamorphosis is always accounted for in some satisfactory fashion, and usually fairly early on in the film.

Despite this basic difference, both types of films present a gothicized world that is fundamentally non-mimetic. Classical horror films were frankly not interested in presenting what early American viewers would perceive as a modern, realistic, ordinary world. First-generation horror's penchant for exotic settings is a strong tip-off in this regard. As Robin Wood suggests, "In the 30s, horror is always foreign. . . . it is always external to Americans, who may be attacked by it physically but remain (superficially, that is) uncontaminated by it morally" (77). Andrew Tudor has characterized these generally nineteenth-century foreign settings as an "elsewhen," wherein "[c]astles, old manorhouses, country inns and elaborate laboratories repeat themselves from film to

film, forming a highly distinctive setting and, no doubt, serving to divorce the fictions from their audience's immediate context of experience" (123).²¹ Similarly, David Skal refers to classical horror films as a series of "nightmare[s] of geographically indeterminate 'Europe'" which "anxiously blu[r] together elements of America, England, and the Continent" in a "nearly surreal pastiche of accents, architecture and costumes, like the scrambled impressions of a soldier/tourist on a whirlwind tour of duty" (213-215).

Certainly, the appearance of the supernatural is more apt to be taken for granted when it occurs in an alien landscape, as in the case of George Waggner's *The Wolf Man* (1941). *The Wolf Man* opens with a brief, non-diegetic explanation of lycanthropy. As the camera zooms in on a shelf of encyclopedias, an anonymous hand draws a volume from the shelf and turns to the following entry, which is offered to the viewer in a close-up shot:

LYCANTHROPY (Werewolfism). A disease of the mind in which human beings imagine they are wolf-men. According to an old LEGEND which persists in certain localities, the victims actually assume the physical characteristics of the animal. There is a small village near TALBOT CASTLE which still claims to have had gruesome experiences with this supernatural creature.

Though the entry begins with a nod to the modern, scientific perspective (according to which lycanthropy is merely a "disease of the mind"), with its capitalization of LEGEND and its invocation of a geographically unspecified "small village near TALBOT CASTLE," the entry immediately signals to viewers that the world projected by the film,

the one into which the viewer is about to be thrust, is an alternate world in which supernatural phenomena “still” take place. This is further signaled by the general *mise en scène* of the film, whose bizarre pairings of covered wagons and modern automobiles, detectives and ancient gypsies, telescopes and pentagrams, castles and misty forests, ultimately mesh to create a virtual fairy-tale world. Indeed, the film flaunts its supernatural provenance with no less than three explicit man-to-werewolf transformation scenes – and it does so in the face of persistent “scientific” and quasi-psychoanalytic objections from characters like Dr. Lloyd, who characterizes werewolfism as a form of psycho-somatic phenomena comparable to “stigmata appearing in the skin of zealots,” and Larry’s father, who declares Lycanthropy a “variety of schizophrenia,” and the product of “self-hypnotism.” Universal’s decision to soundly trump science with fairy-tale is reflected in its insistence on the scenes, which were in fact absent from Curt Siodmak’s original script, which presented a much more subtle rendering of the story. Not inclined to deviate from the widely popular formula established by its foundational monster films (including *Dracula* and *The Mummy*), Universal, in the end, demanded that the scenes be added (Brunas 272) – as if to verify, unambiguously, the oft-chanted local legend of Talbot Castle and its neighboring village:

Even a man who is pure in heart
 And says his prayers by night
 May become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms
 And the autumn moon is bright

Well-trained in suspending their disbelief, early horror viewers found it just as easy to accept the pseudo-scientific tenor of early science-fiction/horror crossbreeds.

Films like *Island of Lost Souls*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and *The Ape Man* are just as blatantly non-mimetic as their supernatural counterparts; despite bearing a superficial resemblance to legitimate scientific theories and concepts, science-fiction/horror's positing of cross-species brain transplants and gland grafting is every bit as transparently non-realistic as the existence of vampires and those who "become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms." As Kathleen Spencer has noted, drawing on the work of Polish critic Andrzej Zgorzelski, science-fiction writers "direct their efforts" toward making the fictional world of their texts appear "ordinary...normal, everyday-like" according to the laws established within the world projected by the text. In other words, though the scientific laws of the fictional world do not exactly correspond to those of empirical reality, the reader (or viewer) accepts the events as "natural" according to the reality presented in the text.

As is the case for both types of transformation narratives – supernatural and natural alike – dramatic tension is invested primarily in the horrifying *effects* of the transformation event, rather than in the nature of the event per se, or in its cause. Given this context, *Cat People* is notable for its unprecedented attempt to inject the supernatural directly into what would be viewed by 1940s Americans as a modern, realistic setting. *Cat People* presents a direct and sustained confrontation between natural and supernatural explanations; for the majority of the film, the viewer is uncertain of whether or not Irena Dubrovna is truly a cat woman, capable of taking the form of a panther (as she insists she is), or merely a victim of psychosis (as the psychiatrist Dr. Judd maintains). In its deliberate withholding of crucial information, the film renders Irena's

“true” identity indeterminate, thus prolonging the viewer’s hesitation as we puzzle over how to make sense of her alleged curse. The film’s stubborn indeterminacy resonates significantly with “the fantastic” as elaborated by Tzvetan Todorov:²²

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings – with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently.

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. (25)

Though Todorov defines “the fantastic” within a framework of strict genre delineations, his analysis, as Lucie Armitt points out, actually works to subvert the very classificatory system which he has established (31). According to Armitt, Todorov’s book-length exploration of the fantastic profoundly resists the spatializing vocabulary of genre theory, opting time and again for a dynamic model based on “temporal disruption” (32). In its emphasis on the reader’s temporal experience of uncertainty, Todorov’s fantastic eludes the spatializing genre-logic implied by categories like “the uncanny” and

“the marvelous”: “the realm of the fantastic takes up no space at all. Instead it demarcates frontier territory” (Armitt 32). Indeed, we see this in Todorov’s attempt to justify the seemingly paradoxical notion of “an evanescent genre” (Todorov 42) – that is, one liable to change forms at any given moment – Todorov analogizes the fantastic to the “classic definition of the *present*” as “a pure limit between the past and the future.” “The comparison is not gratuitous,” he insists, continuing:

the marvelous corresponds to an unknown phenomenon, never seen as yet, still to come – hence to a future; in the uncanny, on the other hand, we refer the inexplicable to known facts, to a previous experience, and thereby to the past. As for the fantastic itself, the hesitation which characterizes it cannot be situated, by and large, except in the present. (42)

Here, Todorov analogizes all three “genres,” the fantastic, the uncanny, and the marvelous, in terms of the temporal, precisely in order to highlight the peculiar nature of the fantastic – a genre that is, in a significant sense, no genre at all.

As a film whose dramatic effect hinges on the viewer’s uncertainty in the face of the supernatural, *Cat People* is a striking exemplar of the fantastic – and thus an anomaly in classic horror. Given the film’s unorthodox approach to horror, and its preoccupation with borders, and border-crossing, Lucie Armitt’s post-structural reappropriation of Todorov’s fantastic serves to illuminate the transgressive quality of the fantastic in Lewton. As I have suggested, Lewton’s primary means of introducing the fantastic is through traces, suggestions of a presence that is, somehow, both there and not-there – a presence exemplified by the fleeting figure of the animal.

Cat People continually posits a presence that has always-already just vanished. In this way, the film confounds both the viewer's and the film medium's reliance on vision as a means of grabbing hold of – and so, gaining mastery over – the immediate environment. In its refusal to show, for instance, Irena's transformation into a cat, *Cat People* rejects the spatializing logic of both genre classification and visual mastery in favor of a radical emphasis on the temporal – on the present as “a pure limit between past and future.” Indeed, the most compelling figures in *Cat People*, be they human or nonhuman (a Serbian-born fashion designer, a zoo animal, a muddy print), are those which resist immediate comprehension – signs of something just past, or of an imminent threat.

***Cat People's* “logic of the trace”**

Given the genre conventions and audience expectations evoked by a title like “Cat People,” the absence of a transformation scene in the film amounts to a strategic erasure, and so, justifies Lewton's claim to have “tossed away the horror formula.” As a result of this erasure, the viewer – indeed, the camera itself – is put in the position of a detective in search of the ever elusive monster-culprit. This is best exemplified in the much discussed “stalking scene” which occurs about two-thirds of the way through the film, in which we see tracks, but no monster.

In the lead-up to the scene, Irena discovers Ollie and Alice together in a restaurant and hides just outside the entrance as the couple steps out into the chilly night air. “You cold?” Ollie asks, as Alice buttons up her coat. Alice's retort, “A cat just walked over

my grave” sets the stage for the sequence to follow. Declining Ollie’s offer to walk her home, Alice sets off alone on a stone wall-lined sidewalk cutting through Central Park, with Irena trailing behind wrapped in a black fur coat, just out of sight. Playing up the expressionistic juxtaposing of lights and shadows, a central stylistic motif of *Cat People*, the scene follows both Alice and her pursuer in parallel, cross-cutting fashion, with tightly focused profile shots, as the women pass through alternating pools of light and shadow cast by the street lamps. The suggestion of a stalking, and the attendant psychological tension, are enhanced by the soundtrack’s elimination of all sounds except the clicking of the women’s heels on the sidewalk. The tension increases when the intercutting shots cease, and the camera comes to rest on the figure of Alice (the pursued), who, alarmed by the sudden cessation of sound from the second pair of heels, slows to a stop under the light of a street lamp, and uncomfortably looks around. Here the camera angle shifts from a sustained profile shot, to a position directly in front of Alice, thus offering the viewer Alice’s point-of-view as she turns to look behind her; of course, nothing is there, and not a sound is heard. Alice, now genuinely frightened, runs to a lamppost, which she clutches in panic as the sound of a panther-like growl mysteriously surfaces on the soundtrack, only to merge seamlessly, and immediately, into the hissing sound of air-brakes as a bus rushes into the frame from the right.²³ Just before boarding the bus, Alice turns once again to investigate a rustling sound emitting from the bushes above the wall behind her. A point-of-view shot reveals violent movement in the bushes. As the noticeably rattled Alice steps onto the bus, the driver remarks “You look as if you’ve seen a ghost.” Taken together, the bus driver’s comment, along with Alice’s previous quip about a cat walking over her grave, serve to frame the

otherwise wordless stalking scene with spectral references, thus reinforcing the suggestion of an invisible presence. In the casualness of their delivery, this set of lines presents a perfect example of Lewton's suggestive approach.

After the bus takes off, with Alice on board, the camera resumes its shot of the bushes, still ominously shaking. Curiously, the angle of this shot is the same as Alice's previous point-of-view shot, though she has now departed with the bus. From here the camera, now moving independently from the characters (as in the film's opening scene, discussed above), departs for the zoo, apparently in search of Irena, whom we have not seen since the beginning of Alice's walk through Central Park. The ensuing sequence presents a series of disconnected visual shots, implicitly held together by a continuous soundtrack. As the sequence begins, we hear the off-screen sounds of bleating sheep. The first brief visual shot is of the black panther backing, as if alarmed or threatened, into the corner of its cage. The second fleeting shot is of the leopard in the neighboring cage, twitching its head to the right and turning its ear as if in response to the bleating sheep. From here we are taken to the source of the bleating sounds as the camera cuts to a muddy field where a small herd of sheep shuffles anxiously from left to right in the frame, revealing what appears to be three slaughtered sheep lying in the mud. The presence of a fence and back wall suggest that the field is located in the zoo. As the sheep pass from left to right, a figure (apparently, a caretaker or zookeeper) enters the frame from the right, carrying a lamp, and moving towards the slumped sheep bodies. As the zookeeper crouches down with his lamp for a closer examination, the camera cuts briefly to an anonymous shot of paw impressions in the muddy ground, illuminated by a flashlight or lamp – presumably that of the zookeeper. At this cut, the soundtrack goes

silent. Another cut brings us back to the zookeeper in the muddy field, who, standing up from his investigation, raises a whistle to his mouth. Just as the whistle's sharp blast breaks the soundtrack silence, the camera cuts again to the paw marks which now appear as muddy prints on a sidewalk. A moving close-up shot follows the animal tracks from left to right as they gradually morph from paw marks to high heel prints. As this happens, we hear one blast of the whistle (corresponding visual: animal prints), then silence (visual: morphing tracks), then the sound of heels on pavement coupled with another blast from the whistle (visual: high heel prints). Once again the presence of a light source, tracking with the camera, serves to illuminate the marks, suggesting the presence of a tracker figure whom the viewer is likely to identify as the zookeeper. As the sound of the heels and whistle continue, the camera cuts to a shot of Irena walking to a lamp post at which she stops and wipes her mouth with a handkerchief. Here the sound of the whistle, now in shorter, more frequent blasts, merges with the sound of a taxi which, entering the frame from the left, slows to a stop before the startled Irena: "Taxi, lady?"

This entire sequence, beginning with Alice's walk across Central Park and ending with Irena and the taxi, exemplifies the sort of stylistic innovations which Lewton and Tourneur enacted in order to avoid the direct visualization of Irena's transformation into a wild panther. In rendering her transformation this way, the film replaces sensationalism with suggestion. In the first part of the sequence, the camera transitions from an "objective" presentation to a subjective presentation, as is reflected in the shift from crosscutting profile shots of Alice and Irena, to Alice's limited point-of-view shots. The inherently limited nature of subjective presentation is demonstrated in the fact that, once

the shift is enacted, we no longer *see* Irena; she has disappeared altogether – leaving both Alice and the audience to speculate about mysterious growl sounds and rustling bushes.

What is particularly striking about the second half of the sequence is that the camera itself, even when it moves independently from the characters, is rendered equally limited in its ability to visualize, and thus comprehend, Irena’s “nature.” Indeed, the limited ability of the *camera* to fully comprehend these strange phenomena is the primary contributing factor in the audience’s uncertainty regarding Irena’s status. As if to emphasize the camera’s inability, the film equates it with the inherently limited *character* point-of-view. For instance, in the second part of the sequence, the camera, though independent from the characters, is associated with Alice’s limited perspective through its repetition of the point-of-view shot of the bushes. Similarly, though we are initially led to believe that the spotlight which follows the animal tracks is provided by the zookeeper’s lamp – as Chris Fujiwara points out, the moving light should instead be read as “a nondiegetic component of the search by the *camera*” (76). That is, since no human appears when the camera “catches up” with Irena, we can only conclude that the camera itself is the (merely subjective) agent of the tracking. Going a step further, Mary Ann Doane points out that the camera in this scene “cannot quite ‘catch up’ with Irena until the metamorphosis is complete – she/it is always just outside the edge of the frame” (51). In this way, Doane notes, “the film expounds the logic of the trace, a logic which undermines the cinema’s reliance on visibility as a standard of truth” (51).

Given the film’s preoccupation with the supernatural, and this particular sequence’s spectral references, we may conclude that the frustrated efforts of the camera – its utter inability to comprehend Irena and the events surrounding her – are in fact an

indication of the inherent limitations of human seeing – even perhaps, of sight itself. Ironically, the disjointed shots of the camera’s independent “search,” which constitute a clear stylistic break from the film’s general presentation (Paul 171), suggests to viewers that something very important is about to be revealed – yet what is actually revealed is the utter elusiveness of Irena’s transformation. To be sure, the film’s dependence on the “logic of the trace” is by no means confined to the tracking scene. In the very next scene, back in Irena’s apartment, a visibly dejected Irena resists Ollie’s attempts at reconciliation and resigns herself to a bath, behind a locked bedroom door. Before tracking up to reveal Irena, sobbing in the tub, the camera lingers on the image of the tub’s claw feet – evoking the traces of blood which, we’re led to believe, the bath has been drawn in order to clean away. Later, after Irena follows Alice into the YWCA swimming pool area, the only visible clues we’re given of the cat’s presence (beyond an amorphous shadow cast on the wall) are the claw marks discovered on Alice’s robe. Then, in the film’s penultimate scene, in which Alice and Ollie are confronted by a black panther in their drafting room office, the cat’s/Irena’s departure from the building is signaled only by the still-turning revolving doors. Alice, having just registered the clue, notes the lingering presence of “Irena’s perfume, strong, sweet.” In short, *Cat People*’s representation of metamorphosis, Irena-turned-cat, is always deferred. The viewers are forced to imagine what is happening – what *has already happened* – just outside of the frame.

Tracking

In his thematic and stylistic use of tracking, Lewton calls to mind Terence Cave's study of recognition plots and their centrality to dramatic and narrative literature. As Cave notes, "The sign of recognition in drama and narrative fiction belongs, then, to the same mode of knowledge as the signature, the clue, the fingerprint or footprint and all the other tracks and traces that enable an individual to be identified, a criminal to be caught, a hidden event or state of affairs to be reconstructed" (250). Cave, following Carlo Ginzburg, traces this mode of knowledge to the ancient "hunting model," positing an analogue to the modern emphasis on recognition in the "set of signs in which the skilled hunter reads the narrative of a beast's passage – footprints, droppings, broken twigs, bent grasses" (250-1).²⁴ "The hunting model," Cave notes, "is certainly appropriate [as an analogue of modern recognition plots] in that it takes a characteristically sequential form: a sequence of contiguous signs leads to an identification which 'fits' the sequence and thus fills it with meaning" (251). Hunting, the tracking of beasts, requires certain "special skills" – skills, Cave suggests, that are "quite unlike those of the logician or the mathematician, not only because they are inductive rather than deductive but because the induction is based on an unquantifiable internalized ability to select significant detail on the margins of perception and make capital out of chance occurrences: the talent sometimes known as serendipity" (251). By their employment of these very same skills (to a similar end: accurate identification), criminal detection, connoisseurship, and psychoanalysis constitute the "modern equivalents" of the hunting model of epistemology.²⁵

Cat People makes a direct connection between tracking in the modern sense of recognition, or identification, and its ancient analogue of the hunting model. The scene in which the camera “tracks” the prints of Irena/the panther graphically illustrates the connection suggested by Carlo Ginzburg and elaborated by Cave. Lewton would go on to make the connection between animal tracking and modern criminal detection explicitly in his 1943 noir-horror hybrid film *The Leopard Man*; in *Cat People*, animal tracking is linked to psychoanalysis. In the case of both films, Lewton’s association of animal tracking with its “modern equivalents” serves to highlight the particular mode of knowledge implied in the process of identification – a process, as Terrence Cave suggests, upon which much, indeed, depends. For,

[u]nless an individual *can* be correctly identified, the system of laws, conventions and taboos on which society depends will be undermined. . . . To put it the other way round, the successful ‘tracking’ or identification of individual humans is the necessary precondition of any such system. Society is constituted by recognition, by a transference of the cynegetic [i.e. “hunting”] model to the realm of human relations. (252)

Understood as such, the process of identification constitutes the very grounds of social stability, or “satisfaction” (“the capture of the beast, the recovery of a threatened security”) – but not without a price. Though our knowledge systems and social structures no doubt depend upon the possibility of distinguishing one individual from another, the process of identification carries with it, not only the prospect of failure, but also the “implications of violence and coercion” (252). Identification is an aggressive procedure, both intrusive and exclusionary. Indeed, “[t]he hunter,” as Cave puts it, “coming face to

face with the beast in the jungle, might easily see in it the image of his own aggression” (252).

Much of the drama in *Cat People* revolves around the issue of Irena’s *identity* – who is she? According to Ollie, Irena’s dilemma consists in her failing to acknowledge her own *true* identity. When Ollie questions Irena about why they’ve never kissed, and Irena confesses to him that she’s “lived in dread of this moment,” Ollie, grabbing hold of Irena’s shoulders, declares:

Irena, now you’ve told something of the past, about King John, and the witches in the village, and the cat people descended from them. They’re fairy tales, Irena. Fairy Tales heard in your childhood. Nothing more than that. They’ve nothing to do with you, really. You’re Irena. You’re here in America. You’re so normal, you’re even in love with me, Oliver Reed, a good plain Americano. You’re so normal, you’re going to marry me.

And those fairy tales, you can tell ‘em to our children. They’ll love ‘em.

Irena’s problem, Ollie suggests, is that she fails to see who she really is – “You’re Irena” – that is, a normal, Americanized, would-be wife of a “good plain Americano.”

Ollie’s statements (like those of Dr. Judd, discussed below) expose both the prospect of failure, and the implication of coercion (albeit, gentle), in the process of identification.

Formally, the film’s status as a recognition plot is established in the film’s concluding line – “She never lied to us” – delivered by Ollie (to Alice), standing over the dead, ambiguous form of Irena. Here it seems, at curtain’s close, Irena’s identity is now conclusively established – she really *was* a cat-person. And yet, as the troubling image of

Irena's vaguely human-like form, draped in black fur on the sidewalk, suggests – what the film plays up most is not the satisfaction of identification, but its problematic nature.²⁶

Ultimately, *Cat People* may be seen as a failed recognition plot in the sense that its “monster” defies simple identification; Irena simply refuses to be pinned down. In Lewton's fantastic appropriation of traces as markers of spectrality, of a presence that is, ontologically speaking, there and not-there; and, in his reliance on “curse” over (individual) fault or pathology, the producer unravels the telos of (individual) identification defining both hunting and plot itself.

***Cat People* and the Oedipalized animal**

Mary Doane links *Cat People*'s failure to make Irena's transformation directly visible to the film's engagement with psychoanalytic discourse. In Freudian discourse, the cat, Doane notes, is “the signifier of a female sexuality which is self-enclosed, self-sufficient, and, above all, object-less” (51). Thus, *Cat People*'s failure to “image” Irena's transformation reflects the film's designation of “female sexuality as that excess which escapes psychoanalysis . . . that which inhabits the realm of the unknowable” (51-52). In Doane's analysis, *Cat People* is read as a critique of the psychoanalytic hermeneutic apparatus; the film, she notes, “demonstrates the limits of psychoanalysis and rationality in general when faced with femininity” (49). Though Doane does not mention Deleuze and Guattari in her analysis, she might well have. In developing their notion of becoming-animal, Deleuze and Guattari present a thoroughgoing critique of psychoanalysis and its “Oedipalization” of the animal – a critique which resonates

strikingly with *Cat People*'s juxtaposition of animality and psychoanalysis. Irena's resistance to Judd's psychoanalytic reading of her curse reflects the film's more general resistance to the classic horror monster formula, in which all of society's abject elements are written onto the individualized body of the monster, and, thus ejected from the civilized sphere. If Irena's curse is indeed a matter of the "soul" and not the mind, as Irena insists – if the "monster" is plural, rather than singular, as the film suggests – then Judd's tidy diagnosis (let alone his cure) is rendered suspect.

In their concept of becoming-animal, Deleuze and Guattari develop a radical retranscription of animality, rejecting the static logic of both naturalistic and mythic-symbolic models in favor of a thoroughgoing emphasis on multiplicity, dynamism, and interaction. Becoming-animal, Deleuze and Guattari note, "is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification" (*TP* 237). Rather, becoming-animal is a phenomenon characterized by "transversal communications between heterogeneous populations" (*TP* 239). In contrast to natural history, in which "Nature is conceived as an enormous *mimesis*," where each animal is defined in terms of its resemblances to other animals according to an imposed grid of ordered series or structures; *and* in contrast to a model of evolution which restricts transformation to the processes of descent and filiation within so-called homogeneous types – becoming-animal "concerns alliance. . . . *symbioses* that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation" (*TP* 238). Animals, in this sense, are creatures of becoming, rather than being; as such, they defy the logic of

identity and sameness. “Becoming is a rhizome,” suggest Deleuze and Guattari, “not a classificatory or genealogical tree” (*TP* 239).

In addition to being anti-naturalistic, the Deleuzian-Guattarian concept of animality is fundamentally anti-symbolic; as such, it presents a radical challenge to conventional ways of “reading” animals in both nature and art. “There is nothing metaphoric about the becoming-animal. No symbolism, no allegory” (*Kafka* 35). One common form of animal symbolism which comes under particular scrutiny in Deleuze and Guattari is the Oedipalization of the animal in Freudian psychoanalysis. Deleuze and Guattari claim to make “a simple point” about Freudian psychoanalysis and its treatment of the animal: namely, in its rush to read the animal as an individuated symbol, as merely “a representative of drives, or a representation of the parents” psychoanalysis “killed becoming-animal, in the adult as in the child” (*TP* 259). Deleuze and Guattari illustrate this point through their analysis of Freud’s famous Wolf-Man case. Confronted with the mysterious appearance of multiple wolves in his patient’s dream, Freud, they suggest, inevitably falls back on the symbolizing impulse, thus “purging” the wolves of their multiplicity, and reducing many animals to a single transcendent signifier: “the wolf is the father” (*TP* 28). “For Freud, when the thing splinters and loses its identity, the word is still there to restore that identity or invent a new one. Freud counted on the word to reestablish a unity no longer found in things” (*TP* 28). Thus, Freudian psychoanalysis, like animal symbolism more generally, is bound to miss what Deleuze and Guattari identify as the most crucial aspect of animals: their multiplicity. “The wolf,” they note, “is not fundamentally a characteristic or a certain number of characteristics; it is a wolfing. . . . What we are saying is that every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack”

(*TP* 239). While acknowledging the relative legitimacy of both mythic and scientific treatments of animals, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal aims to shift attention away from characteristics, away from classification and signification, toward modes of being and acting: "what interests us are modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling" (*TP* 239). Getting back to Freud – what psychoanalysis fails to see, despite its frequent encounters with the becomings-animal of humans, is the "the reality of a becoming-animal, that it is affect in itself, the drive in person, and represents nothing" (*TP* 259).

Cat People presents a classic illustration of the Oedipalized animal in Dr. Judd's psychoanalytic reading of Irena. Here we turn to the scene of Irena's first visit with Dr. Judd, and the hypnosis session in which she first reveals to the psychiatrist the story behind her family's curse, and her related fears of turning into a cat. In the spirit of temporal disruption, and the trace logic which pervades the film, the scene opens just as Irena is coming out of hypnosis. Denied the "presence" of Irena's spoken words, the audience is instead given an account of her hypnotic testimony after the fact – filtered, as it were, through Dr. Judd. After Irena is awoken and admits to remembering nothing of the hypnosis session, Dr. Judd, tapping his notebook, remarks "It's my duty to remember. I have it all here." He goes on to recount Irena's story while reading directly from his notebook:

JUDD. Most interesting. You told me of your village and the people and their strange beliefs.

IRENA. I'm so ashamed. It must seem so childish.

JUDD. And the cat women of your village too, you told me of them.

Women who in jealousy or anger, or out of their own corrupt passions can change into great cats, like panthers. [Closes notebook.]

At this point, Judd transitions seamlessly from a (presumably faithful) transcription of Irena's own words, into a more directive, interpretive register, signaled by his closing of the notebook and a more speculative tone: "And if one of these women were to fall in love and, uh, if her lover were to kiss her, take her into his embrace, she would be driven by her own evil to kill him. That's what you believe and fear, isn't it?" At this point, Judd moves, without a break in his lines, into a classical (if somewhat vague) Freudian explanation of Irena's condition:

These things are very simple to psychiatrists. You told me about your childhood. Perhaps we'll find this trouble stems from some early experience. You said you didn't know your father, that he died in some mysterious accident in the forest before your birth. And because of that the children teased you and called your mother a witch, a catwoman.

These childhood tragedies are inclined to corrode the soul, leave a canker in the mind. But we'll try to repair the damage.

This scene occurs almost halfway through the film and presents, in Judd's recounting of Irena's hypnotic session, an explicitly supernatural explanation for Irena's behavior – "And the cat women of your village, you told me of them. . . ." It is indeed striking, as William Paul points out, that the account "comes not from Irena herself, the believer in ancient tales, but rather from the representative of modern scientific understanding, the psychiatrist Dr. Judd" (163). According to Paul, because the

supernatural explanation occurs simultaneously with the psychoanalytic one, the supernatural “effectively loses the priority it normally has in horror films” (163). This remark is consonant with Paul’s general characterization of *Cat People* as a thoroughly psychoanalytic film (175).

And yet, it is worth pointing out here that *not all* of Irena’s hypnotic session is delivered via Dr. Judd. The scene opens near the end of the session, with Judd leaning over his hypnotized patient. Fittingly, the room is dark with the exception of a spotlight which is tightly focused on Irena’s face, as if to reinforce Judd’s supreme confidence in psychiatric science’s ability to illuminate and explain the mysteries of his patients’ inner worlds. Upon Judd’s prompting, the first words of the scene, “You were saying ‘the cats’” – the unconscious Irena replies: “They torment me. I wake in the night, and the tread of their feet whispers in my brain. I have no peace, for they are in me.” Irena’s statement explicitly links animality with multiplicity, a link which the film endorses in the face of the other characters’ desperate attempts to reduce Irena’s “cat-ness” to individual pathology (Dr. Judd) or the childish fantasies of one over-active imagination (Ollie). Indeed, if we allow Irena’s lines to guide our consideration of animality in the film, rather than the pathologizing reading of Dr. Judd, animality begins to look very different – more elusive and dynamic.²⁷

Cary Wolfe has identified in Freud’s account of the human’s transformation from the animal “a fundamental antinomy around which it circulates like a bad conscience” (2-3). Wolfe points that, according to Freud, “the human being, who becomes human only through an act of ‘organic repression,’ has to *already* know, *before* it is human, that the

organic is repulsive and needs to be repressed. And so Freud's 'human' is caught up in a chain of infinite supplementarity, as Jacques Derrida would put it, that can never come to rest at an origin forming a break with animality" (3). In this respect, Freud both acknowledges and disavows animal-human continuity; or, as Rosi Braidotti puts it, following Deleuze and Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis, "Freud ends up closing the very door he had opened" (140). This is accomplished in part through the psychoanalytic appropriation of animals as *mere* signifiers, symbols of pathological conditions. "In psychoanalytic thinking," Braidotti explains,

each animal signifies a repressed or disavowed aspect of the patient's remembered experience, now festering silently into pathology. It is a gateway to his or her unconscious and a significant lead into his or her secret fantasy-life. Animals are metaphoric representations or metonymic displacements of unprocessed traumas. As a 'cure' psychoanalysis rests on the linguistic method of interpretation: to access the unprocessed material brings it to resolution. This resolution is conceptualized as the unveiling of 'manifest' meanings, according to the linguistic-semiological paradigm. (140)

By translating animality into the linguistic-semiological paradigm, Freud "ends up 'humanizing' the kind of drives or desires that intimately associate humans with animals or blur the boundaries between them" – the assumption being that "the animal part, like all the other 'dark continents,' needs to be managed and clearly differentiated from the civilized subject one is to become" (140). All of this amounts to a pathologizing of the so-called animal drives and desires. Freud makes this strikingly clear in the following

remark, excerpted from a letter dating from 1897: “Perversions regularly lead to zoophilia and have an animal character” (qtd in Wolfe 226, n.30). In modern psychoanalysis, in other words, to *read* a human’s becoming-animal is to diagnose a pathology. Alternatively, *Cat People* channels Irena’s becoming-animal through the register of the fantastic, a mode of artistic expression which the film in turn modernizes through its linking of the supernatural with the figure of the zoo animal, modernity’s spectral presence *par excellence*.

Having said this, the intersections between Freud’s account and *Cat People* are quite striking indeed. As I have already indicated, *Cat People* casts tremendous suspicion on the power of sight. In its sustained reliance on traces and its preoccupation with the supernatural, the film consistently challenges both the alleged mastery of sight and its isolation from the other senses. The film extends this devaluation to science more generally. This is reflected in the film’s association of the psychoanalytic perspective with the sense of sight (through Dr. Judd’s use of the spotlight in the hypnosis scene), and in its casting of Alice and Ollie as professional drafters in a shipbuilding company. For all their power of vision – or, rather, hindered by their over-reliance on vision (and the mode of rational calculation which vision implies) – neither the psychiatrist, nor the pair of architects, nor even, it seems, the camera itself, are able to register the reality of Irena’s metamorphosis. Irena’s visibility confounds them as it confounds the viewer. In this way, the film performs an implicit critique of vision’s mastery.

Notes

¹ The emergence of Hollywood horror cinema in the 1930s and 40s was instrumental, not only in revitalizing the Gothic tradition in American culture, but also, through its role alongside of the Western and film noir genres, in securing America's international dominance in the new artistic medium of film.

² *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) are Lewton's most acclaimed films.

³ Tracking is a central trope Lewton's third film, *The Leopard Man* (1943), as well. In that film, the resonance between ancient/animal and modern/human forms of tracking is highlighted when the search for an escaped killer leopard turns into a noir-inflected manhunt.

⁴ See Telotte (passim) for absence as both a narrative strategy and central thematic concern in Lewton's films.

⁵ Lewton's unique approach to horror cinema was effectively established over the course of his first three films – all of which were directed by Jacques Tourneur, a director whose later work apart from Lewton suggests a remarkably similar aesthetic.

⁶ For more on the atomic mutations of postwar horror, see Skal (247-250). See Shaviro (127-155) for a provocative reading of Cronenberg.

⁷ The general consensus concerning the rough periodization of American horror identifies two initial phases, the first represented by Universal's horror films of the 1930s (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy*, et al), and the second by Val Lewton's productions at RKO

and the “second wave” of Universal horror films (including *The Wolf Man*, *House of Frankenstein*, et al) (Senn 1-7; Hutchings 27).

⁸ See Hale on the popular rise of psychoanalysis in America.

⁹ Strictly speaking, the Hollywood versions of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* were adaptations of adaptations – films based on popular theatrical productions which were, in turn, based on the novels (Jancovich 3). See Hurley (5-6 and passim) on the British fin-de-siècle’s Gothic’s relationship to science.

¹⁰ *Island of Lost Souls* was found so disturbing that it was banned for 25 years in England, also in Latvia, the Netherlands, India, South Africa, Germany, Tasmania, Holland, New Zealand, and Singapore. (Skal 171)

¹¹ Virginia Wright Wexman identifies the racial-Darwinian undercurrent of Mamoulian’s film adaptation – reflected in the “racial overtones of Mr. Hyde’s dark skin, thick lips, and broad, flat nose” – as one of the primary elements setting the 1931 film apart from both the numerous others film versions produced at different historical moments (288), as well as Stevenson’s original novel portrayal.

¹² See Wexman, 289-291.

¹³ Having taken a serious hit from their calamitous sponsorship of Orson Welles, and the box office failures of *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), RKO hired on Val Lewton to produce modestly-budgeted horror films so as to compete with Universal Pictures, which had recently re-established their monster grip on the genre with the 1941 release of *The Wolf Man*. Under the banner of RKO’s new production philosophy, “showmanship, not genius,” the conditions of Lewton’s hire stipulated that

he would produce horror “programmers” to appear on double bills; the budget for each of the films was not to exceed \$150,000, and the length of each was to be 75 minutes or less (Siegel 21). For more on the circumstances and conditions of Lewton’s hiring, see Newman (7-8), and Siegel (19-26).

¹⁴ See Jay for an indispensable treatment of anti-ocularcentrism in Western thought.

¹⁵ The fact that the zoo is set in Central Park is not insignificant. Central Park is a classic example of a “middle landscape” – one that attempts to integrate nature and culture. As Elizabeth Hanson explains, late-nineteenth-century “[m]iddle-class reformers advocated [urban] parks as helping to contain the threat posed by urbanization to moral and social order. American city planners created parks as pieces of country in the city, restorative retreats that would offset the stress, noise, grime, overstimulation, debauchery, and disorder of city life” (16-17).

¹⁶ For a critique of zoos, in addition to Mullan and Marvin, see Berger and Malamud (57-104). For an alternative reading of zoos, see Hanson.

¹⁷ See Malamud (225-267) for more on the power dynamics of spectatorship in zoos. See also Berger’s reflections on the zoo, which I discuss in my Introduction. On a related note, Berger suggests that, in photography all animals appear like fish viewed in an aquarium – that is, fixed in a “domain which, although entirely visible to the camera, will never be entered by the spectator” (14). Photographic images of animals owe their existence to what Berger refers to as a “technical clairvoyance,” whereby the mechanical devices used to obtain “ever more arresting images – hidden cameras, telescopic lenses,

flashlights, remote controls and so on – combine to produce pictures which carry with them numerous indications of their normal *invisibility*” (14).

¹⁸ In this respect, the set is notably inconsistent with the dominant twentieth-century trend among American zoos towards more “natural” settings. See Hanson (130-161).

¹⁹ Chris Fujiwara, who briefly alludes to the image of the torn sketch, characterizes director Jacques Tourneur as a creator of “minor” literature, in the sense elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari: “the expression must break forms, mark ruptures and new branch-lines. A form being broken, reconstructs the content which will necessarily be in rupture with the order of things” (7). (Fujiwara lists Irena’s torn image as one among many examples of rupture in Tourneur’s work.) William Paul, in contrast, sees the torn image as conclusive proof of Irena’s “perverse psychology,” “a subjectivity that must appear disturbed because of the disturbing way it is presented to us” (163).

²⁰ See Gunning for an analysis of figurative language and its relation to the discourse of the fantastic in *Cat People*.

²¹ Critics have had much to say about early horror’s foreign settings, and the implications thereof; see Hutchings for a survey of opinions and some qualifications (20-22).

²² Gunning sees *Cat People* as the “locus classicus for the fantastic in film” (31).

²³ The effect of this scene on the audience is one which Lewton (and Tourneur) would simulate again in future films; it has become known, in film parlance, as the “bus.” For editor Mark Robson’s account of his invention of the technique, see Newman (42).

²⁴ See Ginzburg, “Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method.” *History Workshop* 9 (1980): 5-36.

²⁵ Cave, again following Ginzburg, qualifies these three “modern equivalents” of the hunting model as follows: “criminal detection (at least as practiced by the likes of Sherlock Holmes), connoisseurship (the art of distinguishing the authentic from the bogus, the original from the copy), and psychoanalysis: in the last case, the reconstruction in narrative form of a psychic history proceeds from unconscious lapses and quirks in the patient’s discourse” (251-252).

²⁶ In his conclusion, Cave states that “The central thesis of this study is that recognition scenes in literary works are by their nature ‘problem’ moments rather than moments of satisfaction and completion. Anagnorisis seems at first sight to be the paradigm of narrative satisfaction: it answers questions, restores identity and symmetry, and makes a whole hidden structure of relations intelligible. Yet the satisfaction is also somehow excessive, the reassurance too easy; the structure is visibly prone to collapse. An ignorance which was never wholly innocent turns *for the moment* into an implausible and precarious knowledge; the apparently opposite poles of knowledge and ignorance meet in surreptitious complicity. . . . (489).

²⁷ Irena’s emphasis on the plurality of the cats within her serves to remind us of the unique circumstances behind her cat-person status. In contrast to the dominant wolf-man model, in which an individual’s transformation is always precipitated by the isolated bite of a werewolf, Irena’s transformation is a result of her being born into a cursed race of cat people. Indeed, *Cat People* takes great pains to emphasize Irena’s group status. One of the most disturbing, and memorable, scenes of the film, the wedding celebration at the Serbian restaurant, is marked by the mysterious appearance of a second cat person.

Amidst the festive celebration, an office friend, “the Commodore” leans over to Alice and remarks, in reference to Irena, “Oliver’s bride seems to be a very nice girl and a very pretty one too. Carver tells me she’s a bit odd. He’s worried about the marriage.”

Immediately after commenting on Irena’s “oddness,” the Commodore stands to make a toast “to the bride.” His toast draws the attention of a lone female diner, who, dressed in an elegant black dress with a black cat-ears bow in her hair, looks over at the table. The Commodore catches her glance and notes to a tablemate: “Look at that woman. Isn’t she something?” The gentleman’s off-handed response, “Looks like a cat!” seems to beckon the mysterious woman’s approach – she immediately stands up and approaches the table, focusing her intense gaze on Irena. At this point, the background noise on the soundtrack is reduced to an eerie near-silence as the strange woman addresses Irena in a close-up exchange: “Moia sestra.” When the woman repeats the greeting, Irena, shocked into silence and clearly disturbed, quickly makes the sign of the cross. This signals the departure of the woman, who, as the wide shot of the table’s occupants only now reveals, has riveted the attention of all the guests of the wedding party. Questioned by Oliver about the woman, Irena responds, “She greeted me. She called me ‘sister.’ You saw her, Oliver. You saw what she looked like.” Oliver, chuckling, remarks: “Oh, the cat people. She looks like a cat so she must be one of the cat people...one of King John’s pets. Oh, Irena, you crazy kid.” Of course, Oliver has it exactly wrong. The eeriness of the scene, evoked by the film’s dramatic manipulation of sound and camera positioning, present a direct counter to Ollie’s dismissive remarks. The strange woman, as the film makes clear, is indeed a cat person. The most disturbing thing about her, however, is not her

uncanny resemblance to a cat, but rather the disruptive role her appearance plays in the film. It is never accounted for in any explicit fashion; we have no reason to believe that the two women have ever seen each other, and the event is never referred to by any of the characters again. Plot-wise, the encounter appears to be a loose thread, a narrative dead-end. And yet, it is entirely consistent with the film's indirect treatment of the supernatural, and its generally unorthodox approach to horror. "In a genre supposedly committed to the mysterious but too often given to explaining everything," Kim Newman suggests, the encounter "is a master stroke" (31).

To elaborate further on Newman's remarks, what makes the appearance of the Cat Woman a "master stroke" is her inassimilable status. Her appearance fits no better into the greater plot arch than it does the wedding gathering itself. Yet her address of Irena, "Moi sestra," suggests an intimacy, or alliance, that neither Irena herself, nor the film (and certainly not Ollie, the Commodore, or Dr. Judd) are willing to fully acknowledge. The scandal of the would-be alliance is no doubt enhanced by a tendency among some early viewers to read a lesbian significance into the scene. Commenting on this phenomenon, DeWitt Bodeen noted, "I rather liked the insinuation and thought it added a neat bit of interpretation to the scene. Irena's fears about destroying her lover if she kissed him could be because she was really a lesbian who loathed being kissed by a man" (qtd in Newman 31). This suggestion of Irena's latent lesbianism also serves to trouble Ollie's identification of his bride as a "normal," American-ized bride, the embodiment of bourgeois domestication.

The disconcertingly random quality of the cat woman encounter scene suggests another aspect of Irena's curse, and yet another contrast with the wolfman formula. Once bitten, the wolfman transforms at the appearance of a full moon. His transformation is regular, calculable to the day and time. Irena's transformations, in contrast, are triggered by the unpredictable stimulus of jealousy, or, presumably, of sexual attraction. Her fear of sexual excitation is what prevents her from consummating her marriage to Ollie. And it is her jealousy of Alice which precipitates Irena's first (suggested) transformation in Central Park. Finally, the sexual advances of Dr. Judd are what trigger her final, fatal transformation at the end of the film. Though the curse is hereditary, and so internally borne, it only manifests itself when triggered by (unpredictable) environmental factors.

Afterword

In the last century or so it has become increasingly impossible to separate our perceptions of animals from the distinctly modern systems of representation through which we experience them—“realistic” nature stories, photography, film, zoos, museum taxidermy, national parks and so on. In Heideggerian terms, these modern forms of representation may be said to “enframe” vanishing wildlife—rendering it, in this case, not so much a natural resource, but a cultural and ideological resource to be conserved, administered, and exploited as needed. Not surprisingly, in a period abounding with anxiety concerning overcivilization, emasculation, and a lost frontier heritage, animals—particularly wildlife—emerged as a privileged symbol of American national identity and origins, and as a vicarious source of primitive regeneration. And yet, as the first two chapters of this study have demonstrated, an extensive technical and ideological apparatus is needed to construct animals as emblems of the primitive. Animals are in fact figured as modernity’s “primitive” Other—nostalgic objects of premodern enchantment, vitality, and innocence—through an elaborate system of distinctly modern discourses and representational forms, which together have contributed to the evolution of the modern animal into a *vanishing* object to be at once mourned and possessed. This logic—a form of taming, with “real” and symbolic results—is a seemingly benign correlative of the modern impulse to expel all things “animal” (wild, irrational) from the ever-expanding human domain.

The dissertation’s critical shift comes in the transition from the second chapter to the third chapter. Here, the focus turns from the social realm of American modernism to

the realm of modernist aesthetics—represented by Hemingway’s idiosyncratic, “A Natural History of the Dead,” Faulkner’s high modernist novel, *As I Lay Dying*, and Val Lewton’s Gothic masterpiece, *Cat People*. What these works offer is a form of “zoopoetics” that is distinctly modern.¹ (And one may do well to add others, which I do not discuss here, such as Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*, Walt Disney’s *Silly Symphonies*, and certain writings of Franz Kafka, Rainer Rilke, and D. H. Lawrence for instance.) As I demonstrate in the second half of this study, these works, when read with a careful eye to their “animal” content, serve to illuminate the peculiar spectral logic that comes to characterize animal life in the modern era. These texts serve to defamiliarize the ubiquitous trope of the “vanishing animal”; through their self-reflexive treatment of “the animal”—both “real” and figured—they remind us that the *meaning* of animal life is inseparable from the representational forms, narratives, and ideological filters through which we experience animal life in the modern world. More radically, the provocative zoopoetics of these texts serves to undermine the relentless anthropocentrism that characterizes modernity’s relationship to the nonhuman world—by calling attention to the ineradicable trace of “the animal” within “the human” (that is, within human language, subjectivity, and modern technics), while at the same time, through their gothic resonance, evoking a world of meaning that exceeds, and indeed actively works upon, that which we call “human.” Thematically, then, this dissertation has attempted to address both sides of a double logic, proceeding from the technological reconstruction of animal life in the first chapters to the animal’s uncanny haunting of modern technologies in the later chapters.

Poststructuralist theory has provided powerful tools for thinking beyond the old Nature-Culture divide, as is evident in the impressive array of scholarship on the “body” that has emerged in the past two decades. However, if we are to genuinely move beyond the old and destructive dualisms, it is imperative that we in literary and cultural studies not limit ourselves to the realm of the “human” (or even the anti- or post-human). By employing the deconstructive notion of “spectrality” to read the zoopoetics of literary and cultural texts, I have attempted to read the traces of animal being inscribed deep within the body of the modernist text. To put it differently, my intention has been (particularly in the second half of the dissertation) to open up cultural texts to their nonhuman other; and in turn, to open up the larger nonhuman world to the force of the figurative – letting *zoon* inform both our *logos* and our *poesis*, and indeed, vice versa.

Notes

¹ The term “zoopoetics” is used by Derrida in “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” in reference to Kafka’s vast writings about animals. Derrida also suggests the critical role of poetics in thinking through “the question of the animal”: “For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a hypothesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of. That is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking” (377).

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B.A., English and Philosophy, Miami University (OH), *magna cum laude*, May 1997
- DISSERTATION** *Animals, Technology, and the Zoopoetics of American Modernism*
- EMPLOYMENT** Lecturer, The Pennsylvania State University, 2007-present
Writer, Rock Ethics Institute, The Pennsylvania State University, 2007-present
Editorial Assistant, The Pennsylvania State University, 2006-07
Research Assistant, The Pennsylvania State University, 2001-03
Teaching Assistant, The Pennsylvania State University, 2000-06
- ARTICLES** “The Modern Magnetic Animal: *As I Lay Dying* and the Uncanny Zoology of Modernism.” *Journal of Modern Literature*.
Forthcoming ms. 30 pp.
- AWARDS** University Graduate Fellowship, The Pennsylvania State University, 2000-06
Humanities Initiative Dissertation Grant, The Pennsylvania State University, 2005
- CONFERENCES** Co-Organizer, “Visualizing Animals,” An International Symposium, The Pennsylvania State University, April 2007.
“Gothic Animal: Val Lewton’s *Cat People* (1942).” “Visualizing Animals,” International Symposium, The Pennsylvania State University, April 2007.
“Civilizing Beasts: Turn-of-the-Century Animal Narratives and the Regeneration of Modern America.” Mid-Atlantic Popular / American Culture Association Annual Conference, October 2006.
“Civilizing Beasts: Animal Narratives and the Regeneration of Modern America.” Poster presentation, Graduate Exhibition, The Pennsylvania State University, March 2006. Winner: 3rd prize.
“Liberating Memory: The Memory Image in Bergson and Nabokov.” “Reconstructing Worlds: The Response-ability of Memory” Graduate Student Conference at The University of Vermont, April 2003.
- SERVICE** Chair, Guest Speaking Committee, Leonhard Center Technical Writing Initiative, 2005-06
Member, Leonhard Center Technical Writing Initiative, 2004-05
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Member, CAFE Film Series Committee, Graduate Student Association, 2004-05