

**THE LITERARY REPRESENTATION OF PRO-ANIMAL THOUGHT:
READINGS IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION**

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the representation of pro-animal thought in literary fiction published over the last thirty years.

Recently, critics have begun eclectically to trace animal rights arguments in past literature, attaching criticism to politics in a familiar way (considering the recent history of the literary academy). However, they have neither explained the holistic picture of human–animal relations in individual texts, nor how such questions relate to a specific literary context. This thesis, on the other hand, involves more a pinpointing of the particular value of literary works for extending the horizon of current ethical debates about animals than a partisan mobilisation of literary criticism in the service of animal rights. To that end, each chapter offers a thoroughgoing reading of an important text in the story of contemporary fiction’s ethical encounter with the animal. I contextualise these extended readings with more succinct discussion of the wide range of contemporary authors who represent pro-animal thought.

This approach requires several theoretical methodologies, though all are within the realm of feminist post-structuralism. Butler’s work on the discursive production of sex illuminates the ethical representation of *species* in Atwood’s *Surfacing*. The representation of animals (both literary and political) in Walker’s *The Temple of My Familiar* is explained by situating the animal within feminist debates about the relation of literary writing to the discursive formation of race. Levy’s avant-garde representation of the animal in *Diary of a Steak* is explained by placing a literary-theoretical reading inspired by Bakhtin and Irigaray within a broader cultural study of the BSE crisis. Derrida’s recent work on ethics and the question of the animal helps me explore the literary representation of ethical vegetarianism in Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*.

My concluding remarks suggest how the results of my research might impact on the future role of animal ethics in literary criticism.

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On a more personal note, I have also had the benefit of supportive relationships which it would be an injustice to name only working or personal: I can sense the friendship of Marcus Nevitt, Andrew Jorgensen, and, especially, Elsie Walker on every page of this thesis. I would also like to thank my mother, Heather McKay, and her husband, David Clines; they have given me all the help I have asked of them throughout my postgraduate studies.

Most importantly of all, I must acknowledge the indefatigable assistance, the constant inspiration, and the care and love given me by my wife, Gayle McKay, during the work that has culminated in this thesis. Without her, it simply would not exist.

DECLARATION

Parts of chapter two of this thesis appeared in *Mouth to Mouth*, June 2000 and in *Society & Animals*, 9.3 (2001).

By preferring my work, simply by giving it my time and attention, by preferring my activity as a citizen [...] I am perhaps fulfilling my duty. But am I sacrificing and betraying at every moment all my other obligations: my obligations to the other others whom I know or don't know, the billions of my fellows (without mentioning the animals that are even more other others than my fellows)?

Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 71

This thesis was written for the animals in whose lives I have shared, and with every single one of the others in mind.

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INTRODUCTION

FROM PRO-ANIMAL LITERARY CRITICISM TO READING THE LITERARY REPRESENTATION OF PRO-ANIMAL THOUGHT

For a long time the first sentence of this thesis was going to be 'this is a work of pro-animal literary criticism'. The project began as an exercise in politicised literary-history of the contemporary period. I was convinced that in the years since Peter Singer published his seminal essay 'Animal Liberation' in 1973, there must have been literary writers who had used the resources of fiction to engage with the subject of humans' ethical relationships with animals. Singer's essay was the genesis of a book by the same name that would go on to motivate the global animal rights movement.¹ Yet when I began researching there seemed (and there was) little prospect of finding criticism of contemporary writing that would even discuss, let alone champion, contemporary 'pro-animal literature' in the way that over the last thirty years or so there has been a body of work (however diverse) that delineated fields of study around contemporary feminist literature, post-colonial literature, or working-class literature, to name a few. As a result, I perceived a need to uncover contemporary texts that it would become important to consider from the point of view of their literary

¹ 'Animal Liberation', review of *Animals, Men and Morals*, edited by Stanley Godlovitch, Rosalind Godlovitch and John Harris, *New York Review of Books*, April 5 1973; *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Avon, 1975).

representation of animal ethics, in the way that a reader interested in those more established fields would very quickly find themselves led to read (confining oneself to a British context alone) Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), for example, or Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), or James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994).

It goes without saying that such socio-cultural groupings of literary texts, amongst other things, chart the rise of identity politics and its effect on the politicisation of the literary academy. And of course the animal rights movement, as a social formation in English-speaking cultures at least, is far from immune to the workings of identity politics, as much evidence from the tactics of image-conscious pro-animal groups like *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals* (PETA) to the increasing availability on supermarket shelves of products specifically designed to promote 'vegetarian' consumption suggests.² Yet despite the apparently conducive environment portrayed in this quick sketch—and it is not my intention here to delve further into either the sociology or the institutional politics—it is clear that specifically pro-animal discourses have made little impact on established patterns of academic literary reading, or (more pertinently) publishing.³

² I do not want to imply that contemporary pro-animal thought has no historical roots; these are charted (for British society at least) in Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800* (London: Reaktion, 1998). The modern movement is well defined by Gary L. Francione, *Rain without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996). I will say more about vegetarian identities in chapter four.

³ This is not of course to say that there is not interest in animals *per se*, which we can find in some studies such as David Salter's *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature* (London: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Christine Kenyon-Jones's *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing* (London: Ashgate, 2001); and Margot Norris's *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, Kafka, Ernst and Lawrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). In fact, there has been a profusion of work on animals in cultural studies over the last ten years, much of which I will mention in this thesis. When it comes to addressing animal ethics square-on, however, cultural studies as a whole lags far behind other disciplines, in particular analytic ethical philosophy, sociology and geography. Work

Of course, uncovering important contemporary texts is only one strand in the complex weaving of feminist (or any other politicised) literary criticism. Amongst other methodologies involved are the discovery of progressive patterns of meaning in literatures of the past, and, perhaps more importantly, reading key texts as symptomatic examples of the ways that entrenched social hegemonies have worked their way into (and out of) established literary texts and genres. These other methodologies can be found in the work over the past ten years or so of a few critics—Marian Scholtmeijer, Randy Malamud, John Simons, and Cary Wolfe—which marks the beginning of pro-animal literary criticism.⁴

At this point it is worth clarifying what such a thing as ‘pro-animal literary criticism’ might entail; and there are two main reasons for doing so. In purely practical terms, I can explain this hyphenated adjective, which is not prevalent either in the work of these writers or in more popular discourses that still tend towards the terminology of animal rights, yet will be used consistently in this thesis. I will also set out very briefly some other key terms in my discussion. More importantly, though, I want to delineate my own intentions by quickly describing my salient differences from these few models that do exist of literary criticism with a pro-animal approach.

published under the aegis of the journals *Environmental Ethics* and *Society & Animals* consistently signifies this difference.

⁴ Scholtmeijer, *Animal Victims in Modern Fiction: From Sanctity to Sacrifice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Malamud, *Reading Zoos: Representations of Animals in Captivity* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998); Simons, *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002). Although I will refer to Wolfe’s work as it originally appeared in a variety of journals, he has very recently published it in modified form as *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Two important books of criticism written from a pro-animal perspective, which I will not discuss because they address different disciplines (history and popular culture studies respectively), are Erica Fudge’s *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000) and Steve Baker’s *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

The easiest way to define the phrase 'pro-animal' is by comparing it with analogous political signifiers. Cary Wolfe, discussing Singer's work, speaks of the important concept in animal rights of 'speciesism'; this concept 'like its cognates racism, sexism, classism—discriminates against another based only on a generic description and not on what we actually know about its needs, interests and capabilities'.⁵ The approaches that I refer to as pro-animal share a common disagreement with speciesism as it is described here. As such—to build a comparison on just one of the cognates Wolfe mentions—as an adjective, *pro-animal is to speciesism as feminist is to sexism*. My use of the term pro-animal stems from a discomfort with the language of rights that is the most readily available discourse for speaking about anti-speciesist thinking. The reasons for that discomfort will become clear in the course of this thesis, particularly in my lengthy discussion in chapter one of pro-animal feminism—one of the key sites of the critique of rights discourse in pro-animal thought. Yet it should come as no surprise to anyone versed in recent debates, which can be loosely grouped under the umbrella of postmodernism, about the theoretical legacy of Enlightenment humanism. I should, however, make it quite clear that it is not at all my intention to get bogged down in justifying the basis of pro-animal thinking, from whichever theoretical standpoint; this is something which has been, and continues to be, done effectively in other critical environments.⁶ I have sidestepped actually

⁵ Cary Wolfe, 'Old Orders for New: Ecology, Animal Rights, and the Poverty of Humanism', *Diacritics*, 28.2 (1998), 21–40 (p. 31).

⁶ Notably, of course, in analytic philosophy; the canonical book-length discussions are Singer, *Animal Liberation* and Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); valuable recent additions to these are Evelyn B. Pluhar, *Beyond Prejudice: The Moral Significance of Non-Human Animals* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995) and Mark Rowlands, *Animal Rights: A Philosophical Defence* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998). Legal Studies is another key locus for such debates, see Gary L. Francione, *Animals, Property, and the Law* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) and Steven M. Wise, *Rattling the Cage: Towards Legal Rights for Animals* (London: Profile, 2000).

debating the pros and cons of animal rights in order more fully to discuss how recent literary texts have represented positive conclusions in that debate.

The four pro-animal critics I mentioned can be grouped in two sections in terms of their broad methodologies. While their specific thematic interests are different, Scholtmeijer, Malamud and Simons all make their pro-animal stance clear at the outset of their work; they then proceed to read examples from a disparate range of literary texts with the broad intention of explaining how they either confirm that stance, or can be criticised because of it. One of the main benefits of this approach, which uncovers many progressive possibilities in past literature, is eclecticism—between them, Scholtmeijer’s study of representations of animals that are subject to human violence and Malamud’s of literature about animals in captivity, discuss almost one hundred late nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts. Simons’s book is more thematically arranged, taking in areas such as anthropomorphism or the animal as symbol; within these themes he is able to juxtapose writers from Apuleius through Chaucer to Robert Burns, Virginia Woolf and Will Self. However, leaving aside whether or not such ahistoricism can be theoretically justified, the most telling negative implication of these eclectic methods is that they have a generalising tendency about them. It is difficult not to see this as rooted in the fact that each critic is looking from a predetermined perspective to extract fairly well-established modern political meanings from material of great diversity, both historically and in literary quality. More often than not this is done with no attention to that material’s historical or literary context.⁷ The texts discussed lose their specificity, much of their

⁷ I offer a wider critique of Scholtmeijer’s book in ‘Animal Form: Can Realism Serve the Cause of Animals?’ (unpublished master’s thesis, University of Sheffield, 1997), pp. 5–7.

contextual significance and, most crucially, their ability to suggest *new* possibilities of ethical meaning under the gaze of the critic's immovable pro-animal approach.

What these critics collectively do not manage to show is how individual texts might holistically offer a coherent set of questions about human–animal relations, nor indeed how such questions might inter-relate within the context of a literary period. This problem distinguishes them from Wolfe, whose exacting and thorough readings of individual creative texts I turn to repeatedly in this thesis. Wolfe mobilises a high level of theoretical erudition and complexity—he works amongst the theorisations of the animal by a veritable who's who of continental philosophers—to read novels by Ernest Hemingway and Michael Crichton and Jonathan Demme's film *Silence of the Lambs*. He does so with an eye to analysing how these are subtended by what he terms 'the discourse of species'. For Wolfe, this phrase defines a logic and a set of linguistic practices by which the other is marginalised or objectified along species lines, and by which 'the human' is delineated by means of its difference from and superiority over 'the animal'. One thinks here, as an example, of the derogatory usage by humans about other humans of the word 'beast'. By understanding that the discourse of species thus simultaneously structures hegemonic views of human and animal others Wolfe is able to offer textual readings that attend to how representations of the animal contain a broad range of socio-political implications. This in turn allows him, unlike the previously mentioned critics, to work within a very well-defined cultural-historical framework, and to situate readings that are

Similar key points to the ones I make there are elaborated in Sue Walsh, 'Child/Animal: It's the "Real" Thing', *YES*, 32 (2002), 151–62. I say more about Simons's book in my review for *Society & Animals*, 10 (2002), 324–26.

inspired by pro-animal thought within topical critical debates about post-humanism, ethics and the representation of gender, sexuality and race.

This desire to map pro-animal discussion over such a theoretical terrain is the most immediate difference between Wolfe and the other group of critics, who either gloss over theory of a post-structuralist stripe (Malamud, pp. 1–49), generally ignore it but have at least some ambivalence (Scholtmeijer, pp. 87–91), or are downright hostile towards it (Simons, pp. 61–84). A more implicit difference is that the aim of Wolfe's work is to theorise the complex discursive workings of speciesism as they are found symptomatically in texts he discusses, rather than to elucidate the pro-animal meaning found within them. As such, rather than being immanent to the texts Wolfe reads, any specifically pro-animal meaning is strictly a function of his critique of them.

This thesis aims to steer a path between these two kinds of critical practice. My methodology is similar to that of the first group of critics to the extent that I am interested in analysing the pro-animal content of literary works. However, I want to avoid the problems I have outlined in their methodologies: of ahistorical generality and of analysing texts to explain how they match pre-established pro-animal meanings. To that end, each of the chapters in this thesis is an extended reading of what I regard as an important text in the story of contemporary fiction's ethical encounter with the animal; indeed, each chapter is designed to stand in its own right as a contribution to scholarship on the specific text at hand. Moreover, the thesis as a whole involves more a pinpointing of the particular value of recent literary texts for *extending* the horizon of current ethical debates about the human–animal relationship than a partisan mobilisation of literary criticism in the service of animal rights. This approach has much more in common with Wolfe's theoretically-inflected criticism; except that instead of

diagnosing the hegemonic discourse of speciesism in symptomatic texts, I am interested in exploring how contemporary literary fiction has responded positively to the ethical claim of animals.

Chapter one offers a reading of what I term the ‘animal politics’ of Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1973); by which I mean the way that the text distributes power, literally as well as literarily, between humans and animals. *Surfacing* was published in the same year as Singer’s original ‘Animal Liberation’ article, so it can be taken as a valuable starting point for our understanding of pro-animal thought in literature.⁸ Through a detailed analysis of the linguistic and narrative fabric of the text, I explain how the novel’s narrator, a young Canadian woman, progresses towards, and yet is finally forced to discard, an ethical identification with animals. This process, I argue, plays an integral part in the wider concerns of the novel’s development: the narrator’s attempt to forge an individuated self and sexual identity in relation to her absent parents and within the general context of entrenched gender power-relations amongst her companions. My reading of the animal politics of the novel complicates consensual readings that have discussed it terms of 1970s French feminism, placing it instead in the context of my own critique of recent pro-animal feminism, a critique that is rooted in the work of Judith Butler. Feminist thought has played an important role in contemporary pro-animal theory—Singer’s ‘animal liberation’ is a deliberate echo of women’s liberation—and the theoretical influence of feminism (particularly in Butler’s post-structuralist reconfiguration of it) is deeply

⁸ Such line-drawing can never avoid unfortunate exclusions; one might cite, for example, Brigid Brophy’s *Hackenfeller’s Ape* (1956) as a novel which deserves attention. Brophy is a major figure in the development of animal rights in Britain. She published an important article on ‘The Rights of Animals’ in *The Sunday Times*, 10 October 1965, which is reprinted in her *Reads* (London: Cardinal, 1989), pp. 123–34.

rooted in this thesis. In Atwood's novel, the human-animal relation is played out in terms of a series of concepts—language, gender and the body—that are central to Butler's work. This work allows me to explain the ethical implications for animals of the discursive formation of sex, and in turn that of *species*, in *Surfacing*.

Although not explicitly cited, Butler's work also underpins my analysis in chapter two of Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989); this is a book that extends some of *Surfacing's* key concerns about the hierarchical evaluation of language and the body, and how it affects animals. The key difference with Walker's novel is the addition of the issue of racial identity to this conceptual mix. My reading explains that the novel uses various strategies such as a parodic rewriting of Judeo-Christian mythology and a privileging of imaginative oral storytelling over written history to deconstruct this opposition of language and the body. In doing so, it structurally aligns the speciesist abuse of animals with specific human oppressions and allows thus othered humans to speak for animals. This creates the conditions whereby an apparently unbridgeable gap between the species—of which the animal's lack of language is emblematic—can be crossed.

My third chapter changes direction slightly in order to examine the animal politics of Deborah Levy's *Diary of a Steak* (1997), an avant-garde work about what is perhaps, in Britain at least, the single most important incident in the recent history of human relations with animals: the BSE/CJD crisis. Although I spend some time contextualising Levy's highly confected and defamiliarising representations of BSE within more popular discourses on the subject, the main thrust of the chapter explains the pro-animal possibilities suggested by the text's avant-garde style. *Diary of a Steak*, almost unbelievably, manages to combine a grotesque description of the realities of

the meat industry and an erudite feminist critique of psychotherapeutic medicine within a profoundly disjunctive use of language and form. This combination configures the interpretive relationship between the reader and text so that it becomes analogous to others represented within the text—between the psychoanalytic doctor and his hysterical patient and between the meat-eating consumer and the consumed animal. This at times makes for uncomfortable reading from a pro-animal perspective, since it is difficult to ground such a perspective when reading the text is likened to consuming the animal within it. To explicate these quite convoluted patterns of meaning requires the interpolation of various theorists—from Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément to Mikhail Bakhtin, Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida. As we saw with Wolfe, there is much to be gleaned from theorisations of the animal by post-structuralist philosophers; Derrida, in particular, has recently dedicated prolonged attention to the question of animal ethics, and I turn to his work in more detail in chapter four.

I should say in parenthesis that there is one very pregnant post-structuralist theoretical possibility that I do not explore in this thesis: the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, specifically their idea of ‘becoming-animal’.⁹ The reasons for this exclusion are two-fold. First, their work is simply too philosophically dense, its implications too wide-ranging, and its exposition too elaborate, for me to do justice to it here (not that these are bad things). To extract the animal-focussed work from its place in

⁹ For Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of becoming-animal in general, see *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone, 1988), chapter 10. Their attention to animal issues is varied and complex and it influences discussion of several major conceptual arenas in their work, for example the unconscious (pp. 26–38); language (p. 77); the face (pp. 170–71); and the rhizome (pp. 11–21); see Brian Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 93–106.

Deleuze and Guattari's wider project would risk misreading it. Indeed, not surprisingly, very few attempts have been made to follow through the implications of their animal-related work in the area of literature.¹⁰ The second reason is suggested by Deleuze and Guattari themselves when they explain that the politics of becomings-animal are 'extremely ambiguous' (p. 247). This is a position with which my reading inclines me to agree, despite the progressive statements the writers make elsewhere, especially on the subject of political 'minorities' (p. 292).

This is not to say that their work does not suggest many intriguing issues for those who are, like me, interested in thinking about animals and ethics in the aesthetic arena.¹¹ However, the aim of the present thesis is to explain and interrogate the representation of pro-animal thought, something that requires a certain degree of political stability. So, while I am not in the business of simplifying contemporary literature's ethical encounters with the animal, there remains a need to work through at length the politics of the becoming-animal concept, something that makes it unhelpful for the present as a critical tool.

It is when compared in these terms to Deleuze and Guattari that Derrida's work appears all the more useful, since it very fruitfully reworks the conventional terms of discussion about animals and clearly does so within an ethico-political mode. In chapter four, I marshal many of Derrida's

¹⁰ See Susan McHugh, 'Marrying My Bitch: J. R. Ackerley's Pack Sexualities', *Critical Inquiry*, 27 (2000), 21–41 and Cary Wolfe, 'Faux Post-Humanism, or, Animal Rights, Neocolonialism, and Michael Crichton's *Congo*', *Arizona Quarterly*, 55 (1999), 115–53.

¹¹ See Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion, 2000), pp. 99–152 and 'What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like?' in *Representing Animals*, ed. by Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 67–98. Lynda Birke and Luciana Parisi offer an introduction to 'becoming-animal' in the context of eco-feminism in 'Animal, Becoming', in *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology and Animal Life*, ed. by H. Peter Steeves (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 55–74.

conclusions about human-animal relations in order to interrogate the representation of animal ethics in the work of J. M. Coetzee, particularly his recent work *The Lives of Animals* (1999). Although it is rarely noticed by his critics, Coetzee more than any other contemporary writer has addressed himself to representing the complexities of humans' omnipotent power over animals, as well as to the dilemmas that this omnipotence poses for the writer of fiction. My analysis of *The Lives of Animals* explains how it portrays in its content and enacts through its form a countermanding of the speciesist logic that conditions the broad social realm. While Coetzee's text does not appear, to use Roland Barthes's term, as 'writerly' as Levy's, it even more profoundly works with the formal resources available to fictional writing to make pro-animal meaning.¹² The pro-animal meaning it makes is of a very particular kind, however, since a primary effect of the text is to undermine in the first place the very possibility of a purely moral literature. A methodology designed to uncover pro-animal literary texts, the one with which I set out on this project, necessarily bases itself on such a possibility.

So, to close this introduction by revisiting the comments with which I opened it, it can be recognised that to characterise literary texts in political terms such as 'feminist', 'post-colonial', 'pro-animal' might well be useful for focussing attention on unknown or ignored texts, for identifying their shared or key concerns, comparatively evaluating them, and isolating the most important and valuable among them—in short, the techniques of canon-building. However, pigeonholing individual texts with such a univocal characterisation can rapidly come to constrict the very ethical potential that it hopes to unleash. This is something that the literary works I discuss in this

¹² See Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), p. 4.

thesis as a whole strive against, and is precisely what I do not intend to do. Therefore, this thesis is not a work of pro-animal literary criticism; it offers readings in the literary representation of pro-animal thought.

CHAPTER ONE

'IDENTIFYING WITH THE ANIMALS': LANGUAGE, SUBJECTIVITY AND THE ANIMAL POLITICS OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S *SURFACING*

Introduction

Animals are prevalent in Margaret Atwood's early work, whatever the genre. Images of identification with slaughtered cows and hunted rabbits proliferate throughout *The Edible Woman*, and in *Lady Oracle* a 'con-crete artist' makes sculptures from squashed animals that prefigure the contemporary animal-based art of Damien Hirst, Mark Dion and Bruce Nauman. Atwood discusses 'animal victims' as paradigmatic in Canadian literature in her critical work *Survival*, and she insists in 'Don't Expect the Bears to Dance' that 'zoos make her nervous'. Perhaps most ubiquitously in her poetry, Atwood provides 'a multitude of animals of diverse generic and aesthetic kinds,' as Kathleen Vogt has noted.¹ Despite this recurring fascination with the animal in Atwood's work, there has yet to be an exploration of the animal politics of

¹ Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (1969) and *Lady Oracle* (1976) in *The Margaret Atwood Omnibus* (London: André Deutsch, 1991); *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972). On contemporary animal-based art see Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal*. On zoos, Atwood is quoted in Kathleen Vogt, 'Real and Imaginary Animals in the Poetry of Margaret Atwood' in *Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms*, ed. by Kathryn van Spankeren and Jan Garden Castro (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 163–82 (p. 163) and her poetry described by Vogt on p. 164.

her fiction. It is often noted that Atwood's protagonists, in Barbara Hill Rigney's words, 'find it difficult to eat animals', a fact which probably lies behind Atwood's comment that 'people are always asking me if I'm a vegetarian [and] they are astonished when I tell them that I am carnivorous'.² However, thus far no one has explored the discrepancy indicated by this vignette to ask how Atwood's world might contain such opposing possibilities. This is my aim here, for I want to argue in a discussion of *Surfacing* that Atwood's novel entails an animal politics that is remarkably complex and instructive primarily because it is marked by the vital importance of language to the production of human subjectivity; and secondly because it traces the implications of this fact for our relationships with animals. My intention, in the second section of this essay, is to read these animal politics in part through the lens of Judith Butler's influential work on the discursive production of sex and sexuality. To facilitate this discussion, though, I first introduce the terms at issue here by exploring the implications of Butler's work for pro-animal theory as expounded by the feminist writers Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan.

I. Pro-animal Politics, Feminism and the Body

Adams and Donovan explain the reasoning behind the influence of feminism on pro-animal theory that has developed throughout the 1990s:

² Barbara Hill Rigney, *Margaret Atwood* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 54–55 and Margaret Atwood, *Conversations*, ed. by Earl G. Ingersoll (London: Virago, 1992), p. 47. I have discussed vegetarianism in *The Edible Woman* at length in 'Animal Form', pp. 29–48.

It could be argued that theorising about animals is inevitable for feminism. Historically, the ideological justification for women's alleged inferiority has been made by [approximating] them to animals: from Aristotle on, women's bodies have been seen to intrude upon their rationality.³

The key critical term here, of course, is the body. Feminist writings of the 1970s and 1980s reappraised cultural notions of the body by disputing the masculinism and somatophobia inherent in enlightenment humanism; these writings have proved of paramount worth in constructing contemporary pro-animal theory. Indeed, as Adams herself writes, the problem is not just that 'women are equated with animals' bodies, for instance in pornography, but also that *animals are equated with their bodies*.⁴ This focus on the wholesale repudiation of all bodily matters in the construction of the hegemonic idea (or, perhaps more accurately, ideal) of humanity as essentially *rational* ensures that the body serves as the all-important ground for a politics that appeals to an even wider constituency than feminism *per se*. Stating that the 'connections between the abuse of women and the abuse of animals make explicit that somatophobia applies to species as well as gender, race and class

³ Introduction to *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Speculations*, ed. by Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 1. Notwithstanding influential ecofeminist theorists like Val Plumwood and Karen J. Warren, Adams and Donovan can rightly be called the motivating figures of contemporary feminist pro-animal theory. See in this regard their other edited collection *Beyond Animal Rights: Towards a Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals* (New York: Continuum, 1996), which includes Donovan's influential feminist critique of the enlightenment-rationalist basis of conventional animal rights 'Animal Rights and Feminist Theory', pp. 34–59; and Adams's *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1990). The influence of these writers and an indication of the changes they have brought to pro-animal thought is helpfully detailed in a review essay on these books by Steve Baker for *Society & Animals*, 4.1 (1996), 75–89.

⁴ *Neither Man Nor Beast: Feminism and the Defence of Animals* (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 152, her emphasis.

interactions' (p. 152), Adams argues for a pro-animal politics based on the recognition of 'interlocking systems of domination': racism, sexism, classism and speciesism. The intersection of these systems is visible precisely because of the perception of somatophobia as foundational for each. An apt condensation of Adams's 'progressive, anti-racist defence of animals' (pp. 78–84) can be found in her belief that 'dismantling somatophobia involves respecting the bodily integrity of all who have been equated with bodies' (p. 161). Given its roots in feminist body politics, we might helpfully think of Adams's view, then, as an animal-body politics.

Looking a little more closely at Adams's conceptualisation of the body, though, the first thing I want to note is the way that the body is posited as having an 'integrity' that is prior to and then obscured by somatophobic discourse. This discourse, she argues, underpins the oppressive logic of Western culture. Derrida has provided an abbreviated term for this logic in the word 'phallogocentrism' though this term is rarely if ever explicitly used by Adams and Donovan.⁵ That the functioning of Adams's pro-animal feminism requires a notion of the body-before-discourse becomes clear if we consider that she thinks of her methodology as ideological critique, exposing the flawed, obfuscatory or contradictory logic inherent in Western culture's hierarchical denial of the (animal) body. Her stated intention in *Neither Man nor Beast* is to expose the 'ideology that ontologises animals as usable' and to make 'the ideology and material reality of corpse production visible, to denaturalise it'. Such consciousness-raising exposition allows Adams to posit that 'when the concept of species is seen as a social construction, an alternative social construction that recognises animals as a subordinated

⁵ *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981), pp. 48–49.

social group, rather than naturally usable, becomes apparent' (pp. 15, 114). Here, Adams is aware enough of her own implication in this usage of ideological critique to recognise that she cannot simply appeal to an extra-discursive truth, noting instead the social construction of her own pro-animal position. Nonetheless, theories of ideology require a ground on which such social constructions are built and Adams serves notice that this ground is the ontological and ethical integrity of the body; in her clear statement of the feminist pro-animal position, she argues:

We reject a cultural construction of some bodies as so completely and solely matter that their bodies become immaterial, unimportant. Animals' bodies do matter. [...] We affirm that we all share the same universe in which we are a community of subjects—no matter how fragmented the notion of the subject—not a collection of otherwise objects. In this way we respond with integrity, respecting bodies (p. 13, my emphasis).

Thus Adams reclaims the integrity of the animal body from speciesist ideological constructions. Theoretically, her argument echoes the reclamation of the female body through the division of sex and gender that facilitated second-wave feminism's critique of traditionally conceived femininity. Adams also invokes the bodily essentialism for which the division of sex and gender has come under increasing scrutiny in the past decade or so. Therefore, it is particularly fascinating (if perhaps unintentional) that Adams's affirmation so clearly evokes the title of Judith Butler's 1993 book, *Bodies that Matter*. This work is itself prefaced by the notion not only that gender, but that the supposedly natural category of biological sex itself is

constructed, that 'bodies are in some way *constructed*'.⁶ Butler's compelling (and by now famous) thesis radicalises the theory of social construction at issue in my discussion thus far, placing a question mark over both the straightforward critique of speciesism as ideology and the concomitant pro-animal appeal to the integrity of the animal body. Her thesis also goes some way towards explaining the inadequacy of such ideological critique fully to capture the socio-discursive othering of women and animals.

Rapidly to recapitulate Butler's thesis, gender is not simply an ideological imposition upon the uncodified human body; rather, 'the matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of "the human"' (p. 7). The key point is that, indeed, we are not always-already human, but that in order to 'be' at all, we must 'become' human by passing through the enculturating mechanism of gender. Biological sex, then, is 'not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility' (p. 2). Butler's development of this claim is worth quoting at length, not least for its focus on the conceptual category of the human—always important for theorising the animal, the most persistent other of humanity:

The construction of gender operates through exclusionary means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation. Hence, it is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that

⁶ *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. x, her emphasis.

produces the more and less 'human,' the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the 'human' as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation. (p. 8)

The point here is not just that the category of 'the human' or 'humanity' is a cultural construction, in which one specific type of biologically marked body is valued via a set of arbitrarily positive-coded cognitive abilities (for example rationality, language, or tool-use);⁷ this recognition has been a touchstone for pro-animal thought, and is something that animal advocates who would see political advantage in the point that 'humans are animals too' have long recognised. Rather, Butler's analysis further indicates that such easy equations of human and non-human animal, based as they are on a fantasy of essential communion between the two on the level of the ethical integrity or equality of the body, miss a fundamental point. Indeed, 'becoming human'—if we take that to mean developing even the most basic form of identity within the social field of human interaction—*requires* passing into 'that field of discourse and power that orchestrates, delimits, and sustains that which qualifies as "the human"' (p. 8). To make explicit this

⁷ Of course, to this list could be appended other attributes supposedly exclusive to human beings such as self-consciousness, deceptive behaviour, peacemaking, aesthetic interest, trans-generational culture, and altruism. These are listed, sourced and this issue discussed at more length than I can here in Marian Scholtmeijer, 'What is "Human"? Metaphysics and Zoontology in Flaubert and Kafka', in *Animal Acts: Reconfiguring the Human in Western History*, ed. by Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 127–44 (p. 127). Cary Wolfe follows Scholtmeijer in noting the way that such attributes retain philosophical and cultural cachet while the exclusive human-ness of each has been ethologically disproved, in 'Faux Post-Humanism, or, Animal Rights, Neocolonialism, and Michael Crichton's *Congo*', *Arizona Quarterly*, 55 (1999), 115–53 (p. 116).

exclusionary logic: being-human in a fundamental sense means not-being-animal.

For Butler, whose main interest is the functioning of compulsory heterosexuality, the primary effect of this field of discourse is seen most clearly when we look to 'those abjected [human] beings who do not appear properly gendered; it is their very humanness that comes into question' (p. 8). All of us are compelled to become 'properly' gendered, because otherwise we would not become 'properly' human: such is the logic of the discursive production of sex. This thesis has two unstated implications, however. The first is that it is *absolutely unavoidable* that we become human, for it is only by the force of this inevitability that subjects can be compelled towards 'correct' gendering. The second is that this necessity is *cultural* rather than biological: our being-human is not simply a function of species but instead is a cultural imperative, just like gender, to which we are necessarily obliged to accede.

Bearing this in mind, the focus of the pro-animal theorist will be slightly different from Butler's analysis of gendering. She somewhat rests on her laurels in that she fails to extend the critique of heterosexism inherent in the binary gendering of human beings to the speciesism of a field of discourse that relies on the category of the 'inhuman' to police that effective gendering. This is surprising, since one of Butler's most powerful claims, which prefigures Adams's emphasis on interlocking systems of domination noted earlier, is that she does 'the important work of thinking through the ways in which [...] vectors of power deploy each other for the purposes of their own articulation' (p. 18).⁸ Extending Butler's purview, I would want to look for

⁸ See Adams, *Neither Man*, chapter four. For an analysis of contemporary identity politics that exhaustively follows through this claim with respect to the discourses of race, ethnicity,

ways to work against the suggestion that our becoming-human is unavoidable. For, to paraphrase Butler, it is surely possible to find people in the realm of pro-animal politics (ethical vegetarians, for example) who are 'not properly humanised', at least in the sense that to become human is to become the other of the animal. Notwithstanding this blind spot regarding speciesism, however, Butler's consistent focus on the productive exclusionary power of discourse itself suggests an important critical development for the pro-animal feminism I have described.

For as Butler makes clear, not all beings of the *human* species get to enter the 'community of subjects' which Adams would like to see include humans and animals. Indeed the very notion of a community of fully human subjects is founded on exclusion: not only of animals but also of a whole gamut of social alterities. A list (which is, logically speaking, limitless if every community is founded on exclusion) would extend well beyond the oft-cited class, gender, race and sexuality to include any others who do not match the conventional typology of humanism: children, criminals and the mentally ill, for example. Butler's reading, then, marks a shift from an understanding of social injustice based on ideology. Following her, I have suggested that speciesism is inherent to the discursive production of the human. Ideological critique, on the other hand, imagines that speciesism as a cultural ideology obfuscates a 'truer' relationship to the reality of the animal world. For pro-

nationality, gender and sexuality as well as centring on species, readers could do no better than consult Susanne Kappeler's 'Speciesism, Racism, Nationalism... or the Power of Scientific Subjectivity', in *Animals and Women*, ed. by Adams and Donovan, pp. 320–52. A light-hearted, if quite disturbing example of such an intersection happened to me when, on being given a vegetarian meal by a family friend, he said to me (with an uneasy laugh) 'Here's your lesbian food!' The economical condensation of the twin disavowals of lesbian sexuality and pro-animal consciousness leaves one in no doubt as to the efficiency of such discursive intersections.

animal feminism as I have described it, such a relationship is the equality of humans and animals due to the integrity of the body-before-discourse. It is this relationship that provides the bedrock for a community of equal subjects based on total inclusion: essentially a community of sameness, rather than one that accepts otherness, whether it is of species or sexuality. Rejecting these implications of ideological reasoning, Butler's analysis offers instead the hint of a pro-animal politics that responds to her insistence that 'every discourse operates through exclusion' (p. 189). Such a politics will no longer have the notion of the integrity of the body on which to rely but my claim is that it will be all the more rigorous for that.

The reconfiguration of the influential pro-animal feminism of Adams and Donovan via Butler is amongst other things, then, a readjustment in critical focus from 'the body' to 'discourse'. This shift inevitably involves a parallel change in register towards that of a post-structuralist and psychoanalytically influenced feminism that is the critical method that most consistently inquires into the relationship between discourse and the body. As my analysis thus far makes clear, this relationship is fundamental to any reading of the politics of human-animal relationships. To be sure, such a development has its drawbacks, as theories such as Butler's that insist on the discursive nature of social relations of power have a tendency to slide into a linguistic essentialism that in one way is not all that far from the humanism they would critique. This slippage itself presupposes (or indeed enacts) the exclusion of animals from the 'community of subjects' that the pro-animal critic attempts to redress. Butler asks in a later text: 'can we imagine a subject apart from his or her linguistic bearing?'. She concludes that 'it seems that

this linguistic bearing might well qualify as something essential [...] without which they could not be said to exist'.⁹ Such a circumscribing of subjectivity within the human-linguistic realm would seem to ignore the many developments in understanding of primates' and other species' subjectivities, even though these results of studies in primatology or cognitive ethology have found broad cultural recognition via the discourse of popular natural history. Nonetheless, pro-animal theory can benefit profoundly from Butler's sophisticated brand of feminist discussion. Therefore, my aim in the next section is to delineate the ways in which the animal politics of *Surfacing* exemplify the problems inherent in the appeal to an ethics of the body-before-discourse. In my third and final section, I will look to the alternatives that the novel offers for pro-animal theory, chiming as they do with Butler's notion of a politics that acknowledges how all communities of subjects are formed through exclusion.

II. Language, 'Being Human' and the Sacrifice of the Animal:

The Animal Politics of *Surfacing*

During the 1980s, in resonance with the feminism of the time, the critical focus on *Surfacing* was valuably shifted from a blunt reading of the novel as a revision of myth and indigenous religion or as an analysis of Canadian cultural nationalism; instead, critics saw this novel as a feminist search for the maternal body in language. Sherrill Grace aptly condenses this theme in describing the book as a drama of the 'discovery, articulation and recovery'

⁹ *Excitable Speech: Towards a Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 28, 30.

of the 'lost, silent mother'.¹⁰ This is an apt description, as far as it goes. However, Grace does not explore the way in which the possibility of eventually achieving such a conclusion is delicately tested by Atwood. In fact, the novel counterpoints to this maternal quest the female narrator's search for her father, one that also leads her away from her mother. For in the good tradition of the psychoanalytic description of Oedipal subject development, if the narrator's mother equates to the maternal body always-to-be recovered by the speaking subject, the search for her father in *Surfacing* figures her drive towards a place in the symbolic order of language. Now, complicating this tidy Lacanian schema, and of vital importance to my reading, is Atwood's insinuation into it of the narrator's tentative and confused search for an ethical relationship with animals. *Surfacing* resonates profoundly with my earlier reading of feminist pro-animal politics: the ethical relationship with the animal the novel explores is one which necessitates a drive away from discourse and from the ideology to which Adams refers, and towards the body.

Part three of the novel details the narrator's thoroughgoing attempt to identify with animals, who 'have no need for speech', by denying the most basic elements of her enculturation: 'I no longer have a name. I tried for all those years to be civilised but I'm not and I'm through pretending'.¹¹ In this

¹⁰ 'In Search of Demeter: the Lost, Silent Mother in *Surfacing*' in van Spankeren and Garden Castro (eds.), pp. 183–204, (p. 184). See also Rigney, pp. 54–55. The fullest reading in terms of psychoanalytic feminism's search for the pre-oedipal mother is Sally Robinson, "'The Anti-Logos Weapon": Multiplicity in Women's Texts', *Contemporary Literature*, 29 (1988), 105–24.

¹¹ Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (1974) in *The Margaret Atwood Omnibus*, pp. 410, 400. On being named as an essential part of becoming a subject, or becoming human see Butler, *Excitable Speech* pp. 28 ff. On a matter of grammar, here and throughout the current thesis I often use personal rather than impersonal pronouns to refer to animals. This is intended to reflect the

sense, the animal is in a position analogous to the maternal body for psychoanalytic feminism: it is that which is before (or beyond) discourse. An image recurrently presented by the narrator of her mother surrounded by jays is perhaps the most telling and poignant example of this configuration. These birds are always just beyond the extension of the mother's reach. And the mother herself is always hazily described, eluding the grasp of the narrator's memory. But before I come to a reading of this vital image in the final section, which will serve my Butlerian pro-animal politics, I want to track the path of the narrator's developing animal ethics in these particular terms of the interplay between discourse and the animal (or maternal) body.

The key moment in sparking this development is the narrator's encounter with a dead heron, shot by hunters: 'I turned around and it was hanging upside down by a thin blue nylon rope tied round its feet and looped over a tree branch, its wings fallen open. It looked at me with its mashed eye' (p. 356). The transfixing quality of this look signals a compelling agency of the animal, even beyond death, in its ability to interpellate the narrator into some form of relationship with it. The visual power of this identification, despite its undoubted genesis in the physicality of the mutilated animal, is almost a cognitive after-effect of the narrator's primary, visceral reaction: 'it was behind me, I smelled it before I saw it; then I heard the flies. The smell was like decaying fish' (p. 356). It is, first and foremost, the narrator's *body* that reacts with disgust to the presence of the animal's corpse.

arguments I am making about the need to reconsider the way animals are considered other to the human constructed in and by language.

The gap between the narrator's bodily reaction and a more cultural or discursive one is most clearly marked by her companion David's response to the dead heron. Immediately, he captures it for his decidedly modernist art-film, *Random Samples*. This film's discourse is motivated by a Jackson Pollock-like aesthetics of chance, which David believes gives his work an 'organic' relationship with its physical subject matter, 'like a painter throwing paint at a canvas' (p. 328). Such a relationship fails to materialise, however: the film instead goes the way of all 'fleshy' modernism by stifling into a passive specularised object the physical body which it aims to capture in representation. That this stifling effect extends from the animal body to the human female is evident later when photographs, just like 'windows opening into a place [the narrator] could no longer reach', fail to capture completely her mother's communion with the birds; and when David wants to film his girlfriend Anna to juxtapose 'a naked lady with "big tits and a big ass"' with the dead heron (pp. 350, 371).¹²

At this juncture it is worth pausing at length to note that the complex interplay of visuality and physicality in this section of the novel fascinatingly reworks the relationship between humanity and animality as portrayed in Freudian psychoanalysis. For the repression of *smell* (and with it carnality) in favour of the development of *sight* and the aesthetic is at the basis of Freud's theory of the emergence of humanity in *Civilisation and its Discontents*.¹³ (And if David enacts his allegiance to this Freudian heritage in the production of

¹² Adams offers an extended critique of the interrelationships between women and animals due to their simultaneous passive positioning by the (male) gaze in *Neither Man*, chapter two.

¹³ *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953–1974), XXI: *The Future of an Illusion; Civilisation and Its Discontents; and other works* (1961).

his film, then his modernist formal method seems quite appropriate.) However, as Cary Wolfe has noted in a sophisticated discussion of these matters, there is a fundamental aporia at the heart of Freud's humanist schema:

the human being who only becomes human through an act of 'organic repression' has to *already* know, before it is human, that the organic needs to be repressed, and so the Freudian 'human' is caught in a chain of infinite supplementarity, as Derrida would put it, which can never come to rest at an origin that would constitute a break with animality.¹⁴

Wolfe helpfully reconfigures this deconstruction of Freud's humanism in post-Darwinian terms, and in doing so leads us back towards our reading of Atwood. 'The subject of humanism', Wolfe writes,

is constituted by a temporal and evolutionary stratification or asynchronicity in which supposedly 'atavistic' or 'primitive' determinations inherited from our evolutionary past—our boundedness to circadian rhythms, say, or the various physiological chinks and frailties that foreground the body as profoundly other and physically determined by a fundamentally a-human universe of interactions—coexist uneasily in a second-order relation of relations, which the phantasmatic 'human' surfs or manages with varying degrees of success. (pp. 118–19)

Wolfe's recognition that a deconstruction of the solid opposition between human and animal as set up by Freud can concomitantly be found in the philosophical implications of human biology is important for our reading

¹⁴ Wolfe, 'Faux Post-Humanism', p. 118. These matters are also discussed in Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Towards a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 121–27.

of *Surfacing*. It leads him to argue that even if theory has recognised the forms of power that are implied by vision (and here he notes a critical lineage from Sartre to Foucault to Haraway), then this power is also 'ineluctably tied to the specifically human'. Indeed, if the transcendence of the human is purchased 'only at the expense of repressing the other senses—and more broadly the material and the bodily as such with which they are associated—then the only way to recast the figure of vision (and therefore the human) is to resituate it as only one sense among many in a more general—and not exclusively human—bodily sensorium' (p. 119).

Such a resituating is precisely what Atwood attempts when *Surfacing's* narrator encounters the dead heron. Not only is the power of the gaze temporarily shifted (even if in a heavily circumscribed way) from the human to the (dead) animal with its affecting 'mashed eye'; but also the status of vision itself is undermined by a visceral reaction (the narrator's disgust).¹⁵ And it's worth remarking here that although it is almost a critical cliché to note a critique of the logic of the gaze in Atwood's work, there has rarely been sustained inquiry into what exactly can be said to *escape* the gaze. Here, at least, it is *smell* that profoundly acts on the body of the narrator and prepares her for an ethical relationship with the animal; and smell is also the physical remainder inassimilable into David's representation of the dead animal in the discourse of his 'art'. As he replies—discounting the

¹⁵ This problematic of the animal gaze is central to Derrida's most recent work on what he calls 'the question of the animal'. He goes as far as to suggest, in an uncharacteristically sweeping gesture, that the absence of 'the experience of the seeing animal, of the animal that looks' is a 'calculated forgetting' that is constitutive of Philosophy itself; and, more generally still, that absence marks 'an immense disavowal whose logic traverses the whole history of humanity', 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More To Follow)', trans. by David Wills, *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2002), 369–418 (pp. 383, 380).

importance of the smell, and hence its bodiliness—when his cameraman Joe complains that it “‘really stinks’”: “‘that won’t show in the movie [...] you can stand it for five minutes, it looks so great’” (p. 356).

However, if the dead heron, in its irreducible physical materiality, suggests that the starting point for understanding the narrator’s ethical relationship with the animal is the shared level of the body—the argument of current pro-animal feminism—then Atwood quickly sheds doubt on this straightforward possibility. Reading the position of the heron in the psychoanalytic schema of subject development which I have outlined (mother/animal=body : father=discourse) we see that while the bird is (as body) aligned with the mother, it is also, paradoxically, aligned with the father. Herons form a recurrent motif in *Surfacing*, and the striking visual imagery that represents them demands close attention. Describing a plane flying above her as ‘an X in the sky’, the narrator is reminded of an earlier vision of a heron ‘flying above us the first evening [...], legs and neck stretched, wings outspread, a bluegrey cross, and the other heron or was it the same one, hanging wrecked from the tree’ (p. 375). Her almost compulsive remembering of the dead bird, which repeats the original traumatic encounter and underscores its ethically foundational status, here indicates the heron’s structural parallelism with the narrator’s lost father.

By linking the heron to the ‘X’ Atwood evokes the narrator’s search for the father that repeatedly takes the form of a search for an X marked on a map. Read at first as her father’s signifiers for the location of indigenous cave-paintings that he had been researching, the signification of these Xs becomes remarkably unstable. The X also indicates later the location of the father himself, and the number of significations proliferates further to suggest *possible* sites for paintings. The narrator furthermore acknowledges the equally unstable origin of the pictures signified by these Xs when she

finds her father's hand-drawn reproductions. She first thinks they are hallucinogenic self-portraits, and then realises they are 'not originals, only copies' that trace the indigenous paintings. Hence they offer a symbolic way to find him by 'vindicating' the legacy of his research. Finally, they are read as his 'guide' to help her understand the pantheistic power of the environment (pp. 347, 365, 370, 383). If X marks the spot at which the narrator presumes she will complete the search for the father, it would appear that such a search is doomed to ever-displaced failure.¹⁶ Significantly, the search for the father is always also a search for a logic and language that can completely represent the physical world with no remainder: the logic of enlightenment rationalism that he explicitly values (p. 290), or indeed the artistic discourse of *Random Samples*. Stumbling with uncanny accuracy on a key insight of the post-structuralist critique of such discourses, the narrator finds during one of her early forays in search of her father, not that there is 'no sign' of him, but there are 'too many signs' (p. 300).

As we try to come to ethical terms with the animal by reading the dead heron image according to the psychoanalytic schema, it appears that the heron is positioned as that physicality which is irreconcilably beyond discourse (that is, aligned with the mother). Yet in being marked, like the lost father, by the signifier of the X, it is important that the heron *also* comes to indicate that this function will always itself be a figuration. The heron cannot actually *be embodied* in the narrator's written text; it can only symbolise that embodiment beyond discourse. Such an inability to escape the symbolic

¹⁶ Here, Atwood's novel diverges slightly from the Lacanian schema, as for him it is the attempt to reach the mother, rather than the father, which necessitates the subject's entry into the differential logic of language.

structure of language, of course, is the crucial position with respect to bodily materiality in the post-structuralist logic of the sign, as it has been aptly described by Judith Butler:

The linguistic categories that are understood to 'denote' the materiality of the body are themselves troubled by a referent that is never fully or permanently resolved or contained by any given signified. Indeed, that referent persists only as a kind of absence or loss, that which language does not capture, but [...] which impels language repeatedly to attempt that capture, that circumscription—and to fail. [...] To posit a materiality outside of language is still to posit that materiality, and the materiality so posited will retain that positing as its constitutive condition. (p. 67)

How then to discern an ethical response to the animal from the novel's portrayal of this murdered heron, marking as it does this complex interrelation of discourse and the body? Perhaps the clearest explanatory way to do this is to follow Atwood's narrator, as in a short space of time she passes through a series of key stages in her adoption of an ethical consciousness about animals. By watching her thinking proceed from stage to stage, we can see more clearly the underlying logic that propels her beliefs.¹⁷ By analysing in the first instance the complexities and ambiguities of the narrator's response to the heron, the ethical relation to the animal offered by the text as a whole will become clear.

¹⁷ Also, this approach responds to an important fact about the novel that is implicit in the many readings of it as quest narrative, whether feminist, spiritual, psychological or otherwise: *Surfacing* is an essentially developmental novel in the sense that comments made by the narrator have to be judged by their chronological position, for she frequently contradicts herself, progressively uncovering 'truths' which she had repressed but then assimilates into the logic of her actions.

Vital to the narrator's response is the way she apportioned blame for the heron's death. Wondering why the heron had been strung up 'like a lynch victim', she equates it to other 'trophies' that are displayed by hunters to 'prove they could do it'. She recognises that since the wild heron cannot be 'tamed or cooked or trained to talk, the only relation they could have to [it] was to destroy it'. Reading the heron thus as, once again, a specularised object, she decides that 'it must have been the Americans' who killed it (p. 357). This is a national group whose ability to unite animal display with the economic colonisation of Canada is noted early in the novel, as a gas station is advertised by a stuffed moose dressed in human clothes 'waving an American flag' (p. 270). Perhaps the narrator's most perceptive comment on this 'American' commodification of nature is to recognise that the killing and display of the heron has a primarily *sacrificial* function; it provides the hunters with an object onto which they can project the unwanted parts of themselves. To use a term that is apposite for its etymology in the important place of the animal in such human procedures, the heron serves as a scapegoat.

Interestingly, given my earlier reading of the logic of specularisation and the failure of representation vis-à-vis the female and animal body, the narrator's perception of the sacrificial function of the heron appears in the context of the simultaneous objectification of woman and animal by David. He makes a sexualised joke that Canada's national emblem should be the 'split beaver' and the narrator responds with a naivety which is anything but insignificant: she reads his pun literally, just as she earlier queries the old axiom that 'there's more than one way to skin a cat'. "'Why should it be split?" I said. It was like skinning the cat, I didn't get it'. This defamiliarisation helps reveal the function of David's metaphor. In his jocund collocation of woman and animal the bodiliness of female genitalia and

animality itself are both repressed, even symbolically butchered, in a misogynistic and speciesist configuration of the self. The narrator's mental response to his joke returns her to the scene of the heron's sacrifice: 'a part of the body, a dead animal. I wondered what part of them the heron was, that they needed so much to kill it' (pp. 358–59).

Seen in this light, the narrator's sympathetic ethical response to the animal adumbrates Adams's pro-animal feminism, particularly in relation to her theory of the 'absent referent', which has been cogently described by Cary Wolfe and Jonathan Elmer:

In speciesist, sexist society, both women and animals are subject to a twofold process of objectification through dismemberment (real or figurative) and renaming, a process that foregrounds edible or sexually charged body parts and makes what Adams calls an 'absent referent' of the subjectivity and ontogeny of the Other. Thus, for example, dead cows are 'meat,' baby ones 'veal,' [...] and so on. The sexual absenting of women operates by the same sort of renaming of women as animals (chick, beaver, playboy bunny).¹⁸

The narrator's ignorance of metaphor (split beaver/skinned cat) suggests a 'respect for the literal' that Adams sees as vital to a pro-animal literature or criticism that would rescue the absent referent from this ideological renaming.¹⁹ Indeed, I read this dismantling precisely as an attempted denial of the 'sacrifice' inherent in the symbolic logic of metaphor itself, in which the vehicle (the 'real' animal) is eliminated by the metaphoric substitute. This

¹⁸ 'Subject to Sacrifice: Psychoanalysis, Ideology and the Discourse of Species in Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs*', *Boundary 2*, 22.3 (1995), 141–70 (p. 151). See Adams, *Sexual Politics*, chapter two.

¹⁹ *Sexual Politics*, p. 104. Adams fleetingly refers to *Surfacing* in similar terms on pp. 183 and 185.

process of dismantling continues as the narrator suddenly becomes aware of the act of killing involved in fishing. With the 'thud of metal on fish bone, skull, neckless headbody' comes the realisation that 'the fish is whole, I couldn't do it anymore, I had no right to'. The description of the fish as 'whole,' and particularly as a 'neckless headbody' clearly resonates with Adams's animal-body politics, which refuses the phallogocentric separation of mind and body. The use of this description certainly prefaces the narrator's 'rescue' of some frogs that she had used to bait the fish while the others admire the 'murder[ed] cadaver'. It also leads to her recognition of the sacrificial logic that validates this use of the frogs just as it does their use in high school vivisection (p. 360).

This reading is complicated, however, if we revisit for a moment a Butlerian reading of linguistic reference to the body. For Butler, language operates 'by means of the displacement of the referent, the multiplication of signifiers at the site of the lost referent'—as we saw with the Xs marking the absence of the narrator's father. 'Indeed, signification *requires* this loss of the referent, and only works as signification to the extent that the referent remains irrecoverable' (p. 209, my emphasis). Wolfe and Elmer extend this psychoanalytic reading of the formation of the human subject in language and link it explicitly to the logic of sacrifice as it is inscribed in the inherently symbolic function of language. In doing so they make a vital point about the pro-animal feminist schema that posits the animal or female body as the lost referent of phallogocentrism. 'There is a powerful psychoanalytic account of [the] accession to culture,' they note; and in it

what intervenes between child and mother, what effects the 'primordial repression'—of mother, [...] of 'nature' and 'the animal'—and erects thereby a regime of symbolic substitution and sacrifice, is in fact language itself, or rather symbolicity *tout court*. (pp. 162–63)

This observation suggests that the living animal—whether it be heron, cat, beaver or fish—is not the absent, hidden reality behind speciesist ideological practice, as Adams claims. For, as Butler notes, the bodily referent is *always* beyond language. The animal-body is better considered (in Butler's terms) as the 'constitutive outside' of the discourse of speciesism.

Indeed, to recapitulate my point made in section one, Butler's reading of the binary 'sexing' of the human being locates the gay or lesbian body as the constitutive outside of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (p. 18). Extrapolating from this, the critic who attends to this gendering of the human while attuned to the complementary functioning in it of *speciesism*—a discursive formation which repudiates the animal as sexism does the feminine and heterosexism does homosexuality—will go on to read the animal-body as the constitutive outside of what we might call, following Butler, 'compulsory humanity'. It is compulsory that we 'become' human, and this very becoming is a function of our renunciation of the animal. This reading allows a recognition of what I would call, with Wolfe and Elmer, the essentially sacrificial structure of language itself; or, again in Butler's terms, a recognition that 'every discourse operates through exclusion'. (As I will explain in more detail in the following chapter, when we look in particular at the pro-animal literary-critical methodology that Adams advocates, if the recognition that the animal body is always-already outside language renders problematic the concept of the animal as 'absent referent', then it suggests a redundancy in the use of 'literal language' to restore it.)

In light of this Butlerian analysis of the animal politics of *Surfacing*, I want to explore more fully the implications of the narrator's putative denial of the metaphoric logic that sacrifices animals. The futility of such a denial quickly becomes clear. It is signalled by her insistence that such a 'sacrifice'

certainly jumps the species barrier, for humans do not *only* sacrifice the animal: 'anything we could do to the animals we could do to each other: we practiced on them first'. The narrator insists that 'the Americans'—for whom the only 'things worthy of life were human, their own kind of human'—are most responsible for the sacrificial repudiation of the animal in their killing of the heron. And if for the narrator 'guilt glitters on them like tinfoil', then perhaps the xenophobic rhetoric by which she apports all blame for any abuses of power to 'the Americans' points to another sacrifice, another discursive exclusion (pp. 360, 366). But this time the sacrifice is in the human sphere. That her readiness to condemn entails its own form of exclusion is evident only when the hunters are revealed not as Americans but as a group of Canadians sporting New York Mets merchandise because they 'always root for the underdog'. Clearly, the scapegoating of 'Americans' had simply served to relieve the narrator of responsibility or complicity in her own—and importantly the animals'—fate. For throughout the book we find the narrator searching for ways to justify any use of animals—from her pretence that fish might forgive her in advance if she prays for them to be caught or her belief that 'killing certain things is all right, food and enemies, fish and mosquitoes' (p. 312), to her remarks about indigenous Americans' strategies of atonement (p. 365). Since these strategies do not exiate her profound but unacknowledged guilt at using animals as a resource, she projects that guilt onto 'the Americans'. Envisioned as oppressors, they bear the weight of the guilt that she tries to repress. In this she mirrors the hunters who also project an unwelcome part of themselves onto the sacrificial heron. In their case, it was the animality that must be purged as they perform their masculinity and humanity.

Atwood herself has shed some light on this complex configuration of victimisation and responsibility, guilt and sacrificial substitution in the

context of both animal and national politics. In response to a series of questions around the notion of guilt in *Surfacing*, she has said in an interview that what she was 'really into in that book was the great Canadian victim complex'.²⁰ And in *Survival*, her survey of Canadian literature, Atwood argues that Canadian writers, from 'wild animal story' authors Seton and Roberts onwards, had been better able to write 'from the point of view of the animal' because of their perception of Canada's perpetual oppressive colonisation (whether by Britain or America). As she asks, *faux-naïve*: 'if animals in literature are always symbols, and if Canadian animal stories present animals as victims, what trait in our national psyche do these animal victims symbolise?' (p. 75). This perspective is clearly at play in *Surfacing*, in which the narrator identifies with the 'innocent' animals who 'get slaughtered because they exist' (p. 365).

This understanding of Canadian animal literature in terms of the 'victim complex' gives notice of a postcolonial analysis of national psychology, but in doing so suggests how postcolonial thinking can easily short-circuit pro-animal politics. In the fiction of Graeme Gibson, Atwood finds a critique, which prefigures one found in *Surfacing*, of 'the need to see yourself as a victimised animal' (p. 81, her emphasis). For her, this is a cultural weakness or pathology that needs to be transcended because it short-circuits what she sees as a necessary progression in the national-cultural psychology of the Canadian from identifying with the victimised animal (exemplified by Seton and Roberts) through self-knowledge and self-definition (such as her own or Gibson's cultural analysis) to healthy self-respect. The problem with Atwood's otherwise valuable description of the progression from colonial to

²⁰ *Conversations*, p. 13.

postcolonial consciousness—aside from its slightly harsh impatience with a 'victim complex' that might betoken the very real psychological effects of cultural disenfranchisement—is that such progression occurs in direct proportion to a concomitant disavowal of the animal's right to be an object of cultural concern.²¹ Atwood's assertion that animals are *always* symbols—that they can *only* bear anthropomorphic meaning such as providing the vehicle for cathartic explorations of Canada's national identity in victimisation—has an important corollary. She makes it *logically impossible* to render the victimisation of animals in literature. In doing so, she herself replicates the speciesist sacrificial logic that I have thus far used her novel to put to the test.

Of course, *Survival* appeared in 1972; I would suggest that in the intervening decades Gibson has been replaced by another of Atwood's contemporaries, Timothy Findley, as the Canadian writer most committed to exploring the dynamics of human identification with animals. In a series of novels since *The Wars*, which won Canada's most prestigious literary prize (the Governor General's Award) in 1977, Findley describes the processes of social othering and repeatedly marks them with cross-species identifications. He examines a set of different social formations from the perspective of those

²¹ Cary Wolfe makes a similar point about the implications of/for the animal of Homi Bhabha's deconstructive reconfiguration of postcolonial identity in terms of colonial mimicry and the destabilising 'time-lag' that it insinuates in Eurocentric constructions of what it means to be human: 'once we have rewritten the figure of the human in Bhabha's terms, it is still necessary to understand that if the colonised opens up a 'time-lag' in relation to the coloniser's modernity, then the non-human other is *even slower than that*, as it were, in relation to both those forms of the human'. If, for Bhabha, the importance of colonial mimicry is that it creates the possibility for the colonised of 'active agency of translation—the moment of making a name for oneself', then his work 'elides, under the figure of the human, the right not to be colonised with the ability to engage in cultural translation'. ('Faux Post-Humanism', p. 148). The irony of Bhabha's postcolonialism is that precisely because *the animal* cannot speak, to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak, its colonisation is secure.

human others the reality of whose lives is excluded by the hegemonic norm. One could summarily describe these scenarios as subjections: of Canadian adolescence to military/colonial masculinity (Robert Ross in *The Wars*); of empathy with others to instrumentalist patriarchy (Mrs. Noyes, Ham and Emma in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*); of a child's mental illness to the demands of middle-class social mobility (Lily in *The Piano Man's Daughter*); and of a son's need for parents' love to their need for sexual freedom in a post-nuclear family (Will in *Spadework*). But rather than representing human otherness in terms of a sort of colonisation of animals' victimhood (*qua* Gibson), Findley does three things. He represents cross-species identification as a *result of*, and spiritual cure for, his characters' being treated as outsiders: for example Lily's fascination with entomology in *The Piano-Man's Daughter* or Will's with a pack of crows in *Spadework*. Or, he situates the victimisation of animals as a *conditional* part of the process of social othering itself as with Emma's rape by Dr. Noyes using a murdered unicorn's horn in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. Most significantly, the fight against abuses of animals goes hand in hand with resistance to other forms of dominance: in *The Wars*, the way Robert Ross rebels against the calamitous and callous military strategy of the British generals is to abscond with a troop of horses that he refuses to see ordered to an inevitable death. The importance of Findley's differences here from Gibson, or the Atwood of *Survival*, is that by them he explicitly ties his larger renunciation of social oppression to a proper concern for animals' lives themselves, rather than making the latter a screen for the former. Such concern is actually abrogated by Atwood's postcolonialism.²²

²² *The Wars* (London: Faber, 2001), *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (London: Arena, 1986), *The Piano Man's Daughter* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1995), *Spadework* (London: Faber, 2002). Scholtmeijer touches on Atwood's ideas about the animal victim with surprising brevity in

Perhaps an explanatory path through the differences can be found by returning to *Surfacing* and following the stages of its narrator's own reaction to the discovery of her shared nationality with the hunters. Her response is to remove from her xenophobia whatever basis (justifiable or not) it had in the substantive realities of North American geo-politics.

But they'd killed the heron anyway. It doesn't matter what country they're from, my head said, they're still Americans [...]. They spread themselves like a virus, they get into the brain and take over [...]. If you look like them and talk like them and think like them then you are them, I was saying, you speak their language, a language is everything you do. (p. 367)

Here, the narrator de-essentialises nationality, representing it as a matter of linguistic or cultural mindset instead of one of geographical or genealogical origin. Consequently, she is able tentatively to maintain the othering of Americans that shores up her own victimised, and hence guiltless, position. Yet the dispersal from within stable national boundaries of abusive power—or as she calls it, 'evil'—as a virally proliferating cultural construction only provides the narrator with the resultant problem of pinpointing its original causes. 'But how did [the Americans] evolve, where did the first one come from?' she asks (p. 367). Remembering her post-war childhood she becomes increasingly aware of the ubiquity of scapegoating, and its failure to purify the world of oppression: 'if only he could be destroyed everyone would be saved, safe [but] Hitler was gone, and the thing remained' (p. 367). In the face of this collapse of the logic of sacrificial substitution, the narrator confronts

Animal Victims, pp. 84–85. She also ignores Findley's challenge to them in her analysis of *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (pp. 244–49), which differs from my approach by judging the novel in terms of its animal politics rather than inquiring into how those politics intersect with broader cultural concerns.

again the dead heron, 'still there, hanging in the hot sunlight like something in a butcher's window, desecrated, unredeemed. It smelled worse' (p. 367).

Re-experiencing this bodily identification with the animal, only this time without scapegoats to blame for its death, the narrator reaches perhaps the key stage in the development of the animal politics of *Surfacing*. She feels 'a sickening complicity, sticky as glue, blood on my hands'. 'The trouble some people have being German,' she thinks, 'I have being human' (p. 368). Inspired by this acceptance of guilt—which I might venture is a common feeling, even if not expressed in these terms, amongst animal advocates—she relives her liberation of animals from her brother's childhood vivisection 'laboratory', only to find there a further complicity. Her fear of his angry reaction had allowed many others to die (p. 369). Through this series of realisations the scapegoating of 'the Americans' as an means to assuage her guilt appears as just another exercise of exclusive power, an exercise which the narrator characterises as constitutive of 'being human'. In an attempt to void herself of this power the narrator compulsively clings to her Rousseau-like innocent childhood visions of the 'peaceable kingdom': 'I didn't want there to be wars and death, I wanted them not to exist; only rabbits with their coloured egg houses, sun and moon orderly above the flat earth, summer always, I wanted everyone to be happy' (p. 369). As Atwood describes the narrator:

she wishes not to be human, because being human inevitably involves being guilty, and if you define yourself as innocent, you can't accept that [...] you refuse to accept power. You refuse to admit that you have it, then you refuse to exercise it, because the exercise of power is defined as evil. (*Conversations*, pp. 13, 14–15)

If this all seems to invoke Butler's argument that power 'orchestrates, delimits and sustains [...] the human' then it is because Atwood's belief,

borne out in the text, is that sacrificial substitution—Butler's 'constitutive exclusion'—is just such a human inevitability.

This conclusion is nowhere more obvious than in the text's playing out of Atwood's assertion that 'what the heroine does at the end of *Surfacing* results from taking a hypothesis and pushing it as far as it goes: what happens when you identify with the animals?' (*Conversations*, pp. 43–44). I want to claim that the result of Atwood's animal politics in *Surfacing* is indeed a Butlerian one, and to do so I return to the narrator's bodily identification with the dead heron and 'neckless headbody' of the fish. As I argued earlier, this identification aligns the animal body with the lost maternal one; this alignment is entirely consonant with pro-animal feminism's 'identifying with the animals' on the level of the body. Atwood makes the connection clear after comparing the 'unredeemed' heron and all animals to Christ—that ultimate sacrificial 'lamb'. Strung up in the shape of an X, the heron is an 'unsacred crucifix'.

Whether it died willingly, consented, whether Christ died willingly, anything that suffers and dies instead of us is Christ [...]. The animals die that we might live [...]. And we eat them, out of cans or otherwise; we are eaters of death, dead Christ flesh resurrecting inside us, granting us life. (p. 375)

This passage obviously collapses two Christian notions, the sacrament and the crucifixion, to recognise the physically and spiritually redemptive function of meat for human beings, as well as the sacrificial substitution of animals that a carnivorous diet involves. There is also an intimate connection between the sacrificial logic at work here and the denial of the body in

enlightenment humanism. Indeed, this connection has recently been marked by Derrida in his extension of his already quoted description of western cultural logic to *carno-phallogocentrism*.²³ Unlike meat-eaters, however, the narrator in her guilt goes 'unredeemed' like the heron. Her oft-commented upon dive into the lake, which immediately follows, offers this redemption and in doing so marks her most explicit configuration of animal body and maternal body as the sacrificed others of humanity.

The 'spiritual' or 'baptismal' nature of this dive and its vital place in the textual construction of the narrator's identity has been repeatedly noted by critics, yet its function in the novel's animal politics has not. Marking her imagined equivalence to the victimised animal, the dive explicitly parallels the narrator's earlier release of the frogs which she had been using as fishing bait: she dives 'letting out air like a frog', evoking the way that they had 'slipped into the water' (pp. 376, 360). And it is precisely via this state of identification that the narrator is able to confront the trauma of her own determined non-acceptance of the maternal body, her abortion—the function of the dive as it is usually read. Indeed, she remembers the aborted foetus itself in terms of animal abuse, 'in a bottle curled up, like a cat pickled' (p. 378). The foetus was the bodily part of her that she rejected, precisely the heron's function for the hunters. However, she is not able to maintain the distance insinuated by the sacrificial logic that underpinned the hunters' killing of the bird: 'it was filled with death, it was touching me' (p. 377). This confrontation with abjected maternity and animality—for the narrator's lover

²³ "'Eating Well", or the Calculation of the Subject', trans. by Peter Conner and Avital Ronnel, in *Points: Interviews 1974–1994*, by Jacques Derrida, ed. by Elizabeth Weber, trans. by Peggy Kamuf and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) pp. 255–87 (pp. 280–81).

the foetus 'wasn't a person, only an animal' —marks the start of the narrator's thorough merging with the victimised animal. As such, it prefigures the rejection of her humanity undertaken in the third part of the novel:

I realised it wasn't the men I hated, it was the Americans, the human beings, men and women both. [...] I wanted there to be a machine that could make them vanish, a button I could press that would evaporate them without disturbing anything else, that way there would be more room for animals, they would be rescued. (p. 387)

This is perhaps the key passage for my Butlerian reading of the novel's animal politics, not least because the passage unselfconsciously reveals that attempts to rid the world of abusive power can so easily slide into a terrorism that replicates that power's very logic. This passage is important also because the narrator's attempt to purify herself of the power inherent to her humanity, an attempt to create for herself a non-human world, is explicitly a refusal of sacrificial or substitutive logic. With Butler as well as Wolfe and Elmer, I earlier identified this logic as characteristic of language itself, of 'symbolicity *tout court*'. The narrator's renunciation of substitution is also a renunciation of language.

The narrator makes it quite clear that language is a problem, for 'language divides us into fragments,' while 'she wants to be whole' like 'the animals [who] have no need for speech' (pp. 381, 410). Furthermore, she indicates that the symbolicity inherent in language is itself the problem in the ethics by which she understands fishing: 'if we dived for them and used our own teeth to catch them, fighting on their own grounds, that would be fair, but hooks were substitutes' (p. 365). The narrator thus attempts to fashion a level playing field for human and animal, an ethical field devoid of power, by refusing humanity access to anything but its own natural *tekhne*. In a passage that suggests that the novel's logic drives towards concerns that are strictly

environmentalist, rather than pro-animal, the narrator rejects the setting up of any distinctions or borders such as her father's fenced garden. The narrator's attempt to forge herself into a symbiotic part of a holistic natural environment in disavowal of these most literal of human cultural barriers is another indication that the symbolic logic of language is a problem.²⁴ Such demarcations, like those between subject and object, or sign and referent are essential to the logic of language and so to renounce them is to renounce language itself.

Of course the very *possibility* of such a denial of the gap between word and absent referent is exactly what is at issue in my Butlerian critique of Adams's pro-animal criticism. And as I have argued, identification with the animal on the level of the body—such as the narrator's attempt to suffuse herself in animality by abrogating symbolic-sacrificial substitution—is eventually seen by Atwood to fail. It fails precisely because it necessarily entails a rejection of human community. At the novel's close the narrator must return to some sort of place in human society: 'withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death' (p. 418). Indeed, Atwood predates Butler in recognising that any abrogation of language in celebration of the body will in the end always be just that, an abrogation. Atwood makes this most explicit when detailing the narrator's futile attempt to divest herself of all the trappings of human productivity. In a gesture that ironically adds to the proliferating signification of Xs earlier in the novel, the narrator attempts

²⁴ See p. 409. Atwood advocates an environmentalist position in her non-fictional statements such as *Survival*. There, her explicit concern to question 'the great Canadian victim complex' insists that the type of identification with individually victimised animals that promotes pro-animal thought in *Surfacing* is unhealthy in contemporary human society. She concedes however, that one should be 'humane to animals or protect the wolf' (p. 81).

to 'sacrifice' her possessions by symbolically scratching a cross onto a suitcase and 'x-ing it out' (p. 406).

Julia Kristeva has most succinctly captured the impossibility at the heart of the narrator's aporetic project here to cancel out the stain of discourse symbolically: 'purification is something only the Logos is capable of'.²⁵ Agreeing with this point, Butler suggests in her psychoanalytic reading of the substitutive logic of language that there must remain a gap between word and referent. 'Were the referent to be recovered this would lead to psychosis, and the failure of language', and of subjectivity itself, she writes (p. 209). And if that state of psychosis which means exclusion from human linguistic community must be avoided, so too must the narrator 'surface' from her immersion in animality in order to attempt what Atwood calls the 'supposed ideal' of becoming a 'whole human being' (*Conversations*, p. 16). This surfacing happens at the moment of the narrator's re-entry into language, the recognition that 'the name of the father' must also mean the absence of the father himself, and the simultaneous acknowledgement of the otherness of the animal:

I say father

He turns towards me and it's not my father. [...] I'm not frightened, it's too dangerous for me to be frightened of it; it gazes at me for a time with its yellow eyes, wolf's eyes, depthless but lambent as the eyes of animals seen at night in the car's headlights. Reflectors, it tells me it has nothing to tell me, only the fact of itself. (p. 414)

This is an extremely ambivalent description of the father-wolf's eyes: first, they are depthless (that is, both 'unfathomably deep' and 'shallow and

²⁵ *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 27.

superficial', OED); moreover, if the wolf allows for no more than basic phenomenological knowing, with 'nothing to tell [...] but the fact of itself', then the symbolism with which its eyes are described suggests that such knowing will destroy it.²⁶ This ambivalence indicates that the wolf's 'otherness' must ultimately be recognised as an aspect of the self, as it is when the narrator finds that the wolf/father's footprints are in fact her own (p. 416).

Yet this assimilation is of a particular kind. The narrator's re-entry into language itself entails another form of surfacing:

From the lake a fish jumps

An Idea of a fish jumps

A fish jumps, carved wooden fish with dots painted on the sides, no, antlered fish thing drawn in red on cliffstone, protecting spirit. It hangs in the air suspended, flesh turned to icon.

I watch it for an hour or so; then it drops and softens, the circles widen, it becomes ordinary fish again. (p. 415)

We see here the narrator's re-acceptance of linguistic substitution (after her 'submersion' into the animal world) and her perception of the animal's inevitable elevation in the process of human linguistic cognition from real to symbolic meaning. Indeed, the highly literary representation of this progression by a textual change from free-form poetry to punctuated prose seems almost to presume its inevitability. Only *after* this progression is made, and it is granted that to know the animal is necessarily to know symbolic representations of it, can the fish 'become ordinary' again. However, if we are

²⁶ This passage is reminiscent of the narrator's most thoroughgoing moment of identification with the animals, hoping to escape the search party for her when they arrive on the island: she has 'rabbit's choices: freeze, take the chance they won't see you; then bolt' (p. 412).

to read this ordinariness as a state of autonomous being, then that autonomy must also bear some of the ambivalence that applied to the wolf.

What are we left with then, in surveying the animal politics of *Surfacing*? Clearly, there is recognition that humanity cannot 'identify with the animals'. Our construction in language *requires* the sacrificial substitution of both the animal and the (maternal) body. Yet, as both Atwood and Butler show, a simple renunciation of this construction—identifying with the animals and accepting the integrity of the body, the position of pro-animal feminism—is clearly impossible. At the end of the novel, Atwood offers us a character who must perforce abandon the position of victim in order to function in human society (p. 418); but in doing so she must renounce her bodily connection with animals, and admit the absence of the maternal. To put it succinctly, *Surfacing* suggests that pro-animal politics is 'humanly' impossible.

At this point it is worth briefly picking out some parallels with two other novels that offer correctives to this conclusion of Atwood's text: the first is Catherine Bush's *Minus Time*, the second Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.²⁷ Bush's novel includes some fascinating echoes of *Surfacing*; so much so that it can be considered a 1990s response to it. Set in Toronto and North Ontario, it switches between first and third person narration to relate the life of a Canadian woman in her early twenties, Helen Urie, who develops a commitment to animal rights while trying to come to terms with the lack of a maternal presence in her life. The major difference from *Surfacing* in terms of these texts' mother-daughter relationships, however, is that in *Minus Time* questions about the absent mother do not

²⁷ *Minus Time* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995); *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. by Michael Henry Heim (London: Faber, 1985).

centre on maternity and the body *per se*, but on how the structural shift in women's employment from home to workplace during the sixties affects their daughters' late twentieth-century femininity. In terms of the relationship between that femininity and animal politics, though, Bush offers a more profound reconfiguration of *Surfacing's* logic. The novel recounts Helen's ambivalent reaction both to the absence from home that her mother's job requires and to the celebrity that it entails (Helen's mother is the first woman Canadian astronaut). The ambivalence lies in the fact that her mother's achievements both compel and overshadow Helen's own progression out of adolescence while her prolonged absence (by undermining childhood security) renders unstable the foundation for that progression.

In light of this, Helen's commitment to animal rights risks being presented, quite conventionally, as an act of rebellion that is a part of her liminal status as an adolescent; 'just a phase', as they say, that she will leave behind as she emerges from the maternal shadow. However, Helen in fact desperately tries to hide the connection to her famous mother and refuses to use the publicity of her mother's space-trip to bolster that of a pro-animal rally organised by her animal activist group ('United Species'). '*I'm doing this because I believe in it*', she thinks, '*This has nothing to do with my mother*' (pp. 237–38, Bush's emphasis). Doing so, Helen insists that pro-animal politics is kept separate from daughter-mother identification and consequently on the irreducibility of belief in animal rights to a question about adolescent

identity. Such a reduction is what happens in *Surfacing*, when all is said and done.²⁸

Turning now to *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, the final chapter of that novel thoughtfully explores the relationship of a woman called Teresa with her dying dog Karenin. Teresa (also not unlike *Surfacing's* narrator) feels that her identity and her relationships with men are in crisis.²⁹ Teresa's bonds with Karenin offer a means to comment on her relationship with her philandering husband Tomas; they also suggest people's need in a post-Christian age to position themselves psychologically as victims of the control of others. Thus, Teresa empathises with Karenin and other animals by identifying with their absolute weakness before human acts of power. In this, Kundera is rather like Atwood. His modulation of this story, though, is to suggest that although the future happiness of Teresa and Tomas requires her

²⁸ The idea that pro-animal commitment is the province of adolescent naivety is a cultural cliché widespread enough not to require documentation here. A recent literary example though is Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (London: Penguin, 2000), in which a character called Joshua Chalfen's attachment to a group of animal rights activists is satirised as the consequence first of a crush on the group's leader, and second of rebellion against his bourgeois parents, but not of concern for animals. These facts combine with the group's manipulative co-opting of Joshua because his father is a vivisector to demean their ethical concerns about Marcus Chalfen's genetic experimentation on animals and resignify them as examples of the fundamentalism (another pro-animal cliché) that the text elsewhere condemns. The result is that animals are the first casualty of what the text portrays as a properly adult awareness of pluralism. T. Coraghessan Boyle similarly represents animal activism as a ridiculous pursuit serving an adolescent's hidden sexual agenda that is ultimately foiled by the manipulateness of the object of desire in 'Carnal Knowledge', in *Without a Hero* (London: Granta, 1995), pp. 123–44.

²⁹ The place of animal ethics in this novel requires a much longer discussion than I could attempt here. It would need to attend both to the complex structural importance of animal ethics in the novel's broader philosophical logic (they appear only in the final chapter yet seem essential to the final understanding of the main protagonists) and to the unexpected provenance of profound pro-animal thinking in a novel from Eastern-Europe. Sadly without mentioning Kundera, Simons (pp. 10–11) describes the perception in post-communist countries' literary circles that pro-animal thought is frankly absurd given the human horrors that abound.

to divest herself of such victim-thinking the need to empathise with animals remains in fact a valid one given the existential rootlessness of contemporary human life (p. 290). Indeed, for Kundera, neither Teresa's recognition that her passivity is itself a possessive and selfish form of control over Tomas nor, in turn, her desire to renounce it, compromises her ethical sympathy with animals (p. 302). In fact the chapter is filled with statements like the following about animal ethics which stand unquestioned in the authoritative narrative discourse of the text; some are so powerful that they have often found their way into the literature of animal rights groups.³⁰

True human goodness, in all its purity and freedom, can come to the fore only when its recipient has no power. Mankind's true moral test, its fundamental test (which lies deeply buried from view), consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals. And in this respect mankind has suffered a fundamental débâcle, a débâcle so fundamental that all others stem from it. (p. 281)

Sadly, Kundera does not really develop in the novel this radical proposition, which I would regard as entirely consonant with my discussion of the discursive construction of the human in section one (to the extent that animals have most consistently been the other against which humanity has defined itself).³¹ Nonetheless, in terms of human–animal relations, the novel's

³⁰ For example, *Vegan Outreach*: <http://www.veganoutreach.org/whyvegan/compassion.html>; *Northwest Animal Rights Network*: <http://www.narn.org/quotes.shtml>; *International Vegetarian Union*: <http://www.ivu.org/people/quotes/goodevil.html>.

³¹ Derrida has claimed that an ethics based on animals' passivity—epitomised by what is perhaps the ur-text of animal rights thinking, Jeremy Bentham's claim in *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) that 'The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?'—is the fundamental challenge to the metaphysics of presence that subtends western philosophy. See 'The Animal', p. 396. Bentham is quoted by Peter Singer in his edited volume *In Defence of Animals* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 5.

main difference from the apparent logic of *Surfacing* (in which pro-animal politics were incompatible with a psychologically healthy humanity) lies in the fact that Teresa's renunciation of victim mentality is a result of her recognition that both Karenin's love for her and the love it occasions in return, unlike her experiences of parental or conjugal love, are *entirely selfless* gifts to the other (pp. 289–90).

Despite the correctives that Bush and Kundera's novels offer in terms of the animal politics we have found in the novel, there is something insistent in *Surfacing*, not a voice or an event but an image, which points to the possibility of an ethical relation to the animal similar to the one suggested by Kundera. It is the image of the narrator's mother and her gift of food to the birds. I want in my brief final section to suggest, albeit tentatively, that this image implies a pro-animal ethics of otherness, that seems to exceed Atwood's own pronouncements.

III. *Surfacing* and the Ethics of Animal Otherness

If the legacy of the narrator's father is that the 'real' animal, the bodily animal, is possessed of an otherness that can never itself be shared by humanity, only subsumed into the self-identity of human understanding, then the mother, the only person in the narrator's life who 'prohibited cruelty', offers something very different, a gift 'simple as a hand' (pp. 369, 383). The hand in question is the mother's own as it is repeatedly remembered by the narrator, always 'stretched out' towards the jays that she often feeds (pp. 301, 324, 350, 411). In the distance between human and animal marked by the mother's perpetual reaching, the birds maintain their difference from her, despite her desire to close this gap; indeed, one of the few biographical facts we hear about the mother is her injurious attempt to

fly as a child (p. 362). It is clear, though, that the impossibility of complete identification with the birds does not imply a steadfast divide. We might also explicitly contrast the hand's continual *reaching towards* the animal other with the notion of *capturing* it. Such a capturing is permissible in the ethics that results from the narrator's refusal of 'substitutes' and human productivity: 'perhaps I can catch a bird or a fish with my hands, that will be fair' (p. 410). The difference between the narrator and her mother here marks the difference between an ethics that tries to reach beyond the fundamentally exclusionary logic of any identity formation—a logic that is constitutive of 'the human'—and one that imagines the figure of humanity can be divested of such exclusions and returned to equity with nature. As was suggested by my earlier allusion to Atwood's political statements, this is perhaps the difference between pro-animal ethics on the one hand and strictly environmental ethics on the other.

The narrator's logic is flawed, of course, in thinking of the 'catching' hand as not being tainted by human technicity. In ignorance of now developing ethological knowledge of tool-use amongst the great apes, the hand has conventionally been considered as the locus of an essentially human technical capacity of which such substitutes are only an extension. This is what Stanley Cavell has called 'the fantasy of the apposable thumb'. As such, the hand stands as a key figure for the human–animal divide. However, a more conceptually nuanced idea of the hand's human-ness has recently been subject to deconstruction, by Derrida and others.³² Derrida's

³² See Derrida, 'Geschlecht II, Heidegger's Hand', in *Deconstruction and Philosophy*, ed. by John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 161–195 (pp. 168–176); see also Cary Wolfe, 'In the Shadow of Wittgenstein's Lion: Language, Ethics and the Question of the Animal', in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. by Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis:

discussion is in fact very pertinent here because it revolves around 'the opposition of the gift and the grip' (p. 176)—two functions of the hand that separate the narrator and her mother. Derrida explains a philosophical idea of the human hand that 'belongs to the essence of the *gift*, of a giving that would give, if this is possible, without taking hold of anything' (p. 173, his emphasis); this idea has been opposed to the notion of simple 'grasping' that has been thought available to the animal, at least in the Heideggerian discourse he is critiquing. This definition of hands as giving comes very close to describing those of the narrator's mother in *Surfacing*. Yet, for Derrida, the idea of the 'giving' hand cannot correctly be used to demarcate human from animal: 'nothing is less assured than the distinction between giving and taking' (p. 176). Similarly, the mother's giving hands simultaneously reach towards the birds while suggesting her difference from them.

Surfacing's contrast between seeking (or being tantalised by) animals and capturing them also brings into view the link between the animal ethics I am sketching here and Butler's political project. That project follows from her assertion of the constitutive nature of exclusion in any social field. Developing this assertion, I have argued that the exclusion of the animal, as a figure of the 'inhuman', is constitutive of the human community. Yet for Butler, exclusions of this kind are inevitable: every social formation—whether it is sexuality, nationality or race—has its others. Her political project, therefore, is to try to redefine those socially excluded positions as 'a set of *future possibilities for inclusion*', rather than dreaming of a community empty

University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 1–58 (pp. 20–23); Cavell is quoted by Wolfe on p. 21; on Derrida, and for a reading of the hand motif in contemporary animal-based art, see Steve Baker, 'Sloughing the Human', in Wolfe (ed), pp. 147–164 (pp. 149–157).

of all human power relations. 'The ideal of radical inclusivity is impossible', Butler states, but that very impossibility demands that a socius defined by political and ethical hospitality should extend welcome to those excluded beings—as animals certainly are by the current constitution of society—whose lives form the 'not-yet-assimilable horizon of community' (p. 193).

Figuring the animal other, the ever-elusive jays are just such a horizon, I would argue. In terms of the animal politics of *Surfacing*, then, the 'gift' of the mother exceeds that of the father. His gift characterises the text's most apparent trajectory as I have described it: that human subjectivity, always-already in language, necessitates the otherness of the animal. The maternal gift is essential because it insists that such an otherness is neither a reason for fear, nor indeed a validation for cruelty. Rather, in the words of Steve Baker's pertinent invocation of Luce Irigaray, animals' difference is 'a space for wonder'. It propels our always-human attempts to reach beyond our humanity and towards the animal.³³

³³ *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Catherine Porter (London: Athlone, 1993), p. 73, qtd. in Baker, 'Review Essay', p. 84. Professor Catherine Rainwater made editorial comments in response to an early draft of this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM REPRESENTATION TO IMAGINATION: GETTING CLOSE TO ANIMALS WITH ALICE WALKER'S *THE TEMPLE OF MY FAMILIAR*

Introduction

There is a surprise and something of an irony embedded in the fact that of those few African-American women who emerged as 'important new voices' on the American literary scene in the late 1960s and 1970s—Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker—it is in Walker that academic critical interest has proportionately most waned during the past decade. It is not just that this has occurred despite the exponential growth of her popularity outside the academy. In fact, the abruptness of the critical turn away from Walker's work is brought into relief by a comparison with Morrison in particular, who during the nineties has reached almost canonical status, particularly on the strength of her novel *Beloved*. By comparison, *The Temple of My Familiar*, which Walker published two years after Morrison's novel, and the largely hostile critical reaction to it mark the start of a recoiling from Walker's work as an object of critical concern. This is surprising at first given that, like *Beloved*, *Temple* is a novel that merges historical fact with creative rewriting to develop its abiding concerns with personal and cultural memory in African-American life, with racial and gender power relations, and with the effects of colonisation on meaning in general. Moreover, *The Temple of My Familiar* nails its postmodern colours to the formal mast much

more brazenly than does *Beloved*—from its juxtaposition of multiple genres, forms and literary styles to its incorporation of intertextual reference, pastiche, irony and kitsch. The lack of critical interest in the novel is all the more ironic, however, given that Walker's shared concerns with Morrison are housed by her novel's narration of its characters' consciousness-raising searches for personal-political identity. For this would seem to make it ideal critical territory in the decade whose defining critical drive was identity politics. Another side of the irony is that although all this takes place in the context of the novel's reimagining of human relations with nature and the animal world, the other emergent critical field of the last decade for which this should signal its interest, ecocriticism, has not embraced it either.¹

It is not my intention here to develop explanations for the shift in critical interest away from Walker's work in general or from this novel in particular. However, I do want to suggest that if the novel has fallen between two critical stools—its concern with holistic ecology, ecospirituality and animal ethics putting off those interested in representations of race or gender; its extended focus on racial memory, feminist consciousness and personal identity-politics deterring green critics—then that very fact suggests its importance for my project. For I want to claim that (in political terms at least) the real value of *The Temple of My Familiar* only appears not just when we consider its race, gender or ecological politics, but rather when its

¹ To date, on my count, only six articles and a chapter in the two full books on Walker have been dedicated to the novel, with a few more comparing it to *Beloved*. This is a bigger tally than is reported in Adam Sol's 'Questions of Mastery in Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*', *Critique*, 43 (2002), 393–404 (p. 399). While most of the novel's academic critics pay some attention to its representations of nature, only one reads it from within an ecocritical (in fact, ecofeminist) framework: Amanda Greenwood, "'The Animals Can Remember': Representations of the Non-Human Other in Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*", *Worldviews*, 4 (2000), 164–78.

recodings of gender, race and postcolonialism are seen as supporting a more general reconfiguration of human-animal relations. So, when one character in the novel says that 'Africa itself became—was made—in the world imagination, an uninhabited region, except for its population of wild and exotic animals. On the maps of Africa of five hundred years ago [...] Europeans placed elephants where there were towns', we should hear in that assertion not just an indictment of the conventional racist figuration of Africa as absence, mute and void of civilisation.² We should hear also the quieter recognition that this recoding of Africa as empty of *humans*, and thus ready for geo-political possession, allowed the institutional practice of speciesism that manifests itself in a violent commodification of the animal body, by hunting and the ivory trade for example.

Listening for such confluences of cultural politics and animal politics in the novel, and more specifically listening for the suggestion in them of the difficulty with which otherness of a cultural or animal kind can be represented *at all*, allows us to discern the importance of Walker's novel for both pro-animal discourse and a wider cultural criticism alike. I will explain these matters in more detail below via a lengthy discussion of how *The Temple of My Familiar* and its representation of animals might intervene in debates about the social construction of race and gender. For now, though, it will suffice to say that the difficulty of representing animals' difference from humans is presented in the text as first and foremost a problem of language and of animals' exteriority to it.

² Alice Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 168–69.

Now, it is generally taken for granted that it is only in imaginative or literary creations that nonhuman animals can speak. Yet even in classic fictional examples of talking animals such as *Aesop's Fables* or *The Jungle Book* it is easily understood that animals are simply voicing human ideas and concerns and are certainly in no sense speaking for themselves. Despite research on chimpanzees' use of sign language, and even if we allow that animals can communicate to us some elemental needs or wishes, it is usually agreed that real communication between humans and animals, such as on the level that occurs when one human speaks to another, is impossible. That is to say, humans' use of language separates them from other animals. Or, more precisely, with their lack of language animals must always be thought of as at a distance from humans in a way that humans are not separated from one another.

Of course, we saw in chapter one that confidence in the irrevocability of this separation lies at the heart of the animal politics of *Surfacing*. However, the strength with which this conviction has been held right across the history of ideas has been demonstrated very clearly recently by Akira Mizuta Lippit. In a comprehensive survey of notions of 'the animal' in the history of western philosophy, he describes the latter's overwhelming conclusion that although a human being 'can project anthropomorphic characteristics onto the animal or experience emotions (such as pathos or sympathy) in response to its being, an impenetrable screen—language—divides the loci of human and animal being'.³

³ Lippit, p. 179. He focuses on Descartes, Leibniz, Rousseau, Kant, Burke, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger. However, he does not address the implications for animals of the challenge to this secure human ownership of language in the philosophy of language of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Stanley Cavell, Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida.

Now, in Atwood's novel, animals in the main are spoken *about*; that is to say their presence never goes further than being a mediated one. They are reported as objects of the narrator's attention rather than taking part, in anything more than the briefest way, as subjects of the narrative. This certainly does not stop animals being of paramount importance to the meaning of the text; but they remain passive in terms of the development of the narrative, which has a fundamentally human trajectory—even if that trajectory does concern humans' ethical relationships with their animal others. Here, we might think of the dead heron or the enigmatic and elusive jays as exemplary instances.

In *The Temple of My Familiar*, however, while it is true that Walker shares some of Atwood's reticence in giving over her narrative to the portrayal of animals' consciousness—and with it a certain anthropomorphic subjective presence—it is the case that she attempts to negotiate a way past Atwood's insistence on animals' absolute otherness to linguistic representational strategies. Walker does this by way of a complex approach to the idea of representation itself. The novel's implication is that although humans' ability to represent animals *linguistically* necessarily creates a tantalising distance between the species, it correspondingly creates the possibility of representing them *politically*, concomitantly offering the scope to traduce that distance. These ideas are summarised, in words to which I will return, by Lissie in *The Temple of My Familiar*: 'Our language [the animals] will never speak; not from lack of intelligence, but from the different

Cary Wolfe gives an exemplary account of this alternate line of thought in 'Wittgenstein's Lion'.

construction of their speaking apparatus. In the world of man, someone must speak for them' (p. 226).

In this chapter, then, I will examine the basis and many implications of the progression from animals being simply 'spoken about' to being 'spoken for' in and by Walker's novel. In particular, I want to suggest that this 'speaking for' marks a development from Atwood's novel in terms of the animal politics of contemporary fiction. That is because it suggests a subtle but crucial reconfiguration of the supposedly abyssal limit between humans and all other species caused by the single fact of our linguistic being. By conceding that such a difference is indeed a fundamental part of human-animal relations, Walker goes along with Atwood: but if for the latter language irrevocably polarises humans and other species, *The Temple of My Familiar* insists that through imaginative fiction that distance can be spanned.

I. Rewriting Genesis, Rereading Gender and Race:

Questioning the (Linguistic) Representation of Animals

The narrator of Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* pithily captures the idea that subtends a pro-animal revision of the foundation myth of Judeo-Christian culture.

The very beginning of Genesis tells us that God created man in order to give him dominion over the fish and fowl and all creatures. Of course, Genesis was written by a man, not a horse. There is no certainty that God actually did grant man dominion over other creatures. What seems more likely, in fact, is that man invented God to sanctify the dominion that he has usurped for himself over the cow and the horse. (p. 277)

There could hardly be a clearer critique of Genesis as an ideological use of discursive power. Walker certainly agrees with the critique; but to begin to

understand how she reformulates this basic recognition of ideology in terms of representation and its relationship with the animal body, we should turn to another writer (and an enthusiastic reviewer of *The Temple of My Familiar*), Ursula Le Guin, and her important contemporary fable 'She Unnames Them'.⁴ Rewriting the moment when Adam names the beasts, which Le Guin sees as the primary point at which human language imposes itself on animals' bodies, her story has Eve retracting that imposition and giving the animals back their namelessness. Of the animals, Le Guin writes, 'most of them accepted namelessness with the perfect indifference with which they had so long accepted and ignored their names' (p. 194). Realising that she cannot 'in all conscience, make an exception' of herself, Eve joins the now nameless animals and hands her own name over to a distracted, insouciant Adam, saying 'I'm going now with the— [...] with them, you know' (p. 196). Now, it is true that Eve's gift of namelessness to the animals is a human gift, after all it takes a human to imagine animals as nameless. Yet Eve's disavowal of Adam's discursive power encourages the recognition that animals *do* exist beyond the ways in which we think about them; and this necessitates the attempt to imagine what such an existence might be like. As she leaves Adam behind with his power of naming animals, Eve realises the seriousness and difficulty of relating to her fellow creatures without them. 'My words must be as slow, as new, as single, as tentative, as the steps I took going down the path away from the house, between the dark-branched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining' (p. 196).

⁴ In *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (London and New York: Plume, 1988), pp. 194–96.

Here, Le Guin's Eve practises a theory of language subtly different from straight linguistic constructionism. While she is aware that to name the world is inevitably to alter it by possession, she does grant language the capability not to impose itself on the world. It is certainly clear that language does not call it into being. Rather, human language can *respond* to the physical reality of the world if it is used with enough care and imagination. As is suggested by the way Eve's words are assimilated to her steps, this will require at the very least dismantling the strict opposition between humans' language and their own bodily presence in that world.

I will return to the importance of such a careful and imaginative response to animals later in my discussion of *The Temple of My Familiar*, but for now two aspects of Le Guin's brief rewriting of Genesis can introduce the terms of Walker's much more thoroughgoing one. First is its collocation of women and animals as subjects of the patriarchal power to name. Second is its recourse to the form of the fable which, in a quintessentially postmodern way, works parodically from within the fictional, narrative terms of Genesis-as-myth to deconstruct its ideological moves. Importantly, however, because Le Guin's form is the result of a belief that, as myth, Genesis is necessarily imaginative, its derivative parody is paradoxically all the more insistent on a *creative* rethinking of our relationship to animals.

Walker pushes this formal method to its limit, engaging in a profoundly anti-realistic and creative sort of myth-writing, in which Genesis is rewritten through the narrative of one of the book's main protagonists, Lissie, shifting sections of the novel into the genre of fantasy or fantastic literature. Rosemary Jackson has described the motivation that often lies behind a

writer's choice to step outside of conventional reality: 'the fantastic traces the unseen and unsaid of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made "absent"'.⁵ Thus, the genre of fantasy is particularly appealing to the writer who sees the hugely influential human-created narratives by which our world is understood as suppressing other more politically desirable ones. For Walker, the story of Genesis is just such a narrative, and so this ability to speak the unspoken is perhaps the clearest reason why the fantastic mode is employed to 'speak for animals'.

Since this chapter includes much discussion about 'the representation of animals', it will serve well at the outset to analyse a section of *The Temple of My Familiar* that stages—in relation to animals—the two-sided concept of representation as I will be using it here. I will use 'representation' in the twin senses of (a) signification: the presentation of phenomena by means of words or images that act as symbols for the things they represent. For example, the word 'dog', or an image of a dog, represents a particular species of furry animal, or individual of that species; and (b) advocacy: someone's acting as a proxy for another, in the sense that lawyers represent their clients.

The scene that stages the concept of representation involves two of the novel's central characters: Suwelo, a middle-aged African-American professor of history is listening to the words of Lissie, a remarkable old woman of the same ethnicity whom Suwelo comes to view as a wise mentor and guide. Lissie describes one of her 'dream memories' which detail what she says are past lives (p. 99); these lives have taken place from prehistory to recent centuries and in them her race, gender and even species are not fixed.

⁵ Quoted in Bonnie Braendlin, 'Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* as Pastiche', *American Literature*, 68 (1996), 47–67, p. 54.

She has been variously white, male and in one instance a lion. These past lives can be seen as Walker's rewritings of the stories and creation-myths, particularly the book of Genesis, through which Judeo-Christian culture came to understand its own origins. Lissie describes a particularly distant past life as a white boy approaching adulthood and living with his mother and the other women in a sexually segregated black tribe. Importantly, Lissie notes that in this lifetime humans and animals formed part of the same community:

In the days of which I am speaking, people met other animals in much the same way people today meet each other. You were sharing the same neighbourhood after all. You used the same water, you ate the same foods, you sometimes found yourself peering out of the same cave waiting for a downpour to stop. (p. 393)

Furthermore, the women of the tribe were accompanied by 'familiar': companion animals of a special kind—reminiscent of the oft-described witch's familiar and contrasted specifically with contemporary 'pets' (p. 138). They live entirely independently from, yet enjoy a relationship of reciprocal physical and emotional care with, their human companions. Lissie's mother in this past life had an adult lion named Husa as her familiar, yet animals in this life constituted no aggression or danger to humans, as Lissie explains: 'this perhaps sounds strange to you, Suwelo. About the lions, I mean. But it is true. This was long ago, before the animals had any reason to fear us and none whatever to try to eat us' (p. 393).

Clearly, then, there is a sense of togetherness of humans and animals. This seems impossible today, when most people think, Lissie claims (with a hint to the novel's interlinking of concern about animals and about contemporary neo-colonialism), that a lion is 'some thing that cares about tasting their foul flesh if they get out of the car in Africa' (p. 394). Eventually,

however, this togetherness comes to an end when Lissie—a boy in this past life—is expected to find a mate. The girl he meets has her own familiar, a serpent named Ba. Immediately after their sexual coupling, the boy comes to recognise his racial difference, the whiteness (apparently the result of what we would now term a genetic mutation) which his mother had always hidden from him by the application of pigmented ointment (p. 398). Empathising with her partner's thorough trauma by this recognition of racial lack, the boy's mate seeks to comfort him, displaying once again the human-animal relatedness that obtained in this past life:

She was crying as much as I was, and beating her breasts. For we had learned mourning from the giant apes, who taught us to feel grief anywhere around us, and to reflect it back to the sufferer, and to act it out. But now this behaviour made me sick. I picked up a stick and chased her away. (p. 398)

As his mate's familiar defends her, the boy kills Ba in a final act of violence caused by the repression of his grief. 'In my rage I struck it, a brutal blow, with my club, so hard a blow that I broke its neck, and it fell without a sound to the ground'. Finally, the boy's mate retrieves Ba's broken body and abandons him (p. 399).

This memory, as recounted by Lissie, can be seen as a feminist anti-racist re-enacting of the story of the Fall. Through a feminist reading, Eve's temptation of Adam under the malicious influence of the serpent becomes the story of humanity's (primarily Man's) loss of sexual innocence, of the moment that the difference between the sexes is first perceived, and patriarchy instituted. In Lissie's story this becomes the boy's unwarranted aggression towards the girl, borne out of the repressed pain of his racial difference or imperfection. Oppression by gender and race, Walker suggests, marks this most powerful biblical myth of human origins.

Linking this assertion to the question of animals, in her rewriting Walker has realigned the strict opposition of human and animal that marks the story of the Fall. She positions the animal *inside* a triangular relationship that is not conditioned by species: woman–familiar–man, in contrast to the positioning of the serpent of Genesis. There, the serpent is necessarily *external* to a specifically human community—it acts on Adam and Eve as a malicious agent. This is because it is only by being thus separate that the figure of the animal can bear the burden of the traumatic rent in this community that is sexual (and, for Walker, racial) difference. How then do we read the murder of the familiar-serpent Ba? With it, Walker suggests a continuum between the rhetorical violence in the humanism of Genesis—the exclusion of the animal in order to suture the wound of difference and underwrite the human community—and a more literal violence against animals. Such violence is in turn authorised by the assertion of humans’ essential difference from animals.

This confluence of racism and speciesism has been remarked upon slightly differently by Cary Wolfe in his discussion of Ernest Hemingway’s *The Garden of Eden*, a text posthumously published just three years before *Temple* and which casts an intertextual shadow over this part of it. Wolfe exposes Hemingway to a theoretical reading that both reveals a concern with the ethical problematics of animal otherness which in that author can only come as something of a shock and which chimes consistently with my reading of Walker here. Wolfe concludes that in *The Garden of Eden* the ‘ur-mechanism of whiteness’s own self-naturalization as a racially unmarked category—its fundamental operation of recoding the always unstable and fluid distinction between white and nonwhite as the more stable and identifiable distinction between human and animal’ is exposed as a racist sham by the childhood attachment of the novel’s protagonist to an African

elephant. As Wolfe reports it, this sympathetic identification, which is subject to various traumatic repressions in the Hemingway text, bears an uncanny resemblance to that with the animal familiar in Walker's novel. Wolfe points out that such identifications mark a problem for racist discourse because, 'after all, the use of "animality" as a crucial supplement to the discourse of racism is only effective so long as the distinction between human and non-human is assumed to be unproblematically coterminous with the distinction between subject and object'.⁶

Compelling though it is in itself, the rehearsal of Lissie's past life does not end here with the boy's racially based aggression towards his mate and her familiar and the exile from his community that it causes. Rather, Walker proceeds from questions of race to ask her most pertinent questions about the representation of animals. Alone, the boy enjoys an all too brief period of care by his mother's familiar Husa during which the lion gives him the skin of one of the already lame animals he has killed. As Lissie relates, she (that is the boy) uses it as clothing:

With a stone I battered it into a shape that I could drape around myself. I found a staff to support me in my walks and *represent 'my people'*.

Husa left.

And now I gradually made a discouraging discovery. The skin that Husa gave me [...] frightened all the animals with whom I came into contact [...]. They ran from me as if from the plague. And I was totally alone for many years. (p. 400 my emphasis)

⁶ 'Fathers, Lovers, and Friend Killers: Rearticulating Gender and Race via Species in Hemingway', *Boundary 2*, 29.1 (2002), 223–57 (pp. 255–56).

Thus the post-lapsarian boy of Lissie's past, exiled from his human community by the murder of the serpent Ba, ends up exiled from the animals, just like Adam and Eve. This is a quiet but important shift in the conventional perspective on the consequences of humans' shame at the nakedness signifying their exile from God. Also, Walker explicitly indicates the psycho-social context of this exile: the boy's desire as a result of his loneliness to assume power over a fictional tribe. He does this by 'representing'—that is, symbolising by means of a staff—'his' people. It is precisely this tropic ability to represent, *to make one thing stand for another*, which is the very essence of human language, in which a linguistic sign (the word we use) stands for the thing it represents. From this vantage point, we can see Walker's preliminary suggestion that the very notion of representation—language—marks the moment at which human community with animals has been lost. As my analysis of her rewriting of the Genesis story shows, however, this profound opposition of human to animal is not fixed or essential, as is presumed by the view that sees language as the specific mark of the human. Instead, it derives from the power of white male patriarchy over women and animals, a power figured in the unexpectedly white boy's murder of his mate's familiar.⁷

⁷ Derrida offers a different reading of nakedness and naming in Genesis from the point of view of the animal that is consonant with Walker's. He deconstructs the Biblical moment of naming which would posit Adam as having precedence over animals to remind us that the animals come before Man and watch over his creation. This is part of Derrida's more general reconfiguring of the power of the gaze in his essay to explore both the philosophical denial and the constitutive importance for 'the human' of the animal gaze. He goes as far as to claim not only that humans can be close to animals but that their very being is constituted by that relationship of contiguity: 'I am inasmuch as I am *alongside* [*auprès*] the animal', 'The Animal', pp. 379–87 (p. 379).

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At this juncture, it is worth pausing at length to reinterpret these developments in Walker's text by way of some explicitly theoretical discussion. This will let us do two things: attend to some of the broader (human) socio-cultural implications of Walker's animal politics as outlined here, expounded as they are in the context of race and gender; and in doing so let us mark the point at which Walker's understanding of animals moves away from Atwood's. To do this, I will discuss the work of literary critic and theorist Margaret Homans. It is of particular salience to my discussion firstly because she has offered perhaps the most sophisticated (if flawed) discussion of Walker's novel in terms of its economy of language, cultural markings (such as race and gender), and the body. What makes a detailed analysis of Homans's reading of Walker essential for my larger purposes in this thesis, though, is that Carol Adams's idea that the animal is the 'absent referent' of meat-eating culture is an extrapolation from Homans's suggestion that women are the absent referent of patriarchal culture. Adams's idea has been perhaps the most influential methodological concept in cultural criticism from a pro-animal perspective.⁸

⁸ See Adams, *Sexual Politics*, pp. 40–62. The term absent referent is derived from Homans's *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). For its influence see, in addition to Wolfe and Elmer (quoted in chapter two), see: Josephine Donovan, 'Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Reading the Orange', *Hypatia*, 11 (1996), 161–84; Erica Fudge, *Animal* (London: Reaktion, 2002), pp. 36–37; Scholtmeijer, *Animal Victims*, pp. 148–49; Stephanie Wardrop, 'They Don't Have a Name for It Yet: Patriarchy, Gender and Meat-Eating in Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*', *LIT*, 5 (1994), 95–105.

So, the ensuing critical reading of Homans's work on Walker has several functions. It allows for a detailed critique of the theoretical underpinnings of Adams's pro-animal literary-critical method that demands a 'multilayered evocation of the literal', in order that fiction and/or criticism reveal the real animals behind figurative representations of them.⁹ Also, my reading of Homans brings to the foreground two particularly important strains of animal politics in *The Temple of My Familiar*: the recognition that any culture is hegemonically founded upon its constitutive exclusion of others; and, in the light of this fact, the reconfiguration of liberal politics that is required to avoid purchasing the dismissal of racism, sexism or heterosexism at the expense of a renewed speciesism.

Homans uses her reading of the Genesis scene that I have been discussing to interpret Walker's position in what was in the late 1980s and into the 1990s probably the key debate in race and gender theory: whether or not these are cultural constructions, and the conceptual availability of a pre-discursive body that might be thought to lie behind them. She suggests that in Walker's rewriting of the Fall, there is a 'difficult tension between figuration and the body [that] comes neither from racial division alone, nor from sexual division alone, but from racial division as it is complicated by sexual division'.¹⁰ For Homans, the materialism-constructionism debate is best carried out in terms of the spectrum of the literal and figurative aspects of language; the body is collocated with the literal, and cultural construction

⁹ See the section of *Sexual Politics* entitled 'Writing the Literal; Writing Vegetarianism', pp. 104-05 (p. 104).

¹⁰ Margaret Homans, "'Racial Composition": Metaphor and the Body in the Writing of Race', in *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race Psychoanalysis Feminism*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian and Helene Moglen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 77-101 (p. 94).

is aligned with figuration. In the work of Walker and other African-American women writers such as Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison who have rewritten the Fall story, Homans writes,

the use or representation of a *relatively* literal language corresponds to and puts into practice a belief in the embodiedness of race and of gender (a belief that race and gender are experienced in the body), whereas the view that race is figurative coincides with and is performed as a celebration of language as figuration. (p. 79, my emphasis)

However, this apparently stable binary understanding of the meaning of the racially marked or gendered body in terms of the presence or absence of language (figuration) is troubled by a fundamental ambivalence. This ambivalence is indicative of a constitutive exclusion from debates about social construction—the exclusion of animals and pro-animal meaning—so I will take the time here to explain it.

It is signalled by a continual, almost metronomic, recurrence in the phraseology Homans uses to characterise the representation of embodiment. The modifier ‘*relatively*’, which I have italicised in the quotation above, is repeated by Homans ten times in reference to the use of literal language by Walker and other writers; indeed, it marks every use of the phrase ‘literal language’ in that context.¹¹ This compulsive repetition betrays Homans’s recognition that a *completely* literal language is in fact logically impossible

¹¹See pages 79 (3), 85, 88 (2), 92, 95, 95 and 98. The example I describe here is, because of its significant repetitiveness, the most telling example of Homans’s before the fact annulment of the project of Walker, Morrison and Angelou to write the literal body into their work. More mundane examples abound: for example at one point, Homans writes (in relation to Walker) ‘language risks betraying the things it refers to because of the inevitable gap between word and referent’ (p. 87).

within the figurative structure of signification. The prevaricating use of this modifier, then, in Homans's description of the authors' supposed attempt to develop a purely bodily understanding of race and gender consigns that attempt to the realms of impossibility almost before it is described.

Despite arguing throughout her essay that the language of Walker, Morrison and Angelou characteristically fits onto a spectrum between binary poles (literal/figurative) and that these poles must remain separate—'each concludes by representing the necessity of choice: figuration or the authentic body, but not at the same time' (p. 93)—Homans summarises their work otherwise. She writes that

in each scene, the fall is the moment at once of embodiment (entrance into history) and of the failure of embodiment adequately to represent a prior condition of wholeness. As narratives of the embodiment, stories of the fall explain why the literal is always accompanied by its opposite: figuration names the gap that embodiment seeks to fill but fails to close. (p. 94)

Again the vocabulary is telling: for Walker *et al*, 'embodiment' is the moment of 'entry into history' (surely a contested *discursive* field); we find that this 'embodiment' cannot 'represent' a prior condition of wholeness (presumably, were embodiment literal, the opposite of figuration, it could not 'represent' anything). Furthermore the very fictionalisations of embodiment that Homans bases her essay upon are '*narratives* of embodiment': their fictionality only highlights the impossibility of discussing embodiment outside of figuration, or narrative. Finally, Homans explicitly admits that these authors' '*narratives* of embodiment' prove the fact that the 'literal is always accompanied by [...] figuration', surely evidence itself that any discussion of these works in terms of markedly different meanings which they supposedly apply to (and elicit from) these supposed opposites, literal and figurative, is firstly misguided and secondly pointless.

The binary terms in which Homans discusses these writers in particular and the debate about the social construction of race and gender in general are now beginning to look extremely limiting, indeed misleading. And this limitation cannot but be felt in any theory that develops from it, such as Adams's pro-animal criticism focused on the literal.¹² That Homans should continue to formulate her discussion of the possibility of assigning positive cultural meaning to the body in binary terms of literalisation and figuration, despite her awareness that those terms are conceptually flawed by the logic of language, suggests that those terms support a deeper need within that discussion itself. That need, I will argue, is that a debate which has now accepted the discursive, cultural condition of bodily knowledge and meaning—be it of race or gender—should not be allowed (as it easily could be) to promote a questioning of the centrality of the one common denominator on which feminists and anti-racists can rely in their demand for equality: the common species of all human subjects. While racism and sexism are revealed as ideological formations by constructionist thought, its own humanism remains intact.

In fact, despite her recognition that 'Lissie's remembered lives [...] constitute a world history of interracial (or interspecies) conflict' Homans does not pursue a reading of *The Temple of My Familiar* attentive to the complexities of its representation of animals. However, when her discussion of Walker's work does alight on this topic, the moment carries

¹² I should note that Adams's later work on race questions is more consonant with my argument here, suggesting that animal advocacy can be a 'progressive, anti-racist possibility'. Often explicitly referring to Walker's journalism, she insists on the need to recognise, in speaking for animals, the interconnected yet different abuses in our culture of (among other groups) women, animals and the environment, people of colour or who are gay or lesbian, *Neither Man*, pp. 71–84.

disproportionate importance for my reading of *The Temple of My Familiar*. Homans describes a harrowing anecdote in Walker's *Living by the Word* in which Walker—compelled by a fear of snakes, a fear that she herself abhors—kills a companion being, a 'snake person' in her garden. This clearly prefigures the novel's own revision of the Fall in which the girl's familiar is killed by Lissie's dream memory self. As Homans decodes this anecdote, though:

By having the snake 'be' a person, Walker rhetorically enacts an Edenic unity between animal and human. Her murder of the snake in the garden [...] is an act at once of physical and of rhetorical violence, for it reveals that the snake is only metaphorically a person. *Is* falls into its component parts, exposing as fallen metaphor what Walker tries to present as the literal designation of identity. (p. 92)

Since what Walker 'enacts' is a prelapsarian 'Edenic unity between animal and human' it is clear that Homans herself regards the essential difference between these two categories of being as a linguistic one: humans are different from animals as a consequence of the 'fall' that renders them fundamentally linguistic beings.

The fall is certainly not a fortunate one for non-human beings, however, who obviously are defined by their negativity in Homans's binary schema: ontologically, they are fundamentally non-linguistic beings. Walker, it is claimed, uses rhetoric to re-enact this prelapsarian status by having the snake 'metaphorically [be] a person' (personhood, for Homans, is a necessarily human preserve). The snake's 'murder' reveals that it can only ever attain the status of person 'metaphorically'. Walker's metaphorical act is

to ascribe the concept of 'humanity' (personhood), to what we must presume is the literal (i.e. aconceptual) animal.¹³ Therefore, just as elsewhere Homans criticises black male post-structuralists such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. who, by theorising race as metaphorical, substitute 'in the undesirable position of the referent or ground from which language differentiates itself, female for black' (p. 78), she herself substitutes the animal in that undesirable locale in place of both black and female. That is, the animal fills the gap that is left by Homans's recovery of the black/female body from the domain of the non-linguistic. Given the acceptance of discursive constructionist thinking, however, such a domain is necessarily unintelligible, that of the pure body beyond language. It is a domain which is necessarily abject from all cultural understanding. Walker's attributed attempt to 'personify' the snake, then, is circumscribed by a profound pathos in that it can never really achieve its object.

Now, the idea that humans are separated from animals by language was the first conclusion that I drew in my reading of the Fall scene in *Temple of My Familiar* just as it is (in the main) Atwood's position in *Surfacing* as I described it. Left as it stands, however, this idea remains deeply problematic. In the first place, as is familiar from work such as Judith Butler's, the use of language figuratively to position a specific cultural formation as the domain of the non-figurative is illogical and pernicious; as is Homans's delineation of the meaning of the concept 'animal' as the literal body, as non-meaning. This is an exclusionary move that relies on and reinforces the preconceived

¹³ It is surprising that Homans does not parenthesise the word 'murder' here, since the logic of her point presumes that 'murder', as the rules of semantics dictate, should not be used of non-human beings. I would suggest, though, that this is a particularly piquant example of the way language can be anthropocentric.

understanding that ontology can be rigidly demarcated in terms of the possession or lack of language; and as such it is a fundamental humanism consonant with the philosophical heritage as I described it at the outset.¹⁴

What Homans's reading fails to remark, however, is that as a self-reflexive representation of the fall into representation, Walker's novelistic recasting of the lapsarian story is able (by focusing in the story on the violence against woman and animal) to bring to the surface the work of patriarchal power and racial denial inherent in that fall. The supposedly ontological difference between human and animal, woman and man, black and white is reconfigured in *The Temple of My Familiar* as an effect of a particular working of both physical and discursive power.

This argument that the notion of unbridgeable human–animal difference is discursively constructed opens out, as I read it, on to a slightly more complex but nonetheless vital point. It is not simply that humans are separated from animals by the violence inherent in linguistic representation; rather, the very concept of an irreducible difference between humans and animals is always-already ideological. I should be clear that Walker does not disavow the obvious facts of psychology, physiology or ecology to claim that there are *no* differences between humans and animals. Quite to the contrary, my reading suggests that the notion of commuting the multiple differences in order to code the human–animal relation as a single and essential difference in kind—especially in terms of one symptom such as language use—begs the question of the power relations involved.¹⁵ The inscription of that difference

¹⁴ See *Bodies*, chapter seven. To see these issues played out in terms of poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, see Wolfe, 'Fathers', pp. 246–49.

¹⁵ Compare on this point Derrida: 'I am trying to explain how drawing an oppositional limit itself blurs the differences, the difference and the differences, not only between man and

in humans' dominant form of communication (language) is necessarily an exercise of human ideological power. This power is enacted in the murder of the serpent Ba. Violence against animals is implicit in the concept of linguistic representation *as such* while it remains conceived as that which marks their unbridgeable separation from the human community.¹⁶

Thus we do not see in *The Temple of My Familiar*, a use of literal language to write the body into our cultural consciousness, as is ambivalently suggested by Homans. Neither is literal language used, as Adams would ask of the pro-animal writer, to bring into cultural view the bodily presence of the real animal. Rather, Walker accepts the irrevocable circumscription of materiality by discourse in human life (what more could we expect from the writer of a book called *Living by the Word?*). But—and this is where Walker both exceeds Homans's reading and differs from the Atwood of *Surfacing*—she sees that circumscription as an opportunity to unpick the essentialism of a humanism, itself of course discursively constructed, that would see language itself as an abyssal limit between humans and animals. Walker wittily makes this point by narrating the novel's only explicit description of a human being's actual accession into the field of language as an acknowledgement of representation propelled by a desire to understand the animal other. Fanny (Suwelo's estranged wife) learns to speak as a child when she progresses from a fixation on her

animal, but among animal societies—there are an infinite number of animal societies and within human society itself, so many differences'. Matthew Calarco quotes this among many other instances of this point in Derrida's work, 'Deconstruction Is Not Vegetarianism: Humanism, Subjectivity and Animal Ethics', *Continental Philosophy Review* (forthcoming, 2003).

¹⁶ This point is an extension of arguments about the inherence in representation of misogynistic violence, see Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986).

transitional object, a red bird made of cloth, feathers and rubber that she repeatedly stuffs in her mouth with quite some childish violence. It is only when she understands that this object represents the beautiful real birds that Fanny sees outside and hears spoken of by her relatives that she says her first word: 'bird' (p. 175). In fact, since it turns out that the bird is also the familiar-animal of Fanny's grandmother Celie, her embracing of the animal in language also roots her in her ancestral family. As such, this moment is the positive correlative of Lissie's traumatic dream narrative.

So, Walker's concern is to complicate the claim that as beings bound by the representational logic of language, humans are always-already separate from animals. She does so in order to open up the possibility that by advocacy (that other sense of representation) people like Lissie might bridge that essential difference. Now, as Lippit shows, the claim that language essentially separates humans and animals has the validation of the western philosophical tradition; it is to counter such a hefty weight of agreement that Walker deconstructs the Ur-text of Judeo-Christian myth, Genesis. It could be argued that this approach results in a monolithic critique tied to the structural level of patriarchy, one that is blind to the complexities of different historical situations. As I will suggest below, however, Walker does indeed attend to such complexities. More importantly, however, it is only by first engaging her critique at the broadest level that the notion of essential human-animal difference can be dislodged from its cultural centrality. Therefore, we must bear this reason in mind while analysing Walker's researches at the margins of western history, beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition that for her has divorced humans and animals under the influence of racist patriarchy. There, Walker explores the forms of representational advocacy that her rewriting of Genesis suggests are possible.

II. Alternative Histories, Unheard Voices: Speaking for Animals

In *Temple*, Lissie writes a letter to Suwelo shortly before her death. In it, in contradistinction to the rewriting of Genesis, she describes an alternative, non-Judeo-Christian story of the relationship between women of colour and animals. It is a story of people whose lives have gone unrecorded in conventional western history. Of central importance here is the figure of the witch, which Lissie has also been in a previous incarnation. Lissie writes that the witches of medieval Europe were women (often women of colour) who had an especially close relationship with animals. Following from the argument of the previous section, being human and language-using, women might be thought to be separate from animals. Yet in the history Lissie outlines, although they cannot communicate fully, women in the Middle-Ages were not as divorced from the community of animals as men.

Woman [...] kept alive some feeling for the other animals, though she was reduced to caring and feeding one small house cat. [...] We never forgot it should be possible to communicate with anything that had big enough eyes! So there we were, the dark women, muttering familiarly to every mouse or cow or goat about the place. (pp. 225–26)

Lissie suggests that one reason why the notion of the 'witch' as we currently understand it appeared in the medieval period under the influence of the Spanish Inquisition was to meet the need to subdue this relationship with animals: 'the inquisitors, set in place to control us, declared consorting with animals a crime, punishable by being burned at the stake!' (p. 226). Here, the inquisitors' law that criminalises 'consorting with animals' and calls its perpetrators 'witches' in effect invents a legal category called 'witch' which can be used to describe such women. By being too close to animals

some women called into question the inquisitors' belief that to be human is to be different from animals.

Moreover, as Lissie continues, this legal foreclosure of human–animal communication is reinforced by other cultural methods:

The inquisitors claimed we were fucked and suckled by bulls and goats and all manner of malformed animal creatures. For good measure, they gave their devil—the black thing that represented the people they most despised and wished to be separate from—sharp cloven hoofs and pointed horns, a tail. They made it seem not only natural, but also righteous to kill [...] any animal or dark creature that one saw. (p. 226)

Lissie suggests that through these derogatory images or representations of women and animals, and ultimately through the force of written law, the cultural constructions of the white male inquisitors leave no space for alternative realities, such as that of women who maintained a close relationship to animals. Furthermore, as long as conventional written history consistently fails to recognise this, theirs is literally a silent story. An epigraph to the letter Lissie is writing makes clear these initial and subsequent erasures: 'They burned us so thoroughly we did not even leave smoke' (p. 221).

It is with this erasure of history, however, that we reach an important point in Walker's understanding of the representation of animals. First, in order to make these points about witches and animals, she relies on the recognition that both the law and history are powerful means by which the people who write them silence others. She shares the viewpoint of Erica Fudge that if 'our only access to animals in the past is through documents written by humans, then we are never looking at animals, only ever at the representation of the animals by humans'. Walker develops this into the recognition of the power that such representations (in my first sense) have to

hide from view the animals (or witches) they represent. As Fudge notes, the fact that 'representation is always-already inevitable' means that 'the real animal can disappear' from our understanding.¹⁷ In this sense, human representations fail both animals and the 'witches' who have a close relationship with them. The preliminary conclusion to be drawn here is that language, now specifically understood as language controlled by the interests of the inquisitors (or representation as 'speaking about') separates humans and animals. With the figure of the witch in the story of Lissie's past lives, however, Walker offers some recuperation from this state of affairs.

Concluding her letter on the subject of language and the distance it creates between humans and animals, Lissie extends the statement quoted in my introduction by returning to the witch:

The animals can remember [...]. But our language they will never speak; not from lack of intelligence, but from the different construction of their speaking apparatus. In the world of man, someone must speak for them. And that is why, in a nutshell, Suwelo, goddesses and witches exist. (p. 226)

Having traced the creation of the witch in the suppression of women's relationships with companion animals by the legal discourse of the Middle Ages, Lissie now claims for the witch a special ability: the representation (in my second sense of 'speaking for') of animals. Just as I have suggested that fantastic literature aims for the political power to speak the unspoken, so Walker's imaginative creation Lissie reclaims the figure of the witch from its former designation of evilness or inhumanity and sees it as a place in which

¹⁷ Erica Fudge, 'A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals', in Rothfels (ed.), pp. 3-18 (pp. 6, 7).

animals can be spoken for. The power of both the witch and the goddess, which Lissie also claims to be (p. 409), is that being supernatural they are not quite human and not quite animal. At the borders of humanity, both goddess and witch provide creative and imaginative ways to reappraise our cultural ideas of being human. And if, as Lissie's description of the Inquisition suggests, such ideas have to an extent been formed by criminalising close communication with animals as witchcraft, the witch perhaps provides an ideal figure to effect a particularly feminist, anti-racist setting for the political representation of animals.

It is necessary now to pause to look critically at what sort of 'speaking for animals' is offered here. Walker's use of the figure of the witch does do some important work by making clear an alternative perspective on human relationships with animals. As I have suggested, this alternative provides Walker with a way to query the opposition of humans and animals on the basis of language possession that is central to the western tradition. It does, however, raise a worrying question. We might wonder, as does Amanda Greenwood, whether Walker reinscribes the politically reactionary idea that to be female or black is to be bound to the bodily realm and hence to be more like animals in the derogatory sense of being unworthy of fully human ethical treatment (p. 166). This of course is a key paradox that must be negotiated by any pro-animal thinking that takes feminism as its starting point.¹⁸ Indeed, Marian Scholtmeijer suggests just such a problematic reading

¹⁸ Beth A. Dixon uses this argument as the key point in her somewhat niggardly denial of the suggestion, so central to the pro-animal feminism of Adams and others, that animals and women suffer analogous masculinist oppressions, 'The Feminist Connection between Women and Animals', *Environmental Ethics*, 18 (1996), 181-91. See also the extensive debate on the subject 'Should Feminists be Vegetarians?' between Katherine Paxton George and Carol Adams and others in the pages of *Signs*, 19 (1994), 405-34 and 21 (1995), 221-41.

of the novel, stating that through Lissie's descriptions of an elemental connection between black women and animals, 'the inner animal, in Miss Lissie, and in all women, surfaces, to explain and render powerful that correspondence between women and animals'. Greenwood, as might most pro-animal feminists I think, adroitly side-steps the problems of such a claim by focussing on animals' increased status, rather than on the demeaning of women. She asserts that while Walker does perceive an alignment of black people or women and animals, the text is celebratory of it rather than condemnatory (pp. 166–67).¹⁹

My argument sorts the competing ideas more discriminately than this. I would repeat that for Walker the very notion of humans' absolute difference from animals is itself a rhetorical trope that is marked by our power over them. This essentially post-structuralist point underlies what I regard as the novel's concerted critique of liberal-humanist forms of feminism or anti-racism as I described them in the earlier analysis of Homans's project. The effect of her recuperation of the female, black (or black female) body into cultural meaning was the forging of a necessarily all-human community by distinguishing the inevitable discursive marking of the human body from the essential materiality of animality. This in turn casts the latter concept into the realm of cultural negativity. Such a failure to attend to othering *per se*, and the concomitant othering of non-human species in such a language-centred ontology, is the inevitable corollary of liberal forms of community that are predicated on sameness of whatever kind (gender, race, species) rather than the embracing of difference. This is precisely the difficulty with otherwise

¹⁹ For Scholtmeijer's comments see 'The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women's Fiction' in *Animals and Women*, ed. by Adams and Donovan, pp. 231–62 (p. 251).



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'on the bottom steps of an enormous white stone building in a different city and a different century[...] the colour of cheap false teeth' (p. 140). This debased image of Capitol Hill suggests the inadequacy of American representative democracy to accommodate Lissie's cultural alterity as symbolised by the familiar. More significantly, though, Lissie's traumatic uprooting in the dream from indigenous homeland and abandonment with the white others at Capitol Hill warns that the price of accession to modern metropolitan forms of political enfranchisement as they stand is the foundational repression, indeed loss, of a human relationship with the animal other. Of course, the positive side of this is that Lissie's acts of repression do not succeed: just as the familiar escapes in the dream, so does Lissie reveal her subaltern histories to Suwelo in the narrative proper; and by doing so she speaks for animals.

So for Walker the point is not simply to celebrate or condemn women's theoretical closeness to animals. Rather, it is to examine the ideological conditions by which a genuine affinity might be made possible—that is, one that is based on a positive revaluation of all forms of otherness (not just animals') and so cannot be part of a strategy to demean blacks or women as 'animals'. Walker therefore writes Lissie's dream memories in order to release the hold of the argument that there is an 'essential difference' between humans and other species and to effect just such a possible affinity. For, if 'the human' itself is a discursive category marked by ideological power, any essence it might have been said to have is riven by its differential relationship with its non-human others. This important aspect of Lissie's place in the structure of the novel is missed by both Greenwood and Scholtmeijer. They fail to see the radicalism of Walker's text by understanding Lissie as a paragon of virtue, someone who unproblematically voices the text's message or can be wholly integrated into it. In my reading,

however, it is fundamental that Lissie's story itself always remains open to critique, when read, as it will be below, in conjunction with the worldviews of the novel's other characters. Lissie's feminist and afro-centric reclamation of history is part of what I see as Walker's larger commitment to pluralism based on the imaginative understanding of others, both human and animal.

III. Imaginative Understanding: Getting Close to Animals

Can one speak of the animal? Can one
approach the animal?

*Jacques Derrida*²¹

Before explaining the details and implications of Walker's commitment to pluralism in the novel, I will begin with an example of it, in which no one character has a singular claim to morally authoritative status, although ethical choices are certainly made. It is borne out in the story of Fanny, her mother Olivia, her grandmother Mama Celie and her lesbian partner Mama Shug. These latter characters are described to an extent as moral exemplars in the novel, a description that refigures Walker's development of them in *The Color Purple*; Mama Shug institutes a religion founded on, among other things, compassion for animals.²² Yet it eventually becomes clear that Mama

²¹ 'The Animal', p. 390.

²² See pp. 317–19. I will not explore the intertextual possibilities suggested by Walker's inclusion of these characters, but we should be wary of the realist conclusion that Mama Celie and Mama Shug are the same people as the characters in *The Color Purple* (London: The Women's Press, 1983) since the textual forms in which we meet them are so different. Nonetheless, it is worth remembering in our current context the moment in the earlier novel when Celie finds herself equated to an animal as a counter in a patriarchal economy, passed

Celie, having herself been battered by her ex-husband, had for a long time repeated the pattern of this abuse by beating the family dog. Her compassion for animals only comes about when Mama Shug, having 'liberated' the dog from his subservient acceptance of this and made him bite back, laughs at Mama Celie's reversal of fortunes, embarrassing her (p. 344). Celie's compassion, then, is not a 'truth' inherent in her womanhood as Scholtmeijer would appear to argue. Rather, it is the consequence of a specific action arrived at by way of the complex negotiation of empathy and mockery in Mama Shug's response to the factors of Celie's emotional history. Thinking further in terms of the novel's disavowal of moral exemplarity in any one person, we can read this scene as a corollary of Lissie's profound prejudice against 'man's "best friend"', the "pet" familiar, the fake familiar, his dog' (p.403). Because she thinks of dogs as agents of male power, Lissie's prejudice is less a direct result of her identification with cats throughout the novel than of her anti-patriarchal thinking. Yet in its mistaking of human (or masculine) abuses of dogs' power for the essence of the dog itself, such thinking suggests that even Lissie's radically politicised animal advocacy conceals its own excluded other.

More importantly, though, the novel also reveals that although Mama Shug and Mama Celie may appear exemplary in their actions towards others, their very over-competence as parents to both Olivia and her daughter Fanny itself creates a problem. Olivia comes to feel supplanted as a mother and eventually leaves the home, the gap left by her departure creating a deep sense of loss in Fanny. Fanny's attempts to recover from this abandonment

from her 'Pa' to Mr. ____: when Mr. ____ asks about a dowry ('That cow still coming?') Pa's answer (speaking of Celie) is 'her cow' (p. 12).

form a large part of the novel. Thus, while Mama Celie and Mama Shug complicate Lissie's animal advocacy, they also exhibit the capacity of even the most virtuous personal philosophies to overpower and silence other people. Compassion, Walker seems to say, is the hard-won result of an always ongoing, genuinely engaged thought, rather than easy moral judgements: 'the awareness of having faults [...] opens us to courage and compassion', she has written.²³ This acceptance of flaw leads directly to Walker's celebration of the creativity of imagination which always, she believes, maintains openness to others' realities, be they human or animal.

I have argued that in the character of Lissie, Walker uses the creative power of the human imagination, especially as it occurs in story-telling, to re-envision the human-animal relationship. The existential distance that the fact of language is conventionally said to insinuate between humans and animals was shown to be socially constructed and power-laden; it can thus be traduced. And as Lissie shows, the force which brings humans close to animals is the creative imagination. Here, Walker foreshadows a point made in J. M. Coetzee's novella *The Lives of Animals*. His main character, a novelist called Elizabeth Costello, discusses the supposed boundary between humans and animals suggesting that the imagination can bring the two close:

There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. If you want proof, consider the following. Some years ago I wrote a book called *The House on Eccles Street*. To write that book I had to think my way into the existence of Marion Bloom [...]. The point is *Marion Bloom never existed*. Marion Bloom was a figment of James Joyce's imagination. If I can think my way into the existence of a being who

²³ *Anything We Love can be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (London: The Women's Press, 1997), p. xxiii.

has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life.²⁴

Walker herself has taken this point about imaginative empathy further, arguing that the very *purpose* of fictional writing is to use the imagination in this way, and that the absence of life is not even a barrier to it:

[The] writer's pen is a microphone held up to the mouths of ancestors and even stones of long ago. [Once] given permission by the writer [...] horses, dogs, rivers, and, yes, chickens can step forward and expound on their lives. The magic of this is not so much in the power of the microphone as in the ability of the nonhuman object or animal to *be* and the human animal to *perceive its being*.²⁵

In these examples, Walker and Coetzee equate the imaginative writer to the witch or goddess as exemplified by Lissie: he or she can get close to animals. I would argue, however, that the important aspect of this assessment is imagination and the ability to be creative in understanding others—and here we are reminded of Ursula Le Guin's *Eye* and the sort of creativity demanded of her that foregoes the use of entrenched patterns of thought—rather than writing *per se*. Indeed, perhaps surprisingly in a written work, Walker's novel explicitly denigrates writing, as we saw in Lissie's narrative when the force of written law was used to criminalise witches and

²⁴ *The Lives of Animals*, ed. and intro. by Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 35, Coetzee's emphasis. The character's argument here sidesteps the ethical dilemmas noted by Fudge above that surround the linguistic representation of 'real', that is living, animals. She posits that from the point of view of the creative understanding delineated here the 'realness' of its object is of no importance to the ethical or 'sympathetic' imagination; indeed real animal and fictional creation are equivalent.

²⁵ *Living by the Word: Selected Writings 1973–1987* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 170, Walker's emphasis.

silence those women's correspondence with animals. So the written word holds the power of representation (in my first sense) to silence others. Therefore, Walker's speaking for animals through the celebration of imaginative understanding (representation in my second sense) emerges in this novel paradoxically in proportion to the denigration of writing.

This occurs most obviously through Lissie's past lives which are imaginative, though not strictly 'imaginary', since she claims that she remembers them (p. 80). The key impact of her merging of fictive and real is its ability creatively to reflect another one: the merging of material fact with discourse that occurs in any process of representation. Doing so, the dream memories can flag the ideology present in the representation of the supposed facts of species difference. However, it is important to remember that Lissie's report of these past lives never attempts to achieve the status of objective, verifiable fact. Indeed, Lissie's past lives are explicitly contrasted to official history, always appearing in the form of the oral narratives that she tells to Suwelo, himself (significantly) a professor of American history. These force him to recognise, for instance, that the authoritative discourse of history, and hence the written facts on which his knowledge is based, often ignores the stories of women, indigenous Americans, other people of colour and animals—groups who do not fit the authoritative description of the past.

This distrust of the written word is dramatised explicitly in the text, in which written documents of the past have a very tenuous status. For example, one character reads the diary of her nineteenth-century ancestor, Eleandra Burnham, and in it learns about the history of British Imperialism. Even before the diary has been completely read, it crumbles in its reader's hands having been eaten by moths (pp. 258–59). The diary tells of Eleandra's trip to the British Museum, in which a captured indigenous African is housed as an exhibit. This exercise of colonial power reminds Eleandra of

animals: 'animals in zoos were afraid of me simply as [yet] another human being come to stare at them, but this was different somehow' (p. 250).

This issue marks one aspect of the novel in which Walker moves beyond the rather unhistoricised approach to the question of human–animal difference discussed in this chapter. She extends the understanding of the important place of animals and zoos in nineteenth-century British colonialism—extensively documented by Harriet Ritvo²⁶—to the perspective of contemporary neo-colonial capitalism. As the novel opens, Zedé, a Guatemalan woman, crafts head-dresses from peacock feathers. Hers, the most beautiful, are made from found feathers retrieved by Zedé's daughter, not those plucked from the live peacocks whose 'mournful cry' is distressing to her (p. 11). When, years later and living in 1970s San Francisco, the daughter herself makes head-dresses for rich American rock stars, her own child is also able to 'find' feathers by stealing them from the sweatshop where she works as a cleaner. By paralleling the two generations, Walker implies that the plight of peacocks and of sweatshop workers, of animals and oppressed peoples, must be understood in the context of each another.

As an aside, I would note that because this approach attends to the negotiation of postcolonial and animal politics that contextualises many of the representations of animals in the novel it indicates the lack of perceptiveness in Scholtmeijer's unilateral claim that the novel has a 'vegetarian message'.²⁷ Such an appeal to moral authority cannot accommodate the apparently contradictory fact that eating meat is a vital

²⁶ See *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in The Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

²⁷ 'Power of Otherness', pp. 249–50.

part of Lissie's identity as an African-American and that self-adornment with feathers plays a crucial role in maintaining the cultural identity of displaced South American peoples in the novel (pp. 263–65, 227). Similarly, it hides the text's complex recognition of the socio-political as well as economic factors involved in food choice, and not just of ones based on animal ethics. Lissie suggests that during her childhood the distaste for vegetarian 'rabbit food' in her black community has its roots in their internalisation of the values of previous generations of slave-owners who had punished the eating of such prized foodstuffs (p. 69). It is true that in other places the novel offers a more damning verdict on the dietary deficiencies that whole communities of African-Americans suffer in later years through their ideological prejudice against healthy eating. This prejudice is itself a result of a fetishisation of fast-food commodities (p. 196). Nevertheless the motivation for this verdict remains an attack on the structural racism it implies rather than on the ethics of meat eating *per se*.

But returning to the problem of writing, the disintegration of Eleandra Burnham's diary is mirrored elsewhere in the novel. Fittingly enough, the letter in which Lissie narrates her alternative history of witches is written in special invisible ink, which disappears after being read only once (p. 225). Clearly, in both of these instances the all-powerful status of documentary history is being problematised. Furthermore, Lissie recalls a confrontation with a white woman professor after a lecture at which she, Lissie, had been describing a past life as a slave of the middle passage. Although she knew that 'the professional way to present [her] experience was as if it had been merely told to [her]', she accidentally presented it in terms of actual memories. Recalling the professor's correcting of her, Lissie tells Suwelo that:

[some] people don't understand that it is [...] the nature of the mind to recall everything that was ever known. Or that was the nature, I

should say, until man started to put things down on paper. The professor went on to say that she couldn't even imagine what it must have been like on the slave ship. (p. 80)

For Lissie, written history itself, the period when 'man started to put things down on paper', hinders the imaginative understanding of others. In this instance, Lissie is discussing Africans of the Diaspora, yet the point equally applies to the animals of her dream memories. Indeed, because of its structural position in the novel, this white professor's inability to imagine the conditions of the middle passage can be equated to a failure of imagination that separates humans and animals.

Now, if there was one commonplace amongst the hostile critical responses to *The Temple of My Familiar*, it was to debate what was seen as the extreme relativism advocated in Walker's novel, exemplified here in its dramatisation of the power of unverified oral history. The dismissal of such relativism by historically aware critics often accompanies a tendency to look rather sniffily at the novel, its characters, and their outré embracing of holistic ecological spirituality. Such critics often dismiss the text (and its sometimes high-flown spiritualist rhetoric) as evidencing a naïve faith in new age faddism.²⁸ To indict the novel for the charge of relativism—that there is not one historical 'truth' and all interpretations of reality are equally truthful

²⁸ The issue of relativism is resignedly reported by a generally more affirmative critic, Maria Lauret, as the point at which her defence of the novel in terms of Jungian psychoanalysis collapses in *Alice Walker* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 129–30; for the more ambivalent Adam Sol, the task for future Walker critics should be a negotiation of what he sees as a contradiction between the novel's 'trite post-hippie feminism' and its 'muddling of history and realism' with its ambitious attempt to 'break down hegemonic viewpoints and mythologies' (p. 399). Defending the novel, Braendlin argues that the high-flown rhetoric is only one sound in the disjunctive clash of discourses from which Walker creates a postmodern polyvalent text (pp. 48–51). This latter point fits well with my argument here.

or valid, so genuine inquiry is impossible—would, however, miss Walker's point. First, she does not deny that there are empirical facts. Indeed, whole sections of the novel are a response to the specific material impact of capitalism and colonialism on parts of Africa and South America. Rather, the main focus of the relativist charge, Lissie's 'dream memories'—which merge some of the status of the real with some of the imaginary—are Walker's way of releasing the potential in notions of the unconscious. These render permeable the oppositions between reality itself, our factual knowledge about it, and our subjective imaginary responses to it; such permeability is necessary for the creation of new forms of knowledge.

In addition to all of this, the continuing (if reducing) scepticism of Suwelo, the novel's modernist historian (and to a lesser extent of Lissie's husband Hal) balances Lissie's revisionist dream memories. So rather than shying from the factual altogether, Walker draws attention to the way in which *a selection* of (in themselves perfectly valid) historical facts can cohere via a particular unified perspective into what might be called a regime of truth. As such, this partial and selective approach, which characterises any history, nonetheless utilises for its own ends the power inherent in the absolute authority of the truth. To cast this in terms of my earlier argument about the human–animal relation, we might say that the (problematic) truth at which we arrive by viewing humans and animals in terms of language-use is that there is a single oppositional limit between them. The problem is that the factuality of such a unilateral opposition is itself underwritten by the powerful status of truth. Walker's response is to abjure the absolute authority inherent in that power. Relativism, on the contrary, smuggles this power of authority in through the back door by simply sharing it across the variety of different interpretations of empirical reality.

I would argue that it is precisely through Walker's holding back from the authoritative power of truth that genuine inquiry becomes all the more possible. A good example of this is Walker's strategic marshalling of Lissie's claim that the witches of Europe were often women of colour ('daughters of the Moors', p. 222). Walker quite possibly gleaned this from the many afro-centric alternative histories that proliferated in the early eighties, though it is not a position that is at all consonant with most historians' reports.²⁹ What is important, I think, is that Lissie's claim retains the value of highlighting the racist and sexist arena in which the argument of human-animal difference appeared and is maintained. Yet it is equally important that its mode of presentation also ensures that Lissie's claim remains open to doubt on a purely factual level by her interlocutor Suwelo (p. 222), as well as by its readers.

Just as I have indicated Walker's concern with the written word and the representations it offers, so too are photographic images problematised. Living in the house of his recently deceased uncle before his first meeting with Lissie, Suwelo notices that there are many faded patches on the wall where once there were photographs. Eventually he discovers that these correspond to photographs of Lissie that she had hidden. However, when she gives him them, what he sees are 'thirteen pictures of thirteen entirely different women' (p. 107), as it transpires that this photography has magically been able visually to capture Lissie's various past lives.

²⁹ For the authoritative historical view at the time of *Temple's* publication, see Brian Levack's *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1987) a more recent voluminous cultural-intellectual history is Stuart Clark's *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

I will conclude with this example which is vital to Walker's understanding of representation, in my first sense of using words or images to stand for the phenomena they represent. First, the fact that Lissie's past lives shine through in these magical and unusual pictures calls attention by contrast to the way that photographs, being mere static images, reduce and simplify the complexity of life. Beyond any photograph, these pictures suggest, there is always a varied life history that cannot be captured. Just as Walker suggests that written history excludes the lives of people (or animals) not considered important, even photographs—what we might think of as the most 'realistic' of representations—by their very nature exclude much.

Furthermore, Lissie's hiding of the photographs from Suwelo until she knows he will be accepting of her unconventional life story marks a series of connections that it has been the purpose of this chapter to outline. It links Walker's disaffection with claims to absolute truth in written or photographic representation, her valorisation of imagination and creativity rather than 'facts', and her concern to speak for animals. Lissie later tells Suwelo that, just as she had hidden the photographs, she has always had to hide her past lives. Particularly harrowing for her is the fact that even though her empathetic husband knew about many of her past lives, she had repressed the memory of her being a white boy cared for by a lion because of her husband's intense fear of white people and cats. She can only divulge it when she meets Suwelo, by whom she thinks this life stands a chance not of being believed but 'of simply being imagined, fantasised' (p. 402).

Importantly, Suwelo's imaginative ability to understand others is always only partial in the novel, part of an ongoing learning process that the novel describes. He is not complacently offered as an exemplar of the imaginative understanding the novel promotes. Rather, we view Suwelo moving from a position of self-centred authority at the novel's opening to

one of humble, outward-looking ignorance at its end. Such a commitment to ignorance promotes the ongoing learning about others and their worldviews that Walker sees as the precondition of closeness to animals. Until Suwelo paradoxically learns this ignorance, and with it openness to others, the closeness to animals which is figured in Lissie's past lives remains hidden, silent, impossible. Therefore, it is not only the failure of photographic or written representations that stops the closeness to animals described in Lissie's memories being heard. Human separateness from animals is equally reinforced by the added failure of people to imagine the possibility of such closeness. This is Walker's abiding concern in *The Temple of My Familiar*. The creative power of the human imagination—exemplified most obviously by Lissie's oral history—enables humans to bridge the gap caused by the insistence that language use separates them from animals. It is only by abjuring authoritative claims to the truth, by being open to the realities of others and by 'imagining' or 'fantasising' the very possibility that people can get close to animals.

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Now, while *The Temple of My Familiar* attends to the material abuses of animals on a grand scale, and to differences in human-animal relations across different historical contexts, there is one avenue open to the literary representation of animals that it does not explore. It is the coming together of an experimentation with textual form that can tap literature's full potential to affect our thinking about animals with detailed exploration of the specificities of animal politics in a particular historical situation. This is perhaps not surprising given the text's ambitions in debunking grand narratives, to say

nothing of the fact that *Temple* is a mass-market novel by a best-selling literary author. In the next chapter, however, I will explore a text which does offer this: Deborah Levy's *Diary of a Steak*. It is a profoundly reader-unfriendly avant-garde text about what has come to be known as 'the mad cow crisis', its impact on our relationships with animals, and on the ways we represent them.

CHAPTER THREE

(MIS-)READING THE AVANT-GARDE ANIMAL: BSE, HYSTERIA, AND THE ANIMAL POLITICS OF DEBORAH LEVY'S *DIARY OF A STEAK*

Prolegomena: A Story of BSE

On 20 March 1996 Stephen Dorrell, the then Secretary of State for Health, announced to parliament that he had been advised of the likelihood of a link between Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD). This contradicted his government's repeated denials of such a link over the preceding decade. Now, he was admitting that a disease that had caused people, many of them young, to become anxious, depressed then withdrawn, to lose their memory and sense of balance, all of their physical functions, and finally their life was indeed the human form of BSE. This was the disease which had caused cows to become irritable, foam at the mouth, to lose their balance, stagger and collapse. The pictures shown over and over again on television of deranged cows stumbling and thudding into the ground in a muddy farmyard could no longer be viewed by meat-eating Britons secure in the knowledge that the species barrier protected them from a similar fate. Instead, in the aftermath of Dorrell's announcement, the pathos (and for some, the humour) of those images took on a more frightening aspect and that earlier impervious security gave way to the fear of contagion. For the implication of the BSE–vCJD link

was that the eating of meat cut from cattle to be eaten any time in the preceding ten years, an act apparently so innocuous before the announcement was made, could have belated life-shattering effects. The 'Roast Beef of Old England' once had life-affirming power, both literally and as a national symbol. It was suddenly resignified as a bringer of illness and death: a disturbing and abject reversal.

20 March 1996 was the day that 'mad cow disease' stopped being solely a problem of animal health, and became the 'mad cow crisis', perhaps the most important political and social event of 1990s Britain. Beyond the terrible immediate fact of the deaths of humans from cases of vCJD (127) and of cows diagnosed with BSE (179,901), its ramifications were and are widespread. Epidemiologists still cannot calculate accurately the number of people who continue to incubate vCJD. The response to export controls imposed by the European Commission on the British meat industry repeatedly exposed the Conservative Party's schism over the issue of UK-European relations. This was a rift which (along with the handling of the BSE epidemic itself) must be seen as a huge factor in the Labour Party's general election win in 1997. BSE's cost to the UK treasury was to have reached £3.7 billion by the end of the 2001/2 financial year, a cost largely borne for the removal from the food chain of all cows over thirty months old. To date the cull of animals in the wake of BSE has required the slaughter and disposal of 5,784,006 animals.¹

Such a figure as this last may still have the power to shock. Yet as one draws a breath at the sheer scale of death involved here, it is easy to overlook

¹ Statistics pertaining to BSE are found on the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs website the (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/bse/index.html>) and for vCJD from the Department of Health website (<http://www.doh.gov.uk/cjd/stats/apr03.htm>).

the complicated interplay of empathy and disavowal involved in such a response. For expressions of dismay at BSE's mass slaughter, or indeed at the modern-day hecatombs that blighted the countryside during 2002's Foot and Mouth outbreak, may give evidence of a real sense of loss at the demise of these beasts. Yet at the same time the mourning of these animals acts as a screen for a more profound loss to the psyche of the meat-eating public: that of a quasi-pastoral ideal in which meat is produced without the visible reality of death by farmers whose intimate relationship with their living herd counteracts the meat consumer's alienation from the animal that is slaughtered. Indeed, despite appearances, it is not strictly the *death* of the animal in the aftermath of BSE or Foot and Mouth that is mourned, but also its *waste* as a commodity.² There is a salient difference between the demise of the animals condemned during these epidemics and the six thousand cows that are killed each day in Britain's meat industry. Although the latter disappear into an efficient market where gastronomic and economic consumption are combined, the deaths of the former remain visible, languishing with no use value and hence no economic destination. The condemned animals' burning, whether in pyres or incinerators, bears witness to the hard facts of an industry where death is essential to production and consumption. The decision was made to eradicate Foot and Mouth because it reduces milk yields and animal growth (that is, profit); the decision to cull cattle over thirty months was made primarily to retain public confidence in

² By analysing Britons' ethical response to the nameless mass of animals, I want to maintain a different (more materialist) perspective from that of Erica Fudge, who suggests that both the public outcry for the reprieve of 'Phoenix', a calf who miraculously survived a cull, and that outcry's stimulus in the calf's movement from nameless object to subject are evidence of the profound ambivalence in a 'nation of animal lovers' that eats dead animals (*Animal*, pp. 38–43).

British beef after BSE, rather than to meet the explicit requirements of human or animal health.

I. BSE Narratives

The reason that I have begun this chapter with a foray into some of the meanings of BSE is that in surveying the cultural aftermath of the crisis it is fascinating to note this surprising irony: BSE has spawned a great number and variety of narratives, but virtually no literary response. Newspapers and television documentary, news, and discussion programmes have attempted to manage the ongoing story for the public.³ As Richard Kerridge has noted in his analysis of these, two particular narratives emerged: one of a return to normality as BSE itself was gradually eradicated; the other of a crisis ever harder to control as blood transfusions and growth hormones were implicated and information about possible longer incubation periods forced reconsiderations of the eventual number of vCJD cases.⁴ Accompanying these, however, were two highly politicised narratives. First, the nationalist Euro-phobia which turned the international politics of BSE into a 'Beef War' tapped into Britain's carnivorous image repertoire of beefeaters and John Bull to promote a flagging industry by making the eating of beef a matter of national pride. Harriet Ritvo writes:

³For an interesting analysis of the media coverage of the BSE crisis in the UK and USA, see J. Gregory Payne, Daniel Dornbusch and Veronica Demko, 'Media Coverage of the Mad Cow Issue' in *The Mad Cow Crisis* ed. by Scott C. Ratzan (London: University College London Press, 1998) pp. 131–65.

⁴Richard Kerridge, 'BSE Stories', *Keywords*, 2 (1999), n.p..

Although the government proclaimed its policy was based on 'scientific advice', it was more transparently founded on patriotism, which had the advantage of immediate public appeal. From this perspective, the interests of the nation, its citizens and its cattle industry were happily indistinguishable from those of the animals themselves [despite] the similarity between BSE-induced culling and ordinary slaughtering from the bovine point of view.⁵

She continues: 'Beef, and the cattle that produce it, holds a special place in British national mythology. Before John Bull was a canine he was a bovine' (p. 120). The second accompanying narrative, that of the reaction to BSE as 'mass hysteria', tried to reassure the public by characterising the response to Dorrell's announcement (a turn away from beef consumption) as irrational panic.⁶ In her otherwise insightful analysis of contemporary mass panics, Elaine Showalter has followed this trend by suggesting (without evidence or argument) that 'the furore over Mad Cow Disease in 1996 owed some of its intensity to British fear and denial of anything mad'.⁷ She mentions neither the complex manipulation of such a denial by politicians, marketers and press to promote the interests of the meat industry, which was surprisingly effective, nor the genuine life-preserving self-interest which might have been behind the original turn away from beef.

Accompanying the journalistic response, books appeared such as Stephen Dealler's *Lethal Legacy: BSE—the Search for Truth* (1996) and Pulitzer Prize-winner Richard Rhodes's *Deadly Feasts: Tracking the Secrets of a Terrifying*

⁵ Harriet Ritvo, 'Mad Cow Mysteries', *American Scholar*, 67 (1998), 113–22 (p. 119).

⁶ See Ray Brookes, 'Newspapers and National Identity: the BSE/CJD Crisis and the British Press', *Media, Culture and Society*, 21 (1999), 247–63 (p. 257).

⁷ Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London: Picador, 1998), p. 28.

New Plague (1997). As their titles suggest, both of these are essentially modern-day quest stories, dramas of search and revelation. *Lethal Legacy* yokes the recounting of events into his personal narrative of professional and scientific justification in the face of governmental refusal to take BSE seriously. *Deadly Feasts* combines the genres of medical history and airport novel. As the jacket blurb says, Rhodes's book 'reads like a Michael Crichton thriller', a 'brilliant and gripping medical detective story'.⁸

Finally, the most weighty narrative of BSE, in terms of sheer size as well as cultural capital, and the one that aims for authoritative status as regards both the facts and ethics of the case, was the report of the official public inquiry into the events leading up to Dorrell's announcement, which was chaired by Lord Phillips. The centrality of story-telling to the understanding of BSE is underscored by this report's reliance on a narrative-led style and metaphorical conceits. A glance at volume one, section six, 'The Final Months', which documents the inquiry's findings about the protection of human health during the crisis, reveals that it begins with the phrase 'we come to the last section of our narrative'. Also, as it narrates the approach to the 20 March announcement it contains sub-headings such as 'The Storm Clouds Gather', 'Rumbles of Thunder', and (inevitably) 'The Storm Breaks'.⁹ The fact that what is essentially a bureaucratic report with a main readership of health professionals and parliamentarians should have such a reliance on narrative plotting at its most important moment only goes to insist that any

⁸ Stephen Dealler, *Lethal Legacy: BSE: the Search for Truth* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996); Richard Rhodes, *Deadly Feasts: Tracking the Secrets of a Terrifying New Plague* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

⁹ <http://www.bseinquiry.gov.uk/report/volume1/chapte68.htm#646149> (sic).

understanding of the politics of BSE–vCJD should not be separated from the analysis of its formal representation.

Taking all of this into account, I want to suggest here one consequence of the prevalence of these particular narrative types in our understanding of BSE. The animals at the source of the epidemic are in effect effaced from the general cultural response to it—an effacement that my opening narrative tries in part to redress. This is not to say that popular and official BSE narratives do not talk about cows. Rather, they follow the pattern that I documented in my opening paragraphs of appearing to be about cows, while all the while being about commodities. The *BSE Inquiry Report* is a good example. Second in its list of thirteen key conclusions is the following:

A vital industry has been dealt a body blow, inflicting misery on tens of thousands for whom livestock farming is a way of life. They have seen over 170,000 of their animals dying or having to be destroyed, and the precautionary slaughter and destruction within the United Kingdom of very many more.¹⁰

Here, the deaths of the cows are unsurprisingly secondary in importance to the survival of an industry facing a collapse that is the chief cause of the farmers' 'misery'. Such misery is in turn the main concern of the report's authors. The telling word 'precautionary' is the signal for the emotional dynamic I discussed earlier, by which a professed sadness in response to animal death acts as a screen for the projection of a more profound, economic loss. One can see that the misery annotated in this passage would be out of place if conditions allowed the replacement of 'precautionary' with 'productive' or some such.

¹⁰ <http://www.bseinquiry.gov.uk/report/volume1/execsum2.htm#669592>.

However, the interesting point here is not that there is an ideology inherent to the meat industry, one that is repeated by the report, which masks the fact that meat is predicated on death. Indeed, an interesting recent development in the narratives of meat-eating in the wake of Foot and Mouth disease has been a major shift in this ideology away from masking the conditions of meat production and towards a persistent focus on the ideal of organic consumption: knowing where one's meat comes from, and purchasing accordingly.

This is represented in a recent Channel 4 television film called *It's a Cow's Life*. Having in its own right a fascinating narrative form, this programme offers a modern adult morality tale by combining tongue-in-cheek reworkings of both the *Bildungsroman* form and the scene of the farmyard stories prevalent in British primary schools, complete with patronising narrator. The film mirrors the pattern I have identified in meat narratives by once again carefully reconfiguring the story of a cow (named Lulu) into one about the demise of farming. Also, it sees no problem in confounding the viewer's narrative desire by using as its plot one specific animal's progression from birth to death, yet abjuring narrative tension by making explicit early on the absolutely inevitable cathartic closure in the slaughterhouse. The programme begins, in quite conventional *Bildungsroman* terms, by establishing its purported main character. It does so via the presentation of Lulu's owner's anthropomorphic treatment of her. Then, juxtaposed with self-consciously cute pictures of the frolicking calf, the narrator says:

It's funny how farmers humanise their animals, especially when you think about the reason why animals like Lulu exist. And although this is a story about Lulu the cow, it's also about the people who come into contact with her...like you perhaps. She could end up on your table. Have a good look at her. With her silky skin and big eyes she's cute and pretty. But let's not forget why she's here....¹¹

At this point, the action is frozen so that Lulu, a wide-eyed epitome of the neotenous representation of animals, appears to fix the viewer in her gaze. As I argued in my earlier discussion of Atwood's *Surfacing*, the animal gaze has an uncanny power as an aesthetic signifier of (or incitement to) cross-species empathy. But the voice-over of the film swiftly overcodes any possibility of viewer identification with the cow in the space of this look with its explanation of exactly 'why she's here':

She's hamburger. And sirloin steak and a roast beef dinner. She's sausages and tripe and steak and kidney pie, or perhaps pet food. She's the leather jacket on your back, the shoes on your feet. She could even be the soap in your sink.

Thus, the sympathy evinced from the viewer when the narrative uses the *Bildungsroman* form to give the animal a clear individuality is subtly obscured by the self-deconstruction of that narrative. After all, it would seem to be impossible to unfold a story about the life of a being whose very ontology—'why she's here'—is that it is always-already dead: 'she's hamburger'.

Yet what makes such moments as these so interesting is not only that the programme's makers are willing to use such grotesque realism to reverse an almost universal trend in the ideology and urban geography of modern

¹¹ *It's a Cow's Life*. Dir. Brian Hill. Channel 4. 2002.

western meat-production by making very visible the facts of meat production. The programme indeed draws to a close with scenes from inside the slaughterhouse of Lulu's death and butchering that are so graphic that the programme, broadcast at 11pm, carried a warning to viewers. This is the first such warning that I can remember in the history of television's recording of meat stories—such warnings did not accompany news footage of the aftermaths of BSE and Foot and Mouth—and it adds another layer of significance to the politics of representing animal death. It would appear that in the minds of the broadcasters, narrative conventions (as opposed to those of the news reporting) allow for the kind individuality that allows scenes of animals' death to produce compassion for them in the viewer. But what is most unusual in this film is that the explicitness and visibility of its representations of animal killing do not occur in the context of arguments for animal rights, the conventional place for anti-obfuscatory rhetoric about the meat industry. Rather, it is in the service of enlightened, or organic, consumption. And it is this type of consumption (the ideology of *It's a Cow's Life* suggests with forlorn hope) that might resurrect the pastoral ideal of small farming. The film's denouement tells us the moral of the tale. It begins with a parallelism that mirrors the earlier effect of narrative self-deconstruction, ironically tying the fate of the cow to the inevitable closure of the text that gave her individuality:

Well, that's the end of Lulu, and almost the end of our story. The next time you tuck into a juicy steak or a lovely hamburger you might spare a thought for Lulu, or one of the other six thousand cattle killed in this country every day. I'm not trying to put you off eating meat, but it's a good idea to know where your food comes from. [...] And as for the farmers: they're still struggling, and getting into debt, and wondering how they'll survive. The end.

So, once again the key point of interest here, just as it was in the narratives of BSE, is not just that the most prevalent modes of narrative for telling the story of meat ideologically mask animal death. Rather, it is the way that nostalgic mourning for the demise of what is essentially an economic endeavour can only find its expression precisely and ironically via grief for the very animal deaths that are the *raison d'être* of the industry. Moreover, such an overlaying of animal by industry closes off the possibility of mourning the animal itself.

Of course, it is not surprising that narratives produced for consumption by a public that is largely meat-eating and so is fully invested in a productive meat industry should have this sort of focus. This is so especially when the passage from animal to human misery is the essence of the disaster of vCJD. Obviously, too, the narrative drive of scientific research into the nosology and epidemiology of both BSE and vCJD is to document a specifically human teleology. The extension of this, as the cultural narrative of BSE responds to the *BSE Inquiry Report*, is to find *The London Review of Books* turning to an eminent bacteriologist to review that document. Hugh Pennington's main conclusion was that the most important lesson of BSE is that we need more scientists in the Executive: 'gifted amateurs with non-science first-class Oxbridge degrees may be able to write brilliant position papers proving that black is white, but they should not be occupying the heart of government'.¹² Thus in one of Britain's premier cultural reviews, BSE becomes a drama about the recruitment policy of the civil service. However, a claim implicit in

¹² Hugh Pennington, 'The English Disease', review of *The BSE Inquiry: Vols. I-XVI* by Lord Phillips, June Bridgeman and Malcolm Ferguson-Smith, *London Review of Books*, 22.24 (2000), 3-6 (p. 6).

the work of the present thesis is that it is one of the possibilities of literary narratives to complicate the predictably anthropocentric focus which guides the popular and scientific narratives I have been discussing here.

As I mentioned earlier, there has been only a small number of very brief literary responses to BSE–vCJD.¹³ On the one hand, this is perhaps an understandable result of the oft-noted dilemma for the postmodern fabulist that the contemporary world offers such fantastic narratives that fiction can barely keep up. This is certainly the case with BSE, which ‘is a story as rich in images, subsidiary plots and tragic outcomes as any novel’.¹⁴ On the other hand, however, the lack of a literary response remains surprising given the fact that if BSE were a novel, it would be a distinctly postmodern one. As Joan Leach notes, ‘the BSE event offers no narrative closure, no ending by which the truth is recovered, boundaries stabilised, or uncertainties made certain’.¹⁵ Obviously, there is the human tragedy involved for sufferers of vCJD and the possibly national scale on which it was predicted to appear. There is also the arresting repertoire of the imagery of BSE, replete with staggering cows and infernal incinerators. Then, there is the challenge to narrative technique itself of representing the traumatic belatedness of a disease with such a complex chronology, a point remarked by Barbara Adam.

¹³ After researching this particular topic since 1997 I have found this to be the case aside from BSE’s appearance in the occasional poem, such as Vicki Raymond’s ‘Mad Cow’s Song’, in *Selected Poems* (London: Carcanet, 1993), or Simon Armitage’s film poem for the millennium *Killing Time* (Channel 4, 2000). This film, which has the same director in Brian Hill as *It’s a Cow’s Life*, not unsurprisingly introduces the anguish of farmers with the iconic falling cow image. The only extended literary response has come in the form of Jo Shapcott’s cycle of ‘Mad Cow Poems’, some published before and some after 1996, see *Her Book: Poems 1988–1998* (London: Faber, 2000).

¹⁴ Pennington, p. 3.

¹⁵ Joan Leach, ‘Madness, Metaphors and Miscommunication: the Rhetorical Life of Mad Cow Disease’ in Ratzan (ed.), pp. 119–30 (p. 128).

As Kerridge applies her argument, 'the timescapes of the dominant forms of contemporary narrative, from thrillers to documentaries and news reports, cannot accommodate the timescape of BSE/CJD, with its unknown rates of infectivity and unknown incubation period'.¹⁶ The prevalence of other kinds of traumatic narrative in recent years, covering such diverse social phenomena as slavery and race, the Jewish Holocaust, and HIV-AIDS, only serves to bring into relief their dearth in the case of BSE–vCJD. In fact, Leach suggests that 'the BSE story-line has much in common with other disease narratives such as AIDS' and describes BSE in terms Paula Treichler has used of AIDS as an 'epidemic of signification' (p. 125).¹⁷ There is, however, one literary story of BSE which responds to each of these exigencies of its representation, as well as counteracting the particular effacement of the animal that I have documented in other modes of BSE narrative. It is this work, Deborah Levy's *Diary of a Steak*, which will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

I will begin with a description. Published in late 1997 and clearly responding to the aftermath of the BSE–vCJD as a trans-species problem, *Diary of a Steak* is a fascinating addition to the emergent cultural narrative of BSE firstly because of the potential of its avant-garde form. This text explodes from the

¹⁶ Kerridge, n.p.. See Barbara Adam, *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁷ The comparison was in fact a staple of the middle-market papers' handling of BSE. The front-page headline of the *Daily Mail* on 22 March 1996 was 'COULD IT BE WORSE THAN AIDS?'. The *Daily Express* ran with 'IT COULD BECOME WORSE THAN AIDS'. See Brookes, p. 252.

confines of conventional literary forms and in doing so offers a markedly different figuration of the animal from any of the other books analysed in this thesis. Throughout this chapter I will be referring to *Diary of a Steak* in terms of genre by its self-designation, as a diary, or by other non-literature-specific terms such as book or text. This is because standard literary generic categories, such as the novel, seem unable to accommodate this extremely unusual piece of writing. Formally, it is largely made up of fractured stretches of prose, but it also resembles at times the text of a performance artwork, containing both transcribed conversations and declamatory statements that explicitly address a public audience. The meaning of the prose itself is extremely enigmatic, with plenty of unexplained extra-textual allusion. And throughout, language itself is broken down, losing coherence at all semantic levels: words often have letters missing; there is erratic grammar and frequent non-sequiturs; and the text itself is heteroglot, incorporating both a host of European languages and also, strangely, English words transliterated into ancient Greek.

Responding to this heteroglossia, one good way of describing the text is in Bakhtinian terms, for in addition to the journal form it accommodates a range of other genres and modes of writing which are put into dialogic interaction, from medical and cultural history to psychoanalytic case study, news reportage and surrealist free-association poetry, from parliamentary speeches to popular celebrity magazines like *Hello!*, private letters and even bureaucratic documents like faxes. This all contributes to a remarkably pluralist, even anarchic, textual arena in which the reader has to make a meaning of the text as much from the clash of these discourses as from the insight of any one of them. The resulting text is certainly a grotesque one, its language decomposed and difficult to make any sense of. It is filled with allusion to food, illness, the exigencies of time, and death (not surprising in a

text about BSE) as well as to sexuality and other bodily processes. The final entry of the diary, which comments on the cause of BSE's spread at once with punning humour and melancholy, suggests that BSE-vCJD is in a way the most Bakhtinian of social phenomena: 'My momm y went to the incinerator. She was not allowed to suckle me. I'm a herbivore but I was made into a carnival'.¹⁸ In its sad indictment of a fact structural to the dairy industry (the forcible removal of calves from their mothers) this entry also introduces to the narrative of BSE a gender-based inflection that will be of central importance to my reading of the text.

This entry is written by the eponymous steak, but the panoply of discursive modes that I have described is in fact called upon (in the space of forty nine pages) to relate two interwoven stories. *Diary of a Steak* takes the form of the highly unconventional journal of, ostensibly, two different diarists. It is a record of the last six days in the (shelf-) life of a steak culled from the body of a cow that has been slaughtered while incubating BSE, and it incorporates both individual memories of the cow's actual life and what we might call 'cultural memories' of her bovine grandparents. But it is also a diachronic memoir of the treatment of women by the various stages of psychotherapeutic medicine, ranging from Victorian 'moral management' through Darwinism and the birth of psychoanalysis, to anti-psychiatry and electro-convulsive therapy (ECT). These stages correspond to chapters in Elaine Showalter's book on that subject *The Female Malady*, which along with the *Diary of a Steak's* obvious allusion to Gogol's 'Diary of a Madman', is its

¹⁸ Deborah Levy, *Diary of a Steak* (London: Bookworks, 1997), p. 49. All quotations from this will be transcribed exactly, including the unusual typography and misspellings that characterise the text; I will not mark these with 'sic'. The only alteration will be my own occasional ellipses.

most obvious intertext.¹⁹ The summary moment of this history, for Levy as well as for Showalter, is the explosion of hysteria across fin-de-siècle Europe, which marks the high watermark of incidence of female psychiatric illness, as well as the foundation of psychoanalytic therapy as we know it today.

The collocation of hysteria and the carnivalesque will be of no surprise to some. The influential reading of the former in terms of the latter by Allon White and Peter Stallybrass was an important corrective to the utopian ideals of early feminist theorising about hysteria as well as of carnival's revolutionary potential in contemporary culture.²⁰ After their work it seems impossible to argue that either carnival or hysteria is a space that effectively allows the other to challenge the patriarchal/bourgeois hegemony that oppresses it. Such issues will of course be important to any reading of *Diary of a Steak* for its ability to give voice to the animal other and a pro-animal politics.

It is primarily by marking out the connections between hysteric and BSE cow that *Diary of a Steak* makes its most interesting contribution to contemporary pro-animal thought, but the text also indicates other surprising links between animals and the history of female psychiatry, such as the fact that ECT technology grew out of research work by Ugo Cerletti in Rome's

¹⁹ Nicolai Gogol, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). The surrealistic tone of *Diary* is clearly descended from that of the thoughts of Gogol's paranoiac, revolving as the latter do around the imagined Machiavellian machinations of talking dogs. Another key intertext is Roland Barthes's essay 'Steak and Chips', which is quoted on pages eight and eighteen. See *Mythologies* trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1989), pp. 62–64.

²⁰ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986).

pork slaughterhouses. Here is how the diarist relates the development of ECT:

The distinguished gentlemen of Italy got involved with pork. The slaughterhouses of Rome became the electroconvulsive laboratory of Europe. Their learned project was nothing less than the re-incarnation of the pig soul... kill off the bad self and birth the good self... electrify torment out of the system just as you cut crusts off bread; bad pig soul zapped with electricity, leaving pure peaceful harmonious piggery... it caught on in the hospitals of Europe and pigs were allowed to get back to just being slaughtered. (pp. 42–43)²¹

In addition to all of this, *Diary of a Steak* stages a veritable polyphony of voices, including unnamed politicians at the time of the BSE crisis as well as famous physicians and hysterical patients such as Jean-Martin Charcot, Joseph Breuer, and Sigmund Freud, Augustine, Anna O., and Dora, among its characters. It is interesting to note in parenthesis that by thus fictionalising the actual scene of hysteria in the context of BSE, *Diary of a Steak* is simultaneously part of a thriving tradition in terms of the former and a forerunner in terms of the latter. For in contrast to the literary silence about BSE, the actual historical scene of hysteria has been an inspiration to the contemporary avant-garde.²² Yet as if such a Babel formed by the clamouring

²¹ See also Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 206.

²² This tradition is an interesting parallel to the rise in literary-critical work on nineteenth and early twentieth-century representations of hysterical illness. See Hélène Cixous's play *Portrait of Dora* (1979). Showalter documents in *Hystories* more recent work such as that of the London based 'Dora film collective' in the late seventies; artist Mary Kelley's exhibition *Interim* (1984–85); plays such as Dianne Hunter's *Dr. Charcot's Hysteria Shows* (1988), *Augustine or Big Hysteria* by Anna Furse (1991) and Kim Morrisey's *Dora: A Case of Hysteria* (1994). Charcot appears in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992); and Pat Barker's 'factional' novel *Regeneration* (1992), like *Diary*, interpolates Showalter's *The Female Malady*. Most recently Sharon Kivland's

voices of the *dramatis personae* of hysteria and BSE were not disorienting enough, the guiding form in which it appears is the quotidian self-disclosure of something which one would think cannot signify (a steak!).

In analysing the book, I especially want to flag the problem of how to categorise it since, as I will argue later, one of its chief concerns is to undermine the notions of conventional aesthetic authorship and interpretation. It is therefore very difficult to talk about the book as a novel, or other such literary genre. This is something which one might feel compelled to do when confronted with a text that, despite its titular claim to be a non-artistic form of self-disclosure, is clearly confected by an author called Deborah Levy, a writer of several highly regarded works of fiction.²³ These are concerns to which I will return later; but it will suffice for the moment to recognise that some form of effacement of human authorship seems a repeated concern of the project of figuring the animal. It is a trope which will be recognised as much from my discussion of Walker's disavowal of written discourse as from that of *Surfacing's* narrator and her flight from the symbolic function of language. Indeed, as will have become clear, I want to suggest that this book, *Diary of a Steak*, tackles the difficult task of telling the animals' story of BSE, and confronts (and thus exposes) the way in which that story has been subsumed beneath the dominant human-centred interpretive schema. In fact, in my reading of the text, the story of BSE proves an especially fertile ground for the contemporary figuration of the animal.

revision of the Dora case as a postmodern detective novel, *A Case of Hysteria* (1999) is published by the same small publisher, Bookworks, as *Diary of a Steak*.

²³ Levy has written several plays published in a collection by Methuen and a number of novels, books of poetry and short stories published by Vintage. These, as well as her contributions to a number of avant-garde projects are detailed on her internet homepage <http://www.deborahlevy.co.uk>.

This is because BSE–vCJD marks a moment when the structurally related oppositions of human to animal, of language to body, and of culture to nature—oppositions that I return to again and again in the present thesis—*simply* will not hold. This is encapsulated in one harrowing extract from *Diary of a Steak*. It gives words to a BSE cow that bring into the open the fact of human responsibility for infecting cows with BSE and the devastation of the slaughter that we have visited on them.

I lost my mind before they culled it. Loss is not in the equation. I gained mindlessness, memories of knives and psychic anguish in the English countryside. The mind gentlemen is closely related to the flesh...
the mind is a body...the mind falling falling falling. (p. 11)

In the case of vCJD, humans became infected with a disease that began as BSE in the bodies of Britain's cows, but which only disseminated throughout those many bodies because of their complete industrialisation, or enculturation.²⁴ The reason for the spread of BSE, as we know, is recognised to be the practice in animal husbandry of replacing grass with meat and bone-meal made of rendered cattle carcasses. This is a high-protein cattle feed which increases milk yields and is a process integral to the post-war industrialisation of farming. One could say that the animals infected with BSE have in a sense been turned into texts, their very bodies inscribed with a disease that is the most explicit manifestation of agriculture's denaturalisation of the animal. Seen in this light, BSE repositions the animal

²⁴ I will use the term 'infected' here because it is the one most often used and easily understood in the epidemiology of BSE. In fact, the more accurate term is *poisoned*, since BSE and vCJD are contracted by a process of ingestion over time of what are known as 'infective units', and the agent of the disease is not organic matter, a virus with which one is infected, but what is known as a prion-protein. See Pennington, 'The BSE Inquiry'.

body from the silent or asignifying realm of nature and into a circuit of cultural meaning.²⁵ That human bodies should then be infected with the disease after working another essentially textual device, the conversion of the animal body into meat ready for culinary preparation, makes it even more difficult for such binaries as human/animal, language/body, and culture/nature to hold. Indeed, the format of the text itself works to defamiliarise meat and to realise its textuality. The book's dustcover bears a life-size image of a steak pictured against a silver background which resembles a meat display; inside is reproduced a price ticket bearing the legend: 'ENGLISH, 10lbs' (figures one and two). The process of purchasing this book is thus uncannily (or was for this vegetarian, at least) like a trip to the butcher shop.

So, it is in the context of these implications of BSE and meat that *Diary of a Steak* emerges, for in such a confusion of human, animal body, and text, any complaint that giving words to an animal is anthropomorphic seems entirely beside the point. In fact, it would seem to require only a small leap of the imagination to suggest that we can read meat as 'a poetics of spleen and kidney and tongue' (p. 11), or indeed that steaks can write diaries! And it is in this context of the breakdown of the boundary between body and text that I

²⁵ This is not of course to say that Nature is meaningless; however, in a standard post-structuralist reading, Nature is replete with meaning as the binary opposite which constructs the meaning of Culture as its negative. Such a reading thus accepts the absence of positive signification in Nature; it simply sees significance in that very absence. My point here is the more nuanced one that in the case of BSE the supposed opposition between silent natural body and semiotic cultural text is crossed, the BSE-infected cow is both body and text. Contrasting post-structuralist readings of the significance of nature can be found in Kate Soper, *What is Nature?: Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), Cary Wolfe, 'Nature as Critical Concept: Kenneth Burke, The Frankfurt School and "Metabiology"', *Cultural Critique*, 18 (1991), 65–96, and Val Plumwood, *Feminism and The Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).

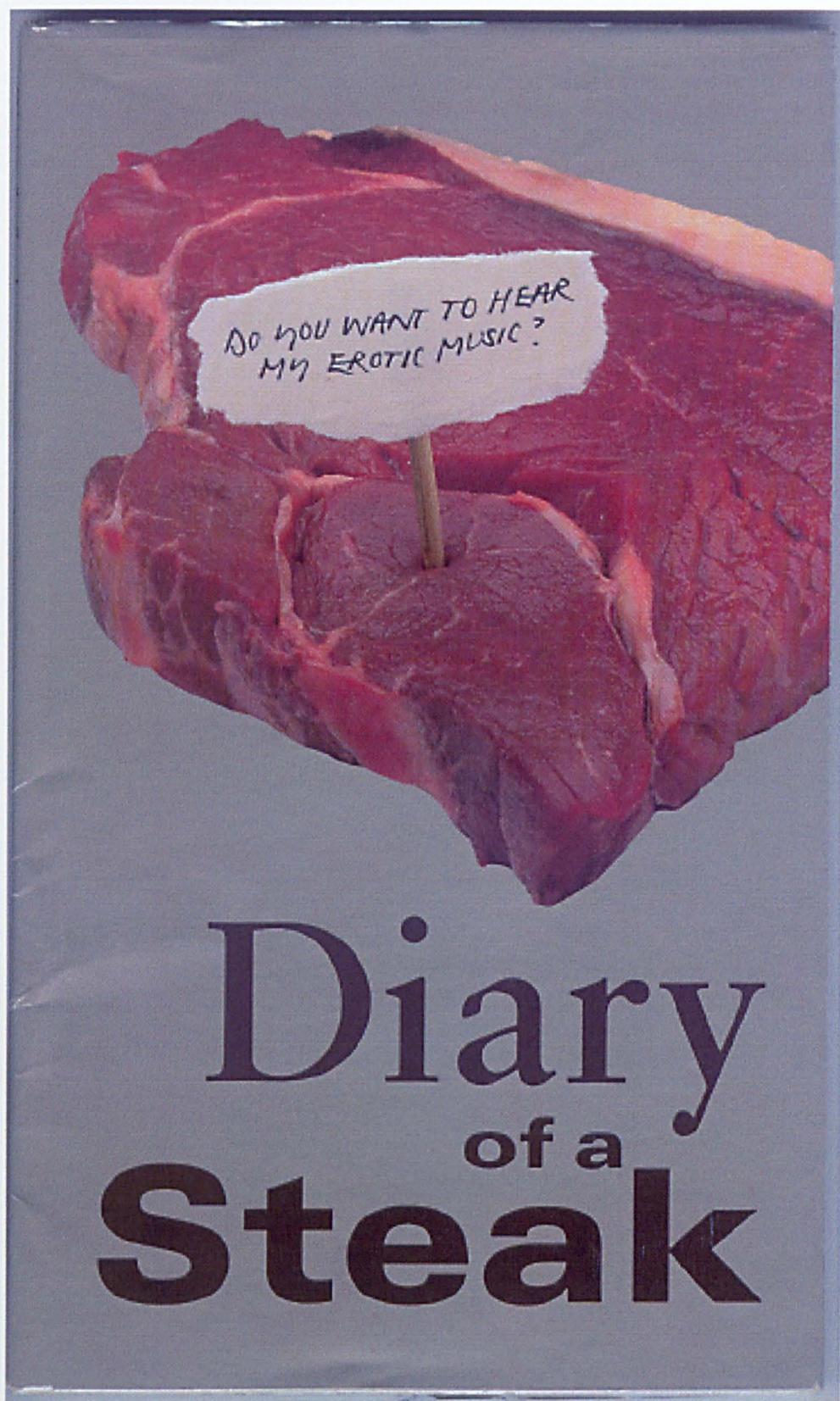


Figure 1: cover of *Diary of a Steak*

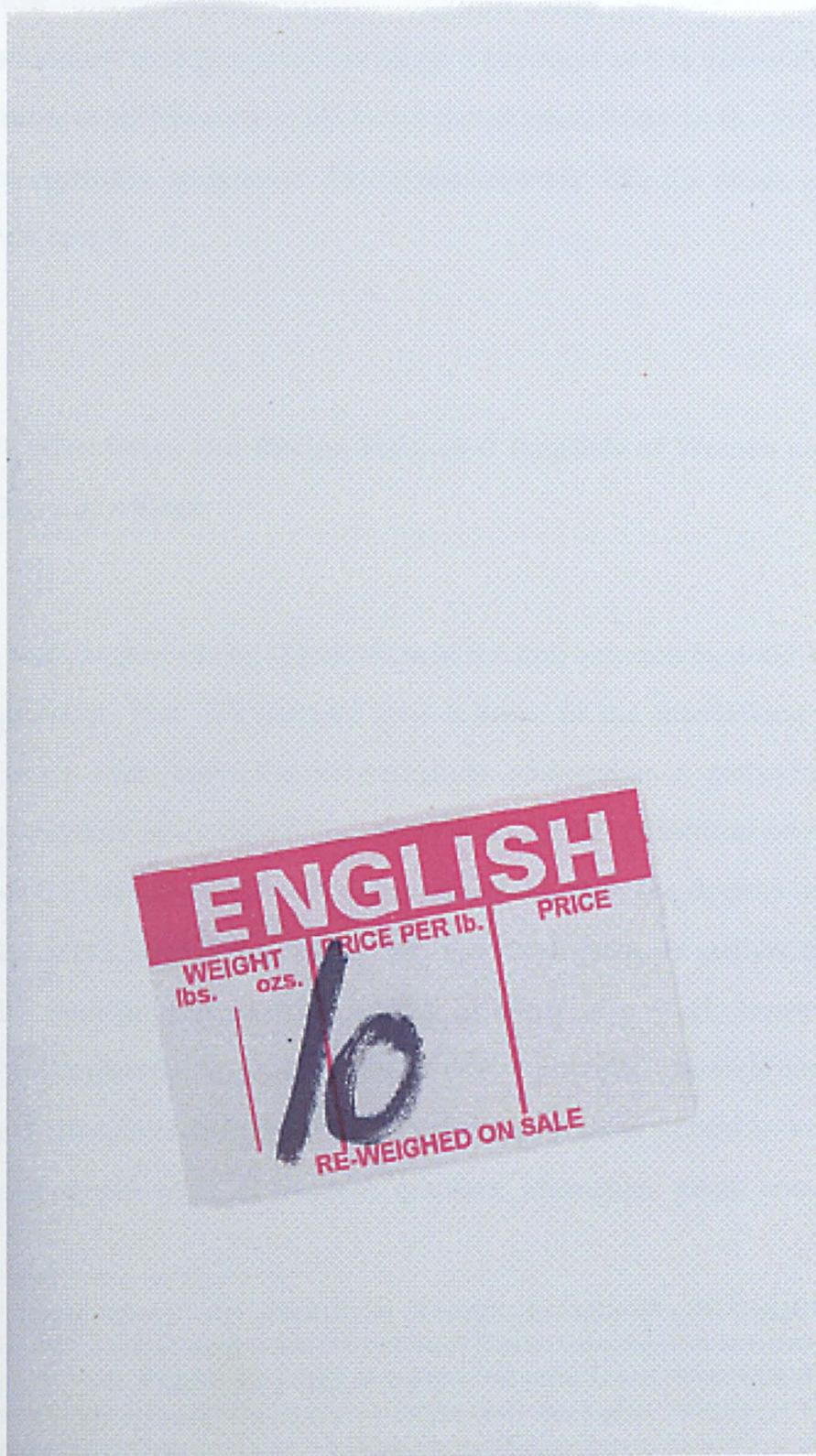


Figure 2: Inside Cover of *Diary of a Steak*

now turn to the key guiding concept in *Diary of a Steak*: hysteria. For such a boundary transgression is perhaps a key facet of this illness in which mental traumas manifest themselves on the physical body in the form of culturally recognisable symptoms. The hysterical body, like the steak, is at once body and text.²⁶

II. Mad Cows and Bovine Hysterics? Parallels of Women and Animals in *Diary of a Steak*

I want to preface my explanation of the link between hysteria and BSE with a quotation that will perhaps give a sense of the interlinking of the two in Levy's text. Here the cow-steak is addressing a gathering of 'learned gentlemen' at Charcot's famous *leçons de mardi*, his lectures on hysteria. These were a sensation, attended by Freud along with the doctors and students of the Salpêtrière Hospital at which they took place as well as many others of the Parisian artistic cognoscenti. In *Diary of a Steak*, however, Charcot's Parisian lecture theatre is merged with a post-BSE Brussels committee room, and the aforementioned 'learned gentlemen' now comprise 'vets, journalists, leading personae of Europa, scholars, journalists poets, more vets'.²⁷ The

²⁶ Lippit explores some congruencies of hysteria and animality. He suggests that 'in hysteria the animal world erupts onto the surface of human consciousness as a kind of primal scene' (pp. 103–04). Despite the mixed metaphors, his point is well taken here. But my difference from Lippit is that where his concern deliberately stops at the influence of the concept of 'the animal' in philosophy, mine is to look for the implications of thus influenced philosophy for animals themselves.

²⁷ The text's use of 'Europa' here, and throughout, alludes to the Classical Greek story of the princess of Tyre who was mounted by Zeus in the form of a bull: we can only wonder if this

narrated subject is the privileged psychoanalytic subject of the 'primal scene' of the cow's own conception. She also touches on a possible cause of BSE, the feeding to cattle of scrapie-infected sheep, as well as humorously alluding to the BSE symptom of intense itching. In addition, though, her narration merges with that of someone who would appear to be one of Charcot's own patients. The cow's actions with the ammonia, charcoal and top-hat are actually paraphrased from a contemporary report of the *leçons*, although these were exhibited by different women. Here as elsewhere I include a long stretch of the text; this is because its allusive and enigmatic quality, which is absolutely vital to its overall meaning, can only come across in this way.

Gentlemen: Pank you for calling me to the lecture theatre today and in such a pretty nightie too. Do you think my nose is too big? I tell you what. We do have something in common after all. You eat sheep and I eat sheep. I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine. If you want milk just tee heee. Mother was an eating machine. Father never got to breathe on her neck. He copulated with a large leather mock-up of mother and his semen was transferred via a glass tube into her womb. I think I was a Friesian Hereford cross, with plentiful width. Mother showed me how to do it. Hysteria. I learnt all I know from her milk. She taught me everything. Perfected my falls. Rolled my eyes. [...] They gave me a bottle of ammonia to smell, I said it was rose water. They gave me charcoal to eat, I told them it was chocolate. They gave me a top hat and I told them it was a baby and suckled it in front of the distinguished gentlemen farmers and independent experts on brain disease. (pp. 6–8)²⁸

is the text's punning indictment of the xenophobic desire in the aftermath of BSE for England (John Bull) to 'fuck the European Union'?

²⁸ For the original report of the *leçons*, see Axel Munthe, *The Story of San Michèle*, quoted in Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 148.

The merging of patient and cow as narrator here would seem analogically to equate hysteric and cow, effacing the differences between them, and reinforcing the oppressive ideological collocation of women and animals. As Mary Jacobus writes, 'analogy is a means of denying difference; since it really works to superimpose likeness, difference becomes the blind spot of analogy'.²⁹ The term I would want to use here, however, is that the text indicates *parallels* between hysteric and BSE cow. This term allows for the evocation of similarity between the two, as parallel lines run in the same direction; while insisting on a necessary difference between them, as the lines cannot come into actual contact. Thus, while it remains possible to recognise that there is an obvious political necessity not to *equate* women and animals (an age-old patriarchal gesture), this notion of a parallel between hysteric and BSE cow allows me to use insights gained from the feminist study of hysteria to understand the figuration of animals.

Now, while I do not want to give here a thorough introduction to hysteria as a disease and critical category—a project as impossible as it is unnecessary in the wake of a number of magisterial publications³⁰—I do want to touch on the most pertinent concepts for my purposes that study of hysteria has provided. To put it in very schematic terms which I will complicate as I progress: there were two contrasting ways of reading hysteria

²⁹ Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 283.

³⁰ Hysteria now has enough currency as a critical concept to deserve a pocket-sized introductory guide: Julia Borossa, *Hysteria* (London: Icon Books, 2001). For an exhaustive historical survey of the disease in both the medical and cultural arenas, see Mark Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Showalter's *Hystories* is a more polemic study in the field of feminist studies. For the most thoroughgoing aesthetic study of hysteria, see Elizabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

during its development as a valuable concept in the field of feminist influenced literary-cultural criticism in the 1980s and 1990s. The first, largely inspired by readings (or misreadings) of Cixous and Irigaray, saw the disease as a language of the female body that is symbolically repressed in patriarchal culture. In the quotation above, in fact, the cow's discourse seems a classic example of hysteria as Cixousian *écriture féminine*: 'Mother showed me how to do it. Hysteria. I learnt all I know from her milk'.³¹ Ironically, by viewing hysterical symptoms as a sort of proto-feminist avant-garde poetics of the body and the famous hysterics documented by Charcot, Breuer and Freud as its artists, this reading finds itself in a tradition with the famous claim of Aragon and Breton that hysteria was 'the greatest poetic discovery of the end of the nineteenth-century'.³² In turn, literary works which represented such symptoms in either form or content were championed by feminist scholars.³³

The second reading of hysteria, best represented by the historicism-inflected work of Showalter, viewed hysteria in a less celebratory light, stressing the fact that while hysterical symptoms are a way for the unconscious to voice its disaffection, hysteria is most certainly not only a female malady and is at its sad essence a debilitating illness. As Showalter polemically claims in her recent cultural survey of hysteria:

³¹ See Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1 (1976), 875–93: 'There is always within [a woman] at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink' (p. 881). In this essay, sounding not unlike Lissie in *The Temple of my Familiar*, Cixous imagines a connection between *écriture féminine* and animals: that women's writing cannot fail to become a 'chaosmos of the personal' is a fact 'known by the colonised peoples of yesterday, the workers, the nations, the species off whose backs the history of men has made its gold' (p. 888, my emphasis).

³² Quoted in Micale, p. 194.

³³ For a manifestation of this in theory, see many of the essays in *In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism*, ed. by Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (London: Virago, 1985); in literary criticism, see Jacobus.

some feminist critics have overread women's stories and underread doctors' studies. They have reduced the vast literature on hysteria to a few canonical case studies of the great hysterical stars, chiefly Dora and Anna O. They have disregarded the history of hysteria and treated it as a metaphor.³⁴

Thus dissent emerged over the political effectiveness of hysteria as a feminist-theoretical category while excitement waned at the radical potential of hysteria's voicing of the female body, particularly when it appears in literary texts. Celebrating hysteria as a 'feminine discourse' too quickly placed women in a powerless position of victimhood, with no culturally or politically productive voice. Nonetheless, one factor does remain constant through both these competing readings: the critical leverage gained by the fact that in hysteria body and culture meet. 'Hysteria is a mimetic disorder', Showalter writes, 'it mimics culturally permissible expressions of distress' (p. 15). As a psychosomatic illness, hysteria formulates its symptoms by tapping into the image repertoire of the culture of its sufferer. The hysterically suffering body is therefore both body and text, just like the BSE-infected cow.

Bearing these points in mind, it is possible to draw out the interest of hysteria as a critical category in trying to understand contemporary figurations of the animal by situating hysteria in the context of some ideas already discussed in this thesis. This can be done in particular by remembering my discussion of the search for the lost female (or maternal) body in Atwood's *Surfacing*. There, I suggested that in that text, the animal is in a position comparable to the female body for psychoanalytic feminism—it is beyond the reach of discourse. Hysteria, in the second generation feminist

³⁴ Showalter, *Hystories*, p. 93.

definition I have outlined, was perceived as a response to that otherness of the body, a way for the body to speak; in those terms, one could imagine it acting as a context for the voicing of the animal body.³⁵

In taking such a path, one would only follow the lead of Cixous and Clément, who align hysteric and animal in their creative reading of the analogous relations between, and equivalence of, sorceress and hysteric. In a passage that foreshadows Walker's turn to the witch-animal bond in *The Temple of my Familiar*, Cixous and Clément write of the sorceress-hysteric who 'finds herself in the heart of the forest. It has become her kingdom; she has become like the animals'.³⁶ The opening section of this work, conventionally attributed to Clément, is in fact a veritable bestiary. She touches on the many animal phobias of Freud's hysteria patient Emmy von N. Also, an array of animals and animal imagery marks her discussion of the witches, shamans and carnival performers whose population of the abject realm of the patriarchal imaginary is Clément's object of study.

Neither she nor Cixous, however, is willing here to follow through their political conclusions about women to the *animals* with whom their hysterics share the status of patriarchy's other. There is certainly debate between them

³⁵ Indeed, an interesting coincidence in terms of the authors studied in this thesis is that Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Walker's *Meridian* have been read as 'hysterical' texts: Patricia Waugh in *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 168–86 briefly notes the importance of animals in Atwood's text, recognising that Marian, its main protagonist's body expresses feminist protest through 'disordered perception, confusion of species, hysterical conversion' (p. 186). Waugh does not, however, follow up the potential for animal politics of the hysteric's refusal to consume animals. I have attempted precisely this in 'Animal Form' chapter three, and in my analysis above of a related refusal in *Surfacing*: there, we see not a hysteric's neurotic abstinence but a fully psychotic one. See also Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature: Feminist Fiction in America* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 135–38.

³⁶ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), p. 4.

as to the revolutionary power of hysteria as feminine discourse; Clément disagrees with Cixous's assertion that as part of its imaginary hysteria is a 'force that works to dismantle [bourgeois patriarchal] structures' (p. 156). Clément argues that the very fact of the hysteric's position in the imaginary is a problem for her revolutionary force. The distinction between 'those who nicely fulfil their function of challenging with all possible violence' (that is, those whose protest is bodily) and 'those who will arrive at a symbolic inscription' (that is, those who engage in direct social action) 'seems essential', she writes (p. 156). Despite this productive dissent within their joint work, the ignorance of which played a key part in second generation feminism's unchecked 'celebration' of hysteria, they agree that the interest of the hysteric for feminist politics is her challenging, marginal position. For it is the fact that the symbolic can *only* function via the exclusion of the imaginary that grants the other its particular force. We might imagine, then, that the animal would hold a similar force for Clément and Cixous. However, when they boil down their social analysis to its explicit Lacanian reduction, its post-structuralist logic vanishes and it consists of a surprising ethological humanism. The imaginary realm is integral only to human subject-development, *not* a logical consequence of socio-cultural formations, so the animal has no part in it. In response to Clément's assertion that while 'the chimpanzee looks behind the mirror to see who is there, another chimpanzee, itself, or nobody [...] man identifies and constitutes himself with the mirror', Cixous's caveat is that 'the chimpanzee actually is the chimpanzee and we are the result of our relationship to the [mirror]' (pp.137–38). The irony, of course, is that by being explicitly excluded from this schema to allow it to function, the chimpanzee becomes the imaginary of such symbolic definitions as the Lacanian reading of human subjectivity.

I want to offer a different reading, however, to one which has hysteria as a language of the animal-as-body. Instead, I want to follow through the implication of hysteria as an explicit textualisation of the body. With the case of hysteria, and in turn with that of *Diary of a Steak's* figuration of the animal, we are dealing with the *body-as-text*. Because of its textualisation of the animal body, this work offers a radicalisation of Atwood's position in *Surfacing* that identification with animals on the level of the body is impossible because humans are linguistic or cultural beings. Atwood's position is just that of Cixous and Clément, above, that the symbolic function of language acts as a bar that cannot be crossed between humans and animals (or mind and body). On the contrary, in *Diary of a Steak's* manipulation of hysteria, we confront the fact that such a bar is problematised because the animal (or body) itself is seen as a text provoking or requiring interpretation rather than as non-signifying matter. Under those circumstances, as we shall see, making sense of the animal and hysteria means, to be sure, understanding the politics of their interpretation. But to return to BSE and *Diary of a Steak*, I will now analyse the ways in which hysteria and BSE find their way into this text.

In the literary publishing climate of the mid 1990s, in which the emergent genre of 'chick-lit' gained much market force, it was almost inevitable that someone would make a banal appropriation of the metaphors of women, insanity, and BSE. Sure enough, Kathy Lette's comedic novel *Mad Cows* duly

appeared in 1996, its title expertly chosen to make best use of the cultural currency of the disease.³⁷ Its content of course had nothing to do with real cows (or real insanity) and everything to do with zany women and their adventures in post-feminist consumer society. Comedy, albeit of a distinctly more surreal and ironic kind, also marks *Diary of a Steak*. However, it in the end offers a more serious corrective to Lette's ignorance of any gender political implications of BSE itself. One of the text's funniest moments is a particularly acerbic comment on the gender politics that accompanied 'mad cow disease'. The diary contains this fantastical piece of government propaganda:

The minister is proud to tell the world's press that the newly furnished Farmer's Bar [...] in Somerset has been guest visited by an internationally renowned stand up comic unemployed in Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Zagreb. He donated his act free of charge to rally the depressed gentlemen farmers dizzy spells, high blood pressure, beating vegetables out of defeat and into defiance. 'How do you know when a woman really loves you? She rubs her head on your gatepost every morning!' 'What's the difference between BSE and PMT? At least you can incinerate BSE!!' (p. 40)

An efficient cutting down to size of the sexist comic's international prestige is achieved here by way of the satiric marginalia in small font, which may or may not represent unconscious commentary emanating from the diarist herself. With this, the text goes further than a simple mocking of the gynophobia of such jokes. For in the shadow of its satire the jokes reveal that, as was suggested by the diarist's mournful complaint that her mother was not allowed to suckle her, such gynophobia crosses the species barrier. In

³⁷ Kathy Lette, *Mad Cows* (London: Picador, 1996).

turn, perhaps, we might remember that the animals who actually developed symptoms of BSE were all dairy cows, female beasts whose pregnancy is continuously enforced throughout their lives. With an irony that is implicit to *Diary of a Steak*, they are a literal manifestation of the classic diagnosis of the hysteric symptom: the wandering womb.

I have already touched on the way that the word 'hysterical' became a key epithet in the political management of the public refusal of beef in the wake of Dorrell's announcement. *Diary* uses this fact as a launching pad for its much more thoroughgoing mutual implication of the two realms (hysterical illness and BSE and vCJD). This might at first seem only a theoretically ingenious parallel, but the symptomatology of hysteria (at least as it is recorded most famously by Freud and Breuer) and of vCJD are remarkably similar, including as they do uncontrollable emotional states, aphasia, memory loss and a variety of bodily dysfunctions. In fact, my (and Levy's) looking to hysteria for pro-animal meaning only repeats in reverse the work of Victorian anti-vivisection activists who condemned the 'no less disgusting experiments practised on the lunatics and hysterical patients in the Salpêtrière'.³⁸ Looking specifically to BSE, *falling* is the symptom that is virtually synonymous with the disease, just as the conventional feminine swoon is one of the most pervasive cultural signifiers of nineteenth-century hysteria.³⁹ Two extracts from *Diary* bring this parallel, this similarity in difference, shockingly to life. The repeating, circular form of the first also tends to the traumatic force for its viewers of the image of the stumbling cow.

³⁸ *Zoophilist* 7 (1887), p. 110 quoted in Elaine Showalter, 'Hysteria Feminism and Gender' in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. by Sander Gilman, Roy Porter and Elaine Showalter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 286–344, (p. 311).

³⁹ See Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 149.

Its small font again suggests that it is in some way an unconscious discourse, as would be pertinent to represent the traumatic content of the image:

my eyes roll in their pink sockets my knees give way my ankles turn I fall I move my head from side to side I try to stand yet again my eyes roll in their pink sockets my knees give way my ankles turn I fall I move my head from side to english country side. (p. 35)

Another more submerged connection between BSE and hysteria is that the repetition of 'falling' in this second quotation recalls Anna O.'s repetition of 'tormenting', which Breuer remarks as one of the key signifiers of her aphasic speech disorganisation⁴⁰:

The camera has been crucial to the study of my hysteria, just as the microscope was crucial to histology. I have become partial to the status the lens has given me and my falls... falling falling falling keeling and shuffling on sawdust... I'm thinking of Marilyn bathing naked in rock pools before she took the pills... (p. 8)

This second quotation in fact is particularly densely packed with meaning for my interpretation of the text. For in addition to its introduction (via the invocation of Anna O.'s aphasia) of the theme of the hysteric's *failed speech*, it also introduces the fact that *visibility* is central to the understanding of hysteria. That is to say, hysteria in this text is explicitly a performance before an interpreting viewer. Elizabeth Bronfen has summarised the complex play of hysterical performance and medical interpretation at Charcot's Salpêtrière:

⁴⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953–1974), II: Joseph Breuer, and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* (1955), pp.24–25.

Doctors, insatiably seeking images of hysteria (be these live performances or photographic representations) and hysteric patients, complying with this spectacle, outmatching each other with the theatricality of their poses, came together to stage a scene where hysterical suffering could be invented and fabricated as an art form, both as a spectacle and as an image. (p. 190)

The text's linking of hysteria and BSE in the context of visibility is cemented by the allusion to the iconic photographs of a bathing Marilyn Monroe. Ironically, these photographs were taken by Eve Arnold on the set of *The Misfits* (1961), a film in which Monroe's character rages against animal abuse. In a letter to me, Levy explained the genesis of this link from hysteria to animal via what Bronfen calls Monroe's hysterical 'performance of seduction': 'it was the image on TV news programmes of a deranged cow staggering, falling and rolling her eyes that made me feel she was the Marilyn Monroe of BSE rhetoric. A perverse combination of abjection and celebrity'. S. Paige Baty has argued of Monroe iconography that such 'mass-mediated hagiographic rememberings' serve as a method for American culture to come to terms with the trauma inflicted by the apparent suicide of such a glorified figure.⁴¹ It is clear that for Levy, however, the ubiquity of the falling cow image has a very different and certainly not palliative effect on the national psyche.

A last important message to be read in the above quotation from *Diary* is that its series of implications about hysteria, failed speech and the visibility

⁴¹ Levy, personal correspondence, 28 January 1999. On Monroe, see Bronfen, p. 330; Eve Arnold, *Marilyn Monroe: An Appreciation* (London: Pan Books, 1967), p. 79; and S. Paige Baty, *American Monroe: The Making of a Body Politic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 157. Another possible reference point for the diarist here is a set of stills of a naked bathing Monroe from *Something's Got To Give* (1962), a film which was not completed because of her suicide.

of the hysterical performance are made by way of quotation from Showalter. As such, it is one clear example of the text's construction from a tissue of such quotations. For in *The Female Malady*, we learn that 'one of [Charcot's] admirers remarked that "the camera was as crucial to the study of hysteria as the microscope was to histology"' (p. 149). In fact there are more than thirty such quotations from Showalter placed throughout the book, indicating that this particularly direct form of intertextuality is a formal method vital to the text's meaning. For just as the text's notion of hysterical performance presumes, following Bronfen, a certain dialogism or at least mutual complicity in the patient-doctor relationship, the incorporation of Showalter's words ensures that Levy's avant-garde presentation of that performance comes into dialogue with Showalter's historicism. This will all become clear in my final section, in which I will explain how the two major themes I have mentioned (failure of speech and the performative nature of hysteria) hold the key to *Diary of a Steak's* original contribution to the figuration of the animal.

III. Textualising the Animal

The Failure of Speech

The first entry in *Diary of a Steak* begins with the apparently affirming words that 'it's good to talk', although the affirmation is not a little undermined by the fact that the phrase is overcoded with idiotic sales-talk in the form of a British Telecom advertising campaign. As the week's worth of entries progresses, however, this axiom passes through various stages of corrupted

mutation. It appears as 'goo o alk', 'o alk', 'it's od to ta' (my personal favourite), and 'goo tal', until on Friday the entry reads:

good to talk
gd talk
o a tlk.⁴²

By this time the original notion that 'it is good to talk'—which bearing in mind the rationalist prejudice of Western thought is as much an anthropocentric credo as it is a barely masked piece of canny marketing—has been radically undermined. Considering the notion of 'talk' more specifically than just as a synonym for language, this very *textual* destruction of talk (how would one pronounce 'o a tlk'?) indicates a certain denigration of the value of the spoken word itself in favour of writing. Here, we can recognise something of a clash of ideologies between *Diary of a Steak* and Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*, which endorses oral history over written discourse for its openness to pro-animal thought. *Diary* instead recapitulates the familiar deconstructive critique of the sovereign subject, a subject that is always, of course, human, and whose self-certainty is underwritten by speech's prevalence over writing in Western thought. For, if this critique is correct, then the self-present subject of oral history—for example Walker's Lissie—is a humanist subject through and through. So, although Walker's text does certainly exemplify the importance of issues of *race* in pro-animal politics—something which the almost invariably colour-blind French feminist

⁴² Levy, pp. 9, 9, 11, 19, 32.

theorising of hysteria cannot do—Lissie’s humanist subjectivity might not be the best conduit for representing the animal.⁴³

Diary’s turn from speech to textuality is also a consequence of its representation of hysteria. Hysteria has a very ambivalent relationship to speech, and its patients certainly indicate an alternative to the self-present humanist subject. They live not in the here-and-now, but belatedly, riven by unconscious forces and mnemonically signify their traumata only obliquely with their symptoms, rather than by conscious recollection. Hysteria’s ambivalent relation to speech rests in the fact that its symptoms are essentially the result of patients’ silencing, of their inability to find a valid cultural voice. *Diary of a Steak* finds an ingenious way to imbue this fact with additional meaning by staging a meeting between the steak and Josef Breuer:

Das ist frauelin...? — This is Miss?

– Buttercup

Ein beefsteak?

Yes.

Aha.

I was born in East Grinstead. [...]

Einen stuchl? — A chair

I’d like a car.

Voll Bitte — A car? You want me to ‘fill her up’?

At what time does the bank open?

Voll bitte — Talk more about filling up this car...

In what direction is the catherdral?

Haben Sie etwas zu vorzollen? — have you anything to declare?

May I have the bill?

Es war mir ein Vergnugen — It was nice meeting you

May I have the bill please

⁴³ Sander Gilman’s impressive work, in which hysteria is inextricably bound up with early twentieth-century figurations of blackness and Jewishness in the best counteraction to this: see his ‘The Image of the Hysteric’ in Gilman, Porter and Showalter (eds.), pp. 344–452. For a reading of a narrative that reclaims hysteria as a vehicle for communal resistance to racist oppression, see Emma Parker, ‘A New Hystery: History and Hysteria in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 47 (2001), 1–19.

Alles ist inbegriffen — all is included.

Pank you very much

Guttentag Buttercup — Good afternoon Buttercup. From now on I will call you Buttercup O.

He called me Buttercup O (p. 34)

Here, the scene of psychoanalysis is melded with the scene of the ignorant Brit abroad in continental Europe. The heteroglot result makes a telling comment not only on the deafness of the analyst to the hysterical voice. With Breuer's German tongue so uncomprehending or ignorant of the steak, it also manages a wicked joke at the expense of a certain kind of English xenophobia, one which resurfaced so tellingly during the BSE debacle. For although all of Europe banned British beef, it was as ever *Germany* that bore the brunt of the ire in the tabloid press.⁴⁴

Breuer's naming of the steak 'Buttercup O' obviously reaffirms the parallel with Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim), whose case study is the first recorded in Breuer and Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*.⁴⁵ Like another name taken by the diarist, Aberdeen Augustine (compare Aberdeen Angus), this is a delicious parody of both farmers' Adamic naming of their beasts and the psychoanalyst's power to possess his patient and her symptoms (at least in his text) through her renaming. The allusion to Anna O. also highlights the ambivalent relation of hysteria to speech:

⁴⁴ On 22 May 1996, under the headline 'CATTLE OF BRITAIN' and beside a picture of Winston Churchill *The Sun* reported that 'in a showdown on a scale rarely seen since the Battle of Britain, the beef fiasco has forced us to fight to save our traditions and freedoms'. It continued: 'in 1996, we must draw on that bulldog spirit again—and show one of Sir Winnie's famous V-signs to the boors of Berlin, the killjoys of Cologne and the mutts of Munich'.

⁴⁵ *Standard Edition*, II (1955).

I, Buttercup O
 Craisy Daisy
 invented the talking cure that is psychoanalysis...
 mute. I was mute (p. 37)⁴⁶

Muteness, the other of speech, characterises the hysteric as well as the animal. As Jacobus notes:

It is an irony of the history of psychoanalysis that the patient credited with the invention of 'the talking cure' (Anna O.'s English phrase for the therapeutic technique which she evolved with Breuer) should have had as her major hysterical symptom the inability to talk. Afflicted by a 'deep-going functional disorganisation of her speech,' Anna O. took refuge in a speaking dumbness. Initially at a loss for words, and eventually almost completely deprived of them, she successively 'lost her command of grammar and syntax'.⁴⁷

Avant-garde writers from the Surrealists to Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva have played with language in an attempt to capture at the level of the text this challenge to subjectivity and signification posed by Anna O.'s aphasia. Levy's development of this tradition is to take its challenge for the fictional representation of postmodern human subjectivity into the realm of representing the animal.

The diarist's self-introduction on the opening page aligns Buttercup with a roll-call of now famous hysterics:

At times I will lose control of grammar and syntax. Call me Emmy, Dora, Bertha, Anna O, Augustine, Buttercup. (p. 5)

⁴⁶ The diarist's name, 'Craisy Daisy', invokes the popular Romantic figure of Crazy Jane, originally created by Mathew 'Monk' Lewis.

⁴⁷ Jacobus, p. 205. She is quoting from *Studies on Hysteria*, p. 25.

This passage has several implications and contradictions for the understanding of work that tries to represent cows. Primarily, it inscribes on the very first page of the work the slippage from spoken to textual word. To introduce herself by way of the idiomatic phrase 'call me' implies communication, a moment of spoken address by the reader. And yet written on the first page of a work of fiction, that phrase cannot but seem explicitly intertextual, evoking Melville's—and his character Ahab's—attempt to capture in literature a very different (cetacean) kind of cow. Indeed, we can see that the diarist is a specifically *textual* sort of animal when we recognise her further self-expression, in this most personal of written forms, by way of a slight modification of Breuer's words about Anna O., which are quoted by Jacobus above.

Furthermore, that the diarist should imply an estranged reader who would need to 'call her' anything immediately makes a problem of the notion of self-reflexivity inherent to the diary's conventional mode of construction, which presumes that it will only be read by its writer. As a form, the diary might at first appear to avoid the narratological consequences of conventional autobiography. The diary is implicitly perspicacious as a form, because it has no apparent addressee (other than, as with the 'Dear Diary' approach, the diary itself). Also, unlike autobiography, it is structured only by the real condition of its writer's temporal existence, rather than by more aesthetic concerns. Yet, as a written document the diary must have an implied reader, even if only an unacknowledged part of the writer's own subjectivity. So, in a sense the diary is an ever-failing attempt to shore up the self-presence of the writing subject. The writer attempts to control their personal history through the very act of revisiting it in writing. Yet once the diary passes from process to product and is read, it can only reveal the self's ongoing construction in time. In *Diary of a Steak*, moreover, the writing

subject is not only split across a variety of selves (from Emmy to Buttercup), but it also explicitly emerges as the result of a dialogic performance with the text's implied reader. And this dialogism is spread into a larger cultural realm by the fact that the performance interpolates intertextual utterances.

Such a dispersal of the first person in writing is of course a familiar lesson of post-structuralist readings of enunciation. Far from being a signifier of self-presence, as a general singular form in grammar the 'I' can always be possessed by others. Recently, however, Derrida has noted the link between this sense of the 'I' and the word *animal*:

It happens that there exist, between the word *I* and the word *animal*, all sorts of significant connections. They are at the same time functional and referential, grammatical and semantic. Two general singulars to begin with: the *I* and the *animal* designate an indeterminate generality in the singular and by means of the definite article. The *I* is anybody at all; *I* am nobody at all and anybody at all must be able to say *I*.⁴⁸

And in a surprisingly lyrical passage, Derrida goes on to suggest what might be at stake for the representation of animals in Levy's deconstruction of the bovine diarist's position of enunciation: it grants this represented animal a certain kind of *freedom*. He suggests that by using the general singular and effacing animal difference, philosophers' talk of humanity's difference from 'the animal' enacts a kind of imprisonment. Derrida metaphorically connects that philosophical gesture to literal animal abuse ('a crime of the first order against the animals', he calls it on p. 416).

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal', p. 417.

Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of the definite article ('the animal' and not 'animals'), as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are *all the living things* that man does not recognise as his fellows, his neighbours, or his brothers. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog. (p. 402)

All of this is a far cry from the simple validation of self-expression, 'it's good to talk'. Indeed, as we shall see shortly, the other constituent factors of the *Diary's* deconstruction of speech—performativity and dialogic construction—are essential components of Levy's representation of the hysteric-animal parallel.

Teasing out the implications of 'talk' for human-animal ethical relations, Alec Irwin writes:

Talk stops where human culture stops, and conversely, where there is no more talk, we have reached the limit beyond which culture's codes of rights and responsibilities (response-abilities) no longer apply.⁴⁹

Fascinatingly, this Kantian logic, in which there is no ethical community between (human) self and (animal) other without responsive spoken communication, echoes Jean-François Lyotard's reading of hysteria, which though fascinating has been surprisingly uninfluential in the critical literature on the topic. In his catalogue essay for a 1980 exhibition entitled 'Photographs of the Salpêtrière' Lyotard stages a Socratic dialogue between, it seems, two

⁴⁹ Alec Irwin, 'Talking to the Animals', in *Talk Talk Talk: The Cultural Life of Everyday Conversation*, ed. by S. I. Salamenski (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 145–62 (p. 145).

different philosopher-doctors. The first is an empiricist who wishes (like Charcot) to understand the bodily language of hysterics and to 'record them everywhich way'; the second is a sceptical postmodernist (such as Lyotard, although his voice also features outside the dialogue) who refuses to accept that such a scientific heuristic can accommodate the heterodox subjectivity of the hysteric. The dialogue's opening exchange introduces its remarkably Cartesian topic:

- Do these women have souls? What do they want?
- Ask them.
- But to ask someone a question is to presuppose that he wants to help you to know something, that he wants to know with you, cooperate in a dialogue, and therefore that he has a soul and wishes for the good.⁵⁰

It thus constructs the hysteric as precisely the same kind of epistemological object as Descartes's infamous 'automatic' or soulless animals. The problem of whether or not hysterics have souls comes down, in this dialogue, to whether, and in what way, they can *respond* to a question; to whether or not the bodily language of their symptoms can be part of a human dialogue. Adding credence to Levy's linking of the two realms, Lyotard's notion of response-ability in *the hysteric* becomes important to Derrida's own critique of thinking about *the animal* within the philosophical tradition. Philosophers from 'Aristotle to Lacan, and including Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, and Lévinas,' he writes,

⁵⁰ Reprinted as 'Speech Snapshot' in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 129–34.

all of them say the same thing: the animal is without language. Or more precisely unable to respond, to respond with a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction, the animal is without the right and power to 'respond' and hence without many of the things that would be the property of man. (p. 400)

Returning to Lyotard in this context, his Charcot-like philosopher-doctor defines his approach to hysteria with a methodological passage that now sheds light on the desire of philosophy (as glossed by Derrida) to know the non-human other:

—That's it, it's a problem of communication, i.e. translation. No doubt they have a soul, but of a type different to ours, speak a language, but a bodily language [...]. We have to establish what they want. We record them every which way, like extra terrestrial beings. We describe their gesticulations exactly. And, you'll see, we shall decipher their idiom, they'll end up by talking to us. They will want to know, like we do. They will enter our community. There will be no more hysterics.

—You mean that this strange, foreign idiom will be absorbed, that a universal language will permit the circulation and exchange of all meanings, you'll have finished with obscenity? (pp. 130–31)

The second philosopher's incredulous response to the first's empiricist interpretative method evidences a commitment to the hysteric's otherness. Doing so, it can stand as an epigraph to the next stage of my reading of *Diary of a Steak*. For I want to argue that such a commitment to the otherness of both hysteric and animal results from the text's method of representing both as particular kinds of performer, whose act seduces the desire of the viewer to interpret it. In the case of hysteria, the viewer of this performance is of course the examining doctor; in the case of the animal, it is the human who would wish to know the animal other. What is vital, though, and what links the two across the species barrier, is that the hysteric's performance is one

without (as far as we can know) conscious *intention*. Just so, the viewer's (or, here, reader's) agency is effaced when they are compelled to interpret the hysteric performance.⁵¹

The interest of the scene of hysteria for the pro-animal critic, then, is that it describes a drama of power and resistance that is *unconscious*. This unconsciousness separates the hysteric's protest from conventional liberal political action which presumes a rational human subject. The parallel of hysteric and BSE-cow thus offers a space for *animal* protest, something that otherwise seems ridiculous in conventional terms. The task of the next section will be to explain just how a highly confected artistic text manages to promote a protesting agency that is predicated on the effacement of authorial power. To do so, however, first requires understanding that although feminist interpretations of hysteria presume that the hysteric enacts a bodily performance without conscious intention, the feminist political potential of the disease has nevertheless been understood in terms of strategic agency.

⁵¹ The particularities of animals' representation (and presence) in various kinds of performance are explored by the contributors to a special issue titled 'On Animals' of *Performance Research*, 5.2 (2000); one of these is the major performance artist Rachel Rosenthal with her propagandistic pro-animal piece 'The Others' (pp. 92–107).

Performing Hysteric, Performing Animal

Aberdeen Angus?
I don't know who I am.

I don't know who I am.
What am I? barking
I am what?
Who

I can feel some erotic hysteria coming on

βαρκινυ

It's coming

my theatre of rib and shadows

here it comes
nearly these
my hysteria (p. 28)⁵²

The words of the diarist here chime with those of Lyotard, who suggests that hysteria is 'a theatre of corporeal elements' (p. 132). In this assertion of the performativity of hysteria, he implicitly recapitulates the work of Luce Irigaray, who famously argued that the female hysteric over-performs the masquerade of femininity. As glossed by Dianne Chisholm, Irigaray's point is that 'the hysteric's exaggerated 'miming' of sexual pleasure in bodily contortion, in broken speech and/or aphasia, signifies her inability to cope

⁵² The Greek script here is a transliteration of the word 'barking'.

with the discursive norms of desire and femininity'. Irigaray argues that this hysterical performance of mimicry is a result of the 'phallogentrism' of representation which leaves no space for an authentic voice of the feminine.⁵³

Butler helpfully summarises the post-structuralist logic here:

when Irigaray sets out to reread the history of philosophy, she asks how its borders are secured, and how it is that the excluded comes to constitute negatively a philosophical enterprise that takes itself to be self-grounding and self-constituting? Irigaray then isolates the feminine as precisely this constitutive exclusion.⁵⁴

As is well known, Irigaray devises from this reading of hysteria the notion of mimesis as a feminist critical strategy, in which a space is created for 'a possible operation of the feminine in language' (p. 76) by parodically miming the masculinist discourse of philosophy. What distinguishes Irigaray's work from a naïve celebration of the tragic heroism of the hysteric—and ensures that hysteric mimicry maintains a critical distance from the patriarchal discourse it mimes—is her explicit redefinition of the hysterical symptom from a counter-patriarchal language of the body into a strategic textual practice. For it is not a matter of celebrating the disease of hysteria and its supposed unconscious rebellion; rather, by textually performing hysteria one can 'assume the feminine role *deliberately*', Irigaray writes (p. 76, my emphasis). It is only with the caveat of this deliberation that Irigaray argues the political power of the hysteric performance.

⁵³ Dianne Chisholm, 'Irigaray's Hysteria' in *Engaging with Irigaray*, edited by Naomi Schor, Margaret Whitford, and Carolyn Burke (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 263–83, (p. 265). Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 80.

⁵⁴ *Bodies*, p. 37.

Irigaray's insistence on the strategic performance of hysteria implies that it is at essence an artifice, its performer an aesthetic creator. It is thus not surprising that Irigaray describes hysteria in terms of an avant-garde poetics. The importance of this for my reading of *Diary of a Steak* is that Irigaray's version of textual hysteria could easily be a description of the book's fractured form (as evidenced by the quotation from *Diary* that began this section). 'Sense', she argues, 'will undergo unparalleled interrogation, revolution'. She exhorts the feminine writer to: 'turn everything upside down, inside out, back to front'; to insist 'on those blanks in discourse which recall the places of [the feminine's] exclusion'; and to 'overthrow syntax by suspending its eternally teleological order'.⁵⁵ Such textual strategies are necessary to reveal the deliberate parodic intent behind Irigaray's grand theoretical strategy of miming the masculine discourse of philosophy, which is thereby subjected through such strategic imitation to its constitutive exclusions as described by Butler.

In fact, Butler takes up where Irigaray falls short here, noting that the latter's 'idealising and appropriating' of the space of constitutive exclusion as 'the feminine' insists that women form the only constituency oppressed by philosophy and forgets that many such otherings have been necessary. 'After all', Butler writes, 'Plato's scenography of intelligibility depends on the exclusion of women, slaves, children and animals' (pp. 48–49). Butler, as I noted in an earlier chapter, adapts this critique of Irigaray to her own anti-heterosexist theory, but the implication that pro-animal meaning might be

⁵⁵ *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 142.

voiced by a strategic miming of discourse is brought to bear in *Diary of a Steak*.

The diarist pastiches the meetings of various British politicians, health professionals and veterinarians with their European counterparts which took place in the wake of the 20 March 1996 announcement. These discussions, which of course were as much about what it means to be human as about the control of an animal disease, eventually resulted in the 'thirty month scheme', the slaughter of millions of healthy cattle over that age as a public relations exercise. A particularly sharp example of the diarist's mimicry involves a parody of the Major Government's policy of non-cooperation in Europe, put into effect on May 21 1996, a policy that involved Major's exercising the UK's power of veto on much EU legislation. This apparently petulant behaviour succeeded in rewriting the BSE crisis, for Britain's more xenophobic contingent at least, as an anti-European 'beef war'. As the quotation opens, the diary incorporates the genre of news reportage, although that discourse itself is dialogically contaminated by the diarist's animal-obsessed imagination:

The minister from Whitebait has promised Europa he will do everything in his power to avoid lunacy in the English herd –

He made a speech

Tell the Greeks.

Tell Luxembourg

Tell the Portuguese they're

Tell the French

Tell the Italians their gnocci has a mental disorder

And the Danish they've lost the plot

The Neverlands

The Germans and their bratwurst holograms

Tell the Spanish about their poppies salamis

Tell Belgium they're silly.
Tell Denmark
Finland
Sweden
Republic of Ireland
Tell Poland they're homosexual
Don't cry, please don't cry (p. 12)

As the shocking final line makes clear, there is obviously a profound unease in the psyche of the faceless ministerial official caused by BSE and the abject encroachment of animal disease upon humanity. The implication is that this is Douglas Hogg, but sadly my extensive searches of EU parliamentary papers have not yielded a conclusive result on this.⁵⁶ The speech's repetitive form also shows that his disquiet leads to an appeal to xenophobic, and latterly homophobic, discourse. The expelling force of the repeated imperative, 'tell', attempts to force by the power of word alone the repulsion of a European otherness that encroaches on the British subject. The collapse of normal national stereotypes seems only to underline the unconscious, obsessive and frantic nature of this xenophobia. But the real panicky need at the heart of government to silence any disruption of carnivorous society's human hegemony by the BSE cow—and here I return to its abject transversal of the species barrier with which I began this chapter—comes across most clearly as the quotation continues. The official discourse can now only attempt to silence the BSE-cow's rupture of anthropocentrism via an act of

⁵⁶ In fact, Levy may be using a pastiche of Hogg to ventriloquise *The Sun*. Jon Garland and Michael Rowe report that on page four of the 22 May 1996 edition, which I mention above, that newspaper informed British consumers of '20 THINGS TO STEER CLEAR OF' (sic) should they wish to hit back at European countries refusing beef imports; the list contained numerous offensive stereotypes. See 'War Minus the Shooting: Jingoism, the English Press and Euro '96', *Studies in Crime, Order and Policing: Research Paper 7* (Leicester: Scarman Centre for the Study of Public Order, University of Leicester, 1996), pp. 9–10.

pure will that evidences a pathetic desire to 'legislate' the disruptive cows into the proper patriotic (or xenophobic) state, as if that could make BSE and its worries for humanity go away: 'The official (eyes still closed)/ Telepathic legislation to the herd://You are/normal//You are/the/National/Anthem' (p. 14, see figure three). The text presents this legislation in a way that parodies the tabloid press mentality of the government's response to BSE by setting the second half of the quotation in red ink and a large font evocative of red top newspapers.

So far, then, it would appear that *Diary of a Steak* is formally constructed of an Irigarayan textual hysteria, a parodic inhabitation of anthropocentric political discourse, which aims to give voice to the animal by making clear that it is that political discourse's excluded other. However, we must bear in mind Irigaray's insistence on the *strategic agency* of the parodist in such matters. For if this is the case then in terms of the literary representation of animals *Diary of a Steak* is in one sense very similar to *The Temple of my Familiar*. There, Walker's argument was seen to be that although the animal itself cannot speak, the creative imagination holds the power to give it voice. Just so, by deliberately and parodically performing the discourse of anthropocentrism Levy would wield that same power. The problem with this is that the very interest of hysteria in terms of pro-animal politics was that it offered a form of protest that was bodily, non-linguistic, and without agency as such. These were hysteria's parallels with the animal. However, by inscribing an artistic human subject as the agent at the root of hysteria's feminist-political power, the Irigarayan reading rules out that parallel.

This problem is perhaps best explicated by following up the implication of the text's Bakhtinian ending, in which the diarist insists: 'I used to be a herbivore but I was made into a carnival' (p. 49). As it stands alone on the final page, it is hard to overestimate the power of this summary moment of a

The Official (eyes still closed)
Telepathic legislation to the herd:

**You are
normal**

**You are
the
National
Anthem.**

Figure 3: extract from *Diary of a Steak*

text that includes so much that is grotesque: from the anorexia and self-harm presented in its picture of psychiatric illness to the rotting stench that emanates from the steak as it lingers on the shelf. The connection between the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and hysteria (two very different kinds of performance) has been a fruitful one in terms of understanding the political potential of non-official and agent-less discourses. Focusing on the carnival as a site of meaning in this text seems apt indeed; for if the feast of carnival originally was the 'taking up of meat' after lent (*carne-levare*) then the British culture to which *Diary of a Steak* responds, with a daily consumption of six thousand cows, is certainly carnivalesque. Further, as the quotation and much of my discussion suggest, the animals who stumble to the ground in the iconic images of BSE are themselves transformed into carnivalesque performers by television; just as, of course, animals are still so transformed in today's vestigial carnival performances of the circus. The problem with the BSE-cows' image-performance, though, is that because the cow makes explicit a trans-species disease, her freak-show cannot so easily be objectified, and hence humorously enjoyed, by the viewer.

With the transgression of the human-animal binary that goes on when human carnival-goers perform various kinds of animality, as well as carnival's more general re-coding of high-low power relationships, it would seem a fruitful sphere of discussion for pro-animal politics. Also, as with hysteria, the fact that carnival seems to offer a mode of both creative and political action that foregoes conventional artistic or individual agency would also begin to explain Levy's recourse to the carnivalesque in an attempt to find a textual voice for the animal. Another intriguing link between animal and carnival in terms of animal representations lies in Stallybrass and White's argument that the literary carnivalesque form is a space of nostalgia which remembers the scene of popular carnival forms at the same time as itself

signifying their disappearance.⁵⁷ It is worth speculating that this influential thesis is an unacknowledged but direct descendant of John Berger's claim about the zoo in his ground-breaking essay on visual representation, 'Why Look at Animals?'. In modernity, metropolitan humans have abjured their pre-modern link with animals, and representational forms such as the zoo melancholically mourn its passing.

Public zoos 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. Modern zoos are an epitaph to a relationship which was as old as man.⁵⁸

This allows us to keep animals in mind while looking at a key implication of Stallybrass and White's work on the nostalgia of the carnivalesque, which is to undermine the latter's celebration in contemporary theory as a space for political transgression of bourgeois-patriarchal hegemony. Hence, of course, the methodological link with hysteria, which has suffered the same fate.

The very nature of the Irigarayan hysterical performance in *Diary of a Steak* as I have described it highlights the dilemma of what happens to carnival's potential when it is incorporated into an avant-garde literary text. For if we are to accept that Levy's parody of the anthropocentric discourse of government BSE policy opens a space (to paraphrase Irigaray) for 'the possible operation of the animal in language' then a key problem remains.

⁵⁷ Stallybrass and White, 'Introduction'.

⁵⁸ Parts of this essay were originally published in *New Society* in 1977 as separate articles. The complete essay appears in *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), pp. 1-28 (p. 21). Berger's fiction, notably *Pig Earth* (1979), responds to the disappearance of peasant life and traditions in Europe in a manner that is consonant with Stallybrass and White's project.

Stallybrass and White criticise the inherent political romanticism of avant-garde writers' nostalgic appeals to the carnivalesque as transgression. For them, it is a fact that 'bourgeois writing smashes the rigidities of its own identity by projecting itself into the forbidden territories of precisely those excluded in its own political formation'. This, however, only proves that the bourgeoisie 'is perpetually rediscovering the carnivalesque as a radical source of transcendence' (p. 200–01). We can turn this suggestion towards *Diary of a Steak*. Were it to be the case that the pro-animal meaning of Levy's avant-garde representation of the animal is *only* visible with the presumption of Levy's strategic (authorial) intent then it seems impossible for the text to avoid the taint of Stallybrass and White's critique. *Diary of a Steak* appears as just one more way for the hegemonic group (in this case, a specifically human as well as bourgeois one) to spend itself in melancholic nostalgia for its always-already abandoned other: the animal. In this sense it is just like Berger's zoo. The cow does not really appear in this text, we might say; rather, its carnivalesque representation acts as a screen for a romantic transcendence of the author's modern humanity. Here, we are uncannily reminded of the invisibility of the actual animals in popular cultural bemoanings of BSE and foot and mouth disease.

The text manages to undermine this problematic reading, however, and *does* put a pro-animal inflection on Berger's belief that the space of representation puts an unbridgeable distance between human and animal. For this to be explained, we need to revisit the text's own avant-garde practice in the context of its dramatisation of hysteria. The text explicitly includes the actual historical personages of hysteria: Charcot, Breuer, Anna O. et al. But it also includes in this scene extracts from *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter's feminist critique of the psychotherapeutic institution, which argues that doctors have enforced their interpretive will on their

patients. Some of these extracts from Showalter are amended, almost garbled, and I have italicised them in the quotation from Levy's text below. Showalter replicates Lyotard's suggestions about the visibility of hysteria which were inspired by the very photographs that the text describes being taken by Charcot's assistant Albert Londe in perhaps *Diary of a Steak's* most telling scene. With characteristic wit, Charcot's analysis of his patients at the *leçons* is presented as a 'grilling', whose metaphorical status shifts to a literal one in the context of the hysteric-animal parallel. This parallel is expanded to correlate Charcot's audience with European BSE officials. It also includes a connection between the Parisian doctor and the xenophobic British politician discussed earlier, made clear when Charcot's own discourse is similarly dialogically polluted by animality:

I am Jean-Martin Charcoal.

I will etch and icon you in *full hysterical seizure*. I will draw you in *coloured chalks* on the blackbird. I will create with you your hysterical vocabulary... but first we doctor I want your baby will rehearse some of the *exaggerated gestures of French classical theatre* doctor I want your baby we will watch *stills* doctor I want your baby *from silent movies*, we will observe together *the paintings of Millais* doctor I want your baby *in particular his Ophelia*. You will learn timing and perform on cue for my photographer, Albert[...]

I will Charcot grill you

Buttercup
 Crazy Daisy
 Aberdeen Angus
 Augustine
 Emmy
 Dora
 Anna O
 Bertha
 Blanche

serve you to a venerable audience of actors,
 vets, journalists, leading personae of Europa,

scholars, journalists, poets, more vets. (pp. 30–31)⁵⁹

Bronfen's incisive analysis helps to explicate the drama of the original *leçons* that are re-described here. She describes them as a 'scene of mutual representative complicity, with the physician requiring the poses of the patient to confirm the scientific text and the patient, accepting this desire, performing the symptoms the physicians sought to discover' (p. 191). The hysteric's unconscious desire for affirmation by the doctor (represented in the quotation by the small font allusion to Anna O.'s hysterical pregnancy) is manifested by her performance of the symptoms that the doctor wants to see. These symptoms, as many have noted, mimic cultural representations of femininity such as Millais's *Ophelia*. The patient's symptomatic performance is thus inextricably bound up with the doctor's desire to interpret it, and vice versa, adding a further layer of meaning to the critique that complains of the doctor's exertion of interpretive power over the patient. For 'the cost of visualising and objectifying is not simply that it silences the hysteric performer but also that it cruelly delineates the limits of the empiricist medical enterprise' (p. 201). Empiricism fails because the entity that Charcot wishes nosologically to describe, hysteria, is produced by his very attempt to analyse it.

The parallel of animal and hysteric—of Buttercup and Bertha Pappenheim and of Aberdeen Angus and Augustine—makes clear that *Diary*

⁵⁹ 'The grand finale would be a full hysterical seizure', *The Female Malady*, p. 148; 'Charcot [...] drew on the blackboard in coloured chalk' (p. 150); 'All of her [Augustine's] poses suggest the exaggerated gestures of the French classical acting style, or stills from silent movies' (p. 152). Showalter report's Stephen Heath's observation that the performing Augustine resembles 'something of the Pre-Raphaelite Millais's painting *Ophelia*' (p. 154).

of *a Steak's* representation of animals needs to be understood in terms of Bronfen's analysis. This is especially so bearing in mind the description of Charcot as a sort of butcher. Perhaps the wards of the Salpêtrière, punningly known at the time as a *charcoterie*, would be better termed a *charcuterie*? For if Charcot 'grills' the narrator in the process of his analysis, then it is in preparation for a consumption that is obviously a work of power pertinent to hysteric and the animal. In the light of Bronfen's analysis, the text's parody of Charcot goes one step further than an Irigarayan strategic imitation designed to expose the silencing of the hysteric or animal. For in the context of the unconscious circuit of interpretation between doctor and patient that Bronfen describes, the 'meaning' of hysteria emerges as a dialogic compendium from their encounter. It therefore seems ridiculous to suggest that anyone acts strategically or with agency in such a mutually implicated scenario.

Diary of a Steak's avant-garde form finds its *raison d'être* in the textual realisation of this effect. For the text in fact makes a major problem of its own meaning and interpretation by representing the animal and dramatising the scene of hysteria with the sort of extremely unusual language and form that I have been describing throughout. The result of this avant-garde form is that the reader who would wish to ascertain meaning about cows and meat from their representation in *Diary of a Steak* is drawn into precisely the same interpretive position as Charcot, whose interpretive power is so radically undermined by hysteria. By its representation of the cow-steak as a hysterical performance, so difficult for the reader to make sense of, the text seduces the reader's desire to make meaning of either animal or meat. The most practical understanding of this is that the text acts out the dialectic of fetishisation and projection that characterises the meat industry. Marketers present meat as a commodity to be desired by consumers at large; *en masse* they project cultural desire onto meat and view the animal's body as an image of (amongst other

things) economic status, national pride and masculinity. Understood in more theoretical terms, *Diary of a Steak* produces a fundamental aporia at the site of representation of the animal: its animals are essentially unreadable. The reader wants to make meaning of the textual representation of the animal, but cannot without exhibiting their own desire to know, a desire that constructs the object of interpretation. Just as, in the quotation above, Charcot's desire to make meaning of the hysterical patient consumes and silences her, so the reader's desire will consume and silence the represented animal.

It is precisely this supremely compromised hermeneutic environment that makes a tortuous process of writing about this text and its avant-garde animal representations. For one cannot correctly discuss *Diary of a Steak* as if the text is the source of meaning about animals, let alone as if its author strategically assumes the hysteric role to offer a pro-animal literary representation of cows. These points become especially problematic if we remember that the Irigarayan theory of hysterical writing requires a quasi-artistic authority behind the text to anchor its progressive feminist politics. Yet we cannot posit such a source of meaning about animals because one key implication of the text's hysterical performance of the animal is that any such meaning can only arise from the dialogic interaction (or mutual suggestibility) of hysterical text and interpreting reader. Yet there is a second implication, one that has serious knock-on effects for the entire project of pro-animal literary criticism. By interpreting the text (as I have obviously been doing) one must always consume and silence the animal that it is the apparent point of the text to present. Only in the process of admitting that as a textual representation of the animal the artwork *must* be about a steak (an animal objectified and made ready for consumption), can the reader sense that it will be always-already about the cows from which such a steak is cut.

Now, this may be terribly tentative as an assertion about the pro-animal representation of animals. Or, to put it another way, *Diary of a Steak* enacts the very problem it tries to critique (the 'real' animal is rendered absent); it will not posit a radically utopian refusal of the humanist terms of animal representation. One factor in this is that the political alternative to anthropocentrism offered by 'animal advocacy', such as we saw in the preceding chapter, is rejected as all-too-human. Its tidy binary opposition of humans as active ethical subjects and all animals as passive objects of concern at root replicates a conventional humanist paradigm to understand the animal. *Diary* complicates such demarcations, its readers implicated in a circuit of desire and meaning with the animals and humans it contains. The result is that the text is certainly devoid of any grand political potential. Nevertheless, as we look back over all the other stories about BSE, *Diary of a Steak* is the only text that manages to create a place, albeit unsure, in the consistently anthropocentric cultural narrative of BSE to think about living (or indeed dying) animals in their own right.

One final thing must be said about the text's thoroughly conditional representation of the animal, with reference to its incorporation of Showalter's historicism. In fact, as the publication data of the book suggests, incorporation is not the right word here. We are told therein that 'the diarist has grazed upon, and is indebted to, the research and scholarship of Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*'. The result of this grazing, however, is not a faithful reproduction of Showalter's work in the text, for the many 'quotations' that it includes are always more or less modified, never quoted directly, as if they have been ruminated and excreted in the explosion of grotesque textuality that is *Diary of a Steak*. The diarist is, perhaps, more 'shitting' than 'citing' Showalter's words. Such a Bakhtinian confusion of bodily and intertextual process seems entirely consonant with my foregoing

analysis. For were the text to represent faithfully Showalter's words, it would simply install them as the authoritative voice of the text and Showalter's feminist historicism would be posited as the authoritative discourse on hysteria. This, of course, would short-circuit the dialogism of hysterical performance and desiring reader with which the text created the space for pro-animal meaning. Instead, if we recognise that *Diary of a Steak* is forged of a corrupted amalgamation of other texts—for remember that it quotes many other sources than just Showalter—we can see in that corrupt amalgamation a way towards pro-animal meaning. It suggests that although we must always consume representations of the animal, the possibility remains that out of such consumptions, new corrupted meanings, pro-animal meanings, might appear.

Diary of a Steak thus confronts the inherent problem of representation for the pro-animal critic, as noted by Berger above, and as explored by Atwood in the animal politics of *Surfacing*: that by representing animals in language humanity can only underscore its difference from them. However, this work does not follow the profoundly humanist conclusion to the logic of Atwood's novel—that because of humanity's being-in-language, a genuine pro-animal politics is impossible. Rather, *Diary of a Steak*, like Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*, proceeds from its acceptance that representation separates humans and animals to insist that such representations are always-already ideological, and that they have material effects on the bodies of animals. Despite (or rather because of) this, those representations can always be replaced. In this lies *Diary of a Steak's* great importance and inspiration as a literary representation of pro-animal thought.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANIMAL ETHICS IN THE FICTION OF J. M. COETZEE

Introduction

Of all the contemporary writers that have addressed themselves to representing our ethical relations with animals, J. M. Coetzee is the one whose attention to this issue has been the most continuous, and the most exacting. It is visible right across his published work—in fiction and non-fiction, conversation and memoir. My approach in this chapter will therefore be slightly different to the foregoing ones. As in my earlier chapters, I will examine one key text for its extended representation of pro-animal thought, in this case *The Lives of Animals*; however, for contextualisation I will look to Coetzee's own work more generally. Many of his novels share with *Lives* an ability to interrogate conventional patterns of ethical belief and moral conduct, particularly as these affect our social relations in the widest sense (that is, both with other humans and animals). So in order to do justice to the complexity of Coetzee's engagement with the animal over a period of nearly twenty years, this chapter will progress towards its main focus by working through the importance of animals in Coetzee's *oeuvre*. Thus, I hope I will offer a chapter that meets the inclusive demand of its title.

By way of an introduction to the sort of ethical ideas at play here, let me bring together two quotations, one from Coetzee and the other from Derrida. This seems entirely fitting for my purposes since their work on animals is the

subject of an intriguing coincidence. Derrida first presented his important lecture on animals and ethics, 'The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', at a colloquium on his work in Cerisy la Salle on 15 July 1997—precisely three months before Coetzee delivered the first of two lectures that would become *The Lives of Animals*. Among their many consonances are a critique of the anthropocentrism of Reason; criticism of canonical philosophers such as Aristotle, Descartes and Kant for their theorisations of the animal; the comparison of factory farming and the industrialisation of animal death to the Nazis' treatment of Jews; and, structuring all of these, a profound concern with the meaning of authorial self-disclosure.¹ The quotations I want to cite do not come from these lectures, however, but from two prefiguring texts that touch on ethics and animals: Derrida's is from the interview, "'Eating Well'", in which he coins the term *carno-phallogocentrism* to designate, in preparation for its future deconstruction, the schema that 'installs the virile figure at the determinative centre of the subject [who] accepts sacrifice and eats flesh' (pp. 280–81); Coetzee's is from an article that comments, from the perspective of a somewhat ambivalent vegetarian, on the anthropology, biology, psychology, theology and cultural history of meat eating.²

¹ Derek Attridge alludes to such similarities, without citing them, in his 'Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee's *Disgrace*', *Novel*, 34 (2000), 98–121 (p. 113).

² Coetzee, 'Meat Country', *Granta*, 52 (1995), 42–52. This piece contains both autobiography and discursive prose; one is left scratching one's head as to how to respond to the ambivalence of Coetzee's self-deprecating admission (almost confession) of his vegetarianism—a lifestyle he characterises as 'eccentric and dated', 'comic', yet 'perfectly sane' (pp. 43–44)—whilst professing some essentialist ideas about omnivorousness being 'human nature' (p. 46) and some (to say the least) contentious ones about meat's nutritional 'goodness' (p. 51).

In “Eating Well”, Derrida prepares to deconstruct what he calls the ‘sacrificial structure’ that underpins (for everyone, meat eater and vegetarian alike) the discursive construction of ‘the human’ (p. 278). Derrida’s concept is not dissimilar to what Judith Butler terms ‘constitutive exclusion’, which I addressed in chapter one. As Matthew Calarco puts it in his painstaking reading of the “Eating Well”, Derrida aims to complicate the strict distinction between this constitutive symbolic sacrifice inherent in the logic of discourse and the actual sacrifice of animals; the result is that, within Derrida’s broader understanding, even vegetarians do not escape the logic of sacrifice.³ The most rigorous critique of the sacrificial logic, therefore, cannot simply say that vegetarianism is the most moral practice because it avoids sacrifice. The best we can do is to determine ‘the best, most respectful, most grateful, and also the most giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self’ (pp. 281–82). In light of this, for Derrida the ‘moral question’ regarding the ethics of food is not ‘should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the non-living, man or animal’ (p. 282) but rather

how, for goodness sake should one eat well [*bien manger*]? And what does this imply? What is eating? [...] And in what respect does the formulation of these questions in language give us still more food for thought? In what respect is the question, if you will, still carnivorous? (p. 282)

For Coetzee, too, ‘the question of whether we should eat meat is not a serious question’ because it

³ ‘Deconstruction’ (forthcoming).

is on the same level of logic as posing the question, 'Should we have words?'. We have words; the question is being posed in words; without words there would be no question. So if there is going to be a question at all, it will have to be a different question, one I have not even begun to frame. (p. 46)

With the comments of both writers, we find ourselves with what is by now a familiar argument. Our ethical relation to animals is apparently predetermined (that is, towards acceptance of their being killed) by the basic facts of linguistic cognition. Language-use is explicitly linked to meat-eating; speaking and carnivorousness are regarded as the always-already of humanity.

What is interesting about these statements, however, is the more or less explicit possibility they leave open, as Coetzee puts it, of 'framing a question' that voices the moral dilemmas raised by the killing of animals for human food without recourse to the logic of 'should', the logic of morality. Taken as a more general dilemma about pro-animal thought, this is to an extent the essential question towards which the main texts I have discussed are pushing. How does one use literature to think ethically about animals when that very process is stymied by literature's essential precondition—language? Or, to put it another way: can literature find a way to get beyond itself in order to respond ethically to the otherness of the animal?

Of course, while Coetzee's statement can be used as a way to highlight issues of concern in his work, it should not be read as an authoritative comment on it. For Coetzee's fiction, nowhere more so than in *The Lives of Animals*, relentlessly does away with any clear-cut authority, moral or otherwise, and whether voiced by character or narrator. This ensures that it is an open-ended commitment to ethical thinking. It is noteworthy that Coetzee gestures towards the question, not the answer, about animal ethics, for this is precisely how we should approach *Lives*—as an interrogation of the

potential for pro-animal thought in literature. This means taking it seriously as an important literary text in its own right, something that is all the more necessary because of the initial response to it; *Lives* is yet to receive proper critical attention. To the extent that it has been caught up in the academic stampede towards *Disgrace* it has largely been used as a foil for discussing the ethical dilemmas of that text.⁴ And while critics have generally paid lip-service on a broad philosophical level to the interest of the animal-ethical issues raised by *Lives*, they have at best failed to consider these as woven into the fabric of a holistic and coherent literary work. Or (what is worse) they have subordinated the text's ethical issues to its literary aspects.⁵ In contrast, the ultimate purpose of this chapter will be to find in *The Lives of Animals* an exposition of that elusive question for those writers addressing themselves to pro-animal thought: how do we use literature to think our ethical relation to the animal in a way that responds to the animal's otherness?

⁴ The amount of recent commentary on *Disgrace* encourages me to exclude it in the main from my discussion here; it has already had two journal issues dedicated to it (*Scrutiny* 2, 2 (2002) and *Interventions* 4.3 (2002)). Two recently published articles discuss animals in *Disgrace*, at length, in terms of a theory of ethics inspired by Derrida's work that I myself use here. See Lucy Graham, "'Yes, I Am Giving Him Up': Sacrificial Responsibility and Likeness with Dogs in JM (sic) Coetzee's Recent Fiction', *Scrutiny* 2, 7 (2002), 4–15, and Attridge, 'Age', pp. 111–15.

⁵ For the literary focus, see especially Garber's untitled piece in *Lives*. The 'philosophical' focus is clear in all of the secondary comment in *Lives*; one particularly notable strand focuses on Elizabeth's comparison of the meat industry to the Holocaust. See both Gutmann and Singer in *Lives*, pp. 6–7, 86; Jacqueline Rose, 'Apathy and Accountability: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Raritan*, 21.4 (2002), 175–95 (pp. 192–95); Simons, pp. 127–31; and the only article-length response to the text, Timothy M. Costelloe, 'The Invisibility of Evil: Moral Progress and the "Animal Holocaust"', *Studies in Practical Philosophy* (forthcoming, 2003), <http://courses.arts.rochester.edu/nobis/animals/costello-coetze.doc>.

I. Coetzee's Animals

J. M. Coetzee's novels contain a veritable bestiary; time and time again his imagination returns to theriomorphic description. In this first section I will survey the many complex and serious ways in which animals are engaged in the five novels that lead up to *The Lives of Animals*.⁶ Generally speaking, two distinct modes are involved, which I will discuss in turn. The first is a representation of animals in metaphors that, when read closely, often extend beyond simply carrying meaning about human characters to form a sophisticated discourse on animals. The second is a representation of actual encounters with animals that grants animals a tentative yet genuine ethical presence in each respective work. One major effect of surveying these two modes will be the implication that much more work needs to be done on the animal ethics (and animal politics) of these earlier texts, in order to elucidate what is a desperately under-researched aspect of Coetzee's work. However, my main intention here is to provide a context for the more thorough exploration of the potential of fiction to perform an ethical engagement with animals in *The Lives of Animals*.

Coetzee's narrator in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, a colonial magistrate, uses animal metaphors to explore many different aspects of sexual desire. This usage multiplies the meanings that animality takes on within the rhetoric of eroticism and it complicates, in particular, the idea of sexual predation. By doing so the novel moves beyond the one-dimensional

⁶ *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London: Minerva, 1997); *Life & Times of Michael K* (London: Vintage, 1998); *Foe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987); *Age of Iron* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1990); *The Master of Petersburg* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994).

critique, made by feminists and pro-animal critics alike, of the inherent misogyny of animalised rhetoric in the context of sex.⁷

Troubled by doubt and the contradictions of his oblique passion for a barbarian girl, the magistrate 'prowls about her [...] without entering her or finding the urge to do so'. Yet still he 'hunts back and forth seeking entry' that he cannot find (p. 46). Elsewhere, he bathetically describes his physical exploits as 'the spasms of a dying animal'; during them he is 'awkward as a lobster' (p. 35). If these images undermine the sense of active sexual prowess that animalised rhetoric can connote for masculinity, other images suggest that the ultimate result of this logic of dominance is in fact submission before an autonomous desire that is beyond rational control. The magistrate describes his penis as 'an animal living parasitically upon me [...] anchored to my flesh with claws I could not detach' and he wonders what difference it would make were it 'rooted in a cat or dog instead of in me' (p. 49). After eventually having sex with the girl, he lies on her 'with the weight of a dead ox'. Oblivious to the post-coital self-loathing that this animal figure implies, she herself 'purrs in her sleep'. (pp. 69–70)⁸

While these observations suggest an interest in how the discourse of species underwrites masculine sexuality, we can also find animal figuration

⁷ See, for example, Adams, *Sexual Politics*, chapter two; Brian Luke, 'Violent Love: Hunting, Heterosexuality, and the Erotics of Men's Predation', *Feminist Studies*, 24 (1998), 627–55; and Joan Dunayer, 'Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots' and Marti Kheel, 'Licence to Kill: An Ecofeminist Critique of Hunter's Discourse', both in *Animals and Women*, ed. by Adams and Donovan, pp. 11–31; 85–125.

⁸ Of course, the possibility of misogyny emerging in such moments as this is a structural necessity of Coetzee's willingness to represent masculine experiences of sexuality without any narratorial reserve. A similar effect is felt in the work of a philosophical writer who also multiplies the meanings of human sexuality by the proliferation of animal metaphors, but who actually does so in a much more ecstatic tone than Coetzee: Alphonso Lingis. See his 'Animal Body, Inhuman Face', in Wolfe (ed.), pp. 165–182.

at the heart of the novel's more explicitly violent but nonetheless related themes of imprisonment and torture. After being captured, the magistrate describes his cell as a 'den' (p. 128): 'I guzzle my food like a dog', he thinks, 'a bestial life turning me into a beast' (p. 87). On escaping, he flees 'from hole to hole like a mouse' (p. 110). Recaptured and after suffering humiliation that he cannot resist because he is 'a tired old bear made tame by too much baiting' (p. 127), he is tortured and strung up on a tree.

Someone gives me a push and I begin to float back and forth in an arc a foot above the ground like a great old moth with its wings pinched together, roaring, shouting. 'He is calling his barbarian friends,' someone observes. 'That is barbarian language you hear'. (p. 133)

When the human body in pain is compared to an abused insect, the traumatic nature of the event seems at first disproportionate to the bathetic context of this metaphor—a cliché of childish violence. One effect of the metaphor drawing attention to itself, by collapsing into illogic at the word 'roaring', is to replicate the magistrate's disorientation; but another is to hint that such violence against insects might itself be taken more seriously.

Some readers might find it outrageous to extract and focus on the plight of a metaphorical moth in response to the representation of such public human torture. This worry will be particularly acute in the context of a novel written at the height of apartheid, and especially so when the novelist's work is already implicated in heated debate over South African writers' social responsibility to represent the violent inequalities of a corrupt political regime.⁹ To answer this point, it is worth noting the importance of an animal

⁹ These issues are addressed in Michael Marais, "'Little Enough, Less than Little, Nothing": Ethics, Engagement and Change in the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46

in Coetzee's own foray into this debate, written during apartheid in 1986.¹⁰ Discussing Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, Coetzee relates its chief protagonist's response to the disturbing sight of a donkey being flogged by a drunken black man on the outskirts of the Johannesburg townships. She is unwilling to condemn the man for visiting the social abjection he has suffered himself on the donkey; yet this would be to accept abuse just because liberal humanitarianism towards animals in such an endemically racist context might look suspiciously like a way of ignoring human oppression. The protagonist reluctantly passes by but soon abandons South Africa.

In his reading, Coetzee does not dispute this tacit agreement with the man's ethical primacy over the donkey. However, the key point about the scenario is that the animal's needs are granted genuine validity vis-à-vis the man's, thus making its body the site of an (almost) irresolvable cross-species ethical drama. In the radical constriction of the protagonist's choices to 'either looking on in horrified fascination as the blows fall or turning one's eyes away' Coetzee finds a symbol of the South African novelist's dilemma over the representation of torture in a police state (p. 368, his emphasis). By representing the torture scene s/he is enthralled by but forbidden to see, the novelist capitulates to the state's power to create such a mysterious obscenity; under such conditions, to fictionalise torture with moral authority is impossible. The irony, of course, is that Coetzee's willingness in this essay

(2000), 159–182 (pp. 159–61), and Derek Attridge, 'Literary Form and the Demands of Politics: Otherness in J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*', in *Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. by George Levine (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp. 243–63 (pp. 244–49).

¹⁰ See Coetzee, 'Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State', in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. by David Atwell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 361–68.

to do justice to *human* torture by insisting on its invisibility is effected precisely by way of the compelling visibility, and eventual avoidance, of *animal* torture in Gordimer's novel. Nevertheless, Coetzee looks forward to a point, after apartheid, when 'all human acts, including the flogging of an animal, will be returned to the ambit of moral judgement' (p. 368).

Coetzee's response to these issues in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, of course, is to forbid his narrator access to the *barbarians'* torture, while later narrating his own. We can now return to this text with a proper understanding of animals' relation to human oppression. The magistrate's pained body is aligned with the supposedly irrational barbarians, echoing other descriptions of the barbarians as animals (pp. 19–21). We can see a nexus of parallel oppositions emerging:

reason	:	pain
language	:	agonised cries
freedom	:	imprisonment
mind	:	body
coloniser	:	barbarian
human	:	animal

This nexus patterns the novel's intersection of the discourses and practices of colonialism and speciesism.¹¹ Nothing more clearly suggests this intersection than the magistrate's description of the colonial community's violent reaction

¹¹ Arguing that literary representations of caged zoo animals suggest that animals' pain is allowed by the result of imaginative failure on the part of real zoo-goers, Randy Malamud explicitly modulates a claim by philosopher Elaine Scarry that pain marks the point at which human language and imagination collapse. For Malamud, this is also an effect of zoos as imperialist institutions, *Reading Zoos*, pp. 180–81 and chapter two.

to the arrival of migrating birds, metaphorically described as 'a rival city'. Trappers succeed in 'huge catches: birds with their necks twisted, slung from poles row upon row by the feet, or crammed alive into wooden cages, screaming with outrage, trampling each other, with sometimes a great silent whooper swan in their midst' (p. 62). Yet the blankness of the magistrate's comment on this, containing within its positive phraseology only the barest unconfirmed hint of irony, indicates a reticence in the novel to provide a clear moral context for judging such practices. The catch represents 'nature's cornucopia: for the next weeks everyone will eat well' (p. 62). This moral reticence, as we shall see, is a characteristic of Coetzee's writing on animals.

Moving on, we find the animal at the heart of Michael K's summary self-description in the final pages of his 'life and times': 'I am more of an earthworm [which] is also a kind of a gardener. Or a mole, also a gardener, that does not tell stories because it lives in silence' (p. 182). Throughout the novel, in fact, animal descriptions are attached to K. He thinks of himself, for example, as a 'termite boring its way through a rock' (p. 66); 'like an ant that does not know where its hole is' (p. 83); 'like a parasite dozing in the gut'; and 'like a lizard under a stone' (p. 116). A vital effect of the presence of such descriptions is that they can be seen to measure K's attempt to absent himself, in a reaction to the dominance of police-state ideology that pervades his war-torn country, from any mode of self-narration or interpretation: he wants to achieve the 'silence' of the mole and live 'like a beast [...] that leaves no trace of its living' (p. 99).¹²

¹² Wolfe offers a sophisticated discussion of Derrida's claim that neither humans nor animals can erase their traces 'of their own accord' in his 'Wittgenstein's Lion', pp. 1-11; see Derrida's 'The Animal', p. 401 and his 'And Say the Animal Responded', in Wolfe (ed.), pp. 121-46 (pp. 135-39).

Of course, one of the most important of these interpretive modes in the novel is the medical officer's attempted diagnosis of K, though this is ultimately a futile attempt to read the 'trace of his living' in K's fasting body. K's silence only solicits further inquiry when it is brought to bear in his refusal to respond to medical questioning. 'When he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness [...] into which it was useless to pour words' (p. 110). The representation of K here evokes that of the hysteric-animal in *Diary of a Steak*. Muteness, of course, was evoked in that text as a key symptom of hysteria. Moreover, at another point the female patient and the BSE-cow are collocated at the site of two terms very pertinent to K: anorexia and nothingness:

In 1873 Nervosa Anorexia was born.

= 0

Perhaps that's where she is? Not here. Hardly there. There she is. There. There.

0 0 0

Lacking the appetites of the earthly

Buttercup¹³

K's position vis-à-vis the medical officer is consequently suggestive of the hysteric-animal's seductive undermining of interpretation that was central to my reading of *Diary of a Steak's* animal politics.

¹³ Levy, p. 24. On K, interpretation and anorexia see Maud Ellman, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment* (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 108–10.

However, we can also locate a slightly different way of bringing the animal into play here. Working in part against this kind of theorising of K's muteness, Derek Attridge reads *Michael K* for what he calls its 'literal' evocations of human experience. His conclusions lead him to disagree with the critical consensus that K can be read as a figure for the 'force of *différance*' (one way of describing the effect of the hysteric-animal in *Diary*, in fact). This is mainly because this consensual opinion repeats the unreliable medical officer's own suggestion that K allegorises the way that 'meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it' (*Michael K*, p. 166). Yet, despite this belief, the officer himself exempts K from physical exercise because that 'would be like trying to teach a rat or a mouse or [...] a lizard to bark and beg' (p. 163). Doing so repeats the catechistic way that K's meaninglessness is consistently given meaning in animal terms. In attendance to this fact, Attridge's 'literal' reading can actually be reinforced by taking Coetzee's animal metaphors seriously as also a discourse about animals.¹⁴

At times, especially in his period of 'going native', K is reminiscent of the narrator of *Surfacing*, in whom the furrowing out and eating of raw vegetables signified the untenable end-point of thinking ethically about animals.

He also ate roots. He had no fear of being poisoned, for he seemed to know the difference between a benign bitterness and a malign one, as

¹⁴ 'Against Allegory: Taking J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life & Times of Michael K* Literally', presented at the Department of English Literature, University of Sheffield, 20 November 2002. Attridge does not focus on animals, but he does find a tentative and moral-free resistance to exploitation of the earth in K.

though he had once been an animal and the knowledge of good and bad plants had not died in his soul. (p. 102)

Yet there is a clear difference between the two texts. When the narrator eats raw plants in *Surfacing* it is an attempt to renounce the power over others inherent in her humanity and begin a future life assimilated completely into an animal realm considered powerless. On the other hand, the animal nature represented by K's botanical knowledge is suggested only as a comparison, he remains a human anomaly. K's putative animality is also figured as the vestigial trace of a lost pre-history. K seems to have learned the lesson of *Surfacing* that becoming utterly natural cannot be achieved. Similarly, the narrative's occasional attempts to align him with an animality that is performatively figured as empty of significance are also bound to fail. The proliferating animal metaphors that attach themselves to K ironically defeat any attempt at 'silent' or 'trace'-free meaninglessness by themselves occupying the site of meaning that might be thus vacated. Equally, of course, they ensure that animals cannot be regarded as essentially meaningless either.

Part of the power of *Michael K* lies in the stringency with which it worries away at its protagonist's possible meaninglessness. Susan Barton—the narrator of *Foe*, Coetzee's re-writing of *Robinson Crusoe*—resorts to animal comparison to represent her own profound sense of insignificance when contemplating the island of which she and Cruso (sic) are *de facto* colonisers. She imagines asking Cruso:

have you never been struck of a sudden by the living, breathing quality of this island, as if it were some great beast from before the Flood that has slept through the centuries insensible of the insects scurrying on its back [...]? Are we insects, Cruso, in the greater view? Are we no better than the ants? (p. 89)

Similarly, Friday's absolute muteness—his actual insignificance—in response to Susan's language lessons evinces an incipient scepticism that forces her to confront her own adjacency to animals: 'when I take the spoon from his hand [...] and say *Spoon*, how can I be sure he does not think I am chattering to myself as a magpie or an ape does' (p. 57).

In fact, if we can judge by Coetzee's own statements about his fiction, there is another way to transcend the species barrier on the subject of muteness and scepticism. Referring specifically to Friday, but also adumbrating my discussion of *Waiting*, Coetzee has claimed that the suffering body is a 'standard' in his work against the scepticism that results from the kind of linguistically bounded universe that *Foe's* metafictionality suggests: 'Friday is mute, but Friday does not disappear because Friday is body'. Chiming with my critique of Margaret Homans in chapter two, Coetzee says that 'the body is not "that which is not," and the proof that it is is the pain that it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt'.¹⁵ The pain of the suffering body therefore commands an 'authority' that Coetzee does not limit in terms of species difference. For him, his fiction is a response to his 'being-overwhelmed' by 'the fact of suffering in the world, *and not only human suffering*' (p. 248, my emphasis).

Nonetheless, Susan's sense of futility in the face of scepticism reminds us of a human–animal relationship we have already seen in *The Temple of My Familiar*, when she later realises that she talks to Friday 'as old women talk to

¹⁵ *Doubling*, p. 248. Coetzee's claims predate Butler's explanation, on which my critique of Homans draws, of how to sidestep the problem of scepticism while insisting on a discursive construction of the body (*Bodies*, pp. 4–12). In 'Wittgenstein's Lion', Wolfe discusses the issue of muteness when exploring the ethical status of the animal in Cavell's philosophical scepticism (pp. 1–11).

cats, out of loneliness, till at last they are deemed to be witches, and shunned in the streets' (p. 77). Such moments make clear the extent to which Friday's muteness throws into confusion the conventional human–animal dichotomy that the concept of human linguistic rationality maintains.

Of course, Mrs Curren, the epistolary narrator of *Age of Iron* is another woman who befriends cats (pp. 11, 22, 33). But that novel is marked by many types of animal imagery—canine, feline, avian—that adhere to almost every character. Perhaps the most important of these is entomological imagery, underwriting as it does the novel's concern with one woman's experience of the desire for personal and social regrowth in the harsh climate of apartheid South Africa. Mrs Curren dreams about her cancer, imagining it as a fly: 'it is upon me, it is here: it struts across me, a creature from another world' (p. 24); she describes the white children of her neighbourhood having the 'innocence of beegrubs, plump and white', in opposition to the black children (who are, incidentally, 'rapacious sharks' (pp. 6–7)); elsewhere, she is herself like 'a grub in a hive' (p. 144) and remembers the joy of riding a bike, feeling 'as a butterfly must feel when it is being born, or bearing itself' (p. 14); the homeless man Vercueil is 'an insect [...] emerging from behind the skirting-boards when the house is in darkness to forage for crumbs' (p. 12). That such imagery does not just attach to one person but spreads across the many characters of the novel makes clear the complex political demands placed on the individual by the need for widespread social regrowth after apartheid. Moreover, as well as being signifiers of these competing demands, animals themselves are subject to them—a fact felt bluntly by the cats whose exile from Mrs Curren's hearth is the effect of her hospitality to Vercueil and his dog (p. 180).

Progressing finally to *The Master of Petersburg*, the tortured attempts of Dostoevsky, its main focaliser, to come to terms with the death of his stepson

Pavel are an exercise in the use, and ultimate incapacity, of animal metaphors. He remembers Pavel as the typical adolescent boy: 'fullgrown, but can't leave the nest yet. Feathered but unable to fly. Always eating, always hungry. They remind me of pelicans: gangling creatures, ungainliest of birds, till they spread those great wings of theirs and leave the ground' (p. 221). Dostoevsky believes it better to have fathered Pavel 'at a distance, like a frog or a fish' (p. 207). In this novel, more so than the others I have mentioned, the animal imagery takes on a gothic tone, often used to describe characters' unconscious desires, fears, or disgusts. Feeling jealous of his son's sexual conquests, the father is 'like an old grey rat creeping in afterwards upon the love-scene to see what is left for him. Sitting on the corpse in the dark, pricking his ears, gnawing, listening, gnawing' (p. 107). Dostoevsky's powerful unconscious desire to reach the dead son, as well as the traumatic sense that such a project is doomed to failure, plays itself out in a dream of being part-human, part-turtle. He dives towards the son, figured as a baby who sleeps (with a strange dream-logic) on a riverbed. When he tries to call to his son 'each syllable is replaced by a syllable of water' (p. 17). Dostoevsky is alienated within a body that is unable to achieve the animal's comfort in its environment; the human bizarrely drowns because of the weakness of his exhaled words. The otherness of animals is here juxtaposed with the otherness of the dead, two ontological states that Dostoevsky's unconscious signally fails to access, just as do his other Orphic methods in the novel: sex and imaginative writing.¹⁶

¹⁶ A full discussion of this novel would need to take account of the extremely complex relation of animals, language and death in it; see especially p. 20. The best guide to such philosophical discussion would be Matthew Calarco's exacting analysis of Derrida's work on animals and death in *Aporias*, 'On the Borders of Language and Death: Derrida and the

Now, despite the weaving of ideas about animals into the linguistic fabric of Coetzee's novels, it will not be entirely surprising if their readers remain unfamiliar with the number therein of extremely compelling actual human encounters with animals. However, if such incidents as appear in the majority of Coetzee's earlier work do so only briefly, and if their place in the structure of each text as a whole remains elusive, then this fact should not itself be entirely unexpected. For as critics are beginning to realise, encouraged by influential readers such as Derek Attridge and Gayatri Spivak, Coetzee's fiction offers an exploration of ethical demands occasioned by the events and characters he portrays, but it is an exploration undertaken with an abiding concern not to assimilate those demands to conventional contexts and patterns of meaning. Attridge writes of the 'figures of alterity' that one finds in the novels, 'usually as subordinate third-world individuals', noting that 'the task Coetzee has set himself is to convey the resistance of these figures to the discourses of dominant culture [...] and at the same time to find a discursive means of representing the claims they make on us'.¹⁷ That we consistently find encounters with *animals* accompanying the representation of such people, however, is not something that has been seen

Question of the Animal', *Angelaki*, 7.2 (2002), 17–25. Marais discusses at length in "Little Enough" the many revisitations of the Orpheus/Euridice myth in Coetzee's fiction, particularly in relation to Maurice Blanchot's description of the literary writing as an Orphic movement, propelled by a desire to reach and capture the Other that also ensures its failure. See also Blanchot's *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pp. 171–76.

¹⁷ Attridge, 'Literary Form', pp. 249–50. See also Gayatri Spivak, 'Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*' in *Consequences of Theory*, ed. by Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 154–80. An exemplary reading that attends to such otherness in terms of history and the body is Samuel Durrant, 'Bearing Witness to Apartheid: J. M. Coetzee's Inconsolable Works of Mourning', *Contemporary Literature*, 40 (1999), 430–63.

as important to the reading of these novels in general.¹⁸ Despite being consistently apparent, Coetzee's animals seem even less amenable to interpretation than those incommensurable 'figures of alterity'—even more 'other' than the human others, we could say. It is worth looking at some of these early encounters, then, since they provide the background to Coetzee's much more fulsome fictional engagement with the ethical dilemmas of human-animal relations in *The Lives of Animals*.

Worth mentioning is the wailing, shackled dog in *The Master of Petersburg*, whose plight Dostoevsky eventually ignores because he will not accept that the dog might signal an ethical substitute for his lost son (pp. 78–84); this happens despite his recognition that his refusal to accept the logic of symbolic substitution—the distinction of 'things that are things from things that are signs'—is the reason for his failure to complete the mourning of Pavel's death (p. 83). This scenario must also remind us of Vercueil's dog, whose physicality and noise make for a choral presence on almost every page of *Age of Iron*. Mrs Curren asks, four pages from its close: 'is it possible that the dog is the one sent and not [Vercueil]?'; she does this after having spent the majority of the novel exploring the possibility that to accommodate an abject figure such as Vercueil might be to entertain a redemptive presence in her life. An answer to her question is certainly suggested when she is at her absolute nadir—having given up on life, she is sleeping rough, incontinent, and has been physically abused by a group of children. The dog brings her

¹⁸ Although *The Lives of Animals* has encouraged critics to see the importance of animals in Coetzee's recent writing, the interest is confined to that work. To his credit, Attridge is the one commentator who at least briefly bucks this trend: see his 'Expecting the Unexpected in Coetzee's *Master of Petersburg* and Derrida's Recent Writings' in *Applying—To Derrida*, ed. by John Brannigan, Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996) pp. 21–40 (pp. 28–31).

back from unconsciousness by sniffing her and 'licking up the salt of [her] tears', by giving her 'kisses, if one wanted to look at them that way' (p. 146). The dog relates to her in such a physical way that it seems to reaffirm her being in a world that she has given up on trying to interpretively understand.¹⁹

Other ethical encounters occur in various scenes of animal slaughter, of which there are several in Coetzee's work. Each time the event occasions ambivalence.²⁰ Her traumatic viewing of a chicken slaughter incites Mrs Curren to meditate critically on the cultural invisibility of both the 'enterprise' of animal killing and the effort of the (predominantly black) workers it requires (pp. 38–41). The narrator of Coetzee's childhood memoirs watches a sheep being slaughtered on a farm and thinks of 'all the things that a sheep has inside it that he has inside him too'. Despite this somatic identification he does not act to protect the animals because of what he sees as sheep's recognition that eventual slaughter is 'the price of life on earth'.²¹ We might think also of the 'apes'—in fact they sound like monkeys of some kind—that are clubbed to death as pests by Cruso and Friday in *Foe*, despite the fact that Susan 'saw no harm in them' (p. 21). The real reason of course, is

¹⁹ Simon Glendinning offers a sophisticated path through the philosophical Scylla and Charybdis of behaviourist naturalism and Romantic anthropomorphism when representing, as Coetzee does here, a dog's ability to form an ethical relation with a human subject. See 'From Animal Life to City Life', *Angelaki*, 5.3 (2000), 19–30.

²⁰ In a short text entitled 'Following Derrida' for the internet journal *Tympanum*, Attridge reports an incident when, in response to a paper on Levinas, Coetzee asked him 'are you also being addressed by the face of the other when the eyes that are looking at you are those of the slaughter-ox?', <http://www.usc.edu/dept/comp-lit/tympanum/4/attridge.html>. Attridge does not answer the question about Levinas's animal ethics, but it has been by Calarco in 'Deconstruction' (forthcoming) and by David Clark in 'On Being "The Last Kantian in Nazi Germany": Dwelling with Animals after Levinas', in Ham and Senior (eds.), pp. 165–98.

²¹ *Boyhood: A Memoir* (London: Vintage, 1998), pp. 98, 102.

that their skins are an excellent source of shoe-leather. Yet their presence in the novel indicates that Crusoe's arrival on Friday's island is in fact a second form of human colonisation of this land. Finally, if K is the figure of alterity in *Michael K*, then we can think of the goat that he desperately tracks and kills as that text's other (animal) other. Rather than providing physical sustenance, as K had hoped, the goat is eaten only partially and with apparent distaste, the useless majority of its body buried (pp. 52–57). Each of these fictional situations is worthy of extended analysis; however I want to end this survey with two key incidents from *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

A silver-fox is purchased by the magistrate and given as a pet in a failed attempt to infantilise (and perhaps to domesticate) the barbarian girl who is the novel's main figure of alterity. 'Animals belong outdoors', the girl says, but will not let the magistrate release it because it is too young and will starve to death. Being the object of this irresolvable double-bind, the cub lingers about half-wild, unwanted and barely tolerated. The girl is impervious to the magistrate's attempt to alleviate the problem by humour—he jokes that 'people will say I keep two wild animals in my rooms' (pp. 36, 37). The girl's implacability, however, only reinforces the joke's alignment of her with the animal. Rather like Michael K's goat, both remain completely unassimilated. Their persistent and uncanny presence in the magistrate's home environment is a result of the text's refusal to categorise girl or animal under the sign of any conventional moral rubric, the most obvious of which would, I suppose, be 'humanitarian' concern as embodied by the liberal magistrate. As the word implies, such concern is part of a domesticating process that necessarily lessens the otherness of the animal.

In another incident, the magistrate finds himself unable to complete a hunt by killing a ram, shaken from a pastime that usually offers him bucolic escapism (pp. 9, 41–42, 62). He describes an aestheticised moment of mutual

recognition on spotting the ram, one that can be compared with the other moments of animal looking that I discuss in earlier chapters. As the magistrate reports, the ram 'turns his head and sees me. His hooves touch the ice with a click, his jaw stops in slow motion, we gaze at each other' (p. 42). Yet, unusually, it is not the integrity of the individual animal's existence that is perceived as a result of this look and which stops the magistrate from shooting. Rather, the moment seems to transport him into the realisation that he and the ram have become participants in an event that is at once so clichéd and so overcoded with symbolism that it denegates the magistrate's own self-present individual will. The hunt 'loses its savour' because of

the sense that this has become [...] an occasion on which either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim; that for the duration of this frozen moment the stars are locked in a configuration in which events are not themselves but stand for other things. (pp. 42–43)

The buck 'disappears into the tall reeds' with an insouciant 'whisk of the tail' while the magistrate tries to 'shrug off this irritating and uncanny feeling' (p. 43).

This experience is exemplary for delimiting a particular kind of engagement with the animal that betokens a development from the human–animal interactions we have seen in earlier chapters of this thesis; as such, it can introduce the issues raised by the texts I will discuss at greater length below. Something clearly happens to the magistrate so that he finds himself perceiving the animal in a way that stops him killing it. However, the encounter does not follow usual patterns of identification such as respect for the rights, or empathy with the suffering, of another individual. Instead, it is experienced only when the encounter passes into the realm of symbolism (and as we saw in both *Age of Iron* and *The Master of Petersburg* there is

significance for animal ethics in the difference between 'things that are signs' and 'things that are things'). The magistrate as 'old hunter' allows the buck as 'proud ram' to escape.

In fact, we should be more precise, since the categories of rational freedom and moral decision are invisible here. The ram's escape is an effect of the magistrate's hesitant recognition that he cannot avoid being spoken by a discourse that is beyond him. This recognition, at most only partly inspired by the sight of the animal, occasions in the magistrate a profound sense of otherness to himself. 'Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms', he tells the barbarian girl (p. 43). It is not at all clear, however, what terms he *is* living on; nor is it clear, more specifically, whether they are the animal's (nor indeed what the animal's terms might be).

Thus the ethics at play in the magistrate's interaction with the ram certainly cannot be straightforwardly categorised as pro-animal; it would be ridiculous to suggest that the magistrate's actions here, or anywhere else in the novel, are based on a morality of animals' rights. The magistrate, clearly struggling for the right term to describe what he has experienced, describes what he feels about the ram as an 'obscure sentiment', but I would prefer to call it an ethical relation. It is an encounter in which a man finds himself, in even the obscurest of ways, bound to an animal because his actions affect it.

This definition of the ethical relation is deliberately open-ended, and can be applied to a great variety of human-animal encounters. This flexibility is useful because it encourages the discovery and interrogation of valuable ethical meaning as it usually occurs in Coetzee's fiction: in unconventional places like this hunting scene. On the other hand, the broadness of the description explicitly forestalls any predetermined sense of what a 'good' or 'bad' ethical relation to the animal might be, a sense for which I will reserve the term *moral* to avoid confusion. The reason for holding open the

possibility of an ethical relation beyond the blunt calculation of right and wrong required by this sense of morality is that such a calculus can foreclose the possibility of new and unexpected configurations of the human–animal relation, constricting our understanding within already accepted norms. This conception of ethics is indebted to Derrida’s distinction between justice, which he characterises as incalculable, and law, which is calculable.²² This is a distinction that Derrida makes clear is absolutely tied to the consideration of animal ethics. Elaborating the concept of carno-phallogocentrism that I touched on at the start of this chapter, he claims that ‘carnivorous sacrifice is essential to the structure of subjectivity, which is also to say the founding of the intentional subject and to the founding, if not of law, at least of [...] the difference between justice and law’.²³

The ram incident’s importance is that it foregrounds the way that Coetzee’s writing presents our ethical relation to animals as intrinsically *discursive*. That is, encounters with animals occur amongst the admittedly diverse context of ideas in which both animals and ethics are already understood. Thinking of animal ethics as always-already discursive is categorically different from thinking of an unmediated experience of animals’

²² This distinction is elaborated in Zygmunt Bauman in a book length discussion of ethics that subtends my comments here, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); for some worries about and complications of Bauman’s Levinas-inspired ethics from a pro-animal perspective, see Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, pp. 194–207.

²³ ‘Force of Law: The “Mystical” Foundation of Authority’, *Cardozo Law Review*, 11 (1990), 920–1045 (p. 953), see also pp. 945–57. On carno-phallogocentrism, see also “‘Eating Well’”, pp. 272–283 and *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 66–71. These issues are discussed elsewhere by Baker, pp. 76–78; Calarco ‘Deconstruction’ (forthcoming); Clark, pp. 176–78; Wolfe, ‘Wittgenstein’s Lion’, pp. 25–28; and Wolfe and Elmer, pp. 145–47. Coetzee has himself spoken of his interest in ‘an idea of justice, somewhere, that transcends laws and lawmaking’, *Doubling*, p. 340.

value—a precondition of the notion of animal rights.²⁴ To see how this idea is explored at its fullest, we have to turn to *The Lives of Animals*.

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²⁴ This idea of unmediated value subtends, in different ways, the two major strands of animal rights philosophy in the Anglo-American tradition. The theory of rights based on 'inherent value' is applied in its purest form to animals by Regan. Peter Singer's approach in *Animal Liberation* contrasts because its utilitarian conception of ethics is based on calculating overall social happiness rather than on intrinsic value *per se*; yet that calculation is itself based on equal treatment of similar intrinsic qualities in human and animal (for a detailed critique, see Wolfe, 'Old Orders', pp. 33–34). Martha Nussbaum's recent analysis in terms of the 'capabilities approach' explicitly bases ethical treatment on a respect for different beings' intrinsic needs and capabilities. Interestingly, this forms part of her own Tanner Lectures titled 'Beyond the Social Contract: Toward Global Justice', presented at the Australian National University on 12 and 13 November 2002; the text is available at <http://philrsss.anu.edu.au/tanner/>.

II. Vegetarianism and the Performance of Animal Ethics in *The Lives of Animals*

Anti-illusionism—displaying the tricks you are using instead of hiding them—is a common ploy of postmodernism. But in the end there is only so much mileage to be got out of that ploy. Anti-illusionism is, I suspect, only a marking of time, a phase of recuperation, in the history of the novel. The question is, what next?

*J. M. Coetzee*²⁵

In these two elegant lectures we thought John Coetzee was talking about animals. Could it be however, that all along he was really asking, 'What is the value of literature?'

*Marjorie Garber*²⁶

Coetzee offered his own small step forward in answer to his question when, on 15 and 16 October 1997, he delivered the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Princeton University, under the title 'The Lives of Animals'. His performance took the concept of metafiction, with its blurring of the boundary between the authorial and the textual, to a new level. The lectures, individually named 'The Philosophers and the Animals' and 'The Poets and the Animals', narrate the story of a novelist called Elizabeth Costello who has been invited (like Coetzee) to speak at an American college on a subject of her choosing—she chooses animal ethics. Moreover, 'The Lives of Animals' combines within its narrative frame many more discursive contexts in addition to the lecture-performance. The more distinctive of these are the

²⁵ *Doubling*, p. 27.

²⁶ In *Lives*, p. 84.

classroom seminar and the public debate, but we also find social milieus more conventionally found in fiction—the prestigious dinner, the family visit, the conjugal argument and the intimate confession. With the addition of academic discourse to the eventually published book in the form of scholarly footnotes, we can call it a novella only by profoundly limiting its sense of generic diversity. Nevertheless, that book, published in 1999 as *The Lives of Animals* is, first and foremost, the text of Coetzee's performances.²⁷ I draw attention to these issues of genre at the outset in order to focus on the absolute importance of attending to the context of performance that conditions *The Lives of Animals*—in particular, the way this context adumbrates its status as written fiction. For I want to argue that the text's representation of pro-animal thought hinges on its cross-pollination of writing and performance, and on its management of the competing aesthetic and ideological implications of such different generic modes. Therefore, despite the false binary imposed by Marjorie Garber, *The Lives of Animals* is indeed about animals precisely *because* it is about the value of literature.

In terms of the present thesis, as well as of Coetzee's *oeuvre* as a whole, *Lives* is important firstly because of the explicitness of its address to animal issues, specifically its inclusion—through the character of Elizabeth—of progressive theories about animals as subjects of philosophical and literary representation. During the course of her lecture, for instance, Elizabeth develops an argument that underpins the contemporary feminist pro-animal

²⁷ Clearly, we are dealing with a tricky textual environment here, which it will be important to attend to precisely. Because I occasionally need to maintain a distinction between 'The Lives of Animals' the performance and *The Lives of Animals* the published book, I reserve the term 'lectures' to refer to the former and place their title in quotation marks while italicising the title of the latter and using conventional textual terms of reference.

theory I addressed in chapter one, and which allowed me in chapter two to compare her views to those underpinning *The Temple of My Familiar*. From critiquing the human-centeredness of the Cartesian discourse of rationalism, she moves instead to a consequent valorisation of the body, and finally argues for the ideal of imaginative sympathy based on ‘embodied knowledge’ of other animals’ being.²⁸ Her debate with Thomas O’Hearne about animal rights, while the least compelling part of the text in literary terms, could serve as a primer for those interested by theoretical developments in animal ethics over the past ten years or so.²⁹ She also touches on a number of issues mentioned in this thesis, from the compelling power of animals’ silence (p. 25), to the problems of extending conventional human rights to the animal realm (pp. 25–26), and from the importance of concepts like instrumental technicity, scepticism, imprisonment and torture for our philosophical consideration of animals’ lives (pp. 28–33, 59), to the need to understand animals’ place in the history and representations of colonialism (pp. 57–58).

²⁸ See pp. 22–35. Elizabeth’s clearest philosophical similarities are with the work of Josephine Donovan; the first two stages are explored in Donovan’s ‘Animal Rights’, the third in ‘Attention to Suffering: Sympathy as a Basis for the Ethical Treatment of Animals’, both in *Beyond Animal Rights*, ed. by Adams and Donovan, pp. 34–60, pp. 147–69.

²⁹ The text offers sources for some of these issues, though many of the points not referenced can be found in recent writing about animals: O’Hearne’s first argument that animal rights reproduces Western Imperialism is played out in Julia V. Emberley, *Venus in Furs: The Cultural Politics of Fur* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998); his second (Kantian) argument that animals are objects not subjects of ethics is debated at length in Regan; Elizabeth’s insistence on the need to ‘interrogate the whole question of rights’ (p. 62), points to Wolfe’s project in a number of essays, especially ‘Old Orders’; although O’Hearne’s final claim—that animals cannot comprehend, nor therefore experience, death—is deconstructed by Derrida in *Aporias* (see note 15) it nonetheless forms the basis of Lippit’s theoretical approach to animals, which is heavily influenced by deconstruction.

On a more literary level, Elizabeth's critique of what amounts to a certain Platonism in Ted Hughes's poetry lucidly describes the point at which an environmentalist or eco-poetic representational ethic differs from a pro-animal one by prioritising the abstract species over the individual animal (p. 53); I touched on this opposition in Atwood's work. John's disagreement with Elizabeth on this point voices an oft-repeated critique of animal rights: that it trades on the aesthetics of sublime animals (gorillas, pandas) to save the ridiculous (rats, prawns).

Jaguar poems are all very well, he thinks, but you won't get a bunch of Australians standing around a sheep, listening to its silly baa, writing poems about it. Isn't that what is so suspect in the whole animal rights business, that it has to ride on the back of pensive gorillas [...] because the real objects of its concern [...] are not newsworthy? (p. 55)

Unsurprisingly, however, there are indeed Australian poets who do not share John's prejudice for wild over domestic animals.³⁰ John also has a lengthy discussion with Norma about what she dismissively calls the 'French irrationalism' concluded by Elizabeth's critique of reason's anthropocentrism (a charge which I negotiated in my discussion of Walker). Indeed, there is an unlikely alliance between Norma and Peter Singer on this point—one finds resistance to what we might loosely term postmodern pro-animal thought in

³⁰ Primarily under the aegis of vegan poet Coral Hull's internet journal *Thylazine* (<http://www.thylazine.com>) and John Kinsella's editorship of the Salt publishing house in Sydney (<http://www.saltpublishing.com/zoo.html>). To see played out the difference that Elizabeth marks between eco-poetic and pro-animal literary approaches to animals, compare Jonathan Bate, 'Poets, Apes, and other Animals', in *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2001) with Randy Malamud, 'The Culture of Using Animals in Literature and the Case of José Emilio Pacheco', *CLC Web Journal*, 2 (2000) <http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb00-2/malamud00.html>.

the most unlikely of places.³¹ However, even more interesting to me than these many points of what we might call theoretical interest is the narrative that contains them, in particular its deft fictionalisation of the social drama occasioned by Elizabeth's vegetarianism. Addressing these two realms together, one within the other, the text offers a fascinating study of the effect of fiction on the moral philosophy of pro-animal thought. Thus, while *Lives* is a short work, the sheer intensity of its focus on pro-animal themes sets it apart even from the other texts I have discussed. I will be addressing these matters throughout this section.

However, I will also dedicate much of my discussion to exploring the impact on its pro-animal themes of the text's form: to put it quickly, the way that the published work is simultaneously a fictional text that narrates its own conditions of production (the narrative of a visiting novelist to an American college) and a text of the physical performance of that fiction (Coetzee's reading). This arrangement is important to the extent that it seriously undermines any opposing of the stable and authoritative meaning conventionally expected of a lecture to the plurality of meaning that is the province of fiction. I will explain these suggestions shortly in order to show that by thus problematising the authority of its own discourse *Lives* insists on the complexity and variety of discursive contexts that mark the pro-animal thought it contains. And by discursive context, here, I do not mean simply a specific social arena or a single set of formal and linguistic conventions, but rather the realisation of the social relations, suffused as they are with very real differences of power, through the languages and concepts that people

³¹ See Singer in *Lives*, pp. 88–89.

use. Pro-animal thought, particularly as it is practised in vegetarianism, is represented in *The Lives of Animals* as a performative animal ethics that emerges as part of a network of many inter-related discursive contexts. But before I get into the devilish complexities of what is going on in *Lives* in terms of literary form, let me exemplify what I mean about the discursive emergence of vegetarianism in it.

The opening pages establish Elizabeth's vegetarianism in an environment highly charged with interpersonal power-relations. Elizabeth and her daughter-in-law, we are told, 'do not get on' (p. 15). Throughout the text, however, antipathy on Elizabeth's part is not actually presented, it is only occasionally reported as if it is a fact; indeed, her only comment on the matter mentions Norma's 'kindness' (p. 69). On the other hand, Norma's hostility is repeatedly and explicitly evidenced by her own comments, both presented and reported in the narrative. The following is a particularly telling example:

Norma and his mother have never liked each other. Probably his mother would have chosen not to like any woman he married. As for Norma, she has never hesitated to tell him that his mother's books are overrated, that her opinions on animals, animal consciousness, and ethical relations with animals are jejune and sentimental. (p. 17)

The narrative method is one Coetzee has used elsewhere, notably in *The Master of Petersburg*, and *Disgrace*. Events are related by a third-person narrator but consistently through the consciousness of the text's chief male protagonist (here, Elizabeth's son John); yet the narration does remain essentially external to him. There are very occasional moments where the text's more usual method of indirectly reporting John's thoughts is replaced by direct reporting, not distinguished by quotation marks; this can then slip into free indirect discourse. John's comment about jaguar poems is a good

example here. Such important moments very briefly allow the narrator's voice to reinforce John's less self-restrained attitudes. However, the much more usual effect of free indirect discourse in the text is that the assimilation of character and narrator seems inconclusive, as in the second sentence of the above quotation.

Nevertheless, the consistent use of John as the narration's focaliser ensures that there is little or no distance between his and the narrator's opinions. The text thus offers the reader no vantage point from which to judge the accuracy of John's perceptions. This means we are strenuously encouraged to take the narrated analysis at face value, and when it comes to reports of behaviour external to the text we have little option; this results in complicity with John's hardly tolerant attitudes about his mother and Norma's uncharitable response to her.³² On the other hand, there is a telling lack of external validation for these opinions and this means that doubts can creep in.

In the above quotation, for example, several possibilities are sparked. Might John's willingness to imagine such negative scenarios for both women—which rests on the word 'probably' and the phrase 'he would not be surprised'—suggest an unconscious investment in positioning himself as an object of contestation between these two women? Doesn't there seem to

³² In early reviews of the book, this has manifested itself as hostility towards Elizabeth's vegetarianism. The reviewer for *The Times* finds her a 'crank' (May 23 1999) and Elizabeth Lowry claims that it is Elizabeth who cannot extend her sympathy with animals to her family, as a result of her own 'fears [...] about her place in the hierarchy: 'Like a Dog', review of *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee, *London Review of Books*, 21.20 (1999) available online at http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n20/lowr01_.html. For a more empathetic and theoretically sophisticated attitude, see Ian Hacking, 'Our Fellow Animals', review of *The Lives of Animals* by J. M. Coetzee and *Ethics into Action: Henry Spira and the Animal Rights Movement* by Peter Singer, *New York Review of Books*, 29 June 2000.

be something of a misogynistic fantasy in this idea of the dutiful son caught between overbearing mother and combative (almost hen-pecking) wife? His mother is a prize-winning feminist novelist; it seems at least unlikely that she would ignorantly subscribe to such a cliché, even if there does seem to be enough evidence elsewhere of Norma's spitefulness, and a plausible explanation suggested for it in terms of her professional jealousy (p. 17).

The unreliability that marks the narration is played out more clearly over the 'hostilities' between Elizabeth and Norma that are claimed to be 'renewed almost at once' about the family's eating arrangements (p. 15). Both John and the grandchildren effectively become counters in what is represented as a cross-generational battle for control. Elizabeth twice pushes Norma for an explanation of the children's absence from the dinner table. Norma pressurises John to reply, again placing him as the tug-of-love object—an expectation he fulfils with resignation, explaining that it is because the children are to eat chicken. Their absence is thus portrayed as a straightforward concession to what Norma rather patronisingly calls "your mother's delicate sensibilities" (p. 16). It is worth noting at this point, though, that this imputed touchiness over others' eating habits is nowhere actually voiced by Elizabeth (notably not in the lengthy dinner scene, for example). Similarly, there is no obvious hostility in Elizabeth's questions—or rather, if there is, it is only of an unconsciously passive-aggressive sort. The questions about the grandchildren's whereabouts tacitly reveal Elizabeth's (possibly resentful) sadness at not seeing them, something which seems quite understandable having just flown in from her home thousands of miles away. My point, however, is not to suggest that Norma is hostile and Elizabeth is not; in fact, by its very inconclusiveness over John's psychology the text leaves the possibility of Elizabeth's hostility open, albeit as unconscious. Instead I want to point out the way that Elizabeth's

vegetarianism has become caught up in other dynamics altogether—in this case a submerged contest over the maternal or spousal role in which all family members are embroiled.

The narrative therefore requires of its readers a stance of quite some critical vigilance if they are to read against the grain of John's perception of events, and this is often necessary if one is to appreciate the profundity of the text's representation of vegetarianism. Another way of bucking against the narrative's most apparent trajectory is to attend to ironic resonances in its language. Norma's reference to Elizabeth's 'jejune' ideas about animal ethics is one such moment. This word jars because it seems a little obscure for its context, effectively the report of a dismissive attack on Elizabeth by Norma. The synonym 'naïve' would perhaps ring more truly beside the other adjectives used, 'overrated' and 'sentimental'. The *OED* reports that behind this denotation of 'jejune', and its other meaning of 'dry and uninteresting', the original sense of the word was 'without food' and hence 'not intellectually nourishing'. Behind that, the Latin root *jejunus* means 'fasting, barren'. I want to leave to one side for the moment the apparent irony of tautologically referring to a vegetarian's ideas about animal ethics as 'without nourishment', or as 'fasting', although this irony does imply that there is a certain vacuity to Norma's complaints. But the addition of the idea, etymologically faint though it is, that Elizabeth's ideas are *barren* is of equal significance here. For we certainly find Elizabeth represented in *Lives* more generally in terms of her anomalous status within a discursive network that fans out around the principal concept that defines her: motherhood. She is figured on the one hand in terms of weakness, tiredness and age—the conceptual opposites of a hearty and fecund maternity—and yet as fundamentally child-like on the other.

I have already mentioned Norma's characterisation of Elizabeth's vegetarianism as an example of sentimental 'delicateness', which echoes quite stereotypical associations of meat eating with moral and emotional fortitude.³³ Elizabeth is also repeatedly figured in terms of senescence. The book's opening paragraph very efficiently brings motherhood and age together by introducing Elizabeth in terms of John's shock at how his mother has aged (p. 15). This perspective guides other crucial moments, such as when she gets up to read her lecture (p. 18); just before an aggressive question from Norma after it (p. 36); after the Faculty Club dinner (p. 44); and in the compelling final scene of Elizabeth's breakdown (p.69).

This last is perhaps the most disturbing example; it is, for me, the most compelling pro-animal moment in contemporary literature. In it we see the devastating effect on an ethical vegetarian's emotional life of the competing claims of human community and justice to animals. Elizabeth is distraught by the contradiction of believing that the kindness she sees in the eyes of her family masks complicity in 'a crime of stupefying proportions' against animals, but more so by her failure to come to terms with it. John pulls the car over and 'takes his mother in his arms. He inhales the smell of cold cream, of old flesh. "There, there," he whispers in her ear. "There, there. It will soon be over"' (p. 69). There is an almost queasy ambiguity to John's words here that simultaneously renders Elizabeth senile and infantilises her; in either case John usurps his mother's parental position by assuming the role of either the care-giving son or the attentive father to her. His final statement simultaneously suggests complete bafflement by her problem

³³ See Nick Fiddes, *Meat: A Natural Symbol* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 65–93.

while also managing to be consoling and yet condescending, hopeful yet utterly resigned. Not only these, it could be self-addressed, voicing his relief at his mother's imminent departure. And since he is so troubled by her age, we can sense lying behind all of this John's resignation to, or perhaps even unconsciously matricidal hope for, Elizabeth's (he believes) impending death. Just as we saw with the scene of the family dinner, the expression of Elizabeth's pro-animal beliefs here becomes thoroughly entrenched within parental-filial dynamics.

What are we to make of Elizabeth's positioning as both redundant old woman and needy child at such profound moments in the text? Taking this alongside Elizabeth's supposed 'hostilities' with Norma, why is there such instability over the parental role? And what is the function of that instability in a work that on first glance mainly concerns the development of moral arguments about animals? The best answer to these questions can be found by returning to Derrida's comments on carno-phallogocentrism, with which I began this chapter. Derrida explains that 'authority and autonomy' are attributed

to the man [...] 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 subject. The subject does not want just to master and possess nature actively. In our cultures, he accepts sacrifice and eats flesh. (pp. 280–81, my emphasis)

The representation of Elizabeth, it seems to me, bears out the truth of the inter-relations that Derrida sets out in this passage; indeed it truly captures the spirit of the emphasised dyad, which might now also be read conversely as 'to the *mature* child (son) rather than to the *senile* adult (mother)'. As a vegetarian, Elizabeth's refusal 'to sacrifice and eat flesh'

ensures that she is on the wrong side of the dominant, carno-phallogocentric schema of the subject. This creates a sense of fit when John's way of conceptualising her is not just as a mother and as a rival to his wife, *but as a weak old woman* (which completely divests her of any power she might have had in these other roles). His behaviour might seem a perfectly normal filial response to an apparently ailing mother. However, that John's attitudes are in fact ideologically undergirded by the discourse of carno-phallogocentrism is suggested in several ways: the availability of alternative attitudes (say, genuine respect for her achievements as a world-famous novelist); the fact that Elizabeth seems perfectly at ease in other discursive contexts than the lecture; the possibility that the 'hostilities' between his wife and mother are a way of centring attention on him; and the way that his treatment of Elizabeth so quickly slips into infantilising her.

Of course, the very normativity of carno-phallogocentrism allows both Elizabeth's age and her vegetarianism to be regarded as anomalous in the first place, and thus appropriate subjects of John's paternalistic attention. Moreover, this combination of normative context and anomalous behaviour conditions the suspense that drives the narrative at two critical moments: Elizabeth's lecture and the Faculty Club dinner. This is no coincidence. John makes quite clear that prestigious dinners are usually meat-based affairs; while the public speech, as a prime site of 'authority and autonomy', is the carno-phallogocentric arena *par excellence*. As Derrida puts it, focussing on a different kind of speechmaker, 'who would stand a chance of becoming a *chef*

d'état (a head of state) by publicly, and therefore exemplarily, declaring him- or herself to be a vegetarian?'.³⁴

So there is already something outrageous in the very idea of Elizabeth lecturing about vegetarianism, or even dining at a high-status event. This is borne out in the narrative itself; think of the way that the two events are portrayed as nerve-wracking experiences. The presentation of both instances is filtered through John's concerns, thus encouraging the reader to become complicit in his worried supervision of Elizabeth's actions. In the first instance we are convinced that Elizabeth gives a poor lecture (and will fold under questioning from Norma) because she is so 'old and tired', and because we are told that when she does speak she 'lacks animation' (pp. 18, 19); in the second, we worry that she cannot be trusted to behave well enough in company to keep her vegetarian opinions to herself (pp. 37–38). But whether she is figured as in her dotage or as a petulant adolescent—such a vegetarian cliché—John's (and thus our) surveillance remains a paternalistic act. In another register we would call his attitude to the elderly ageism (there doesn't yet seem to be an equivalent concept for what vegetarians suffer), yet it shows that he implicitly understands the logic of carno-phallogocentrism. John sits in the front row with Norma before the lecture, looking at his mother, and 'tries to will strength into her' because of her perceived invalidity (p. 18). The phrase betrays the unpleasant Oedipal economy that subtends John's attitude towards his mother, which comprises of a chaotic mix of need, paternalism, envy, guilt, resentment, loathing and sexuality.

³⁴ 'Eating Well', p. 281.

And therein lies the rub, for the problem with both portrayals of Elizabeth is that, once again, her actions give them the lie and suggest that they must have another source. Elizabeth's lecture as quoted is perfectly clear, coherent and compelling, to judge by my own response; and this is confirmed by most critical readers, even those who eventually disagree with her claims. Her extremely self-aware discussion of the pitfalls of reason as a theoretical discourse, which nonetheless prefaces her strategic use of it, is close enough to orthodox deconstructive methodology to demand at least recognition and respect, if not agreement, from a university audience. And while it would be disingenuous to suggest that she does not make her opinion of the meat trade perfectly clear, her attitude could not be further from hectoring; indeed she twice sidesteps questions that implicitly ask her for a moralising or politicised response (pp. 37, 43). Similarly, the points she makes at the dinner are most often neutrally anthropological; she makes no attempt whatsoever to put constraints on her companions' normal eating habits or to make them uncomfortable. Only under the most direct and persistent of personal questioning does she make statements in defence of vegetarianism; they are not an attempt directly to induce any kind of moral change.

As I said, readers have to be quite vigilant to pick up on these inconsistencies—or at least, as is no doubt the case with many, be aware of the conventional prejudices against the elderly and against vegetarians that are a submerged part of them. In fact, with such vigilance a compelling sociological analysis could be made of the book along specifically vegetarian lines, finding examples in it of the sorts of social interaction that occur again

and again between vegetarians and meat eaters, both within the family and in broader social context.³⁵ Still, the inconsistencies in the book suggest that John's and Norma's negative attitudes towards Elizabeth—expressed as they are through the three interlocking discourses of age, motherhood, and meat-eating that come together under the umbrella of carno-phallogocentrism—must be seen as strategies for controlling a profound unease that Elizabeth's abject characteristics occasion. I want to hold off an explanation of how these strategies impact on animal ethics *per se* in the text until my detailed analysis of the crucial dinner scene in which the philosophy of diet becomes the focus of discussion. But it should at least be clear how utterly intractable Elizabeth's vegetarianism is from the discursive contexts through which it is voiced in the text, and in relation to which it operates. This fact about the way vegetarianism is represented is easily overlooked when a large chunk of the text comprises the direct quotation of Elizabeth's limpid argumentation about animal ethics. Yet this is precisely why it is important to attend to the discursive context of *The Lives of Animals* itself.

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³⁵ See for example Carol J. Adams's *Living Among Meat Eaters: The Vegetarian's Survival Handbook* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002); it describes many such scenes that have resonance for *Lives*, in order to suggest methods for vegetarians to negotiate them. By writing what is essentially a self-help book, Adams embraces (albeit tacitly) the theory that vegetarianism is first and foremost a set of discursive practices. Adams intriguingly posits that the not-so-convivial arguments of which vegetarians can find themselves unwitting instigators are in fact ways for the meat-eater to avoid addressing animals' ethical demand not to be eaten.

If we look at 'Lives' first of all as a performance, it is obvious that it revisits those 'anti-illusionist tricks' of high postmodernism mentioned by Coetzee in the epigram to this section; these made visible literature's own conditions of possibility, and thus blurred the lines between creator, text and world. However, it is not quite right to say that Coetzee creates a conventional *mise en abîme* effect by fictionalising the creative process—such as we find in, say, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, or more profoundly in John Barth's 'Life-Story'—although, the text has been read this way.³⁶ Rather, the effect is worked from the opposite direction, as it were. One has to remember first of all that in performance Coetzee reads Elizabeth's lecture as part of his own, and as such the boundary between character and author starts to break down. This cannot happen completely, of course, but the effect is strong enough to result in an uncanny inhabiting by Coetzee's fictional creation of the performing space that he himself assumes. This is quite different from the author-function fictively inhabiting the text. Of course, it is a perfectly normal state of affairs for a dramatic performance, but it clearly is not for a written fiction or a lecture.

Because Coetzee's lectures were given on the occasion of his being invited to present a discourse on the august moral topic of 'human values',

³⁶ On metafictional *mise en abîme*, see Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 112–28. For this reading of *Lives* see both Lowry and Garber, p. 76. Using a rather hasty analysis of the text's metafictional effects Garber somewhat myopically reads it as an example of the academic novel genre, ignoring the wider significance of these effects for the representation of animal ethics. She does so despite recent academic novels, in the form of *Disgrace* and Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, having been the site of some of the profoundest contemporary thinking about the meaning of 'the human'. For example, Garber is titillated by speculation about Coetzee's possible sources of personae and locations for the novella, but doesn't stop to examine the ontological implications of relating text and world in such a way.

their fictionality already troubles the opposition between spoken, argumentative prose and narrative fiction. To put this more explicitly, 'The Lives of Animals' submits the lecture form to the polyphonous potential of fiction. Even if it is true that, as rhetorical performances, lectures cannot strictly be monologic, we can at least agree that the genre conventionally expects moral argument in the form of a univocal expression of authorial meaning. The work thus teeters on a certain ambivalence. In the 'anti-illusionist' set-up of written metafiction, the author-function is foregrounded as part of the aesthetic event; yet this simply draws attention to the unavailability of actual authorial meaning, which is endlessly deferred by its textual expression. But when the metafictional effect is realised in a context that presumes authorial meaning is being expressed via univocal argumentative rhetoric, and when the author is *physically there* to express it, that deferral comes to inhabit authorial meaning itself. The result is that Coetzee's own beliefs, as authorial meaning, become explicitly imbricated in the lectures as one factor of their already plural fictional meaning. This is obviously an unusual claim to make since avoidance of discussing authorial intent is a shibboleth of academic literary criticism. But I should be clear that I am not suggesting Coetzee has found a way to halt the play of the signifier and transmit meaning with no supplementary trace, but rather the converse: he has found a way to render fictional the reality of authorial intent that is supposedly deferred by its writing.

Obviously, such an effect is going to have an influence on the fictional representation of having, acting on and professing moral values about animals—apparently the *raison d'être* of these 'Tanner Lectures on Human Values'. But before I examine that effect, let me look at the published version of the lectures to show the way that meaning in this text is complicated by a further confusion of discursive modes. As Elizabeth begins to read her

lecture, she discusses a previous lecturing visit to the United States; she describes the lecture she then gave (it was a discourse on Kafka's 'Report to an Academy'). The published book at this point includes a non-editorial footnote that refers us to another published text, authored by Coetzee, called 'What is Realism?'.³⁷ At this point we are spun into a vertiginous metafictional spiral, which I will take the time to navigate. The earlier text is similar in form to *Lives*, being the published version of another American Coetzee lecture that also tells the story of one Elizabeth Costello's lecturing trip to the United States. Obviously, it was *Coetzee who actually made such a trip*, but the addition of the footnote to Costello's lecture suggests that both the real event and its fictional counterpart are now wholly subsumed into their printed realisation. Moreover, the Elizabeth of 'What is Realism?' is clearly different to the woman of *Lives*. Although they are superficially similar, important details of her personal history, and of her son John's, as well as of the Appleton College setting, are substantively different in this version. Almost more importantly, there are also profound inconsistencies in characterisation. For example, Elizabeth happily discusses the Kafka text with reference to the epistemological questions it raises, calling it a 'zoo of ideas', but with no sense whatsoever of the ethical dilemmas (either of zoos or of epistemology as such) that we see in *Lives*.³⁸ The most obvious result of this is the sheer ontological fluidity of 'Elizabeth Costello'. She is represented as a person who can be held neither to a proper history, nor (more importantly in the present context) to consistent moral attitudes.

³⁷ *Salmagundi*, 114–15 (1997), 60–81. See also Franz Kafka, 'Report to an Academy', in *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*, ed. by Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1971), pp. 250–59.

³⁸ These aspects of 'What is Realism?' are discussed by Gareth Cornwell in 'Realism, Rape, and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*', *Critique*, 43 (2002), 307–22 (pp. 307–12).

In fact, the issue of Elizabeth's fictive nature is further complicated by the publication of two more 'Costello texts' in which she assumes John's role as the subject, rather than the object, of the narrative focalisation. Like both *Lives* and 'Realism', these texts are at base complex meditations on the ethico-political value of literature and the humanities in general, but differ by firmly rooting their discussion in the context of postcolonial Africa.³⁹ However, let us just look at one incident—from *The Novel in Africa*—that has animals as its focus. Elizabeth arrives at Macquarie Island, off Tasmania, on a day trip from a cruise she has embarked on as an after-dinner speaker. This is a place that we are told Elizabeth knows was the centre of an industry that boiled down hundreds of thousands of penguins into oil, yet Elizabeth is perfectly blasé about this fate, and the way those penguins' descendants 'seem to have learned nothing' and approach humans without caution (pp. 16–17).⁴⁰ We hear that she has to be carried ashore, but only 'as if she were an old woman' (p. 17, my emphasis). She is suddenly confronted by an albatross, which (again drawing attention to the animal's look) 'regards her steadily'.

Sticking out from beneath it is a smaller version of the same long beak. The fledgling is more hostile. It opens its beak, gives a long silent cry of warning.

So she and the two birds remain, inspecting each other.

Before the fall, she thinks. This is how it was before the fall. I could miss the boat, stay here. (p. 17)

³⁹ *The Novel in Africa*, Occasional Papers of the Doreen B. Townsend Centre for the Humanities: 17 (Berkeley: The University of California, Berkeley, 1999); *The Humanities in Africa* (Munich: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 2001). Another, 'Elizabeth Costello and the Problem of Evil', is to follow; Coetzee presented it at the University of Chicago in November 2002.

⁴⁰ This enterprise, under the entrepreneurship of one Joseph Hatch, lasted about thirty years from 1886. See 'The History of Sealing at Macquarie Island', <http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/webpages/UTAR-52XVRM?open>.

This is one of the few references to animals in these two later Costello texts, which are almost exclusively confined to *The Novel in Africa*.

One could spend much time discussing the albatross here, with its heavy intertextual baggage as an emblem of Romanticism. The roots of Romanticism stretch deep into *The Lives of Animals*, as is suggested by my invocation at the end of chapter two of Elizabeth's comments on writing about animals; these exemplified the claim of the imaginative writer to transcend human separation from nature through empathic creativity. The provenance of such ideas could hardly be made clearer than by Elizabeth's comment on the effect of poetry: 'when we read a jaguar poem, when we recollect it afterwards in tranquillity, we are for a brief while the jaguar' (p. 53).⁴¹ What is most notable about the albatross is the way that it is very affectively portrayed, its stark presence well-captured, and yet its portrayal cannot but, somewhat knowingly, involve Romanticism itself in the text as one layer of its discourse. We experience the epiphanic appearance of the physical albatross at one and the same time as the trace of Coleridge's literary one. Similarly, we experience the physical and the created at the same time in Coetzee's metafictional inhabitation by Costello during the lecture.

⁴¹ There is a similarity here with David Lurie's presentation in *Disgrace* in terms of his love of Romanticism, most notably as a scholar of Wordsworth and Byron. Others have dedicated more time than I can here to the influence of Romanticism on the ethics of both books. See especially Jane Taylor, 'The Impossibility of Ethical Action' review of *Disgrace*, ZA@Play Books, <http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/books/9907/990727-disgrace.html>. Her arguments are sophisticatedly debated by Mike Marais in 'The Possibility of Ethical Action: JM (sic) Coetzee's *Disgrace*', *Scrutiny* 2, 5.1 (2000), 57–63.

The final thing to say about this extract, to return to the analysis of discontinuity in Elizabeth's characterisation, is that her Edenic fantasy is entirely incongruent with her overall attitude in *Lives*, where such utopian imaginings are utterly redundant. However, although this discontinuity is unusual and effective, it is hardly a groundbreaking metafictional tactic. Beyond it, I want to focus attention again on the boundary between Costello and Coetzee, between the character and the author who has written (and reads) the words that narrate her. The scholarly footnotes as we now have them were not part of the original performance—the most profound site of the work's metafictional effectiveness—so it seems pertinent at first to take them at face value as conventional authorial statements. Occasionally, they can seriously intervene on points at issue in the text—such as at the moment when a quotation from a biography of Kafka seems to correct Norma's claim, part of a scathing attack on Elizabeth, that Kafka's eating habits (like hers) represent a self-aggrandising 'sick game' (p. 68). Such intervention would imply active involvement on Coetzee's part in the text's moral dilemmas, something which—consonant with Elizabeth's own intention not to 'enunciate principles'—he steadfastly refused to do during the questions that followed the lectures.⁴² However, when Elizabeth mentions that her own lecture is 'backed up with footnotes' (p. 26) there is definite cause for confusion over the stability of the authorship that such references imply, especially since those footnotes appear consecutively numbered with others in the printed text. The result is that, as with the reference to 'What is

⁴² See p. 37. Details of the Princeton event were reported by Derek Attridge (personal correspondence, 24 February 2003). The lectures were first published with the footnotes on the Tanner website (<http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu>); the text published by Princeton University Press is identical.

Realism?', the 'Coetzee' whom we might imagine to possess, in the final instance, the authority that the footnotes imply merges into a shared textual realm with Elizabeth.

What we are left with, then, is a situation where not just 'authorship' but 'authority' itself is subject to endless deferral. Coetzee's own moral theses about animals lose any remainder of autonomy to become utterly entrenched in his text's discursive conditions of production. *The Lives of Animals* thus enacts the discursive emergence of morality at a formal level—reinforcing precisely what happens at the level of content in the portrayal of Elizabeth's vegetarianism.

In terms of the overall development of the present thesis, we can therefore distinguish in *Lives* a modulation from Levy's work, particularly in terms of its profound implications for the very ideas of pro-animal literature, and pro-animal literary criticism. *Diary of a Steak* inveigles the reader into the world of the text, situating both as two poles in a dialogic interplay of meaning, desire and interpretation; as readers we are enjoined to recognise our active complicity in the textual production of meaning about animals. The result was that it became difficult to discuss that book in terms of its animal politics, or indeed to describe the pro-animal meaning or argumentation that it might be imputed to contain. Yet if we do read literary works in this way as a political acts—and the very idea that literature might holistically enact a progressive moral line seems to assume that we do—it is really the *author* who comes to stand metonymically for moral autonomy itself. It seems difficult, although I admit it is certainly not impossible, to conceive of a form of representation that might persuade us of the need for moral change without sourcing that representation in an intentional subject who does the persuading. The literary-critical process of such politicised reading works something like this: author x has written a novel with

something progressive to say about pro-animal morality, a pro-animal novel; and here is an analysis of that novel's pro-animal thought.

However, by drawing the author—not just Elizabeth Costello but Coetzee himself *as author*—into the fictional world, the methodology of *Lives* mitigates against such a conceptualisation of literary pro-animal thought. We are reminded that however much we, as readers, understand our complicity in the text's creation of meaning, there is strictly no place outside of the discourses in which the text operates to stake a moral position. The resultant effect is best summed up in terms of the Butlerian analysis I elaborated in chapter one. *The Lives of Animals* cannot strictly be said to *be* a moral work; rather, it performs its morality (I should say, now, its ethics) as an effect of the discourses it contains. We do not encounter—either within the text or via the text as a whole—a statically held set of beliefs about right. Instead we experience the effects of a competing set of discourses, which to be sure command varying degrees of power. Elizabeth's ethical vegetarianism is just one of these; the moral lecture, seminar analysis and argumentative debate she is asked by the college to offer are others; Norma's scientific rationalism and is one more; and John's carno-phallogocentrism is yet another.

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The Lives of Animals is at its most compelling and original when showing this theoretical framework in practice, and I would like to focus in the final part of this chapter on the most important of such moments: the dinner conversation about vegetarianism. The discussion proceeds by way of various anthropological comments about what religious dietary codes, such as rabbinical prohibitions, tell us about human-animal relations. Its guiding

concept is *exclusion*: how and why certain foods are made taboo and thus excluded from the body; how and why such taboos become cultural shibboleths and thus function as mechanisms of social exclusion. The ubiquitous functioning of exclusionary power, it will be remembered, is of paramount importance to Butler's political theory; for her, 'every discourse operates through exclusion'.⁴³ We can therefore offer a reading of this section of *Lives* that explains vegetarianism, as an ethico-political practice, in Butlerian terms.

The various contributors take the discussion through a series of conceptual turns that will be recognised by readers of Mary Douglas's seminal book *Purity and Danger*, or indeed of Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, which redirects Douglas's anthropological conclusions into the realm of psychoanalytic philosophy.⁴⁴ To abbreviate, the stages in the debate are as follows: dietary taboos are to do with the concepts of cleanness and uncleanness; these latter are really to do with patrolling the human sense of shame; animals are unclean, thus unlike humans, because their sexuality is not predicated on shame; the 'religious horror' taboos effect is closely related to the human sense of disgust; religious taboos are, in fact, just arbitrary cultural formulae, 'folkways' that do not signify any consistent biological or ethical differences (pp. 39–42). For Norma, vegetarianism is best described in terms of this conceptual framework: 'the ban on meat eating that you get in

⁴³ *Bodies*, p. 189.

⁴⁴ *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969). Interestingly, the key concept for both Douglas and Kristeva—the fact that taboos forbid objects (animals or otherwise) that transgress boundaries—is not explicitly mentioned. A compelling Kristevan analysis of *Lives* is a definite possibility: Kristeva's central claim in *Powers of Horror* is that incomplete separation *from the mother* is at the root of every form of abjection, whether it is patrolled by phobic behaviour, defilement rite, rabbinical taboo or Christian confession (pp. 32–132).

vegetarianism is only an extreme form of dietary ban [...] and a dietary ban is a quick, simple way for an elite group to define itself'; vegetarians mobilise the logic of taboo 'to self-define themselves, negatively, as an elite' (p. 42).

By this reckoning, vegetarianism doubly operates through exclusion, first of certain foods, then of the people who eat them—as such, it is a discursive mechanism of power. John trails the suggestion that vegetarianism is a quasi-religious rite when he wonders whether the college will treat Elizabeth's vegetarianism with the deference it would accord kosher requirements (pp. 37–38). And Norma's off the cuff evidentiary reference to the asceticism of 'the Brahmins' suggests that she roots her argument in a fairly blunt assessment of the function of vegetarianism in the Hindu caste system (p. 42). Leaving aside whether or not Norma mistakes the historical complexities of Hinduism's attitude to animal ethics, as is suggested by Wendy Doniger's contribution to the *Lives* volume (pp. 93–106), it does seem that vegetarianism, as a moral code, has a case to answer here. And this is where the text's foregrounding of discursive contextualisation comes most importantly into play. It encourages us, as readers, to look at the vegetarian exclusiveness Norma diagnoses as just one incident in a diverse pattern of exclusions that resurfaces throughout the text.

We might think here, looking to the familial context, of the already-mentioned grandchildren, or even the significant absence of John's dead father (a more psychoanalytically-minded argument might compare this to a correlative absence of the mother in *Disgrace*). But the most pertinent aspect of this issue is the way Elizabeth's visit is frequently felt, by both John and Norma, to be an intrusion; Elizabeth herself is implicitly felt as a contaminating presence that needs to be purged, abjected, excluded. This is usually expressed in terms of frustration at Elizabeth's pro-animal views, although it is clear enough from the foregoing analysis that the other threats

she poses as an aging mother are projected onto this issue. We are told John believes that 'if she wants to spend her declining years making propaganda against cruelty to animals, that is her right. In a few days, blessedly, she will be on her way to her next destination' (p. 17).

In parenthesis, an interesting fact about this idea of Elizabeth as a contaminant is its consonance with her own suggestion that the apathy of those Germans who acquiesced to the Holocaust leaves a polluting stain on the character of their entire generation. This is her way of explaining the complicity with horror that she perceives in meat-eating society. By doing so she displaces explicit argumentation about the rights and wrongs of meat-eating, reconfiguring the moral discussion in terms of another discursive framework entirely: that of anti-Semitism and Holocaust memory. Elizabeth pays her addressees 'the honor of skipping a recital of the horrors' of animals' lives and deaths, instead citing the statistics of Treblinka and suggesting that animal killing 'rivals anything the Third Reich was capable of' (p. 21).⁴⁵ I do not want to go into the ethics of such a comparison in detail, as has been done at length elsewhere in several different spheres.⁴⁶ I simply

⁴⁵ This is one of the most salient of Coetzee's similarities with Derrida, who creates very much the same effect in the context of his animal-holocaust comparison; he circumlocutes the actualities of animal abuse, saying they are what 'is well known' and that which 'no one can deny', 'The Animal', pp. 394, 396.

⁴⁶ See note 5. See also Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002). The analogy is the source of a current campaign by the pro-animal group PETA, 'Holocaust on Your Plate'; they justify it with reference to a moral injunction, expressed by some official Holocaust memorial institutions, that we must use the Holocaust to help reduce other atrocities (<http://www.masskilling.com>). Elizabeth's reference to Treblinka here carries a reference within it to a quotation from Isaac Bashevis Singer that gives Patterson his title: 'for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka', 'The Letter Writer', in *The Séance and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1968), p. 270. The Holocaust comparison has a history within critical theory too, having been tackled by Adorno, Derrida, Heidegger, and Levinas at least (see Clark, pp. 165–75).

want to note that by using analogic comparison rather than literal evocation, Elizabeth gives us cause to wonder whether, as Coetzee himself had hoped in his comments on Gordimer, the end of apartheid has indeed returned animal abuse 'to the ambit of moral judgement'. The comparison serves very effectively to position her audience in a contradictory position of knowing ignorance vis-à-vis the abuse of animals that structurally repeats the deliberate not-knowing of acquiescent Germans during the Third Reich. Apathy, of course, is hardly exclusive to Nazi Germany, and it is difficult not to detect in this discussion a gesture to the South Africa of apartheid.⁴⁷ For Elizabeth at least, it seems that when animal abuse is considered in and of itself, the institution of speciesism that underwrites it simply replicates for animals the conditions of representation that apartheid's racism had brought to bear, in Coetzee's analysis, on human torture.

But to return to the representation of Elizabeth herself, in the following quotation, taken from just before the dinner scene begins, the text's most intensive use of free indirect discourse signals the vehemence with which John experiences the feeling of contamination by his mother's very presence.

He wishes his mother had not come. It is nice to see her again [...] but the price he is paying and the price he stands to pay if the visit goes badly seem to him excessive. Why can she not be an ordinary old woman living an ordinary old woman's life? If she wants to open her heart to animals, why can't she stay home and open it to her cats?
(p. 38)

⁴⁷ The issue of South Africans' apathy and the responsibility of the intellectual to continue to counter it is the focus of Rose's lucid remarks on *Lives*.

Again, carno-phallogocentrism rears its ugly head. I would argue that the distinguishing formal properties of this moment push us to read it along such lines as a symptom of this much more pernicious discourse of exclusion by which Elizabeth herself is rendered abject by her son and daughter-in-law. One looks in vain in the text for definitive evidence of such a symptomatology; but how else, other than as the paranoid projections of someone who feels her authority to be under threat, are we to read Norma's words about Elizabeth and her vegetarianism:

It's nothing but food-faddism, and food-faddism is always an exercise in power. I have no patience when she arrives here and begins trying to get people [...] to change their eating habits. And now these absurd public lectures! She is trying to extend her inhibiting power over the whole community!⁴⁸

This after Elizabeth, in her lecture, has explicitly renounced the function of polemical rhetoric to divide people into 'the saved and the damned' (p. 22), precisely the words that Norma uses to describe the exclusiveness of Elizabeth's behaviour (p. 68).

On this issue, the distinction of ethics from morality (and behind this Derrida's separation of justice and law) becomes vital to the animal politics of the text. It is understandable that from the perspective of the confirmed meat-eater, Elizabeth's comparison of the abattoir to the death camp will be felt as the criminalisation of an implicitly held way of life. Yet Elizabeth explicitly states that she has 'never been much interested in proscriptions,

⁴⁸ *Lives*, p. 67. T. Coraghessan Boyle's *The Road to Wellville* (London: Granta, 1998) is a literary work that, while not addressing pro-animal thought *per se*, builds its comedy around puncturing the power-hungriness of more faddish tendencies in the American history of vegetarianism.

dietary or otherwise. Proscriptions, laws' (p. 37). Like the magistrate of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Elizabeth seemingly struggles for a language that does justice to the non-judgemental sort of imperatives she is trying to describe in the lecture, but she can only offer gnomic vagueness: 'I was hoping not to have to enunciate principles [...]. If principles are what you want to take away from this talk, I would have to respond, open your heart and listen to what your heart says' (p. 37). Despite Elizabeth's caution in this regard, Norma mistakes what is really an attempt to encourage, rather than command, a genuinely ethical responsibility to animals; she takes it as advocacy of a new moral law—'thou shalt not put to death the living in general', as Derrida puts it in "'Eating Well'" (p. 279).

Since Elizabeth tries to sidestep the more authoritarian effects of moral argumentation, the question is: how do we correctly understand the power-laden function of exclusion in the case of vegetarianism? It seems clear that Norma's analysis of 'faddism' is at least partly viable, even if it is not pertinent to the ethical stance Elizabeth enacts. It is certainly true that there are pro-animal, vegetarian and more broadly ecological discourses, of which we should be wary indeed, that rely on the rhetoric of naturalism, asceticism and purity—discourses which have a chequered political history, to say the least.⁴⁹ Furthermore, to the extent that pro-animal thought achieves moral and political influence, it cannot avoid excluding the moral claims of at least some others. One sees the effects of this regularly, in debates ranging from the rights of ethnic groups such as the Micah to hunt whales, to the acceptability of Jewish or Islamic slaughter practices (*shechita/dhabh*). More

⁴⁹ For example, during the Nazi era; see Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, trans. by Carol Volk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 93–107.

importantly still, as Matthew Calarco points out in his careful reading of “‘Eating Well’” from the point of view of veganism, vegetarianism itself remains an exclusive, or in Derrida’s terms ‘sacrificial’, practice. Although ethical vegetarianism does work against carno-phallogocentrism by avoiding meat, vegans have a more stringent assessment of what constitutes the acceptable sacrifice of animals to the extent that they will not allow chickens to remain in battery farms and cows in industrialised milking units.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the problem with Norma’s position is that by investing all of her energy in critiquing the exclusionary logic of vegetarianism as a dietary taboo, she fails to recognise the way that such exclusionary power is at work in the carno-phallogocentrism that underpins in her own attitudes towards Elizabeth. It is only in the final scene, when we hear of the utter psychological devastation Elizabeth silently suffers as a vegetarian in her family’s meat-eating world, that we can recognise the profound irony in Norma’s argument, spoken during the dinner scene with Elizabeth present before her, that vegetarians wield their social power by withdrawing from the carnivorous society they regards as inferior.

The conclusion to be drawn from the text’s sharing of exclusionary powers across both vegetarian and carno-phallogocentric discourses is that ethical reasoning needs more precision than simply ascertaining which discursive practices are exclusive and which not, since all are. Elizabeth herself gestures towards an explanation of how to do this in her comments on Mahatma Gandhi’s vegetarianism, which, as she says, ‘can hardly be conceived as the exercise of power’ because ‘it condemned him to the

⁵⁰ ‘Deconstruction’ (forthcoming).

margins of society' (p. 43). In this light, Norma's paranoid attitude towards Elizabeth's 'inhibiting power' appears to replicate for carno-phallogocentrism the well-known backlash against 'political correctness'; it is a very efficient method of entrenching social hegemonies by imagining them to be under unnecessary threat from groups who actually have relatively little power.

From this point of view, Elizabeth's ethical vegetarianism, even if it were the hectoring and exclusionary moral assault that Norma imagines, would still be different from the behaviour of John and Norma herself. For it is ludicrous to deny that in the contemporary western world there is a substantive difference in the *wealth* of socio-cultural power that the discourse of vegetarianism and the discourse of carno-phallogocentrism each possesses. The narrative's portrayal of John, Norma and Elizabeth, as I have elucidated it through much of this chapter, reveals this disparity of power more than anything else. And in a world where 'every discourse operates through exclusion', as Butler would have it, this is the salient difference.⁵¹ This revelation is made all the more profound, I would argue, by the text's self-awareness about its own discursive conditions of possibility. For these allow the two speakers in this text, Elizabeth Costello and J. M. Coetzee, to be divested, through fiction, of the carno-phallogocentric authority that inheres in the Tanner Lectures on Moral Values.

The best summation of the achievement of *The Lives of Animals* can be made by revisiting the comments with which I began this chapter, and by reflecting critically on the idea that language and meat-eating are together at

⁵¹ *Bodies*, p. 189

the very essence of our humanity. For if there is anything to be taken away from *Lives*, it is that awareness about the inextricability of all morality from the power of discourse, an awareness encouraged and redoubled by self-conscious literary experimentation, can indeed point the way to pro-animal ethics. David Wood admirably condenses this logic:

carno-phallogocentrism is not a dispensation of Being towards which resistance is futile; it is a mutually reinforcing network of powers, schemata of domination, and investments that has to reproduce itself to stay in existence. Vegetarianism is not just about substituting beans for beef; it is—at least potentially—a site of proliferating resistance to that reproduction.⁵²

The Lives of Animals, I have argued, leads its readers to this very realisation by performing it at both the levels of characterisation and form. To that extent, it offers the most profound and compelling literary representation of pro-animal thought that I have considered in this thesis.

⁵² 'Comment Ne Pas Manger—Deconstruction and Vegetarianism', in Steeves (ed.), pp. 15–35 (p. 33).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

ON READING THE ANIMAL ETHICS OF FICTION

If the foregoing chapters have made it clear that the representation of pro-animal thought is a profound, complex and fascinating area of study in contemporary fiction, then this thesis has achieved its main aim. The issue of humans' ethical responsibility to the animal world, and to animals in their very singularity—as my discussion of the BSE crisis makes all too clear—is a pressing one, and it gets more pressing every day. My intention in this thesis has been to examine how recent fiction has signalled, and perhaps attempted to meet, that responsibility. The texts I have studied were chosen because they contain in this regard many more possibilities than can be exhausted by a single critical approach; yet if the readings that I have offered can open the way for other, different readings of pro-animal literary thought, then another of my aims will have been met.

Looking back over those texts, it is clear that there has been one worrisome issue that comes up again and again: the hierarchical opposition of humans to animals in terms of the possession of language. The four authors have each offered different fictional responses to the entrenched nature of this opposition. These responses have been rooted both in content and in literary form. Atwood offers opaque images of birds being attracted by a woman's giving hand; these images signify a tentative attempt to transcend species difference. Walker gives form to just such a transcendence

in the character of Lissie, who embodies a Romantic ideal of sympathetic imaginative creativity that has been revised by awareness of social oppression. The texts of both Levy and Coetzee, on a formal level, have wrought pro-animal meaning from a profound challenge to conventional ways in which fiction is created and read. These formal tactics divest language, hierarchically considered, of its carno-phallogocentric power.

It would be a mistake to conclude from my readings of these matters, however, that the representation of pro-animal thought in contemporary fiction straightforwardly suggests utterly new patterns of ethical meaning. For in just the same way that an effect of modernist or postmodernist literary experimentation is often to defamiliarise aspects of fictional creation that are present yet thoroughly taken for granted in realist modes of writing, so too Levy's and Coetzee's pro-animal formal experimentation should return us to all fictional representations of human-animal relations with a perspective that is aware of animal ethics. And if we look more broadly at all of the writers discussed here, the primary conclusion to be taken from the foregoing readings is that contemporary literary writers have found ways by which to make ethical meaning about animals visible.

I hope that by explaining the underpinnings, the workings and the effects of such literary strategies, this thesis—more than just promoting more readings of literary pro-animal thought—leads towards a renewed understanding of the representation of human-animal relations more generally. And by this I mean not only the kind of understanding that leads to the symptomatic reading of speciesist texts that is admirably represented by Cary Wolfe's work; rather, that understanding would follow more the model of my own reading in chapter four of the novels Coetzee published before *The Lives of Animals*. These works do not at all wear pro-animal meaning on their sleeve for all to see; rather an ethical sense of the way

characters interact with animals inheres in the those texts in a cryptic way, displaced by the immediate concerns of the novels' human protagonists; yet it nonetheless emerges from beneath those concerns.

The ability to read for pro-animal meaning in such inhospitable places becomes all the more pressing when one generally surveys the representations of pro-animal thought I have discussed in this thesis from the perspective of their generic mode—something I have not often done. It is hard not to be struck by the way that they are suffused with tragedy. One thinks of the attempt by the narrator of *Surfacing* to live an ethical life by identifying with the animals; it is a way of living that leaves her prey to illness and, it is clear, imminent death. Or again, we might think of the traumatic images of the stumbling BSE cow in *Diary of a Steak*; these are not only emblematic of the destruction of animals' autonomy by factory farming, but a reminder that as cows are represented in *Diary of a Steak* (and the title clearly suggests this) they are always-already dead. Although these dystopian scenarios are to an extent countermanded by the imaginative empathy with animals of a character like Lissie in *The Temple of My Familiar*, the negative underside of Lissie's mode of being is the profound alienation from meat-eating society felt by Elizabeth Costello. She will feel that otherness until her death: "'There, there. It will soon be over'", she is told, with little consolation.¹ A dispirited tone seems inevitable in writing that expresses pro-animal meaning explicitly (that is, rather than cryptically), simply because the apparent omnipotence of humans over animals, and the sheer omnipresence of human violence towards animals, traps animal-ethical discourse in a tragic mode that seems to offer no catharsis.

¹ *Lives*, p. 69.

From the perspective of reading the animal ethics of fiction, then, it is all the more exciting that in recent decades the fiction shelves of English language bookshops have become a veritable literary ark; the animals are everywhere. A survey of novels from the past thirty years that are structured around representations of the animal world reveals not only under-read yet fascinating work by authors who remain relatively unheard of, but also important books by a plethora of well-established literary figures. I have only mentioned a fraction of these many writers. Just to focus on the more well known, the list would include novels by Margaret Atwood, Paul Auster, Julian Barnes, John Berger, William Burroughs, J. M. Coetzee, Timothy Findley, Ursula le Guin, Will Self, Jane Smiley and Alice Walker.² We find explorations of humans' relationships with animals in different but interlacing contexts—from the domestic (pet-keeping, horse racing) to the wild (hunting, fearful encounters) and from the technological (scientific observation and experimentation, meat production) to the imaginary (worship, mythologizing, mimicry and identification). Alongside these, we find fully developed animal characters; animal narrators; the representation of animal consciousness; humans turning into animals and vice versa.

If this enumeration suggests nothing else, it is that the figure of the animal should be a fascinating one for critics of contemporary fiction. Whether those texts should and will be read with a view to unpicking their animal ethics is a question that the texts I have discussed—and this thesis itself, I hope—answer in the positive.

² The relevant works by these authors are listed in a bibliography of contemporary literary fiction focusing on animals appended to this thesis.

APPENDIX

ANIMALS IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY FICTION

To attempt to compile a bibliography of all works of contemporary literature (even of literary fiction) that include representations of animals in them would be too great a task; such a bibliography would include almost every published novel. This bibliography attempts the much more modest task of listing literary fiction in which interest in animals themselves is (at least) one of the most important factors in the text itself. Therefore, it does not attempt to include non-literary or children's fiction. Also, because of the focus of my research in this thesis into specifically pro-animal literature rather than, say, science fiction or ecological literature, certain kinds of texts have largely escaped my remit; the most obvious examples of this is the hunting narrative (James Dickey's *Deliverance* would be an example here). Neither does it attempt to cover animals in other genres: an excellent introduction to animals and theatre is 'On Animals', edited by Alan Read, a special issue of the journal *Performance Research*, 5.2 (2000); on poetry, see Randy Malamud, *Poetic Animals and Animal Souls* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2003); for information on animals in film, see Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film* (London: Reaktion, 2002). Lastly, the category of zoo representations, of which John Irving's *Setting Free the Bears* (London: Black Swan, 1995) and Russell Hoban's *Turtle Diary* (London: Picador, 1977) are good examples, has been excluded because a large bibliography of such texts can be found in Randy Malamud, *Reading Zoos: Representing Animals in Captivity* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998).

Texts are categorised either by animal, or for those texts that do not focus on one particular animal, by concept such as animal-human hybridity; cross-species identifications; the literary ark; animal activism; animals and women. Occasionally, some texts which would well fit in two categories have been placed in the one that best characterises them.

Literary Animals

Primates

- Boyd, William, *Brazzaville Beach* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993)
- Brophy, Brigid, *Hackenfeller's Ape* (London: Vintage, 1993)
- Burroughs, William, *Ghost of a Chance* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2002)
- Chandra, Vikram, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (London: Faber, 1995)
- French, Sean, *The Imaginary Monkey* (London: Granta, 1993)
- Goldsworthy, Peter, *Wish* (Sydney: Flamingo, 1992)
- Høeg, Peter, *The Woman and The Ape* (London: Harvill, 1997)
- Quinn, Daniel, *Ishmael* (New York: Bantam, 1992)
- Self, Will, *Great Apes* (London: Penguin, 1999)

Cats—Domestic and Wild

- Burroughs, William, *The Cat Inside* (London: Penguin, 1992) (Domestic/other)
- Hogan, Linda, *Power* (New York: Norton, 1998) (Jaguar)
- Le Guin, Ursula, 'May's Lion', in *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (London and New York: Plume, 1988) (Lion)
- Le Guin, Ursula, 'Schroedinger's Cat', in *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (London and New York: Plume, 1988) (Domestic)
- Leigh, Julia, *The Hunter* (London: Faber, 2000) (Tasmanian Tiger)
- Lessing, Doris, *The Old Age of El Magnifico: A Cat's Tale* (London: Flamingo, 2000) (Domestic)
- Martel, Yann, *Life of Pi* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002) (Bengal Tiger)
- Walker, Brenda, *Poe's Cat* (London: Penguin, 2000) (Domestic)
- Wilson, A. N., *Stray* (London: Walker, 1987) (Domestic)

Cows (and the Meat Industry)

- Agee, James, 'A Mother's Tale', in *Fifty Great American Short Stories*, ed. Milton Crane, (New York: Doubleday, 1972)
- Coe, Jonathan, *What a Carve Up!* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995)

- Faber, Michel, *Under the Skin* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000)
Francis, Geoff, *Babylon Farm* (London: Animus Books, 1998)
Levy, Deborah, *Diary of a Steak* (London: Bookworks, 1996)
Mazza, Chris, 'At the Meat Counter', in *Animal Acts* (New York and Boulder: Fiction Collective, 1988)
Noon, Jeff, *Automated Alice* (London: Black Swan, 1996)
Ozecki, Ruth L., *My Year of Meat* (London: Picador, 1999)
Reyes, Alina, *The Butcher*, trans. by David Watson (London: Minerva, 1992)
Sterchi, Beat, *The Cow* (London: Faber, 1999)

Dogs

- Adams, Richard, *The Plague Dogs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978)
Auster, Paul, *Timbuktu* (London: Faber, 1999)
Bakis, Kirsten, *Lives of the Monster Dogs* (London: Sceptre, 1997)
Berger, John, *King* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000)
Coetzee, J. M., *Age of Iron* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1990)
Coetzee, J. M., *Disgrace* (London: Vintage, 1999)
Coetzee, J. M., *The Master of Petersburg* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1993)
Kundera, Milan, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (London: Faber, 1985)
McEwan, Ian, *Black Dogs*, (London: Vintage, 1998)
Mazza, Chris, *Dog People* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1997)

Horses

- Findley, Timothy, *The Wars* (London: Faber, 2001)
Hawkes, John, *Sweet William* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996)
Hawkes, John, *Whistlejacket* (New York: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1988)
McCarthy, Cormac, *All the Pretty Horses* (New York: Knopf, 1992)
Smiley, Jane, *Horse Heaven* (London: Faber, 2001)

Other

- Flannigan, Richard, *Gould's Book of Fish* (London: Atlantic, 2003) (Fish)

Gowdy, Barbara, *The White Bone* (London: Flamingo, 1999) (Elephants)

Literature with Animal-Related Concepts

Human–Animal Hybridity

Dahl, Roald, 'Pig', in *The Collected Short Stories of Roald Dahl* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) (Human–Pig)

Dariussecq, Marie, *Pig Tales*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (London: Faber, 1997) (Human–Pig)

Emschwiller, Carol, *Carmen Dog* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1990) (Human–Dog)

le Guin, Ursula, 'Buffalo Gals, Won't you Come out Tonight', in *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (London and New York: Plume, 1988) (Human–Coyote)

West, Paul, *The Rat Man of Paris* (London: Paladin, 1988) (Human–Rat)

The Literary Ark

Barnes, Julian, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (London: Picador, 1990)

Findley, Timothy, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (London: Arena, 1986)

Jensen, Liz, *Ark Baby* (London, Bloomsbury, 1998)

Roberts, Michèle, *The Book of Mrs. Noah* (London: Vintage, 1999)

Winterson, Jeanette, *Boating for Beginners* (London: Minerva, 1990)

Cross-Species Identifications

Atwood, Margaret, *The Edible Woman* (London: Virago, 1998) (rabbits)

Findley, Timothy, *The Piano Man's Daughter* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1995) (insects)

Findley, Timothy, *Spadework* (London: Faber, 2002) (crows)

Roth, Phillip, *The Human Stain* (London: Vintage, 2001) (crows)

Animal Activism and Ethical Vegetarianism

- Boyle, T. Coraghessan, 'Carnal Knowledge', in *Without a Hero* (London: Granta, 1995), pp. 123–44
- Bradfield, Scott, *Animal Planet* (London: Picador, 1999)
- Bush, Catherine, *Minus Time* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993)
- Coetzee, J. M., *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)
- Colegate, Isabel, *The Shooting Party* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982)
- Greene, Graham, *The Comedians* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966)
- Hoban, Russel, *Turtle Diary* (London: Picador, 1975)
- Kumin, Maxine, *Quit Monks or Die* (Ashland, OR: Story Line Press, 1999)
- Rosenthal, Rachel, *The Others*, *Performance Research*, 5.2 (2000), 92–107 (Performance Artwork)
- Smith, Zadie, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin, 2000)
- Tobias, Michael, *Rage and Reason* (San Francisco and Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998)
- Williams, Joy, *The Quick and the Dead* (London: Harvill, 2001)

Feminism—Women Interacting with Animals

- Atwood, Margaret, *Surfacing* (London: Virago, 1998)
- Corrigan, Theresa, and Hoppe, Stephanie, (eds.), *With a Fly's Eye, Whale's Wit and Woman's Heart: Animals and Women* (San Francisco: Cleis, 1989)
- Corrigan, Theresa, and Hoppe, Stephanie, (eds.), *And a Deer's Ear, Eagle's Song and Bear's Grace: Animals and Women* (San Francisco: Cleis, 1990)
- Diski, Jenny, *Monkey's Uncle* (London: Phoenix, 1994)
- Engel, Marian, *Bear* (London: Pan, 1985)
- Grahn, Judy, *Mundane's World* (San Francisco: The Crossing Press, 1988)
- Hogan, Linda, Metzger, Deena, and Peterson, Brenda, *Intimate Nature: The Bond between Women and Animals* (New York: Fawcett, 1998)
- Namjoshi, Suniti, *The Blue Donkey Fables*, (London: The Women's Press, 1988)
- Reyes, Alina, *Lucie's Long Voyage* (London: Vintage, 1999)
- Walker, Alice, *The Temple of My Familiar* (London: Penguin, 1990)

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