

THE TEEMING AND THE RARE: DISPLACEMENTS OF SACRIFICE AND THE
TURN TO INSECT LIFE

A dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Adeline Patten Rother

August 2012

© 2012 Adeline Patten Rother

THE TEEMING AND THE RARE: DISPLACEMENTS OF SACRIFICE AND THE
TURN TO INSECT LIFE

Adeline Patten Rother, Ph.D.

Cornell University, 2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

This is a dissertation on how the differences between human beings and animals have been represented through frameworks of sacrifice and sexuality.

Through readings of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Jacques Derrida's "Rams," my first chapter explores the inadequacy of "sacrifice" as a violent action that may be problematically *legitimizing*. This concept of sacrifice is placed in tension with a different vision, that of an "ethics of response," which, far from negating sacrifice, sustains it as a figuration of the necessity and destructive potential of the encounter with the other.

I next trace a movement away from rapports of domination with animals in a "turn" to insect life. Although insects have been objects of a phobic orientation, I show that a non-phobic insect emerges in nineteenth and early-twentieth century works by Jules Michelet, Maurice Maeterlinck, Jean-Henri Fabre, André Gide, and Eugène Marais. Viewed as a thing of intricate beauty, the insect becomes the paradigm of our dissemination into a fabric of infinitesimal differences. Derrida returns to these currents in his writings on sexual difference with their unexpected entomological metaphors. The cuts of the "in-sect" contest the fascination with redemptive violence, including sacrifice, in works by Michelet or Derrida.

My third chapter explores a "zoö-curious gender discourse" that produces two imaginary shifts. On one hand, a recognition that differences, including sexual differences, cannot be regarded as the property of humans alone, as has been assumed by critics who valorize human differences while relegating animality to a zone of

repetition without change. Secondly, the eroticized insect imaginary I describe reorganizes binary sexual difference into an operation that *produces* differences, including the multiple forms of homosexuality opened up in Gide's *Corydon*.

Finally, I argue that theoretical concepts of Difference depend upon a notion of "the same," for example, in theories that link humankind to an inexorable differentiation while failing to explore evidence of authentic differences among animals. I study the ivory-billed woodpecker, an extinct bird whose tragic rarity has elicited the exuberance and the contradictions that, I believe, characterize our investment in exaggerated Differences and in the sacrifices that give them flight.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A native of North Central Florida, fascinated from the beginning by the area's dense tableau of plants and animals, Adeline Rother began a new life in the habitats of Oregon at eleven years of age. Troubled by human relations, preferring to stare out the window, Adeline came late to academic interests but became enamored with French before she went to college. At Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, she majored in French Studies and Religious Studies (writing a thesis on logics of sacrifice in the writings of Paul the Apostle), and went on to Cornell, Paris-VIII, and the École normale supérieure de Lyon, where her zoö-curious dissertation finally took shape, attempting (not unlike a biography of the author) to reflect upon human stories and subjectivities through relationships with nature and the animal.

To Alice, born in this project's final push.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In gratitude to the members of my academic committee, Anne E. Berger, Dominick LaCapra, Tracy McNulty, and Jonathan Culler.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Sacrifice, Sexuality, and The Imagination
of Animal Difference1

CHAPTER 1

Say the Ram Survived: Altering the Binding of Isaac
in Jacques Derrida's "Rams" and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* 17

CHAPTER 2

The Matter of Difference: Michelet's Literary Entomology
and the Poetics of The Cut53

CHAPTER 3

Becoming Zoö-Curious: Reading Sexual Differences
in the Field of Animal Life 111

CHAPTER 4

Enchanted Endangerment: Sacrificial Affects
in The Case of The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker159

CONCLUSION

Lines of Force and Fascination:
Tracing Sacrifice's Imaginary Power192

INTRODUCTION

Sacrifice, Sexuality, and The Imagination of Animal Difference

This is a dissertation about *differences* and about the ways in which they tend to take on meaning, texture, significance and form. Beginning with a curiosity for the concept of “the cut,” this work progresses through readings in French-language literature and literary theory; through a Derridian thinking of “sexual difference” as a logic of rupture and reparation; and through a textual memory of Biblical narrative and law—from the carefully grafted patriarchal branches, to the repeated evocations of animal sacrifice, to the many forms of real and metaphorical cutting that are carried out in the name of human wholeness and belonging.

Such highly charged and performative forms of cutting are of the kind that concern me the most—that provoke my curiosity as to how they work, and my doubt as to whether they work at all. Certain “cuts,” I argue, produce their intended effect in addition to their opposite. To separate radically, to divide decisively—isn’t this ultimately a means to bring about forms of inclusion, connection, protection, and integrality? Like the Greek *pharmakon*, the poison that brings out the cure, “the cut” in its most divisive forms can generate a bind, as when a scapegoat, “cut off” from a community, helps create alliances between the people *inside*. I want to argue in this dissertation that even our most subtle figurations of difference (in critical theory and in the ethics of admitting nuance and gradation), can give rise to, and depend upon, a decisive, “sacrificing” form of the cut. As we attempt to represent or to recognize what Jacques Derrida refers to as “differences in the plural,” we depend often upon the

possibility—or even the threat—of sameness and exaggerated separation, the very fantasies or fantasmata that *différance*, as a movement of spacing that is always also signatory and entangling, is supposed to work against and interrupt.

A question that spurs this dissertation is the question of who. *Who* gets to inhabit the field of infinite, non-binary differences? Do animals reside there in the same way that humans do, or in some alternative if authentic way? Is the question of differences the key to nuancing our misleading, inherited representations of “the animal”?

Philosophical and theological discourses that think of human beings as somehow absolutely *different* (marked by a “constitutive Lack” or a “Fall from grace”) uphold a field of “Difference proper” from which animals are by definition excluded. Whereas the human is defined in connection with a break from Nature, an unforeseeable future, an inherent alienation from self, with laws that cannot be met and desires that can never be fulfilled, “the animal” is presented in terms of sameness: sameness between a species and the members of it, symmetry between an animal’s instincts and its capacity for fulfilling them, and even an “essential” sameness across the animal kingdom, so that a single animal (from the ape of Heidegger, to the snake of Lévinas, to the tick of Agamben) can be said to represent them all. This dissertation demonstrates that notions of human Difference or “Lack,” while claiming a sort of incompleteness or insufficiency in the human being, cooperate with a desire for integrity and sameness in that they expel a certain animality from the criteria of what can be considered human. In response to this complex of ideas, this dissertation searches for ways to liberate the Lack from the task (or the sacrifice) of creating the

human over against an inadequate vision of “the animal.” It does so by tracing, in works of literature, philosophy and natural history, the workings of an irreducible difference within the realms of animality. However, I argue that noting or exploring the differences within animality and within our ideas of animality is not sufficient for truly and newly formulating a relationship between humans and animals or between the “us” and “them” at large. The value of Difference (with a capital *d*) must be examined even in its most subtle and apparently generous enunciations. This is what I attempt to do by examining a nineteenth-century moment where a genre of French-language natural history gives shape to a fabric of microscopic differences that enmesh and disseminate the human being. Even in the articulation of this web we find sacrifices that relegate the other (often a feminized other) to the order of “the same.” The mesh of infinite Difference can not only accommodate these othering or victimizing “cuts,” but may indeed take flight from the violence of their sacrificial operation.

In my search for the hidden discriminations achieved by logics of Lack and world-visions of *coupure*, I’ve chosen to pursue the objects of my second obsessive curiosity, *les animots*. Animal-words, animals in words, animals seemingly without words that we speak so much about: these are the inexhaustible referents of Jacques Derrida’s “neographism,” *l’animot* (CITE). (Singular in its letter, the term is phonically plural, rhyming with *les animaux*.) I want to study *mots* (words) and systems of differentiation by peering into teeming throngs of animals—in literature, in culture, and in the enigmatic scriptures that continue to inflect them both. I also want to interrogate “the Animal,” this construction of Enlightenment philosophy, which,

like so many heightened instances of “the cut,” upholds a form of differentiation (human *versus* animal) to create coherences on either side of the divide.

In this dissertation on poetics and rhetorics of the cut, I focus on some of the stranger and more troubling imaginary sites at which our humanity is articulated over against a notion of the animal.

Sacrifice and sexuality are domains of practice and imagination where we differentiate ourselves urgently from the natural world—from the ways in which non-human animals seem to live, to reproduce themselves and to die.

I argue that the connections between sacrifice and sexuality—imaginary fields centered upon a connecting, conjugating form of cut—can be clarified through a focus on animal life. Sacrifice itself is connected with sexuality in a fundamental way. In forging a relationship of domination (or deification) with animals, sacrifice also separates the world of men from a feminine otherness defined by naturalness and impurity. By investigating this gender ideology that accompanies the subjection of animals, we might begin to understand the ways in which sacrifice, this hierarchic mode of relating to animality, might also engage and regulate questions related to human sexes, sexualities, and sexual and reproductive practices.

In her feminist theory of sacrifice, Nancy Jay interprets sacrifice as a profoundly dichotomous operation which, by way of the decisiveness of death, can manage and reinforce the oppositions between male and female, clean and unclean, the community and the wilderness. According to her analyses of global sacrificial traditions, sacrifice can be interpreted as the male-dominated emulation and attempted “amelioration” of childbirth and other feminine inheritances that produce life, but

which, through the mythologies of sacrifice, are coded as non-cultural and associated with human danger and finitude. At face a subjection of the animal, sacrifice is also the production of the human, but narrowly so, as it links itself to male lineages of gods, priests, and ancestors. “Birth done better,” sacrifice is a generative performance in which finitude can be deflected away from (male) insiders—and from the community they define—in a highly charged but ultimately programmatic othering if not victimization of the animal.

Sacrifice creates a freedom that can never entirely transcend the question of who or what belongs in the community. Aspects of sexuality may share this need for identity at the base of a liberating structure. Derrida’s “Fourmis” (“Ants”) attempts to organize sexual difference (the complementarity relationship of female and male) in new ways by theorizing the modes of relationality opened up by the insect and its many segments and sexes (the cuts of the body, the stages of metamorphosis, the multiplication of genders in some species, and the unthinkable diversity of insect life in general). The “cut” that defines the ant (both in its body and in the letter of the French word) is not, for Derrida, a break between two sides (or a mechanism for repairing division and recreating the whole), but the beginning of a game of folds that nothing can put an end to or immobilize. It’s a procedure that might be subject to the critique made of Derrida’s *Éperons* (another text on sexuality) by Gayatri Spivak, namely, that a feminine trope (“sexual difference” in the sense of femininity, “the second sex”) becomes appropriated as a site of freedom or as a “device” (a cutting tool) for initiating a deconstructive process. And yet, the cutting aspect of the insect metaphor (or of “spurs”) might bring us closer to acknowledging the very construction

of second sexes, as well as the denials, exclusions, and simple limitations that create the (phallic?) impression of the free. Wherever there is infinite play, there is also an act of repression, a fear of repetition and a fantasm of wanted-unwanted immobility. Even our most subtle and generous procedures of admitting difference can give rise to, and depend upon, a decisive, “sacrificing” form of the cut. Such a sacrifice might also be at work in the discourse of queerness in which sexuality and subjectivity and language become synonymous with difference and detour. Queerness not only represents a movement in the streets in which human beings come out as different, as noticeable, and as proud for standing out (as Eve Sedgwick remembers in “Tendencies”), but is also a term referring to and replacing a fundamental characteristic of “criticism,” which involves changing and renewing the inherited notions that limit our thinking, our understanding, or even our human possibilities. Without wishing to deflate these concepts or their usage, I want to ask in this dissertation whether the construal of sexuality as a space of freedom and inescapable difference is linked with, or even dependent, upon a vision of sameness, and in particular, with a humanist or anthropocentric notion of “animal sex” as a fearsome kind of repetitive cycle—a harbor, perhaps, for displaced notions of feminine sexuality.

This dissertation examines not only displacement (such as the transference of feminine stereotypes onto the figure of the animal), but also at the energy that such displacements can provide. The violence of sacrifice itself can be displaced or repressed, and sacrifice might in some way signify this negational movement and the impression of purity or unity it creates.

Sacrifice, this apparent relic preserved in figures of thought and in texts, continues to inform problematic attitudes and practices regarding animals. This is what I argue in the final chapter of my dissertation, where I evaluate the “cultural text” of the “return from extinction” of a “real” animal, the ivory-billed woodpecker. The desire to view the ivorybill as a sort of phoenix, or as a sign of ecological salvation, may point to some of the problematic affects surrounding endangerment and the mass disappearance of animals. Like the process of sacrifice, which subjects the victim to a double movement of elevation and degradation, the ivory-billed woodpecker’s return has brought about the depreciation of its evolutionary double: the pileated woodpecker, a non-endangered bird that seems too abundant and even pesky or pest-like to birders searching for a glimpse of the extinct or critically endangered animal. This correlation between the perception of extreme rarity, and the perception of overabundance, is ancient and possibly profoundly cognitive in the ways it can organize our encounters with animals. As a framework for rethinking animals, or for recognizing an autonomous non-human existence that is independent of human needs and desires, the sacrificial model must be questioned. It “works” by co-producing a valued rarity (the endangered animal) and a commonness or sameness (the pest, the meat-animal) marked as sacrificeable. Though we crave a mediatized environment that is thickly populated with the greatest possible diversity of wild and exotic creatures, we tend to denigrate species that are common (indeed, almost as common as we are): in the North American landscape, the raccoons, opossums, white-tailed deer, Canada geese, or crows, some of which have been subjected to relocation, sterilization, or extermination, management campaigns that punish these animals for being as prolific

as we are in the radically transformed environments we create. I ask whether it is possible to view this double sentimentality in terms of the affectivity of sacrifice, which merges phobic and exterminating sentiments (the sensation of the teeming) with processes of idealization and isolation (the affects of the beloved and the rare). “Tender murderousness,” writes J.M. Coetzee, merging the affective poles. “Love turned inside-out to reveal its ugly stitching.” (“And what is that love stitched from?”) (125)

Though I end with a view of the persistence of sacrifice, I also trace its diminishing imaginary power. The figure of “the insect,” in its connection with a new vision of sexuality, directs our imaginary migration away from an imaginary of sacrifice and from the notion of the cut that binds.

Why insects? Where is the connection to ideologies of the cut? I want to suggest that insects, linked in the letter of their name to an imaginary of the tiny cut (“in-sect”: cut into sections), reorient our relationship with the animal and with the non-human in general by confusing the operation of sacrifice. Defined by their segmented bodies and by their lack of flesh, skin and blood, insects are “non-ritual” animalcules that ease the need to separate humans from animals, and men from women, in fearful reaction to the confusing sameness of red blood. Archaic objects of disgust, insects become a source of fascination and even eroticism among a series of mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth century European francophone writers, including Jules Michelet, Maurice Maeterlinck and André Gide. The threads woven by these authors in their entomological divagations are found again, I argue, in what I call a “zoö-curious gender discourse,” including in the entomological metaphors of Derrida,

in the “Green Pornography” of Isabella Rossellini, in the articulation of a “feminine becoming” by Rosi Braidotti, in the poetic biology of Eva Hayward, and in the broader “zoo-curious” conversation that these writers, performers and others may open up.

The co-articulation of sex and insects in the zoö-curious gender discourse might be taken at first as evidence of the disgust and shame that still adhere to human sexuality. However, I adopt a historicizing perspective in order to argue that entomology allows the “sex-positive” re-evaluation of “sex” itself as a field of ever-expanding possibilities and natural or inherent aberrations.

Focusing on Derrida and the entomological currents he coordinates in his writings on sexual difference, I also interpret the erotic poetics of the insect as a dissemination of “the cut”: no longer a decisive site of stability, the cut becomes a micro-figure that facilitates the play or dance of differences beyond the binaries that privilege one “sex,” one side of the divide. In the imaginary movement I trace, a “productive” vision of sexual differences in the plural displaces the life-taking cut of sacrifice in a complex and incomplete historical passage, a passage that is worked through in strange Derridian moments, for instance, in “A Silkworm of One’s Own,” where Derrida seems to conjugate the insect and its micro-divisions with more “sacrificial” modalities of the cut. The “turn” in the end of that essay to a childhood of a miraculous entomological moment seems to efface, or to blind us to, the earlier comments and mediations on animal sacrifice and male circumcision. This turn to the insect, in “Silkworm,” suggests the tension between capture and escape that I want to contemplate in the broader strokes of my dissertation. The freeing fabric of

“differences in the plural” woven by Derrida, Michelet and Gide around the figure of the insect is intended in some ways to unravel the seams of sex and the sacrifice of alterity, but remains problematically attached to the specter and the continued prospect of cuts (such as slaughter or circumcision or revolutionary violence) that wound in order to correct and to fertilize and to bind.

In terms of our relationships with animals, I believe there is value in examining this “human” fascination with the wholesome or immunizing or elevating cut. (Is it human? I’ve just read of an octopus who marks the boundaries of his crevice-home with a “symbolic” fence of two or three rocks, newly piled up each night. The lines that give us the “me” and the “us” cannot be merely ours!) How we use these lines to relate ourselves to different animals depends very much on our cultural frameworks and on the specificities of the animal others. Depending on whether we look at the so-called “higher animals” (sentient, suffering creatures with whom we relate through ambivalent processes of identification and distancing) or turn instead to the infinite, inscrutable, alien field of invertebrate beings, sacrifice and separation may play very exaggerated or diminished roles in structuring our relation to the animal world.

My first chapter, “Say the Ram Survived: Altering the Binding of Isaac in Jacques Derrida’s “Rams” and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” explores the role of mammalian metaphors in the works of Derrida. Whereas Derrida’s reflections on sexual difference are pervaded by figures of the insect (defined, in their association with movement, as micro-figures of “the cut”), his “ethics of reading” draws upon an imaginary of the mammalian animal: a more sympathetic creature than the insect, and one that cannot be distinguished totally from our enfleshed and vulnerable human

selves. I argue that mammalian metaphor raises the ways in which our suffering and finitude are shared with non-human animals. The similarities between “us and them” may precisely give rise to sacrifice, I argue: to the ritualized efforts, couched in law and in the authority of transcendent approval, to separate ourselves from the living and dying of animal others. Derrida casts doubt upon this sacrificial separation in the mammal-text entitled “Rams,” where he employs the enigmatic maxim: “[E]ach time, and each time singularly, each time irreplaceably, each time infinitely, death is nothing less than an end of the world.” (140) Immediately, the two kinds of death are collapsed (“theirs” and “ours”), along with the entire process of using (animal) death to link (human) lives into a semblance of the same. My chapter coordinates this idea with one developed in Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and represented by the character Lucy, who dismisses the human exception and the notion of two opposed systems of dying in her maxim that, “There is no higher life.” David Lurie, in his volunteer work with unwanted dogs and cats, and Derrida in his emphasis on the vulnerability and the sacrifice of the poetic text, interrogate the connections between the love for the other (the literary animal, the animal-like literary text) and desire for self-assertion and for some degree of survival in the practice of “animal” sacrifice. In closing the world of one animal (or of “the animal” in general), can sacrifice affirm the continuity of lineages, boundaries, traditions, oaths—indeed of the entire human world? Bringing Derrida into conversation with *Disgrace* around the Biblical story of Isaac and his ram, my chapter interrogates an investment in sacrifice as a cut that worlds.

In my second chapter, “The Matter of Difference: Jules Michelet and the Poetics of the Cut,” I examine tensions between the valorization of sacrifice and

visions of a more subtle relationality in the natural history tomes of Michelet. Michelet is regarded as a totalizing thinker, one who continually creates and recreates a coherent universe upon the basis of some ever-shifting conceptual unity, whether Nature, Mother, Water, Justice, or Soul. Roland Barthes describes Michelet's world-vision as one that is fundamentally smooth, or "*lisse*," to cite a descriptor that Barthes uses so frequently, in his book on Michelet, as to create an effect of continuity that is not always present in Michelet's writings, as Barthes himself indeed acknowledges. I counter Barthes's emphasis on "the smooth", as well as his flowing style of "pre-critical" analysis (as he calls it), in arguing that Michelet, the nineteenth-century historian whose writings traversed multiple genres without losing focus on the idea of universal oneness, becomes less capable of propagating the poetics of *le lisse* when he decides to explore the world of insects in his research and writing of the early 1850s. To enter authentically into a form of life that is minutely cut-in-to (*en-tomo* in Greek or *in-sect* in Latin), Michelet must infinitely in-sect his ideological poetics of universal coherence. Essential now are the segmentation of the insect body, the radical discontinuity between insect generations, and the imponderable or even sublime aspect of insect metamorphosis as a sequence of radical transformations. In certain sections of *L'insecte*, the insect's connection to segmentation is even rendered sacred in a way that may be illuminating for contemporary literary-theoretical discourse. Michelet's insects prepare our concentration upon differences and missing links in our analyses of language and literature, in our accounts of human subjectivity, and in our thinking of sexual difference(s), as I go on to argue in my following chapter.

In “Becoming Zoö-Curious: Reading Sexual Differences in the Field of Animal Life,” I apply Dominique Lestel’s framework for approaching animality not as an essence that is opposed to humanity, but as a space in which the human being continually constructs itself through a relationship with animal others. A queer current of this relational animality that I refer to as the “zoö-curious” eroticizes nonhuman life-forms (the invertebrates in particular) in order to reorganize male and female within a productive and unstable fabric of sexual differences in the plural. The use of insect metaphors by authors like Derrida, André Gide or Maurice Maeterlinck in formulating this new and sensualized mesh of species interconnectivity blurs the absolute differences between the sexes and between the human and the animal. Their zoological perspective delineates multiple sexes, sexualities and reproductive practices in insects that illustrate the spectrums of sexual differences that have emerged in human beings. At the same time, the exploration of sexual differences in animals (for instance, in the queer pigeon parenting discussed by Gide, or in the third, fourth and fifth sexes identified by Eugène Marais in his studies of termite colonies) leads us to consider the ways in which “Difference” as such has been territorialized as a definitive “property” of the human being (*le propre de l’homme*). The notion that the human differs from the animal by virtue of Difference itself (through some abyssal modality or moment of rupture), is not only deeply aporetic (difference, with its ability to produce analogies and subtle margins of distinction, nonetheless gives rise to a single difference between human and animal), but also essentially blind, in that sexual differences or other differences among and within different animals are overlooked. The appropriation of “sexual differences in the plural” as a trait that would be

uniquely human or human-making suggests the way in which “difference” as such, especially in its most exaggerated formulations, is often generated by way of dividing lines that confine alterity to the order of “the same.” This is my argument in the reading I propose of André Gide’s *Corydon*, a zoo-curious text that opens all the imaginable variation of sexual differences in humans and in certain animals, but which also inherits and reinforces a “homo”phobic vision of feminine sexuality as the awesome and terrifying drive to regenerate and to sustain the continuity of life in its most primitive and undifferentiated forms.

In my final chapter, serving both as postface and case study, I consider an example of the ambivalent sacrificial affects that continue to shape our relationships with a surprising range of animals. My case in point is that of the ivory-billed woodpecker, which apparently “returned” from extinction circa 2006 in what became a highly mediatized scientific, cultural, and political event. Now, sadly, the return of the ivory-billed woodpecker is believed to have been a false positive, a case of mistaken identity with a similar bird, the common pileated woodpecker. In my reading the event and its confusion points to the affective ambivalence created by the “sacrifice” of biological diversity for the apparent sake of “our” species “as a whole.” The ivorybill enables us to trace the mixed affects and fascinations that accompany the ideology of human dominion and that typify sacrifice in general. I again ask how sacrifice survives for the sake of our own surviving, even as we seek to better tolerate the prospect of our own relatedness and limitation. I show how sacrifice persists, and sometimes plays a role in creating, the worldview of ecological interconnectivity and human integration into a larger field of life.

REFERENCES

- Coetzee, J.M. *The Master of Petersburg*. New York: Penguin, 1994, p. 125.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Fourmis." *Lectures de la différence sexuelle*. Paris: Des femmes, 1994. 69-100.
- Sedgwick, Eve. *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "French Feminism in an International Frame." *Yale French Studies*. 62 (1981). 154-184.

CHAPTER 1

Say the Ram Survived: Altering the Binding of Isaac

in Jacques Derrida's "Rams" and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

"[Ea]ch time, and each time singularly, each time irreplaceably, each time infinitely, death is nothing less than an end of the world" (140). In this chapter, I consider the implications of this enigmatic Derridian maxim for the practice of animal sacrifice. In the act of ending the life of one animal, can sacrifice affirm the continuity of lineages, boundaries, traditions, and oaths, indeed of the entire human world? Bringing Derrida into conversation with Coetzee's *Disgrace* and with passages from Genesis, this paper interrogates the limitations of our imaginary investment in sacrifice as a "cut that worlds."

J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* ends with an obscure decision regarding the life of an animal. With the words, "Yes, I am giving him up," an assistant in an animal shelter, David Lurie, delivers a crippled dog to Bev Shaw, a veterinarian who performs euthanasia (220). In David's statement, the "yes" is followed by a partial *cogito* ("I am"). David also employs a prepositional verb phrase implying completion ("give up"), and for the first time refers to the dog not as "it", but as "him." And yet, no statement could be more undecidable from an interpretative point of view. Does this final sentence – this spontaneous and solemn sentence of death, this rendering of the beloved and unique animal – announce an animal sacrifice, or does it constitute an "ethical" pledge to carry and support the animal in putting it down, even if this means imperiling or sacrificing the "I"?

In his essay “Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue – Between Two Infinities, the Poem,” Jacques Derrida raises the question of sacrifice in relation to the end of the entire world. In an enigmatic refrain, he states that the death of each being – “human, animal or divine” – signifies “the absolute end of the one and only world” (140).¹ But when confronting the inevitability of surviving certain friends and loved ones, Derrida determines that he must “carry” the other, and the world of the other, beyond the end of the entire world. He affirms, “I must then carry [the world], carry *you*, there where the world gives way: that is my responsibility” (161). But in carrying the other beyond the other’s death, one must impossibly endure through the end of the world. Carrying the other, one must inevitably sacrifice the other’s singularity and reduce the fullness of the other’s world, at least to some extent. Derrida therefore insists, “It’s a question of carrying without appropriating to oneself.” He writes,

To carry now no longer has the meaning of “to comprise” [*comporter*], to include, to comprehend in the self, but rather *to carry oneself or bear oneself toward* [*se porter vers*] the infinite inappropriability of the other. ... (161)

Derrida grants that carrying the other, though it entails a certain risk of sacrifice, is the only way to carry or sustain oneself. Quoting Paul Celan, he writes, “For no one bears this life alone” (163). But the work of “countersignature,” of bearing oneself toward the other’s enunciation, and offering an inflected, interpolating response, may moderate the risk of sacrifice by obliging one to risk the speech and signature of the self. In the term’s legal acceptance, to “countersign” is to add one’s signature to a document that has already been signed – usually by someone else, but occasionally by

oneself (for example, in a consulate, when one is required to reproduce one's signature in order to prove one's identity). When Derrida adopts the term, he affirms and embraces the activity of signing, while troubling the notion that the repetition of our signature – like the repetition of sacrifice – can permit us to prove or sustain our identities time after time. In responding to the other's enunciation or to a signature as complex as a literary corpus, we find our own signatures, idioms and worldviews inevitably altered and signed.

In *Disgrace*, the last dog to be euthanized is a dog that nearly “sings” (215), inviting David into a strange form of call and response that could resemble the “uninterrupted dialogue” mentioned, and longed for, in the title of Derrida's essay. Of course, within “Rams”, Derrida qualifies even the best of dialogues as *virtually* uninterrupted and *nearly* continuous (139). Incessantly, he considers the melancholy interruptions in our sustained and sustaining conversations with the other, interruptions ranging from shifts and lapses in the self, to irresolvable misunderstandings between friends, to the ultimate interruption of an interlocutor's death. In *Disgrace*, David does confront with the ultimate finitude of self and other, but he glosses over faults, lapses, and complications, both in the other and in himself, when he “consigns” the singing dog to the flames (144). Beginning with “I,” saying “I am,” David bears the other – up. The novel ends when David signs, “Yes, I am giving him up” (220). But David's “yes”, like Derrida's “virtually”, hints at the existence of an implicit and unbounded dialogue whenever the “I” is announced. Saying “yes”, David concedes to a vague sense that someone is approving his performance in the

“theatre” of euthanasia (142). With some irony, he has already named this grand Other, calling it “the universe and its all-seeing eye” (195).²

Saying “yes,” responding to Bev’s question (“Are you giving him up?”), David may lapse in his responsibility to countersign the voice of the singing dog (219, 143). In fact, this dog nearly disappears during sacrifice, and is seemingly replaced by a sacrificial lamb. In the book of Isaiah, the prophet is compared to a sacrificial lamb, not because the prophet never speaks, but because he never blames God for setting him apart from the rest of society. The prophet “was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (Isa 53:7).³ When David calls the singing dog to the veterinarian’s table, it hurries over eagerly, yielding to David “like a lamb,” a male lamb, a “him” (220). Though the lamb-dog does open its mouth, excitedly licking David’s face, it does not protest the fate of being sacrificed or “set apart” (although the other dogs do, by madly snapping left and right) (143). Perhaps the singing dog, like a beloved child, is “saved” from sacrifice, but at the same time effaced and victimized when substituted for by this figure of the silent, compliant sacrificial lamb (220).

Certainly, the traces of sacrifice in this scene point us toward a “darker reading,” to use David’s term, of David’s “love” for this dog and other animals (118, 219). Sacrifice is at work in David’s interactions with Driepoot, other animals, and with human beings as well. However, David’s work for dogs is frequently interpreted not as sacrifice, but as an obscure calling to carry and respond to animals at the moment of their greatest alterity, in and beyond the moment of death. Derek Attridge’s

reading of *Disgrace* is perhaps the best-known and most impressive contribution to this angle of understanding. In “Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” Attridge figures dog-work within the paradigm of the pure and disinterested gift. “The two tasks Lurie undertakes in his state of disgrace,” dog-work and creative production, “although each can be seen as bizarre and as bizarrely conjoined in his mode of living at the end of the novel, do have a common thread. Both manifest a dedication to a singularity that exceeds systems and computations: the singularity of every living and dead being, the singularity of the truly inventive work of art” (116-117). In putting this argument forward, Attridge may in fact downplay the importance of sacrifice, conceived somewhat narrowly as penance or a search for redemption. Referring to David’s virtual sexual assault of a young woman early in the novel, long before his involvement with the dogs, Attridge writes that, “Lurie’s commitment to the dead dogs can’t be thought of as an attempt to counterbalance the sexual wrong that began the sequence of events it culminates” (115). Attridge also notes the absence of the word “penance” from David’s self-reflections, adding, “[I]t would be a misreading of his behavior” with the dogs “to suggest that he is taking on an existence of suffering and service as expiation for his sin” (116). Because the mongrels are of no value to contemporary society (and are in fact a drain on the economy), David cannot fulfill his debt to the young woman, to her family, or to society, by suffering on their behalf. Instead, Attridge argues, dog-work explodes this debt, transcending its conditions in the passage to another economy defined by disinterested service and bestowals of unearned, unexpected “grace”. Though I agree with Attridge that dog-work does not function as the absolution of a debt, I think it can

be understood as sacrificial in a different sense. Dog-work, and especially the killing of the lamb-dog, is not the redemption of David's crime against the young woman, Melanie Isaacs, but may be an effort to complete it, impossibly, upon an ever-shifting chain of substitutional animals.

David's sacrifice of the singing dog, Driepoot ("three-leg"), invokes the classic image of the sacrificial lamb, but also restages the burnt offering of Isaac's ram, a struggling animal that is caught by its horns in a bush. Thus, David becomes a figure of Abraham, and is forced to wrestle with Derrida's wager that the death of the animal signifies the end of the world as a whole. Derrida's hyperbolic maxim with existential and ethical implications is restated in his short preface to *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, where he writes that, "Death, death itself, if it exists, leaves no place, not the slightest chance, either for the replacement or for the survival of the only, unique world" (11).⁴ This formulation gives rise to a world picture in which all life strives for continuity, produces "God" and the entire world in the face of perpetual perishing. Derrida perhaps includes sacrifice in this striving when defining "God" as such; in a surprising moment, he writes, "God signifies this: death can bring an end to one world, but death does not signify the end of the entire world" (11).⁵ If animal sacrifice brings an end to one world, it not only does not signify the end of the entire world, but rather forges the entire world, generating an aura of a higher life even as the animal is excluded from it. One anthropologist, Nancy Jay, has even criticized sacrifice for masquerading not as death at all, but as birth – as a form of "male childbearing" that relegates maternity to a second, more "animal" order of reproduction.⁶

When Derrida inscribes sacrifice into the work of interpretation in “Rams”, figuring countersignature as the act of writing upon the almost bodily uniqueness of a work of literature, while allowing one’s own idiom to be altered and signed, he acknowledges the necessity of bridging, of communicating, of making contact, and of giving rise to some degree of worldly ground. But sacrifice loses its fantasmatic status as the cut that worlds, as a hyphen in a slash, as Derrida indicates in glossing a verse by Paul Celan (“The world is gone, I must carry you”). Even in a potentially sacrificial encounter, poeticized with an idiom of signing, writing, sealing and the pact, self and other meet in a virtual arena in which there is no ground or table for sacrifice. Derrida writes,

No world can any longer support us, serve as mediation, as ground, as earth, as foundation or as alibi. Perhaps there is no longer anything but the abyssal altitude of a sky. I am alone in the world right where there is no longer any world. Or again: I am alone in the world as soon as I owe myself to you, as soon as you depend on me, as soon as I bear, and must assume, head to head or face to face, without third, mediator, or go-between, without earthly or worldly ground, the responsibility for which I must respond in front of you [...]. (158)

In the uncertainty of this encounter, the temptation to create the world by sacrifice persistently remains, a point that Derrida foregrounds in selecting Genesis 22 (the near-sacrifice of Isaac) to explore the necessity and destructive potential of engagement with the other.

The sacrifice of Isaac (or Ishmael) belongs to the three Abrahamic traditions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism. As a seminal narrative that fathers “Father Abraham,” the *Akedah* is perhaps particularly vulnerable to the infinite usurpations that form the basis of dissemination. In lines of textual inheritance, or in lineages of fathers and sons, dissemination describes the inherent but obsessed losses that drive the performance of sacrifice as a sublime sign of filial continuity and relation with the gods. In Genesis 22, slaying and burning the animal on the pyre prepared for Isaac elicits, or at least precedes, God’s blessing of an exceedingly copious posterity, of descendants which are nonetheless figured as sand grains and distant stars and not in terms of lineages and lines.⁷ Derrida, developing the suggestion of dissemination in the text’s poetry of sand-grains and stars, questions the animal sacrifice that seems to repair the virtual rupture of Abraham’s line. Self-consciously replicating the intervention of the angel that saves Isaac, Derrida intervenes on behalf of the ram. Or perhaps, he faces the animal as Abraham does, observing its struggle for life and even imagining the consequences of the ram’s escape — not in order to erase the future set out before Abraham, but to question the deflection of filial uncertainty onto the “fatherless” animal.

The Biblical chapter, which ends with a list of Abraham’s nephews and nieces, begins when God orders Abraham to take Isaac, his and Sarah’s only son (but not the only son of Abraham), to an unnamed high place in the distant land of Moriah, where Abraham is to sacrifice Isaac for a burnt offering (Gen 22.2). Accompanied at first by two servants and an ass, Abraham and Isaac accomplish the final part of the journey alone. After several days of walking, Abraham,

came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh [Jehovah/YHVH will see]: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen. (Gen 22.9-14)

Though the ram is sacrificed as a burnt offering “in the stead of” Isaac, the animal is not presented as a “substitute” for Abraham’s son. At stake in the narrative is God’s outrageous request for a human child, a form of sacrifice forbidden by law in Leviticus 18.21, which bans offering children “to Moloch,” or passing them through fire. Isaac is furthermore a beloved child, referred to as, “thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest” (v. 2). This love only heightens the undesirability of Isaac’s sacrifice from the perspective of the historical audience. In fact, Isaac asserts his own categorical difference from the sacrificial animal when he puts a question to his father. First, Abraham and Isaac take leave of the two servants and the ass. At this point, Abraham

transfers the wood for the sacrifice – presumably borne by the ass until then – onto Isaac himself (v. 5-6). This implied transformation into an animal makes Isaac suspicious, prompting him to say, “Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (v. 7). When Abraham reassures Isaac that God would “provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering,” Abraham admits privately that God has transformed the boy into a lamb (v. 8). Gradually, Isaac’s humanity is restored through a certain “passing of the torch”: the wood – transferred from the ass onto Isaac and prompting his mention of the lamb, is later arranged under the boy in preparation for his sacrifice; however, the wood ultimately serves as a pyre for another animal: not the lamb, but the lamb transformed into the full-grown sheep that God provides.

Throughout, Abraham has borne the duty of sacrificer even as the identity of the victim remains in flux. When the wood finds its proper destination and is set aflame, sacrificial law is restored; a passage is made from a morally contemptible slaying, to one that is codified in Biblical law. This passage is marked by the rhythm and relativity of time. Whereas Abraham’s knife hesitates over Isaac long enough to allow the contretemps of the angel’s intervention, the sacrifice of the ram is executed quickly and with no mention of Abraham’s knife (v. 13), again suggesting the incommensurability of the beloved son and the sacrificial animal.

In Derrida’s reading of Genesis 22, as reimagined through a poem by Celan (“Grosse Glühende Wölbung”), Abraham’s arc of violence is halted twice: first by the angel that intervenes for Isaac, and again by the ram, who fights for its survival. Derrida champions the animal, no doubt, but may also accentuate a struggle implied in the Biblical narrative, when the ram is pictured locking horns with a pseudo-ram in the

form of a shrub. If Abraham fails to sever the enraged animal from its adversarial double, or finds the branching horns turned upon him, the sealing, reparative sacrificial fire becomes improbable. The violence directed at Isaac will continue to reverberate. The blessing is also deferred, an authorial coup by Derrida that is not meant to again inflict existential uncertainty upon Abraham, but to question its sacrificial projection upon the animal. Though God's blessing lays down seed, it was composed by Biblical authors in a retrospective search for roots. This search is not problematic in itself, unless it ascribes finitude onto "the animal" or another outsider, including the "enemies" that Abraham's descendants will possess at their gate, according to the blessing of God (v. 17). When Derrida disrupts the killing of the ram, disturbing the blessing of God, he refuses to stand on ground that is gained by displacing finitude onto the animal other (147). Coetzee also stages and interrupts the sacrificial slaughter of Isaac's ram in *Disgrace*, leaving his Abrahamic figure, David, in need of some substitute – or of some alternative. In virtual dialogue with Derrida, Coetzee gestures toward an alternative to sacrifice in an other-directed ethics of listening and response.⁸

In Coetzee's novel, David Lurie, fifty-two, is a professor of Communications at a fictional university in Cape Town, South Africa (4). Early in the novel, he jeopardizes his professional life by seducing a college student, Melanie Isaacs, into an affair involving sex he calls, "not rape, not quite that, but undesired nonetheless, undesired to the core" (25). Although their story provokes outrage among students and faculty, David's colleagues offer a path to professional rehabilitation that David refuses to take. He leaves Cape Town to stay with Lucy, his only child, who manages

a farmhouse, a market stall, and a dog kennel in the uplands of the Eastern Cape. Soon after his arrival, three strange men descend on Lucy's home, raping Lucy, beating David, and killing the kenneled dogs.

In the weeks and months after the attack, Lucy's exact thoughts and memories are never revealed, but she struggles with depression and gradually accepts the realization that she is pregnant. David tries to find his footing again in two different ways, composing a libretto about Byron's mistress, Teresa, and volunteering at an animal clinic where injured or unwanted animals are put to sleep. Every single weekend, a number of dogs must be killed. Afterwards, their corpses are sheathed in plastic, and then cremated at a hospital incinerator. David takes over the latter part of the work, folding the dogs' bodies so they won't become broken or jammed, and placing them in the plastic shroud. He then drives the dogs to the incinerator, and gradually begins staying with the dogs' bodies in order to feed them into the flames (work normally done by laborers) (141-146). The final scene of the novel takes place during a "session" of euthanasia (144). Twenty-three dogs have already been killed (219). Bev Shaw, the veterinarian in charge, gives David the chance to "save" the young that showers David in "generous affection" (215). But deciding to euthanize this dog as well, David calls the dog, and then,

Bearing him in his arms like a lamb, he re-enters the surgery. "I thought you would save him for another week," says Bev Shaw. "Are you giving him up?"

"Yes, I am giving him up." (220)

Contemplating the stunning coup of this final scene, Rita Barnard has described it as a reminder of the “radically new,” and has even cautioned against “beating it into shape with a critical shovel,” in reference to the way the dogs’ bodies are processed by laborers before David takes over the job (222-223). But if we treat the final scene as a radical departure from the body of the novel, we risk another sort of interpretative “violence”: not the battering to which Barnard alludes, but something resembling David’s own actions when he sublimates the dogs into ashes. In the critical literature on *Disgrace*, the many signs and fragments of the Binding of Isaac have not been considered; in fact, the novel’s sacrificial thematic has been largely passed over in enthusiastic and sometimes exuberant discussions of the focalizing character’s involvement with animals. Certain readings culminate in a sort of euphoria over David’s work for dogs, a feeling that may be driven by the suppression of sacrifice from David’s relationships with women and from his obscure involvement with animals, including the twin-like slaughter-sheep, the he-goat, and the dogs.

Following Isaac

In *Melanie Isaacs*, an “s” pluralizes the name of the Biblical character, inscribing both characters into a chain of substitution and incomplete or disappointed sacrifice. In *Disgrace*, Melanie shares her name and identity with a sister, Desiree Isaacs, a schoolgirl dressed in “uniform” who has “Melanie’s eyes, Melanie’s wide cheekbones, Melanie’s dark hair” (163). Both are assimilated to the figure of the “girl child” who “does not own herself,” as David says of Melanie: in other words, in David’s half-ironic fantasy, they tremble on the border between human and animal,

sexual maturity and childhood, self-possession and possession by the other (53, 18). Melanie's animal aspect is part of her seductive power. David fixates upon her "coarse-knit sweater," "black tights," and "little black woolen cap" (9, 11, 26). A diminutive horn is even visible in the "delicate whorl of her ear" (25). Through scattered references to sacrificial law in the Hebrew Bible, ovine Melanie is further identified as an acceptable sacrifice. David describes her as a "firstborn" child, and repeatedly admires her "perfect" body (164, 23). Falsifying his classroom records, he marks her attendance as "unblemished" (41). David's sexual possession of Melanie, which he qualifies as "not quite rape," even bears comparison to the near-sacrifice (or "not-quite" sacrifice) of Isaac in Genesis 22 (25).⁹ When David "mounts" Melanie upon the low elevation of his living room floor, he suffers a *petite mort* that Coetzee suggestively compares to falling from a mountain top: "he finds the act pleasurable, so pleasurable that from its climax he tumbles into blank oblivion" (19). When David revives, he discovers that "the girl is lying beneath him, her eyes closed, her hands slack above her head, a slight frown on her face" (19). In Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac* (Princeton version), the boy's bound hands express a certain calm; in Rembrandt's *Sacrifice of Abraham*, they are invisibly pinned at the small of his back.¹⁰ Melanie's unbound hands lack any definite expression, but her stretched arms suggest bondage and exposure to harm (a situation that Melanie may indeed desire). But in a clever reversal, David is the one ligatured like a sacrificial beast. Whereas Melanie's "tights and panties lie in a tangle on the floor," David's "trousers are around his ankles" (19).

Coetzee transitions quickly from here to David's classroom lesson on "the poet in the Alps" in the sixth book of William Wordsworth's *Prelude* (21). David asks his students, "The majestic white mountain, Mont Blanc, turns out to be a disappointment. Why?" (21). Unconsciously, he interrogates the phenomenology of his own disappointment after the incomplete "sacrifice" of Melanie. Like "a visual image burned on the retina," as David lectures, discussing Wordsworth's metaphysical poetics, Mont Blanc replaces the Moriah of David's living room floor, forming a chain, or mountain-chain, of erotic resemblances. In broader terms, the duplication of the sacred place points to the recurrence of sacrifice as a supposedly "perfect" accomplishment which is nonetheless repeatedly performed.

Another Moriah is outlined as David compares the Alps of Wordsworth to local mountains of South Africa. The European mountains are like the "Drakensberg," David suggests, struggling to engage his class – or like "Table Mountain, which we climb in the wake of the poets" (23). Table Mountain, a landmark overlooking the city of Cape Town, is a plateau surrounded by peaks and cliffs. It looks uncannily like an elevated, sacrificial slab, hewn by cosmic forces.

As Melanie and her substitutes continue to free themselves from David's embrace, a shifting Moriah remains as the fantasmatic bedrock of passing rapture and inevitable disappointment. The evasion of Melanie continues to haunt David in his exile, as he admits in speaking of "something unfinished in the business with Melanie" (190). When attempting to reconcile with Melanie's father, David speaks of being "at a loose end" (165). Of course, David had previously been left in a lurch when Soraya, a well-liked prostitute, permanently cancelled their weekly meetings in

the opening pages of the novel (11). This sense of unfinished business is one force compelling David to create the weekly appointments with the dogs. At the same time, in working with dogs and especially Driepoot, David stages an ideal interaction that transcends everyday interactions with others, others with “shadows [and] complications,” as David remarks with frustration (170). David “is tired of shadows, of complications, of complicated people”; he “loves his daughter, but there are times when he wishes she were a simpler being: simpler, neater” (170). By sacrificing Driepoot “in all its idiot simplicity”, he momentarily removes the folds and frictions from relations with people, and from dog-killing, which David finds increasingly traumatizing and exhausting (170).

To trace an additional “fold” (a word that should denote an enclosure for sheep in *Disgrace*’s verbal-imaginary networks), David’s sacrifices in the clinic’s “inner room” evoke his essential erotic scene of folding, enfolding, and escape (5). Though Driepoot allows David to collect him in his arms, the other dogs “lock their legs” on the clinic table (143). But after they have been killed, David folds their limbs before rigor mortis sets in, making the classic shape of the sacrificial lamb (219). This folding takes place within enclosed spaces, which render the power of the sacrificer absolute while also presenting the possibility of escape. David’s seduction of Melanie is framed by barriers and thresholds, conducted within walls; one night, he enjoins her to stay while enabling her release, reluctantly “unlocking the garden gate” and allowing her to “wiggle out” (18):

He reaches out, enfolds her. For a moment he can feel her little breasts against him. Then she slips his embrace and is gone. (17)

David's libidinal scene complicates his relationship with his daughter, Lucy, who demands recognition as a fellow adult. David knows this – telling the man who wants to marry Lucy that “She wants to live her own life” – but he also keeps his daughter's childhood bedroom, and twin bed, unchanged in his house in Cape Town (202, 26). After the attack, David follows Lucy into the dog kennels, where she is attending to the dead and dying dogs. In the parameters of the fantasy space, David is reduced to the bumbling desirous father.

“My dearest child!” he says. He follows her into the cage and tries to take her in his arms. Gently, decisively, she wriggles loose. (97)

And again, with Lucy,

“My child, my child!” he says, holding out his arms to her. When she does not come, he puts aside his blanket, stands up, and takes her in his arms. In his embrace she is as stiff as a pole, yielding nothing. (99)

Folding the dogs, sheathing them in bags, David makes a routine of these idealized exertions of gentle power. When Driepoot appears, his scene repeats,

He opens the cage door. “Come,” he says, bends, opens his arms. The dog wags its crippled rear, sniffs his face, licks his checks, his lips, his ears. He does nothing to stop it. “Come.” (220)

Enfolded in the room of mirrors, Melanie, Lucy, Driepoot and others assimilate traits of one another. They also bear traces of intertextual doubles (including Lolita, the Nabokovian girl-child, who is remembered in David's reference to Driepoot's lolloping and by Coetzee's repetition of the number twelve).¹¹ But Driepoot and Melanie take on the special relationship of Isaac and the ram, of the royal child and the

whipping boy, of the beloved firstborn that can be taken by God, and the livestock firstling that redeems him (Exodus 13). This embedded bond is indicated by a subtle play of similarities. When David spies on Melanie during her play rehearsal, he is ravished by her “wiggling bottom,” a canine image applied more fittingly to Driepoot when the excited mutt “wags his crippled rear” for David (25, 220). The room in which Driepoot is to be put down is described as a surgical “theatre,” which connects the dog’s gripping death to Melanie’s performance at the chic Dock Theatre (142-143, 190). The stage is haunted by euthanasia as one modality of modern violence toward animals. David notes that it was formerly “a cold storage plant where the carcasses of pigs and oxen hung waiting to be transported across the seas” (190-191). In these theatre spaces, circuses of animal suffering, David occupies a strange position between participant and spectator in the killing of animals. From our perspective, he becomes a witness to animal suffering in modernity, whether in animal shelters, scientific laboratories, or windowless slaughterhouse plants.

Coetzee pushes the concept of the “double” to its limit by linking Melanie to the ram-dog through a series of oppositions. While Driepoot is deformed (unfit for sacrifice, according to Biblical law), Melanie is “perfectly formed” (30); whereas Melanie is impervious to the so-called “cat-music” that David plays as he “wills the girl to be captivated,” Driepoot, “the dog that likes music”, is a captive audience “fascinated by the sound of [David’s] banjo” (15, 219, 215). Again, in these connections, Coetzee may establish a registry of human violence toward animals. In *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human*, Paul Shepard remarks that German

medieval *Katzenmusik* (or “cat-music”), a ritual and social genre analogous to the French charivari, imitated the cries of cats being tortured in the streets (276).

In a final indication of the links between them, Melanie and Driepoot are bound together by proxy in the pair of “half-grown”, “slaughter-sheep,” purchased by Lucy’s neighbor, Petrus, for a party to celebrate the birth of a son (113, 126). The pair is tethered on a desolate patch of earth where they have no access to food or water. David, though irritated at first by their bleating, finds himself strangely disturbed by the manner in which the condemned sheep are being kept (123). He puzzles,

A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians, he does not know how. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, which he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him. (126)

Here, and throughout the novel, recurring images that are seemingly incidental indicate, without unveiling, the patterns in David’s mysterious impulses. In this case, the stammering of “bond” may point to the “Binding of Isaac.” Indeed, David compares the sheep’s slaughter to the open-air sacrifices practiced by non-priests in the Hebrew Bible. He remarks that the celebrants, cooking the sheep, send a pleasing odor skyward, which David, godlike, judges offensive: “Soon there comes on the wind the stench of boiling offal, from which he infers that the deed has been done” (127). In a clarifying afterthought, he adds, “the double deed.” With this splicing of one deed into two, David inscribes the slaughter-sheep into diverging chains of doubling and

substitution that lead progressively to Melanie and to the novel-ending dog.

Describing the victims as “black-faced Persians,” he points to Melanie (“Melàni: the dark one”), and to the clothes she wears (“dressed from top to toe in black, with a little black woolen cap”); moreover, remarking that the sheep “do not own themselves, do not own their lives”, David echoes his assertion that Melanie “does not own herself” (123, 18). However, in a second chain of association, the sheep are linked to Melanie’s canine substitutes. At a loss for how to rescue the sheep, David contemplates “pen[ning] them up in the dog cages” (18, 26, 126, 206).

Of course, when David asserts that Melanie Isaacs “does not own herself,” he adds, “perhaps he does not own himself either” (18). But this is part of David’s belief that his responsibilities are evacuated whenever he is ravished by a woman’s beauty. Indeed, when David later refuses to excuse Melanie’s absences from class, citing his professorial “responsibilities”, he notes that Melanie “does not dignify the word with a reply” (35). In general, David is skeptical of the notion of taking responsibility. But in his cynicism he embraces the opposite extreme, concluding that “the source of his impulses is dark to him” (33). In this sense, David becomes like Abraham, abandoning responsibility to his child when ravished by the all-consuming voice of God.

Indeed, David is linked to Abraham in numerous ways. If the literal meaning of Abraham is “exalted father” or “my exalted father,” this is the role assumed by David in the relationship with Melanie. One morning, David comforts Melanie as she sobs in Lucy’s childhood bed, the place he chose for her to sleep. “There, there,” he says, nearly murmuring, “Tell Daddy what is wrong” (26). Later, when Melanie’s father (“the other father, the real one”) comes looking for Professor Lurie in the

corridors of the university, David “says without thinking,” “Here I am” (6-7, 37). The phrase is one that Abraham utters three times in Genesis 22, responding to God, to the angel, and to Isaac as well (v. 1, 7, 11). Moreover, the word “intervenes” punctuates all of *Disgrace* (53, 130, 145, 173), ringing popular retellings of the Biblical story and indicating David’s stubborn belief that forces more powerful than Melanie are to blame for ending the affair. He says, “Melanie would not have taken such a step by herself [...]. She is too innocent for that, too ignorant of her power” (39). He instead blames Melanie’s father, describing him like the Wizard of Oz, concealed behind a screen: “He, the little man in the ill-fitting suit, must be behind it” (39). Finally, Coetzee alludes to the multiplication and dissemination of Abraham’s descendants when David wonders whether “old men” like himself should indeed father future generations (190). David concludes it “unnatural” to “broadcast [...] old seed, tired seed, seed that does not quicken” (190). Lucy agrees, encouraging David in his struggle to abandon his characteristic paternalism. She says, “You cannot be a father for ever” (161).

In addition to the binding of Isaac, another episode concerning Abraham’s paternity and Isaac’s very life is encrypted in *Disgrace* in the catastrophic attack on Lucy’s farm. This time, David plays the role of Abraham in relation to Sarah, his wife. Whereas Abraham and Sarah dissimulate their relations when dwelling among the Egyptians and the Philistines, posing as siblings and not as husband and wife (Gen 12:9-20, Gen 20), David and his daughter, Lucy, find themselves living not as father and daughter, flesh and blood, but as a stereotypical married couple. David remarks, “As inexorably as if they were man and wife, he and she are being driven apart [...].

Their very quarrels have become like the bickerings of a married couple, trapped together with nowhere else to go” (134).

In Genesis 18, God visits Abraham and Sarah in the guise of three strangers. Abraham rushes frantically to show the strangers hospitality, offering scarce water for washing their feet, asking Sarah to prepare bread, and selecting the choicest calf from his herd to be dressed by a manservant (v. 4-7). After a sumptuous meal, the strangers inform Abraham that Sarah will have a son. Sarah, eavesdropping, laughs at the prospect of conception, saying, “After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” (v. 12). The immaterial gift of improbable conception does reach Sarah, transported by the strangers’ words. Thus, even as Abraham’s paternity is assured, his conjugal authority is compromised, as Sarah, standing at the opening of her tent, hears the strangers’ intimate promise and makes her audible laughter in exchange. The attack on Lucy’s farm accentuates these libidinal undercurrents, giving more room, or greater hospitality, to the suggestion of sexual ravishment, seizure of wealth, and circumvention of conjugal authority in the Biblical narrative.

Gift-bearing marauders, the divine visitors arrive in *Disgrace* on what David calls a “day of testing” (94). David and Lucy are walking with the dogs. When three men approach with “long strides” from over the horizon, David and Lucy offer them “a nod, a greeting,” without expecting or inviting them to stop (98). The strangers request hospitality themselves. Asking to use Lucy’s “telephone”, they open a line into ethereal alterity. When Lucy asks, “Why must you telephone?”, they mention “an accident,” “a baby” (92). Lucy lets them in, first locking the dogs in the kennels and instructing David to stay outside. They rape her (an event unseen), ignoring David’s

plea from outside the house to “Take everything. Just leave my daughter alone” (94). When their work inside is done, the strangers use Lucy’s rifle to slaughter the dogs in the kennels, eliminating Lucy’s defense system in an amplifying remembrance of Abraham’s slaughter of a calf from his herd. The ice cream they devour in Lucy’s kitchen before leaving may even recall the “butter and milk” with which Abraham and Sarah regale their guests (96). But despite the exploitative nature of the strangers’ passage, it bears the ambivalent status of a *pharmakon*, as David implies when describing the probable rapist as “strikingly handsome” (92). In this expression, spoken before the rape, David presciently fuses the extreme violence of the “strike” to the chance of beauty for Lucy’s child. There are other glimpses of the brighter life Lucy envisions when, deciding to go through with the pregnancy, she “determine[s] to be a good mother” (). In the early morning, before the strangers arrive, Lucy admires the auspicious, “lucky” geese that visit her each year (88). The same morning, chiding her father, “Lucy laughs” (91), ringing Sarah’s laughter at the notion of having a child after menopause (Gen 18.9-15).

Two events in Coetzee’s novel, the attack on the farm, and the sacrifice of Driepoot, stun us in a first reading, and always retain their frame of incongruity. But regarded as encryptions of Genesis 18 and 22, these events can surprise us again: they become rewritings of ancient material, and of ancient surprises, no less. One word that does not surface often in the patterns of Biblical allusion in *Disgrace* is “sacrifice”. Lucy uses it once in the sense of self-sacrifice, but David detects an intention to sacrifice him. Lucy says, “I must have peace around me. I am prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace” (208). David demands, “And

am I part of what you are willing to sacrifice?” Shrugging, Lucy replies, “I didn’t say it, you did.” David shoots back, “Then I’ll pack my bags.” Here, David activates a chain of “packing” metaphors that figure two modalities of sacrifice in the novel: being sacked – like the dead dogs, wrapped in black plastic bags – and being sent packing, like the Biblical scapegoat loaded with iniquities and expelled into the wilderness. David, repeatedly sent packing, projects this condition onto lower-ranking others that, in some cases, he quite literally “packs.” Soon after telling Lucy that he will “pack his bags”, David takes refuge in the clinic with the three-legged dog, and turns again to his outlandish opera (215). Not without an air of resignation, David foresees having to “fold [Driepoot] up and pack him away in his bag” (219-220).¹²

Another possible trajectory is traced in David’s interaction with Driepoot. When David takes refuge in the clinic, Driepoot invites David into an absurd and unpredictable musical routine of call and response, nudging him toward a greater acceptance of humility and humiliation. In the clinic, David works on his opera, strumming his banjo and humming the very limited lyrics that he writes. Driepoot, enchanted by the music, “smacks its lips and seems on the point of singing too” (215). In the beginning, David is inclined to allow Driepoot to “loose its own lament” between the strophes that he composes. He wonders, “Would he dare do that: bring a dog into the piece [...]?” (215). Ultimately, he says no, which compels us to ask David’s frequent question: why? One answer lies in David’s emblem and most enduring flaw: the burnt and slow-healing ear.

During the attack on Lucy's home, the intruders use household alcohol to set David on fire. He goes to the hospital with burns on his scalp, face, and eye, but he notes, "[T]he flange of his right ear" is the only part of him "that actually caught fire" (106). Eventually, David reaches a point where "[only] the ear still needs daily attention" (141). When David sacrifices the dog that wants to sing, and that wants David to sing, David fails to attend to the ear, as Coetzee indicates through the mirroring of events: the hospital incinerator where the dogs are "burnt up" presumably sits on the grounds of "Settlers Hospital," where David was treated for his wounded ear and promptly "discharged" (220, 116). When David returns to the periphery of the hospital, where he feeds the dogs into the incinerator, he may transfer his burn-wounds to the dogs, while also stubbornly keeping them raw. The incinerator signifies the perpetuation of David's deafness to others: it is a realm of silence where David nourishes his preference for the eye, noting a sign "in three languages" and scrutinizing the activities of the laborers, whose "sodality" he does not wish to join (145). Before determining to sacrifice Driepoot, to "wheel the bag into the flames and see that it is burn, burnt up," David even represses a thought of the untrained ear (219, my emphasis). He wonders, "Is it too late to educate the eye?" (218).

Following David to the incinerator can be obscurely gratifying. Perhaps it makes us feel that lives are being concluded properly, even sublimely, without residue. David is magnetized by dog-work but has difficulty listening to Lucy, and answering her call to recognize the fullness of her world. In a number of conversations and arguments with David, Lucy struggles to convince him that she is — like him, like all others — at the center of an entire world (198). She affirms, "I have a life of my own,

just as important to me as yours is to you” (198). Hinting that the problem lies with her father’s burnt ear, she writes in a letter, “You are not listening to me. ... I am not the person you know” (161). Listening to Lucy, and gradually knowing her, would lack the possibility of perfection and completion in dog-work, a weekly cycle of incineration and sweeping clean. Like poetic interpretation in Derrida’s essay, the relationship with Lucy presents David with the trial of an encounter, of an open-ended test on the borders of the sacrificial paradigm.

In “Great, Glowing Vault,” Celan protracts the ram’s killing to a point of infinite deferral. The singular animal is bodied forth infinitely, allowing Derrida to register its refusal to submit generously to sacrifice. In Coetzee’s novel, idealized representations of the “lamb to the slaughter” do appear in the final moments, in a scene of closure that corresponds to the sudden appearance and burning-up of the ram in the Biblical story. Almost as soon as Driepoot appears, he surrenders trustingly to David, tolerating David’s embrace and crossing the threshold to oblivion “like a lamb” (220). The novel as a whole, however, questions the exaggerated pliability of Driepoot, who “would die for [David], he knows” (215). Coetzee troubles the deflection of ordinary perishing onto idealized images of the animal, and gestures toward a non-absolute alternative to sacrifice in an other-directed ethics of listening and response.

In the encounter with alterity, there remains the risk of sacrificing the other’s enunciation in order to protect one’s “naked” ear (*Disgrace* 120). Derrida inscribes this condition in the catachretic figure of the “wounded mouth.” For a short period, David hangs upon the other’s speaking wound. When he hums the music to his opera,

feeling the blood hammering in his throat, Driepoot licks his lips and almost sings or howls (215). In Derrida's words, both sustain an animal alertness that,

keeps attention forever in suspense, breathless, that is to say, keeps it alive, alert, vigilant, ready to embark on a wholly other path, to open itself up to whatever may come, listening faithfully, giving ear, to that other speech. (146)

But in the breathless suspension of sacrifice, one doesn't remain passive, but rather attempts to countersign the vulnerable elocution of the other. David merely hums, but he should have brought himself to sing to Driepoot, who "sits up, cocks its head, listens", and seems ready to sing in return (215). Derrida continues, speaking about poetry,

Even when one recognizes — and this is my case — that on the side of the poem there is a wounded mouth, speaking, one still always risks suturing it, closing it. Hence it is the duty of the reader-interpreter to write while letting the other speak, or so as to let the other speak. It is this that I also call, as I was saying a moment ago, countersigning. ... One writes some other thing, but that is in order to try to let the other sign: it is the other who writes, the other who signs. (167)

In *Disgrace*, Lucy might be the one to best represent this art of countersigning. After the attack, David finds Lucy "taking in the carnage of the dog-pens" in an impossibly faint, radically transfigured iteration of the sacrifice of Isaac (97). Lucy attends to "one dog" that remains alive with a gunshot wound in its throat. The dog's agony, its very wounded mouth, appeals to Lucy, almost from beyond the limit of the world.

The dog with the throat-wound is somehow still breathing. She bends over it, speaks to it. Faintly it wags its tail. (97)

Bending, speaking, breathing with and for the other, Lucy creates peace for a dog whose life is seeping out. David learns from Lucy and performs the same work for the dogs in the clinic. However, *this* moment of “carrying the other” is shattered in a tragicomic intervention of the angel of the Lord. David comes wailing: “Lucy!” causing her to look up with a frown (97).¹ Is it proof that his ear still needs daily attention? Isn’t it Lucy who has been listening faithfully, giving ear, to that other speech?

ENDNOTES

1. “Rams” belongs to a larger constellation of contemporaneous material, including a brief preface to the volume *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* (9-11). See also Derrida’s interview with Évelyne Grossman, “The Truth that Wounds,” as well as Derrida’s eulogy address for Hans-Georg Gadamer, entitled, “*Comme il avait raison! Mon Cicérone Hans-Georg Gadamer.*”

² See Derrida’s essay, “Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce.” Coetzee seems to respond to “Ulysses Gramophone” in *Elizabeth Costello*, in Costello’s recorded interview about Joyce’s character, Molly Bloom. See *Elizabeth Costello* 9-15. Mark Sanders, while not highlighting the Derridean “yes” in David’s affirmation, makes a fascinating argument about the novel’s final phrase, “Yes, I am giving him up”. Though “giving up” belongs to a category of verbs that David terms “perfective” (including “seal off”, “burn up”, and “finish off”), the verb’s “progressive” form, “I am giving,” implies suspension, process, and non-completion.

³ Biblical citations are from the *King James Version*.

⁴ My translation. Derrida’s words are, “*la mort, la mort elle-même, s’il y en a, ne laisse aucune place, pas la moindre chance, ni au remplacement ni à la survie du seul et unique monde . . .*” “Avant-propos,” *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*.

⁵ My translation of Derrida’s phrase, “*‘Dieu’ veut dire: la mort peut mettre fin à un monde, elle ne saurait signifier la fin du monde.*”

⁶ See Nancy Jay. According to Jay, groups that sacrifice are often acutely concerned with father-son lineages, including the cultic lineages of legitimate priests.

On the other hand, sacrifice is almost never performed by women (with the exception of aged women and virgins, in some cases) (152, note 2). The rites, Jay argues, overcome the role of “childbearing women” in the reproduction of society, affirming a more essential “male intergenerational continuity” through sacrifice, a bloody demonstration of “birth done better” (xxiv). In *Disgrace*, Coetzee inscribes the classic opposition, which Jay explores, between pure, male, sacrificial blood, and the contaminating blood of women (though all blood is regulated and potentially dangerous). When David muses that “the blood of life is leaving his body,” he compares himself to a “clean” sacrificial animal whose blood must be drained into the ground (see Gen 9:4, Deut 15:23, 1 Sam 14:32). And yet, David rejects affiliation with the blood of women, glossing “blood-matters” as “a woman’s burden, women’s preserve” (104). While glamorizing his own sacrifice, he fixates uncomfortably upon “sanitary napkins” (180), Lucy’s “staleness, unwashedness” (125), Lucy’s blood-stained mattress (121), and all that falls under “menstruation, childbirth, violation and its aftermath” (104).

⁷ The blessing reads, “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (v. 16-18).

⁸ To the series Celan-Derrida-Coetzee, in which the Genesis story is reopened with a focus on the ram, one could add Caravaggio’s two oil paintings of the sacrifice

of Isaac (c. 1600). Particularly in the painting referred to as the “Princeton version,” Caravaggio presents the ram as a dog-like partner to the intervening angel. Hélène Cixous also brings the animal presence in the *Akedah* into relief, identifying the donkey as Abraham’s confidant. See “Writing blind: conversation with the donkey.” Dominick LaCapra argues that Derrida elides the sacrificial animal, and the question of victimization more broadly, in his reading of Genesis in *The Gift of Death*, where he focuses instead upon Abraham’s impossible position between imperatives (the absolute imperative to obey God, and the ethical imperative to preserve the life of his son). However, when Derrida returns to Genesis 22 in his later essay, “Rams”, he focuses on the animal as a key problem, a shift in focus that highlights the problem of victimization both in the Genesis story and in a broader theoretical tendency to valorize sacrifice or sacrificial qualities (182-183).

⁹ Here is the passage in full; Melanie and David have dined at an expensive waterfront restaurant.

It has begun to rain: sheets of water waver across the empty bay.
“Shall we leave?” he says.

He takes her back to his house. On the living-room floor, to the sound of rain pattering against the windows, he makes love to her. Her body is clear, simple, in its way perfect; though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable, so pleasurable that from its climax he tumbles into blank oblivion.

When he comes back the rain has stopped. The girl is lying beneath him, her eyes closed, her hands slack above her head, a slight frown on

her face. His own hands are under her coarse-knit sweater, on her breasts. Her tights and panties lie in a tangle on the floor; his trousers are around his ankles. *After the storm*, he thinks: straight out of George Grosz.

Averting her face, she frees herself, gathers her things, leaves the room. In a few minutes, she is back, dressed. "I must go," she whispers. He makes no effort to detain her.

He awakes the next morning in a profound state of well-being, which does not go away. (19-20)

¹⁰. Rembrandt's painting is available at *Rembrandt: The Complete Works*, <http://www.rembrandtonline.org/>.

¹¹. Lucy and Soraya (with her "honey-brown body") are especially linked to Lolita in her adult and pubescent instars (1); but Melanie is as well, appearing on the threshold of her apartment in Lolita's "sloppy felt slippers" (*Lolita* 269; *Disgrace* 24). To give just one example, Lucy's corpulent, asthmatic bulldog (Katy), resembles the dog of Lolita, "heavy and old," who "loped alongside [H.H.'s] car like a fat dolphin," but was "too heavy and old" to keep up (*Lolita* 280). This image helps H.H. complete his picture of Lolita metamorphosed, like Lucy, into an unlovely but endearing (and "milk"-skinned) mother-to-be.

¹². David never considers destroying the pages of his opera, but this represents an unexplored trajectory in Coetzee's storyline, one that wends its way through another novel by Nabokov. In *Pale Fire*, John Shade performs a weekly ritual in which he admits creative failures but also covers his traces. As Nabokov's delirious

narrator informs us, Shade “crafted verse on index cards but destroyed drafts the moment he ceased to need them” (9). One “brilliant morning,” the narrator watches Shade, “burning a whole stack” of his index cards “in the pale fire of the incinerator before which he stood with bent head like an official mourner among the wind-borne black butterflies of that backyard auto-da-fé” (9). However, Shade “saved” “twelve” draft-cards out of “a sneaking fondness for” them (9), as David feels “a particular fondness” for Driepoot, the twenty-fourth dog, and must decide whether to “save him for another week” (215, 219). David’s very name may connect him to Nabokov’s “pale fire” and to Shade’s ritual of self-immolation. By a single alphabetic step, *Lurie* becomes *lurid*. The adjective is contradictory: it means both pale and glowing, like pale fire, like the dim fires of the hospital incinerator on the horizon (150), and like David’s personality: “his temperament, though intense, has never been passionate” (2); his style in bed is “lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest” (3).

¹³ There is another iteration of the angel’s interruption just prior to David’s sacrifice of Driepoot, which is in turn interrupted by the end of the novel in Coetzee’s self-conscious authorial coup. Lucy is bent over “at work among the flowers,” surrounded by bees “in their seventh heaven” (217); David, clearing his throat, calls Lucy’s name “loudly” and prompts her to look up – this time with a smile. Even at this bright moment, a sinister lining is present: there is mention of the truck that David uses to take the dogs to the site of cremation (211), and there is also Katy, a placid ram-dog like Caravaggio’s, who “raises her head” then comes to sniff David’s shoes, perhaps sensing his movements around the clinic and the incinerator. Katy is in fact

the only dog that the attackers spare when they shoot the dogs in the kennels. David tells a neighbor that he and Lucy lost “the dogs, of course, all but one” (115). David may therefore exceed the programmatic spirit of the attackers when he kills the last dog, Driepoot, telling Ben Shaw that there is “one more” (220). As the twenty-fourth dog, Driepoot is, like Katy, the seventh dog (110), precariously marked for the ritual metering of time.

REFERENCES

- Attridge, Derek. "Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Novel* 34.1 (2000). 98-121.
- Barnard, Rita. "J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and the South African Pastoral." *Contemporary Literature* 44.2 (2003). 199-224.
- Coetzee, J.M. *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.
- . *Disgrace*. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.
- . *Elizabeth Costello*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Cooper, Pamela. "Metamorphosis and Sexuality: Reading the Strange Passions of *Disgrace*." *Research In African Literatures* 36.4 (2005). 22-39.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce." *Acts of Literature*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 253-309.
- . "Avant-propos." *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*. Paris: Galilée, 2003. 9-11.
- . "Comme il avait raison! Mon Cicérone Hans-Georg Gadamer." « *Il y aura ce jour...* », à la mémoire de Jacques Derrida. Ed. G. Leroux, C. Lévesque and G. Michaud. Montréal: À l'impossible, 2005. 53-56.
- . "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue – Between Two Infinities, the Poem." Trans. Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski. *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Ed. Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

---. "The Truth That Wounds: From an Interview." Trans. Thomas Dutoit.

Sovereignties

in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan. Ed. Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

LaCapra, Dominick. *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.

Jay, Nancy. *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Pale Fire*. Berkeley: Berkeley Medallion Books, 1962.

---. *The Annotated Lolita*. Ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Sanders, Mark. "Disgrace." *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 4.3 (2002). 363-373.

Shepard, Paul. *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human*. Covelo, CA: Shearwater Books, 1996.

CHAPTER 2

The Matter of Difference: Michelet's Literary Entomology and the Poetics of The Cut

This chapter begins with two quotations, one from Roland Barthes on the "universal" notion of blood in the works of Jules Michelet, and another from the zoologist André Duméril, whose comments on entomology prefigure Michelet's sympathetic reading of insects, a class of living creatures who possess a strange sort of cut without blood.

[F]or Michelet, blood is not at all a sealed biological element, strictly belonging to this or that person who possesses his blood as he might possess eyes or legs. It is a cosmic element, a unique and homogeneous substance which traverses all bodies, without losing, in this accidental individuation, anything of its universality. Itself a transformation of the earth (of bread and of the fruits that we eat), it has the immensity of an element.

Michelet par lui-même (1965)

Il est évident que le mot Insecte, en latin *insectum*, vient par syncope *d'intersectum*, entrecoupé, et que ces noms sont eux-mêmes la traduction littérale du mot grec *entomon*, qui exprime la même idée. Cette étymologie rappelle la conformation la plus générale des animaux qu'on nomme insectes ; car leur corps est composé de petites parties distinctes, qui forment autant d'anneaux ou de

segments, articulés les uns sur les autres de manière à représenter autant d'intersections.

Considérations générales sur la classe des insectes (1823)

In 1954, Roland Barthes published a short book on Jules Michelet in which he describes the historian as engendering "*un monde sans couture*": a world without cutting, sewing, or the seam. Michelet, Barthes seems to argue, envisioned a world or world-fabric in which no link was missing.

In order to explore this fabric, which he refers to as *le lisse*, Barthes navigates the four volumes of natural history that Michelet published between 1856-1868 (*L'oiseau, L'insecte, La mer, La montagne*). These were no simple compendia of species, their anatomies, habitats and behaviors. In the view of Edward Kaplan, they advanced the historian's larger project of elevating the people by glorifying their past. The proto-evolutionary, "transformationalist" theory of change developed by Michelet in his analyses of animals recapitulated his vision of a French nation evolving toward perfection (21-40).

Like his friend Etienne Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, Michelet rejected the Biblically-influenced, "catastrophist" view of time (a view that set the Earth's age at only several thousand years) and embraced a notion of "transformation" positing gradual transitions in morphologies and environments across long-term, "geological time." Michelet situated the values of individualism, rational thought, and freedom as the end-points of this gradual evolutionary development, both in humans and in the natural world. Although many creatures would stagnate or fail, all of them, even corals and jellyfish, strove in

Michelet's view to gain greater autonomous motility and the primitive lights of intellect or mind.¹ "*Tout se délie par un effort constant*" (*La mer* 122).

While developing these moral scientific theories, Michelet's volumes of natural history also attempted an exuberant exploration of self.² Embracing the first person (*je* in addition to *nous*), they were autobiographically-framed contemplations that approached nature as a succession of intimate scenes, scenes that displayed the obsessive metaphors of Michelet's imagination. The scenes of Michelet, his incandescent, "moving" tableaux, are a wash of images, narrative structures, and relationships that Michelet has developed innumerable times before. Whether his object is historical, political, geological, moral, or zoological (difficult and overlapping distinctions, as Michelet is recognized for enriching the scope of what could be considered properly "historical"), these scenes were often infused, as Roland Barthes points out, with the fluid substances of water, blood, mucus, or milk, "solutions" that allowed the many directions of Michelet's project to flow together as one, from the personal to the national to the world-historical, from the consideration of lowest nature to the analysis of social milieus and human peoples that were all included in a boundless community. Seemingly indivisible, the flowing substances of water, blood, mucus, and milk coursed throughout nature, and not just in the warm-blooded bodies of humans and other mammals. In Michelet's very confessional and perhaps proto-Freudian view, these liquid materials provided all existence with a lasting contact with "the mother," a contact that Michelet sought personally and explicitly in his turn to natural history, even when entering the alienating realms of insect or deep-water life. She, mother nature, *terra mater*, source of life-blood and life-milk, was sustained by Michelet as a kind of primordial source, as something that was flowing,

unchanging, and always there, and for this reason ultimately passive or inert. As Barthes suggests in his glossary, the matrix of associations between blood, water, mother, and earth as an idealized and eroticized womb is particularly dense in *The Sea*, a work whose French title, *La mer*, clearly bears the classic oedipal homonymy. One of Barthes's glosses upon *La mer* brings out the romantic and erotic hydrology that Michelet engenders, as well as the readerly pleasure of discovering it. Barthes repeats Michelet's gesture, signaled by Kaplan, of integrating the human subject, or something akin to the phenomenology of spiritual development, into a transformationalist picture of gradual historical time.

Or, décrire ces passages, c'est comme les caresser. Aller de l'eau molle, visqueuse, ni fluide, ni formée, au poisson transparent qui semble naître d'elle, c'est allonger sa main sur *une absence de couture* et s'étendre soi-même tout au long de ce lisse idéal. Aussi, dans cette instabilité de la matière, si délicieuse à Michelet, une substance est privilégiée : l'eau. L'eau peut supporter les mille états intermédiaires de la matière : le clair, le cristallin, le transparent, le fuyant, le gélatineux, le visqueux, le blanchâtre, le grouillant, l'arrondi, l'élastique, toutes les dialectiques sont possibles entre l'eau et l'homme. Mais ce n'est pas tout : par son pouvoir de liaison, elle est aussi l'élément mythique des fécondations, c'est-à-dire que l'homogène qu'elle propose est un espace-durée, à la fois substance et avenir. Michelet a souvent parlé du monde-Poisson et il l'a toujours associé au monde-Femme. Ces deux mondes sont pour lui ceux de la génération spontanée (à laquelle il croyait fermement) et de la

parthénogénèse. Entendez que l'eau est l'archétype de toutes les liaisons, et qu'ici l'homogène fuse, il produit la vie : l'eau engendre la peau, c'est au fond la même nappe. (31-32, mon emphase)

With the mention of *monde-poisson* and *monde-femme*, Barthes hints another Micheletian thematic obsession, that of feminine embodiment in its smooth and fluid aspects, not excluding fluid elements (such as menstrual emissions) that are traditionally censored and which exert a violently arousing force upon Michelet, as his personal letters and journals seem to show (Barthes 141-149). Indeed, a certain feminine corporeality (often reduced or expanded to its protean potential in water, milk, or blood) is so important in Michelet that it can seem surprising that he did not write a separate volume on the mammal, a zoological class that takes its name from the female, from the breast-bearing, milk-giving mother. What Michelet referred to as his "books of nature" were limited to four volumes, *L'oiseau* (1856), *L'insecte* (1858), *La mer* (1861), and *La montagne* (1868). Arguably, the "missing" mammalian volumes could be *L'amour*, published in 1859, or *La femme*, in 1860. (These volumes, put forth like *Le peuple* as popular tracts or brochures, are remarkable for their positive figuration of feminine embodiment, including the cycle of menstruation, within the rhythms and the praxis of a robust and satisfying marriage.) But if "the mammal" is absent from Michelet's treatments of nature, a certain complex of mammalian values is clearly nonetheless present throughout. Whether Michelet is discussing beetles, birds, or even geology, mammals are alluded to by way of comparison; they are the furry, warm-blooded, feminine creatures who give live birth, who nourish their young from the breast, and who take the time to rear their helpless offspring. These are the qualities that give mammals their status as higher animals.

Indeed, Michelet sustains this term, this hierarchical category of the "higher animal." And yet, because he attempts to dismantle or dissolve all hierarchies in nature, he demonstrates that non-mammalian life-forms, such as insects, birds, corals, and even landscapes, are not inferior to mammals, but rather, their equals, their strange and disparate sisters. In nature, in zoology, all is breast, sustenance, warmth and continuity. Species and living systems in general are in essence *mammifère*, to cite this incredible word that literally refers to bearing milk, and which echoes and is echoed in the almost pre-linguistic enunciation of *maman*. To some extent it is this mammalian fascination that Barthes is pointing to when describing Michelet's universe as one without severance or lack.

Barthes is undeniably correct that a longing for the connection with the mother is evinced in Michelet's writings and in the natural history volumes in particular. Barthes points to the passage in *La montagne* in which Michelet, remembering his submersion in the mud baths of Acqui, Italy, idealizes the seemingly embryonic state he attained. During the harrowing months following the coronation of Napoleon III (Michelet had refused to sign the oath of allegiance required of civil servants in the Second Empire and had lost his posts at the Collège de France and the National Archives), he longed for a personal sequence of experiences that would lead to being reborn. In a fractured emotional state he conceptualizes the therapeutic mud baths of 1854 as dialectic rituals of immergence, submergence, and emergence that would heal him from the shock of the *coup d'état*, the loss of his livelihood, and his own recent writing of the history of *La terreur*. In *La montagne*, mud becomes mother, matter becomes *mater*, as Michelet enters the mud baths of Acqui. "*Je la sentais très bien, caressante et compatissante, réchauffant*

son enfant blessé. Du dehors ? Au dedans aussi. Car elle me pénétrait de ses esprits vivifiants, m'entraînait et se mêlait à moi, m'insinuait son âme. L'identification devenait complète entre nous. Je ne me distinguais plus d'elle" (114, cited in Barthes 43-44).

These images, these prolonged ecstatic and melancholic notes in Michelet's natural historical writings, are part of what inspire Roland Barthes to foreground *le lisse* not only in the texts themselves, but also in his own manner of critical response. Barthes glosses these Micheletian passages in a language of echoes; he goes with the grain of Michelet, even disappearing in Michelet in a book that is elliptically entitled, *Michelet par lui-même*. Submerged in Michelet's *œuvre*, Barthes seems to be saying, "*Je ne me distinguais plus d'elle.*" This itself can generate the impression of the smooth.

Without neglecting this entire chorus of unifying inclinations in Michelet, I want to put forth the idea that the tome entitled *L'insecte* deserves to be distinguished from the others, precisely in its difficult relation to the continuous or the perfectly smooth. In the entomological volume, the matter of "the discontinuous" migrates to the heart of Michelet's concerns, invading his process of envisioning nature. Despite the renewed labor of assimilating and rehabilitating the inharmonious elements in nature (of which there are many in the insect world), Michelet must sometimes concede to the male-coded work of differentiation and disavowal, but without departing from the bounds of the "feminine" domain of nature in general. He (I put the subject pronoun in invisible inverted commas) must admit at times that insects are utterly different from the mammals and mothers that are his Heimlich and his usual measure of comparison. As a zoological genre, insects lack the feminized metonymies of milk, flesh, skin, and blood and are defined instead by things like exoskeletons, coverings, silks, veils, threads, leaf-like

layers, and other thin materials that break off and adhere, that meet and depart in cruxes and folds. Insects are demarcated in a fundamental way, and in the material of their name (*insect*: “cut into sections”) by their anatomical divisions (the segmented body, the molt, the detachable part) and by the temporal ruptures they undergo (the stages of metamorphosis, the ephemeral life span, and the spacing between insect generations). Insects figure the intervals, seams, and hidden pockets within the universal fabric of *terra mater*.

Linda Orr, confirming that a “vision of harmony has often been ascribed to Michelet,” acknowledges the ruptures in this unity created by the examination of the insect (44). “[I]t is true,” she writes, “that to guard against the disturbance of any great discontinuity, he insisted on discovering the links between forms. He forced himself to find explanations for any deviation: if not through science, then through the imagination. Certain discoveries in *L'insecte*, however, gravely challenged the certainty of a homogenous, or *lisse*, view of organic development” (44). To develop Orr’s idea of a certain fertile rupture, I approach the insect as a modality of “the cut” competing with the apparent primacy of milk and blood, these substances that unite all nature in a manner that privileges mammals and man. Then, I want to suggest that Michelet’s difficult negotiation with the insect, and with the separations, gaps, and missing links that characterize the insect realm, lead him into a strange and dark place in his thinking. Unexpectedly, the poet of continuity, who is also in a sense the poet of kindness, is led to justify and valorize the necessity of “the cut” in terms of its cleansing and renovating sacrificial functions. The turn to entomology suggests that the cut, including the cut from the mother, is as undeniable as it is awesome and necessary; true fertility, true creation,

comes from an intervention in the maternal elements, in the alluring/horrifying primitive flow.

The “primacy” of the mammalian

“La nature, on commence par l’aimer sans la connaître, sans la bien voir, en réalisant dans les choses un amour qui se fond ailleurs” (132). The initial love referred to in these words by Gaston Bachelard is of course the love of the mother, or what Orr thinks of as a “prenatal eroticism” in Michelet (Orr 50-51, 80-82).⁴ Animal species are elevated (and made erotic) to the extent that they exemplify prolonged gestation, live birth in the mother’s presence, breast-feeding, newborn helplessness and the need for maternal care. Michelet’s insistence upon these maternal or mammalian features is perhaps the strongest when recognizable “mothers” are absent, for example, in fish, which are known cast their eggs and sperm into the minimally hospitable expanse of the sea. Michelet works against this harsh “reality” of life in the sea by comparing *la mer* to *la mère* and the fish to an embryo. The fish is, “[P]rotégé uniquement par sa fluidité gluante, par le mucus exubérant qui l’entoure, et qui, peu à peu, se fixe en écailles élastiques. Molle cuirasse qui prête et plie, qui cède sans céder tout à fait” [...] “[L]e poisson garde encore l’apparence embryonnaire” (106-7). Neoteny—the retention of natal traits into adulthood—is ambivalent, however, and presented by Michelet as a necessary trade-off. The fish never attains the personhood that enables complex relationships in higher animals, and yet, he is a happy creature, hence the expression that Michelet cites, *“heureux comme un poisson dans l’eau”* (109). And while the corporeal boundaries of the fish are imperfect, “he” can better sense and relish the m/other through

his skin ("*On est plus vulnérable, bien plus capable de jouir, de souffrir*") (239).

Retaining this embryonic corporeality is impossible when animal species make the birth-like transition out of *la mer*. Exposure to the atmosphere—which is sharp, cold, and biting, in Michelet’s system of antitheses—solidifies species as they evolve. When animals move onto land, venturing further and further from the sea, they essentially devolve again into crustaceans, forming a desensitizing (but necessary) shell.

The bird’s egg is a point of special consternation for Michelet because it seems to encapsulate the regrettable severance that occurs as life evolves into new forms on land. Michelet begins his book on The Bird (a book that contains many insects) with a strange series of avian/ovarian interrogations. Does “the egg” allow bird-mothers to “externalize” gestation and birth—to finish with their labor before term? How can the bird be considered a “higher animal” when its offspring begins life in a rigid prison outside the mother’s body? This “premature” foreclosure of embryonic sensuality threatens to weigh down the genre of birds as a whole. For in nature, “*la diversité de la destinée tient surtout à la mère. Elle agit et prévoit, elle aime plus ou moins ; elle est plus ou moins mère. Plus elle l’est, plus l’être monte ; chaque degré dans l’existence dépend du degré de l’amour*” (*L’oiseau* 3). How does a bird-infant receive maternal love—and ascend as a species—when faced with the prophylactic barrier of the eggshell?

Michelet assures himself that the higher mother of Mother Nature facilitates mothering in birds as in every form of life. "*La nature s’ingénie dans l’idée fixe de caresser l’enfant, de le prendre et de l’approcher*" (*La mer* 122). Through her genius, and through Michelet’s own rhetorical work of rehabilitation and reversal, the egg, the bird’s congenital flaw, becomes an unexpected advantage. During incubation, as the egg turns

and turns, it wears away the mother's stomach-feathers, exposing a patch of her skin. Through the egg, because of the egg, the embryo is already inching a little closer to its home. The downy under-feathers chafed away from the mother's stomach (and ripped out by the mother's beak) can also line the nest around the egg, expanding the mother's body into a broader cradle with the infant nestled at its center. The female, with her wound of self-sacrifice ("*une pierre pressée si longtemps sur le cœur, sur la chair, souvent la chair vive !*"), can remain in contact with her egg thanks to her mate, a dynamic bird who comes and goes and moves on her behalf ("*Elle ne peut quitter. Le père y suppléera*") (4-5). The mother cannot fly off because she's extended herself into the nest, enlarging her pregnancy and extending her gestation in the greater body of the home. "[L]a maison, c'est la personne même, sa forme et son effort le plus immédiate ; je dirais sa souffrance" (209). The mother-bird's paralysis, though painful, is required by the menace of another form of immobility, even of amputation, as the slightest exposure of eggshell to the outside air could result in the loss of a leg or a wing for the embryonic chick inside ("*tout point refroidi serait pour le petit un membre mort*") (210). But far from becoming stunted, the bird perfects the mothering spirit that elevates a species in the chain of existence. Never literally fed at the breast, the embryonic bird is itself consumed, rapturously eaten by the breast as a whole. The egg becomes "*un océan tout entier ... où flotte le bien-aimé du ciel.*" (8). The chick's umbilical attachment is total. In the egg, it is suspended by a hammock of little attachments.

Il flotte, ne craignez le naufrage; les plus délicats ligaments le tiennent suspendu : les heurts, les chocs, lui sont sauvés. Il nage tout doucement dans ce tiède élément, comme il fera dans l'air. Sécurité profonde, état

parfait au sein d'une habitation nourrissante ! et combien supérieure à toute allaitement ! (8)

When the hatchling emerges, it enters an uncanny phase of independence without severance that further elevates the status of the bird. The contact between mother and chick is now frenetically doubled in a kind of *frottement* that generates more immanence, more heat, while remaining free of any irritation.

Tandis que le petit quadrupède, habillé dès son premier jour, rampe, marche déjà, le jeune oiseau (surtout dans les espèces supérieures) gît sans duvet, immobile sur le dos. C'est non-seulement en le couvant, mais en le frottant soigneusement, que la mère entretient, suscite la chaleur. (4-5)

Michelet is clearly less enchanted by the nesting habits of the flamingo, the long-legged, flightless bird that can "walk away" from her "home" at any time. "*Dans les oiseaux maçons, le flamant, qui élève la boue en pyramide pour isoler ses œufs de la terre inondée, et les couve debout sur ses longues jambes, se contente d'une œuvre grossière. C'est encore un manœuvre. Le vrai maçon, c'est l'hirondelle qui suspend sa maison aux nôtres*" (212).

Incorporating fissure

Composing works of history and natural history at the same time, often becoming discouraged by the obscurity and the suffering of past human lives, Michelet recoils from one to find comfort in the other.

His meditations upon the intimacy of female creatures and their offspring is perhaps queerly queering, as Barthes argues, a kind of sexual transformationalism, a

vector of becoming-woman. But if the turn to the animal is a way of both repairing and newly (en)gendering the self, it also has the consequence of reifying the feminine sex as a site of return and penetration, as something that is unchanging and ultimately passive (despite its irresistible alluring force). In *La montagne*, when Michelet recalls the daily mud-bath treatments he underwent in the mineral springs of Acqui, he unfolds an entire series of gendered oppositions between feminine sameness and masculine self-identity: between birth/death and the short-lived consciousness in-between; between bodies that are feminine (vast and amorphous and absorbing), and masculine bodies that are partial, solid, and wonderfully-terribly absorbed. Only the masculine element, it appears, is capable of becoming-hybrid, of merging with its other, because, discrete, self-containing, and vulnerable, it can fuse with, and then refuse, the total and unvarying qualities of the primary sex.

Le 20 juin, la terre m'envahit plus haut, jusqu'à l'estomac, me couvrit presque entièrement. Le 21, je disparus. Le visage seul resta libre pour respirer. Je pus m'apercevoir alors du talent de mon ensevelisseur. Il était sculpteur habile dans le genre égyptien. Je me vis (sauf le visage) tout entier fort bien moulé dans ce funèbre vêtement. Je pouvais me croire déjà habitant du sombre royaume.

Déguisement étrange. Rien cependant qui doive étonner fort. Ne serai-je pas ainsi en terre dans quelque temps, dans bien peu d'années sans doute ? De cette tombe à l'autre faible est la différence. Notre berceau, la terre, où naquit notre race, n'est-elle pas aussi un berceau pour renaître ?
Espérons-le. Nous sommes en bonne main.

Je ne sentis d'abord qu'un bien-être indistinct. État voisin du rêve. Après plusieurs épreuves, j'y démêlai des états successifs, qui différaient entre eux. Au premier quart d'heure, quiétude. La pensée, libre encore, s'examinait. Je revins sur moi-même, mon mal, son origine. Je n'accusai que moi, et ma volonté mal réglée, l'excès de cet effort pour revivre à moi seul la vie du genre humain. Les morts avec qui si longtemps je conversai, m'attirent, me voudraient sur l'autre rivage. Nature me tient encore, me veut sur celui-ci.

Dans le second quart d'heure, sa puissance augmentait. L'idée disparaissait dans mon absorption profonde. La seule idée qui me restait, c'était Terra mater. Je la sentais très-bien, caressant et compatissant, réchauffant son enfant blessé. Du dehors ? Au dedans aussi. Car, elle pénétrait de ses esprits vivifiants, m'entraînait et se mêlait à moi, m'insinuait son âme. L'identification devenait complète entre nous. Je ne me distinguais plus d'elle.

Au point qu'au dernier quart d'heure, ce qu'elle ne couvrait pas, ce qui me restait libre, le visage, m'était importun. Le corps enseveli était heureux, et c'était moi. Non enterrée, la tête se plaignait, n'était plus moi ; du moins, je l'aurais cru. Si fort était le mariage ! et plus qu'un mariage, entre moi et la Terre ! On aurait dit plutôt échange de nature. J'étais Terre, et elle était homme. Elle avait pris pour elle mon infirmité, mon péché. Moi, en devenant Terre, j'en avais pris la vie, la chaleur, la jeunesse. (114)

Marriage, exchange, fusion: but only if it can be "seen" through the eyes of a valued "me" that remains autonomous and differently alive. "*Je me vis (sauf le visage) tout entier fort bien moulé dans ce funèbre vêtement.*" Indeed, even in emphasizing the merger into oneness, Michelet circumscribes the imperfectly integrated part, brings out troubling fissures and irreducible points of resistance. He notes that a certain "idea" remains during the immersion in the mud, though this idea is tautologically reduced, in essence cancelled out, as the simple incantatory thought of *Terra mater* ("*La seule idée qui me restait, c'était Terra mater*"). "The third", the master of ceremonies (here, the servant-undertaker who mediates the supposedly inexorable process of integration), also shifts in these narratives between presence and elision, between the status of a unique person, and abstraction into the elements of myth ("*mon ensevelisseur ... sculpteur habile dans le genre égyptien*"). These fissures and mediations compromise the moment of return, but are necessary, in the end, for re-launching and prolonging its pursuit. In other words, for preserving the (masculine) agency and the free movement, however indecisive, towards, away from, and around a mother-object that enables (but is deprived of) the adventure of self-estrangement. Like the "annoyance" or the "strangeness" of the un-immersed face ("*le visage ... m'était importun*" ; "*déguisement étrange*"), infinite barriers to full immersion also provide a reassuring difference, preventing our integration into a fatal whole, and facilitating the "return" that is actually desired: the return to the independence of the self. Lionel Gossman has argued that Michelet's hesitations and failures serve as defensive measures against integration with "The One": a thing that is sought after in the way one seeks an archaic nightmare of being devoured. The One becomes the object of an anxiety both to restore it and to fend it off; The One is idealized, but defensively so, as

it gets projected in an improbable future or an irrecoverable past. As Hélène Cixous has said, the best promise of The One is that it remains *pro-mised* (put forward); it is awaited and even pursued, but in this way deferred, held outside the self. "Être soi," exclaims Michelet in a passage on jellyfish in *La mer*, "*être à soi seul un petit monde complet, grande tentation pour tous ! universelle séduction ! belle folie qui fait l'effort et tout le progrès du monde, d'ici bas jusqu'aux étoiles !*" (*La mer* 167-168).

Turning to insects in this context of desire for regeneration and contact with The One, Michelet again attempts to elevate mothers and to discover scenes of union,⁵ but confronts immediately with ruptures that define the matter and the temporality of the insect as such.

Michelet must confront with a divided corporeality (so incongruous with the texture—or the lack of texture—of the wet and the smooth); with the absence of familial "scenes" in the worlds of insects ("*la mère devant ordinairement mourir en donnant naissance à l'enfant*"); and with the ingenious evacuation of maternal femininity in systems of surrogate motherhood, as reproductive queens—bees or ants—farm out their labor to inferior workers in the comb (*L'insecte* 9). In the cities formed by the "social hymenoptera," the mother-queen is wholly separated, even cloistered from her offspring. As soon as her eggs emerge from her elongated ovipositor, they are collected and shuttled away by leagues of ant-aunts, and then packed or cradled into "sexing" cells that determine the children's role within the hive. Is this the future of a rational humanity, to combine the orphanage with the industrial workshop? In the insect, a mother-monster also appears, reversing the feminine lure into a visceral repulsion, and leaving little possibility for a compromise formation: for something like an oblique, uncertain relation

with the maternal alterity. Certain insect bodies, like the mother-termite with her swollen body and miniscule head, press the Micheletian fantasy of the pregnant body to its intolerable extreme.⁶ The insect immediately reveals itself as an object of ambivalent affectivity. And yet, Michelet works on evincing the same tone of confidence, of hardiness in the face of unpleasant truths, as in the other tomes on nature. He announces on one hand, "*L'insecte est essentiellement une femelle et une mère,*" but concedes with equal frankness to the distance between the insect realm and the higher animals that are connected to humans through our common contact with the mother. "[*L'insecte*] *n'a pas les signes touchantes de la proche parenté qui nous rendent si intéressants les hauts animaux ; il n'a pas le sang, il n'a pas le lait*" (369, 372).

The imperfect homecomings admitted to in the memory of the mud-bath come to the fore in Michelet's analyses of the insect world through an entomological paradox. Without the mediums of amniotic water, viviparous birth and maternal care, the insect can still attain a form of autonomous existence.

Quelque humble que puisse sembler l'apparition de l'insecte, il est d'abord indépendant de l'existence immobile, expectante, de tous ces peuples inférieurs. Il est par lui-même, il se meut, va, vient, avance ou retourne, se détourne à volonté, change de détermination, de direction, selon ses besoins, ses appétits, ses caprices. Il se suffit ; il prévoit, pourvoit, se défend, fait face aux hasards imprévus. (41-42)

Though attaining the status of mammalian creatures, the insect circumvents the normal path of animal evolution with its entrenched bundle of smooth and fluid metaphors. A chapter in *La mer*, entitled "*Fleur de sang,*" establishes the evolutionary thresholds that

the insect seems to work its way around. The chapter opens at the mouth of geothermal vents in the sea floor, places where, “*la mer surabonde de vie à ce point de ne pouvoir, ce semble, équilibrer ses créations. Elle dépasse la vie végétale. Ses enfantements du premier coup vont jusqu’à la vie animée*” (137). Along with anemones, sea-fans, and gorgons, coral (a rocklike and treelike structure covered in soft, “shy” organisms) is put forth as an emblem of these deep aquatic places, of their power to open passageways and to generate transitions. The coral reef, drawing on the warmth of the volcano, extends into shallow waters where one finds, “*animaux [qui] se parent d’un étrange luxe botanique, de livrées splendides d’une flore excentrique et luxuriante*” (137). In Michelet’s voluptuous descriptions of these creatures (part plant and part animal), their vibrant colors, viewed through currents and pulses in the water, suggest some form of translation, of sublimation into “animal” intentionality and desire.

Aux limites des deux règnes, l’esprit, sous ces apparences flottantes d’une fantastique féerie, témoigne de son premier réveil. C’est une aube, c’est une aurore. Par les couleurs éclatantes, les nacres ou les émaux, il dit le songe de la nuit et la pensée du jour qui vient.

Pensée ! Osons-nous dire ce mot ? Non, c’est un songe, un rêve encore, mais qui peu à peu s’éclaircit, comme les rêves du matin. (138)⁷

Because of its treelike, “communitarian” structure, coral exemplifies the problematics of the threshold between vegetable and animal. Is it really, as Michelet claims, the first animal and the first true female? Certain stony corals are known by the astonishing name (which Michelet uses) of *madrépore*, of ambiguous Latin etymology, combining the root for “mother” with either *pore*—pore or passageway—or *porus*, calcareous stone; in other

words, combining "mother" with a base that is open, or rocklike, or both. A *madrépore* reproduces by producing an entire bed, a surrounding skin, of tiny beings that extend beyond her rocky core to attempt the process of becoming-animal. These are the animalized plants, "*molles et tendres créatures qui n'ont pas même de peau*", that reach movingly forward with their "*petits poumons extérieurs*" and "*cheveux mobiles et sensibles*" (145-146). Sketches of animal souls, these little creatures crave freedom, despite their perfect environment; they orient toward the outside of a maternal structure that is itself open, but immobile: an "animated flower" (145). However, the daughters of the *madrépores* are condemned to live as "sisters" rather than brothers and sons; after a time, they perish in their "*lit vivant*", and contribute their remains to the porous, ossified trunk of the maternal body (145).

La pierre ne fut pas simplement la base et l'abri de ce peuple ; elle fut un peuple antérieur, la génération primitive qui, peu à peu supprimée par les jeunes qui venaient dessus, a pris cette consistance. Donc, tout le mouvement d'alors, l'allure de la cité première, sont là visibles et saisissants, d'une vérité flagrante, comme tel détail vivant d'Herculanum ou Pompéi. Mais ici tout s'est fait sans violence et sans catastrophe, par un progrès naturel ; il y a une paix sereine, un attrait singulier de douceur.

(143)

The entire complex of thresholds represented by the life of the reef (plant / animal, flower / flesh, mother / offspring, immobile / mobile, silence / voice) must be reworked as Michelet transitions to the universe of the insect, an "advanced" animal that nonetheless lacks the crucial symbolic variables: not only voice, breath, blood, milk, and soft flesh,

but also the heroic suffering and rending-open of a mother who bears. Is the insect truly "essentially a woman and a mother", or does it discover a detour of speciation around the mother entirely? Female insects present Michelet with a number of unsettling indications. The ovipositor, an extended apparatus on the abdomen for laying eggs, suggests bodily autonomy from the site of birth. A queen bee possesses not only an ovipositor, but also a spermatheca, a gland near the ovaries containing tens of millions of sperm that were all extracted, fatally wrested, from a single male during a single "wedding flight." The weak productivity of the *madrépore* is now competing with a mode of birthing that extracts and wrests the masculine capacities of agency and genuinely creative production. Maurice Maeterlinck, in *La vie de l'abeille* (1901), suggests that the queen bee decides upon the sex of each egg she lays with her ovipositor, suggesting rational detachment ("the queen must possess the power, while laying, of knowing or determining the sex of the egg"). For Maeterlinck, this power is pleasure: he is "inclined to believe" that the queen, this "great amorist, a great voluptuary," "has perfect control over the muscles that open and close the spermatheca on the vagina ... and these muscles are certainly very numerous, complex, and powerful." Maeterlinck also envisions the laying of eggs by the queen bee as an act of same-sex sensuality: when a favorable laying-spot has been reached, the queen "arches her back, bends forward, and introduces the extremity of her long spindle-shaped abdomen into one of the cells. ... During the slight spasm that visibly accompanies the emission of an egg, one of her daughters will often throw her arms around her and appear to be whispering to her, brow pressed to brow and mouth to mouth. But the queen ... takes her time, tranquilly, calmly, wholly absorbed by the mission that would seem amorous delight to her rather than labour." In solitary insects,

both this familial sensuality and the surrogate labor of mothering are absent, as the insect-mother becomes more autonomous still; her scores of eggs are simply deposited on leaves or in carcasses shortly before she dies. The task that Michelet must therefore take on is to dialectically transform the absence or the perversion of maternal signs into some form of unexpected surplus. Without blood, without flesh, the insect must become an animal, attaining the free movement and the confrontation with chance that were beyond the reach of the tiny blooms in the colony of coral. As an "animal", the insect seeks incessantly to find something, to discover what is next, to meet the other, to check something out, to move itself away from all that entraps, detains and dooms one to being done in. (Of course, plants also "move", but their "tropism" demands a slowed-down sense of time). No mere vegetable, the insect even achieves a societal organization and technological genius that are "world-historical", varying according to qualities of the people and the accidents of biogeography, and rising and falling in a tumultuous progression toward the ideal state. As Michelet considers the incredible advancement of insect societies, the warm, liquid blood that enabled progress in mammals must now be symbolically flipped, transvalued into a cause of stagnation that the insect is better off without.

Les grands animaux, qu'ont-ils trouvé ? Rien. Il semble que la chaleur de vie, le sang rouge qui est en eux, offusque leur lumière mentale. [...] Au contraire, le monde insecte, libre du lourd appareil des chairs et de l'ivresse sanguine, plus finement aiguisé, et mû d'une électricité nerveuse, semble un monde effrayant d'esprits (373).

The matter of difference

Although Michelet introduces a different set of astonishing morphologies in each of the natural-historical tomes, his original editions were purely textual, lacking in illustrations. They contained neither the engravings of animal "types" (the docile cow, the mischievous ferret, etc.) presented in the *Compte de Buffon's* mid-eighteenth century *Histoire naturelle des quadrupeds*, nor the scientific drawings (organisms that seem pinned and dissected, though without any signs of the instruments or pins) presented on plates inside the entomological encyclopedia of Duméril (1823), nor the more integrated natural scenes by Hector Giacomelli (illustrator of Alfred de Musset's *Histoire d'un merle blanc*) that appeared in the earliest English translation of *The Insect*, by W.H. Davenport Adams (1875). In Adams's *Insect*, Michelet's translated prose is surrounded by teeming clusters of amiable-looking bugs upon their botanical supports. Like the insects they are, they invade and menace the signature of Michelet. Though so much of the imaginary process in Michelet's natural-historical works is "visual" – his emphasis is on variations in shape and color, on the detail that is revealed beneath the microscope – Michelet's mode of exploration might properly be called "the vision", which illustration, a genre that is perhaps eminently secondary and representational, at least in its common reception, could only flatten, by bringing us back to the stereotyped representations of animals which Michelet's insects sometimes violently displace.

In the four natural history tomes, the process of "envisioning" is not supported by "scientific" illustrations, but it is informed by the observational and experimental methods of science. The author, often with his young wife, Athénaïs Mialaret, operated a microscope to study biological samples; at Fontainebleau or in Switzerland, they also

attempted observational fieldwork, including patient observation and less patient intervention (such as their experimental destruction of an ant hill, or their staged face-offs between insect-super-predators). The tools of science also shaped "envisioning" as Michelet pursues a painless, imagined labor of erotic micro-dissection (undoing the layers of a nymph's swaddling-clothes, or pulling apart the hexagonal cradle of an infant bee). As he rapturously traces the barely perceptible material differences within his many tableaux (outlines of fossilized crustaceans, the uniform scales on a wing) he works to avoid damaging the exquisite structures or causing anything pain. He is the most delicate and in his view the most "feminine" practitioner of entomo-tomy (cutting into the insect). His gesture of dissecting the section, his re-marking of the mark, is almost like countersigning the insect's complex organization of cuts and folds.

To confront seriously with the insect's organization — to treat it as (an) existential matter while dismantling the moral interpretations of previous naturalists — Michelet is obliged to intervene in his own discourse, and to question the poetics of seamless continuity that holds his entire ideological system together. The encounter with a mode of being that is "complicate" (in biology, "folded longitudinally one or several times, as certain leaves or the wings of some insects"), disturbs the agenda of the entire natural-historical series: the establishment of a universal teleology in difference. The insect is a whole new language that can analyze the Micheletian world; it (dis)articulates the *monde sans couture* and the many modalities of universal transfusion (divine intelligence, soul, maternal love, etc.). At the same time, any straightforward, projective or telepathic relation with animality is deferred as Michelet faces the insect, because of the insect's size (the insect cannot behold the human as a whole); because of its startling

lacks (lack of the face and the gaze, of motherhood, skin, soft fur, and blood); and because of its unthinkable communications (via antennae, colors, lights, or meaningful odors) that a future science would have to decode.⁸

The problem of the lack of blood tests Michelet's willingness to go beyond the ideology of the Judeo-Christian universe and the sacrificial connection, fraternal as well as antagonistic, between human life and the life of the beast. Michelet develops this relationship in the previous tone, *L'oiseau*, where he characterizes ornithologists and bird amateurs, himself included, as over-ardent and sometimes undeniably violent. Enthusiasts follow an ambivalent passion, an impure love, when they frequent abusive bird markets, "collect" specimens in the wild, or keep birds captive for their colors or their song, as Michelet did with a *rossignol* (given to him by the famed ornithologist Toussenet) that eventually perished in Michelet's living room. *Ami* and *ennemi* seem to replace one another at many moments in *L'oiseau*, as when Michelet, speaking about woodpeckers and the ardent ornithologists (like Wilson in the United States) that frequently killed them, writes, "*Puisse surtout l'ornithologiste, l'ami des oiseaux, se tenir loin de ces lieux !*" (190). In *La mer*, Michelet characterizes "pity", as well as erotic passion, as evolving almost organically from blood, and it is interesting to track how here, in the insect world, he cultivates pity for creatures that are more likely to draw blood than to produce it. Unlike the vegetal or mineral, the insect is brought into the symbolics of blood, but only by virtue of their lack.⁹ Invertebrates, once known as "white-blooded animals", had been defined chiefly by their lack of flesh and blood. In the early seventeenth century, Randal Cotgrave described "insects" in the *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* as, "small fleshlesse, and bloudlesse vermine," forming a class of "little animals without red

blood, bones or cartilages, furnished with a trunk or else a mouth, opening lengthwise, with eyes which they are incapable of covering, and with lungs which have their openings in the sides." The first thing that defines an insect is the primary menace to blood, the cut. Duméril's opening comments cited at the beginning of this paper embed anatomy into language, physical form into what becomes a spiny concept. In insects, everything points to a deprivation, or at best, to an infelicitous endowment: whether with cuts and openings, or with an equally troubling multiplicity (like the multiple sets of legs that wave uncontrollably in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*).

In English, the word "insect" was first coined by Holland in his 1601 translation of Pliny the Second's *History of the World. Insecta*, Pliny's term, was in turn a *calque* of Aristotle's *entomon*, the Greek etymology suggesting that the insect is something inherently cut-in-to, something segmented or jointed. "As their name indicates," Aristotle writes in *History of Animals*, insects are "animals which have insections either on their under or upper surface, or in both places; they have no separate bony part nor fleshy part, but consist of something intermediate between the two" (5). Pliny reiterates this observation in the eleventh book of the *History*, where he writes, "Many and sundrie sorts there be of Insects... and well may they be called Insecta: by reason of those cuts and divisions, which some have about the necke, others in the breast and belly; and which ... goe round and part the members of the bodie, hanging together only by a little pipe and fistulous conveyance" (310). Pliny also emphasizes the dry and even airless materiality of insect life. He draws the reader into the insect chapter as into an esoteric mystery: "It remaineth now to write of those living creatures, which are the most subtile of all other that Nature hath brought forth: forasmuch as some are of opinion, That they breath not,

ne yet have any blood at all." This peculiar formal constitution, troubling the investment in bodily fluidity in Michelet, prompts the historian to refashion the poetics of seamless continuity that has held his entire cosmic system together. Insects will even enter the values of blood, milk, breath and skin, asserting themselves as the operation of a tiny cut, a cut that is itself fissile, like a node of refraction or dissemination.

Jacques Derrida takes the figure of the insect in a similar direction in his essay "Fourmis", in which he mentions Maeterlinck and cites from both Barthes and Michelet (90-92). In that curious piece, an ant, linguistically transsexual (*un fourmi*), embodies the differences and the ambiguities, to be "read" rather than scientifically "seen", that stem from our languages and from the divisions by which the insect is ordinarily articulated within them (71, 74).

Michelet acknowledges the insect's complicating separations in his entomological study, while nonetheless wanting to figure the insect as an instance of the ultimate uncut. "*L'insecte est essentiellement une femelle et une mère,*" he announces from the first endnote of *L'insecte* (369). He also frequently presents the insect as a figure of the child, a warm and vital orb that may be male or female as long as it is singular. (Even among insects, which often lay eggs by the thousands, Michelet perceives figures of "the only child").¹⁰ In order to domesticate the insect in this way, Michelet must rehabilitate its cut and cutting nature, a nature that is announced immediately in its armature of pincers, saws, spines, stingers and needle-like extensions. Is the insect really a mother and a child, as these have been dreamed of by Michelet? From the beginning of *L'insecte*, the analogy is in doubt. Unlike the mammal, the insect cannot open itself to osmosis or transfusion, whether in the womb, at the breast, or in the simple action of breathing through the

mouth. Michelet himself contrasts mammals and insects on this point. "*Chez ces êtres [les mammifères], comme chez l'homme, le sang va sans cesse à la rencontre de l'air pour se vivifier. Et chez l'insecte, au contraire, des appareils protecteurs qui gardent ses bouches latérales qui sont disposées de manière à pouvoir toujours modérer, tamiser, s'il faut, exclure l'air envahisseur*" (54-55). Even the extremely soft, newborn insect is equipped with cutting devices, with the tiny blade of its own segmentation. Michelet imagines the incredible way in which a silkworm butterfly emerges from its pillow-like cocoon. "*Le papillon du bombyx ... au moment critique, trouve une lime où ? Dans son oeil ! Cet œil à facettes, d'une fine pointe de diamant, lime et coupe sa prison de soie*" (80-81).

In addition to rehabilitating the insect's cut and cutting nature, Michelet is compelled to explain the definitive absence in insects of blood, the poetic substance that enables so many of his logics and narratives to congeal. "*Il n'a pas les signes touchants de la proche parenté qui nous rendent si intéressants les hauts animaux ; il n'a pas le sang, il n'a pas le lait*" (372). These concessions to science go further still: in his experiments with the microscope, he asks whether mammalian blood in fact displays the "touching", connecting qualities he had assumed.

The chapter entitled "*Le microscope*" provides a curiously oblique view of Michelet and his young wife, Athénaïs, experimenting with the microscope to examine a series of slides, including a slide of human blood.

In light of Michelet's preoccupation with the monthly cycles of Athénaïs, it is difficult not to wonder if the "*goutte de sang*" they observe, "*d'un rouge brique peu agréable à la simple vue,*" is not hers, as is probably another object they place under the

microscope: “*une main humaine, blanche et délicate, une main gauche, la plus oisive, d’une personne qui ne fait rien*” (115, 113).

Through the lens of the microscope, Michelet beholds the way in which feminine blood itself, usually constructed as a vector of continuity, in fact contains an elaborate structure of lovely little branches that can neither entirely associate or divide.

[U]ne simple goutte de sang, d’un rouge brique peu agréable à la simple vue, lourde, épaisse, opaque, si vous la regardez, séchée, au verre grossissant, vous offre une délicieuse arborescence rose, avec des fins ramuscules aussi mignons que ceux du corail sont mousses et grossiers”
(115).

This is a sublime revelation, with implications for the affective privilege and the sense of coherence and interconnection accorded foremost to the mammals. If blood itself is internally divided, then the higher animals are drawn into a broader materiality of which the insect is not the other, but the paradigm. Internally patterned and folded, blood can no longer serve as a solution that is absolutely uniting or repellent; it is no longer relating, but related, profoundly crossed-through by the fabric of microscopic difference.

The revelation of difference in blood is a cause both of wonderment and horror for Michelet. In the same chapter, the historian, cerebral and yet acutely attuned to the vicissitudes of his flesh, mentally conjures the microscopic insects, the “*molécules vivantes*”, that infiltrate his very own blood, milk, breath, and water. (6)

Ceux-ci ... m'entourent, me pressent et me servent ou me nuisent. S'ils ne sont pas semblables, ils me sont associés. Fatalement associés. Et je ne

peux pas les fuir : plusieurs vivent dans l'air que j'aspire, que dis-je ? dans mes liquides, au dedans de moi. (112)

Entering the former idea of blood, hatching in the *sein* of maternal nature, insects assert themselves as an imaginary operation of a tiny cut. Blood has been a value (a measure of rhythmic temporality, stigmata of feminine suffering, site of circulatory union) to which Michelet is singularly drawn. In other scenes he obliquely renders of himself and Athénaïs, he becomes a kind of gynecological researcher if not a kind of acolyte, obsessively examining and chronicling the menstrual cycles of his young wife in a part of his journal he calls, *Le journal de sa santé* (354). Through a patient work of taming, of humiliating the other to the point of overcoming her *éducation*, Michelet is able to perform what he characterizes as a formal study of Athénaïs Mialaret. In the *Journal intime*, he recounts telling Athénaïs about the total study he has been subjecting her to.

Assis au jardin anglais, par un joli temps mêlé d'un doux et pâle soleil, avec un tant soit peu de brume, nous causâmes du Journal intime que j'ai écrit ici de toute notre vie et surtout de sa vie physique (l'intérieur de l'extérieur : idées, jouissances, fonctions, ce qu'elle prend, etc., qu'elle rend, enfin tout, même aussi parfois les circonstances atmosphériques qui influent tant sur l'humeur). C'est je crois, la première fois qu'on entre dans un si grand détail. ...

Son esprit élevé qui comprend tout, même les choses les plus contraires à sa nature virginale, ne peut méconnaître l'originalité et l'utilité d'un tel Journal intime, que personne n'a osé faire. Cependant il y a

quelques jours, quand je lui lus quelques mots de ce qui touche sa vie physique, et elle fut troublée. Ce culte de ce qui est d'elle l'effaroucha quelque feu. Je lui dis qu'elle en détruirait plus tard tout ce qu'elle voudrait, mais qu'il fallait au moins attendre que le... Car ce Journal en sera l'inspiration et la lumière. Je ne lui cachais pas (hier) que j'avais noté, précisé, caractérisé chacun de ses mouvements divins que j'ai eus en elle, —tous variés : ou sublimes, ou profonds, ou puissamment magnétiques, avec un sentiment chaud, doux, tendre, charmant du trésor vivant où j'entre. Sa douceur, sa docilité, sa modestie ravissante et ses petites hontes dans mes exigences trop grandes y ajoutent, à certains jours, mes vifs aiguillons. (355-356)¹¹

In *L'Amour* and *La femme*, Michelet transforms his intimate practice of mapping the movements of Athénaïs's body into a set of recommendations for husbands in general. All husbands, he actually claimed, should hygienically aid their wives through the exquisite monthly crisis. Is it possible to determine the ideological charge and the implications for feminism of such a proposition? Is woman liberated from the aura of taboo imposed upon her adult body, or merely fetishized in connection with a substance that remains powerful, sacred, and potentially purifying, because of its link to the untouchable? Many of the radical propositions and recommendations in *La femme* reveal the ambivalent status of Michelet's ideology as both classically patriarchal (even in his generous *élans*: idealization of the mother, refusal to imagine women's criminality, etc.), but also aggressively egalitarian, to the extent that he questions the traditional temperament and roles of the husband, as well as the designation of intellectual spaces

(studies, laboratories, field sites, etc.) as properly masculine domains. Michelet often ventured to feminize himself, to espouse and incorporate disparaged "feminine" qualities. He even described his intellectual process as a feminine labor, as a man's work of conceiving and mothering. In the preface to *L'Oiseau* (just before the chapter he writes on the egg), he wrote,

« Rêves de femme » , dira-t-on. Qu'importe ?

Qu'un cœur de femme soit mêlé à ce livre, je ne vois aucune raison pour repousser ce reproche. Nous l'acceptons comme un éloge. La patience et la douceur, la tendresse et la pitié, la chaleur de l'incubation, ce sont choses qui font, conservent, développent une création vivante. (x)

But here again, Michelet is referring only obliquely to his collaboration with Athénaïs, who did much of the reading, the note taking, and the drafting that preceded *L'oiseau*, but who here is subsumed in a French *nous* that may include her, or may simply index and magnify the author.

On the basis of the classical feminine attributes he names in passages like these (pity, warmth, the supposedly superior patience, endurance, compassion, and sensitivity to slight detail), Michelet demanded the inclusion of women in science and in medicine, claiming that, "*Les leçons d'anatomie sont suivies aux États-Unis par les deux sexes également*" (*La femme* 423, *L'Oiseau*, 284). He clearly embraces the goal of more rights, of more opportunities for women, but also undeniably augments his own authorial and authoritative range when he speaks on behalf of women. By becoming woman, even in his intellectual production, he can allow himself to speak for these *petites*, to accomplish a *coup de parole* that he frequently questioned (especially when he assumed the voices

of the dead), but more frequently justified, often through a notion of complementarity in difference (he said of the bird, “*je parlais pour lui, il chantait pour moi*”) (*L’insecte* v-vi). In *La femme*, Michelet places limits upon the power of married men; but in doing so, he seizes the voice of the lawgiver and addresses himself to husbands alone. “*1° Nul grossesse sans consentement exprès. A elle seule de savoir si elle peut accepter cette chance de mort* [idealization of feminine self-sacrifice?]; *2° On doit à la femme ce respect d’amour de ne pas en faire un instrument passif. Nul plaisir, sinon partagé*” [a way to prepare the total coercion he undertook with virginal Athénaïs?] (458).

Michelet’s strange feminism, in many ways paternalistic, but set forth from a place that would be interpreted as marginal, would inform his encounter with entomological life. The mammal might have yielded more readily to Michelet’s delineation of femininity in nature, as he indicates in the *Journal intime*: “*Je sentis que le livre des mammifères,*” (which he never wrote) “*devait peut-être préparer celui de l’amour humain.*” (326).

The microscope, indispensable to entomological study, ambivalently advances and complicates Michelet’s book of human love. Feminine blood, fascinating and erotic, full of both unifying and phobic associations, is revealed as having a clean, bright, and patterned structure within it. This discovery may increase the scientific-erotic complicity of Athénaïs, by scientifically overturning her aversion to fluid emissions, and the strong sense of the bodily envelope, ingrained in her as in other women over the course of a traditional education. But at the same time, by using the microscope to analyze blood in a new way, Michelet risks breaking the spell of his own enchantment; he risks diminishing blood’s allure as both a unifying substance and an erotic prohibition or taboo. By

transferring feminine blood onto thin glass slides, he parses his concept of woman-as-body, separates the flowing, feeding, unifying sources that threaten us with separation only to promise a seemingly perfect, immersive return. The revelation under the microscope of the structure and complexity within blood, within *le lisse*, troubles the cult (as he calls it) of *Terra mater*: it analyzes the enduring visceral terminology (the liquid, the soft, the unbounded), and enables us to overanalyze, to scientifically demystify, the rituals of contact invented by Michelet (the monthly duties as a gynecological priest, his own regenerative baths in ocean water and mud), with their cyclical progressions of return, renewal, and ecstatic restoration.

At the end of this paper, I attempt to trace one of the paths in *L'insecte* of this new awareness of micro-difference inside the conjugating substance of blood. The problem of the terribly small leads Michelet to explore and to eventually proclaim the positive function of the cut.

The ethics of the unthinkably small

Michelet is often regarded as a totalizing thinker, one who creates and re-creates a coherent universe upon the basis of some ever-shifting conceptual unity, whether Nature, Mother, Justice, or Soul. These concepts of homogeneity serve an ethical purpose for Michelet, and function less by assimilating or effacing otherness, than by dissolving areas of exclusion. Through his democratic pantheism, Michelet is able to make a place in his system not only for the other, but also for the abject other, the bogeyman, the scapegoat, the alien, the insignificant, or the banned. “*Ah rotifère, rotifère !*” he apostrophizes in *La mer*. “*Il ne faut mépriser personne*” (135). Often negotiating with his own fear and

disgust (“*En plusieurs choses, l’insecte nous paraît un être à rebours*”), he undertakes an effort to redeem all life, to magnify the small things within their own scale; this requires seeing strange beings through adjusted eyes, and subjecting the function of minimization itself to an analysis that will disable it.

All creatures, even those that are backwards, teeming, or invisible, are restored, granted a place within the coming community of *Cité*. Natural history becomes a task of rehabilitation. The movement of the *re*, the work of bringing back, is underscored frequently by Michelet: “*Rétablir les âmes obscures et confuses (des êtres simples), dédaignées jusque là, niées..., leur rendre la dignité d’âmes..., les replacer dans le droit fraternel et dans la grand Cité.*” Often, in communitarian logics at large, the gesture of including-fully-within relies upon some occluded, sacrificial gesture of exclusion-fully-without, but the distinction between interior and exterior is deconstructed, to some extent, as Michelet interrogates the socially reinforced drive to maintaining it.

In *Le peuple*, Michelet's famous, semi-autographical work of popular edification, he unfolds a vision of a coming community, an ancient, slow-evolving dream attributed at one point to Virgil, “*avec sa timidité de vierge et ses longs cheveux rustiques.*” “*Il reconstitue, cet homme simple, dans son cœur immense, la belle cité universelle dont n'est exclu rien qui ait vie, tandis que chacun n'y veut faire entrer que les siens*” (187). Michelet is distinguishing between a limited community that permits entry to *semblables*, and a coming community that functions not by granting entry, but instead, by virtue of its ability *to not exclude* (at least within the boundaries of the living: *qui ait vie*). The coming city is an expanding universe, passing through every conceivable circle of belonging, including the periphery of the human being, as Michelet suggests when he

makes a comparison between the *Cité* that does not exclude, and the community of salvation that is based in Christian anthropocentrism. “*Le Dieu-Homme est mort pour l’homme. ... [Les animaux], [n]’ayant point part au salut, ils restent hors la loi chrétienne, comme païens, comme impurs, et trop souvent suspects de connivence ou mauvais principe*” (187). Continuing this reflection, he recurs to an earlier suggestion that Christian anthropocentrism rooted itself in animal prohibitions inherited from the Torah. “*Le Christ, dans l’Évangile, n’a-t-il pas permis aux démons de s’emparer des pourceaux ?*” (187). Addressing this history, and taking on a mission that is not without Christian resonances, Michelet lowers himself (pleading for the animals) in order to redeem non-human beings from their perceived demonism, ugliness, or filth: not only for swine and other animals declared abominable in Judaic texts,¹² but also for microbial life-forms (the inner alien, the living atoms in the bloodstream), the extinct creatures, and even the monstrous and the violent.¹³ Attempting to unravel another Christian inheritance, Michelet questions the organizing metaphors in the Great Chain of Being, the medieval schema in which every species (along with human beings as individuals) plays chutes and ladders on a scale between damnation and salvation, always in relation to the celestial heights that are realm of God and the heavenly host. Though Michelet will, for example, single out “the bird” as the highest and most divine being because its milieu is the sky, he also rehabilitates the blind monsters of the deep, implying that the metaphors of size and height must be emptied of their moral charge. “*La taille de fait rien au droit*”, he declares in *Le peuple* (vii). Or of insects: “*Que sont ces petits des petits ? Rien moins que les constructeurs du globe où nous sommes. De leurs corps, de leurs débris, ils ont préparé le sol qui est sous nos pas*” (*L’insecte* 31).

In attempting this transvaluation of values, this distortion of size in favor of insects and other *petits*, Michelet acknowledges the barrier of visceral prejudice. Like our aversion to the dark and the deep, our anxiety toward insects and other invisibles can seem almost instinctual, justified by its sheer primordial and mysterious force. “*Ce qu'on voit mal inquiète. Provisoirement on le tue.*” But this blind destruction is not simply an impulse or reaction, antithetical to thought; it is in fact supported by systems of rationalization that allow us to deny the Others their fair evaluation or trial. Michelet writes in the introduction to *L'insecte*, “*Nous admettons volontiers cet arrêt définitif d'un rêveur allemand qui tranche leur procès d'un mot : 'Le bon Dieu a fait le monde ; mais le Diable a fait l'insecte' ”* (vii). Although this kind of rationalization (staged here in a courtroom, and couched in German idealism) might be regarded as qualitatively distinct from disgust (one is a “thought process,” and the other a “gut reaction”) the first is merely an alibi for remaining comfortably uncomfortable in the bodily symptom of the second, as Michelet suggests in venturing, “*systèmes du philosophe ... et peur de l'enfant ... peut-être sont la même chose*” (vii).

This belittling of the child (“*peur de l'enfant*”) is rare in Michelet. In *Le peuple*, at a more characteristic moment that again unsettles the basis of phobic exclusion, the world of the child is enlarged. Childhood becomes a site that precedes ingrained prejudice, a fantasy-space of nostalgic return and ideological catharsis for adults who are filled with learned, settled, and now virtually instinctual fears. Looking up-close at the world of the child, Michelet adopts a forgotten perspective, enters into another scale of size in which humans and animals are on the same level. “*C'est l'enfant qui rassure l'homme. Il craint si peu ses animaux qu'il en fait ses camarades. Il donne des feuilles au bœuf, il monte sur*

la chèvre, manie hardiment le chat noir” (*Le peuple*, 188).¹⁴ In exposing taboos (the black cat), inverting the visceral metaphors of species and size, and elevating *les petits* in the tomes of natural history as well, Michelet is working against a scholarly tradition that claims to discover the world while merely reinforcing aversions and their supporting systems of rationalization. André Marie Constant Duméril (professor of anatomy at the prestigious *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle*, and one of Michelet’s sources), begins an 1823 volume on insects with the openly hierarchic question, “*Du rang que les insectes paroissent devoir occuper sur l'échelle des êtres.*” Through a comparative anatomy of the insect's constitution (organs, instruments, nutrition, etc.), Duméril places insects low on the scale of creaturely "perfection", but declares them to be categorically superior the mollusks, shelled creatures that are internally and etymologically "soft". Positioned below the insects on the ladder of existences, the mollusks are "condemned", claims Duméril, to a mode of existence characterized by many of the primordial repulsions (invisibility, creeping movement, and mixture and confusion, including the blurring of sexes). The mollusks are,

animaux condamnés, pour la plupart, à vivre dans l'eau, où ils ne manifestent que de mouvements lents, souvent à peine perceptibles ; privés, par cette circonstance, de plusieurs des organes du sens, quoique munis de nerfs très-distincts ; ayant, en général, le corps très-mou, mais le plus souvent protégé par des coquilles ou des croûtes calcaires ; n'ayant jamais de membres articulés, offrant tantôt un mode de génération semblable à celui des plants, tantôt la triple complication d'un sexe distinct, individuel, ou de deux sexes réunis dans le même individu, soit

comme hermaphrodites, soit comme androgynes : telles sont les
MOLLUSQUES.

Ceux qui suivent ne sont pas beaucoup plus parfaits. ...

It is against this kind of hierarchic analysis that Michelet abolishes the ladder of existences and articulates a new interconnectivity between species that do not all progress toward an idealized form of life (the land-dwelling, the intelligent, the sexually dimorphic, and so on). Perhaps, in creating this new web of relation, Michelet profits from the insect itself, as it becomes the crucial stitch in a new fabric of universal materiality: a fabric that can withhold extreme but non-hierarchic difference, and which complicates, in a network of nuance, movement, and repetition, any radical expulsion of a condensed and simplified alterity.

There is an ode to this living mesh and to the shift in perspective it brings in the chapter "*La pitié*", in a passage about a silkworm anatomist aptly named "Lyonnet" (Lyon was the center of silk production at the time). "*Le détail minutieux de l'infiniment petit lui avait révélé les sources de vive sensibilité qu'à cachées partout la nature. Il l'avait retrouvée la même au plus bas de l'échelle animale, et avait pris le respect de toute existence*" (306). The oxymoron that Michelet pronounces, that of the "infinitely small", captures the surprising magnification of hidden cuts into a fabric of all existence. The tiny organisms at the lowest level of the "animal ladder" do not remain as small as they are, nor do they remain in their place; instead, as the "animal ladder" is infinitely dismantled and spread out, the tiny living monads, incessantly metamorphosing, dying, and consuming one another, are woven into a fabric of the infinitely large. Insects, in their connection with the cut, become the generalized motif of new materiality that

sweeps up and redefines the human being. The cut displaces and differently reanimates everything of human value: Michelet even grants his insects the title of "historians", calling them decomposers and reanimators of past life, banner-carriers of his own solemn task. Displacing us, recasting us, insects even become a rival to the self and a menace to human being in general. The cut, like the maternal oneness, is a dangerous machine to open.

This is Michelet's argument in his chapter on Swammerdam, the seventeenth-century Dutch pioneer of the microscope who discovered that the "king bee" was actually a queen and the "mother" of the entire hive.

Swammerdam's effort to verify not only facts, but also human values, in peering into the *infiniment petit*, is an effort that is somehow cursed. "*Plus il entrait dans le détail, plus il eût voulu monter à la source générale de l'amour et de la vie. Effort impuissant qui le consumait*" (102). The mesh's detail is not only unmalleable, but fundamentally chaotic, characterized by movement and by the war of all against all. Swammerdam "*se recule devant le gouffre de la nature en combat, se dévorant elle-même*" (92). As if a new man were needed to resist dissolution in this Death of God (Swammerdam, seeing into the chaos, "*semble craindre que toutes ses idées, ses croyances, n'en soient ébranlées*"), the microscope offers itself as the prototype of a *homme-machine* ("*C'est un aide, un serviteur qui a des mains pour suppléer les vôtres, des yeux mobiles qui changent pour faire voir l'objet à la grosseur désirable, dans tel détail ou dans l'ensemble*") (93). Swammerdam is the creator but also the martyr of this artificial man; he succumbed to blindness, illness, mysticism, madness, and early death from the excess of revelations it allowed. "[*Le microscope*] *débuta, comme on a vu, par*

tuer son père, Swammerdam” (112). Microscopic study is decadent and destructive; it lures one to isolate oneself in an obsessive search for knowledge, to enter into an intense relationship of reciprocal fixation with one's hallucinatory double. “*On comprend parfaitement l'absorbant attrait qu'il exerce ; on ne peut plus s'en détacher. Me voici donc face à face de mon petit homme en cuivre. Je ne perdis pas un instant pour interroger son oracle*” (112-113). This oracle, like all oracles, is one of fatality: it shows the horrifying or ecstatic abolition of the individual, internally fragmented by *enveloppement successif [et] mouvement prodigieux des êtres qui sont l'un dans l'autre* (106). The metonymic emblems of human exceptionality — the face, feminine beauty, naked skin, the human hand — are subjected to this micro-sacrifice from the inside out. Like blood, the smooth skin of Athénaïs's hand is converted into a cellular geometry that defines and surpasses it. One must get close, deep inside, in order to translate its intricacy into beauty; but at times this effort fails, and we are simply repelled.

Pour la main humaine, le point qu'on en pouvait présenter sous le microscope semblait, même au verre le plus faible, un objet immense, vague, incompréhensible à force de grossièreté. ... [E]lle paraissait un tissu jaunâtre et rosâtre, rude et sec, mal tendu, une sorte de taffetas à réseau, dont chaque maille boursouflait d'une manière inégale. (114)

In an *éclaircissement* at the end of *L'oiseau*, Michelet presses this discomfort into terror, allowing the microscopic web of nuance to capitulate, perhaps too rapidly, into a schismatic gap, into the total absence of connections.

L'ignorant, l'inattentif, croit tout à peu près semblable. Et la science voit que tout diffère, à mesure qu'on apprend à voir. Les diversités apparaissent

; cette nuance imperceptible et à peu près sans valeur, qui d'abord n'empêchait pas de confondre les choses entre elles, se caractérise et devient une différence saillante, une distance considérable d'un objet à l'autre, une lacune, un hiatus, parfois un abîme énorme qui les sépare et les éloigne si bien qu'entre ces choses, d'abord à peu près semblables, parfois tout un monde tiendrait sans pouvoir les rapprocher. (321)

Controlling the cut, incorporating sacrifice

Just as Michelet's admiration for subtle differences capitulates, in his analysis of Swammerdam, into a confrontation with the idea of death, this sense of mortality, this hesitation about the fatal cut, capitulates later into a surprising cultic enthusiasm.

In various sections of the natural history tomes and in corresponding entries in the *Journal*, Michelet explores the "function" of cutting violence within the ecological dynamics of the primeval era. This was a time when the Earth, surrounded in impassible masses of asphyxiating vines, was dominated by ambiguous reptiles (*lézards-poissons*, *dragons-volants*), outsize insects, and now-extinct, ferocious birds: "*monstres de l'âge precedent, horribles avortons de la fange primitive*" (*La mer* 238). Today, certain tropical zones preserve these conditions, Michelet affirms, but only in a diluted and inexact way. "*Les plus chaudes contrées du globe actuel en montrent encore quelque chose, mais dans une pâle décadence*" (*L'oiseau* 130). Still, the southern regions, the disease-ridden zones where our bravest explorers penetrate, can show us something about the danger of a primitive world that is truly uncut. "*Les forêts inextricables de la Guyane et du Brésil, dans leur enchevêtrement, dans leurs chaos de plantes folles qui, sans règle ni mesure,*

enveloppent des arbres géantes, les étouffent, les pourrissent, les enterrent dans les débris, voilà des images imparfaites de ce grand chaos antique” (130).

In his highly fascinated discussion of this primitive time, and of the nauseous chaos and rampant (“crawling”) destruction it contained, the insect’s cut, a violent cut, performs a function of sacrifice, in the specific modalities of the cauterizing flame, the useful poison, or the hygienic program. Within the limited framework of a bygone time, the insect plays the role of a destroying angel who cuts, orders, trims and channels a primordial chaos, and then destroys or diminishes himself to make way the gently continuous universe for which Michelet is better known. The notion that the insect is essentially a female and a mother disappears now in a surprising metamorphosis: the insect that was a “source” of fluid life (providing honey and a nourishing habitat for her infant before she dies) is now the enemy of a life that flows too freely. Confronting the hyperfeminine conditions of the primeval world, conditions that still pervade the morally stagnant *pays chauds* of today, insects, voracious dragonflies and scatophagic beetles, intervened in the environments and prepared them. Through the insect, the cut suddenly emerges not only as appealing (as in the new depiction of blood), but also as necessary in its very violence.

Le point de départ est violent. C’est la guerre immense et nécessaire que fait l’insecte à toute vie morbide ou encombrante qui serait un obstacle à la vie. Guerre terrible, travail d’enfer, qui fait le salut du monde. (367)

Michelet now begins to work against his usual aversion to separation, to shock, and to exposure. He seemingly abandons his more familiar mode of abhorring the cut, often from the imagined perspective of a fetus that is rejected too soon from the womb. “*Qui*

n'a vu avec tristesse," he will ask in La mer, "les lents et pénibles efforts du mollusque sans coquille, qui traîne sur le ventre ? Choquante mais trop fidèle image du fœtus qu'un hasard cruel aurait arraché de la mère, jeté sur le sol sans défense et nu. La triste bête épaisit sa peau autant qu'elle peut. ..." (176).

But if Michelet valorizes the function of the cut in his study of primordial time, it is perhaps only in order to reinstate the primacy, affective if not chronological, of continuity and the same.

As is already apparent in the elevation of the insect's demonic activity (*travail d'enfer*) to an act of world-salvation (*qui fait le salut du monde*), Michelet will convince us that the good cut, the "necessary and immense war," is precisely like protection from it: by pruning away the weedy growth, a lacerating agent, reptile or raptor or insect, with blades or claws or devouring chemicals, can delineate and reveal the sound, symmetrical being inside or underneath. During the primordial era, the insect purged the newborn earth of an excess that would have smothered it. The insect, in the broadest sense of a hygienically amputating function, was needed to perform a cutting that would give direction to teeming life, to what Michelet calls *le trop-plein*—not by destructively killing, but by productively culling. Insects could prepare the vectors of healthy reproduction, ordering and bridling the female forces of inexorable burgeoning. By doing so, they would execute what Michelet deems to be the highest law of nature. Michelet more generally defines this law as that of "*enfantement*", whether in water or in the homogenous mechanism of parthenogenesis or virgin birth (31). Here, however, in the tableau of the primeval ecology, the highest law of nature is identified quite differently by Michelet with sterilization, with the suppression of a morbid fertility (*fécondité*

terrible et malsaine) that threatens life by blending the vegetal with the aquatic (*L'insecte* 134).

La haute loi de la nature, la loi de salut, ... c'est la destruction rapide de tout ce qui est décroissant, languissant, stagnant, donc nuisible, sa purification brûlante par le creuset de la vie. Ce creuset, c'est surtout l'insecte. Il ne faut pas accuser sa furie d'absorption. Qui songe à accuser la flamme? (134)

Three gerund verbs, *décroissant*, *languissant*, et *stagnant*, characterize the strange productivity, anemic but deleterious, of a water unpurified, of a wilderness that is too profoundly virgin. One verb that comes to countervail against these is *émonder* (from the Latin *emundare*, to clean), as in *émonder un arbre (débarrasser un arbre de ses branches mortes ou superflus)*, or *émonder des pistaches*, as in *débarrasser des graines de leur enveloppe*.¹⁵ Wielding this verb, leaning on the right-feeling of this action, Michelet can recuperate and paradoxically "include" the association between insects and the cut. Removing vegetation, devouring dead matter, putting an end to "*l'orgie végétale*", they sculpted out the fertility of the world. Michelet writes,

Par [ses] destructions successives, la production a été, non supprimée, mais contenue, et les espèces équilibrés. De sorte que tous durent et vivent. Plus une espèce est émondée, plus elle est féconde. Déborde-t-elle? à l'instant ce trop-plein est balancé par la fécondité nouvelle qu'elle ajoute à ses destructeurs. (129)

The insect was therefore a scorer, a pruner, a circumciser; he brought an end to an abundance perceived as undesirable or overwhelming. But the insect is also a circular

energy. He is a hurricane that annihilates the excess of the other, and then turns the violence upon himself.

Ce puissant accélérateur du passage universel doit détruire comme le feu. Mais pour qu'il ait l'âpreté d'action qu'exige un tel rôle, il faut que son passage à lui-même soit accéléré, sa vie resserrée, que de l'amour à la mort, et de la mort à l'amour, il tourne en un cercle brûlant. Quelque bref que soit ce cercle, il ne l'accomplit qu'au prix de métamorphoses pénibles qui semblent une série de morts successives. (368)

Given this self-sacrifice, are the insect's cuts in some sense its stigmata, marks of violence that nonetheless speak to a connection with wholeness and renewal? This tension between a radical violence (the insect's destruction, its inherent suffering) and a vision of the smooth or the sound (the world of love he creates) is inseparable from the problem of beginnings for the naturalistic Michelet in general. The violent primeval history that Michelet unfolds is somehow coextant, in his thinking, with the other set of beginnings: the period of union with the mother. Michelet is better known for this œdipal, embryo-erotic fantasy of the past, as when he idealized marsupials as primitive animals in the most positive sense because their joeys could move back into the maternal pouch whenever they pleased (*La mer* 238). The co-existence of these, serene beginnings, with the extremely violent, leads me to a certain thesis about Michelet. Certain difficult transitions in his chronologies — in particular, the passage through original chaos, to the time of the mother — cannot be resolved or smoothed over by visions of *le lisse*. A myth of foundational sacrifice (embedded culturally in a nineteenth-century politics of programmatic hygiene and a medicine of surgical removal), is required to help us get

from there to here: in other words, to enshrine the memory of the prehistoric "coup", but also to believe that it is gone, in the same way that the umbilical attachment is undeniably gone. In other words, to justify and perhaps valorize the present as neither purely chaotic, nor perfectly harmonious. Severance from elements that are purely masculine or feminine — from "paternal", violent destruction on the one hand, and from suffocating "maternal" proximity on the other — is not only attestable but also desirable. The materiality of difference opened by the insect brings the dual promise of autonomy and relation in the present; it cannot give rise to the radically other, or to the radically same.

ENDNOTES

1. In *La mer*, Michelet situates the corals (mazelike animal-plants) in the forward movement of this progressive historical and spiritual striving:

*Les riches arborescences où s'épancha l'activité de ces laborieuses tribus,
les ingénieux labyrinthes qui semblent chercher un fil, ce profond jeu
symbolique de vie végétale et de toute vie, c'est l'effort d'une pensée,
d'une liberté captive, ses tâtonnements timides vers la lumière promise, —
éclair charmant de la jeune âme engagée dans la vie commune, mais qui,
doucement, sans violence, avec grâce, s'en émancipait. (144)*

2. Jean-Henri Fabre, a brilliant French entomologist of the late nineteenth century, defended his style in a manner that recalls the exuberance and the moral impetus of Michelet. Fabre writes in reference to those who "reproached me with my style, which has not the solemnity, nay, better, the dryness of the schools":

[M]y dear insects, if you cannot convince those good people, because you do not carry the weight of tedium, I, in my turn, will say to them: 'You rip up the animal and I study it alive; you turn it into an object of horror and pity, whereas I cause it to be loved; you labor in a torture chamber and dissecting room, I make my observations under the blue sky to the song of the cicadas, you subject cell and protoplasm to chemical tests, I study instinct in its loftiest manifestations; you pry into death, I pry into life. And why should I not complete my thought: the boars have muddied the clear stream; natural history, youth's glorious study, has, by dint of cellular

improvements, become a hateful and repulsive thing. Well, if I write for men of learning, for philosophers, who, one day, will try to some extent to unravel the tough problem of instinct, I write also, I write above all things for the young. I want to make them love the natural history which you make them hate; and that is why, while keeping strictly to the domain of truth, I avoid your scientific prose, which too often, alas seems borrowed from some Iroquois idiom.

3. Melville plays ingeniously with an ironic imagery of male and female genital symbols in *Moby Dick*. After an unsuccessful encounter with the phallic whale, Ahab lies vaginally pummeled in the bottom of a small boat. "Dragged into Stubb's boat with blood-shot, blinded eyes, the white brine caking in his wrinkles; the long tension of Ahab's bodily strength did crack, and helplessly he yielded to his body's doom: for a time, lying all crushed in the bottom of Stubb's boat, like one trodden under foot of herds of elephants. Far inland, nameless wails came from him, as desolate sounds from out ravines" (415). The humorous bodily topography is also apparent but more unsettling in the short diptych, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids."

4. See also the wonderful psychoanalytic readings by Lionel Gossman in "The Go-Between: Jules Michelet, 1798-1874."

5. Michelet indicates the need to see motherhood in the insect world in his popular tract, *La femme*, where he encourages members of *le peuple* to educate their daughters about parenting itself through lessons based on animals. When a young girl is taught about birds, "*La maternité héroïque de l'oiseau, construisant son nid avec tant de peine, subissant pour ses enfants tant d'épreuves si pénibles, la frappera à coup sûr. Et*

ce n'est pas sans respect, une sorte de religion, qu'elle verra chez la fourmi, chez l'abeille, un génie bien autrement artiste encore que la maternité inspire" (139).

6. In *The Soul of the White Ant*, a wonderful work of theoretical entomology by Eugène Marais (written in Afrikaans, and heavily plagiarized by Maurice Maeterlinck, who spoke Flemish, in an essay on termites he wrote after completing *La vie de l'abeille*), Marais dwells at length upon the queen-termite's enormous body and on the comedy of her miniscule live-in husband.

In the beginning of his work, he characterizes the queen as a svelte and modern young woman who is not afraid to make the first move. But after marriage with the king, certain things dramatically change: "Upon the king and queen themselves falls the task of feeding and attending the first children. After the latter are fullgrown they take upon themselves all the work of the community. In the meantime the queen grows larger and fatter by the hour. Her small neat body vanishes in increasing layers of fat until at last it becomes an unsightly wormlike bag of adiposity. And to heighten the tragedy, her mate, in addition to having the blessing of almost the only *dolce far niente* existence known to nature, appears to have discovered the secret of eternal youth. He remains as beautiful and active and young as he was on his wedding flight. But if you look at her, an immovable disgusting worm, it seems impossible to believe that she ever fluttered in the air on fairy wings. We could hardly blame his majesty if he began casting an eye at some other female a little less repellent. If you fear this, however, you will be pleasantly surprised. His attachment to his queen seems to keep pace with her own growth. If you lay open the palace cavity, he rushes round in consternation, but always returns to her side. There is no question of saving his own life in flight. He clings to her gigantic body

and tries to defend it, and if the ruthless attacker so wills, he dies at her side. What a wonderful example of married love and fidelity, which can survive this terrible change of his beloved to a loathsome mass of fat!"

At the conclusion of the work, Marais describes exposing the cell of a queen-termite for the first time in his career. "This was what we saw. The queen was enormously big, and lay with her body pointing east and west, her head towards the west. The king, who of course was only the usual size of the flying termite, was constantly either on her gigantic [body? sic] or in its immediate neighbourhood. There was nothing in his behaviour which could in any way establish his function, although I made detailed notes on his every movement. A large mass of the smaller class of workers was in constant movement on the queen and around her. Immediately in front of the head of the queen was a small opening which served as entrance and exit and which was, of course, far too small for the queen to pass through. Through this small opening two streams of workers were constantly passing, one stream coming in and another going out. We very soon established the fact that these small workers were occupied with three different tasks. ..."

7. In his annotations to the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Antoine Compagnon brings out the intertextuality between Proust's description of asparagus, and Michelet's description of underwater phantasmagoria *La mer*. According to Compagnon, the Proustian narrator imitates Michelet's attention to color as well as his "emphatic idolatry" when he recalls his daily pre-dinner trips into the kitchen at Combray to see what was being prepared: "Je m'arrêtais à voir sur la table, où la fille de cuisine venait de les écosser, les petits pois alignés et nombrés comme des billes vertes dans un

jeu ; mais mon ravissement était devant les asperges, trempées d'outremer et de rose et dont l'épi, finement pignoché de mauve et d'azur, se dégrade insensiblement jusqu'au pied – par des irisations qui ne sont pas de la terre. Il me semblait que ces nuances célestes trahissaient les délicieuses créatures qui s'étaient amusées à se métamorphoser en légumes et qui, à travers le déguisement de leur chair comestible et ferme, laissaient apercevoir en ces couleurs naissantes d'aurore, en ces ébauches d'arc-en-ciel, en cette extinction de soirs bleus, cette essence précieuse que je reconnaissais encore quand, toute la nuit qui suivait un dîner où j'en avais mangé, elles jouaient, dans leurs farces poétiques et grossières comme une féerie de Shakespeare, à changer mon pot de chambre en un vase de parfum" (119).

8. In "*Le microscope: l'insecte a-t-il une physionomie ?*", Michelet endeavors to come face to face with a "neuter" female worker ant that he places on his desk on an expansive sheet of white paper. No matter how he turns the paper, the ant turns away from him, refusing to reveal whether there is any hint of thought or feeling in her tiny face. Finally he etherizes her and inspects her from top to bottom (*L'insecte* 117-124).

9. It's interesting that Giorgio Agamben associates the insect with liquids / libation and with blood in *The Open: Man and Animal*, suggesting a fantasm like Roger Callois's of *vagina dentata* (the tick, like Callois's praying mantis, is a "she"—Kevin Attell preserves this in his translation of *The Open*), as well as a continued relation to the animal through the symbolics of blood and through phobic avoidance / fixation (the teeming, the parasitic, the perforated bodily envelope, etc.).

10. I'm reminded of a surprising image in the eighth Duino Elegy of Rilke:

Oh bliss of the *tiny* creature which remains

forever inside the womb that was its shelter;
joy of the gnat which, still *within*, leaps up
even at its marriage : for everything is womb.

^{11.} Also in the *Journal intime*, Michelet writes of solitude with Athénaïs at Fontainebleau.

Pour la première fois je pus, avec suite et sans distraction, noter tous les accidents de sa vie physique et morale, les innocentes fonctions de ce cher petit corps si pur, les sentiments et les pensées de son âme, tout à la fois si réservée, si transparente. Elle me laissa voir au fond, jusqu'aux lieux de nature et d'enfance (10 août) dont la jeune fille a un peu honte. Enfin, le 25 juillet, elle me fit un abandon tout inattendu de sa volonté. Le 11 août, l'union fut plus forte et plus voulue qu'elle n'a été jamais : les deux y participèrent, elle fut ému jusque au fond.

Véritable enivrement. Ma vie, mon œuvre également en furent enchantées et toutes choses enveloppées de son parfum. Pour la première fois je sentis la force et le bonheur profond de l'absolue unité. A grande peine l'histoire et le devoir m'obligent d'en sortir maintenant. Est-il bien sûr cependant que je puisse penser à autre chose qu'à elle ? (341)

^{12.} It is important to specify that the animals named in the abominations of Leviticus are not to be destroyed (indeed, coming into contact with them, even to exterminate them, would be polluting). Still, the system of avoidance mandated in Leviticus, the codification of disgust toward the teeming animals, might be contrasted to the positive emotional investment in animal proliferation and movement in the

conclusion of the flood narrative, where Yahweh makes a covenant not merely with the community of Israel, but with something like Mankind and with all the living creatures, promising never to flood the Earth again. “Then God said to Noah, 'Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it.' So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another. Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: 'Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done'" (Genesis 8.15-21).

13. Victor Hugo seems to envision a similar goal of criticizing a Christianic cultural inheritance through a differently Christianic vein in "La chouette" (from *Les contemplations*), of which the first segment alludes to the rural tradition, originating in the Middle Ages, of nailing an owl to the door of one's home in order to ward off evil spirits.

Une chouette était sur une porte clouée ;
Larve de l'ombre au toit des hommes échouée.
La nature, qui mêle une âme aux rameaux verts,
Qui remplit tout, et vit, à des degrés divers,

Dans la bête sauvage et la bête de somme,
Toujours en dialogue avec l'esprit de l'homme,
Lui donne à déchiffrer les animaux, qui sont
Ses signes, alphabet formidable et profond ;
Et, sombre, ayant pour mots l'oiseau, le ver, l'insecte,
Parle deux langues : l'une, admirable et correcte,
L'autre, obscur bégaiement. L'éléphant aux pieds lourds,
Le lion, ce grand front de l'ancre, l'aigle, l'ours,
Le taureau, le cheval, le tigre au bond superbe,
Sont le langage altier et splendide, le verbe ;
Et la chauve-souris, le crapaud, le putois,
Le crabe, le hibou, le porc, sont le patois.
Or, j'étais là, pensif, bienveillant, presque tendre,
Épelant ce squelette, et tâchant de comprendre
Ce qu'entre les trois clous où son spectre pendait,
Aux vivants, aux souffrants, au bœuf triste, au baudet,
Disait, hélas ! la pauvre et sinistre chouette,
Du côté noir de l'être informe silhouette.

¹⁴. Jean-Henri Fabre, who made extremely close, unprecedented observations of the insect world around the turn of the century (he is known as “the father of modern entomology”), included autobiographical divagations in his scientific tomes, partly in order to explain his fascination with insects, which was regarded with incomprehension by people from his natal village of Saint-Léons in Aveyron. His intense childhood

interest in animals shaped his earliest conscious encounters with language. In this passage Fabre describes his early studies of an alphabet book. “And now, my precious picture, it is our turn, yours and mine. You began with the sacred beast, the ass, whose name, with a big initial, taught me the letter A. The *boeuf*, the ox, stood for B; the *canard*, the duck, told me about C; the *dindon*, the turkey, gave me the letter D. And so on with the rest. A few compartments, it is true, were lacking in clearness. I had no friendly feeling for the hippopotamus, the kamichi, or horned screamer, and the zebu, who aimed at making me say H, K and Z. Those outlandish beasts, which failed to give the abstract letter the support of a recognized reality, caused me to hesitate for a time over their recalcitrant consonants. No matter: father came to my aid in difficult cases; and I made such rapid progress that, in a few days, I was able to turn in good earnest the pages of my little pigeon book, hitherto so undecipherable. I was initiated; I knew how to spell. My parents marveled. I can explain this unexpected progress today. Those speaking pictures, which brought me amongst my friends the beasts, were in harmony with my instincts. If the animal has not fulfilled all that it promised in so far as I am concerned, I have at least to thank it for teaching me to read. I should have succeeded by other means, I do not doubt, but not so quickly nor so pleasantly. Animals forever!”

15. It is interesting to recall that Jean Valjean, during the long-lost life preceding his imprisonment, was an *émondeur*, a "productive" member of society, because of his regulation of unnecessary growth. This metaphor of pruning a tree perhaps also carries some of the renewing force of the French Revolution, as it may for Michelet, who writes the history of *La terreur* in the years preceding the composition of the first natural history volume (*L'oiseau*). There is an echo of this positive force of pruning and clearing later in

Volume 1 of Hugo's work, when a poor man who gleans a broken branch of apples is identified as the fugitive Jean Valjean himself (286-287).

REFERENCES

- Aristotle. *History of Animals*. 10 vols. Trans. A.L. Peck. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1970.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *L'eau et les rêves*. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1942.
- Barthes, Roland. *Michelet par lui-même*. Paris: Seuil, 1954.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Fourmis." *Lectures de la différence sexuelle*. Paris: Des femmes, 1994. 69-100.
- Fabre, Jean-Henri. *The Life of the Fly; With Which Are Interspersed Some Chapters of Autobiography*. Web. 1 November 2011.
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3422>>
- Gossman, Lionel. "The Go-Between: Jules Michelet, 1798-1874." *MLN*. 89 (1974): 503-541.
- Pliny the Second. *The History of the World*. Trans. Philemon Holland. London: Adam Filip, 1601. Web. 10 September 2011.
<penelope.uchicago.edu/holland/index.html>
- Hugo, Victor. "La chouette." *Les contemplations*. 149-152. Paris: Gallimard, 1973.
- . *Les misérables*. 3 vols. Ed. Yves Gohin. Paris: Gallimard, 1973.
- Kaplan, Edward K. *Michelet's Poetic Vision: A Romantic Philosophy of Nature, Man & Woman*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977.
- Maeterlinck, Maurice. *The Life of the Bee*. Trans. Alfred Sutro. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1928. Web. 13 November 2011.
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4511>>

Marais, Eugène. *The Soul of the White Ant*. Trans. Winifred de Kok. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1937. Web. 13 November 2011.

<<http://www.soilandhealth.org/03sov/0302hsted/0302homested.html>>

Michelet, Jules. *L'insecte*. 3rd ed. Paris: Hachette, 1859.

---. *La mer*. Paris: Hachette, 1861.

---. *L'oiseau*. 7th ed. Hachette, 1861.

Orr, Linda. *Nature, History, and Language*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1976.

Proust, Marcel. *Du côté de chez Swann*. Paris: Gallimard, 1987.

CHAPTER 3

Becoming Zoö-Curious: Reading Sexual Differences in the Field of Animal Life

In *L'animalité*, Dominique Lestel begins by explaining the impetus to retain such a fraught and problematic term as "animality", a term in which complex relationships (both among animal species and between humans and different animals) are collapsed into the terms of an opposition (humanity versus animality).

L'animalité appartient à cette classe d'idées que nous définissons difficilement avec la rigueur espérée mais dont nous ne pouvons pas légitimement nous passer. La cause de notre malaise est aisément déterminable : l'animalité désigne une classe de créatures vivantes dont se distingue l'humain ; elle ne renvoie pas seulement à une classe d'entités, mais aux relations que celle-ci entretient avec d'autres classes. Or, notre langue, peu habituée à évoquer des relations aussi complexes, contraint parfois le raisonnement à des simplifications rarement heureuses, parfois obscures et rapidement inopérantes. (8)

In a series of premises Lestel puts forth, the relationships unaccounted for in the way the term animality is normally deployed become the new basis for thinking about animality itself. Animality now designates a field between humans and animals in which oppositional relationships and countless other heavily contextualized encounters, commonplaces, fables, and philosophies are opened up. In their diversity, these imaginary configurations suggest that animality, as a generative space of relation, is

integral to the construction of the human being.

—L'animal représente toujours une étrange figure de l'altérité pour l'homme avec qui il développe des relations étonnantes et d'une intensité parfois inattendue.

—L'identité de l'homme en tant qu'homme se joue en grande partie à travers la caractérisation de l'animalité, qui excède largement la définition de l'animal. (11)

One question I would like to develop from within Lestel's new framework is this: what are the ways in which the animal others are gendered, and what kinds of sexes and sexualities do they engender in us? I want to delineate a fertile nexus in contemporary gender and sexuality studies, one that is situated between the thinking of human sexual differences, and the development of a zoological perspective that is scientifically informed, minutely differentiated, and strangely erotic.

This "zoo-curious gender discourse," as I call it, is forming new human bodies and sexualities in an unanticipated way: by unfolding the sexual practices of non-human life-forms, in particular, insects and other invertebrates. Think of Derrida's "Fourmis", an essay that opens up the range of gendered relations in humans through the entomological (and etymological) figure of "*un fourmi*": an ant, in a masculine grammatical form that "comes out" in Derrida's essay for the first time (perhaps) ever in the French language.

In fact, Derrida credits "Hélène" (or the otherness in her) with the invention of *un fourmi*, mentioning an unusual dream "of hers" (if dreams are really ours) in which "*le mot fourmi se masculinise*" (72).

New kinds of diminutive creatures, like "Derrida's" ants or silkworms, suggest

imaginary possibilities for human gender and sexuality by displaying sexual morphologies and behaviors that appear incredibly alien to some, but which correspond in incongruous ways to human sexualities and relational configurations that have been excluded from "legitimate" and legitimizing discourse (or invoked negatively to establish the norm). By unfolding the strangeness of these animals and animalcules, but without reviving a notion of some universal sexual instinct that encompasses plant, animal, and man, gender theorists in the broadest sense of the term have spawned new imaginary matter for multiplying and nuancing human sexual differences, for tracing and complicating the shifting webs of relation that arise and dissolve all around them.

What I hope to delineate is a brand of animal amateurism, erotically attuned, that is engendering the sexes and genders of the human being by turning to our changing representations of animals, precisely where the sexes and sexualities that these animals display are the most surprising and obscure.

The insect is an especially charged figure in this process as its sex is anything but dimorphic. Hermaphroditism in mollusks and androgynomorphy in butterflies; the presence of a third, fourth, or fifth sex (the sterile female worker bee, the monstrous, hyper-fertile termite queen, or the seahorse "father" with the pelvic pouch); the insect mother with the penis-like appendage (her ovipositor); the "penis" on another appendage (like the tentacle of certain octopi), the "vagina" in a head, or the throat, or nowhere at all (the male bed bug pierces the female's exoskeleton in whichever place he can): for many authors, these anomalies in the field of invertebrate life insinuate what Anne Berger calls "the holographic and moving contours of bodies to come, of bodies as they might come" (64). Derrida has put forth many zoomorphic metaphors and figures (hedgehogs, rams,

cats, etc.), but his insects in particular embody and engender sexual differences. They present morphologies and markings that are strangely erotic, yet unclassified by what we take to be definite masculine or feminine sex. In natural historical discourse, entomological anatomies were sometimes termed "imperfect" for the same reasons that others embrace them today: because they refuse the divisions (into male and female, self and not-self, animate and inanimate) that provide the basis for the classificatory systems in which human sexualities are generated and bound up. Insects provide an obscure impression of "sex" without confirming our expectations of what or where sex is, of how "it" must be parceled out. This is perhaps why, in the nineteenth century, the era of the emergence of sex as a scientific discipline and an apparatus of the hermeneutics of self, the field of invertebratology seems to emerge like another stage of sexology, enticing the "amorous entomologist" mentioned in one of Hugo's letters, or the sensual microscopists of Michelet, desiring *chercheurs* in a science that is often surprisingly autobiographic.

Why would the matter of insects entice us, unsettle us and sometimes arouse us? Taken indoors from the outside, rendered suddenly domestic and even pet-like (collected and cared for by amateurs, like the young André Gide, or much later, by a young Derrida), but without losing their disorienting and sometimes stupefying effects, insects provide an origin, an other, a telos, for 'discovering' the sexuality of the human individual *as* continually shifting or metamorphic, a fantasy I've already played with in these comments, but which I hope to contextualize and question in this paper, as part of a broader rethinking of our inherited conceptions of "the animal" (so frequently a figure of sameness, of the lack of difference and change) in the making of uniquely human prisms of *différance*.

A passage, an orgasmic one, from Derrida's diorama of his silkworms provides a first example of the imaginary nexus I am pointing to and takes me into its many implications and echoes.

We would sometimes say the worm [*le ver*], sometimes the caterpillar [*la chenille*]. I would observe the progress of the weaving, of course, but basically without seeing anything. Like the movement of this production, like this becoming-silk of silk I would never have believed natural, as this extraordinary process remained basically invisible, I was above all struck by the impossible embodied in these little creatures in their shoebox. It was not impossible, of course, to distinguish between a head and a tail, and so, virtually, to see the difference between a part and a whole, and to find some sense in the thing, a direction, an orientation. But it was impossible to discern a sex. There was indeed something like a brown mouth but you could not recognize in it the orifice you had to imagine to be at the origin of their silk, this milk become thread, this filament prolonging their body and remaining attached to it for a certain length of time: the extruded saliva of a very fine sperm, shiny, gleaming, the miracle of a feminine ejaculation, which would catch the light and which I drank in with my eyes. But basically without seeing anything. (88-89)

On the cusp of puberty or its cultural recognition (Jacques Derrida has not yet received his veil called the tallith), the twelve-year-old boy encounters a miraculous suspension of ambiguity, of neither male nor female, finished or unfinished, sex or anus or mouth. This time before thirteen years and prior to the bestowal of the tallith is like the brief deferral between birth and the uncovering-bandaging ritual of circumcision, a ritual which, like

the tallith, is invoked many times in the silkworms essay, and which these ambiguous phallic nymphs seem to transmute into an ecstasy of auto-affection without end, at the very end (or opening, or send-off) of an essay that is preoccupied with endings, "landings" (*atterrissage*), and final words. The silkworms provide an erotico-entomological fantasy, "shown" in everything it has to do with the hidden and the shown, the ambiguous and the clearly sexed or marked.

The attention that Derrida brings to differences in his silkworm scene (*le ver* versus *la chenille*, a head from a tail, the non-differentiation of not "seeing anything") can also pose the question of how differences in general, including sexual differences, are brought out or obscured in the human versus the non-human animal.

Along with so many criteria that are used to differentiate between humans and animals (and perhaps in a way that is "prior" to these criteria), Difference itself has been used to "make the difference" between us and the animal others. To give a few examples: the human trajectory is forever incomplete, the rhythms of the animal are fixed; human action is motivated by complex and self-destructive drives, the animal acts only for survival. The entire legacy of man as an exceptional, fallen, alienated, or original creature should direct us to ask how such ideas have been inscribed in discourses in the "Humanities", especially those that have tended to privilege everything that differs, everything that escapes, everything that exceeds or falls short. These rhetorical structures might belong to an inherited project of producing or transforming the Human through the value of Difference itself. Derrida's inclusion of animal figures in his writings *as* figures of sexual difference points to the problem of animal othering or animal sacrifice in the appropriation of the post-structural "value" of differences in the plural. The resistance to

Derrida's animals, their belittling by some, might be symptomatic of our human monopoly on true differences, true ruptures, true *avenirs*. For as long as the animal is excluded from these processes, they bear the gesture of the sacrificial cut within their workings or their weave. The reduction of the animal to sameness may even create the habitat or territory of infinite differences in which the human of the humanities can reside.

The concept of the self-same animal seems impossible to reconcile with the fabric of gaps and differences, but it's a concept that may in fact be required to set "us" and the fabric into motion.

I want to ask whether Humanity can logically be "defined" in terms of "the open", the infinite, the unknown. I also ask whether the repeating structures and modes of inexorable machinery that we project onto insects are as undeniable, in us, as the more desired elements of the excessive and the free. The faraway viewpoint from which we generally look down at insects can be useful, in turning it towards the human, in beginning to trace the repetitions and continuities that are as irreducible as the difference(s) that make and unmake us. Without these structures of limitation, the differences we want to privilege become senseless or inoperative; without an underlying impression of (animal) sameness, difference ceases to "work". Our sometimes phobic condemnations of sameness and repetition can obscure the fact that identity and limitation are as wanted (and often as exaggerated) as the transcendence or undoing that sameness permits. To embrace an abyssal limitation (an untraceable repetition or repetition with a difference), we need a fantasm of (animal) difference without trace.

While I undertake this study, departing from the shoe-box of Derrida, I too am

observing insects through the impossible shifts and ruptures of their life-cycles, raising silkworms (sent in the mail from my dad), and keeping an eye on the eggs deposited in the garden by a Giant Swallowtail butterfly. Inside these orangey eggs a brownish daub is slowly congealing. At an unknown moment some of the eggs will birth a nearly imperceptible worm, the first of several subsequent phases or "instars" that appear to me (the amateur) as diversified as separate species. These caterpillars will soon morph again into a perfect mimicry of avian feces, and later into a little snake with unseeing eye-spots on its head. As the caterpillars molt and change I remain attuned to the sexes of the insect in their incidental manifestations. In July 2011, a gyandromorph butterfly has just hatched in the puparium at London's natural history museum. Half female half male, its sexes are stitched along a nearly perfect line that cuts straight through the butterfly's genitals, or so the news story goes; this reminds me that Vladimir Nabokov engineered a method of deriving the evolutionary connections between species of Lepidoptera by studying and comparing their genitalia, and finally, that the precocious boy-child of *Speak, Memory* possessed a pinned specimen of a gynandromorph butterfly under glass, which a careless nanny sits on and destroys, extinguishing in the childhood paradise a perfectly androgynous creation (127-128).

Why insects? Why the incredibly small? In *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe*, Mary Campbell argues that the emergence of a microscopic visual imaginary through advances in optical technology contained an inherently sensual or erotic aspect, especially when scholars with creative sensibilities adopted the microscope (real and imagined) in opening new imaginary worlds (183-185). To see the insect from up-close or from the inside, with the feelers of the eyes (Hélène

Cixous's formulation in *Savoir*), is to transform something tiny and confused into something luminous and "*charmant*", to cite a favorite entomological descriptor of Michelet. But the insect presents an ambivalent allure. In his own insect tome, Michelet interprets the new potential for seeing the insect, and the uncomfortable awareness of transgression it brings, as causes of the emotional deterioration and the eventual blindness of Jan Swammerdam, the seventeenth-century microscopic innovator from the Netherlands who discovered, among other strange perversions in the "abyss of life" (92), that the supposed "king" of the bees was in reality "a queen and a mother" (as Michelet announces with an irreverent and yet reverent charge) (99). Other social hymenoptera, like ants and termites, also undergo a male-to-female sex change in the modern imaginary that may prepare the appearance of a linguistically transsexual ant (*un fourmi*) in Derrida.

Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian writer who practiced beekeeping for decades of adult life, mentions Swammerdam's discovery, the apiary sex-change, in *La vie des abeilles*. But he also complicates the picture by bringing out an unknown predecessor of Swammerdam, and by enumerating the various tools (including a new, sharp eye for detail) that were turned upon bees through the moments of their gender transformation.

[B]efore Swammerdam a Flemish naturalist named Clutius had arrived at certain important truths, such as the sole maternity of the queen and her possession of the attributes of both sexes, but he had left these unproved. Swammerdam founded the true methods of scientific investigation; he invented the microscope, contrived injections to ward off decay, was the first to dissect the bees, and by the discovery of the ovaries and the oviduct definitely fixed the sex of the queen, hitherto looked upon as a king, and threw the whole political scheme of the hive into most

unexpected light by basing it upon maternity. Finally he produced woodcuts and engravings so perfect that to this day they serve to illustrate many books on apiculture.

With its inherent connection to fine detail (seen in Swammerdam's dissectional practice and perfectly rendered in his replicable woodcuts), this modern entomological micrography pursued by Clutius and Swammerdam, Michelet, Maeterlinck and Derrida, is also significant in that it marks a shift beyond the ancient trope of the "teeming" insect swarm, which Christopher Hollingsworth conceives as a relational structure that organizes distancing, blurring, and belittling (7-11). As Hollingsworth writes, "The word 'insect' implies distance, reduced or negligible importance, absolute difference ... One may similarly define and reduce an entire race or culture" (8). Through what Hollingsworth calls the topos of the Hive, living things are amassed in a way both repellent and alluring, entrancing and unsettling, capable of arresting and arousing the privileged viewer from his safe-unsafe point of vantage. "The Hive's pictorial space is bipolar; its emotional associations follow suit. Community attracts, but also repels. To know a social order as a whole is an act of simplification that extends to all its elements. Yes, to see the whole, the city, the future from afar is to long for it, to wish, as it were, to join the masons raising its walls. However, to see in this way is also to stand apart and above, to be superior" (15). Maeterlinck constructs this potent visual complex, this "cognitive blueprint" that Hollingsworth describes, when leading the reader into a domesticated beehive for an initial view from above. Priming the lurid fascination, the disorienting interpretative ambivalence, Maeterlinck promises to establish new pathways for engaging visually with the bee, no longer through "the swarm", but through the more

tactile and sensual device of something like "the fold." He lifts the lid off a barnyard hive, moving slowly and pumping out a veil of smoke:

The first impression of the novice before whom an observation-hive is opened will be one of some disappointment. He had been told that this little glass case contained an unparalleled activity, an infinite number of wise laws, and a startling amalgam of mystery, experience, genius, calculation, science, of various industries, of certitude and prescience, of intelligent habits and curious feelings and virtues. All that he sees is a confused mass of little reddish groups, somewhat resembling roasted coffee-berries, or bunches of raisins piled against the glass. They look more dead than alive; their movements are slow, incoherent, and incomprehensible. Can these be the wonderful drops of light he had seen but a moment ago, unceasingly flashing and sparkling, as they darted among the pearls and the gold of a thousand wide-open calyces?

...

They appear to be shivering in the darkness, to be numbed, suffocated, so closely are they huddled together; one might fancy they were ailing captives, or queens dethroned, who have had their one moment of glory in the midst of their radiant garden, and are now compelled to return to the shameful squalor of their poor overcrowded home.

Micrographic observation can mitigate the swarm's anxiety by bringing out the lovely complicated patterns "within" the swarm, "beneath" the disordered groupings (things *like* grapes, *like* coffee beans, *like* the overcrowded poor) that muddle our categories and our thought.

A cognitive blueprint like Hollingsworth's "Hive", "the microscope" in its richest sense (connected with patience, careful dissection, the comfort of a work space or a home) brings the contours of the individual bug into focus, and enables us to connect the structure of one bug into broader, legible patterns that intrigue us without disclosing their overall sense or effect.

In the writings of Michelet and Maeterlinck, as perhaps in the case of Freud or Kinsey, microscopic observation also permits us to discover a sex in the insect (Freud worked in a laboratory to determine the sex of eels before he entered psychology; Kinsey completed a doctoral thesis in entomology on gall wasps prior to becoming a human sexuality researcher), but one that remains difficult to truly see, because of the insect's complexity and tiny size, as Derrida remarks in the beginning of "Fourmis": "*d'une fourmi il est bien difficile de voir, sinon de savoir, la différence sexuelle*" (71-72). This seeing, essential even when it becomes impossible, is integral to the "romance" of the insect in the new paradigm. Shortly after alluding to the revelations of Clutius and Swammerdam, Maeterlinck invokes François Huber, a "master and classic of apiarian science" who was blind. A faithful assistant who helps Huber to imagine insects more clearly (while not seeing them at all) is like Athénaïs, the young wife who toiled at the microscope for Michelet, or Hélène Cixous, the "blind friend" of Derrida who couldn't see without the help of glasses and lenses, but who aided Derrida in seeing *un fourmi* for the very first time (over the telephone, it is true) (*Veils* 37, *Fourmis* 71). Maeterlinck relates the story of the blind entomologist after mentioning Réaumur, the scientific colossus and prodigious inventor who engineered an observable beehive made of glass.

Huber was born in Geneva in 1750, and fell blind in his earliest youth. The

experiments of Reaumur interested him; he sought to verify them, and soon becoming passionately absorbed in these researches, eventually, with the assistance of an intelligent and faithful servant, Francois Burnens, devoted his entire life to the study of the bee. In the annals of human suffering and human triumph there is nothing more touching, no lesson more admirable, than the story of this patient collaboration, wherein the one who saw only with immaterial light guided with his spirit the eyes and hands of the other who had the real earthly vision; where he who, as we are assured, had never with his own eyes beheld a comb of honey, was yet able, notwithstanding the veil on his dead eyes that rendered double the veil in which nature enwraps all things, to penetrate the profound secrets of the genius that had made this invisible comb; as though to teach us that no condition in life can warrant our abandoning our desire and search for the truth.

In Nabokov's *Ada*, the delicate labor of raising Lepidoptera in perfectly constructed artificial environments, of illustrating all their instars and doing line drawings of their genitalia is described as a "work of love", putting us far from the phobia and the blinding presence of the swarm (428).

These examples suggest that numerous possible threads feed into a zoophilic fantasy situated around the insect, a fantasy that reverses a phobic orientation, but not without exploring a new and more exquisite poetics of violence (pinning, dissection, and the penetration of seeing). This violence is what obliges the work of patience, discrimination and indecision on the part of the observer, conditions that make microscopic study an eminently "feminine" undertaking, according to Michelet; it is

again a "labor of love", a passion of precise and minor acts of destruction like those performed by Gide in the company of his most robust female cousin, Suzanne, near their family's manor in La Roque around 1880. "*J'étais parvenu à faire partager à Suzanne ma passion pour l'entomologie; du moins me suivait-elle dans mes chasses et ne répugnait-elle pas trop à retourner avec moi bouses et charognes à la recherche de nécrophores, des géotrupes et des staphylins*" (99).

In Gide's account, the childhood passion leads to revelations: "miracles" forming a strong mental image that stays with one, secreting the sense of a secret, like Derrida's memory of silkworms dribbling their fluid threads (*Veils* 87-91). In Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*, an autobiographical work, a number of these strong mental images and almost autistic private activities configure the *volupté* of Gide as a child (reminding us that children often "learn about sex" by watching their animals). André and Suzanne, the boyish *cousine*, are searching for bugs together in La Roque.

En creusant la sciure, on découvrait aussi [des] larves, d'énormes vers blancs semblables aux *turcs* ou larves des hannetons. On découvrait encore d'étranges chapelets ou paquets d'œufs blanchâtres et mous, gros comme des mirabelles, collés les uns aux autres, qui m'intriguaient d'abord étrangement. On ne pouvait briser ces œufs, qui n'avaient à proprement parler pas de coquille, et même avait-on quelque mal à déchirer l'enveloppe souple et parcheminée – d'où s'échappait alors, ô stupeur ! une délicate couleuvre. (100-101)

Does some aspect of the surprise in this passage owe to way in which the revealed object, a phallic form, is gendered, is emphatically softened by the choice of *une couleuvre* over *un serpent*, or by the emphatic foregrounding of the feminine and feminizing adjective

délicate, all within a broader gender-bending context of young love with the vigorous girl-cousin Suzanne? Like in Derrida's entomological memoir, insect sex is discerned without discerning *a* sex; there is an amalgamation of masculine and feminine forms in a new and unprogrammed moment of birth; there is a desire, "innocent", "autistic", and sometimes homoerotic, to tear sex's veil and to *see*.

Derrida seems to formalize these ecstasies in "Fourmis", where the quasi-concept of sexual difference is explored through insect visions akin to those in Gide or Nabokov or Michelet. Derrida even places sexual differences under the sign of the insect in general, making a surprising figurative move that is atypical of philosophy, to say the least.

Why insects, here again?

Inscribed in the very vocables of en-tom-ology, in-sect, as well as arthro-pod ("jointed leg"), the *cuts* of the insect are the factor that conjugates a non-human phenomenon with the seemingly "human" question of sexual difference or differences. To say "sexual" "difference" is already to allude to the cut, to designate a particular category of difference in almost tautological fashion as being segmented or segmenting ("sexual"), as all differences are. Emphasizing this cut and double aspect allows Derrida to shift the dualistic concept of "sexual difference" into the space of plurality, and from the space of the concept into that of "operation" (hear the hint of surgical cutting). Doubling once again, Derrida breaks "operation" down into the complementary / antagonistic movements of "separation" and "reparation"—on one hand an incision, on the other, the suturing that follows—movements that delineate differences, whatever they "are", as if by hewing them and tearing them apart. Like in the entomological poetics, in

the bizarre scenes where the insect's sex is laboriously determined (or sometimes not), the cut and the seam and the ruptures between forms take precedence over the sexes that meet and depart ("Fourmis" 93).

In these explorations of an insect imaginary in "Fourmis," Derrida highlights "the cut" in a context of movement: both are integral to the insect as such. In *The Life of the Bee*, Maeterlinck, too, insists upon the bee's productive hustle and bustle, even where this movement is almost too subtle to be seen. Deep inside the hive, the bee's minute commotion the hive is even more significant, Maeterlinck suggests, than what she achieves by careening through the open air. In the man-made beehive Maeterlinck opens in opening his essay, he shows the inexistence of insect rest.

Repose is unknown to any; and such, for instance, as seem the most torpid, as they hang in dead clusters against the glass, are entrusted with the most mysterious and fatiguing task of all: it is they who secrete and form the wax. Merged together, micro-movement and the cut are what form the sense of an operation in "Fourmis". There is movement and there is the cut from the beginning of the essay, for instance, in one of Derrida's generalizing remarks about conceptions of the ant. "*La fourmi ... , c'est aussi la chose insecte. Insecte hyménoptère, donc, insecte à aile, insecte à hymen, à aile voilée, à aile en forme de voile. Cela grouille et fourmille*" (74).

Movement clearly comes from the characteristics of the ant and the insect in general, but it's also a sort of unquestioned assumption or energy in this Derrida text, an energy that endows the cuts of difference with their inherently unstable or fissile nature (the cutting of the cut). The intersex ants embody movement by criss-crossing one another, by coming and going and even "dancing", to invoke another metaphor that Derrida connects

with sexual differences in *Chorégraphies*. Indeed, the ants dance formidably in the material that Derrida cites from Michelet: "*Plusieurs se fixèrent et s'aimèrent. Le plus grand nombre tournait, tournait sans s'arrêter*" (91). (In La Fontaine's "La cigale et la fourmi", an ant also points to dance, but only in the form of a dismissal; she says to the cicada, "*Vous chantiez ! j'en suis fort aise. Et bien ! dansez maintenant.*" Derrida makes a playful allusion to this opening poem of *Les fables* in his first mention of the ant, referring to the singing and the working of "*les animaux de la fable*") (La Fontaine 3, "Fourmis" 71).

Derrida's entomological bent, as it dances with a more general thinking and imagining of the cut, is a key axis in what I am calling the zoö-curious gender discourse. In the wake of Derrida, the critic Eva Hayward continues to traverse these intersections between the cutting operations of difference, and the strangeness of invertebrate animals. Hayward is a transsexual woman whose allusions to surgical experience remind me of Derrida's transference of "his" cut of circumcision into his writings and into an account of writing in general. Hayward's identifications with certain kinds of animals are also interesting in light of the often negative associations that are made between women and insects (the praying mantis, the spider), between women and nature in general (women and death, women and the sea), and between non-normative sexual practices, and a homophobic concept of bestiality. In "More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixial Flesh and Transspiciated Selves," Hayward ponders the special erotic materiality of starfish. One feature of the starfish—its ability to regenerate a severed limb, or even for the severed "ray" of a starfish to generate a whole new starfish—can embody the ruptures and transfigurations entailed in the stages of so-called sexual "reassignment" surgery (70-72).

The starfish's non-final or regenerative cut is suggestive, Hayward argues, for imagining a metamorphosis of the cut itself in the context of an operation that enables unforeseeable transformation rather than a simple cure (73-76).

Alphonso Lingis might be invoked as another member of this chimerical marriage of queering discourse and zoö-curiosity. Registering of the vital music and movements of humans and animals taking pleasure, Lingis seems to embrace the notion that sex is "animal" in order to recuperate the sensual and corporeal dimensions of intellectual and creative production.

In the present paper, I discuss further incursions made by writers and artists into the zoological imaginary, incursions that are often erotic and difficult to translate or decode. I argue that these texts and performances enable us to analyze the role of "the animal" in the process of constructing human sexes, sexualities and genders, a process that illustrates Lestel's new definition of "animality" as a process of inventing ourselves through a similar and dissimilar other. In addition, and in concert with the aims of post-humanist animal studies, I suggest that a zoö-curious gender discourse illuminates the ways in which the modern *value* of sexual differences in the plural—whether such differences are cast in a light that is positive or negative, in terms of a positive individuality or a negative deviation—has insinuated itself as *le propre de l'homme*. In other words, our notions of sexual and gender differences in the plural, whether manifest in terms of a valorized plurality, or a pathologized perversion, have been configured as a possibility that is specifically human or somehow human-making: as a capacity or gift that places "us" on another order from animals and from nature more broadly. This division in our tree of life—a division curiously situated around differences and Difference

as such—is explored at the end of my essay in my reading of Gide's *Corydon*, an essay that Gide conceived as a homosexual and even feminist manifesto, but which recapitulates many of the phobias it wishes to address by displacing, onto women, the divide between the animal—defined in terms of its sexual *simplicity*—and Man, seen as a creature of Difference because of its inventiveness in culture, in the fine arts and in sex.

Sounding The Zoo-Curious Discourse

The opening of erotic or gendered experience through a voluptuous, microscopic consideration of the teeming creatures is hardly restricted to the contemporary perspectives represented by Derrida or Eva Hayward. In the second part of the nineteenth century, Michelet documented the bodily and sexual habits and events of himself and his young wife in his *Journal* while also studying the obscure details of animal mating rituals and animal bodily transformations. He was especially transfixed by non-human behaviors and morphologies that reflected his own prenatal sexuality. In the tome entitled *The Sea*, Michelet refers to a perfect stage in the evolution of whales when infant cetaceans could move freely in and out of their mother's body, penetrating and withdrawing as often as they pleased. A similar ecstasy attended the infant bee who is freed from her six-sided chamber. In *The Insect*, Michelet writes that the newborn bee is "welcomed by her numerous kinswomen, who stroke and lick her amorously, and bestow upon her a maternal kiss" (822). Michelet also casts a terrified and voyeuristic glance on animal sexual behaviors that he does not associate with his own, such as a certain form of pedophilic practice in the case of male beetles who, discovering female larvae in their swaddling clothes, remove these "nymphs" from their cradles to mate with them before

they are even born. To think of Nabokov's *Lolita*, here is a case where the literal and figural meanings of "nymphet love" converge into a single illustration. Recently, Rosi Braidotti has taken up this thread of insects (with a -cts) or insex (with an x) in *Metamorphoses*, where her emphasis is on the many kinds of non-human "figures" that can provide us with what she calls, "a living map, a transformative account of the self" (3). In one chapter, she seeks to, "approach insects as indicators and figurations of the decentering of anthropocentrism [that] point to post-human sensibilities and sexualities" (149). Braidotti even proposes a spatial term in which to situate many of these queering insect texts and the human experiences they invite: the "women-insects nexus" (150). She says, "Despite their tininess, and because they are embedded in cultural stories and trajectories of feminine transformation, insects figure and initiate a form of becoming that does not erase sexual difference" (157). Finally, it is under the sign of this "becoming" that insects (and many other animals) reveal themselves in *Green Porno* and *Seduce Me*, Isabella Rossellini's series of short films on the sex lives of animals.¹ These filmic productions engender transformations and cross-dressings between human beings and an entire animal simulacra of costumes, puppets, dolls, and models: a whole animal apparatus that calls attention to the artifice of zoological representation at the very moment where the sex lives of animals are "scientifically" enacted.

In the beginning of one piece in the *Green Porno* series, entitled "Noah's Ark", several kinds of iconic mammals are seen parading before the ark by heterosexual pairs. One of the elephants, but not the other, is endowed with a long, roseate-colored penis. Rossellini, standing under an umbrella, asks, "How did Noah do it? How did he manage

¹ All of the short film in the *Green Porno* and *Seduce Me* can be viewed streaming at <http://www.sundancechannel.com/greenporno/video/>

to organize *all* animals into couples?" She rehearses, "As it is written in the Bible, Noah gathered all animals into his ark, in order for them to reproduce and repopulate the earth. One male, and one female. Couples." Cued by this binary word, a hand comes down from the sky and points to a solitary pink thing that is conveying itself into the ship. On the ground behind the elephants, this naked pink organ looks like the pachydermal penis, inexplicably detached. "You!" the pointed finger calls out, "Why are you alone?" A close-up angle transforms the pink thing into a pointed worm: it is a sheath-like costume in which Rossellini herself is enclosed. "I'm an earthworm," it says. "I am a hermaphrodite. I'm both male and female. To reproduce, I can mate with other hermaphrodite, or I can segment my body and clone myself." Satisfied with this account of "sex" in the apparently asexual, the finger now points to a phalloid cluster that is making its way into the ark. "You!" it says, "What's that pile?" The pile, again presenting Rossellini's face, asserts, "We are *crepidula fornicada*. We are all male. To fornicate we form a pile. Then one of us, the bottom, turns into a female." The love-scenes of these gastropods are even more surprising than this, as I discovered through the kind of amateurism—love-research—that the *Green Porno* and *Seduce Me* films inspire. In the words of one naturalist, "One finds [the *crepidula fornicada*] piled up one on another ... Four to eight in a reproducing clump. The top-most is a male and the intermediates show development where more and more testicular tissue is becoming ovarian." The snails are not identified by this naturalist as female and male, but as "becoming ovarian"; to mate, they assemble in differentiated clusters of relative deviation.

Each of these animal stories, these zoophilic encounters in deterritorializing planes, opens up its own pattern of intersections between popular zoologies, the thinking

of human gender and sexuality, and other imaginary strains. How can we tease out the overarching significance? What are the broad strokes of a discourse exploring sexual differences in humans through fantastic and naturalistic representations of animals? It seems apparent that on one hand, images of animals in the disclosed secrecy of their multiple sexes permit a sort of poetic critique of discrete binary genders as they are inscribed into overly rigid, complementary structures of relation. This is Kelly Oliver's wager when she writes, "By considering the multitudes of animal sexes, sexualities, and reproductive practices, perhaps we can expand our ways of thinking about the sexes, sexualities, and reproductive practices of 'man'" (55). For thinkers like Braidotti and Lingis, this consideration of the animal multitudes take the shape of becoming: through the diversity of animal sexes and sexualities, we sensitize our margins and traverse into ecstatic, decentering, or transfiguring relations with oneself and with the other. The zoo-curious gender discourse is, in this perspective, multiplying human stances, "dances", and trajectories, and affirming the roles of curiosity, uncertainty, and imagination in broadening the open space of human sexuality. The animal intervenes as human sexuality is recuperated from the norm, and folded into a process of differentiation and change.

But it is a term like the one I have just employed—"the open space of human sexuality"—which, in the second part of my paper, directs me toward another implication of the zoo-curious gender discourse. I want to argue that our rhetoric of the open space or free movement of human sexual difference(s) often remains wedded to a binary mode of relating ourselves to the difference of the animal.

In other words, some of our most exuberant visions of "sexual differences in the plural" might be sustained by what Elizabeth Grosz calls "animal sex," in her own

allusion to a state of animal captivity that feminine orgasm can escape or transcend. Her essay entitled “Animal Sex” begins with the epigraph, “If there's one thing animals don't need more information on, it's sex. That's because sex holds no mystery [for animals]” (279). Rather than unpack this dogmatic claim, Grosz seems to press it further, asking, “What would mystery mean to an animal” in any case? (279). Her rhetorical question efficiently implies that animal worlds contain no curiosity, no elements of the unknown—in a certain way, no difference. What does this concept “do” for Grosz; why is it presented at the heading of her essay? Because she seeks to liberate feminine sexuality and feminine orgasm from what can be known and appropriated by sexology, this opening specter of the animal as something that can be entirely “understood” seems to function as the basis for elevating an unknowable human phenomenon. By invoking the female praying mantis and her literally voracious sex drive, Grosz enhances her animal specter, preparing a human evasion away from the insect-monster and away from animal sex, this drive to copulate in ways that are specific to the endless species and sexes of animals, and at the same time essentially common to the entire animal realm.

For the turn-of-the-century amateur entomologist and literary critic Rémy de Gourmont, and for some ways for Michelet (who identified a life-force in “Love”), something like this irresistible animal drive to reproduce represented the underlying motivation of all life (including humans and plants), while for others, such as Freud, animal sex became the site of a man-animal divide, a divide between the sexual instincts of animals (satisfied in the resources of their environments, in their interactions with the other), and the sexual drives of man, which get thrown into conflict and transformation by the repressive exigencies of culture.

In the wake of Freud, and also in response to the dualistic concept of male-female sexual difference in French theory and culture, the turn led by Judith Butler to a concept of gender, broadly signifying a continuum of differences among and within human subjects, and associated with agency and the possibility of performance, free play, and production in excess (“gender *must also designate* the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established”), might owe something to the heritage of animal sex, to the inherited construction of sexuality as something that is limiting, constraining, “animal”. Even where accounts of gender do inscribe the workings of limitation, repetition, or the impact of the other, these are often attributed to culture or to discourse, to contexts that are exclusively human. Can human sexuality truly be charted as a site of oppositional difference between animals and humans? In *Undoing Gender*, Butler seems to make room for the presence of the animal in the human being as she underscores certain effects of biology on the formation of human gender. And yet, in her subsequent reflections on human subjectivity, she establishes a range of specifically human limitations that are brought about by our fall into language, culture, and the violent touch of alterity (21-23). A set of limitations “within” the human seems merely to repeat and displace the division between “man” (equated with a freedom that exceeds us), and animal (assimilated with a state of captivity), a division that nonetheless remains in place, “below” the human, as it were, as Butler speaks of two kinds of life, “one that refers to the minimum biological form of living, and another that intervenes at the start, which establishes minimum conditions for a livable life with regard to human life” (39).

Our entire modern discourse of sexual differences in the plural, once perhaps pathologizing, and now often celebratory, risks sustaining the notion that humans alone

can access Difference, whether in terms of differentiated sexualities, singular sexual encounters, experiences, or events, or in the broader sense of an unknown future, individual singularity, or the difficult or fraught relation to alterity. Beyond the many man-animal differences that Derrida and others have invoked, this human monopolization of Difference itself may represent the most intransigent man-animal opposition of them all, in that it underwrites the entire project of opposing all animals, in their supposed sameness, to man as a fallen, incomplete, irreparable, transcendent, or radically exceptional creature.

In *L'Animal que donc je suis*, Derrida questions the idea that humans possess some defining and yet somehow mobilizing "lack" that initiates us into a field of difference proper. Affecting the strangely elite sense of melancholy that often attends this position, Derrida writes, "*Depuis le creux de son manque, un manque éminent, un tout autre manque que celui qu'il prête à l'animal, l'homme instaure ou revendique d'un seul et même coup sa propriété (le propre de l'homme qui a même en propre de n'avoir pas de propre), et sa supériorité sur la vie dite animale*" (40). The contradictory words *son manque* ("his lack": as if something missing could in fact be owned) bear some of the aporetic tension in this classical relationship to a lack that renders us imperfect or incomplete, but yet at the same time belongs to "us", defines "the us" in terms of an absence, a present absence that is present ("a present") to us. The "completely other" lack that Derrida refers to ("*un tout autre manque*") is of course the lack of the animal, or as Derrida quips, the animal's inherent "lack of the lack". In spite of everything that can change in the natural world (even without the influence of humans), and despite the individual differences and the role of chance in leading animals along different paths,

animals are thought to be adequate to their environments, adapted to live without desire for something else, without the impression of free-floating need, without failure, without alienation (including social alienation). One mode of difference that Derrida theorizes—the unforeseeable encounter with the *à venir*—can allow us to think about the ways in which many kinds of beings confront with an uncertainty that requires improvisation, invites the variable of chance, and can become the cause of anxiety or self-destructive "complexes". The rupture, the difference of the *à venir* is not withheld from the animal by Derrida, but neither are his accounts of sameness, for example, auto-affection ("The living is the possibility of auto-affection, of time and delay: what, in self-affection, will have been able to touch itself") (*Veils* 69), or the stabilizing dream of day-to-day, second-to-second "survival", which works across the "delays" that Derrida mentions and sustains us by the sacrifice of the other. The human no more has a monopoly on ruptures than it can deny its need for the repetition, routine, or action by instinct that we so frequently attribute to the animal.

Our game of claiming difference (or the imperfect sameness of repetition with a trace), displays all of its wonderful contradictions when we make a claim on sexual difference, this construct that refers to no "thing" in particular, but which opens a discursive space that has often privileged the rhetoric and the poetics of the cut.

The imagined texture of this space—its web of tiny and mobile cuts—determines the limits of the game we play "within" it, what can and cannot be done. Establishing certain parameters of "legitimate" play when it comes to "sexual" *différance*, Derrida states that we can speak of "trace" without sexual difference (for instance, in the asexual life-form), but that there is, on the other hand, no sexual difference without the difference

of trace, this differentiating mark that always differs from who or what has left it behind. "[I]l ne peut y avoir de différence sexuelle sans trace, et cela ne vaut pas seulement pour « nous », pour le vivant que nous appelons humain" (74-75). By invoking the trace (an animal word, a legible track), Derrida raises the contradiction, the impossible "move", of trying to divide man and animal, and to consolidate our species, using the trace, this radically unintended legibility that stems from all the lines we inscribe. And yet, the trace is the kind of idealized motif of rupture that is marshaled, for us, over against an animal that is assimilated with the imagined territory of "the same". However, placed like a sword at our boundaries, as our boundary, difference with a trace cannot "work"; like an insect "pest" that gnaws at our house, it leads to unexpected breaches between and within the "us" and the them. The quotation marks that Derrida inscribes around the "nous" in the quote above signal the effort at drawing lines around "the us" as well as the porousness and instability that these lines introduce. (The words *le vivant que nous appelons humain* also place virtual quotation marks around "human", the name that is not a true name because we give it to ourselves).

Doubt about dividing lines, and a desire to expand the poetics of difference using all the imaginary resources inherent in a discourse of the cut, directs many of the writers and visionaries I have mentioned to open up a kind of zoo-curious exploration of sexual differences in the plural. Derrida recognizes such a trajectory in his own work when he claims that each of his animal figures is "welcomed at the threshold of sexual difference." This formulation again invokes the *oikos* in an animal context, while figuring sexual difference as a place of "threshold", a site of both opening and "foreclosure." What I'd like to call the "zoo-curious gender discourse" has sought to consider the sexes and

sexualities of *different* animals, and to avoid the commonplaces of the animal, in order to complicate a man-animal binary that has taken the particularly unstable, aporetic form of a divide affecting difference itself. The zoo-curious gender discourse, by "fleshing out" difference through all the diversity of the animal world (even at its manifold margins with the vegetable), refuses to support the two, clearly hierarchic modalities of difference, on one hand the animal otherness (a "difference" from "us") that is captive, static, or predetermined, *especially* in its "reproductive behaviors", and on the other hand a life—human life—that gender or sexuality somehow liberates from the animal, and undoes.

In the next section of my paper, a sense of animal trouble in the theorization of sex leads me to examine some of its possible "origins" in a strange text by one of the zoo-curious authors, André Gide. I want to treat Gide's *Corydon* as a little-known, key event in the construction of ourselves through something like sexual and sexuality differences in the plural. By opening up a gender and sexuality spectrum or something like it (in a French language of *déviaton*—the cutting of the path, or the cutting away from the path), Gide can complicate the line that is drawn between human beings, with their sexual perversions, aberrant desires, and self-engendering choices and leaps, and non-human animals, with their less variable sexual impulses, maneuvers, and displays. The "natural" "deviation" that Gide elaborates, by splitting sexual pleasure away from its primordial aims in reproduction, produces multiple orientations even within the homosexual or the heterosexual. It produces a spectrum of gender and sexual differences defined by permeable and evolving lines. *Corydon*, the male lead of Gide's dialogic treatise, expresses this in an exhortation to an ex-friend:

You must understand that homosexuality, exactly like heterosexuality, includes every degree and shade: from Platonic love to lust, from self-denial to sadism, from healthy joy to morbidity, from simple ardour to all the refinements of vice. Inversion is only a side-line. Moreover, every intermediate stage exists between exclusive homosexuality and exclusive heterosexuality. It is usual, however, to make a clear-cut distinction between normal love and a love which is said to be unnatural. And, for greater simplicity, all the happiness, all the noble or tragic passions, all beauty in thought and deed are ranged on one side, and on the other, heaven knows what foul dregs of love. (31-32)

Delineating many-colored shades within a sequence of different spectrums (the current-day pride symbol of the rainbow comes to mind), *Corydon* also radiates an affective spectrum ranging from enthusiasm to phobic denial. The breadth of his emotional range, the coexistence and the cooperation of extreme poles of affect, is discussed by Michael Lucey in his study of mimesis in *Corydon*, when he states that reading *Corydon* requires "[t]he effort of learning to read phobic texts without reproducing phobia" (70). *Corydon* "should not be read phobically," Lucey cautions, "but rather in a way that watches the relation between homosexuality and homophobia at work in the text and recognizes and resists the possibility of their continuing to work together" (70). "In the course of this effort," he adds, "we may find areas of resistance to phobia within the phobic response itself" (70).

In addition to the "homo"phobia of *Corydon* (in many ways a phobia of "the same"), there is also a profound misogyny in this work that nonetheless does so much for deconstructing binary sexual difference. *Corydon*'s discussions of "natural history" are

particularly misogynistic, suggesting that this combination of topics (the non-human and the past) elicit powerful stereotypes of femininity for Gide/Corydon and for the biologists that Corydon is citing. In the history of nature there are in fact two natures, Corydon will argue: one that is feminine, primordial, and in every way associated with the terrifying monotony of animal sex, and another that is masculine, chronologically second, but morally first, and which gives rise to multiple sexual differences and to the production of difference in general. This second nature, by splitting from the first, is the one that causes the drifting, the warping, and the straying into side-lines that make life elegant and diversified.

All the sexual variation that Corydon insists upon both in humans *and* in certain animals (sexuality is aberrant, disorienting, multiple) is derived from male sexuality alone, whereas female sexuality is associated quite "straightly" with a primitive, almost vegetal mode of "sexual reproduction" that cyclically, mechanically, horrifyingly(-reassuringly) engenders the same.

This gendered ordering within Difference itself (it is again the "difference" of the other versus the "genuine" differentiation of the "us") compromises Corydon's vision of sexual differences in the plural, but perhaps also gives rise to the dazzling extent of their mobile diversity.

What I attempt to conclude, in looking at who or what is sacrificed in *Corydon's* invention of sexual differences in the plural, is that the longed-for opening of all the madness of excessive excess requires, or seems to require, the illusion of a stabilizing line. Sameness, maintained and reinforced on the "other side", is as needed, is as psychically exhilarating and alluring, as the crazy play of differences in "us."

Corydon is another example of the zoo-curious gender discourse. Invoking the sexual choreographies of insects, mammals, microbes, pollen and spores, Gide frames his approach to human sexuality in a fresh exploration of non-human behaviors and morphologies. He also revives the riveting zoological explorations from childhood and their mysterious connections to matters of sexuality. The many animal scenes in *Corydon*, the parades of show-birds strutting their stuff, the pigeon-houses with their queer male lovebirds tending eggs, derive in some way from the wonderful dovecote of Gide's childhood, the locked little house in the privacy of a courtyard where the young André would absorb himself for hours.

The narrator of *Corydon* (less a true character than a literary trope) is a fashionable young bachelor terribly bored of Parisian society. He is tired, he says, of encountering so much uninformed chatter, polemic and hearsay about homosexuals and homosexuality in every place he goes. In the preface to *Corydon* (a set of interviews that the narrator decides to conduct with a "uranist" in the flesh), the narrator alludes to this constant chatter as if needing to present some excuse for his own interest in 'the homosexual question.'

In the year 19— a sensational trial once again brought into the limelight the vexed question of homosexuality (uranism). In drawing-rooms and bars the story became a nine days' wonder. Tired of listening to ill-informed, bigoted and stupid people declaiming and theorizing at random, I longed to clarify my own judgment. In the belief that reason alone and not temperament has the right to condemn or condone, I resolved to go an interview Corydon. I had heard that he did not deny certain unnatural tendencies, of which he was accused. I wanted to

get to the heart of the matter and to hear what he might find to say by way of excuse. (19)

For these reasons (and by no means to test a latent desire!) the narrator decides to seek out Corydon, his former friend from the *lycée* (the homosocial French institution that hints at the Greek-like romantic aesthetic that Corydon will later idealize). Corydon has become a successful psychologist since completing his medical studies but has now gone somewhat astray: cloistered in his office, surrounded by mountains of books, Corydon is writing an unusual volume that may never be published, entitled *In Defense of Pederasty*. When the narrator introduces us to this work in progress that is consuming Corydon's attention, he again rushes to apologize, this time insisting upon the remarkable masculinity of a man so strangely devoted to a possibly idle, sterile, and dead-end pursuit. He assures us that the virility of his old friend has been in no way lessened by recent devotion to this book or to any of the "unnatural tendencies" of which he'd been accused. Just as the younger Corydon had been "a boy ... full of fire, gentle but proud, gallant and obliging, whose bearing already commanded respect", the mature Corydon also exudes these male-coded energies and traits (19).

On entering his flat, I must admit that I experienced none of the unpleasant impressions that I had feared. Nor indeed did Corydon displease me by his dress, which was neat and correct, with even a certain air of austerity. In vain my eye searched the room he took me into for those signs of effeminacy, which experts recognize in everything connected with inverts, and by which they claim never to be misled. (19-20)

When the narrator enters the office of this man who had apparently gone so adrift, he is

struck by all that is austere, upstanding, "straight." Any signs that would invariably "lead" a keen eye to the conclusion of homosexuality are absent from this thoroughly normal room. Nothing gives off the signals that would direct us toward the *invert*, the feeble degenerate who "turns" inward or toward sameness rather than somehow bearing outward with the composure of a Corydon. In this virtual closet, it's as if all orientations and angles are headed in the right direction. And yet, in the theories that Corydon is developing, he will embrace "deviation" as a positive, generative phenomenon that is inherent in maleness as such. Why then this immediate denial of strange turnings and unhealthy directions? Perhaps Gide is inscribing the anxiety that his own book could become a sterile labor, or worse, the father of unhopd-for consequences. In the preface to the 1920 edition of *Corydon*, Gide wrote that the twelve copies he'd published in a private edition of 1911 had been "put away in a drawer from which they have never been taken" (15). Likewise, *In Defense of Pederasty*, the apology that Corydon is writing, remains hidden like the book that contains it; it is alluded to in the piles of manuscripts and reference books on Corydon's desk, but is never held up and shown or placed in the narrator's hands. Its force, its intended direction, remains unrealized, like a stereotype of non-reproductive sex (masturbation, prostitution, homosexuality, etc.). As for Gide himself, he lacked even the likes of the prejudiced but curious narrator to support him in presenting *Corydon* to an intelligent readership. Again in the preface to the second private edition of 1920, he wrote, "My friends insist that this little book is of the kind which will do me the greatest harm" (13). However, he regarded *Corydon*, this strange work of speculative zoology and social theory, as the most significant writing he had ever produced, confiding in the 1939-1949 section of his *Journal*, "*Corydon reste à*

mes yeux le plus important de mes livres; mais c'est aussi celui auquel je trouve le plus à redire" (142). Perhaps the queer turn to the animal in literary criticism today can provide a new dialogue in which Gide's book can finally trace out its many potential paths.

When Corydon is interviewed about his work in progress, he promises to approach the question of homosexuality in contemporary French culture through a discussion of animal sex, informed by the best of modern-day natural history. When he starts, he implicitly undoes a Freudian divide between humans and animals: the divide between animal sexual instincts that can be satisfied through pre-programmed circuits of behavior, and human sexual desires that find multiple outlets or which frustrate themselves in unsatisfying repetitions or arbitrary, sometimes antagonistic attachments. Though Gide concedes that there may be a simple circuit of sexual impulse and fulfillment in lower animals, in higher animals, such as horses and humans and cats, sexual pleasure becomes autonomous from reproductive sex, and can lead animals to behaviors, like same-sex sex, that have nothing to do with the probability of reproduction. Thanks to the mechanism of free-roaming pleasure, the "sexual instinct" that never strays in bugs can be opened, in the higher animals, onto preferences and behaviors that do not fit the typical heterosexual model. Moralists today, Corydon argues, who defend the "naturalness" of heterosexuality and the necessity of marriage on the basis of some "universal sexual instinct" (one that motivates humans as well as animals), willfully ignore the divagations of pleasure, convincing themselves that the drive to achieve orgasm in the form of reproductive sex is as imperious in insects as it is in human beings. Corydon cites the example of Rémy de Gourmont, the zoo-curious, heterosexist moralist who argues that the "sexual instinct" (with orgasm as its motivating reward),

functioned like "an exact force, a categorical imperative, operating like other instincts with the precision of an infallible machine" (46). Corydon does not entirely deny the machine of reproduction (to use Braidotti's term, he displaces it into the "women-insects nexus"), but he subordinates its function to the more complex goal of pleasure. At a certain "moment" in the animal scale, enjoyment becomes the guiding motivation, leading animals along multiple divergent paths that occasionally still cross through the primitive goal of sexual reproduction. Humans, like mammals and birds, "seek pleasure, and achieve fertilization by a fluke" (47).

In a metaphor Corydon uses to illustrate these points, he traces queer leanings or tendencies in an order that is infallible, exact, precise and categorical. He inscribes an efflorescence in the vision of the straight.

By the words 'sexual instinct' one imagines a sheaf of automatisms, or at least tendencies, which in the lower species are fairly securely knit together, but which, as one ascends the animal scale, are more and more easily and more and more frequently separated. To hold this sheaf of tendencies together, it is often necessary to have a number of concomitants, collusions and complicities, which I will explain to you as we go on [Corydon is referring to the refusal of natural historians to study or even see homosexuality], and without whose co-operation the sheaf falls apart and the tendencies are allowed to disperse. This instinct is not, may I say, homogeneous; because the sexual pleasure, which the act of impregnation brings to each sex, is not, as you know, necessarily and exclusively linked with that act. (47)

When Corydon eventually turns from natural history to a discussion of the role of homosexual men in Western civilization (in poetry, sculpture, theater, and even in the military), he focuses on the cultural impact of the sexual instinct's dispersal at the top of the animal scale. The mad and beneficial splitting of sexual energies in humankind, Corydon claims, is the ultimate source of art: 'the only unnatural thing in nature' (33). The guiding threads of sexual orientation are loosened almost completely in man (although without losing any of their force), so that they can be linked or woven into the novelty of artistic, intellectual, or military genius. Something akin to free will also emerges from the indeterminacy of man's instinctive drives. If "Man" is the highest example of the free play of orientations, conjugations, ruptures, and multiple erotic interactions and choices, he is also the only creature who can channel this indetermination into self-determination, into the self-fashioning and radically novel performances that constitute his gender as a path of self-engenderment.

When it comes to the question of man and animal, Corydon concedes to two positions that do not yet form a binary: that multiple sexual "tendencies" exist in "higher animals" (as shown in the examples Corydon gives of homosexual animals, like a couple of male pigeons tending eggs and raising chicks), and that these tendencies proliferate to an even greater degree in the case of humans, fueled by a higher degree of the mechanism that splits pleasure away from the reproductive drive. Speaking as a psychologist, Corydon tells the narrator what he wish he'd said to a love-sick friend who ultimately committed suicide. By way of his zoo-curious perspective, Corydon would have persuaded his young friend "that the deviation of his instinct was entirely natural" (30).

The autonomy of pleasure from the heterosexual instinct has been "normal" (in its queerness) in many kinds of animals for eons of evolutionary development.

In the metaphor Corydon uses above, the figure of the bouquet illustrates the vertical axis of the animal scale, as well as the way in which the sexual instinct that ascends this scale increasingly separates into a glorious array. Corydon hints at two human hands: a cultural hand that restrains differences as it holds the bouquet together, and another hand that holds the bouquet open like an offering of love. However, comments that Corydon will soon make add an additional scaffolding to this metaphor, a scaffolding that functions, despite everything that Corydon is promoting, like the cruel hand that restricts the flowers' display. The figure of femininity put forth by Corydon functions like a sheath, a column, a bodice of straightness that restrains and compromises the vision of a spray or bouquet of sexual differences in the plural.

Soon after Corydon presents the narrator with his floral metaphor, reaching out and building a bond of complicity to underlie their dialogues, he begins a science lesson that excludes women from all that the bouquet has to offer.

Corydon begins the lesson in a "perverted" or perverting way, by claiming to promote a form of feminism. Laying out the concept of "gynaecentricity", he uses it to overturn what he describes as a male bias in our normal practices of representing nature.

Androcentricity, against which Lester Ward sets his gynaecentricity, is hardly a theory, or if it is, then it is almost unconsciously so. Androcentricity is a practice, commonly followed by naturalists, of considering the male as the representative type of each animal species, and placing it first in descriptions of the species and treating the female as secondary. (49)

In the pages of illustrated encyclopedias, the usual method of depicting sexually dimorphic animal species (those having divergent male and female phenotypes) is to show the male specimen first, giving the most space possible to his brighter plumage, his enormous antlers, his colorful devices for attracting attention, intimidating peers, and simply triumphing in the energy of life. In such illustrations, the female specimen is placed second (if she is shown at all), camouflaged to show the camouflage of her duller feathers, absent to show the absence of her horns or tusks or mane. But in fact, Corydon argues, it is the female that should be presented first in our works of natural history, despite our aesthetic inclinations, in order to acknowledge the "gynaecocentric" tendency of Nature as a whole. Males attract our attention with their dazzling flamboyance, but the female with her wan plumage illustrates principles of self-preservation that have existed for all time, and without which life as a whole could not go on. Females (mothers), with their broods of male and female youngsters in tow, should be given first place in the animal encyclopedias. They form the basis of an inexorable "system" that can support deviation while itself remaining steady and unchanged.

In critiquing the animal encyclopedias (part of the off-page library, like Corydon's own volume) Corydon refers only to how the sexually dimorphic animal "couples" have been represented. He brackets any discussion of animals that are sexually multiplicitous (like the social hymenoptera), perfectly androgynous (certain oysters, sea cucumbers or snails), showing limited phenotypic divergence between female and male (our dogs, our cats, our horses), or where the female is larger and more impressive than the male (many spiders, the spotted hyena, the blue whale). By shelving these in-between cases, these infinite exceptions, and sticking to images of binary sexual difference,

Corydon can sustain the powerful divide not only between feminine and masculine, but also between a myth of homogeneity, and an "outside" mechanism that produces diversity and deviation, somehow "beyond" the all-encompassing and permanent monotony that also sets it free. Corydon reads aloud, referring to avian species that have divergent male and female phenotypes: not like magpies, or starlings, or crows, but rather, like pigeons, like peacocks, like Papua New Guinean birds of paradise. When we visualize these birds, the ardent roosters with their modest hens, the distance of Difference can come into relief. "The normal colour of birds is that of the young and the female, and the colour of the male is the result of his excessive variability" (50). Exaggerated in this way, the dimorphism now produces a "can" and a "cannot", a satellite and a center, all the ingredients of a totalizing scheme. "Females cannot thus vary. They represent the centre of gravity of [the] biological system. They are that 'stubborn power of permanence' of which Goethe speaks. The female not only typifies the race, but ... she is the race" (50).

Although Corydon very clearly valorizes excess ("the color of the male is the result of his excessive variability"), sameness receives an equal, if "negative", influx of reifying value, as the dubious essentialization of race ("she is the race"), as well as the reference to the imposing name of Goethe, might suggest.

Corydon's wager upon excess is a risky one. Excess is a precarious thing, subject to being liquidated (castrated?) in order to create a more balanced, less vulnerable, perhaps "impregnable" whole. The showiness of the peacock is lovely, but tragically so; the gracious parade he performs is subject to being reabsorbed in the more economic churn of feminine survival. Such is Corydon's gynaeocentricity, adopted from the

American biologist and economist Lester Ward. "If need be," Corydon explains, reading aloud from his notes, "nature could do without the male." Men in human societies may enjoy a definite privilege now, but in the grand scheme of nature, the male is the secondary sex, akin to the male bee, a deliverer of sperm who contributes nothing else to the amazing success of the hive. What we know about bees and their formidable queendoms is not the exception, but the rule; when we follow the representational convention that privileges the male over the female (that is, in the case of sexually dimorphic animals—not like Rossellini's *crepidula fornicada*), we permit ourselves to be enchanted, taken (feminized?), by showy masculinity.

Ostensibly critiquing natural-historical representation, Corydon inherits and extends two of its primary conventions: not only the focus on male-female animal "couples", but also its privileging of the male. He will now weave a narrative that traces the part played by "the male" throughout evolutionary history: an all-important part despite the male's connection with everything that is aberrant, secondary, incidental, and comparatively small.

Corydon continues reading from Lester Ward in order to delineate "a kind of history of the male element in the animal species through the various stages of their evolution," beginning from the primordial animalcules, and climbing toward the late emergence of man (50). The term "male element" hints at the manner in which maleness is supposedly minimized (reduced to a mere "element") in the gynaecocentric vision that Corydon is espousing, whereas his decision to trace this element in history, moving forward in time towards whatever makes us "us", indicates a paradox, a rhetorical maneuver of transforming something supposedly minor and small into the mechanism or

the key that unlocks every value of importance. Everything that is to be appreciated in life, and above all in human existence (the new, the changing, the encounter with the unknown), originates, in Gide's analysis, with the appearance of the male. "[C]hange, or progress, as it may be called, has been wholly in the male, the female remaining unchanged. This is why it is so often said that the female represents heredity and the male variation" (50). It's as if maleness were the first nick of difference, the first unit of true, changing time. Maleness, sexual difference as such, came into being at a secondary moment that was in reality the first: the first true, differentiated "moment" in what was truly time.

Corydon reads again from his notes: "The male element ... was added at a certain stage, with the sole object ... of securing a crossing of hereditary strains. The creation of the male element was the first recreation, the first sport of nature" (49). Very quickly, Corydon commits the error he'd worked to bring out in natural-historical depictions of animals: he positions the secondary male ("added at a certain stage") as the "first" recreation, the "first" sport in nature. At the same time, the rapid passage he makes from apparent "fact" ("the male element was added") to jaunty, uninhibited metaphor ("the first recreation, the first sport") indicates the addition of value, the inflation, that shuttles us between levels of rhetoric (from the factual to the lyrical) and between the gendered orders they represent (on one hand the "economy" of the female, on the other, the prodigality of the male).

That Corydon really is decentering males and men is emphasized by Gide in the comments of the narrator, who, while listening to Corydon, interjects several times to express his indignation, to disparage Corydon's ideas as 'farfetched', 'going too fast' and

as 'not very nice' (49-51). "The male is there," the narrator proclaims, "To what position does your gynaeocentric want him relegated?" (49). Corydon resumes his discourse, prolonging the uncomfortable effect, needling a certain castration complex in his interlocutor. If Nature were to rid herself of male element (the narrator wincing at the suggestion), she could carry on alone, resorting, if necessary (and necessity is the name of her game), to an elementary, almost vegetable form of self-propagation. Again citing his sources, Corydon invites his interlocutor to envision endless microbes (pregnant little bodies) that simply burgeon with further growth rather than splitting and recombining in some more elegant way. Life, reduced to an unappealing form of feminine reproduction (a swelling, a teeming, an almost cancerous budding or burgeoning), could still circle on, without the cutting function of "sex" or the crossing of hereditary strains. Corydon's words echo (without citing) the work of Rémy de Gourmont, Gide's heterosexist contemporary, who wrote in *Physique de l'amour*,

Le mode primitif de reproduction des êtres est la reproduction asexuée, ou que l'on considère comme telle, provisoirement, par comparaison avec un mécanisme plus complexe. Il n'y a dans les premières formes vivantes ni organes sexuels, ni éléments sexuels différenciés. L'animal se reproduit par scissiparité ou par bourgeonnement. L'individu se divise en deux, ou bien une protubérance se développe, forme un nouvel être qui alors se détache. (21)

Like in Derrida's account of "operation", like in the way Difference is parceled differently between humans and animals in the humanistic discourse, a cut is made within the cut in this brief passage written by Gourmont and cited without citation by Gide. On one hand Gourmont distinguishes "scissiparity", defined in the OED as "reproduction by fission,

fissiparity, schizogenesis." Literally, the term refers to not only to cutting, but also to birth ("parity"), hence the connection Gourmont makes with the organic production of a "budding" or "protuberance", and with the notion of the "primary" ("*les premières formes vivantes*", "*le mode primitif de reproduction*," the adverb "*provisoirement*"). In the "more complex mechanism", however, in the secondary and superlative modality of the cut, what gets emphasized is not organic growth but an idealized ("more complex") and seemingly phallic form of difference, that of "sexual organs" and "differentiated sexual elements." Gourmont's distinction reads like a mapping of the male and female bodies, parsed differently according to different orders of the cut. Gide inherits these associations between maleness and a different, more radical matrix of cutting, connecting maleness to a secondary moment, to a break from the past, to the function of replication with a difference. What is distinguished is a higher order of life, but one that is defined by the cut in all its troubling aspects, and indeed by a peculiar, more exquisite, modality of death. In renouncing the monotony of vegetal repetition, maleness embraces the risk of an elegant, singular, tragic dead-end. The beauty of the male, its extravagance, its allure, are even connected by Corydon to dead elements within the living and the impression of beauty it creates. "The sumptuous colouring of butterflies is based on tiny scales, exquisite no doubt, but quite lifeless. The colouring of birds develops in feathers, which are completely dead" (56). The essence of maleness, its seed, is moreover produced in such excessive quantities that scores of material is bound to float into nowhere, to dissolve fruitlessly or to be consumed by an alien species. Invoking clouds of pollen, floating hoards of pretty, silly moths, the lives of countless males who "will never experience love," Corydon can show that "the masculine sex [is] that of useless

expenditure" (53-56). Whereas femininity represents the economical and certain investment of life into life, "Everything on the contrary seems to be contrast, contradiction and paradox when it concerns masculine sex. Nevertheless, this sex also has its characteristics. Its brilliant finery and fascinating means of seduction are in effect nothing but the vain display of dead parts, the symbol of thoughtless extravagance, of the inordinate squandering of the organism, the mark of a temperament which is exhibitionist but by no means economic" (55). The heights of admiration and the unthinking phobia are deployed hand in hand; they work together, the one encapsulating a comprehensible threat that the other can evade in multiple, "moving" ways. But as Michael Lucey has suggested, the phobia in Corydon is not so simple, despite its reduction of otherness to all that is fundamentally simplistic. The narrator and Corydon's initial phobia toward men that dress and decorate their rooms like women now confronts with a wild enchantment for everything that is flashy and flamboyant. The "men in skirts" Corydon disparages from his first conversation with the narrator are now vindicated, the human equivalent of a dancing bird of paradise, a barrow bird that continually decorates and redecorates his nest (32). The values are unstable, or so entrenched that they become ambivalent, like in the gradual transfer of Corydon's striking straightness ("his dress, which was neat at correct, with even a certain air of austerity") to femininity as the undeviating, pragmatic, central and "normal" natural force (20). With his clear-cut splits (between masculine and feminine, normal and abnormal homosexuality) Corydon introduces instability and ambivalence, the very kind of inversion and perversion of values he needs to achieve to give homosexuality an improved position in French high culture. Not even Gide resists inscribing the opposite, the abnormal, in his character Corydon, even while working to

tether the mark of weirdness to everything that is triumphant and upstanding. Though the narrator concludes that Corydon's office is "correct", he cannot help but to mention Corydon's bit of provocative flair.

In vain my eye searched the room he took me into for those signs of effeminacy, which experts recognize in everything connected with inverts, and by which they claim never to be misled. All the same, I could not help noticing, over his mahogany bureau, a large reproduction of Michelangelo's "Creation of Man"—in which, obedient to the hand of the Creator, the newly created Adam, naked and stretched on the original clay, turns his gaze toward God in dazed recognition.

Corydon professes some interest in works of art which would have shielded him, had I shown astonishment at this particular subject. (20)

An interest in art is not Corydon's only excuse for this strange and particular subject, as the scene from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is channeled back into the production of "the upright" from out of some imagined inferiority in the confusion of clay. The tableau above Corydon's desk represents our becoming-human, our singular divergence from what then becomes our origin. The animal may possess more (sexual) variability than natural historians conventionally attribute to them, but man, in his appreciation for tragic beauty and proclivity for producing art, is the ultimate figure of Difference, straight and upright although it diverges and goes off path. Adam, this man, is dazed or dazzled and grateful because he accesses the possibilities inherent in difference, in freedom from the tyranny of the animal sexual drive. He is gifted with a difference that moves and generates feverishly, that lifts one up from the ground, but only within certain boundaries; a difference that inexorably accumulates, climbs, and complicates itself, but

only against or beyond a chasm of oppositional difference between a mankind in movement, and an animal (in fact, a woman-animal) that remains stuck in some profound stagnation. Perhaps it is often true that the sublime pinnacles of difference in movement, which critical theory tends almost automatically to valorize, derive or claim their mad energy from some arrested, localizable, and in some sense sacrificial divide. Animal stillness creates human motion, human motion creates animal stillness, by the force of an oppositional rift.

I would like to end with this idea, while putting forth just one more. Perhaps we can embrace "zoo-curiosity" not only as an impetus for questioning, but also as an analytic in itself. Zoo-curiosity, like bi-curiosity or *hétéroflexibilité*, as I've heard it said in French, is a leaning, a tending or a reaching, that turns upon an axis of affinity rather than a certainty of knowledge. Perhaps many of the conversations taking place now in the fields of animal studies and human-animal studies lean this way, and lean together in a coordinated but differentiated fashion, because of a certain amateurism for distant knowledge, because of "amateurism" in the literal sense I mentioned before, of an animal-curious, other-curious, "love-research".

REFERENCES

- Berger, Anne. "Sexing Differance." *Differances: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. 16 (2005): 52-67.
- Cixous, Hélène, and Jacques Derrida. *Veils*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Fourmis." *Lectures de la différence sexuelle*. Paris: Des femmes, 1994. 69-100.
- . *L'animal que donc je suis*. Paris: Galilée, 2006.
- Gide, André. *Corydon*. Trans. P.B. London: Secker & Warburg, 1952.
- . *Si le grain ne meurt*. Paris: Gallimard, 1955.
- Gourmont, Rémy. *Physique de l'amour*. Paris: Mercure, 1913.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. "Animal Sex: Libido as Desire and Death." *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. Ed. Elizabeth Grosz and Probyn, E. New York: Routledge, 1995. 278-300.
- La Fontaine, Jean de. "La cigale et la fourmi." *Fables de la Fontaine, Illustrées par J.-J. Grandville*. Paris: Garnier, 1921. 2-3.
- Lucey, Michael. "Corydon and L'École des femmes: Mimesis, The Mantis, The Gynaecum." *Gide's Bent: Sexuality, Politics, Writing*. New York: Oxford, 1995.
- Maeterlinck, Maurice. *The Life of the Bee*. Trans. Alfred Sutro. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1928. Web. 13 November 2011.
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4511>>
- Michelet, Jules. *L'insecte*. 3rd ed. Paris: Hachette, 1859.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*. New York: McGraw-Hill,

1969.

---. *Speak, Memory*. New York: Vintage, 1993.

Oliver, Kelly. "Sexual Difference, Animal Difference: Derrida and Difference

'Worthy of Its Name.'" *Hypatia*. 24 (2009): 54-76.

CHAPTER 4

Enchanted Endangerment: Sacrificial Affects in The Case of The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker

The ivory-billed woodpecker, formerly of the American Southeast, has been known by many rarefying names: Great God Bird, Lord God Bird, Lazarus Bird, God-A-Mighty Bird, and Log-god (Gallagher 238, Hiers 636, Tanner 101). Researchers and writers also mention the names *kent* and *pait*, onomatopoeic renderings of the ivorybill's "clarinet" or "tin-trumpet" call (101).² In *Stalking the Ghost Bird*, a human geographer explains that the name "forest turkey" was coined by Southerners who hunted the large woodpecker in the years surrounding the Great Depression (81). In the same book, the author proposes a series of new titles, such as "ghost bird" and "bottomland ghost," which situate the rare bird among the "hants" of Louisianan bayou culture. Paul Rosen, the author of a memoir on urban bird watching, remembers jotting "I.B. Woodpecker" in his notebook; when he later reviews his notes, the letters *I* and *B* remind him of the first initials of Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Yiddish writer "steeped in loss," and profoundly horrified by human violence against animals (294). The authoritative 1942 report by James T. Tanner, the foremost ivory-billed woodpecker specialist, provides around

² John-James Audubon wrote in his chapter on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in *Ornithological Biography*:

"It never utters any sound whilst on wing, unless during the love season; but at all other times, no sooner has this bird alighted than its remarkable voice is heard, at almost every leap which it makes, whilst ascending against the upper parts of the trunk of a tree, or its highest branches. Its notes are clear, loud, and yet rather plaintive ... They are usually repeated three times in succession, and may be represented by the monosyllable *pait, pait, pait*. (343)

twenty English names of the ivorybill, in addition to names in Seminole, French and German (101). Enthusiasts and experts have often invented their own names for the bird. John-James Audubon liked to invoke the color profile of the ivorybill with the name “Vandyke,” after the Flemish baroque painter. Audubon wrote in *Ornithological Biography*,

I have always imagined, that in the plumage of the beautiful ivory-billed woodpecker, there is something very closely allied to the style of coloring in the great Vandyke. The broad extent of its broad glossy body and tail, the large and well-defined white markings of its wings, neck, and bill, relieved by the rich carmine of the pendent crest of the male, and the brilliant yellow of its eye, have never failed to remind me of some of the boldest and noblest productions of that inimitable artist’s pencil. So strongly, indeed, have these thoughts become ingrafted in my mind, as I gradually obtained a more intimate acquaintance with the ivory-billed woodpecker, that whenever I have observed one of these birds flying from one tree to another, I have mentally exclaimed, “There goes a Vandyke!” (341)

This impressive bird, which Audubon also referred to as “great chieftain of the Woodpecker tribe,” has possibly been gone for more than sixty years, a victim of the destruction of the last remaining primordial forests in the South. Recently, however, the ivorybill was possibly rediscovered living in an improbable patchwork of second-growth swampland forests crowded between highways and developed areas in the eastern part of Arkansas. In the enthusiastic, exuberant, even quasi-religious response to the ivorybill’s possible return, its reverent or religious-sounding names have been revived by

commentators who label themselves as “skeptics,” “agnostics,” and “believers.” No holy grail of evidence has yet been found. What has been called a “return” has consisted of a diffuse accumulation of sightings and testimonies, some considered more authoritative than others. In a 2005 issue of *Science*, the ornithologist John Fitzpatrick, together with his colleagues and graduate students, announced the “persistence” of ivory-billed woodpeckers in the Big Woods, an area of restored bottomland forest in the Mississippi River Basin in Eastern Arkansas. The authors discuss a clip of video footage which they believe reveals an ivorybill in flight.

At 15:42 Central Daylight Time on 25 April 2004, M.D. Luneau secured a brief but crucial video of a very large woodpecker perched on the trunk of a water tupelo (*Nyssa aquatica*), then fleeing from the approaching canoe ... The woodpecker remains in the video frame for a total of 4 s as it flies rapidly away. Even at its closest point, the woodpecker occupies only a small fraction of the video. Its images are blurred and pixilated owing to rapid motion, slow shutter speed, video interlacing artifacts, and the bird’s distance beyond the video camera’s focal plane. Despite these imperfections, crucial field marks are evident ... At least five diagnostic features allow us to identify the subject as an ivory-billed woodpecker. (1460)

One of the most important “field marks” that the authors refer to (the panel of bright white on the lower portion of the ivorybill’s outer wings) indeed seems visible and even strikingly apparent in the footage, but only as a luminous blur that is impossible for the scientists to bring into focus. Other, dissenting birders and ornithologists, including the illustrator David Sibley (author of the famous series of field guides), have identified the

bird in the video as an ordinary pileated woodpecker that is revealing the white undersides of its wings as it flies hurriedly away. Alexander Wilson, the nineteenth-century, Scottish-American ornithologist whose book, *American Ornithology*, contained illustrations of 286 species of North American birds, emphasizes the effect of whiteness that is created when the pileated woodpecker is in flight. He writes, “the white on the wing is not seen *but when the bird is flying*, at which time it is very prominent” (280, emphasis added).

In *The Grail Bird: The Rediscovery of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker*, Tim Gallagher details the high-tech procedures of video analysis carried out by Fitzpatrick’s team and surveys some of the rebuttals and counter-rebuttals that followed the announcement (251-264). Gallagher’s account, though often technical, is woven through with the language of grace, gratitude and belief. A convinced skeptic is quoted as saying, “I totally believe, thank goodness, that there are ivory-bills” (261). In an interview with *60 Minutes*, Fitzpatrick, the lead author on the *Science* paper, breaks down as he describes sightings from the Big Woods, affirming that, “It is an extremely emotional thing, this bird.”³ The rare bird that is known by many names is now referred to as *this bird*. A determiner of specificity (*this*) can only indicate imagined closeness in context of the interview in New York. *This* bird is all the closer, its rarity all the more pressing and dismaying, in the absence not only of the bird and its former environment, but also of significant material traces of its existence, such as the roosting-holes in trees that could still be found in the early twentieth century. Extensive further searches throughout the

³ From the October 16, 2005 episode of *60 Minutes*. CBS Broadcasting, Inc.

southern states have failed to produce the prolonged and clear sightings that would be accepted as credible in the community of experienced birders.

In the wake of Fitzpatrick et al.'s nationally significant announcement (originally to be delivered to the press by Laura Bush, but passed at the last minute to the Secretary of the Interior), the bird's conservation status was revised, for a time, to critically endangered. This shift, this impossible change from extinct to endangered, has led commentators and bird-lovers to speak (sometimes ironically) of a "second coming" or "rising from the dead" (Lantz 31). One nature writer interprets quite seriously the return of the ivorybill as a proto-eschatological event—as a sign of a divine kingdom to come in the restored environments of our world (Weaver-Zercher 1). One conservation website sells a Christmas ornament bearing the image of a male ivorybill, likely photographed or filmed in Louisiana by the team of Dr. Arthur Allen in 1935.⁴ Below this memorial image, in a matter-of-fact typeface, we read, "Rediscovered in Arkansas—2004." Although this was the year of the "Luneau video" unveiled in *Science*, some say that the recent string of sightings in fact began on April Fools Day, 1999 (Gallagher 25). In a promotional photo, the Christmas ornament — a transparent glass medallion — is shown nestled among the needles of an artificial pine.

In a video episode of the documentary radio program *This American Life*, a detail in the setting points to the messianic dimension of the search for the ivory-billed

⁴ The website is that of the Official Ivory-Billed Woodpecker Conservation Stamp Print Program (<http://www.ivory-bill-woodpecker.com/>). The site also features a photo of Mike Huckabee, the church pastor and 2008 Republican presidential primary candidate, signing a print of the woodpecker painting used for the conservation stamp.

woodpecker.⁵ Following a kayaker through unnamed Arkansan waterways, the camera sweeps over, and later centers on, a patch of “resurrection fern,” a paradigmatic arboreal fern that becomes green again after a rain. The kayaker, Bobby Harrison, peacefully affirms the any-second-now eschatology that drives his unrelenting search for footage of the ivorybill. “This could be very well be the day,” he declares. “This could be the time that it happens.” As he drifts through the passageways, he keeps a camera mounted to his canoe.

The ivory-billed woodpecker, a large and spectacular bird that fed on beetle grubs in the dying trees of “old-growth” forests, was an uncommon sight even in the time of Audubon. Closely related to other large woodpecker species in Cuba and Mexico that have also gone extinct over the last fifty years, it was a sexually dimorphic bird, the male with a red crest that peaked in the back, and the female with a black crest that curved toward the front. Ivorybills behaved differently than the smaller and more common pileated woodpecker, barreling through the forest in a straight pattern of flight (whereas the pileated swoops), and using its white beak (another distinguishing mark) to strip away the bark of dying trees and expose the larval beetles underneath.⁶ To use a familiar

⁵ Entitled “Going Down in History,” the episode is available at

http://www.thisamericanlife.org/TV_Season.aspx?season=2.

⁶ Audubon gives a vivid description of the ivorybill at work:

The strength of this Woodpecker is such, that I have seen it detach pieces of bark seven or eight inches in length at a single blow of its powerful bill, and by beginning at the top branch of a dead tree, tear off the bark, to an extent of twenty or thirty feet, in the course of a few hours, leaping downwards with its body in an upward position, tossing its head to the right and left, or leaning against the bark to ascertain the precise spot where the grubs were concealed, and immediately

expression that is loaded with a certain fascination, the ivorybill has balanced “on the brink of extinction” throughout the twentieth century. The naturalist John V. Dennis published an enthusiastic announcement of its return in *The Auk* in 1967 and another in *Life* magazine in 1972, in which he recounted chasing the bird through a swamp and finally finding it perched on a stump with outstretched wings. Steinberg affirms that the bird has been sighted continually over the decades by local nonspecialists, but that these sightings have not been verified by professional ornithologists (1-4). Because the last living ivorybill to be observed at length lived and died in 1944 (inside the last remaining tract of old-growth trees in the American Southeast), the species has been considered extinct or virtually so. An encyclopedia I owned in the 1980s listed the number of remaining birds as 12 (and yet I hoped to spot one whenever I stepped into the Floridian woods). Today, though the ivorybill’s numbers are still considered extremely low, the announcements of expert sightings have given reason to believe that the ivorybill might be back. The news has been magic: a lost species comes back not because of intensive breeding efforts (or some futuristic feat of genetic science), but just—unexpectedly, like a gift from above or a sign of change to come. The bird’s extreme rarity has inspired a form of enthusiasm that sometimes blurs with the glee of pursuit, the desire for possession, and a certain violent impulse that is registered when searchers talk of capturing, shooting or “nailing” the woodpecker on film. As many commentators mention, American Indians captured and traded the ivorybills extensively, according to Audubon, who added that he had “seen entire belts of Indian chiefs closely ornamented with the tufts and bills of this

after renewing its blows with fresh vigour, all the while sounding its loud notes, as if highly delighted. (345)

species” (343). The naturalist Herbert L. Stoddard relates a similar story from Florida in 1925. Stoddard dissuaded a local hunter from attempting to collect an ivorybill head, which the man wanted for a watch fob (Stoddard 206). Searchers today continue to adorn themselves in the bird’s likeness, with a focus on its fabulous head. In Brinkley, Arkansas, in the months following the official sightings, one could obtain an ivorybill coiffure. National Public Radio interviewed Penny Childs, inventor of the totemic cut, who confirms, “Woodpecker haircut, twenty-five dollars.” She adds, “It’ll come to a point at the top, fire engine red, and then the back and sides are tight, with black on that, and then a little bit of white on the front . . . copying his nose a little bit, you know.”⁷ The design of another headdress, a baseball cap, imitates the classic wanted poster. It is emblazoned with the head of a male ivorybill, in profile, hovering above the word *FOUND*. Many news stories covering the enthusiasm in Brinkley, Arkansas, have mentioned an “ivorybill hamburger” on the menu at a diner in Brinkley. The owner of the restaurant describes the sandwich to NPR as “two big hamburger patties, two slices of mozzarella cheese, peppered bacon and a sesame seed bun.”⁸

Audubon, like his predecessor Alexander Wilson, hunted and killed ivorybills in an admiring way to be used as models for his paintings. Both artists describe the violent protestation of an ivorybill taken captive. Wilson refers to a bird that he had “wounded slightly in the wing,” which, “on being caught, uttered a loudly reiterated and most piteous note, exactly resembling the violent crying of a young child”; his horse, he says, was terrified at the noise (165). In Audubon’s similar account, he underscores the

⁷ The story is available at, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4721675>.

⁸ <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4721675>

violence that the ivorybill was able to inflict on his human captor in turn. “When taken by the hand, which is a rather hazardous undertaking, they strike with great violence, and inflict very severe wounds with their bill as well as claws, which are extremely sharp and strong. On such occasions, the bird utters a mournful and very piteous cry” (346). In order to paint the birds he killed, Audubon pinned them onto a grid of flexible wire and bent them into lifelike poses. This technique allowed Audubon to make the birds he painted seem alive, to represent them in a way that prefigures the possibilities of wildlife photography. Paul Rosen writes in *The Life of the Skies*,

From the beginning, Audubon’s bird killing was tied to an opposite impulse to preserve and restore. Our greatest bird artist, Audubon loved birds, shot them by the hundreds, and then delicately impaled them on wires attached to a special board of his own devising that allowed him to pose them and paint them in lifelike attitudes, rather than in the inert, flightless isolation that had dominated bird art till then. The impulse to kill and resurrect is everywhere evident in Audubon’s paintings. He was obsessed with bringing the creatures he shot back to life; it is the key to all his work. It also gives his work a quasi-religious component. (39)

Audubon’s impulse to safeguard the birds he nonetheless killed motivates the account he fabricates of the ivorybill’s favorite habitat in *Ornithological Biography*. Audubon situates the bird in a forbidding wilderness, a guarded inferno, where it remains protected, invisible, and perfectly at home. A rhetorical pretense of authorial impotence serves to make the ivorybill even less accessible to the dangerous eye of the reader.

I wish it were my power to present to your mind’s eye the favourite resort of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Would that I could describe the extent of those deep

morasses, overshadowed by millions of gigantic dark cypresses, spreading their sturdy moss-covered branches, as if to admonish intruding man to pause and reflect on the many difficulties which he must encounter, should he persist in venturing father into their almost inaccessible recesses, extending for miles before him, where he should be interrupted by huge projecting branches, here and there the massy trunk of a fallen and decaying tree, and thousands of creeping and twining plants of numberless species! Would that I could represent to you the dangerous nature of the ground, its oozy, spongy, and miry disposition, although covered with a beautiful but treacherous carpeting, composed of the richest mosses, flags, and water-lilies, no sooner receiving the pressure of the foot than it yields and endangers the very life of the adventurer, whilst here and there, as he approaches an opening, that proves merely a lake of black, muddy water, his ear is assailed by the dismal croaking of innumerable frogs, the hissing of serpents, or the bellowing of alligators! Would that I could give you an idea of the sultry, pestiferous atmosphere that nearly suffocates the intruder during the meridian heat of our dogdays, in those gloomy and horrible swamps! But the attempt to picture these scenes would be vain. Nothing short of ocular demonstration can impress any adequate idea of them. (342)

Audubon penetrated into these wastes in pursuit of ivorybills and other birds that were “as difficult to be procured”; in his chapter on the ivorybill, he expresses exasperation at collectors who refused to pay top price for a specimen that had been “followed over miles of swamps” and preserved by an ornithologist in the most expert method (342). Wilson shot a family of three during a collection outing near Wilmington, North Carolina, around

1810. Hoping to observe and paint a living specimen, he took one of the birds that he'd merely "winged" into his room at a hotel, where it destroyed the woodwork framing a window and almost succeeded in breaking out. In the time it took Wilson to attend to his horse outside, the captive ivorybill

had mounted along the side of the window, nearly as high as the ceiling, a little below which he had begun to break through. The bed was covered with large pieces of plaster; the lath was exposed for at least fifteen inches square, and a whole, large enough to admit the first, opened to the weather-boards; so that, in less than another hour, he would have certainly succeeded in making his way through. I now tied a string round his leg, and, fastening it to the table, again left him. I wished to preserve his life, and had gone off in search of suitable food. As I reascended the stairs, I heard him again hard at work. And on entering had the mortification to perceive that he had almost entirely ruined the mahogany table to which he was fastened, and on which he had wreaked his whole vengeance. While engaged in taking the drawing, he cut me severely in several places, and, on the whole, displayed such a noble and unconquerable spirit, that I was frequently tempted to restore him to his native woods. He lived with me nearly three days, but refused all sustenance, and I witnessed his death with regret. (275)

Like Audubon, Wilson imagined a fantastical existence for the ivorybill in which it could remain alive. In poetic verses he penned, he seems almost to transmute the ugly scenes of bird collection into a quasi-religious, heroic tableau. A male bird, possibly an ivorybill, battles an enemy figured as serpentine but possessed of the potential violence of the human admirer.

The white-wing'd Woodpecker, with crimson crest,
Who digs from solid trunks his curious nest,
Sees the long black snake stealing to his brood,
And screaming, stains the branches with its blood. (345)

Enabled in some way by these imagined resurrections, the hunting of ivorybills contributed to its eventual extinction. Audubon writes in the early 1800s that the ivorybill's "destruction [is] aimed at ... not because (as is supposed by some) this species is a destroyer of trees, but more because it is a beautiful bird" (343). In *The Race to Save the Lord God Bird*, Phillip Hoose describes the haste with which the ivorybill was collected by naturalists, amateur collectors, universities, and museums; the zeal to collect was disastrous for the ivorybill and for other birds, including the now-extinct Carolina Parakeet (35-47). In the post-Civil War period, a lumber boom across the South posed the new and more radical threat of massive environmental transformation. In many instances, intensive logging led immediately to the departure or disappearance of ivorybills. James Tanner, author of the authoritative report on the species, writes,

The story is much the same in all regions. Ivory-billed woodpeckers have disappeared when the woods that they inhabited were cut over and the virgin timber removed. In many cases the disappearance of the birds almost coincided with the logging operations. In others there is no close correlation, but there are no records of Ivory-bills inhabiting areas for any length of time after those have been cut over. (19)

In the first decade of the twentieth century, there was already some awareness that deforestation was pushing the ivorybill to the brink of extinction. A paper in *The Wilson*

Journal of Ornithology quotes a children's poem from the time, composed by Elizabeth Gordon (Jackson and Jackson 767).

Ivory-billed Woodpecker said:

“Dear me!”

They're cutting down my family tree,

Where can I live, I'd like to know,

If men will spoil the forest so.

In 1924, Dr. Arthur Allen and his wife, the ornithologist Edna Allen, traveled south from Ithaca, NY, in search of surviving populations. In Florida they located a single nesting pair (“Recent Observations” 1). In 1927, the elated professor announced in *Bird-Lore*, “I have found a pair of them and they are very much alive” (301). Ten years later, however, he would print a tragic epilogue to that expedition. Revisiting 1924, he writes,

Since it is our belief that more is gained from a study of the living bird than from a series of museum specimens, we refrained from collecting the birds and planned our itinerary so as to spend the greater part of the following month studying them. Unfortunately our observations were interrupted by the activities of two local taxidermists who thought that ‘a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush’ and collected the birds during our absence. (“Recent Observations” 1)

Allen regrouped with his colleagues for another, broader search in 1935. His team succeeded in locating ivory-billed woodpeckers at one site only, near Tallulah, Louisiana, in a stretch of primitive forest owned by the Singer Company, which planned to use the wood they owned to manufacture sewing machine cabinets. Singer would sell off its timber rights in the late 1930s (Hoose 116), during the time when Allen's graduate

student, James Tanner, was working to study the living species in its last remaining habitat. The Audubon Society fought to have some of the land designated as a refuge; had they succeeded, it would have been our only “sample of primeval southern hardwood forest with its teeming wildlife intact” (Eckelberry 199). These efforts tragically failed (Hoose 115-133), and the “Singer Tract” with its few remaining ivorybills fell to a blitz of logging in 1944. Wood was needed to build packing crates for tea and military equipment as large as tanks. German POWs, captured in North Africa by British and U.S. forces, were brought to Louisiana to fell the last of the ancient trees (Hoose 121, Eckelberry 207).

A final ivorybill was observed in Singer Tract in 1944 by Don Eckelberry, a wildlife artist sent by the Audubon Society with the task of locating any remaining birds. With the assistance of a local warden, Eckelberry found one woodpecker, a female, roosted in an ash tree within (human) hearing range of the logging activity. This was the bird that a previous envoy from the Audubon Society, Richard Pough, spoke of when he said, “I have been able to locate only a single female and feel reasonably sure that no other birds [are] there” (200).

Eckelberry performed a sort of living wake for this unmated female whose living and dying now represented the living and dying of an entire species. For two weeks, the artist spent mornings and evenings at the bottom of the ash tree, where he composed field sketches of the female bird and of other aspects of the condemned ecological setting (Tanner, in his notes on the Singer Tract from five years before, had described black timber wolves that would also go extinct with the destruction of the Tract). Eckelberry fulfilled the role of surrogate kin for a bird who “should have been feeding well-grown

young these days, had she a mate” (206). In his memoir on the two-week stretch, he spoke of “putting her to bed” as often as he could, in a sense building rituals based on what ornithologists knew about the habits of mated pairs. One of the accounts given by the team of Dr. Allen details the habits of a roosting couple. In one instance,

[they] called as they left these cypress trees and flew to the top of a dead pine at the edge of the swamp where they called and preened. Finally the female climbed up directly below the male and when she approached him closely he bent his head downward and clasped bills with her. The next instant they both flew out on to the ‘burn’ where we followed their feeding operations for about an hour. (167)

Eckelberry describes the “poor lone female” (p. 206) as possessed with a “frantic aliveness,” “looking about wildly with her hysterical pale eyes, tossing her head from side to side” (p. 204). Reacting to her distress—improvising a hospice—Eckelberry decides to bring two witnesses, Bobby and Billy Fought, sons of the local game warden, to gaze at the bird for a last time, to complete the familial picture (as “[she] should have been feeding well-grown young these days”), and to forge the kind of intergenerational linkage that the ivorybill itself is losing forever. Hoose interviews Billy Fought about that brief time in 1944. “I’ve never been quite the same since,” Fought said; “I’ll never forget Mr. Eckelberry, or that bird, or that day, as long as I live” (132). Timothy Gallagher interviews Gene Laird, a childhood friend of Billy Fought’s who was another local witness to the scene of destruction at Singer Tract. “It ruined my life,” he says, “if you want to know the truth about it” (98). The devastation of the virgin forest in 1944, and with it, the extermination of the ivorybill, coincide for these adolescents with the end of a free and vigorous, out-of-doors childhood. Hoose, writing for children and adolescents in

his “textbook” on the ivorybill, mentions that the Fought brothers could roam the forest freely and didn’t need permission to go into the woods when Eckelberry invited them to join him (131).

The presence of children in Eckelberry’s experience and in the ivorybill project undertaken by Hoose link endangerment with a sense of forced maturity. The boys’ retrospective impression of being on the cusp of adulthood inside in remainder of intact wilderness is also conveyed in William Faulkner’s *The Bear*, a short work, published in *Go Down Moses* in 1942, that mentions the ivory-billed woodpecker by one of its divinizing names. The story is set in a place resembling Singer Tract: in “doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes” (193). An imagery of scarring illustrates this tension between the surviving wholeness and the regrettable advancement of secondary forces. The influence of “Man” is figured as a form of “writing”—inscribed, for instance, in the injured paw of Old Ben, the mythical bear whose leg had been caught in a trap. However, this bear himself also “signs”, leaving traces like the “rotted log scored and gutted with claw-marks, and, in the wet earth beside it, the print of the enormous warped two-toed foot” (200). The focalizing character Isaac McCaslin, often simply called “the boy,” is still an adolescent when he encounters the ivory-billed woodpecker during a daily search for Old Ben. Listening attentively to the woodpecker, he strings together a series of perceived absences in order to envision the total web of connections in the forest around him. The boy hears the woodpecker hammering, but when the hammering stops, he takes it as a sign of the even more ethereal, unseen, unheard presence of Old Ben.

With the gun which was too big for him, the breech-loader which did not even belong to him but to Major to Spain and which he had fired only once, at a stump on the first day to learn the recoil and how to reload it with the paper shells, he stood against a big gum tree beside a little bayou whose black still water crept without motion out of a cane-break, across a small clearing and into the cane again where, invisible, a bird, the big woodpecker called Lord-to-God by negroes, clattered at a dead trunk. It was a stand like any other stand, dissimilar only in incidentals to the one where he had stood each morning for two weeks; a territory new to him yet no less familiar than that other one which after two weeks he had become to believe he knew a little—the same solitude, the same loneliness through which frail and timorous man had merely passed without altering it, leaving no mark or scar, which looked exactly as it must have looked with the first ancestor of Sam Fathers' Chickasaw predecessors crept into it and looked about him, club or stone axe or bone arrow drawn and ready ...

...

He heard no dogs at all. He never did certainly hear them. He only heard the drumming of the woodpecker stop short off, and knew the bear was looking at him. He never saw it. He did not know whether it was facing him from the cane or behind him. He did not move, holding the useless gun which he knew now he would never fire at it, now or ever...

...

Then it was gone. As abruptly as it had stopped, the woodpecker's dry hammering set up again ... (202-203)

...

In *The Anniston Star*, an Alabama newspaper, an eighty-year-old native of Florida relates how he killed a “big woodpecker” as a young teenager in 1942 or 1943 (Fleming 1). Dale Harvell was hunting with friends in the Florida Panhandle when he remarked an exceptional bird.

Well, I’m out there looking for squirrels and I see this big, big woodpecker, something very different. He’s up high in this tree, but I can tell this isn’t a Pileated Woodpecker, this thing is big. So I shot him and put him in the bag with my squirrels. Later on, when I got home, I showed him to my daddy.

The sight of the ivorybill enrages Dale’s father: “That was the last time he threatened to beat me ... Son,” he said, “you have shot a rare bird. You got better sense than to do something like that, Dale.” Again, the ivorybill’s extinction is entangled with a passage from boyhood, with a final instance of hunting and gathering and a final threat of punishment in the old order of patriarchal family. Dale continues, “He took my gun away from me, put it in the closet. I didn’t get it back til the following year.”

In some discussions of the destruction of Singer Tract with its last surviving female, the moment is referred to simply as “1944”, suggesting displaced horror toward the Second World War. In his memoir, Eckelberry underscores the uncanny presence of German POWs in Singer Tract. In culturally stereotyped terms, he characterizes the ways in which the German prisoners viewed the clear-cutting they were forced to carry out. He describes the German men as unimpressed by the dense and temperate forest (full of ticks, mosquitoes and muddy ground), but at the same time “incredulous at the waste” involved in cutting it down (203). Eckelberry specifies that trees of every species were felled, but

that only the sweet gum trees were hauled away. Ash trees, he explains, were collected in “great brush piles of lopped-off treetops and dismembered prostrate trunks,” which the lumber company “planned to haul out only if the price later made it worthwhile” (203). The ash tree belonging to the last ivorybill is cut without “reason,” for the future possibility of profit, or perhaps, for the strange satisfaction of clearing the earth. Photographs of the area today show an entirely treeless agricultural expanse, sometimes supporting pools of water and flocks of migrating fowl.

Though there is an anthropomorphism in Eckelberry’s description of logging machinery that emitted “shrill squeals . . . all night” (206), and trees that “come screaming down” (207), Eckelberry makes no explicit reference to the human catastrophe of those years. And yet, recurring signifiers in the myth of *Singer Tract* (the year 1944, the presence of German soldiers, the camp where the Germans were held, the use of rail transport in transporting the destroyed trees, the machines that operated all night, the mouth of the sawmill, and even the recurring word “ash”), aggregate to allude without alluding to the Holocaust. Perhaps a divide between nature and humanity, between a persecuted group of human beings and an endangered species of animal, is what keeps these connections both implicit and veiled. Eckelberry’s horror, and the shudder at the early 1940s that runs through the modern body of ivorybill writing, carries some memory of the Holocaust, and possibly, some hesitation or taboo around the gesture of comparing disasters, especially disasters affecting humans versus those affecting animals or environments. Hoose’s treatment of the event in *Singer Tract* is admirable for challenging this divide as Hoose discusses the atmosphere of institutional racism. His text includes a full-page photograph of men who worked for the Chicago Mill and Lumber Company

sitting atop a centuries-old cypress trunk that has been secured prostrate upon a railroad car (114). The colossal cypress, harvested in the Florida Panhandle, is obviously much larger than any tree found there today. On top of the tree sits a row of white men in suits and hats, their hands comfortably folded in laps or upon crossed knees. Several feet below them, to the far edge of the photograph, stand four black men, one of whom is crowded out of view. The arms of these men are crossed tightly, even straightjacketed around their chests. As Hoose explains, Chicago Mill and Lumber,⁹ the company that logged sections of the Singer Tract, had employed large numbers of black sawyers prior to WWII (122). During the war, however, many blacks left to fight overseas or take factory jobs in the North (125-128). The mill, suddenly short on manpower for its operations in Louisiana, actually supplemented the departed workers with about 500 German POWs, hired for virtually nothing from the War Department (127). Though German prisoners were housed in grounds surrounded by barbed wire (127), and although they supplemented black laborers, they were not given the blacks' spot on the cypress trunk. Hoose reports that qualified Germans were allowed to work as mechanics and engineers (127), and that "[I]t surprised some German prisoners that they were

⁹ Hoose mentions a strange remark made by one of the executives at Chicago Mill and Lumber during negotiations with the Audubon Society, which hoped to preserve a section of the Singer Tract. The executive tells the conservationists that the forest will be logged because, "We are just money-grubbers" (128-9). It's hard to overlook this use of the word "grub," which was the primary food source of the insectivorous ivorybill and part of its scientific name (*Campephilus principalis*: "princely eater of grubs," or "principally, an eater of grubs").

allowed to sit in cars reserved for whites, while blacks, who were fighting for America, sat in segregated cars” (126).

When the ivory-billed woodpecker appeared again in the early 2000s, it broke open a time in American history that arouses a mixed affectivity of horror, disbelief, and nostalgia for paradise lost. If the ivorybill persists today, it was still destroyed in 1944; the rare bird remains associated with, and even periodizes, an era of inviolate forests and sanctioned racial discrimination in the South. In 1936, George M. Sutton (one of the specialists to spend time in Singer Tract) published a short memoir called “Kints,” in which he implies with some irony that race relations in Louisiana belonged to the very essence of ivorybills, or “Kints,” as they were locally called.

The weather was beautiful. White spider lilies were blooming everywhere.

Hooded and Prothonotary Warblers were singing ... In high spirits we made ourselves comfortable at ‘camp,’ unrolled our sleeping bags on the big screen porch, and heard Albert, the darky boy, chopping wood for a fire. The land of Kints at last! (191)

For Sutton and others, the twilight of the ivorybills seemed already to coincide with the fading of an impossible civilization built into the deep woods and supported by racist relationships. In his essay on the last surviving ivorybill, Eckelberry describes his friendship with a black maid, Liza, whom he helped with chores while her boss, the irascible and corpulent “Mistah Henry,” was away from the house where Eckelberry stayed (201). Liza told Don Eckelberry that the trees around them were full of “hants” (206). But, he writes, “[T]he only spirit I could hear was the voice of doom for this entire natural community, epitomized by that poor lone ivorybill” (206).

After the destruction of the Singer Tract, there ceased to be any scientific observation of the ivory-billed woodpecker. After “1944”, no one ever again found a tree with an occupied roosting hole, or sat and waited for the bird to return from its foraging in the late afternoon. Observation gave way to “sightings,” stories of the bird passing by or flying rapidly away. Instead of possibly adding to the body of knowledge about the ivorybill (as earlier accounts might have done), the sightings that occur today must demonstrate their legitimacy by lining up with what is already known. In some sightings, the event reported seems to hang upon frameworks of cliché. In 1966, the wildlife expert John V. Dennis gives a report of seeing ivorybills in Texas in which he inscribes the revivalist trope of a baptism performed outdoors in a natural body of water. After several days of heavy rain, Dennis has seen an ivorybill fly across a river. As Tim Gallagher writes,

Dennis walked back and forth, trying to find a way to get across. It was impossible. Finally he stripped and plunged naked into the dark, forbidding water. When he emerged on the other side, he walked in the direction in which the bird had flown and suddenly stumbled upon her, perched like a vision on a stump, her wings outstretched. (20)

Like an account of a ritual, Dennis’s sighting includes a difficult and solitary crossing, peril, nudity, a moment of revelation, and a higher status for the initiate who crosses to the other side. It rests upon a dubious scaffolding of received images—not only the image of the cross, but also that of the anhinga, a large water bird, which, like certain vultures, dries itself, wings outstretched, on stumps and piles sticking out of the water. The

ivorybill in Dennis's story greatly resembles an anhinga or a similar water bird, displaying its wings in the "Christian" posture of agony and self-renunciation.

Tim Gallagher begins *The Grail Bird* by describing his visit to a shrine for the ivory-billed woodpecker in Ithaca, New York. In the loft of a storage barn near the Cornell University campus, Gallagher resigns to his own desire to improvise a ceremony, as he writes,

I gaze at a massive hollow tree stump before me, then at a photograph of an ivory-billed woodpecker nest. In the picture, which was taken in the 1930s by the [lab of ornithology's] founder, Arthur A. Allen, an adult male ivory-bill clings to the side of a tree beside its nest hole. It is clear that the stump in front of me was sawed from the same tree shown in the picture. Placing my hand exactly where the bird is sitting in the photograph, I close my eyes. It's an eerie feeling. Right here, on this rough patch of bark, one of the rarest birds on earth – a species that most scientists declared extinct decades ago – clung to this tree and tried, against all odds, to reproduce its kind. (1)

Only on the premises of distance and rareness can two relics—a natural object and a photographic image—elicit these attempts at contact: the placing of the hand, the contemplation with eyes shut. This portion of tree trunk, taken from the roosting tree of a pair of ivorybills in Singer Tract, is not hollow matter, to those who know, but a poignantly weak vector that links us to real birds and to the searchers who observed them in the 1930s. When roost trees were abandoned, Allen's team felled them and searched the nest cavities for blood, egg remnants, or signs of struggle, in order to determine the reason for the birds' departure; in the case of this particular tree, Arthur's team found no

telling indications, only mites that swarmed all over their hands (176-7). Sixty years later, the barren nest is examined by Gallagher, and compared to a photograph in which the disappeared ivorybill, alert and jaunty, is poised at its lip of the hole. In the photograph, the ivorybill's claw (its 'clinging to the tree') is one of the most "poignant" details (and literally so: "poignant" means "pricking" or piercing, from the Latin root): delicate, slender, and yet hardy and tool-like, the claw is an ingenious hook with several lengthy nails. It no longer truly exits. Audubon highlights the strength of the ivorybill's claws in his 1832 chapter on the ivorybill, where he implicates himself as a shooter of birds.

When wounded and brought to the ground, the Ivory-bill immediately makes for the nearest tree, and ascends it with great rapidity and perseverance, until it reaches the top branches, when it squats and hides, generally with great effect.

Whilst ascending, it moves spirally round the tree, utters its loud *pait, pait, pait*, and almost every hop, but becomes silent the moment it reaches a place where it conceives itself secure. They sometimes cling to the bark with their claws so firmly, as to remain cramped by the spot for several hours after death. (346)

In the modern orientation toward environmental destruction or transformation, the trees themselves, like those that were dismantled and carried in sections to Ithaca, also become relics, and in a certain way, victims, organisms that were plugged into a continuous tissue of circulating life. As Eckelberry describes the devastation of Singer Tract, he focuses on the dismembered trees heaped and mangled in enormous piles. Hoose adds an additional layer to this, regretting the loss of trees for the traces of a violent (if thrilling) human history they contained.

[T]he 45-foot-long conveyer belt that delivered logs to a giant toothed blade at the Tallulah sawmill ran twenty-four hours a day. Log by log, two hundred years of southern history was ground into yellow dust ... From time to time the blade jammed on balls of shot from the Civil War still buried in the logs coming through. When that happened, the log was tossed aside, a switch was flicked, and the blade ground on. Against those whirring teeth the last great Ivory-bill forest collapsed day by day ... (128)

John V. Dennis, the outdoorsman who reported the anhinga-like ivorybill in Texas in 1966, also wrote a paper in *The Auk* entitled, "A Last Remnant of Ivory-Billed Woodpeckers in Cuba." Like Hoose, Dennis is stunned by the environmental destruction that surrounds the endangered species of large woodpecker he searches for in Cuba in 1948.

After arriving at our destination, we spent several days exploring the country in all directions from our headquarters. The mountainous terrain here was largely covered by a broad belt of pine. The pine gave way to a splendid deciduous forest which was in the process of being ruined by lumbering activity and fire. The pine forest had already been ruined, only dead and defective trees remaining. Adding to the devastation, were forest fires which burned unchecked. The lumbermen did not bother to put out their cigarettes but tossed them into the dry underbrush. A view of the mountains always revealed columns of smoke rising from a dozen or more points. No attempt, whatsoever, was made to put out any of the fires. The country was almost empty of inhabitants, but here and there squatters had

moved in. Their huts, made of thatched palm fronds, stood in the middle of bleak clearings where every single tree had been felled, with the exception of royal palms, if any existed. (498-499)

Continuing to reside, ghostlike, in such pictures of desolation, the ivorybill has seemed like the lone remaining piece of a scattered puzzle. The notion of birds as “remainders” compels Jonathan Rosen in *The Life of the Skies*, where he describes a trip to Louisiana, and the haunting resonance of a line from Robert Frost’s “The Oven Bird”: “What to make of a diminished thing?” (146). Not truly expecting to see an ivory-billed woodpecker for himself, Rosen goes to the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area near Slidell, LA, where a promising sighting had occurred eighteen months before. The restored forest he explores is far from pristine. He recalls, “[T]he sound of the highway followed us into the woods. I was, at various times, aware of the report of rifles from a shooting range operated by Wildlife and Fisheries, and the churning of trucks from nearby gravel pits” (51). Over days of searching, Rosen sees plenty of pileated woodpeckers, but no ivorybill. The bird that does not appear, Rosen perceives as a remnant, a puzzling and puzzled survivor, poignant in a way that troubles him.

In “The Second Coming of the Lord God Bird: An Eschatology of Desire,” Valerie Weaver-Zercher reviews and participates in the messianic emotions the bird has provoked. Her article begins with a full-page reproduction of a pop-art painting of a male ivorybill sitting on a branch: not the typical tree-clinging bird, but a more visible bird poised against a blank sky: a seeming icon with open space around it. The woodpecker’s head is thrown back; its beak points upward. Radiating from its head are thick lines like those that adorn the heads of saints in religious iconography. As if to acknowledge the

“pop” character of the image, it is cut out and reprinted on the following page. Despite these glorifying representations, the article is not precisely about the ivorybill, as the author confesses (31). It is about a divide within evangelical Christianity between those who view environmental disaster as a sign of the ruin *necessary* to bring about Christ’s return, and those who feel that “Creation” must be cared for—and ruin prevented—because “God’s reign [on Earth] has already begun” (30). Taking the environmentalist position, Weaver-Zercher proposes that the “almost religious longing” for the return of the ivorybill should be understood as a “desire implanted by God” (28). The longing for the Christ-bird represents an opportunity to dialog with secular environmentalists who are also captivated by “the woodpecker that makes grown men cry” (31).

Like other commentators, Weaver-Zercher relates the folk etymology of the name “Lord God” in her article. In the days when encounters between humans and ivorybills were still possible, people who spotted the bird would exclaim, “Lord God, look at that bird!” However, there is evidence that Southern people also referred to the somewhat smaller, more common and more widespread pileated woodpecker by the name “Lord God.” In a 1976 article on Faulkner’s reference to the ivorybill, the southern literature specialist John T. Hiers states that the name “Lord-to-God” was used by Southerners to refer to the ivory-billed woodpecker and to the pileated as well. The two species, he states, also shared the names “Lord-God” and “Lord-A-Mighty” (636). James Tanner also states that pileated woodpeckers were also called Lord Gods. In the notes to his famous report, he explains,

Common names for the [ivorybill], besides the recognized ‘Ivory-Billed Woodpecker,’ are mostly based on the white bill or large size of the bird, and

many are modifications of names applied to the ordinary Pileated Woodpecker.

(101)

Don Eckelberry, in his account of watching the last living ivorybill in Singer Tract, understands the name “Lord God” to refer only to pileateds.

I was sure I would recognize the short, toy-trumpet call of the ivorybill if I heard it. I caught my breath once when we saw a large bird flying back through the trees, but it was only what my companion called a “Lord God,” or pileated woodpecker, of which there are plenty there. (202)

Finally, George M. Sutton, in the humorous essay “Kints,” describes an encounter with a Louisianan attorney in which the pileated is again named the God bird.

I said, “Mr. Spencer, you’re sure the bird you’re telling us about isn’t the big Pileated Woodpecker, the bird the Florida Crackers call the ‘Lord God Almighty’?”

“Man alive!” answered Mr. Spencer hotly, “these birds I’m tellin’ you all about is Kints! Why, the Pileated Woodpecker’s just a little bird as big as that.” (190)

Despite these indications that divinizing names were shared by ivorybills and pileateds alike, contemporary authors, including Tim Gallagher and Phillip Hoose, tend to confer the theological name to the ivorybill alone. Paul Rosen invokes the importance of naming when he writes,

If the pileated woodpecker were considered extinct, it would cease to be a jackass and become enchanted, transformed by the kiss of death into something fine and mystical. We would have to dig up its nobler common names, and if none could be found, we would meditate on the word “pileated,” a reference to the bird’s

crest, derived from the Latin word *pileus*, which describes a brimless felt cap. The cap was donned by liberated Roman slaves, and so served in antiquity as an emblem of freedom itself. (57)

Called by separate names for as long as one is common and the other rare, the pileated and the ivorybill remind us of two kinds of “sacrificial” animal: the teeming (object of phobic avoidance and non-differentiation) and the rare (object of searching, striving, and glorious sacrifice). The ivorybill is beloved because it is endangered, and endangered because it is beloved; the pileated, for its part, becomes an all-too-numerous pest-bird, safer, perhaps, because it is uninteresting or unsuitable. The characterization of pileated woodpeckers as “loud”, “raucous” or “cackling” birds might even be understood as an expiation strategy. The pileated, like a scapegoat, absorbs the undesired qualities of a similar, but elevated, animal. Love for one animal—sacrificed or pursued in ecstatic rites—can also become an alibi for the forgetting and the sacrifice of many others: an alibi or an “elsewhere” to inhabit without really abandoning sacrifice or the not-quite-sacrifice of everyday overconsumption. In *The Grail Bird*, Gallagher declines to criticize the destructive treatment of animals other than the ivorybill, which is an issue that nonetheless comes up, for instance, when he describes the dietary regime of fast food and canned meats he maintained during his visits to the South, or when he mentions a bizarre ivorybill sighting by Robert Bean, a former director of the Louisville Zoo. The sighting took place near Baton Rouge in 1975, and was later reported by John V. Dennis.

According to Dennis, Bean was driving a truckload of zoo animals across a long bridge in the Atchafalaya Swamp when he saw an ivory-bill fly across the road at eye level, only fifteen feet in front of him. He saw the bird for about five seconds

as it cleared the guardrail and landed in a tree at the edge of the swamp, but he couldn't stop on the bridge because of heavy traffic. (22)

Fixated on the (imaginary) bird zooming across our path of sight, Gallagher declines to comment on the hidden animals that we nonetheless know are abused. Meanwhile, he expresses frustration at the common pileated woodpecker, the bird that is the likely cause of all these mistaken sightings. His reference to the “mocking, Woody-Woodpecker-like laugh” of the pileated is meant to be directed at himself (as he searches doggedly for a bird that might not exist), and yet, the comparison to a cartoon character suggests the kind of disparagement that impoverishes our idea of living animals (12). Don Eckelberry restores a kind of artistic dignity to ivorybills as he describes the last remaining female in Singer Tract. Comparing her call to the sound of a “toy trumpet,” he also invokes another childhood object, an ice cream cone, in a cartoonish sketch that he hesitates somewhat to include.

I hope I am not dispelling belief in what I have said about the regal qualities of this bird to add that there was something comical about it too. The big pale bill sometimes looked almost like an ice cream cone jammed into her black mouth, and then the expression of her eyes seemed the natural one at such an occurrence. Call that anthropomorphism if you like, but it is just such impressions which give the bird painter the key to that “rightness” of expression for which he is always striving. (205)

In recent years, some of the more compelling reports of ivorybill sightings have recalled the cartoonishness of Eckelberry's description. In 2005, a landowner named Scott Ramsey described seeing a small group of large woodpeckers that were “goofy” in

appearance (Steinberg 10). This adjective, notes Steinberg, gave rise to a code name, “Goofy,” used in a search expedition in Louisiana (11). Another local sighting in Steinberg’s book recalls Eckelberry’s “anthropomorphism” more precisely still. A woman who preferred not to be named reported seeing a male and female ivorybill on her property in 2003. When one bird flew close, she noticed that its bill, which was “very large and ‘pearly white,’” “seemed to be ‘pounded’ into the woodpecker’s face, with skin ‘puckers’ where the bill met the feathers” (103).

When the sheen of Christological comparison is stripped away, one discovers a comic creature (“prehistoric-looking,” by some accounts) that also seems manmade, as if it were fashioned by a woodworker who forcefully “jammed” or “pounded” the white bill in. Depictions like these are also interesting in that they bring out childish malice with which we often chase after and capture beloved animals. Eckelberry’s picture of an “ice cream cone jammed into her black mouth” may also have unconscious racial and erotic undertones, particularly in light of his affectionate memory of Liza, the black maid, “clucking and worrying” like a hen, in her “ridiculous paper-bag hat,” and “skimpy print dress over her bony frame” (206).

REFERENCES

- Allen, A. A. (1924). Vacationing With Birds. *Bird-Lore*, 26, 208-213.
- Allen, Arthur A. & Kellogg, P. (1937). Recent Observations on the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker. *The Auk*, 54 (2), 164-184.
- Coetzee, J.M. (1994). *The Master of Petersburg*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Dennis, J. V. (1948). A Last Remnant of Ivory-Billed Woodpeckers in Cuba. *The Auk*, 65 (4), 497-507.
- . (1967). The Ivory-Bill Flies Still. *Audubon*, 69 (6): 38-44.
- Eckelberry, D. (1961) Search for the Rare Ivorybill. In J.K. Terres (Ed.), *Discovery: Great Moments in the Lives of Outstanding Naturalists* (pp. 195-207). Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott Company.
- Faulkner, William. (1942). "The Bear." In *Go Down Moses and Other Stories*. (pp. 191-334). New York: Random House.
- Fitzpatrick, J., et al. (2005). Ivory-Billed Woodpecker Persists in Continental North America. *Science*, 308, 1460-1462.
- Fleming, J. (2007). Regrets About a Long-ago Squirrel Hunt. *The Anniston Star*. Anniston, Alabama: McClatchy-Tribune Business News.
- Gallagher, T. (2006). *The Grail Bird: The Rediscovery of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Hiers, J. T. (1976). Faulkner's Lord-to-God Bird in "The Bear." *American Literature*, 47 (4), 636-7.
- Hoose, P. (2004). *The Race to Save the Lord God Bird*. New York: Melanie Kroupa

Books.

- Jackson, J. A. & Jackson, B. J. S. (2007). "Once Upon a Time in American Ornithology: Last Hopes, Letting Go. *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*, 119 (4), 767-772.
- Lantz, Gary. (2006). Hope Takes Flight. *American Forests*, 111 (4), 30-33.
- Lindqvist, S. (1992). *Exterminate All the Brutes*. London: Granta Books.
- Michelet, J. (1861). *L'Oiseau*. Paris: Hachette.
- Moser, D. (1972). The Last Ivory Bill. *Life*, 72 (13), 52-62.
- Rosen, J. (2008.) *The Life of the Skies: Birding at the End of Nature*. New York: Picador.
- Steinberg, M. K. (2008). Bottomland Ghost: Southern Encounters and Obsessions with the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker. *Southern Cultures*, 14 (1), 6-21.
- Stoddard, H. L. (1969). *Memoirs of a Naturalist*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Sutton, G. M. Kints. In *Birds in the Wilderness*. (pp. 185-196). New York: Macmillan Company.
- Tanner, J. T. (1942). *The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker, Audubon Society Research Report Number 1*. New York: Dover Press.
- Weaver-Zercher, V. (2006). The Second Coming of the Lord God Bird: An Eschatology of Desire. *Sojourners Magazine*, 35 (1), 26-31.
- Weidensaul, S. (2008). *The Ghost with Trembling Wings: Science, Wishful Thinking, and the Search for Lost Species*. New York: North Point Press.

CONCLUSION

Lines of Force and Fascination: Tracing Sacrifice's Imaginary Power

To conclude this series of chapters, to attempt to provide my readers with some sense of closure and greater comprehension, is to again elicit our conceptions of the open and the closed, and our “reasons” for dreading and desiring them both. What are the common threads that could allow me to tie together this sequence of essays and to attempt to tie them closed? How does my turn to the “me,” in this concluding chapter, open up this question of closure, in the way that David Lurie’s exile, his time spent alone, draws him to the finality of animal sacrifice?

In this dissertation, I’ve attempted to demonstrate the inseparability of humanist discourse from the question of the animal, through comparative readings that weave together literature, natural history, Biblical texts, and culture. But I no doubt also attempted to diagnose patterns in the way I thought about or responded to the texts, events and concepts that I studied. Before the dissertation truly got underway, I noticed in my own thinking a tendency to respond to texts in ways that were oppositional if not at times reactive or reactionary. When I began working on *Disgrace*, it was as if I took critical close-reading to mean fighting against scapegoating and conceptualizations that were overly narrow. This led me toward a second unsatisfactory tendency in the way in which I tried to critique and to think and to write. The animus created by the sensation of “going against” capitulated often into exuberance for the field I wanted to enter or the thing I wanted to embrace.

Derridian deconstruction usefully encourages this movement of going-with. A certain "openness" and generosity in close-reading are what enable one to find the fertile textual nodes which, if newly developed, provide us with a way of challenging the limitations and the reactionary moments of a text or corpus. But I noticed in my own thinking, and sometimes in the work of others, that the step-by-step, deconstructive process of "going-with" sometimes led me to take off in flight, to launch into a current of emotion that swept me away. I realized that the two interconnected possibilities (going with and going against) were misleading me. To fly away with, or to fight and wrestle on the Wittgensteinian "rough ground"—why was I positing myself between this set of alternatives? And why was I making an ethic of the textual encounter at all? An "ethic" that occasionally veered into an opposition between excessive interpretative caution, and the possibility of sacrificing a text at hand?

"Rams," Derrida's essay on Gadamerian hermeneutics and the difficulty of interpreting Paul Celan, seemed to confirm these alternatives through the metaphor of sacrificing (or freeing) the animal. Neither route was desirable—the task was to stay in-between and to wrestle with the animal (while taking a few scratches in return). To write in the first place was to graft (*greffer*), and to scratch (*griffer*): to incise the text and to infect its content. But could the impact of this violence be diminished by remaining in the encounter, or in other words, by supposing and upholding undecidability? Was the best approach to remain in the ambivalence of "aporia" (the puzzlement caused by raising unanswerable questions—literally, the *difficulty of passing*)? I was reminded of Kafka's unfinished story, *The Burrow*, which might be interpreted as an ironic mining of the tunnels and blockages—aporias—that complicate the search for truth in rational thought.

The creature in the burrow uses his head to push through the darkness in order to come head-to-head with a predatory digging animal. In the “end” that is not really an ending, the encounter that would put a stop to the tunneling remains a repetitive idea, an unattained possibility—a blockage of the kind that keeps us from reaching the one true reading of any inscription. “In my pile of dirt I can dream of everything, even of coming to an understanding, though I know very well that something of this sort does not exist and that the minute we see each other—no, just sense each other’s presence—we will immediately show each other our claws and teeth in a mutual frenzy, one not a second sooner or later than the other, both filled with a new and different sort of hunger, even if we are otherwise full to bursting ... but everything remained unchanged, the... [Here the story breaks off]” (189). To keep short of deciding, to refuse to meet the truth of the thing we are facing, can infinitely extend the possibility of encounter by interrupting sacrifice (in the way that Coetzee’s *Disgrace* finishes “up” before the sacrifice of the beloved dog can be realized.) To refuse to decide was to *refuse sacrifice*, sacrifice in the sense of mediating between one’s own mind (“my forehead, that unique instrument”) and the one and only truth. And yet, in certain circumstances—in situations involving victimization and the need for protest, action, and change—to refuse to decide can result in continued oppression or sacrifice. At least, in my reading of David and his complicity with the sacrificial program, this is one of the points I have worked to suggest.

A possibility left unexplored in “Rams” and in my chapter was this: that the refusal to decide begins to resemble sacrifice in the sense of setting-apart, and in the status it confers to the deciding non-decider. To refuse sacrifice is, at times, to repeat it unconsciously. I’m reminded of the Freudian account of sacrifice and the way in which

the brotherly celebrants, in order to expiate guilt for the murder of the primordial Father (and to strengthen the patriarchal structure that protects all father figures in general), in fact repeat their crime upon an animal. To construct an elaborate system of avoidance is also sometimes to reenact the thing we'd like to avoid. And yet, "countersignature," unlike undecidability and the setting-apart of the text as Other, is not a system of avoidance and might offer a way of working through. It's an approach, a "cautious approach" like the one David tests out when he listens to the dog that sings. As Derrida says, "I try ... to make myself listen for something that I cannot hear or understand, attentive to marking the limits of my reading in my reading. This comes down to saying: Here is what I believe one can reconstitute, what that could mean, why it is captivating and beautiful and strong, while leaving the unsaid intact, inaudible. That will, moreover, authorize other readings." (166) This points to another difference between countersignature and sacrifice: the open invitation to sign, or the democratization of "author"ity.

I started to wonder why even the perception of possible sacrifice continued to haunt me. Why was I orienting myself toward an Other defined (or undefined) in such a generalizing way? I wondered whether, in critical discourse more generally, our manner of continually facing toward the Other with a capital *o* was secretly displacing an almost religious reverence into the action of interpretation. Such displacement is troubling in that the kind of distance referred to as "critical distance" is devastated by sacralization: it is either magnified to the order of unspeakability and untouchability (especially for disciplinary outsiders), or reduced and collapsed as a reader identifies viscerally-intellectually with the idiom and the fantasm and the lines of force inside a text. What

was the offering of reverence to a generalized Other ultimately offering me? What was I generating, and for whom? An authoritative source on the sacred, accessible to me in the background like the sacred itself, seemed to hold an answer. “There is no need to explain at length why the profane ... enters into a relationship with the divine: it is because it sees in it the very source of life. It therefore has every interest in drawing closer to it, since it is there that the very conditions for its existence are to be found.” (98) This idea that there is “interest” in doing sacrifice (as stated above by Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert) informed and eventually transformed my understanding of David Lurie’s sacrifices in *Disgrace*. David stood in a place of tension between acting on behalf of the other, and acting *out* on behalf of the self. By touching and being touched by untouchable dogs, he draws closer to the very source of life, and to the sublime, a deadliness viewed from a safe and maybe salvific point of vantage. While at first I might have agreed with the readings that glorified the work of David Lurie—*or* might have countered his work for dogs with an equal fervor, I began to realize that these two possibilities were insufficient. In their distinctive affective dichotomy, they resembled the sacrifices I was studying. Mauss and Hubert underscore this double sentimentality (while developing the concepts of victimization and sacrifice’s function in mediating between sacred and profane). “Of all the procedures of sacrifice, the most general, the least rich in particular elements, that we have been able to distinguish, are those of sacralization and desacralization. [...] In any sacrifice of desacralization, however pure it may be, we always find a sacralization of the victim. Conversely, in any sacrifice of sacralization, even the most clearly marked, a desacralization is necessarily implied, for otherwise the remains of the victim could not be used. The two elements are thus so closely interdependent that one cannot exist

without the other” (95). Perhaps in responding, as many critics do, exuberantly *or* with resistance to David’s work with dogs, readers were enacting sacrifice in ways that revealed the lines of force of the novel itself.

How was it possible to resist sacrifice’s lure as I worked with an entire series of texts recasting and repeating our classic relationships with animals? Did going through deconstruction and its fabric body of metaphors (seam, suture, weave, pleats or folds, hymen, hymenoptera, paper, the tear) provide a way to remain in the thick of the divisions without seeking the exit of the *dénouement*?

By operating at the limit between life and death, sacrifice opens up an entire conceptual system of opposites. I was “against sacrifice” for the hierarchic divisions it created and for what Derrida called its carnophallogocentrism: its ability to provide a space for the noncriminal putting to death of the animal. (66) But what if it were possible in the first place to look at sacrifice another way? If sacrifice does noncriminalize the death of the animal (within certain ritual parameters), this only calls attention to and does not efface its original criminal aspect. The killing of animals has always been problematic (as suggested by the original vegetarianism of Adam and Eve), and sacrifice, in regulating this killing, is troubling but also a way of addressing the trouble. A way to kill without murdering, to consume without consuming the life-blood. An exertion of force that also has the force of an apology or an effort to appease. In Freud’s theory, the origin of sacrifice lies in transgenerational culpability and in the longing for the murdered father. “The importance which is everywhere, without exception, ascribed to sacrifice lies in the fact that it offers satisfaction to the father for the outrage inflicted on him in the same act in which that deed is commemorated.” (150) The waste and renunciation in sacrifice, the

inedible parts that are thrown away, also suggest that sacrifices are being made on the part of the human sacrificer as well (in contrast to the total, modern exploitation of 'farm animals' in a system that uses every scrap, or in which there are no scraps at all). Maybe sacrifice, in establishing limits on how animals could be killed, was already a deliberation on the right(s) of the other and the restraints that govern the self. As the exhaustive rules surrounding it suggest, sacrifice could represent a meditation on limits in addition to an effort to transgress them.

This different way of looking at sacrifice, *if* it provides a way to avoid sacrificing traditions that are sacrificial, also induces an apology for sacrifice. I am reminded of a literary piece that remained beyond the margins of my dissertation, in the stack of books that never made it in. In Isaac Bashevis Singer's story "The Slaughterer," the character Yoineh Meir is chosen to be the ritual slaughterer of a small town despite his utter aversion to the job. "He was softhearted; he could not bear the sight of blood." (207) Before being driven mad by the detested labor of slaughtering animals, Meir searches for alibis and apologies in folk wisdom and in the rabbinical literature on sacrifice. "[M]an may not be more compassionate than the Almighty, the source of all compassion. When you slaughter an animal with a pure knife and with piety, you liberate the soul that resides in it. For it is well known that the souls of saints often transmigrate into the bodies of cows, fowl, and fish to do penance for some offense." (207) "And yet Yoineh Meir could find no consolation." (208) The only meaningful prohibition/obligation Yoineh Meir is able to recognize is the law declared by the animal itself. "The bodies refused to know any justification or excuse—every body resisted in its own fashion, tried to escape,

and seemed to argue with the Creator to its last breath. And Yoineh Meir's own mind raged with questions." (209)

Throughout the chapters of my dissertation (I wish I had been able to incorporate readings of Singer, as Paul Rosen does in his book on the ivory-billed woodpecker), I was exploring affects (impulses and longings and avoidances) that seemed profoundly collective, "human all too human," but also exceeding the human, and that are brought to the fore in sacrifice and in the real-imagined relationships with animals. Even "love" for animals can resemble sacrifice and provide a way to enter what Hubert and Mauss call "the very source of life." (95) Bataille's sacrificial narratives and theories focus on human beings rather than animals (human sacrifices, sacrifices of humanoid apes); they bring out excess, eroticism, irrationality and transgression. Bataille suggests that what draws us to sacrifice and even to our objects of study (to scholarly work that is supposed to be ordered and constrained) are "base elements" mostly kept obscured; our fascinations, like my fascination with every apparent signature of the cut, provide a way to access a "subjecthood" of primal and creative potentiality normally concealed by moral requirements and future-oriented goals.

My effort to transcend sacrifice brought me into reach of its allure. In my effort to break down every binary, to discover the contamination that haunted every dominant term, I invested the breakdown itself with such magic, with such a sense of freeing elevation, as to recreate a binary opposition (a basic one, a human/animal one) between the thought of being captive (captive in oppositional thinking, captive in the dichotomy), and the thought of going free. I started to ask whether a desire for escape (a certain "eschatology") was "binarizing" the way we approach questions and knots within the

history of ideas. The persistence of the threat of captivity indicated a strange humananimal desire to *escape*. And yet sometimes, very strangely, this escape, in re-creating and relying upon figures and fantasms of “the same” (the static, the repetitive, the eternal), resembled a form of escaping—into captivity. To enter the burrow. To make a skin of one’s own. To give oneself up to the mother/other. To inhabit “the eschatology of this world,” to cite the title of a reflection that intrigued me on the ivory-billed woodpecker. Michelet’s writings on “mother nature” convinced me more than anything else I worked on of the tension between a desire for freedom (often coded as masculine by Michelet) and a longing for captivity, for immersion in The One. I argued that these two instincts—approach and avoid (to use a certain psychological jargon)—were inescapable, and that this inescapability could be seen in narratives and rational processes (as in Michelet’s dialectic logics) in which freedom and capture rely upon and exaggerate one another.

What about the mesh of infinite differences I saw in the turn to “the insect,” a field of living organisms defined by metamorphoses and bodily divisions? Because of the ways in which the insect carves up monolithic unities in the work of Michelet (in *La mer*, the sea-floor is minutely separated into fossil layers, strata that are augmented continuously by legions of microbes that imperceptibly die), the insect opens up a space (a gendered and erotic space) for *différance*, for a “fissile” (self-splitting) mode of micro-cutting that frays itself in its own formation and indicates the non-purity of Michelet’s “innocent” ideas (humanity, freedom, the child, woman, fertility, perfection, etc.). The activity of the insect invaded the boundaries of the human being (already unstable in Michelet), as allegorized, I thought, by Michelet’s account of the minuscule repeating

structures that make up human blood. But what I concluded, in exploring the workings of this fabric of differences in Michelet and in the interspecies sexologies of Gide, was that *differentiation*, especially in its most transcendental (or microscopic) formulations, remains permanently connected to the possibility (both feared and desired) of captivity, monotony, and unified origins and ends. It was impossible for *différance* to cut off the sacrificial modality of the cut; if *différance* could do this, it would be sacrifice, which I had understood to be a cut that excluded or denied the cut. The inextricability of sacrifice from the mesh of micro-differences was the only way I could think to explain the very strange, paratactic and segmented essay by Derrida, “A Silkworm of One’s Own,” in which discussions of dying and sacrificing and circumcising eventually give way to an ecstatic vision of the hardly visible, ambiguously gendered, uncuttable and auto-enveloping little silkworm. *Différance* comes in the wake of the sacrifices that set it into motion.

In my chapter on the zoö-curious gender discourse, I was trying to ask whether Difference with a capital D (elevated by sacrifice while seeming to deny it) was gaining the authority that “it” should never have. “It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything in us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom.” (22) But what if Difference, in the majuscule, was being appropriated to build up the kingdom of the human being, at the expense of an “animal kingdom” equated with loss, a lack of loss, or a lack of language, singularity and change? Were the Humanities at large, I wondered

(somewhat grandiosely), appropriating difference, appropriating the inappropriate in order to participate in this thing called the human being? Were "we" capitalizing (on) *différance*?

I saw Difference with a capital D at work, I thought, in one of the essays I discovered on the eroticism of the insect in the French context. Elizabeth Grosz, in "Animal Sex," responded to Roger Caillois's praying mantis (a lurid monster, a *vagina dentata*) by insisting upon feminine orgasm and its inability to be completely represented or understood. Instead of women, Grosz connected *animals* with the magnetic, "inhuman" vision of sex epitomized by the praying mantis, whose all-consuming sex drive forces "her" to remove the head of "her" "husband" in order to continue having sex with his still-moving body. Amazingly, Grosz accepts this entomo-psychology and even extends it to include all animals. "If there's one thing animals don't need more information on, it's sex. That's because sex holds no mystery [for animals]." (279) It was an instance, I thought, of acting out—of repeating the gesture that has disturbed you; of dominating another Other in turn; of recurring to the humanistic procedure (used by Heidegger and Lévinas and Agamben) of gaining the authority to redefine the human in a new way by performing a sacrifice of the animal. Sacrifice authorizes; by consecrating the victim it also consecrates the "sacrificer" and the thing s/he represents. Hubert and Mauss write, "In sacrifice ... consecration extends beyond the thing consecrated; among other objects, it touches the moral person who bears the expenses of the ceremony. The devotee who provides the victim which is the object of the consecration is not, at the completion of the operation, the same as he was at the beginning. He has acquired a religious character which he did not have before, or has rid himself of an unfavorable character with which

he was affected; he has raised himself to a state of grace or has emerged from a state of sin. In either case he has been religiously transformed.” (10)

To move beyond this complex, to abandon the sacrifices that create the human being inside narrowly gendered and animated bounds, it is necessary to look outside what is normally considered the domain of the Humanities. Jean-Henri Fabre, regarded as the inventor of modern entomological methodology, complained of the absence of nature from the curriculum at the normal school he attended. “Of natural history, absolutely nothing ... Grammar was allowed to strangle life.” (428) To address the way in which non-human life is effaced or appropriated or strangled in the humanities it necessary to do something—different, something that reaches out more generously to zoological discourses that have, in any case, always subtended the concept of human in the humanities (as Heidegger or Lacan’s usage of zoological science might suggest). This is Cary Wolfe’s argument in promoting a posthumanism and in recuperating animality from its sacral status as a figure of the Real. He calls for taking into account “the relationship between the discourse of animality ... and the living and breathing creatures who fall outside the taxonomy of *Homo sapiens*.” My current muse, a hawkmoth caterpillar or “tomato worm” devouring the daily offerings of tomato leaves we put into its jar, stares at me, or probably not, with the force of both the real and the Real: as the observable subject of –ologies and zoö-curiosities, and with all that remains unknowable and unknown.

REFERENCES

- Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Fabre, Jean-Henri. *The Life of the Fly; With Which Are Interspersed Some Chapters of Autobiography*. Web. 1 November 2011.
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3422>>
- Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo*. Trans. James Stachey. New York: Norton, 1950.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. "Animal Sex: Libido as Desire and Death." *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. Ed. Elizabeth Grosz and Probyn, E. New York: Routledge, 1995. 278-300.
- Hubert, Henri & Marcel Mauss. *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*. Trans. E.E. Evans Prichard. Bristol: Western Printing, 1964.
- Kafka, Franz. *The Burrow*. Trans. Stanley Corngold. *Kafka's Collected Stories*. New York: Norton, 2007. 162-189.
- Singer, I.B. "The Slaughterer." Trans. Mirra Ginsburg. *The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982. 207-216.
- Wolfe, Cary. *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. xx.