Non/Human: (Re)Seeing the “ANIMAL” in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

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NON/HUMAN: (RE)SEEING THE “ANIMAL” IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

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A DISSERTATION

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NON/HUMAN: (RE)SEEING THE “ANIMAL” IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2019

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_non/human: (Re)seeing the “Animal” in Nineteenth-Century American Literature_ uses canonical literary texts as specific anchor points for charting the unstable relations between human and nonhuman animals throughout the century. I argue that throughout the nineteenth century, there are distinct shifts in the way(s) humans think about, discuss, and represent nonhuman animals, and understanding these shifts can change the way we interpret the literature and the culture(s). Moreover, I supplement and integrate those literary anchors, when appropriate, with texts from contemporaneous science, law, art, and other primary and secondary source materials. For example, the first chapter, “Cooper’s Animal Movements: Across Land, Sea, and Species,” centers on James Fenimore Cooper’s use of nonhumans in two of his early novels, *The Spy* and *The Pilot*. The chapter then integrates an analysis of two influential early American painters, John Trumbull and Thomas Cole. The unique pairing of Cooper’s early work with these two stylistically and ideologically different painters of the early nineteenth century gives insight into key tensions between Cooper, nonhuman animals, and the culture that influenced (and was influenced by) these individuals. The pairing also bridges themes and disjunctions across disciplines, developing a dialogue between art history and literary criticism.
The subsequent chapters follow a similar approach; other chapters include: “Transcending Animals: Breathing Machinery, Personhood, and Law,” “Whitman’s Abattoir: Industrial Slaughter, Dis-member/Re-membered Bodies, and the American Civil War,” and “Vivisecting Mark Twain’s Animals.”
I came to reading and bookish things late in my life. Had I known that being bored and broke on an un-spectacularly hot summer day in Texas would have changed my life in such a profound way, I would perhaps have paid more attention to my elementary, middle, and high school English teachers. As I (a then college dropout) sat under a covered patio reading my first “real book,” J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*, with sweat dripping down my back and cigarette smoke polluting my lungs, I found “it,” the thing I had been searching for all those angsty twenty-one years prior. No, I didn’t want to catch kids in a rye field. Instead, I found a story that spoke to moments of life, but it, of course, wasn’t my “story.” This was a large part of the allure of books: they braided strands of the familiar with the new. And this formula of familiar and new kept me coming back for more, kept me searching for the next story to blow my mind, or make me cry, or recharge my hope in humanity.

Fifteen years later, I sit here putting the finishing touches on my dissertation, and I think about all the wonderful human and nonhuman animals that have supported me in my journey. First, I want to thank my wife, Ashley. She has been my foundational pillar of support, encouraging and nudging me, throughout graduate school. All those times I wanted to quit and become a scuba diver instructor in some far away tropical locale, Ashley would pull me away from the computer or the book, and we’d take a nice, long walk. She’d convince me to wait until the semester was over—then if I still wanted to flee the country, she’d support it. However, every time I pushed through all those term papers, presentations, countless books, and knee-high stacks of papers, I resolved that this was not that bad after all. She makes me want to be a better person every day, and without her, I would have never made it.
I want to also thank my parents, Audra and Clyde Carter, for always believing in my potential, even when I couldn’t see it. I wish you could have been here to see this day, Clyde. My mom showed me how to work hard every day, and I can’t begin to express how she shaped the person that I’ve become. Many thanks to the nonhuman companions Napoleon and Star, who now chase lizards and squirrels across the Elysian Fields, and Faulkner (the dog, not the deceased alcoholic author for whom the dog is named) who still keeps Mom company in the Texas Hill Country. Thanks to my two cats, Nietzsche and Leeloo, but for what I’m not sure.

Thank you to my incredibly supportive committee. Tom Gannon, you have been a fantastic Chair. I appreciated that you trusted me throughout this process, yet you were always there to provide extensive feedback whenever I asked. I will forever treasure our regular chats over nonhuman animals, literature, and whatever else came up in conversation while consuming copious amounts of ramen noodles at Amu Ramen. You never discouraged any of my (occasionally “wild”) ideas, letting me work these things out over time. And one day, I will learn when to use “that” and when to use “which” in a sentence. To Fran, I am deeply grateful to have you as a committee member and as a friend. Fran, you change those around you for the better. You have made me a more politically and civilly aware person; and you have, I’m sure, changed the lives of thousands of students throughout the years. I’m lucky to know you. Wendy Katz, thank you for all of your brilliant feedback and suggestions, especially on Cooper, Trumbull, and Cole. Your knowledge of art and culture in the nineteenth century is amazing. Thank you Tom Lynch for being a careful reader of my focus exam as well as my dissertation. And thank you to Greg Zacharias at Creighton University for being not only my mentor for a Preparing Future Faculty Fellowship but also for being a good friend. I hope to pay forward all the support that you all have generously bestowed upon me.
My deepest thanks to Steven Kellman, Wendy Barker, Jeanne Reesman, and Catherine Kasper at University of Texas at San Antonio as well as Mekonnen Haile at San Antonio Community College. Ya’ll (as they say in Texas) are scholars and teachers that I hold close to my heart. Thank you to Don Barnes and Alice Strong for your friendship.

And finally, thank you to my daughter Anais.
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INTRODUCTION

Human denial of our own biological kinship with other animals is a fundamental ideological fallacy, which has been perpetuated from Classical antiquity through the present. The desire to separate one’s self (i.e., the human self) from all other species—terrestrial, avian, oceanic, or otherwise—remains deeply woven into the Western formation of human identity. Indeed, this has been a fundamental problem well before the nineteenth century. Throughout history, the formation of the human remains, in large part, dependent on one’s intellectual and physical separation from any whiff of “animal” kinship. Yet over the course of the nineteenth century, the United States provides an illuminating but elusive model for past and current systems of power rooted in demarcations of social class, race, sex, and species. Moreover, it is a sad but well-known fact that certain racialized and ethnicized humans (e.g., black, indigenous, and Irish) were dehumanized or “animalized” throughout the nineteenth century in ways that pushed them to the boundaries of the human species. The perpetuation of violence and exploitation with utter impunity upon these marginalized individuals, in large part, can be attributed to their own dehumanized social status. No doubt, as Lesley Ginsberg comments, chattel slavery relied on skewing the boundaries between “slave” and “animal” (“Slavery and the Gothic Horror” 103). To a similar effect, nonhuman animal kinships within the cultural/religious beliefs of indigenous Native Americans were seen by many nineteenth-century Americans as signifiers of their own marginal status; Native American nonhuman kinship became yet another marker of their “savage” backwardness in the general (white) public’s perception.

Furthermore, it is important early in this study to differentiate between British and American human-to-nonhuman relationships in the nineteenth century. Mary Allen, in *Animals*
in American Literature, states that the difference can be found in the general themes of each country’s literature. She makes the sweeping generalization that “Americans write of the individual, freedom, and violence,” and “the British deal with society, domesticity, and manners” (10). While this, in general, is a helpful (albeit reductive) distinction, Allen’s scholarship remains stuck in a troubled and anthropocentric worldview, further concluding that this difference is dramatized in American literature by the appearance of wild animals (10). Her monograph is an early effort in what would later become Critical Animal Studies, and according to the above claim, it is those “wild” creatures that highlight these prototypical American tropes such as individualism and freedom as well as an inherent fear of the savage nature of the wild (non-white) human and nonhuman animal. The human individual remains the central figure of importance for Allen; however, her implicit identification of the difference in ideological socio-political systems remains important to highlight as it pertains not only to nonhuman animals but also to the wider concept of “nature.”1 As we will soon see in Chapter 1, nonhumans in the Early Republic do, in fact, reflect themes of society, domesticity, and manners.

Systems of aristocracy, as found in England (as well as across much of Europe), assigned the land and all its flora and fauna to the landowner. Rachel Poliquin reiterates this fact in her insightful monograph on taxidermy in the nineteenth century, Breathless Zoo. She remarks, “Born into an estate, the landlord—literally lord of the land—maintained exclusive rights to its woods and copses and all its creature inhabitants” (157). As Poliquin identifies, hunting and dominion become one and the same in England (157). This ritualized killing of nonhuman

1Allen’s main argument about nonhuman animals attempts to draw a connection between the “American hero” in American literature (e.g., Natty Bumppo, Ishmael, and Huckleberry Finn) as a kind of wandering, asexual nonhuman animal—free from any kind of domestic (or other) responsibilities. Again, one can easily see the “human” center of the book, and though Allen gives an interesting early analysis of nonhumans from Melville through Hemingway, much of the book’s literary analysis feels forced into conforming to the central thesis. As we will later see in Chapter 1, what was conceived of as “wilderness” was a product of American civilization itself (Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness”).
animals attaches itself to a kind of birthright in both England and America; however, there is a vital distinction between them derived from prevalent ideologies surrounding nature and social class. In America, such dominion over nonhumans was not predicated upon being born to the upper-crusts of society. Instead, non-privately owned land and, in turn, the nonhuman animal inhabitants were largely for the people. American land that was not in private hands was, by law, property of the government and could be utilized (given some exceptions) by its citizens for much of the nineteenth century. Nonhuman animals, as a part of the land, were included in this entitlement. Accordingly, this American free and fair use appears less an indication of social dominion rooted in class and, instead, more of a gesture towards egalitarianism, with sovereignty over nonhuman animals in American as a right open to all citizens. Both American and British societies reinforce systems of hierarchy, yet they fall under separate and distinct socio-political beliefs—British aristocracy and American democracy.

The American nineteenth century was a period of radical questioning within natural philosophy. Fueled by emergent questions of a humankind’s place in the greater animal kingdom, curiosity played itself out in the public sphere. For example in 1842, P.T. Barnum opened his American Museum in New York to great public appeal. Barnum’s museum was a space of oddity and imagination, a space that differed greatly from, for example, Charles Willson

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2 There are a few qualifications that must accompany this statement. First, “people” in America were often white, landowning men. Like Early-American democracy itself, slaves and Native Americans were excluded from such “natural” and inalienable rights. Secondly, this differentiation between Old World/New World is dependent on the historical erasure of indigenous inhabitants as well as a false sense of overwhelming abundance.

3 To complicate things, Americans, like the British, were influenced by the earlier Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau, de Buffon, Linnaeus, and Descartes. As much as members of the Early Republic (and later) wanted to accept and champion the “fixed” principles outlined by such historic voices across the Atlantic, it did not take long for such principles to be called into question—both empirically and theoretically. Paradoxically, such provocations caused seismic ripples of repeated anxiety, fear, and reactive countermeasures when the boundaries between human and nonhuman were troubled. Taxonomic systems arising out of French and European Enlightenment natural philosophers such as Georges-Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon and Carl Linnaeus’s tidy and clear imposed “order” provided a fleeting sense of security as the century progressed, even less-so after the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) as well as after the sheer volume of “savagery” required from both sides during the American Civil War (1861-1865).
Peale’s rigidly structured and ordered museum of natural history in Philadelphia. Among Barnum’s many exhibits was the “Feejee Mermaid,” a prime example of the so-called “humbug” of the period. [Figure 1] A clever businessman, Barnum was the master of locating the heartstrings of his audiences and playing upon their desires and fears for his own profit. Even though it was a piece of “humbug,” created by literally sewing pieces of a monkey to a fish, it provides a grotesquely odd window into brewing anxieties over human/nonhuman boundaries at this moment in time. The older Enlightenment-ordered systems that had kept species carefully segregated began to undergo intense scrutiny during the two decades leading up to the American Civil War. Such scrutiny was not limited to such exotic specimens as the Feejee Mermaid. For example, on the cusp of war in 1860, Barnum began advertising a new attraction titled “What is it?” [Figure 2] The caption to the ad reads:

“Is it a lower order of Man? Or is it a higher development of the Monkey? Or is it both in combination? Nothing of the kind HAS EVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE! IT IS ALIVE! And it is certainly the MOST MARVILLOUS CREATURE LIVING!” (sic)

Clearly, he is playing on social, cultural, and biological questions that were being worked out through popular culture as well as science. Even in the language that the advertisement uses, one can clearly identify a problem of classification. Is this a “lower order man,” or is this some kind of “higher” form of primate? The attraction had even more crowd-drawing potential as well because this specimen was “ALIVE!” Unlike the dead and preserved Fejee Mermaid exhibit, audiences could see for themselves this moving and breathing potential link between human and monkey. Sadly, this was a case of human exploitation. The “It” in question was actually named William Henry Johnson, and he was a mentally disabled black man with microcephaly (Dennett
Barnum’s exhibit drew large crowds. The interest, no doubt, was partially the spectacle, but exhibits such as the Fejee Mermaid and William Johnson provided an occasion for spectators to question their own human identity.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* appeared at the end of 1859, and it did not take long for his ideas on evolution to make it to the United States. As Daniel Walker Howe importantly notes in “American Victorianism as a Culture,” “Victorian era influence [ . . . ] flowed in both directions across the Atlantic” (508). It is also important to note that while ideas, theories, and anxieties about the human’s location in the animal kingdom had been present much earlier than Darwin’s publication of *Origin*, Origin’s publication and dissemination of scientific proof for human-animal descent gave new reason for alarm. Peter Capuano points out in *Changing Hands* that the emergence of actual gorilla specimens—a full skeleton in 1851 and a complete pickled body in 1858—had reached the British Zoological Society before Darwin (132). Capuano observes however that the appearance of these opposable-thumb-bearing simians in combination with Darwin’s *Origin* meant that “Virtually every British newspaper and magazine carried stories referencing ‘man’s nearest relation’ by 1860” (132). But again, there was strong resistance to acknowledging such nonhuman animal kinship. Questions over where humans fit, exactly, within the larger ecological context became even more important in the decades leading up to the Civil War, when issues of slavery and race in America were intricately, and often systematically, tied to definitions of “personhood.”

Undeniably, blatant animalized depictions of the African American can be easily seen by skimming political cartoons, advertisements, and much of the literature circulating throughout abolitionist debates in America. The American slave often becomes paralleled with a kind of
“work-animal” or “pet”—legally and politically by their dehumanized status, but also by their instrumental commodification. Of course, the American slave was no more an “animal” than any other human (after all, humans are animals, too). Some especially today might cringe at any such parallel, deeming such a comparison offensive, belittling, or in bad taste. Yet Marjorie Spiegel openly addresses this very issue in her book, *The Dreaded Comparison*. Spiegel remarks, “Comparing the suffering of animals to that of blacks (or any other oppressed group) is offensive only to the speciesist: one who has embraced the false notions of what animals are like,” and who considers one’s own species to be superior to all others (30). The word *speciesist*, a derivative of *speciesism*, was popularized by Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation*; Singer defines *speciesism* as “a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of [ . . . ] other species” (7). What I want to emphasize here is that inquiry and debate over whether or not chattel slaves were “human” was not only a common occurrence in the years leading up to the war, but that this argument was symptomatic of these larger scientific debates about defining humanity preceding Darwin’s 1859 *Origin*. As such they are important to reading and recognizing the significance of nonhuman literary and cultural traces across the century.

Indeed American culture, along with its cultural artifacts such as fiction, affords a unique and vital key to better understanding the events of the tumultuous century. The way(s) in which nonhuman animals were conceptualized, discussed, and presented changed, and even more specifically, the *visibility* of certain nonhuman animals changed. In this study, I identify key moments during the nineteenth century in which nonhuman animals were positioned beside or against human animals, and views of their relationship shifted. I highlight these shifts by using instructive literary anchor texts as well as additional cultural evidence for each of these distinct
moments. Literature as a way to see the past, real or imagined, leads us to the crux of the nonhuman in the American nineteenth century.

Assessing key American texts uncovers crucial historico-cultural fluctuations in the conceptualizations and affirmations of human and nonhuman animals. Indeed, such textual artifacts also provide accurate, albeit complex and at times contentious, reflections and refractions of the dynamic culture which produced these texts. On the one hand, my primary goal for this project is simple: To better understand the ways in which authors represent nonhumans and how this changes throughout the century. On the other hand, I am wary of teleological certainties and broad-sweeping general explanations. Instead, I hope that by locating distinct transitional moments throughout the century, I can find both the literary representation of nonhumans and the actual, historic nonhumans. My transdisciplinary lens can also aid in clarifying the state of nonhuman animals in contemporary American culture, a state that is in large part a product of these nineteenth-century American fluctuations.

I argue that throughout the nineteenth century, there are distinct shifts in the way(s) humans think about, discuss, and represent nonhuman animals, and understanding these shifts can change the way we interpret the literature and the culture(s). A critical concept is the visibility of nonhuman animals, and in this visibility there is a paradox: while nonhuman animals are ubiquitous throughout the century (literature et al), most actual, or real, nonhuman animals are reduced to their metaphoric values within the textual evidence. They exist symbolically through such liminal traces, but as the century progresses, they become physically removed as well. Moreover, the fragmentation or dismemberment of the “animal” metaphor eventually manifests itself physically upon nonhuman animals. Literature, like other kinds of cultural productions, allows humans to craft their own stories, placing themselves apart from all other
species. Nonhuman animals have been used to elevate humans above other creatures, or conversely, other species have been used to strip the humanity from targeted groups. Tracking the use of these “animals” can provide modern scholars touchstones to American nineteenth-century conceptualizations of life and “personhood.” In turn, reading nonhuman animals across nineteenth-century American literature can help us to understand our continued troubled relationship(s) with other species.

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The methodological approach to this study is New Historicism, at its most basic, and yet the general thrust of this study aligns with the goal of the various approaches to Critical Animal Studies (CAS) in seeking to decenter the human. In the next section, I situate this project within CAS, drawing from poststructuralism, ecocriticism, and philosophy. Finally, I will give a brief overview of each of the chapters.

But first, an explanation about the selection of texts. I choose works, of course, that deal with nonhuman animals, but I also choose authors/texts for their circulation during the nineteenth century. I wanted texts that were widely read during the nineteenth century and are still read today. Additionally, nonhuman animal appearances in many of the works I have included are sometimes subtle. This is also intentional. The ubiquity of such liminal nonhuman animal traces coincide with the precarious and shifting boundaries between species. Since one of the primary goals of this dissertation is to better understand cultural perceptions and influences through the nineteenth century, my selections, hopefully, provide an insightful window into human ideologies concerning the nonhuman during the century.
Approaching the “Animal” in the Nineteenth Century:

Jacques Derrida’s “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)” is a common, and helpful, starting point in modern conceptualizations of the nonhuman animal. In his lengthy essay, Derrida explicitly critiques nearly all preceding philosophers, from Descartes through Heidegger, commenting that the failure of these thinkers lies in their fundamental presupposition that ontology begins with the/a “human” and that there is a center from which to ponder “Being” and that humans are that locus. The main tenets of the essay include assertions that there is not simply a dichotomy between “Man” and “Animal,” that there must be a shift from a strictly anthropocentric subjectivity, and finally, any time “Man” attempts to declare such a dichotomy, he is making a stupid mistake (i.e., what Derrida calls “asinanity”) (413-14). According to Derrida, the generalized, or transcendental signified, always seems to create linguistic and philosophical problems at a foundational level. He offers, instead, the neologism animot as a replacement in favor of what he sees as an overgeneralized category of “the animal.” The term, according to Derrida, implies a multiplicity of the plural and singular as well as an ambiguity of gender, thus functioning to deconstruct previous generalities by the multivalent opportunities couched within this neologism.4

Furthermore, Derrida’s essay also affords us the memorable scene of his (actual/real) cat gazing upon his naked body, and this portion of the essay remains an important moment to emphasize; it is worth the time to briefly meditate on this scene. He explains:

I must make it clear from the start, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly,

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4 Matthew Calarco’s Zoographies (2008) also centers its focus upon the “question of the animal.” Like Derrida, he also identifies a kind of foundational anthropocentrism within Continental philosophy, and its continuation by modern philosophy, and he calls for abandoning the human/nonhuman ontological determination.
believe me, a little cat. It isn’t the figure of a cat. It doesn’t silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on earth, the felines that traverse myths and religions, literature and fables. There are so many of them. The cat I am talking about does not belong to Kafka’s vast zoopoetics, something that nevertheless solicits attention, endlessly and from a novel perspective. Nor is the cat that looks at me, and to which I seem – but don’t count on it – to be dedicating a negative zootheology. (386)

This refreshingly clear articulation from Derrida re-reminds us that the critical study of nonhuman animals, in order to move beyond the ideological trappings of linguistic objectivity or generality, must acknowledge the physicality and presence of actual, individual nonhuman animals, meaning that his declaration of a real cat moves away from a categorical generalization of “the animal” or those other creatures. This admission strikes at, and please excuse the terrible pun, the “meat” of his poststructuralist approach to animals: Animals are real; language structures and orders the ways in which actual humans think about actual and/or abstract animals; but language inevitably leads humans astray, time and again intentionally or unintentionally reducing to nonhuman animals to abstractions. Therefore, he promotes a move toward a greater specificity for those “real animals.” The trouble with Derrida is not this prescription of specificity, but rather the “type” of nonhuman (i.e., domestic feline) and the “state” of this nonhuman (i.e., alive) from his memorable example.

To further explain, domestic nonhuman animals have historically held a place above that of other nonhumans. Such “companion species” have held a special place in human hearts and homes. In comparison, say, to a cockroach or aphid, Derrida’s cat—as is the case with many

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5 Irony certainly is present in this “higher” status since these “companions” are subject to human will and socially as well as legally their “owners” responsibility.
domestic pets—appears closer to a human in the minds of many. At minimum, most people in
the Western world share more personal, physical knowledge and have more physical
interaction/contact with a cat or dog. They are easily observable, visible. Only a relatively small
portion of the population has regular and meaningful contact with other common species such as
domestic livestock.° People do not eat their nonhuman “companions” (or if they do, the act is
considered taboo by Western standards). On a related note, Donna Haraway, in When Species
Meet, deals specifically with “companion species,” in a way that demonstrates a fundamental
fault of theorizations of the nonhuman. She privileges domesticated species, and consequently,
she ignores many others (e.g., livestock) that would problematize her theoretical contributions of
the “material semiotic exchange.” 8 Humans see more of themselves in domestic species such as
dogs and cats, and therefore, it makes sense to her why/how one could see these “critters” (as she
calls them) as entitled to subjectivity. She also provides a paltry defense for the material use of
nonhuman animals for (human) scientific purposes, proposing that this practice is both necessary
and admissible. Haraway’s basic discernment of the ways in which humans and nonhumans can
and do communicate is admirable. Unfortunately, Haraway is more interested in romanticizing

6 I understand that there are some sweeping generalizations here and “meaningful contact” is an inherently
subjective term; however, I think that I can safely say that many modern Americans have little to no physical contact
with commercial agriculture/livestock. Moreover, when modern Americans do encounter these nonhumans, it is
often in dismembered pieces, which also frequently undergoes linguistic rebranding (e.g., “cow” becomes “beef” or
“T-bone,” etc.).

7 In the past decade or so, the study of nonhuman animals has entered into mainstream literary discourse. Indeed in
recent years (2012-2017), according to Linda Kalof, Seven Mattes, and Amy Fitzgerald’s ongoing animal studies
bibliography at Michigan State University, well over 600 books have been published in the field (“Animal Studies
Bibliography”). The rate of publication (roughly one hundred per year for the last five years) shows a steady
scholarship on nonhuman animals. As intellectual offspring of the Derridean poststructuralist linguistic turn,
posthumanism has emerged as a continuation of such attempts to see beyond humanism and “the human.” Theorists
such as Cary Wolfe, Matthew Calarco, and Donna Haraway have gained wide attention and acclaim in recent years
for their work in CAS. Yet for my project, I have found these philosopher/theorists less helpful to my goal of
understanding the nonhuman animal in the American nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the spirit of posthumanism,
as a necessary move away from anthropocentrism, remains an integral part of this project as well. Yet such
posthumanists have a tendency to situate the conversation of the nonhuman (and human for that matter) within
overwrought philosophical abstraction.

8 Haraway’s theorizations of what she calls the “material semiotic exchange” is a kind of semiotic “play” between
species.
her relationship with her border collie instead of addressing many other, non-companion animals that might complicate her theory of “contact zones” as well as the human’s ability to communicate with (much less recognize the subjectivity of) other animals.

This leads to another important facet of Derrida’s cat voyeur, which is that “it” is alive. Though this might seem an obvious observation, most individuals encounter nonhuman animals as either dead pieces of meat or linguistic abstractions, not in a living state. It would have been difficult for Derrida to be arrested by the gaze of a dead cat, or a piece of a dead cat for that matter. Humans commonly categorize dead animals as “things,” and dead things do not gaze (at least, I hope they don’t!). Finally, Lawrence Buell also reminds us, it is vital to remember that “there is an actual nonhuman world out there” (Future 110). This, however, does not seem as easy to remember as one might think.

In his meticulous and comprehensive examination of birds in British Romantic and Native American poetry, Thomas Gannon, in Skylark Meets Meadowlark, argues that the Romantics rarely afford readers a glimpse at any “real” birds. Even though avians are mentioned often in their work, these nonhuman animals primarily function anthropomorphically. As I am envisioning the representation(s) of nonhuman animals during the nineteenth century, a good deal of this literature seems to share that inability, or perhaps unwillingness, of the British Romantics to move beyond anthropomorphism and an anthropocentric worldview, in order to sustain a vision of the independent self. Gannon evokes the Lakota writer, Vine Deloria Jr., recounting that “[t]he single attribute that characterizes the Western approach to human

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9 In Chickasaw Native writer Linda Hogan’s chapter, “The Porcupine” in Dwellings, she describes a startling scene as she stares into the face of a dead porcupine, noting “the clean long gaze that death permits us” (145). She reflects on the choice that humans have to acknowledge such life. Hogan writes, “There is always that choice [to either honor or ignore other animals] for humans” (145). Unfortunately, we (humans) often choose the latter.

10 As Gannon eloquently reiterates, “Each bird poem is a cage, and as the reader peers through the cage at the colorful feathers, the poet crosses his fingers, hoping that the reader doesn’t notice that only the flimsiest wire is barely holding together this recuperative container of a self, ultimately, in the throes of lack” (122).
knowledge, indeed to almost all human activities,’ is ‘isolation’” (201). Again in his “Epilogue,” Gannon repeats that the privileging of the human individual has led to our own solitude. He remarks, “We individual humans are incredibly alone. Above all, alienated from the wild and our own animal selves as we are, we are inordinately drawn toward other species beyond some mere genetic biophilia” (315). Likewise, John Berger’s important early writing on nonhuman animals similarly claims that attraction to nonhuman animal companionship (i.e., companion species) lies in the fact that “animals offer man a companionship which is different from any offered by human exchange. Different because it is a companionship offered to the loneliness of man as a species” (6). The habit of Western culture has been to separate the (human) self from everything else, above and apart from the larger ecological kinships and interactions.11

Moreover as yet another iteration of this, humans have developed intricate death rituals that contribute to this ideology of human exceptionalism, separatism, and anthropocentrism. After nearly becoming food for crocodiles in the rural Australian Outback, the modern philosopher Val Plumwood came to the realization that humans are food, too. She writes about this as well as our own systematic removal from this food web. She explains that this denial of our own edibility along with the practices of embalming and preservation are symptomatic of self-ascribed bodily sanctity by the human species. Plumwood writes, “Upon death the human essence is conventionally seen as departing for a disembodied, non-earthly realm, rather than nurturing those earth others who have nurtured us” (19). Not even in death do humans count themselves among the other species. Much like in life, Plumwood continues, “Death becomes a site for apartness, domination and individual salvation, rather than for sharing and for nurturing a

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11 This is similar to what Eric Lott, in Love and Theft, identifies in the minstrel shows of the 1830s and 1840s. Lott argues that the white men were both attracted to and repulsed by black bodies. It is worth pondering whether or not humans, in their self-exile from other species kinships, share a similar “animal” repulsion and attraction that Lott would have us believe existed between these races.
community of life” (19). The deep ecologist Paul Shepard adds that “Mortuary practices which preserve the body reflect our aversion to the organismic agents of decay, cyclicity, and transformation, and at the same time they appeal to the dream of resurrection as literal restitution of the body” (35). Both Shepard’s and Plumwood’s observations of this human corporeal removal circles back nicely to Derrida’s identification of linguistic ambiguity and the abstraction of nonhuman animals. The creation and recognition of formalized systems of language still remain hallmarks of human civilization. Culturally, taxonomically, and linguistically, we, humans, continue to find ways to separate ourselves from all other species on the planet. So acknowledging the materiality, or realness, of nonhuman animals remains a helpful starting point. To recapitulate Derrida, “The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there” (411).

“Animals” Across the Nineteenth Century

This project is organized chronologically, and each of the chapters focuses on representative canonical authors as specific anchors for various instructive moments throughout the American nineteenth century. Additionally, I supplement and integrate these literary anchors, when appropriate, with texts from contemporaneous science, law, art, and other primary and secondary source materials. While literary artifacts remain the backbone of this dissertation, analysis of such texts (much like the aforementioned human isolation) gives only a partial view of the culture from which these works emerged. Therefore, a look across cultural productions remains vital to my argument as well as the task of better understanding the historical habits and ideological legacies that have curated nonhuman animal exploitation.
The opening chapter, “Cooper’s ‘Animal’ Movements: Across Land, Sea, and Species” examines two novels by James Fenimore Cooper from the Early Republic, *The Spy* (1821) and *The Pilot* (1824). The chapter specifically investigates Cooper’s use of nonhuman animals in these frequently overlooked novels and then compares it to two influential early American painters, John Trumbull and Thomas Cole. The pairing of Cooper’s early work with these two stylistically and ideologically divergent painters of the early nineteenth century gives insight into key tensions between Cooper, nonhuman animals, and the early nineteenth-century culture that influenced (and was influenced by) these individuals. Nonhuman animals in the Early Republic frequently appear, whether as character or metaphor, to solidify social taxonomies between “class” and “kind.” Cooper provides a crucial early view of nonhuman animals within American cultural perceptions of such divisions and his human-animal relations works to reinscribe a *natural* order over the foundational principles of American democracy.

The next chapter, “Transcending ‘Animals’: Breathing Machinery, Personhood, and Law,” takes as its primary texts three antebellum slave narratives: Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), William Well Brown’s *The Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (1847), and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). This section investigates how these black writers use nonhuman animals in their own narratives. Unlike Cooper, these writers were not interested in perpetuating a “natural” order between individuals. On the contrary, nonhuman animals appear, whether as character or metaphor, as a means to push back against their own dehumanization as well as a strategy for the “animalization” of their “masters.” These presences bolster the visibility of the slave’s humanity while resituating categories of species in terms of (moral) behavior. The chapter then analyzes legal distinctions of “personhood” alongside these antebellum slave narratives, looking
particularly at major documents such as the Three-Fifths Clause and the Fugitive Slave Act in addition to animal law. From its inception to the ratification of the 13th Amendment, the United States used the legal system to marginalize and dehumanize a race which was more often than not categorized as “property” rather than “human.”

Chapter 3, “Whitman’s Abattoir: “Dis”-membered / “Re”-membered Bodies, and the American Civil War,” identifies a major turning point in the relationship between humans and nonhumans. The shift occurs within the practice of nonhuman animal “production” directly after the War and places this historical shift in conversation with the poetry and prose of Walt Whitman. The American Civil War marked an important shift in the method and scale of nonhuman animal slaughter. This movement occurred in cities across the nation and entailed a change from many small-scale slaughter stalls to centralized large-scale operations. As the architectural historian Sigfried Giedion would later note, “What is truly startling in this mass transition from life to death is the complete neutrality of the act. One does not experience, one does not feel; one merely observes” (246). What’s perhaps even more compelling is that this experience became increasingly unobservable in the years following the War. The design and distance of these emergent industrial slaughter operations solidified the status of many nonhuman animals as dismembered pieces of “food.” Indeed, domestic livestock began to appear predominantly as “cuts” of meat, hides, and bones (i.e., in a state of fragmentary pieces) for the American eye as well as mind. With this emergent historical phenomena, the chapter reevaluates, and also recontextualizes, the poetry and prose of “America’s poet,” Walt Whitman, within this movement of nonhuman animal slaughter away from the gaze of the urban denizen against the methods for “re”-memberance of the Civil War dead, diseased, and “dis”-membered.
Finally the last chapter, “Vivisecting Twain’s ‘Animals’” locates a small, but significant, movement towards giving more consideration to nonhuman animals, exposing human violence upon these so-called “lower” creatures. The chapter specifically focuses on the work of Mark Twain. Twain remains especially instructive here by the way he affords readers, through his use of anthropomorphic talking animals, a greater sense of nonhuman animal visibility. His use of talking nonhuman animals allows for greater emotional investment from (human) audiences and begins the work of troubling the division between human and nonhuman animal, a division deeply entrenched in the nineteenth-century American experience.

In sum, while the methods and contexts differ, we have supported an ideology of human exceptionalism and difference from all other forms of life. While this is a human cultural habit that stretches back to antiquity, the American nineteenth century holds some especially pivotal shifts in the ways in which humans thought about themselves in relation to those other forms of (nonhuman) life. Language is still important as it renders the nonhuman abstractly or attempts to supply readers with something beyond humanist anthropocentric representation. The American nineteenth century appears as a place where the risk is not only the loss of definitions, but it is also a place where definitions over “life” itself determine whether or not a particular life may be dispatched with social, moral, and legal impunity. The century forced the public to continually confront questions over this “life” (human or otherwise) and the subsequent anxieties arising from these questions. Both the human and nonhuman animal were categories of flux throughout the nineteenth century. Rediscovering where, why, and to what degree the nonhuman appears as literary and/or cultural traces moves one step further to lifting the ideological veil that continues to obscure our perception of both human and nonhuman animals in American culture.
CHAPTER 1:

COOPER’S ANIMAL MOVEMENTS: ACROSS LAND, SEA, AND SPECIES

“The horse knows the righteous cause better than his rider”—The Spy

“Theyir approach was utterly unnoticed by the monster of the deep, who continued to amuse himself with throwing the water, in two circular spouts, high into the air, occasionally flourishing the broad flukes of his tail with a graceful but terrific force . . .”—The Pilot

Nonhuman animals have had long established and varied relationships with human animals. More often than not, however, these relations are oppressive, reductive, and guided by anthropocentric tendencies. Literary symbolic use of the nonhuman extends as far back as Aesop’s Fables, and as Mary Allen notes in Animals in American Literature, animals in these types of fables commonly “epitomized” one specific trait and “served a definite moral end” (4). Trickery and slyness relate to a fox; turtles are patient; lions are regal; diligence and provision are associated with ants. The list continues ad nauseam in infinitum (with slight variations) without actually saying much about the animals themselves, though it institutes a species hierarchy. These one-dimensional “animalistic” behavioral tropes are often then used to modify human characters, whether it be negative or positive, static or dynamic. “Animal” as a literary subject remains unavoidably linked to the “human,” and this is especially true in early-American literature.

To understand nonhuman animals throughout the nineteenth century, we must first look to the literature emerging out of the Early Republic, and one of the most canonical and
prominent figures of this period is James Fenimore Cooper. Cooper, I think, has maintained his place in the spotlight of literary studies since his own time until now, by and large, due to the allure of historical romantic fiction, and has since been a means to perpetuate the ideology of the Early Republic and, in turn, nationalism and the formation of an American cultural origin story. His fiction also influenced the perception of America and the American frontier during nineteenth-century for readers across Europe and Britain. At home in America, Cooper added to the historic formation of a nationalist mythos, entering into a cast of cult white-male figures such as George Washington, Alexis de Tocqueville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and William “Buffalo Bill” Cody, to name a few. Aside from America’s penchant for a good adventure story, Cooper (inspired by the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott) wrote stories that championed manifest destiny, independence, individualism, and heroic rectitude. His novels were often set on fringes of the republic, where wilderness and civilization meet at the frontier. And in addition to the occasional indigenous “wild savage,” an array of nonhuman figures appear to occupy the physical and socio-political margins of Cooper’s imagination, and identifying and interpreting these presences can move us toward understanding Cooper’s fiction as well as the relationship between human and nonhuman animals prevalent in the early-nineteenth century.

In his Leatherstocking series, Cooper exhibits a keen, if conflicted, ecological awareness through the character of Natty Bumppo. For instance, in The Pioneers, from the excessive arboreal harvesting and the wasteful fishing practices to the senseless passenger pigeon massacre, Natty’s pointed critiques of human civilization reflect what appears to be an acute sense of what Aldo Leopold would much later call an American “land ethic.” Natty as well as his

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12 Though de Tocqueville is French, his contributions to American identity, such as the concept of “individualism,” places him among these other “native” figures.
indigenous companion, Chingachgook, are aware of the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman worlds. Such characters recognize the moral responsibilities that humans *should* (but often do not) harbor toward the natural world. For Cooper as it was for many during this period of frontier expansion and industrialization, Natty’s clash with the actions and ideals of “the American” in pursuit of “progress” represents a fundamental quandary: the order of civilization versus the wilderness of nature.

Though I’ve opened with references to Cooper’s Leatherstocking series, the foci of this chapter will be on two other novels, *The Spy* (1821) and *The Pilot* (1824). These two novels can give us better insight into Cooper’s use of nonhuman animals, more so than those actually set in a sublime wilderness or settler-colonial frontier. Indeed, in these two early novels that are not often discussed for their engagement with the nonhuman world, we find a clearer picture of the nonhuman presences and a more direct route to uncovering Cooper’s Federalist elitism, as this is less clear in his books that receive more critical attention. The two historical romances that will be focused on here (each set during the American Revolutionary War) bookend the 1823 publication of *The Pioneers*. In 1821, Cooper gained his first acclaim for *The Spy*, a novel set upon the “neutral ground” of Westchester County in New York. The other historical romance also takes place during the Revolutionary War, but instead of situating itself on the terra firma of North America, *The Pilot* (1824), is set off the coast of England. Preceding and following the ecologically aware Natty, Cooper straddles two different, but instructive, iterations of civilization and wilderness in these novels. The distinct movements or fluctuations between human and nonhumans in these works, however, help orient Cooper’s environmental dispositions. Indeed, his representations of nonhuman animals in these novels reveal the physical and ideological boundaries between various species and various (human) individuals in his own time. This
chapter investigates these movements between and against species in an effort to better understand the historical mythmaking of his “revolutionary” work and to initiate the dissertation’s broader investigation of the nonhuman animal throughout the American nineteenth century.

In addition to the novels investigated here, this chapter also puts Cooper in conversation with the contemporaneous painters John Trumbull and Thomas Cole in order to further flesh out how, why, and to what extent the human stands apart from, next to, within, or against the nonhuman and the environment at-large. In this chapter I argue that, for Cooper, human and nonhuman animal pairing is a way for him to amplify certain “breeds” of human while also a technique to demean or dehumanize characters. Trumbull and Cole are important in understanding the dueling American ideologies within Cooper’s work. The earlier neoclassicist Trumbull gives insight into the rigid boundaries that Cooper implements, while Cole’s romantic scenes of sublime landscape help to lift the ideological veil that would seem to pass for environmental awareness or an acknowledgement of nonhuman subjectivity. The semblance of a “revolutionary” American patriotism and democracy in Cooper’s early work, in fact, inscribes older colonial hierarchies of class and species and provides a beginning point in which to view the cultural separation of humans and nonhumans in the early-nineteenth century.

Animal Movements: Land and Sea, Horse and Whale

The Spy’s narrative centers primarily on a Virginian cavalry troop, and it is there, among the American army, where one encounters the bulk of human and nonhuman animal associations, representations, and shifting boundaries. Cooper has distinct types of nonhuman animals. Edible nonhumans include both domestic, or agrarian, livestock as well as the wild creatures from
Cooper’s fictional naturescapes. This wide cast of nonhuman animal specimens are brief echoes in the novels. More often than not, edibility lends itself to objectification in the works of Cooper. The other, more active, nonhuman beings in *The Spy* are cavalry horses. The equine presents a much more complex relationship with the human characters within the novel. Indeed, horses—not too unlike dogs or other domestic companion species—hold an exceptional status in Western cultures. Admittedly, horses are eaten in various parts of the world, yet Cooper’s equines tend to reflect nobility and good “breeding” more than anything. Cavalry horses and their relation to soldiers often distort the boundaries between these two species, and the melding of "soldier" and "horse" into "horseman" does not remain consistent throughout. Rather, there are distinctive shifts and disjunctions between the two species.

As often is the case in war, the justification of killing requires certain temporary states of exception, and the merger between human and nonhuman within the novel gives American cavalry soldiers a greater freedom to traverse the bounds of quotidian morality. A soldier, when mounted, becomes a kind of “beast of burden,” the burden being not a physical “weight,” but rather a moral (and/or amoral) patriotic toil. This, in essence, carries a kind of ethical “neutrality,” yet the same does not apply to characters of lower social status.

Cooper further reinforces this class separation in *The Spy* in the juxtaposition between two types of soldiers. On the American side, there are the “regular,” or official, Virginia horsemen, and there are the unofficial, and morally bankrupt, “skinners.” The foiling works to strengthen the ties of “breed” and “kind” to the “man” as the official American “regulars” are to perform the necessary work of nation-building. In this regard, the skinners take on a pejorative “animalistic” identity, and their own horses are only implied by their arrival and departure from various scenes. In essence, they become the “animals” whenever their behavior signifies to the
other characters as well as the reader. In turn, the Virginians become “noble” or “mythic” in their communion with beast. Equestrian identity in the novel amplifies the qualities of particular soldiers, and, importantly, it does this through blurring the human/nonhuman binary. At other times, this human-to-animal association works as a means to cast “lower” characters as just that—lower. The paradox here is that the proper horseman becomes elevated while also possessing a privileged mobility, meaning that he can merge with the nonhuman as well as separate himself from “animal.” Other “lower” characters do not have such freedom of mobility. This class of character remains fixed in his/her low-social position.

Historically, cavalry played an especially important role for the revolutionary forces, so much so that George Washington himself wrote on December 11, 1776, that there was “no carrying on the War without them” (qtd. in Urwin 25). The Continental Light Dragoons were effective on the battlefield and performed a number of other roles such as “couriers, scouts, and raiders” (25). Cooper’s *The Spy* portrays cavalry as both a strong militaristic force as well as a useful resource outside of physical combat. A clear distinction between “proper” or “official” soldiers and the American “skinner” relegates the most nefarious behavior to the latter. Likewise, in the novel (and historically) the same divide occurs on the British side between the “provincials” (i.e., official British soldiers) and “cowboys” (i.e., unofficial soldiers fighting on behalf of the British). Although the “proper” soldiers, American or British, surely engaged in raiding and pilfering, Cooper portrays them as distinctly apart from the amoral and opportunistic skinner or cowboy. Urwin notes how this area of “neutrality” seems to be somewhat of a misnomer. When describing the area in Westchester County, Urwin remarks that this “no-man’s-land between the lines [was] infested by roving bands of Whig and loyalist foragers known respectively as ‘skinners’ and ‘cowboys,’ who terrorized local inhabitants and ambushed enemy
The separation between regular and non-regular soldier is reinforced through their behavior. Simply put, the American regulars act with an air of aristocratic decorum, while “animal” desire and base instinct drive the non-regulars. Nonhuman animals paradoxically work to either make the characters more or less human.

From the first battle scene, the demarcations of soldier and horse become enmeshed in overlapping and shifting ambiguities. In the moments prior to the first battle, the narrator comments, “On getting sufficiently near, however, to a body of horse of more than double his own number, to distinguish countenances, Lawton plunged his rowels into his charger, and in a moment he was by the side of his commander” (67). In these closing lines from chapter five, a series of interesting associations and dissociations can be decoded. The metonym “body of horse” stands in for the British cavalry, a cohesive unit made up of individual man and horse pairs, but to the American soldiers, the “enemy” stands as a uniform animal “body.” Indeed, this same sentence also juxtaposes the individual soldier, Lawton, against the opposition’s cohesive “animal” whole. Lawton and Dunwoodie appear as individual human characters in opposition to the animal mass. Also striking in this passage, there is an explicit separation between Lawton and his charger, which further works to place each side, American and British, in a distinct position from this initial battle scene. One side appears composed of individual human bodies (each on horseback but distinguished apart from his horse) while the other constitutes a metonymic “animal body.” Not long after, however, this melding of soldier and animal also appears in American characters such as Lawton and Dunwoodie—to a different effect.

Yet before the animal modifications of Lawton or Dunwoodie, the line directly following the scene above makes yet another shift. “The ground in front of the cottage was again occupied by the horse,” states the narrator (67). The line contributes toward moving the reader through a
series of visual and linguistic shifts. First, a sweeping vision of a large animal body of a looming British cavalry; then, a move to the distinctly human body of Captain Lawton; and finally, a shift back to a broad view of “the horse.” Here again the singular functions as a plural, similar to the first mention of the “body of horse.” Furthermore, the descriptors “horse,” “Lawton,” or “body of horse,” are not simply interchangeable, or synonymous, terms. The metonymy of such moments effectively creates bodies that seem to possess stable identities; however, as such literary subjects continually move back and forth between “human” and “nonhuman,” it becomes much more difficult to rely on appearances. Important to reiterate, the movement between human individuality and nonhuman animal is metonymic. In a novel all about movement across a physical space labelled as “neutral ground” or between loyal patriot and traitorous spy, the subtle movement between species reflects the difficult ambiguities tracking the various movements of human loyalties and how human action or moral liberties remain dependent on the “kind” of character being animal-modified; it is a movement which happens commonly throughout the text.

In the following chapter, there is a similar moment as Frances Wharton, an American aristocrat and love interest of Major Dunwoodie, watches from a window moments before the battle begins. The narrator comments that she distinguishes one particular horseman from all the rest, a “youthful soldier” atop his steed; the narrator continues, “his hoofs but lightly touched the earth, and his airy tread was the curbed motion of a blooded charger” (68). Frances locates her romantic interest, Major Dunwoodie, in this passage. Cooper, having his reader gaze over the American side, leads the reader from the assimilated mass of cavalry to a “body” to the individual, and his language here deserves careful attention. The horse’s hooves appear to nearly

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13 This becomes clearer when also considering the clandestine and lowly hero of the novel, Harvey Birch, which will be later discussed.
float above the ground, and as the text also notes, “he sustained the weight of no common man” (68). Here, the text elevates and emblazons; the fantastical descriptions of a seemingly Pegasus-like horse coincides with the following narrative descriptions of Dunwoodie as elevated above a “common man.” Likewise, the narrator goes on to describe Dunwoodie as “master” over both himself as well as his horse, and as the text notes, “[H]is figure uniting the just proportions of strength and activity, being tall, round, and muscular” (68; emphasis added). It is unclear whether “just proportions” apply specifically to Dunwoodie, his horse, and/or a combination of the two, but the term “uniting” is important, even if pinning down a particular subject to grant these qualities upon remains difficult. Dunwoodie might be deemed “master” and “uncommon,” yet these are paired, or juxtaposed, with a strong association to his “beast.” The union of Dunwoodie with his horse therefore amplifies the “greatness” of his character while also suggesting “union” between human and nonhuman animal. Instead of a juxtaposition posing individual American cavalry against a large British animal-body, here is an American officer who stands apart from the rest. Where does Dunwoodie end and the horse begin? They combine and fragment within this passage. Such ambiguity allows a reader to assign these characteristics to Dunwoodie, horse, and “horseman” individually or simultaneously.

In contrast to the frequent appearance of and comparison to nonhuman animals in *The Spy*, such metaphors are rare in *The Pilot*. Yet this lack in frequency is made up by one potent appearance. The example that stands out in *The Pilot* does not appear until rather late in the novel, Chapter XVII. A whale comes into the narrative without much build up. The whale appears in the distance off the British coastline, and American Lieutenant Richard Barnstable, upon sighting the aquatic mammal, instantly wants to kill it. Both Barnstable and Tom Coffin, the coxswain, seem initially motivated by a strange “sporting” desire, the narrator, in fact,
describing Coffin and Barnstable as “sportsmen” (185). Unlike the overt melding of soldier to animal in *The Spy*, *The Pilot* steadily keeps these “sportsmen” apart from the whale. Shortly after the two slay the “monster,” Barnstable asks, “What’s to be done now,” and continues by adding, “he will yield no food, and his carcass will probably drift to land, and furnish our enemies with the oil” (187). In agreement with the sportsmen’s desires, the thrill of the hunt overshadows any practical utilitarian motivations for killing the whale; though Coffin does utter the afterthought to Barnstable that he could capitalize on the kill if only the “creater” were in Boston Bay (188). Nevertheless, both human instigators of the hunt acknowledge that the floating carcass can no longer be of any use to them.

The scene might call to mind a similar sentiment as found in the vast pigeon slaughter in *The Pioneers*:

> So prodigious was the number of birds that the scattering fire of the guns, with the hurling missiles and the cries of the boys, had no other effect than to break off small flocks from the immense masses that continued to dart along the valley, as if the whole of the feathered tribe were pouring through one pass. None pretended to collect the game, which lay scattered over the fields in such profusion as to cover the very ground with fluttering victims. (248)

The waste that Natty Bumppo chides the hunters with is the same kind of excessive “sporting” practices found in the whale hunt. Yet, the whaling adventure distinguishes itself as significantly different from the pigeon hunt. Wasteful abuse upon “nature” certainly tie these two hunts together, but as with the horses in *The Spy*, the whale itself slips in and out of anthropomorphisms. For example, the narrator begins the whale hunt sequence by recounting, “Their approach was utterly unnoticed by the monster of the deep, who continued to amuse
himself with throwing the water, in two circular spouts, high into the air, occasionally flourishing
the broad flukes of his tail with a graceful but terrific force” (184). In this sentence alone, one
can identify an oscillation between “wild animal” and/or anthropomorphic animal.14

The scene starts with a “monster of the deep,” and from this opening, the initial distance
between the “heroic” sailor and “beast” begins. By the beginning emphasis of the monstrous
creature, the ensuing battle, in effect, elevates the human soldier’s heroism. Directly after,
however, the description moves into something more resembling anthropomorphism. The
narrator assigns the human emotion of amusement upon the whale. Thus, the whale at once
appears as an anthropomorphic demonization while also carrying an air of human pleasure in its
water spouting. Likewise, the following description of “graceful but terrific force” further builds
upon both the separation and overlap of human soldier and whale, as both are to become
“enemies” of one another. Barnstable calls the whale “our enemy” shortly before Tom states,
“[whales] need the air in their nostrils, when they run, the same as a man” (186-87). This is then
followed by more oscillations between “monster” and an anthropomorphized whale (187-91).

Barnstable and Tom’s whale differs from Natty’s pigeons in the potential danger present
in each species respectively. After Natty remarks that he has “known” the birds “to fly for forty
long years,” he continues by recounting, “I loved to see them come into the woods, for they were
company to a body; hurting nothing; being, as it was, as harmless as a garter-snake” (248).
Unlike the anthropomorphistic whale, the pigeons are part of the “woods”; the birds are not
threatening; and they are essentially harmless. Instead of such passive objects, the large
foreboding whale poses a potential threat. In this sense, then, the “sport” that Cooper attaches to
both the pigeon shoot and whale battle are nuanced with a valence of what “sport” may imply.

14 This happens to be an extremely long sentence, a grammatical construction that Cooper implements from time to
time. This particular sentence constitutes the whole of a lengthy paragraph.
Both involve the human pleasure derived from killing nonhuman animals and both illustrate wasteful practices. The central difference in the two hunts is as follows: killing large formidable beasts shows readers how powerful and brave American officers are, while protecting the smaller and less-threatening birds highlights the heroic values of stewardship. In each, the human remains the central figure of importance, and what might resemble eco-consciousness (e.g., Natty’s critique of wasteful practices) is simply another iteration of the whale hunt, yet another occasion of the human attempting to enforce his authority over “lower creatures.”

In *The Pilot*, Cooper deliberately parallels the whale hunt and the British versus American sea battle that follows, the two fight scenes appearing to mirror one another. Indeed, Barnstable uses the words “sport” and “game” in preparation for the human-to-human engagement. He champions his own sailor status over the bumbling marines, creating divisions not too unlike the distinctions of “regular” and “skinner” in *The Spy*. In this parallel, the American sailors face the challenge of overcoming another manifestation of the nonhuman. As the human against human battle unfolds, echoes of the whale hunt emerge. Tom and Barnstable, the two previous instigators, yell nonhuman animal epithets at their British opponents, such as “lazy riptyles” and “horse mackerel” (202). What might appear careless name calling provides yet another example of the rhetorical pairing of human with nonhuman; on this occasion, though, the “animalization” of opposing forces raises the American sailors while lowering the British to “animals.” After the battle itself and Barnstable’s surrender, the dead and wounded lie on the ship’s deck. Cooper’s mirroring of the whale hunt and this battle place these dead within a similar frame as the lifeless whale carcass. Nonhuman animal language used on the British substantiate the supremacy of the American forces over the colonial forces while simultaneously reiterating tropes of human mastery over the nonhuman world. What remains key here is
Cooper’s recurring dual use of the nonhuman, either to elevate or demote, moving as the nonhuman does, theoretically, between human and nonhuman associations.

In the final paragraphs of Chapter XVIII, the coxswain Long Tom Coffin and the dead whale again overlap in intriguing ways. Tom again laments that the whale has been “an awful waste of property,” followed by a poetic (and emotionally moving) narrative exposition:

[Tom’s] face resting gloomily on his bony hand, he fastened his eyes on the object of his solicitude, and continued to gaze at it with melancholy regret, while it was to be seen glistening in the sunbeams, as it rolled its glittering side of white into the air, or the rays fell unreflected on the black and rougher coat of the back of the monster. (205)

Tom’s connection with the whale remains subtly implied in his feelings of gloom and melancholy. Tom’s “bony hand” also presupposes the whale’s decay that will soon begin. The whale changes to a lifeless “object” moved only by the ocean’s current. The masculine pronouns of the living whale, as when Tom exclaimed that “I saw his spout,” become “it” (184, 205). This final word of the chapter would appear to again establish a relative distance between “monster” and human. But as a kind of paradox, Tom’s connection with the slayed beast lingers. The fact that Tom shares the whale’s fate as he, too, ends in a watery grave by the close of the novel must not be overlooked.

Jason Berger has convincingly argued that Tom Coffin’s death ties into the author’s own patriotic motivations for the novel, explaining that Tom acts as a kind of liminal character who is a hero, “but his class and occupational status link him to the intrinsic dangers, in Cooper’s view, inherent in American’s [sic] democratic and economic systems” (“Killing Tom Coffin” 664-65). Berger’s claim explains Tom’s inevitable death; it also explains why the sea consumes him and
the character’s sympathy for the dead “monster” glistening in the sun. Tom remains a “heroic” character in a similar fashion to the “heroic” spy, Harvey Birch.

Birch, marked as The Spy’s “hero,” remains separated from the other more elevated characters. Birch is not a “proper” soldier, and he is viewed by the other characters a despicable criminal of war. As the eponymous “spy” in The Spy, his true intentions are cloaked in mystery for the bulk of the narrative. A peddler by trade, like a horse or mule he carries his goods upon his back, and, due in part to his anonymity, he is able to navigate across British and American territories. Accused of treason, he becomes an important “enemy” to capture and execute. Birch himself exclaims when being pursued by Lawton, “Hunted like a beast of the forest!” (115). Later, to Wharton, he similarly asks, “Have I not been the hunted beast of these hills for three years past?” (343). And for a large portion of the novel, Birch is considered a “criminal”; he is continually hunted by members of the Virginian cavalry. Later Birch tells Captain Wharton, “Yes, such are their laws; the man who fights, and kills, and plunders, is honoured; but he who serves his country as a spy, no matter how faithfully, no matter how honestly, lives to be reviled, or dies like the vilest criminal!” (330). Birch cast as a “hunted” animal-like traitor is, in fact, the “hero” of the story. He embodies the public “animalization” of “the skinner” as well as the black servants Caesar and Betty, while also enacting his private heroic deeds, actions which directly lead to his “hunted” status.

Unlike the human elevation that horses provide to (high-ranking) cavalry soldiers, Birch in The Spy and Tom in The Pilot are sacrificial “animals,” who by necessity die so that other (both “high” and “low”) Americans can continue to carry the torch of independence. Their sacrificial roles are indicative of Cooper’s Federalist leanings. Furthermore, the whale’s abundance (and power), in The Pilot, could be symbolic of the democratic masses, and therefore
the human-animal pair both need to die to continue the cultural elitism found in characters of high birth or rank. It, then, does not seem surprising that both of these peripheral heroes, Tom Coffin (in *The Pilot*) and Harvey Birch (in *The Spy*), meet a less than heroic death.

While human interaction with nonhuman animals is meager in *The Pilot*, the whale hunt and Tom-to-Whale pairing are in line with Cooper’s nonhuman animal movements in *The Spy* (i.e., where animals also tend to shift and amplify rather than remain fixed entities). One of the more illustrative passages in *The Spy* appears at the close of chapter fourteen. A roving band of “non-regular” skinners are robbing Harvey Birch, the novel’s clandestine hero. Birch is believed to be a British spy and traitor to his fellow Americans, but he is, in fact, spying on the British. When Katy Haynes, the Whartons’ housekeeper, claims justice will be served for their nefarious actions, one of the skinners responds, “The law of the neutral ground is the law of the strongest” (180). Skinners, and other non-regulars, do not bind themselves to any codes of “honor” as seen in the official American and British forces. Instead, Cooper depicts them as opportunistic, rapacious, and “savage.” In fact, the one and only time “natives” (i.e., Native Americans) are mentioned is in relation to a skinner. Lawton is conversing with an army chaplain who fears scalping from “savage Indians.” Lawton responds, “More than savages; men who, under the guise of Patriotism, prowl through the community, with a thirst for plunder that is unsatable [sic], and a love of cruelty that mocks the ingenuity of the Indian” (288). Lawton, of course, is referencing the skinners in this passage.

T.H. Crawford has argued, in “Cooper’s Spy and the Theater of Honor,” that while Cooper is known for championing “rugged-individual” characters like Natty Bumppo, in *The Spy*, Cooper privileges the upper-class characters. Crawford argues that the higher socio-economic status of a character, the better, or nobler, those characters are. Often (but not always)
the character’s social status gives the reader clues to the individual’s moral compass. The same applies to *The Pilot*’s cast. A complication to this paradigm, though, as Crawford also noted, is the character of Harvey Birch. The pejorative “animalization” of not only the skinners, but also others of “lower” status in the novel, is part of identifying lower classes with base appetites and an inability to govern themselves. Again, as Berger observed in *The Pilot*’s Tom Coffin, a “lowly” character like Birch as well as systems of governance that promote a classless equality pose an inherent threat for Cooper.

Moreover, we can observe many more occasions when Cooper uses nonhuman animals as a way to reinforce social class and kind. For example, Lawton on a few occasions labels a servant named Betty as a dumb little “animal” (190). Another example can be found when the Whartons’ black servant, Caesar, points out the ridiculous wool wig in the disguise of Henry Wharton, noting that (white) people think a “coloured man” looks like a “sheep” (333). Cooper positions social elites as inherently good or noble, yet this does not also mean that “lower” characters like Harvey Birch or Tom Coffin cannot act in heroic ways. It does mean, however, that they cannot be lasting (i.e., living) heroes in each novel.

Cooper’s portrait of the Virginia cavalry in *The Spy* harkens to a telling passage from Cooper’s own *Letters*. On June 28, 1820, Cooper, writing to the New York bookseller Andrew Thompson Goodrich, vents some frustration over what he considers the goal of this new novel: “The task of making American Manners and American scenes interesting to an American reader is an arduous one,” writes Cooper, “I am unable to say whether I shall succeed or not” (44). As Sarah Burns also has stated, “For some, at least, independence meant discarding the formalities and civilities associated with aristocratic, or at least upper-class behavior.” (67). And yet Burns notes that Cooper was “no advocate of mass democracy,” going on to quote from Cooper’s
political essay, “The American Democrat”: “There is no doubt that, in general, America has retrograded in manners in the last thirty years [. . . ] This is not independence but vulgarity (qtd. in Burns 67). One can identify Cooper’s desired “American Manners” in his demarcations between “regular” and “non-regular” soldiers."

As Donald Ringe argues, “[Cooper] envisioned the Revolutionary War, not as a struggle between opposing governments and armies,” but rather an internalized “neighbor” against “neighbor” conflict (357-58). Embedded within this war between neighbors, for Cooper and many others, were questions of social mobility. In the face of the inevitable consequence of war, to kill and to be killed, for Cooper, there is a kind of “natural” order of things. Animal metaphors help maintain division between marines and sailors, skinners and cavalry—whether the setting is on the “neutral ground” of the Americas or off the ambiguous British seacoast. Characters of high rank act in accordance with that rank and station, and even if the socially “lower” characters such Tom Coffin or Harvey Birch can act heroically, they do so to maintain a taxonomic system of social elitism.

**Painting Cooper’s Early Republic**

Powerful iconography of the American Revolutionary War, by the time Cooper began writing *The Spy* in 1820, already had made its presence in visual art. Yet to get to the heart of the dueling ideologies in Cooper’s early work, it is helpful to focus on two American painters, John Trumbull and Thomas Cole. These two painters, or more accurately the manner in which these two painters translated their world or their view of history to canvas, represent the two visions with which Cooper grappled in his early work. Trumbull as the American Neoclassical historian

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15 “Manners” for Cooper do not seem to be a formalized system of etiquette; rather, manners here more likely refers to the overall character or disposition of Americans.
of the Revolutionary War dealt with the same subject, or the same history, within which Cooper sets *The Spy* and *The Pilot*. Cole, on the other hand, though also a contemporary of Cooper, represents a romantic moral vision of the American wilderness, a vision that is acutely aware of the encroachment of civilization upon the land. As the art historian, Earl Powell, has explained, “a new nation . . . required a distinctive artistic tradition,” adding that “Nationalism and Romanticism came together in the first quarter of the nineteenth century to inspire important new developments in literature and painting, which resulted in the emergence of landscape as metaphor for the new country” (9). Powell’s succinct identification of the need for a distinctively American tradition within the Early Republic is key to understanding why both Cooper and Trumbull placed a number of their works in this particular defining “American” historical moment; it is the Revolutionary War that allowed for a distinct break from colonial rule with the beginnings of self-governance, and the patriotism couched in representations of such historic moments help to establish a national mythology of “Americanism,” whether in literature or canvas. Cole painted canvases based on Cooper’s stories, and their national mythmaking pinpoints a key tension as Americans during the nineteenth century were confronted with the immediate issue of the borderland between wilderness and civilization.

William Cronon, in his influential essay “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” locates a fundamental shift in our perception of “wilderness” over the course of the nineteenth century, noting that this concept we call “wilderness” is, in fact, a “product of [American] civilization” (69). He convincingly explains how our contemporary views of nature and wilderness arose from two primary concepts of that century: the sublime and the frontier (72). Cronon further comments that “The two converged to remake wilderness in their own image, freighting it with moral values and cultural symbols that it carries to this day”
Indeed, Cole’s paintings and Cooper’s fiction include elements of the romantic sublime as well as the frontier, and though Cronon does not mention either Cole or Cooper by name, both influenced the ways in which individuals throughout the nineteenth century thought about wilderness (and its nonhuman animal occupants) and themselves.

Thomas Cole’s contemporary nature landscapes offer comparable expressions to Cooper’s own visions of a diminishing natural world. It is no coincidence that, as Albert Boime notes, Cole was a member of the Hudson River School artistic movement, which was funded by patrons such as James Fenimore Cooper’s father, William Cooper. As Boime points out, “The reigning elite wished to record and celebrate the untapped wilderness” (48). Alan Wallach also describes the patrons of Cole’s work as a Federalist/Whig aristocracy who sought artistic renderings of “real” landscapes. As he explains, these “real” landscapes were in actuality seeking nostalgic landscapes from a time in the past. This identification of the aristocracy with a past state of nature (and natural order) coincides with Cronon’s claim that civilizations craft their own vision of wilderness. Wallach goes on to explain that the initial attractiveness of Cole’s art was due in part because “Cole evoked a time when the frontier was up the Hudson and the land, unthreatened by the inroads of commerce and industry, offered limitless opportunities to an aristocracy-in-the-making,” and he adds, “The ‘realism’ of Cole’s paintings, upon which his patrons so insisted, only served to make the evocation more convincing” (98-99). Similar to desires of Cole’s patrons, Cooper was also keen on adding to a “realism” that aggrandized a romantic historical past before the American Industrial Revolution. Even (and perhaps especially) for someone rather nouveau riche like William and James Fenimore Cooper, the allure of such American classicism proved a powerful influence.

Wallach further explains that Cole eventually fell out of favor with these same Federalist/Whig patrons. He elaborates that many of the powerful “New York Federalists” soon figured out that industry was not necessarily antagonistic to land owning, adapting to the times and looking out for their financial futures (102).
Arguably Cole’s most iconic painting, *The Oxbow* (1836), conveys a boundary where wilderness and civilization meet [Figure 3]. The frontier in the painting holds the potential to move in either direction. The land itself is in flux, with the potential for wilderness to subsume the cultivated land or for the human march of progress to continue into the forest. Yet there is also a clear abyss between the manicured fields of American civilization and the wild unkempt forces of the natural world, which seems a fundamental quandary lingering in much of Cooper’s work too. Though painted over a decade after *The Spy* and *The Pilot*, *The Oxbow* speaks to the growing visible division between a progressive civilization and the American wilderness, though the only human figure (if not the only animal; there are pastures in the distance) represented in the painting is the artist himself. He is seated with his easel amidst the apparent wilderness of Mt. Holyoke, a popular tourist viewing spot—a reminder that landscape paintings like his encapsulated the “view” of middle-class urbanites. As one can easily observe in Cole’s painting, “nature” and human alteration of the land are distinctly separate, and this ultimately implies that “wild” untouched nature remains a division apart from, if not antagonistic to, the progressive encroachment of such anthropogenic forces within the cultural ideal of wilderness.

To further emphasize this vital point, Alex Potts, in “Natural Order and the Call of the Wild,” marks an ideological distinction between the representation of nonhumans in the late-18th and early-19th centuries, arguing that “animals are represented as extensions of the social order inhabited by the spectator,” and that “there is no purely wild nature because the relationship between the social and the natural is continuously mediated” (14). Potts then interprets 19th-

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17 It might seem that Cole’s series of paintings depicting scenes from *Last of the Mohicans* would be more appropriate to a comparison with Cooper; however, these pieces are much less illuminating than *The Oxbow*. The *Mohicans* series primarily depict tiny Native Americans amidst a grand wilderness, and thus, the Natives are cast as small features within nature; nevertheless, they are included in the “wild” landscape rather than individualized subjects existing apart from the untrammelled sublime. Understandably, the artist himself is positioned in *The Oxbow* on the side of wilderness, yet still appears to function within a white settler-colonialism—literally mapping out the landscape and braving the wild to do so.
century artists like Cole as attempting to portray wilderness and “wildness” as existing apart from human mediation. It would be difficult to claim that one can ever truly escape human-imposed order in art produced by humans, and Potts acknowledges this by noting that even the famous English animal painter Edwin Landseer allows the audience to “recognise an analogy between this raw nature and a human order of things” (15).

Cooper, then, may very well be sensitive to anthropogenic impacts upon the wild (most explicitly typified in his pointed critiques delivered through the character Natty Bumppo), but his need for an anthropocentric ordered system against which the chaos of wilderness must be conserved or “properly” utilized (as in tourist views) but also, ultimately, controlled and mediated remained. With this in mind, Cooper’s use of nonhumans is variable, yet the concept of control remains the overarching principle. As an example, the utility of the horse rests upon its position as a domesticated nonhuman animal. The wild whale, on the other hand, becomes a force of nature that must be subdued. In both domestic and wild, the nonhuman can amplify the human: either in a brief overlap of signification or as a figure of radical difference to the human. Cast as a “wild” force of nature, the human characters establish their “supremacy,” their place in a species hierarchy. Importantly, Cooper tends to conflate this “natural order” with social order; so that what is “natural” is elite dominance. By tapping into the mythos of human superiority over the natural world, he can propagate a “natural” American Federalist mythos. The center is always human, and even in those seemingly ecologically sensitive moments from Leatherstocking himself, or the heroic amplification of the Virginia horseman in The Spy, or in the impulsive whale hunters of The Pilot, not only are there human centers, but such anthropocentrism utilizes a social ordering of different “kinds” or “breeds” within the taxonomic classification of homo sapiens, most typified in his novel The Spy and Trumbull’s art.
Cooper and Trumbull differed in their socio-economic origins, yet both eventually place a good deal of value in social hierarchy, a belief that inevitably expresses itself in their respective artistic and literary productions. Trumbull even painted Cooper’s father, Judge William Cooper, in 1806 (“Search Results”; Phillips). Unfortunately, according to the Smithsonian Archive, that particular painting is now catalogued as “destroyed” (“Search Results”). Though William Cooper came from humble origins, starting as a wheelwright, he amassed a significant fortune and established the town of Cooperstown.\footnote{For more on William Cooper, see Alan Taylor’s informative monograph, \textit{William Cooper’s Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic} (1996).} Trumbull, on the other hand, came from a more aristocratic stock, or as the early historian William Dunlap describes him, Trumbull was “emphatically well-born” (qtd. in Evans 71).\footnote{Coincidently, Trumbull was suspected as a spy (not too unlike Harvey Birch) while in England during the war. He was imprisoned for a short time, and then he was deported back to America.} All beginnings aside, wealth and the social status that this granted eventually led both James Fenimore Cooper and John Trumbull to oppose Jacksonian democracy in favor of the foundational elitism found in Federalism.

Set in the same war as Cooper’s \textit{The Spy} and \textit{The Pilot}, Trumbull’s painting, entitled \textit{The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton}, ca. 1789, presents a scene bearing a striking resemblance to the first battle scene in Cooper’s \textit{The Spy}. [Figure 4] The subject of the painting is a victory in New Jersey that helped boost the confidence of the American revolutionary forces. The painting clearly demarcates the two opposing sides by the contrasting colors of their coats. Dorinda Evans in her book \textit{Benjamin West and His Students} explains how Trumbull preserves an elite character to the battle, in relation to a similar picture of a Revolutionary War battle by Trumbull, “the picture compromises by depicting the British, in a winning position, displaying humanity towards a fallen American” (90). Moreover, Patricia M. Burnham adds that the painting’s action highlights how “[a]n American subaltern joins forces with British major John
Small to prevent an unidentified British officer from bayoneting Warren” (40). Burnham goes on to note that “Within the painting and the group of paintings of which it is a part [. . . ] Trumbull makes it quite clear that the most significant and compelling heroes are those of elevated rank” (44). Social rank was very much a part of Trumbull’s beliefs and a not-uncommon inheritance from colonial rule over the colonies.

Although British officers and soldiers act in the foreground of Mercer, Washington seated on his horse is the central focus. He appears as the most “elevated” character in the painting by being the tallest in height as well as because of his position in the composition, above the violence. But more intriguing is the human and nonhuman animal interaction occurring below the elevated figure of General Washington. A British soldier attempts to drive his bayonet into a downed horse, while the American General Hugh Mercer—who was bayoneted seven times—tries to stop him, even grasping the enemy’s bayonet with his bare hand. The horse, already in the throes of death, visibly bleeds from a previous puncture wound. Similarly displacing the ostensible subject (the death by bayonet wounds of the American general), in the background British soldier stabs another American soldier, with the cannon serving to prop him up instead of a wounded horse.

Art historian Theodore Sizer, in his 1950 explication of the multiple versions and sketches of this painting, points out how the downed horse is facing the attacker in all versions preceding this final iteration. Sizer writes, “The steed’s head is upturned and its glance directed at two British grenadiers as if in dumb supplication—a decidedly distracting, sentimental note which was not eliminated until the final picture” (3). Sizer closes with the remark, “Though the composition was perfected—and the disturbing element of Mercer’s charger corrected—it remained a dull spiritless performance” (5). This final change by Trumbull lessens the disturbing

20 See [Figure 5] for an example of this alternative positioning.
sentimentality that Sizer describes, thus shifting any potential empathy from horse to soldier. The tête-à-tête confrontation of horse-to-soldier in previous versions afford a greater sense of life and vigor to the horse that this final scene (anthropocentrically) “corrects.”

Washington similarly resides in the background of *The Spy*, overseeing the action while soldiers such as Lawton and his horse Roanoke (or even the clandestine hero of the novel, Harvey Birch) sacrifice themselves for American liberty. Though Trumbull directs our attention primarily to his human subjects, there still remains an evocative parallel between the death of Mercer and horse by bayonet. Trumbull highlights the human and Washington above all else, but like Cooper, he casts the cavalry horse and rider in a similar sacrificial position. Indeed, the soldier’s attempt to protect his horse remains a striking element of the painting, and there is something similar at work in Cooper’s novel.

In *The Spy*, soldiers likewise hold a high reverence for their equine companions. For example, Lawton claims that “[Roanoke] is worth his weight in gold” (276). At other times, Lawton uses the expression “I’d give my horse” as if this horse were the most valuable of his possessions (271, 286). Contrary to this “valuing” of the horse, however, is an earlier scene between Major Dunwoodie and Dr. Sitgreaves. Responding to Sitgreaves’ comment that “I saw a horse this day with his head half severed from his body,” Dunwoodie proudly claims responsibility for this macabre mutilation (102). Sitgreaves then states, “but you knew it was a horse!” (102). To which the Major replies, “I had such suspicions, I own” (102). There is some ambiguity here as to whether “horse” means an actual equine or its rider because Sitgreaves goes on to discuss “such blows alighting on the human frame” (102). The scene is intended to add an air of comedy, as Sitgreaves is continually complaining that Lawton’s style of killing leaves little room for practicing medical procedures like amputation on human subjects. It is unclear whether
one should thus interpret Dunwoodie’s “suspicions” as genuine or just as another comedic gesture. The fact remains that the difficulty in discriminating whether a “man” or “horse” was beheaded provides another example of the ambiguity and fluidity between these figures in the novel, an effect that is not replicated in Trumbull’s painting. Later in the book, Lawton explains to Sitgreaves that if he did by “mischance” fall off Roanoke, then “rider and beast kissed the earth together” (174). This seems to become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy as later Roanoke and Lawton die, much like Mercer and his horse, together on the battlefield.

The close connection between horse and rider, in both Cooper’s and Trumbull’s historical depictions, can effectively increase the rider’s power. As already mentioned, Washington sits elevated upon his horse, raising him above all others in Trumbull’s Death of General Mercer. Conversely, the pairing of horse and rider can also place both as necessary sacrifices in the pursuit of a higher cause as is the case for American martyr Mercer; in the background, the flag is in effect planted through the conjoined bodies of horse and soldier. Similarly in Cooper’s The Spy, Lawton’s connection with his horse instills him with uberhuman powers, but he, like so many other human and nonhuman animals under Washington, meets his end on the battlefield. Cooper and Trumbull both are able to convey complex connections between rider and beast, in which the horse is temporarily aligned with the soldier, while also maintaining a division between the various classes of human or animal species.

Cooper’s Social Taxonomy

In his illuminating work on Cooper and nonhuman animals, Matthew Sivils claims that The Prairie (the last of the Leatherstocking Tales in its historical chronology of setting, published in 1827) was, in part, a response to Georges-Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon’s
negative casting of America’s nonhuman animals as degenerate and inferior in his *Histoire Naturelle* (1749-1804). Sivils remarks that Cooper, in turn, writes against such negative Enlightenment taxonomies through the character of Dr. Bat (351). Sivils further explains how the comical naturalist Dr. Bat exemplifies “how taxonomic systems of compartmentalizing and naming species fail to account for the ways that organisms interact to form multifaceted communities of interdependence” (351). What Sivils sees as Cooper’s reaction to such tidy species compartmentalization is also present in *The Spy* and *The Pilot*—even though the human-to-nonhuman animal pairings would appear to complicate this comparison. Cooper aligns and overlaps the human with nonhuman, but this inconsistent signification eventually reverts to or reinforces stable neoclassical categorical divisions between human and nonhuman.

Cooper’s two Revolutionary War novels show humans and nonhumans paired in mutable relationships. Whether these associations work to amplify the human, anthropomorphize the nonhuman, or both, they would at first glance appear to challenge a division between species. These human-to-animal pairings either hinder or allow human mobility, and hence *do not* challenge the boundaries. In the face of nonhuman animal associations, Cooper denotes clear lines between the various “kinds” of humans as he does for nonhuman animals. This position falls generally under human exceptionalism, specifically human-American exceptionalism, and it remains a technique through which American imperialism of the environment and its nonhuman inhabitants functions. For as much as Cooper might disagree with Enlightenment taxonomies, he was aware of the inherent danger to the social order to which he, like Trumbull, belonged that arose from mobility between species, geographical area, and/or social rank.

Like Trumbull’s *Death of General Mercer* or Cole’s *The Oxbow*, then, lines establishing boundaries might be, at times, precarious, but they are necessary for the purpose of making the
novels palatable to his readers. Cooper champions the self-sacrificing patriotic “Spy,” the superhuman American Virginia horseman, and the heroic coxswain, yet these individuals become sacrificial animals to produce this new republic. Characters such as these, by necessity, die so that other (both “high” and “low”) human-Americans can continue to carry the torch of independence. Correspondingly, in Cooper’s fictional construction of this history, the “noble”—men of “uncommon” breed—continue to be “noble,” and thus, one gets the ending scene of The Spy. Thirty-three years later, a young Wharton Dunwoodie (son of Major Dunwoodie and Frances Wharton) encounters Birch. America is in yet another war with the British, but the heroic lineage of the new nation continues. In a similar vein, Tom Coffin’s death allows for the continuation of the revolution as well as for the ideological defense of the Pilot (aka John Paul Jones) by Griffith in the final scene of The Pilot. And this points to the overarching ethos of these novels: to glorify the lowly and unrecognized American patriot while also maintaining a separation between class and kind. Cooper provides a key early view of nonhuman animals within the American cultural perception: the divisions of “breed” or “kind,” through human-animal relations, work to reinscribe a natural order as one of the foundational principles of American democracy.

Cooper’s teleological approach to history makes for intentional mythmaking of a transitional sort. His human and nonhuman ambiguities do not signify either human mediation or radical difference. Rather, they create a difference within species—distinguishing the “American” as well as “America,” as distinct from Britain and Europe. This new “species” is further divided by noble lineages that survive to lead the new republic, leaving it to the “lower” characters to die to maintain it. Cooper conveys the semblance of American patriotic freedom and democracy while simultaneously reinscribing older colonial traditions of class and species
hierarchy. He, along with others such as Trumbull and Cole, helped to shape cultural perceptions of human and nonhuman worlds. Cooper’s early work adds to the mythology of the domestic equine, human mastery over nature, and an unwavering American patriotism; and while the boundaries between human and nonhuman may appear mutable, the ethos of a new republican is stamped into history.
CHAPTER 2:
TRANSCENDING “ANIMALS”: BREATHING MACHINERY, PERSONHOOD, AND LAW

“These God-breathing machines are no more, in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend.”—Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Harriet Jacobs

“[W]hatever be [African Americans’] degree of talent it is no measure of their rights.”—Thomas Jefferson to Henri Gregoire, February 25, 1809

The elitist visions promulgated in the work of James Fenimore Cooper seem relatively unthreatened by race and racial categorizations. Indeed, Cooper, and others writing during the early nineteenth century, typically represented their non-white characters as racial caricatures (e.g., Caesar in The Spy and/or Aggy in The Pioneers). As discussed in the previous chapter, for Cooper, the greater threat was in the egalitarian spirit of American democracy. The practice and proliferation of slavery and the status of African Americans appear as mere echoes in much of Cooper’s work. The potential for an African American to be recognized as a “person” (i.e., human being) remained arrested by social custom and juridical law. This by no means, however, implies that black writers remained silent against their dehumanized social and legal statuses during the first half of the century. The number of black writers was small due, in large part to the pervasive tactic of suppressing black literacy as a means of maintaining control. Speaking out against the dehumanization and exploitation of chattel slavery carried real and present dangers to the writers themselves. Even (white) abolitionist writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe pandered to
audience expectations of a simplistic, subservient, and loyal people (e.g., Uncle Tom), hoping to garner sympathy for the plight of the American slave. By the time of David Walker’s *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* in September of 1829, black writers were writing on a codified series of issues. Ian Finseth, in *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery, 1770-1860*, lists some themes in this early African-American writing: “a rejection of the notion of a natural racial hierarchy; an emphasis on the scientific study, and technological mastery, of nature; the depiction of slavery as a disordering or pollution of nature; the assumed dependence of social forms on the natural environment” (170). Black “mastery” over nature, with its emphasis on scientific objectivity, combined with conscious efforts made by black writers to distance themselves from wilderness, rather than a spiritual cohesion with nature (as seen in contemporaneous transcendentalism), had to do with habitual conflations of blackness and slavery with a romantic pastoral vision of nature. As Paul Outka succinctly puts it, “under slavery the conflation of African Americans and nature took a uniquely physical form. A metaphor became, for whites, literal” (7).21

Fueled by practices such as the wide circulation and acceptance of pseudo-scientific evidence, the distorted idea that African Americans were distinctly separate and “inferior” led many white Americans to believe that they were of an altogether different “kind.” For example, the influential Philadelphia physician, Samuel George Morton, spent decades (from 1830 up until his death in 1851) measuring the size of human skulls, attempting to “prove” through his own skewed scientific empiricism, or rather deductionism, that African American intellectual capacities were inferior to that of the white race based on cranial circumference (Gould 503). In

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21 Perhaps not too dissimilarly, nonhuman animals as handy metaphors reflect a long history as figurative devices that bleed over into literal cultural “truths.” Hence antebellum conceptualizations of the “animal” often fall under the ever-ambiguous umbrella of “nature” (with all the treacherous and hegemonic baggage associated with terms such as “normal,” “natural,” “wild,” and “wilderness”).
his discussion of nature’s “personhood,” Lawrence Buell remarks on a similar materialist view propagated in debates on the natural world. Buell notes that a denial of nature’s sentience “made increasingly fantastic neoclassical conventions underwritten by the hypothesis of a great chain of being and romantic notions of the visionary imagination underwritten by a myth of pantheism” (188). The debate over nature’s “personhood” (which includes nonhuman animals) correlates to debates over slavery in that each were underwritten by a pervasive, but false, cultural myth of a “natural” hierarchy. The inescapable desires for justification of the dehumanization, ownership, and exploitation of black individuals, in turn, led to a reactionary desire by black individuals to express a counter to the chimera of such “scientific” and popular myths. In the decades leading up to the Civil War and with the rise of American abolitionist movements, the question of the slave became intricately and problematically intertwined with the question of the “animal.”

This chapter takes as its primary focus nonhuman animal traces within three canonical antebellum slave narratives. These carefully crafted and purpose-driven texts are indicative of quotidian injustices and unquantifiable abuses, and yet the very fact that these texts were written and read is an important counterpoint to the pro-slave rhetorics that attempted to meld “slave” and “animal.”

The chapter will examine the ways in which black writers such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and William Wells Brown use nonhuman animals in their own personal narratives. The aim of this analysis is not to conflate chattel slaves with nonhuman animals; rather, this chapter seeks to uncover and understand perceptions of the human/animal divide through the lens of a population that were always already dehumanized. Related to this aim, the chapter will seek to further understand these nonhuman presences by putting the literature in

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22 This “animal” question, in truth, was a series of interconnected questions. However, the primary and underlying question—as this chapter and this dissertation attempts to elucidate—is how human animals of the nineteenth century view themselves beside or apart from nonhuman animals.
conversation with antebellum law, particularly slave law and distinctions of “personhood” in the
years leading up to the War. Such a concept of personhood and either its confirmation or denial
was, in so many words, the foundational conflict leading to the American Civil War and the
precipice that separated person from property (including nonhuman animals). Therefore, it
remains important to scrutinize the precedents, ambiguities, and outcomes of laws concerning the
lives of slaves. If we take Outka’s significant claim at face value—that the nature/slave metaphor
became literal for many whites—then it should prove revealing to further examine the
appearance of nonhuman animals in these narratives leading up to the War as well as the laws
that governed the larger cultural framework.

At the most rudimentary level, an individual’s ability to acknowledge the subjectivity or
legitimacy of the nonhuman was (and still is) predicated upon a certain level of economic or
social privilege in any given society. For a group that enters as already “sub-human” (un-human,
nonhuman, etc.) to acknowledge, or align with, the nonhuman world would be seemingly
antithetical to the goal of social and/or legal recognition as human/person. Stated differently,
much of the task of slave narratives and abolitionist writings was to highlight the black
individual as belonging not to a “natural,” primitive animal world, but to a distinctly human one.
Yet, interestingly, these writings are brimming with nonhuman animal comparisons. In this
chapter, I identify and explore how black antebellum writers themselves use nonhuman animals
as illustrative cognates of their own de-humanized positions and as a method to recast the
“bestial” practitioners of slavery—whereby the strategic use of nonhuman animals by these
writers can be viewed as a counterpoint to antebellum slave law. These writers push themselves
away and their “masters” toward the “animal.”
**Antebellum Slave Narratives: Person, Animal, or Beast**

In the first lines of the abolitionist Wendell Phillips’s letter, which opens Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative*, Phillips writes, “You remember the old fable of ‘The Man and the Lion,’ where the lion complained that he should not be so misrepresented ‘when the lions wrote history,’” and follows with, “I am glad that the time has come when ‘lions write history’” (13). Phillips’s allusion to this Aesopian fable does more than simply highlight Douglass’s ability to write back against a dominant narrative of subservience propagated by advocates of slavery. The passage also inadvertently foreshadows a tension within the narrative itself and, in a broader sense, a tension found throughout antebellum black writing: who can be, or should be, included under the title of “human.” Though Phillips’s comparison here casts Douglass’s new position as one possessing more personhood and agency, he nonetheless feels compelled to compare the black writer to an exotic, nonhuman African animal. In the spectrum of these stock nonhuman character tropes, lions are among the more positive in their metaphoric capital. They are often associated with regal leaders or brave warriors, but it is important to remember that they can also be cast as ferocious, flesh-eating and infanticidal nonhumans of a distinctly separate species. And even in the face of their positive metaphorical value, lions still, after all, are “animals.”

Comparing the status, or condition, of the slave to that of the nonhuman animal is a common move in the nineteenth century. Douglass himself makes such comparisons throughout his *Narrative*. The emergence of such texts, with the rise of black literacy more generally, marks an important move toward pushing back against the animalization, or dehumanization, of the American slave. Along these lines, in his introduction to Douglass’s *Narrative*, Kwame Anthony Appiah makes the salient observation that such slave narratives did more than simply retell

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23 As I have noted (and will probably note again), humans are animals, too; however, this observation points to the fact that amongst the hierarchy of “animals” generally accepted through the nineteenth century, humans tended to keep themselves cautiously apart from all other nonhuman animals.
stories of exploitations and traumas of chattel slavery, noting that such literary artifacts “[were] also evidence of the full humanity of black people” (xii-xiii; emphasis added). Lindon Barrett elsewhere seconds such a claim by locating an African American “corporeality” through literacy acquisition (415). A need to debate distinctions such as “full humanity” or “corporeality” point to one of the fallacious founding principles that helped the institution of American chattel slavery to thrive: slaves were not human. For this reason, human-to-nonhuman animal associations, as we shall soon see in the work of black antebellum writers such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and William Wells Brown, mark a complex, if not troubled, topic for such writers.

As an instructive early example, Douglass writes (only three sentences into “Chapter I” of his own narrative), “By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant” (17). Douglass’s poignant observation here quickly frames the slave and “animal” as sharing a similar condition, yet in the next chapter (“Chapter II”), he goes on to clarify this position by recounting how particular Colonel Lloyd was about the care and attention paid to his horses. Douglass explains, “The slightest inattention to these [horses] was unpardonable, and was visited upon those [slaves], under whose care they were placed, with the severest punishment” (30). Douglass’s discourse cuts through metaphor as he observes the slave literally situated not only by but often below nonhuman animals. Conflation of the slave with the nonhuman animal (particularly domestic livestock) under the umbrella of husbandry was commonplace.
An 1841 lithograph, entitled “America,” is evidence of such a conflation. [Figure 6][24] Festive dancing in the background of the image denotes a general joviality while an elderly black man in the foreground praises his master for food, clothing, and thoughtful care. The slave master responds, “These poor creatures are a sacred legacy from my ancestors and while a dollar is left me, nothing shall be spared to increase their comfort and happiness” (“America”). The text along with the romantic plantation scene emphasizes the slave’s blissfully ignorant condition. As the rhetoric of the lithograph goes—they are “poor creatures” who are in need of care. Marcus Wood, in Black Milk, carefully explicates how the text appears to work in tandem with what he calls a “racist animalization” (92). The positioning of the white female child feeding her white greyhound acts as a kind of visual mirror to the black child at the feet of the elderly slave, and as a counter to the cow in the distance—though the cow, eaten and sold and not loved, is still present. Furthermore, Wood parallels the husbandry that Southern white children assume with nonhuman animals with a similar care and “love” for their slaves, extrapolating that “Humanitarianism and slavery are effortlessly fused via a concomitant equation of slaves to animals” (92). The fallacy of humanitarianism here is found in ubiquitous contemporary claims that nonhuman animal husbandry, and its exploitative habits, are “for their own good” or are a necessary evil for “population control”—often emphasizing kind, gentle, or “humane” treatment.

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24 According to the Library of Congress, the print is believed to be the only surviving half of a two-page spread juxtaposing “white slaves” in Britain (i.e. factory workers) against the “content” black slaves in America (“Summary,” “America” LOC). The artist, Edward Williams Clay, was a well-known supporter of slavery, and the primary thrust of this particular piece was to promulgate that American chattel slaves were happy and content in their bondage.
under such “humanitarian.” Here again, the major ideological move is one of separation from white humans, grouping slave with nonhuman animal.

The nonhuman and the slave often are equivocated by their relative cultural condition or status, and the “humanity” of the black bodies typically requires white affirmation of their own ineptitude. Or, as Michael Bennett puts it, “African Americans in the antebellum United States were much more likely to be referred to in the lexicon of slavery as sheep rather than shepherds—as soulless creatures excluded from the flock ministered to by those men of the cloth” (196). As skewed as the rhetoric espoused here of the “happy slave” should appear to modern sensibilities, it seethes with Northern apologist hues which were prevalent throughout the debate on the abolition of slavery. The message sent by the combination of E. W. Clay’s racial caricatures and the text in “America,” proliferated in print circulating in the North and South, and its political influence cannot be overstated for large sections of the population in the decades leading up to the Civil War. The idea that black slaves were both comically low like dogs and equally content with their servitude, and as well-tended as a sheep or pig, is precisely the sentiment that antebellum black writers, like Douglass, Brown, and Jacobs, were writing against, and yet the “animal” again and again appears within their narratives.

25 One need look no further than any present-day dairy or meat advertisement for something akin to this. Contemporary pastoral mythologies of the “happy cow” or the “family farm” are, of course, as much fantasy as Disneyland; however, these are the bucolic desires and unseen rationalizations that we gladly welcome in lieu of the methane plumes and offal litter runoff of an unimaginable scale—the factory “farm.”

26 Lesley Ginsberg’s study of antebellum children’s literature makes a convincing claim that “the animal in literature for and about children [was a] mirror for adult anxieties over the borders and boundaries of citizenship in antebellum America” (89). She locates an interesting corollary between the non-citizen status of antebellum children, women, slaves, and animals. Hence the moral lessons commonly promoted in children’s literature is a similar kind of paternalism found in antebellum slavery and husband(ry) rhetorics. Brigitte Nicole Fielder makes a similar observation, claiming that abolitionist children’s literature often deployed a strategy of “animal humanism,” using domesticated animals to mediate their readers’ sympathy for enslaved people. For more on nonhuman animals in antebellum children’s literature see Ginsberg’s “Of Babies, Beasts, and Bondage: Slavery and the Question of Citizenship in Antebellum Children’s Literature” and Fielder’s “Animal Humanism: Race, Species, and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionism.”
Broadly, they associated the institution of slavery was often associated with nonhuman images of the serpent. This notably can be observed in Jacobs’s narrative: “O, the serpent of Slavery has many and poisonous fangs!” (201). Later, Linda is bitten by a poisonous snake and comments that her fear of snakes had increased after being bit, and in the “Snaky Swamp” she saw larger snakes than those she was well accustomed to in her life (260).27 She adds, “But even those large, venomous snakes were less dreadful to my imagination than the white men in that community called civilized” (261). Douglass, likewise, explains that a common name for the harsh slavebreaker, Covey, was “the snake” (61), and he also evokes images of the snake in his narrative’s closing poem, “A Parody” (125). Certainly tied to biblical iconography, a famous precedent for Jacobs’s “serpent of Slavery” and the snakes of Douglass is Nat Turner’s third “vision” as taken down by the lawyer, Thomas Gray, in “The Confessions of Nat Turner.” He writes:

“[T]he Spirit instantly appeared to me and said the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first.” (Gray and Turner 11)

Paul Shepard explains how many have argued that there is an instinctual fear of snakes, but he goes on to add that such thinking might be more of a comment on ways of perceiving than instinct. Shepard believes, in line with his Jungian leanings, less in an instinctual fear of serpents and more that “one needs one’s opponents” (The Others 272). However, we might also consider the validity of both instinct and archetype. Put differently, the nonhuman exists in such cases within two simultaneous registers—the physical and the symbolic. More than any ephemeral spiritual encounter as in Turner, the counter-animalizations in Douglass and Jacobs play off of

27 Linda was the pseudonym that Jacobs chose for herself in her own narrative.
the metaphor and ubiquity of human “savagery” through such comparisons. The trope of the “serpent of slavery” provides the “opponent” that Shepard speaks of, but it also taps into a very real physical danger. The latter effect provides some semblance for (white) readers of the fear to be a black slave in the south, to fear the venomous fangs of indefinite servitude.\footnote{Mark Twain, in \textit{Adventures of Huckleberry Finn}, no doubt evokes this serpent trope when Jim is bitten on the heel by a rattlesnake (Chapter 10).}

Like Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, in \textit{Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl}, ends her first chapter by establishing a comparison between domestic nonhuman animals and slaves. She recounts the manner in which most of her grandmother’s children were sold on the auction block, and then concludes, “These God-breathing machines are no more, in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend” (135). Jacob’s description of the slave as a “God-breathing machine” is not the cyborg of Donna Haraway’s theorizations, yet it does signal a position that is caught somewhere between subject and object, and not a critique of essentialism.\footnote{Haraway’s discussion of the “cyborg,” in “A Cyborg Manifesto,” attempts to push against essentialist categories of “machine” or “human” or “nonhuman animal.” Instead, her posthuman troubling of human subjectivity, however, seems antithetical to the goal of black antebellum writers like Jacobs. Moreover, Jacobs’s use of “God-breathing” as a modification of machine might very well be a critique of the inherent hypocrisy embedded in the dual-practice of slavery and Christianity.} The description borders on oxymoronic until we consider, as Barbara Rodriguez encourages, the phrase: “in the sight of their masters.” Rodriguez interprets this phrase as Jacobs establishing her position as subject rather than object (59). Though Rodriguez is correct to emphasize the master’s gaze, she perhaps too quickly jumps to concluding Jacob’s subjectivity. Rather, it seems more likely that Jacobs is identifying the inherent objectivity of slavery. She also illustrates her own objectification, and in turn her own potential for subjectivity, albeit through the monstrous gaze of her oppressor. Her comparison, importantly, does not compare the “human” slave to cotton or horses. Instead, she completes this comparison by beginning and ending within a nonhuman register, as a “God-breathing machine.” Jacobs powerfully illustrates
the position of slave as de-humanized commodity. To revise Louis Althusser's well-known dictum of individuals as *always already* interpellated (through the human) within a given ideological context (i.e., antebellum slavery), Jacobs, by her own account, is seen as *always already nonhuman*.

In another scene from *Incidents*, Uncle Benjamin remarks to Linda, “we are dogs here; foot-balls, cattle, ever thing that’s mean” (150-51). He soon thereafter states that “When a man is hunted like a wild beast, he forgets there is a God, a heaven. He forgets everything in his struggle to get beyond the reach of the bloodhounds” (152). Such slave-to-dog comparisons occur throughout *Incidents*. Another example can be observed in an exchange between Linda and Dr. Flint. Angered at Linda’s love for a fellow slave, Dr. Flint says that he thought her above the “insults of such puppies,” to which Linda promptly replies, “If he is a puppy I am a puppy, for we are both of the negro race. It is right and honorable for us to love each other. The man you call a puppy never insulted me, sir” (173). Likewise, Jacobs describes how slaves caught stealing were given a “dog’s funeral.” She explains, “A rough box was their coffin, and their interment was a dog’s burial. Nothing was said” (182). She soon after follows this by noting, “Women are considered of no value, unless they continually increase their owner’s stock. They are put on a par with animals,” coming to the conclusion that “there are no humane slaveholders” (185).

Certainly, neither Jacobs or Douglass believe that they are actually “animals”; however, they are keenly aware of their status within the oppressive institution of southern slavery. As Brook Thomas notes, there was a pattern within the matrix of white discourse comparing slave men to mules. Indeed, Thomas describes how black slaves often were associated, not with the masculinity and independence of the horse, but with the sterile utility of mules—even more

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30 This nonhuman status would have been reinforced (and enforced) at every opportunity by the cultural practice and (re)production of slavery.
menial “beasts of burden.” He goes on to explain that slavery took away African American “manhood,” and “the association of African Americans with mules implied that they were incapable of equal citizenship” (167). Native writer, Vine Deloria Jr., makes a similar observation in a comparison between Native Americans and chattel slaves: “Because the Negro labored, he was considered a draft animal. Because the Indian occupied large areas of land, he was considered a wild animal” (8). Animal associations such as these were, of course, imposed from outside, yet Douglass and Jacobs provide domestic nonhuman cognates in their own narratives. The key difference, however, is that these comparisons highlight a similar status and/or treatment imposed on them. And in the face of this imposition, the nonhuman animal in antebellum narratives can be used to resist this animal casting, or to describe (and not define) their own slave-condition and a way to dehumanize their captors.

Far surpassed in frequency of slave-to-animal comparisons are those moments animalizing the slaveholders themselves. Douglass provides a number of these animalizations. As he comments on the degenerative effects of slavery on the slaveholder, Douglass describes the mistress of the Hugh family in “animal” terms. He writes, “Under [slavery’s] influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness” (49). Likewise, an early description of the slave-breaker, Covey, reads: “[Covey] rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time after. This whipping was the first of a number just like it” (68). Later still Douglass evokes an insect/avian mixed metaphor: “We had been in jail scarcely twenty minutes, when a swarm of slave traders, and agents for slave traders, flocked into jail to look at us, and to ascertain if we were for sale” (91). “I was afraid to speak to anyone for fear of speaking to the wrong one,” Douglass soon
continues, “and thereby falling into the hands of money-loving kidnappers, whose business it was to lie in wait for the panting fugitive, as the ferocious beasts of the forest lie in wait for their prey,” finally adding that to be in the presence of such company gives one the “feeling as if in the midst of beasts” (108-09; emphasis added).

William Wells Brown’s Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave takes a slightly different approach than Douglass or Jacobs in its “animal” comparisons, emphasizing instead the human within the human-to-nonhuman comparisons. Starting even before the narrative, the preface, written by the abolitionist J. C. Hathaway, begins the work of blending human and nonhuman imagery. Hathaway writes, “The writer of this Narrative was hired by his master to a ‘soul-driver,’ and has witnessed all the horrors of the traffic, from the buying up of human cattle in the slave-breeding States” (viii; emphasis added). The metaphor centers itself on the “human.” Likewise, the use of “slave-breeding” summons animal images while maintaining the human “slave” as subject. Hathaway’s opening connects the two species, though still within an anthropocentric ideological frame.

Brown, like Douglass and Jacobs, highlights the dehumanized condition of slaves. Unlike Douglass or Jacobs, Brown does not use direct nonhuman similes or metaphors to describe the condition of slaves. He does no comparative work of slaves being treated “like a dog” or any commentary about domestic livestock receiving better treatment than slaves. Instead, he finds effective ways of illustrating the inhuman violence inflicted upon black bodies, which often includes subtler traces of the nonhuman. For example in an early chapter, Randall—a strong-bodied and strong-willed slave—will not comply with the overseer’s command; subsequently, Randall fights back against the overseer and is severely beaten. Brown explains the scene:

Woodbridge drew out his pistol, and fired at him, and brought him to the ground
by a pistol ball. The others rushed upon him with their clubs, and beat him over the head and face, until they succeeded in tying him. He was then taken to the barn, and tied to a beam. Cook gave him over one hundred lashes with a heavy cowhide, had him washed with salt and water, and left him tied during the day.

(20)

This type of violent scene is common throughout antebellum slave narratives—as one of the purposes of such narratives (and abolitionist writing generally) was to spotlight the treatment and condition of slaves. The nonhuman here appears as metonymic traces, yet profoundly, in the scene as a “negro-whip” or “cowhide” as well as in the barn setting. The lash was one of the most common instruments for punishment and control. Brown makes it a point to describe it: the whip had a handle that was “about three feet long, with the butt-end filled with lead, and the lash six or seven feet in length, made of cowhide, with platted wire on the end of it,” further noting that “This whip was put in requisition very frequently and freely, and a small offence on the part of a slave furnished an occasion for its use” (14-15). Another subtle bridge between the human slave and nonhuman is this simple yet effective instrument of terror and pain. It is made from the very hide of the bovine and used upon Randall (and countless others) in the barn, a place where the “animals” are kept. Brown tends to opt for metonymy over metaphor in his nonhuman-to-slave associations.

Again, in his exposition of his time with the slave driver, Mr. Walker, the nonhuman appears in subtle traces. Brown writes, “In the course of eight or nine weeks Mr. Walker had his cargo of human flesh made up. There was in this lot a number of old men and women, some of them with gray locks. We left St. Louis in the steamboat Carlton, Captain Swan, bound for New

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31 The word “whip,” “whipping.” (or alternative forms of the words) appear more than forty times throughout the narrative. In Jacobs’s narrative various forms of the word appear over thirty times, and in Douglass’s over seventy times! Like Brown, Douglass too describes the regular practice of slaves being whipped with “cowskins.”
Orleans” (42; emphasis added). Brown must prepare some of his fellow slaves for sale, and yet his term of “flesh,” a materiality which is shared by both human and nonhuman animal, works (not unlike aforementioned human cattle) to evoke nonhuman cadences while emphasizing that slaves, regardless of their treatment, are, in truth, made of living flesh. Brown makes a similar remark after Mr. Walker’s “cargo” is sold at market: “After selling out this cargo of human flesh, we returned to St. Louis, and my time was up with Mr. Walker. I had served him one year, and it was the longest year I ever lived” (62). Unsurprisingly, Brown “was heart-sick at seeing [his] fellow-creatures bought and sold,” as were certainly Jacobs and Douglass (42). This interesting positioning evokes yet another associative bridge, drawing out the shared materiality and subsequent quantification of living tissue.

“Negro-drivers,” or “slave-drivers,” get particular attention in Brown’s narrative and are cast, rightly so, as “despicable creatures” (82). And this is where his nonhuman animal metaphors arise. In an especially poignant passage, Brown compares these individuals to scavenger birds. He comments, “these vile slave-drivers and dealers are swarming like buzzards around a carrion” (82). His emphasis on the corporeality of a slave’s body transmutes the act of selling bodies into flesh eating. Brown’s comparisons to nonhuman animals are subtle, and in this particular example, he taps into the negative cultural perception of these birds; however, when these “animal” metaphors do surface, they become a means to push back against the dehumanized condition of black slaves.

Jacobs uses the nonhuman comparisons even more frequently and explicitly to describe her oppressors. An illustration of this can be seen when she describes the sexual advances of her owner, Dr. Flint. In one of many of these advances, she writes, “[Dr. Flint] sprang on me like a *tiger*, and gave me a stunning blow” (173; emphasis added). Shortly after she further explains
that “No animal ever watched its prey more narrowly than he watched me” (174; emphasis added). Not only is the doctor “like a tiger,” but Jacobs seemingly casts him as even more “animalistic” than an “animal.” Later again, in yet another unsolicited advance, she remarks that “[Dr. Flint] sprang upon me like a wolf, and grabbed my arm as if he would have broken it. ‘Do you love him?’ said he, in a hissing tone” (197). Similar to Brown’s nonhuman flesh-eaters, the predatory sexual advances of Flint clearly contribute to his “animal” nature. Moreover, the similarities are clear between the animalizations in these antebellum narratives, and nonhuman metaphor and metonymy abound as each writer tries in his/her own way to articulate the degenerative savageries of slavery.

Douglass often varies his use of the nonhuman animal. For example, when he details the deep emotional trauma of his grandmother’s children sold at auction before her eyes, he turns to nonhuman animal descriptors. “Instead of the voices of her children,” he states, “she hears by day the moans of the dove, and by night the screams of the hideous owl” (58). In another instance, Douglass reflects on the treatment of a slave named Mary and writes, “Added to the cruel lashing to which these slaves were subjected, they were kept nearly half-starved. They seldom knew what it was to eat a full meal. I have seen Mary contending with the pigs for the offal thrown into the street. So much was Mary kicked and cut to pieces, that she was oftener called ‘pecked’ than by her name” (47). The “animal” comparison here that Douglass evokes is lucid. Though other times Douglass places the slave in an antagonistic position to the nonhuman world, as he does in a retelling of experiences of those attempting to escape North. He writes:

Now it was starvation, causing us to eat our own flesh;—now we were contending with the waves, and were drowned;—now we were overtaken, and torn to pieces by the fangs of the terrible bloodhound. We were stung by scorpions, chased by
wild beasts, bitten by snakes, and finally, after having nearly reached the desired spot,—after swimming rivers, encountering wild beasts, sleeping in the woods, suffering hunger and nakedness,—we were overtaken by our pursuers, and, in our resistance, we were shot dead upon the spot! (87-88).

Like Brown, Douglass draws our attention to the slave’s “flesh,” yet instead of the eating coming from the outside, he positions the slave, and the practice of slavery, as self-consuming—forcing the slave to consume his/herself through starvation and fighting against the “wild beasts” of the natural world. As Michael Bennett notes in his anti-pastoral reading of Douglass’s Narrative, “Douglass ties into an active strain of anti-pastoral discourse that circulated in the antebellum United States, depicting the wilderness and woods as dangerous and frightening spaces” (205). There is, as Bennett suggests, identifiable anti-pastoral qualities in Douglass’s Narrative. Most apparently, nature’s blissful simplicities are made monstrous by slavery. Taking Bennett’s reading further, we can begin to see how Douglass mixes images of the “wild” (e.g., snakes, scorpions, beasts) with the domesticated (i.e., dogs) in the pastoral. The “terrible bloodhound,” an obedient tool of the slave tracker, stands parallel with the other creatures of the forest. It would seem then that man’s “mastery” over certain other species inevitably degrades all those involved, or as Brown plainly states it: “slavery makes its victims lying and mean,” human or nonhuman, owner or slave, wild or domesticated (57).

For all the comparative work between human and nonhuman in these antebellum narratives, we see a counter narrative emerge, a narrative in which nonhuman animals play a more significant role. If the conflation between slave and nature became real for many white Americans before the War, as Outka has identified, then we can also see black writers such as Douglass, Jacobs, and Brown strategically tapping into and redirecting these animalizations,
while also keeping nonhuman animals reduced to their symbolic values in these new counter-narratives. Beyond the metaphoric value of human-to-nonhuman comparisons, these writers bare their own real “flesh” to readers. The nonhuman may remain a shadowy figure as, for example, when Brown, Douglass, and Jacobs either compare slave-to-nonhuman and/or direct our attention to the “human flesh” of the slave. In regards to the comparative work done in the narratives, the very fact that these individuals were writing such narratives pushed back against cultural perceptions about a slave’s “simplistic” or “animal” nature, yet again, this did little for the nonhuman animal themselves. These texts, however, challenged a human corporeality that, much like the flesh of domestic livestock, stood for little beyond its monetary worth according to the practitioners of slavery.

These narratives also attempt to lay bare the real inhuman actions of owners, overseers, drivers, and traders. Again, the nonhuman animal is used towards this end. Similar to the way these narratives call into question slave/animal associations, they also counter pastoral scenes of slave/animal husbandry, like those observed in Clay’s “America.” These antebellum narratives place the owner not as generous humanitarian, but rather as carrion-eating “buzzards” or vicious “tigers,” which from a critical animal standpoint perpetuates speciesism and anthropocentrism. From a historically contextualized position, these nonhuman animal comparisons clearly served a primarily rhetorical means for contesting beliefs legitimizing slavery, which kept the slave aligned with the nonhuman and protected the (white) human with relative impunity for violence upon the other’s flesh.

32 Therefore, it makes sense that there was debate over the authorial authenticity of these antebellum narratives. Hence, the convention arose of having the prefatory/introductory chapter written by a white person—J.C. Hathaway for Brown, Lydia Maria Child for Jacobs, and William Lloyd Garrison for Douglass. Even with such “verification,” there were still many that questioned how such articulate prose could have been penned by a black person.
To some, as Jacobs comments, slaves were no more than “God-breathing machines.” To others, like these writers, slaves were human beings—made of the same order of flesh, albeit a different shade, as the white race. Yet to say that there was such a clear dichotomy of human recognition among individuals would be a hasty generalization. In reality, there were varying degrees of one’s “human” status and recognition in antebellum America—particularly as it applied to slaves. And yet there remained rigid boundaries between the species as well as within the human species. Indeed, the “human,” or distinction of person/personhood, became inextricably tied to law in the nineteenth century. As scholars such as Appiah have argued, antebellum narratives displayed the author's full humanity; however, in the eyes of the United States law, they were always already less than human, like their nonhuman “kin.”

Social and Legal Separation of Species

In an 1809 letter to the French Roman Catholic Priest and abolitionist, Henri Grégoire, Thomas Jefferson wrote that “whatever be [African Americans’] degree of talent it is no measure of their rights” (Thomas Jefferson to Henri Grégoire). Jefferson’s understanding of the rigid boundaries between the races highlights the legal apparatus within which antebellum slave narratives had to function. The black author’s degree of success in reaching the hearts and minds of a more general audience still faced the challenge of being not seen before the law as whole person because, as Jefferson puts it—one’s talents have nothing to do with one’s rights. Built into the foundational documentation of the United States, the chattel slave was a liminal figure, precariously positioned on the border between person and property. Arising from the

33 On a side (but related) note: Thomas Jefferson was a well-documented hater/abuser of dogs. Bill Leon Smith, in “Animals Made American Humans,” opens with a chilling scene of Jefferson hanging a shepherd dog, “[w]ithout the slightest hint of compassion or magnanimity” and summarily “bringing her to a slow and painful death” (126). Jefferson apparently supported a full “extermination [of] the whole [canine] race” (126).
Constitutional Convention of 1787, Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3, the so-called Three-Fifths Clause (or Three-Fifths Compromise) was to solve this “problem” of representation. The clause reads:

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons. (“The Constitution”)

Important here, aside from the exclusion of the Native American, is the slippery language tagged onto the end of the Clause. “All other Persons” clearly refers to black slaves, yet such language is avoided. Moreover, there is inherent contradiction between the Clause’s contrast of a “whole” number of free persons and an indeterminate and nebulous group of other “persons” who, by law, are the fragmented, the incomplete, the lesser. Perhaps the aporia here seems even more pronounced, or rather contradictory, because of the shared use of “persons.” The distinction between free and chattel, on the one hand, seems an issue of degree. On the other hand, the Three-Fifths Clause precludes the personal, or “wholly” human, rights of all these other Persons by these very distinctions of whole and partial, free and slave, white and black. Interestingly, it was the South that wanted slaves to be counted as persons, seeing that the issue (and thus the compromise) was one concerning taxation and representation. Yet the legal dehumanization of the American slave begins here as the slave, from the start, lingers in an apportioned (i.e., inferior) personhood.

As a result, individuals like Douglass, Brown, and Jacobs (representative examples of these “other Persons”) illustrate their own precarious space between persons and property,
between personhood and materiality. Jacobs bluntly reiterates her commodified status as she discusses her father’s death—“What cared my owners for that? [H]e was merely a piece of property” (137).\(^{34}\) Douglass candidly describes his experience when he is taken to auction. He writes, “Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination” (56). Douglass’s comparison here needs little explanation, aside from reiterating that slavery was a business of property. In this regard, Gary Edwards, in “Negroes . . . and All Other Animals,” notes that “for all whites slavery established an economic boundary between those who owned human property and those who did not” (26).\(^{35}\) Understandably, the number of slave owners was a small percentage of southerners. However, whites, particularly white men, had the right to own property—the right to own slaves. Slavery not only established an economic boundary between those own owned and did not own property, but relatedly, it also established who could or could not own things (persons/property). Indeed, this inability for slaves to own property was intertwined with their partial, or 3/5ths, legal existence. Property ownership can also, then, be an indicator of the degree of one’s personhood in antebellum America as whole persons are the only creatures that are able to legally own property.\(^{36}\) Being categorized as property excluded the

\(^{34}\) Taken further, Daina Berry’s recent monograph, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, recounts in frightening detail the full extent of Jacob’s statement. Berry uncovers the shocking scope of white commodification of black bodies, a monetary valuation that occurred under chattel slavery—extending from speculative investing upon a women’s reproductive potential to the value of a deceased slave’s body for medical dissection and study. Berry’s rediscovery of this clandestine cadaver slave trade certainly does, as Berry suggests, “forc[e] us to reconsider the life cycle of human property” (3).

\(^{35}\) Outside of this important observation, Edward’s article is problematic for specific moments where he attempts to ameliorate the dehumanization of slavery. For example, he attempts to damper the regular abuse by remarking that “Occasionally slaves received exceptionally vicious beatings” or when he feels it necessary to follow this with “Slaves did, however, receive some regularly scheduled breaks” (29). All this is to say that I question some of the motivations behind such remarks and would have omitted this source had it not been for the connection that I make between his comment on economic boundaries and who can own property.

\(^{36}\) Today, it is a bit trickier to navigate because “legal persons” can now be a corporation; however, in the context of the nineteenth century, to own property was a signifier of personhood. Women, for part of the century, and children,
chattel slave from not only citizenship but also personhood (with its associative rights), and the ability to transcend their own status as property remained dependent on property owners.

Similar to laws concerning ownership of chattel slaves, animals as property (and laws governing them as property) was established early on. Like slave laws, laws pertaining to nonhuman animals prior to the war were left to the individual states. In 1846, only a year after the publication of Douglass’s *Narrative*, for example, Vermont’s legislature passed the “Of Offences Against Private Property” (Act 34), which outlined the punishments for horse larceny and abuse. Vermonters apparently were serious about their horses—as horse theft brought the offender up to ten years in prison and/or a fine up to a thousand dollars. The Vermonter’s penchant for equestrian justice extends to other livestock in Section 2 of the same Act. “Willfully and maliciously kill[ing], wound[ing], maim[ing] or disgur[ing] any horse, or horses, or horse kind, cattle, sheep or swine, of another person” brought up to five years in prison and/or up to a five hundred dollar fine. As David Fauvre and Vivien Tsang astutely comment about this law, “The purpose of the law was to protect commercially valuable property from the interference of others, not to protect animals from pain and suffering” (“The Development of the Anti-Cruelty Laws”). A person could do what he/she wanted to with his/her own property as the law only applied to injury upon another’s livestock. Fauvre and Tsang do note that various early state laws (roughly from 1829 to 1854) often reflected on the moral slippery slope of cruelty upon nonhuman animals extending to nonhuman animals, but in truth, did little to cast nonhuman animals as anything more than pieces of property (“The Development of the Anti-Cruelty Laws”)

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37 A second offense bumped the prison sentence to fifteen years and/or a fine up to $1,000 dollars (1946 Vt. Acts)! According to officialdata.org, $100 in 1846 would be $3,284.22 in 2018. So the fine would be about $32K today!
Vermont’s “Of Offences Against Private Property” is illustrative of laws pertaining to nonhumans before the war across states. What’s valued and protected by such juridical documents is, again, material property. It would not be until after the American Civil War that nonhuman anti-cruelty laws began to emerge.

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, there was a series of legal acts and rulings such as the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and the Dred Scott ruling of 1857 that either allowed slavery to proliferate and expand or further solidified the slave as a non-citizen/non-person. Perhaps drawing the most ire and responses from abolitionists and the general public alike was the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 (FSA). The passage of the Act provided occasion for individuals like Harriet Beecher Stowe to write her influential, but problematic, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The FSA provided yet another reification of the American slave’s status as property. An interesting characteristic of the FSA is that “slave” is not mentioned anywhere in the document, except in its title. The document contains some artful disassociation, recasting slaves as “fugitive persons.” Similar to the Three-Fifths Clause, there is only a partial acknowledgement of personhood. This is further negated by the fact that the “fugitive person” could not even speak on their own behalf! Section 6 of the FSA states, “In no trial or hearing under this act shall the testimony of such alleged fugitive be admitted in evidence” ("Fugitive

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38 The Enlightenment philosopher, John Locke, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), warned against children abusing animals because this will “harden their minds even toward men.” Mary Wollstonecraft would echo Locke’s theory a century later. William Hogarth’s series of engravings, *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1751), too, illustrates this sentiment of early animal cruelty developing later into cruelty towards humans.

39 An Act that superseded the 1820 Compromise that put forth a boundary upon slavery, not to spread north of the 36° 30’ latitude line. In place of this north/south boundary, the Kansas-Nebraska Act left the decision to the state entering into the Union if it should be a slave state.

40 The ruling affirmed that black individuals, whether slave or free, could never be citizens of the United States. This would later be overturned, but not until the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870.

41 By “problematic,” I am referring primarily to two elements of the book. First, the simplistic, flat rendering of the eponymous Uncle Tom (and all the black characters for that matter) reinforces the misguided belief that slaves cannot/do not exist outside of racial caricature. Secondly, Stowe’s endorsement of the “back to Africa” movement is highly problematic. As was the case with many of this movement’s supporters, to support abolition did not necessarily imply the support of equality and/or integration.
Slave Act 1850”; emphasis added). This non-admittance of self-defense had precedent in previous state laws prohibiting a slave from testifying against a white individual (e.g., Maryland 1717); however, this stipulation in the FSA further reduced the slave’s (or rather “alleged” fugitive person’s) own non-person status under federal law and, as already was the case, in social practice. Allegation was enough under FSA to silence and sentence the “fugitive person.” FSA essentially extended the hands of the slaveholder by placing the onus of reclamation of their “property,” or “fugitive person,” on “all good citizens.”

The FSA explicitly implicated the entire nation in slavery. Section 5 gave local officers the ability to appoint others to “execute all such warrants,” and “bystanders” and “all good citizens are hereby commanded to aid and assist in the prompt and efficient execution of this law” (“Fugitive Slave Act 1850”). Like laws concerning nonhuman animals, laws concerning slaves were largely concerned with protecting the “rights” of “property” owners, and owners could do as they pleased with their own “property.” Going even further than laws concerning nonhuman animals, the FSA not only protected the interests of the owner, but placed a legal obligation for policing on every American citizen. Northerners were legally obligated to participate. There was deeper irony here: there, of course, was no physical marker which distinguished free person from slave; the difference was determined by secondary signifiers such as paperwork, documentation, bills of sale, “inventory” ledgers, etc., all of which were not visible in the “wild.” The savage marks of whip, while lasting traces upon the body of slavery’s violence, were often hidden by distance or under cloth. The FSA, though, had an unintended

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42 In truth, northerners already were indirectly and directly supporting the slave trade by their participation in commerce (e.g., buying or trading southern cotton). FSA simply made this even more apparent.
43 McPherson and Oliver’s photo of the runaway slave, Gordon, was one of the most widely circulated and incredibly effective visual evidence of slavery’s cruelty upon the living body. Taken in the spring of 1863 and titled The Scourged Back, it soon became an iconic example of American slavery. [Figure 7] This was a notable exception to what typically went unseen by northerners. Like the antebellum narratives, such materials aided in the abolitionist movement.
consequence: unable to ignore the business of slavery and no longer contained to the far away south, the FSA made the “flesh,” or physical presence, of black individuals something that others were obligated to scrutinize—if only to determine whether he/she was a fugitive or not. No longer could slavery be contained to idealistic, disembodied debate.

Writing three years prior to the FSA, Brown states in his narrative that “while I am seated here in sight of Bunker Hill Monument, writing this narrative, I am a slave, and no law, not even in Massachusetts, can protect me from the hands of the slaveholder!” (105). Black antebellum writers, faced with legal and social dehumanization and unable to pursue resistance through the traditional channels of the American legal system, used their narratives to make visible the violent apparatus that was American slavery. Law was used as a way to move the “person” further into the category of nonhuman property, a way to remove the opportunity for self-defense before the law. In this way, the slave became mute (as nonhuman animals) and the public, or at least the American system regulating “justice,” could remain blind and deaf, as Jefferson put it, no matter the slave’s degree of talent. The legal system did more than simply aid in making the slave/nature metaphor literal that Outka identified, but it attempted to solidify the boundaries between human and nonhuman, person and property, white and black. Unfortunately, the nonhuman animal remains all the while apart from the human animal.

Transcending the “Animal,” Becoming “Human”

As discussed in the previous chapter, the boundaries between human and nonhuman animal were analogous to elitist visions of a federalist classism in the early republic. The exceptional (white, male) human stood apart from the natural world (including nonhuman animals). Soon, however, these clear boundaries became threatened by race and racial
categorizations. In part, the line between human and nonhuman was intentionally blurred to help justify the enslavement of tens of millions people. Yet it seems that in order for slaves to be seen as human, they needed to work within this human-exceptional model. Echoed throughout this chapter, Outka’s identification of the nature/slave metaphor became real for many Americans, but Douglass, Jacobs, and Brown used nonhumans not to define their condition but to describe their dehumanized status. They might be treated like “animals,” but the authors of these antebellum narratives attempt to highlight their own humanity. Moreover, the efficacy of abolitionism depended on increasing the visibility of the practices of chattel slavery, its “consuming” and “caring” for human bodies. These writers presented human characters who exposed their own inhuman treatment, and by doing so, were “seen” by many as not simple valued objects, but living, breathing, and feeling subjects. Unlike Cooper, who reinforces human class boundaries by using nonhuman animal tropes, antebellum slave narratives instead draw from such tropes to trouble the existing boundaries between the races, but not species.

From its inception to the ratification of the 13th Amendment, the United States used the legal system to marginalize and dehumanize a race that was more often categorized as property than “whole” person. The legal system found new ways to reproduce slavery-like conditions for African Americans following the war. The passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, on paper, gave the race their long overdue basic human rights of personhood. It would have seemed that they were finally transcending their “God-breathing machine,” 3/5ths existence. However, new methods of oppression arose from the legal apparatus like convict leasing and “Jim Crow” laws kept black Americans vulnerable and disempowered. As the century progressed, to echo the
famous Plessy v. Ferguson, African Americans instead of being categorized as “machine” or “animal” were “separate but equal” (which, of course, was not equal).  

Visibility was instrumental in bolstering support for abolitionism. The veil of violence could be temporarily lifted through narratives by people like Harriet Jacobs, William Wells Brown, and Frederick Douglass. Such narratives certainly showed the bestial practice and practitioners for what they were and what they were not. They were not the gentle and kind caretakers of the family farm and stock. Yet actual nonhuman animals remain relatively unseen, or rather, they are seen filtered through trope and stereotype. So while "animals" appear in these narratives, they do so as a literary device in order to increase the visibility of a slave's humanity or a “master’s” cruelty.

As we shall see in the following chapter, the American Civil War signaled yet another shift in visibility. Live nonhuman animals (especially agricultural livestock), by and large following the war, became systematically removed from the city dweller’s gaze. Thus, they became even less visible; and in this way, our less-idealistic and more exploitative relations with nonhuman animals could proceed unchecked and largely ignored. Similar to the relation between the unquestioned proliferation of slavery and the perpetuation of “humane” treatment, distance and abstraction nurture indifference. As the nonhuman animal moves further away from the human gaze, the nonhuman becomes literally and physically dismembered, hiding the violence upon the flesh in disembodied metaphor.

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44 Even after the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the American justice system still works to disenfranchise and dehumanize African Americans through mass incarceration. For more on this, see Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010).
CHAPTER 3:


In a letter to his mother, dated July 7, 1863, Walt Whitman writes that “one’s heart grows sick” from being continually confronted with the horrific carnage of the war. Written just days after the Battle of Gettysburg, Whitman estimates the number of killed and wounded on both sides to be between eighteen and twenty thousand,\(^\text{45}\) and continues, “I feel so horrified & disgusted – it seems to me like a great slaughter-house & men mutually butchering each other” ("Walt Whitman to Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, 7 July 1863"; emphasis added). His use of the word “slaughter-house” here is significant and contrasts vividly with the earlier nineteenth-century evangelical movement’s concept of the “good death.” Moreover, it evokes a kind of “senselessness,” at once reducing human death to animal slaughter and connoting an unabridged futility. Beyond this correspondence, the word “slaughter-house” is a descriptor in a number of Whitman’s poems as well as his Memoranda During the War. Whitman, perhaps more than any other American writer, had an intimate knowledge of the war’s cost in human lives. Arriving in Washington, DC at the end of 1862 and remaining there as a volunteer in the hospitals throughout the war, Whitman daily witnessed death, amputation, and disease. Perhaps it goes without saying that the Civil War affected Whitman and his work for the remainder of his life.

The American Civil War also marked a distinctive shift in the method and scale of nonhuman animal slaughter itself. This shift entailed a move from small- to large-scale operations, and as the architectural historian Sigfried Giedion would later note, “What is truly

\(^{45}\) According to the National Park Service’s “Battle Summaries: Gettysburg, PA,” the actual number of casualties from the three day Battle of Gettysburg is estimated at 51,000 (US 23,000; CS 28,000). This figure also does not include the number of wounded.
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tling in this mass transition from life to death is the complete neutrality of the act” (241). One
can detect a similar “neutral” sentiment in Memoranda when Whitman writes, in a parenthetical
note, that “(The wounded are getting to be common, and people grow callous)” (15). Later he
asserts, “Not a bit of sentimentalism or whining have I seen about a single death-bed in hospital
or on the field, but generally impassive indifference” (32). One can imagine that daily
encounters with the sick and wounded led many doctors, nurses, and volunteers to become
desensitized. The condition of both Civil War soldiers and nonhuman animals both take on a
disfigured quality in the wake of the ensuing bloodshed. Nonhuman animals as “food” became
separated from their living state, thus appearing as “cuts” of meat, hides, bones, etc. (i.e., in a
state of fragmentary pieces). Likewise, amputation, for those lucky enough to survive, would
have been a horrific physical reminder of war. In both cases, there appears a loss of bodily
wholeness. The abattoir, then, marks an important shift to a new orientation to human and
nonhuman “life” during and after the Civil War; “fragmented,” “amputated,” or even
“disfigured” could all be apt descriptors for the condition of the entire country during this time.
Aesthetic transformations, however, arise during and after the war, which move human suffering
into the public’s gaze while also moving nonhuman suffering out of view, though the effect of
the former is not desensitization from overexposure (as Whitman comments about medical staff).
Instead, renderings of the war provide a means of remembrance while the opaqueness of the
industrial slaughterhouse nurtures indifference.

Whitman appears far from desensitized from his experiences volunteering in the hospitals
during the war. In fact, his work reflects quite the opposite. Whitman, in Memoranda as well as

46 Mark Twain, in The Gilded Age, makes a similar observation. He writes that “in the late war we saw the most
delicate women, who could not at home endure the sight of blood, become so used to scenes of carnage, that they
walked the hospitals and the margins of the battle-fields, amid the poor remnants of torn humanity, with as perfect
self-possession as if they were strolling in a flower garden” (146).
in his poetry and letters, remains sensitive to the painful notes ringing through the discordant rhythms of “brother killing brother.” Through a review of Whitman’s work and a consideration of the industrial shift in the historic practice of nonhuman animal slaughter, we may glimpse a horrific and increasingly pervasive concept of life as a condition of dismemberment.

**A Shift to the Industrial Slaughter of Nonhuman Animals: Whitman’s New York and DC**

Whitman’s New York illustrates how the location, size, and scale of nonhuman animal slaughter remained a politically contentious issue throughout the nineteenth century. Intertwined with political concerns, there were also practical ones arising from the exponential increase of urban populations. Large waves of immigrants from Germany and Ireland in the 1840s in addition to established Americans moving from rural to urban locations created the demand for larger quantities of nonhuman animal products. To meet this increased demand, the so-called “nuisance trades” (leather tanners, soap makers, candle makers, bone boilers, and fat renderers) as well as butchers contributed to the slaughter of many thousands of nonhuman animals. With such slaughter came the unsavory by-products of such practices. Jared Day notes in “Butchers, Tanners, and Tallow Chandlers” that these trades were necessary, but they “routinely gave off a terrible stench that often covered whole city blocks and more” (179). In addition to the noxious miasma, one could expect to see offal thrown out into the streets alongside decaying flesh slowly putrefying in the many butcher stalls located around the city. The level of meat consumption, for the average middle-class individual, was about six ounces per day, and according to Roger Horowitz, the expanding immigrant populations in New York began to associate this abundance

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47 The closest a modern individual gets to such odiferous violations would be driving past a modern feedlot. If you’ve ever had the fortunate pleasure of experiencing this, you’ll well remember it (particularly the odor). Regardless, we can imagine this modern nuisance as evanescent while mid-century New Yorkers would have encountered this regularly to an even greater degree.
of meat with “their new American standard of living” (172). Yet this abundance of flesh-based protein was not without its costs: monetary, environmental, sensory, and otherwise.

The American abattoir underwent structural revisions both before and after the American Civil War. During the colonial period there were, in fact, small centralized slaughter locations in New York, but the population boom of the nineteenth century meant that the local regulated infrastructure could not satisfy demands. The important changes were in scale and in visibility: a vastly greater number of animals were killed in the nineteenth century, but the visibility of those operations moved to centralized wholesale slaughterhouses.

By 1850, New York City’s population numbered 515,547 (U.S. Bureau of the Census), containing a staggering 206 slaughterhouses in addition to 531 smaller butcher’s shops and stalls (Horowitz 177; Duffy 381 qtd. in Farland 805). It would be hard to imagine Whitman not encountering the quotidian sights, smells, and sounds of the numerous abattoirs or other “nuisance trades” during his early years. America’s poet was in-residence as the city moved to small slaughter operations throughout the five boroughs.48

With the advent of war, the nation’s capital experienced a massive influx of soldiers, craftsmen, and volunteers (like Whitman) as well as the much needed nonhuman livestock. As in New York, Whitman would have not been able to circumvent the continual barrage of abusive smells ranging from equestrian scat to over ten thousand horses at any given time, dead and

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48 To clarify this new structural change, following the middle of the century, the 531 butcher shops in New York City were not the same locations where the nonhuman animals actually were slaughtered. The job of the wholesale dealer became differentiated from retail shop owners—as did local meat cutters from slaughterhouse workers. The politics and power struggles of New York butchers is too convoluted to delve into here; however, it is important to note that beginning in the early-nineteenth century, the artisan trade of butchery required an apprenticeship, typically four to seven years in length, which was followed by a lengthy journeyman status of about ten years (Horowitz 173). There were individuals, though, that operated outside of these requirements much to the outrage of the “regular bred butchers.” These non-certified butchers often exploited a legal loophole and sold their products in “country” markets. “Regular bred butchers” strived to maintain their hold on the nonhuman animal meat trade, fearing the extra-legal maneuvers from these non-regulars (which also included waves of immigrants also trained in the trade). For a full account of this struggle see Roger Horowitz’s “The Politics of Meat Shopping in Antebellum New York City.”
decaying animal carcasses left to rot in the sun, and the unpleasant voluminous offal from the city’s slaughterhouses. Kenneth Winkle, in *Lincoln’s Citadel*, describes in vivid detail the many challenges that the capital had, as the city scrambled to provide basic necessities not only for the sick and wounded, but for the thousands of soldiers stationed around Washington DC as well. Winkle goes on to note that the White House itself “looked southward over this scene, with its attendant smells, flies, and mosquitoes,” and as the war progressed, “The city’s commissioner of health asked the army to move all of its slaughterhouses outside the city to alleviate the ‘bone and offal nuisance,’ but the Monument stockyards and slaughterhouse remained” (174).

Washington DC’s overcrowded and, often, unsanitary conditions remained a part of Walt Whitman’s (and the city’s other denizen’s) daily experiences. Therefore, it seems odd that Whitman reflects little over these unpleasantries while he devotes hundreds of pages to cataloguing human suffering.

The exceptional conditions within the nation’s capital during the war foreshadowed a turn in agricultural livestock operations—with one key variance, visibility. Technological progress, no longer impeded by war, could expand to fill the growing demand for nonhuman animal flesh. While it was not America but France that first began larger centralized slaughter operations, it did not take long for the U.S. to follow suit (Fitzgerald; Johnson; Lee). Technological advances such as aggressive railroad expansion and mastery of steam made it possible to concentrate these industrial operations and move the actual act of slaughter away from the gaze of most city dwellers after the war. Instead of abattoirs being positioned just outside of urban centers as they had been in the century prior, large-scale operations were established in a handful of nation-serving locations, such as Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Kansas City (Rifkin, qtd. in Fitzgerald 60). The number of retail butcher’s shops increased in major cities such as New York
to meet demand. December 25, 1865, marked the opening of Chicago’s Union Stock Yard—one of the largest and most productive slaughter operations of the nineteenth century. The Union Stock Yard’s “inventory” increased from 1.5 million on 320 acres in 1866 to over 14.5 million on 475 acres in 1900 (Pacyga 154). Amy Fitzgerald, in her study of the social history of the slaughterhouse, notes that “animal slaughtering became the first mass-production industry in the United States, from which Henry Ford partially adapted his conception of assembly-line production (61). Ford simply inverted the process of nonhuman “dis”-assembly to his assembly line.

Whitman’s early experience in New York would have been witness to this steady shift in the method and scale of nonhuman animal slaughter as well. From small slaughter stalls sprinkled throughout the boroughs to assembly-line operations that “processed” millions, the dirty business of nonhuman butchery, paradoxically, became both more apparent (through the vast quantities of hanging meat in shop window and open market stalls) and simultaneously more removed (spatially and by consequence physically) from the actual act of slaughter. His time in Washington also would have also given the poet a special insight into nonhuman animals on an industrial scale. It was an insight, much like his firsthand contact with the “slaughter-house” of the war, that put him in the confluence of life and death, rejuvenation and decay.

**Whitman’s Animal Visions of War**

Early in *Memoranda During the War*, Whitman describes a scene in Falmouth, Virginia, where he sees a horse-cart under a tree: “I notice a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, &c., a full load for a one-horse cart. Several dead bodies lie near, each cover’d with its brown woollen (sic) blanket” (5). As unsettling as this scene might be, it was not an artistic
fictionalization of war’s costs, for the same grotesque image appears in a December 29, 1862, letter to his mother, in which he describes a cart filled with severed limbs under a tree at the “Lacy house” ("Walt Whitman to Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, 29 December 1862"). Betsy Erkkila claims that this scene was “Whitman’s nightmare come true: American not as union but amputee, the heritage of the fathers not remembered but dismembered” (198). Clearly this scene influenced Whitman’s decision to become a permanent volunteer since after this, he travelled to Washington, DC, to help in the hospitals. Likewise, dismemberment and amputation resurfaces throughout Whitman’s poetry. Whether in this particular scene, or ones like it in the hospitals, images of literal and figurative dismemberment haunt Whitman’s work.

Amputation was a common medical practice during this period. According to the *Encyclopedia of Civil War Medicine*, amputation was so commonplace due to the effects of “miné balls,” the common type of bullet used during the war. The soft lead content of the ammunition “tended to distort on contact” which then “created larger entrance and exit wounds, tore and mangled tissue, and shattered bones, rather than simply breaking them” (“Amputation” 16). Moreover, the actual survival rates of amputees were surprisingly high, considering the rather rudimentary medical knowledge by modern standards. Several factors contributed to one’s survival rate, such as how far the wound was from the trunk of the body and the time elapsed from the wound and medical treatment. According to *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*, the mortality rates for both Union and Confederate sat at around 27 percent. To put this figure into context, from the 29,980 amputations reported by Union doctors, 21,753 patients survived (“Amputation” 17). Those surviving twenty thousand soldiers on the Union side were *literally* missing pieces of themselves. Surviving beyond the end of the

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49 As stated, the mortality rates from amputations in Confederate and Union hospitals are similar; however, the exact figures for the Confederates are based upon existing partial records (“Amputation” 17).
war itself, the amputees were visual reminders of a conflict that touched and transformed an overwhelming number of lives.\footnote{To be clear, diseases such as dysentery and typhoid accounted for double the number of casualties than from actual combat (Reilly). While such diseases affected the body, the body remained physically intact. The damage of something like dysentery functioned internally, and the loss of limbs as such accounts for a life-lasting change in one’s physical appearance.}

Photography brought these disfigurements and their trauma into broader view. Dr. R. B. Bontecou, the Surgeon-in-Charge at Harewood U.S. Army General Hospital in Washington, DC, was an early “pioneer” of medical photography, methodically capturing images of bodies both pre- and post-operation. The initial purpose was instructional, but Mandy Reid notes that after the original use of photographs as “training manuals for field hospitals,” they became decisive documentation in the disbursement of military pensions following the war (219). Of the “more than 500,000 military pension claims filed prior to 1885,” Reid continues, “one-third were rejected” (219). The ability to “prove” a pension, many times, relied on photographic evidence rather than the body itself. Perhaps similar to some of Whitman’s graphic descriptions in \textit{Memoranda}, these images also, as Reid claims about Civil War photography, recorded the “dismembered bodies” as a way of telling a “story” (219-20). Like Mathew Brady’s 1862 New York photo exhibition, “The Dead of Antietam,” images from the battlefield could be disseminated in a way that had not been available in previous American wars. Still, as Oliver Wendell Holmes said about Brady’s exhibit, “it was so nearly like visiting the battlefields to look over these views . . . and we buried them in the recesses of our cabinet as we would have buried the mutilated remains of the dead they too vividly represented” (qtd. in Reid 218). Holmes’s commentary suggests an interesting dualism in such photographic representation. Holmes identifies a pathos arising from Brady’s work, but also a certain distance inherent in photography, not unlike the transition from looking at physical bodies to using photographic
documentation in military pensioning. Words such as “nearly like” and “too vividly represented,” along with a separation between the “real” bodies which must be buried and those which are “buried” in “our cabinet” have a self-reflexive quality.\textsuperscript{51} In other words, here the dead can “speak,” but they must be mediated through the camera lens; they must be represented by photographs. Whitman’s Civil War writings are also mediations, appearing as vivid documentation of disease and dismemberment.

In another letter to his mother, Whitman describes in vivid detail the “horrible collection in Armory Building, (in Armory Square hosp.).” The “collection” is wounded soldiers, which Whitman further describes as “200 of the worst cases you ever see,” and over a third are “amputation cases” ("Walt Whitman to Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, 7 June 1864"). He goes on to describe how the incoming sick and wounded are arriving in deplorable health. Whitman writes:

> The papers are full of puffs, &c. but the truth is, the largest proportion of worst cases got little or no attention—we receive them here with their wounds full of worms—some all swelled & inflamed, many of the amputations have to be done over again—one new feature is that many of the poor afflicted young men are crazy, every ward has some in it that are wandering—they have suffered too much, & it is perhaps a privilege that they are out of their senses—Mother, it is most too much for a fellow, & I sometimes wish I was out of it—but I suppose it is because I have not felt first rate myself. ("Walt Whitman to Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, 7 June 1864")

\textsuperscript{51} Cabinet here seems both to refer to a real cabinet (i.e. the physical photos can be filed away) as well as a metaphorical cabinet (i.e. memory/mind). Rather than being filed away forever, however, such images are of the kind that linger in intangible memories and tangible archives.
The excerpt here relays the trauma not only of the soldiers, half-mad in delirium with wounds “full of worms,” but also the trauma of the medical staff having to see such unsettling sights continually. Again, for medical staff, soldiers, and many civilians, surviving the war meant carrying these memories and experiences of pain and trauma for the remainder of their days, as it did for Whitman.

Both despite and because of the incredible losses of human life, American medicine advanced in the wake of the war. Antebellum Protestantism with its sanctification of the body often impeded the anatomical study of corpses (Devine 173). The scale and depth of the war forced the nation to re-orient itself in relation to death on such a colossal scale. The comparison between the surgeon and the butcher was not an uncommon one both during and after the war. Similar to the commodification and objectification of nonhuman animals for human use, civil war soldiers were usable specimens as well. Shauana Devine, in *Learning from the Wounded*, explains that “death” in the war was a matter of ownership. Devine remarks that “The state and the medical department claimed ownership of military bodies and used this claim to justify dissections that had been considered unacceptable in antebellum America” (189). State and medical departments considered enlistment an adequate justification for medical study, an ironic sentiment considering that the “ownership” of certain bodies and the labor that those bodies provided had precipitated the war itself, even if many southerners claimed otherwise, of course. Daina Berry also notes that the American system of slavery had a long practice of selling slave cadavers to medical schools (“Beyond the Slave Trade”). Berry’s identification of this little-known practice allows one to think further about how the War created a temporary space in which white bodies could be “owned” and “used” as well.

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52 For more on this, see Berry’s *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (2017).
In this regard, an effect of the War separated “personhood” from the physical human body. The ownership of and responsibility for black bodies under slavery, and even after death as Berry uncovers, appears as a different iteration in these white “specimen” soldiers. The primary difference, of course, was that the loss of personhood under slavery was in perpetuity. For Civil War soldiers, there was a national debt to be paid for a fixed period of time. Guy Hasegawa comments that a U.S. governmental review board looked extensively at the quality of various prosthetics to fill the growing need among Civil War veterans. Like the government’s claim upon a soldier’s body, its willingness to provide subsidies for artificial limbs evidences an admission of obligation. Damages incurred while “property” of the federal government could be sought. What seems clear here is that enlistment (and later conscription) meant a loss of personal ownership of one’s own body for the duration of the war—the penalties for desertion, for example, carried a maximum penalty of death itself. Compensatory measures like government-issued prosthetics were attempting to make these physical bodies objects in themselves, objects that could be made “whole” again. The obvious problem with such physical attempts is that the physical body remains separate from what it means to be a “person.”

Whitman was cognizant of the high stakes of the individual body well before the war. His “Poem of the Body” in *Leaves of Grass (LOG)* reads as especially instructive. After the opening lines which describe a loving connection among “the bodies of men and women,” the poet remarks that the physical body and the soul are inseparable. He questions what it means to “defile” the body:

> Was it doubted if those who corrupt their own live bodies conceal themselves?

> And if those who defile the living are as bad as
they who defile the dead?
And if the body does not do as much as the soul?
And if the body were not the soul, what is the
soul? (167)

This instructive moment in *LOG* tells much about the poet’s sanctification of the body as it merges with the soul, and whether man or woman (or living or dead), the body, as he writes in the next stanza is “perfect.” Losing a piece of this perfect body in war would then be a loss of a piece of one’s soul. This becomes even more clear in the following stanza:

The expression of a well-made man appears not
only in his face,
It is in his limbs and joints also, it is curiously in
the joints of his hips and wrists (167)

For Whitman, the person and the body are intertwined, and the war forced him to confront the daily fragmentation and decay of countless bodies as well as countless souls.

Adam Bradford has suggested that Whitman, in an effort to represent the individual soldier, works both within and against a “devalued” existence of human life. Bradford contends that Whitman creates “specimen-soldiers” in his poetry and prose as a powerful tool to re-inscribe value upon the “Millions Dead” (128). The re-inscription and presentation of these personal portraits, as “textual commodities,” Bradford asserts, “worked to inspire or recover a sense of human value” (147). It was a way for Whitman to recover the lost “limbs” and “joints,” a way to “re”-member the disjointed and maimed body. He clearly “re”-members throughout *Memoranda During the War*. In one of the numerous examples that constitute the bulk of the book, Whitman writes, “Bed 3, Ward E, Armory, has a great hankering for pickles, something
pungent. After consulting a doctor, I gave him a small bottle of horse-radish” (20). Then in the next paragraph, “In one bed a young man, Marcus Small, Co. K., Seventh Maine—sick with dysentery and typhoid fever—pretty critical too—I talk with him often—he thinks he will die—looks like it indeed” (21). Whitman’s “soldier-specimens,” as Bradford suggests, allow for these men to appear as something more than simple numbers or names on the list of the dead. Naming or individualizing has a strong rhetorical heft as well. Whether Whitman names the soldier or the soldier is signified by location/bed/ward, these personal interactions remind readers that these were actual people, people with families, desires, and basic human needs.

Yet Whitman, as a poet of the body, on several occasions assigns certain “animal” qualities to the soldiers. In his opening remarks in Memoranda, Whitman makes a general comment about both Union and Confederate soldiers by declaring,

The actual Soldier of 1862-'65, North and South, with all his ways, his incredible dauntlessness, habits, practices, tastes, language, his appetite, rankness, his superb strength and animality, lawless gait, and a hundred unnamed lights and shades of camp – I say, will never be written – perhaps must not and should not be. (4; emphasis added)

Significantly, this passage emphasizes that the sketches that follow will not, and should not, be complete. The incompleteness applies both in breadth and depth; of course, these are brief encounters with only a fraction of soldiers afflicted and only a sampling of those Whitman actually encountered. Adding to what Bradford identifies as “specimen-soldiers,” Whitman’s nod to all those “unnamed lights” adds further significance to the individual sketches which make it into the book. The few individual soldiers mentioned in Memoranda become emblematic, standing as metonymic examples of the “Infinite Dead” who do not get named. Furthermore, the
passage diverges from the common nineteenth-century negative connotation of human “animality.” Rather, Whitman conveys admiration for the soldiers’ animal-like quality, or “animality,” both North and South. An anonymous review of *Memoranda* from July 7, 1876, also quotes the passage above.53 The reviewer excerpts a number of the more graphic passages in *Memoranda*, ultimately praising Whitman for creating a book “of surpassing human interest.” There is no direct emphasis on the “animality” in the review, yet the reviewer concludes by highlighting Whitman’s skill at capturing the pain and sacrifice of the war, on both the Union and Confederate sides. Whitman’s inclusion of “animality” among more traditionally admirable qualities (e.g., strength and dauntlessness) iterates what he saw as lacking in the emphasis on the “mind” or “soul” during this time.

At another point in *Memoranda*, Whitman describes an injured Irish soldier as a “frighten’d shy animal” (19; emphasis added). On another occasion, he reflects on Western regiments as often possessing “disinterestedness and animal purity and heroism” (34; emphasis added). Later, in view of an actual Western regiment, he comments, “They are largely animal, and handsomely so” (69; emphasis added). He precedes this comment by noting that the Western regiments are not the most intellectually vibrant bunch, and yet this “animal purity” holds a reverence, or “heroism,” for Whitman—a quality tinged with Romanticism. His casting of this abstract nonhuman animal quality highlights a dignified commonsensical being, alive to the grandeur and pleasures of the body rather than exclusively focused on the mind. The key, for Whitman, was a balanced array of these admirable qualities.

At Whitman’s most pessimistic, in the section “A Glimpse of War’s Hell-Scenes,” he recounts a striking series of violent Confederate attacks and Union retaliations, implicating both

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sides in this savagery. Sometimes, human association with the “animal” runs the risk of uninhibited physical violence. Closing this section he writes:

(Multiply the above by scores, aye hundreds – verify it in all the forms that different circumstances, individuals, places, &c., could afford – light it with every lurid passion, the wolf’s, the lion’s lapping thirst for blood, the passionate, boiling volcanoes of human vengeance for comrades, brother slain – with the light of burning farms, and heaps of smutting, smouldering black embers – and in the human heart everywhere black, worse embers – and you have an inkling of this War.) (46; emphasis added)

On the one hand, Whitman reminds readers that these were actual people through his notation of various hospital encounters. On the other hand, he does not shy away from describing the extent of violence in which both sides were culpable. Betsy Erkkila argues that Memoranda intended “to present models of heroism, sacrifice, and the new virtue he called unionism” in reaction to a public and private “ethos” of greed late in Reconstruction (207). Erkkila’s claim that Whitman intended the book to be about remembrance is fitting. Yet the text’s presentation of the capacity of human violence regardless of side undermines her sweeping sense of Whitman’s valorization of “heroism,” “sacrifice,” and “unionism.” It would seem that there are consequences arising from the visceral propensities of our own “animal” faculties, where the boundaries between human and nonhuman blur. Whitman relegates his comparison to the seemingly inhuman actions of humans. In turn, the wolf’s and lion’s “thirst for blood” exist as metaphors to describe what happens when the balance of mind and body goes askew within the individual.

Whitman’s (Absent) Abattoir
What, then, might be Whitman’s representation of *actual* nonhuman animals? The Preface to his 1855 *Leaves of Grass* speaks to the poet’s position in relation to the nonhuman. He revels in literature’s ability to communicate the “insouciance of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass” (vii). However, there still seems lingering anthropocentric doubts when he later writes in “Song of Myself,” “I think I could turn and live awhile with the animals . . . they are so placid and self-contained, I stand and look at them sometimes half the day long” (34). Whitman goes on to list the many ways that nonhuman animals are free from human dogma and hypocrisy, and he finalizes this by stating “So they show their relations to me and I accept them” (34). In a Thoreauvian sense, Whitman’s attempt to be the “scribe of nature” appears to resemble anthropocentrism more than the expression of a subject within an interconnected ecology. The poet’s distance and doubt are embedded in this seeming recognition across species. Notice the language Whitman uses: “I think,” instead of “I know” or “I feel.” In this moment of uncertainty, Whitman recognizes a romanticized kinship, but the poet, and consequently the human, remains distinct from the nonhuman.

The debate over whether or not Whitman moves beyond an anthropocentric worldview remains a lively one, and it also remains vital to the task here of understanding Whitman, his work, and his rendering of the nonhuman within the material context of the nineteenth century. Jim Garrison, for instance, claims that Whitman’s poetry “sings with a primordial rhythm” which transcends the boundary between human and nonhuman (304). For support, Garrison cites the iconic ending of “Song of Myself.” He interprets the final “barbaric yawp” as supporting evidence of a transcendent language; in Whitman’s poetry, “Human speech and animal

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54 Steven Petersheim and Madison P. Jones IV claims that the danger of writing about “nature” has historically been the “tendency to inscribe upon nature rather than for nature or from nature” (“Introduction” in *Writing the Environment in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* xiii)
gesticulation vibrate together” (304). In another reading of Whitman’s nonhuman animals, M. Jimmie Killingsworth claims that Whitman blurs the human/animal divide as a means to question “the universal difference of humans and animals” (21). Killingsworth also notes that Whitman levels a species hierarchy as a means to “expose the political motives for animalizing others” (21). Blurring the human and animal divide, as the last chapter addressed, was also important for the exploitation of non-white human beings, and Killingsworth includes African American slaves in his mention of “political motives” for animalization. On the other hand, Thomas Gannon’s “Complaints from the Spotted Hawk” asks, against earlier readings of Whitman, whether or not Whitman actually “moves beyond his own anthropocentric poetics” (143). In lieu of an “ecoegalitarianism,” Gannon claims “[Whitman] was much more interested in his own persona as egalitarian and leveler” (148). Gannon is focused on the early 1855 version of Leaves of Grass, and Killingsworth responds to his critique by respectfully recommending that one look at Whitman’s entire corpus, not just a single text or version (33, fn. 19). Yet Killingsworth himself returns to Leaves of Grass, specifically “Song of Myself,” which according to Killingsworth is indicative of a quintessential new orientation to the natural (nonhuman) world, thus evidencing attempts to “animalize the human” (30). This occurs when Whitman asks, as Killingsworth puts it, “‘What do these animals have and what do they do that I cannot?’” (30). Whitman’s presentation and celebration of the nonhuman world, however, carries stark omissions and silences, and a look back to his use of “slaughter-house” and “slaughter” will help draw out the space between human and nonhuman, literary and reified, ideal and real.

55 I, too, cite Whitman’s “yawp” in the next chapter; however, my reference is intended to imply an already shared communication which can cross species lines (e.g., crying, laughing, and yawping), and not a transcendence of language itself. Naming this as “primal” or “primordial” is, perhaps, misguided.
56 Here, Killingsworth is primarily discussing the following lines from Whitman’s “Song of Myself”: “Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves, / . . . of the deform’d, trivial, flat, foolish, despised, / fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung” (21).
57 Lesley Ginsberg’s “Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe’s ‘Black Cat’” similarly remarks that those who supported slavery heavily relied on blurring the lines between “slaves” and “animals” (103).
A telling facet of Whitman’s work is the absence of nonhuman animal suffering. From beginning to end of his *Memoranda*, human suffering is ever-present, yet scenes of nonhuman suffering do not appear. In a number of his poems, Whitman uses the word “slaughter” or “slaughter-house” to emphasize human violence or trauma. For example, the last version (1871-72) of Whitman’s poem, “The Sleepers,” reads: “He sees the slaughter of the southern braves confided to him by their parents” (329). The line is a remembrance of the “older war-days” (328), yet the subject of this slaughter remains human. In “Song of the Redwood,” the word “slaughter-house” appears in reference to war as in his correspondence and *Memoranda*. Here Whitman references much older historic wars of the European continent: “*Not wan from Asia’s fetiches [sic], Nor red from Europe’s old dynastic slaughter-house, (Area of murder-plots of thrones, with scent left yet of wars and scaffolds everywhere*” (167). Again the “slaughter-house” is used to describe human violence, human war. In fact, the closest one gets to actual nonhuman animal slaughter or a slaughter-house is in “A Song for Occupations” (*Leaves of Grass 1855*). The brief moment reads:

Beef on the butcher's stall, the slaughter-house of the butcher, the
butcher in his killing-clothes,
The pens of live pork, the killing-hammer, the hog-hook, the
scalders tub, gutting, the cutter's cleaver, the packer's maul,
and the plenteous winterwork of pork-packing (174)

While the tone of this section is somewhat ominous, Whitman provides neither scenes of killing nor any of the graphic aftermath of slaughter. Certainly, Whitman implies the death of nonhuman animals (e.g., “killing-clothes,” “killing-hammer,” “hog-hook”), but avoids the more unsavory

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58 This poem has quite an extensive revision history. For more on this see *Walt Whitman Archive* – Barney, Folsom, Price’s “The Changing Shape of ‘The Sleepers,’ with Special Attention to the Lucifer Passage.”
business that occurs within the abattoir. Both human butcher and nonhuman livestock sit matter-of-factly in a bare openness of the unmodified or unqualified work of “gutting” and “packing,” and the individualities of both become defined by their corresponding roles. Interestingly, he references the nonhumans by their “meat” name and not the species, or “living,” name.\(^{59}\) This section opens with the word “Beef,” not cow, heifer, Angus, or Longhorn. He makes a similar move with “the pens of live pork.” Calling the attention to the “product” rather than the “animal,” works to reinforce an objective distance between the poet and the nonhuman animals themselves. In addition, this disconnection becomes even more apparent because Whitman then moves on to a flour mill. The slaughterhouse scene describes just another food-related occupation and not anything resembling either Garrison’s human/animal transcendence or Killingsworth’s questioning of universal differences between human and nonhuman.\(^{60}\)

One may muse as well if Whitman’s animals carry something akin to the tension found in his views towards African Americans. Like Abraham Lincoln or white abolitionist writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Whitman was repulsed by the practice of chattel slavery but did not believe in an inherent equality of races. In this light the claim of Whitman moving beyond his own anthropocentrism appears to be one that desperately wants to reconcile the poet’s poetry and prose with the man himself. Instead, it seems more useful to insist on the question: How can we read Whitman and his animals within the material context of the mid-to-late nineteenth century?

The question of Whitman’s relation to the nonhuman resists simple answers, and again, this seems to direct one back to his omissions of (human) violence on nonhuman animals.

Indeed, how Whitman might internally perceive the nonhuman world and how he expresses this

\(^{59}\) There has been some interesting scholarship on the rhetorical function of separating the word humans use for “living” nonhuman animals from the word used for the nonhuman animal byproducts. See Heinz and Lee’s “Getting Down to the Meat: the Symbolic Construction of Meat Consumption” (Communication Studies, Vol. 49, Spring 1998)

\(^{60}\) In a later revision of this poem, “Chants Democratic and Native American,” this scene becomes even more “food” related as it is bookended by a “fruit stand” and a flour mill.
vision in text tacitly remain in tension throughout his work. The “placid” nonhumans that he “could turn and live awhile with” is undercut by the historic move of animal “production” on a very real industrial scale which was forced upon actual animals following the war. Indeed, Whitman, in this same “turn” section of “Song of Myself,” acknowledges a desire to reclaim our connection to other animals. More instructive here is what comes next. The poet picks out an animal that he “loves” on what he calls “brotherly terms”:

A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses,
Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears,
Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
Eyes full of sparkling wickedness, ears finely cut, flexibly moving.

His nostrils dilate as my heels embrace him,
His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure as we race around and return.

I but use you a minute, then I resign you, stallion,
Why do I need your paces when I myself out-gallop them?
Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you. (55)

This might be Whitman’s ideal relationship with other animals, but it remains at odds with the human subject that imagines the scene. A horse that could be caressed as such would not be a wild creature moving, perhaps in a pack, freely through a dense woodland forest or across a hilly plain. It would be of the domesticated variety. Couched in the very fact that the stallion is “responsive” to the touch of the human is a long history of subjugation and exploitation. The
speaker here does come to realize that he does not need to use the horse, and this a significant acknowledgement as a gesture toward alternative human-to-nonhuman relations. What’s important here is that such consent to caress cannot be expressed without the cultural matrix of asymmetrical power relations of human and nonhuman husbandry. Whitman’s gesture is admirable, and he clearly gives nonhuman characters his attention and sympathy. However, this moment becomes another romantic idealized vision of human-animal relations. The beauty of such a scene, without also acknowledging the violence, sets a rather hollow vision of a human acknowledging nonhuman subjectivity. The poet’s concession of power remains couched in the poetic ideal rather than the violence whose daily brunt has been borne by horses and other domesticated nonhuman animals.

“Whitman apprehends, invokes, and announces the tangle of sympathetic threads at work between bodies,” Jane Bennett has argued, “But his poetry also invokes a strange intrabody set of sympathies, an internal relay of associations and infections at work within each human self” (245). Although Bennett focuses her discussion primarily on Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” Memoranda brims with these sympathies as well, human sympathies. By the same token, Robert Leigh Davis makes the claim that, for Whitman, “wound dressing” and poem creation were similar acts. Davis discusses Whitman’s desire to “reconnect patients to routine habits of perception” through poetry (138). Whitman’s work as a means of healing seems to apply not only to his poetry, as Davis claims, but to his writing of Memoranda as well. Yet again, I must also emphasize that this “sympathy” and/or “healing” shows little concern for the nonhuman animal in pain, and while Whitman does make efforts toward the recognition of the nonhuman as
a subject unto itself, his one-dimensional casting of human-to-nonhuman relations overlooks the quotidian violence in places such as the abattoir.  

Reflecting back on Whitman’s July 7, 1863 letter to his mother and how “one’s heart grows sick” from the daily encounters of the “slaughter-house” of the American Civil War, what did he feel or think about the actual slaughter-house? Did his heart grow heavy while a young man in New York as he passed one of hundreds of slaughterhouses or butcher’s stalls positioned around the city? Was the poet disturbed in the nation’s capital from the regular scenes of cattle being shuffled towards the killing floors in the shadow of the White House’s southward gaze, or was his stomach soured by the countless horse carcasses slowly decaying on his daily saunters to the patient office or Armory Square Hospital? These remain difficult questions to answer because they are not the encounters with other species that readers have access to through his body of work. The real war on nonhuman animals never appears in his books.

**Shifting Images of Life: Dis-membering the Nonhuman and Re-membering the Human**

In her book *This Republic of Suffering*, Drew Gilpin Faust poignantly writes, “Man had been at once agent and victim of war’s destruction. Both butcher and butchered, he had shown himself far closer to the beasts than to the angels” (267). Yet to say that because humans both were subject and object of this “slaughterhouse” of a war does not, in itself, transcend the species divide. Whitman was, of course, a product of his time, and while there is evidence of human/nonhuman animal blurring in his work, the “slaughter-house” is simply metaphoric

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61 On a similar point, Saidiya Hartman’s study of violence and race in the nineteenth century, *Scenes of Subjection*, can further contribute. Hartman identifies what she calls the “terror of the mundane,” which are everyday occurrences or practices that she claims normalized violence inflicted upon black bodies. Hartman identifies that as black slaves moved towards subjectivity, they paradoxically also moved towards exploitation transformed, or reimagined. There does seem something quite relatable about a “terror of the mundane” when thinking about the common practices by humans upon nonhuman bodies.
rhetoric in service of fleshing out the grotesque human practices of war. Moreover, Whitman’s “animal” references, perhaps, work more to divide the two categorical distinctions than to “level” them; his omissions of less-favorable encounters in favor of more idealistic scenes with nonhuman animals tend to distort the material context in which he wrote. Instead, this egalitarian “leveling” is between North and South individuals and not between human and nonhuman bodies. With this in mind, Whitman falls short of a transcendental move beyond the dividing line between human and animal. What should be even more evident after following the investigative threads traced here is the substantial effect that the war had on Whitman and his writing. As noted, *Memoranda* is, in fact, about remembrance (Erkkila 207). For many individuals prior to the war, such as the growing body of Protestant “awakened” Americans, human death was an intimate part of life, not to be avoided, but embraced. The Civil War brought with it an unforeseen scale of death, dismemberment, and trauma. For many, these unfortunate by-products of war were documented and retold, mourned and canonized—commonly “seen” or “heard” through visual (e.g., photographs) and/or textual traces (e.g., letters, reports of the dead, memoirs, and poetry). Meanwhile, for those who survived the war years, the effects of war were cut into the flesh and branded onto the memory.

Nonhuman animal slaughter had a more direct presence in day-to-day lives both prior to and during the war, albeit through the unsanitary and mutilated pieces of rotting flesh carelessly thrown into the streets and the subsequent requiem of offensive odors. Shortly after the Civil War, however, there was a distinct move toward centralized slaughter operations away from the public gaze in most urban spaces across the United States. Not only did it move to the extremities of many cities, but the abattoir became an enclosed, *opaque* structure. Unlike the notable “dismembered” bodies that arrived home from war, nonhuman animals began fading
further from the sight of the public. Such suppression of sights, sounds, and smells led to a greater cultural repression of this “mundane” practice, which might otherwise have been a daily reminder of the historic violence of, to evoke Whitman again, “men mutually butchering each other.” In turn, it became more and more likely to see only the nonhuman animal piecemeal, and thus, the “thing” became further distanced from its “product.”

So how does all this help us to think through Whitman’s work, both in its original nineteenth-century context and within current Whitman studies? To start, Whitman’s work shows a great deal of sympathy and consideration toward the natural world, and it also shows a poet answering Ralph Waldo Emerson’s call for an American poet, in search of a kind of harmony between the body and soul, the individual and the natural world at-large. Yet that American poet leaves significant stones unturned. When he muses that “[he] could turn and live awhile with the animals,” he paradoxically also turns away from them. He preemptively turns away (and continues to turn away) from human violence upon nonhuman bodies in favor of reimagining a more peaceful reciprocity between species. The debate over Whitman’s success or failure in pushing the boundaries between species highlights a continued desire to reconcile the poet and his work, and as an effect of this, it has led some scholars to emphasize the ideal animal-encounters rather than noting the stark absences in Whitman’s literary imagination. Although there appears a distinctive cultural post-War turn away from the messy business of nonhuman animal commodification and exploitation (e.g., the industrial slaughterhouse), Whitman’s poetic gaze was long before averted from such sights. What has been too often overlooked in ecocritical readings of Whitman is what is not on the page.

The literary inheritance arising from such omissions is not without individuals and societies working to increase the visibility of nonhuman animals. Following the war, there were a
number of writers highlighting human cruelty upon other creatures. During the latter half of the 1860s, there were a small number of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals (SPCAs) that began to appear across the Northeast and Midwest. In 1873, congress passed legislation, often referred to as the “28-hour law,” that required the transporters of livestock to feed and water their cargo every 28 hours. Unfortunately, the law and the societies were not very effective in preventing harsh treatment; as the American Humane Association explains, “The modest scope of the law, combined with resistance by the railroad companies and lax law enforcement, resulted in little improvement in the conditions endured by cattle, swine, and sheep transported from the grazing lands of the West to the slaughterhouses of Chicago and other cities” (“Treatment of Farm Animals”).

Though the slaughterhouse remained opaque to the gaze of the general city dweller and animal advocacy groups often failed to garner much public support, there were writers that exposed less idealistic portraits of human and nonhuman animal relationships. Mark Twain, as we will see in the following chapter, denounced the violence upon domestic companion and work animals. Twain was of a growing population in America and abroad using fiction to fight against the maltreatment of companion species (e.g., Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* [1877], Marshall Saunders’s *Beautiful Joe* [1893]). Though none of these late nineteenth-century writers commented explicitly on the slaughterhouse, there were significant numbers of individuals attempting to move past romantic idealization, showing a more accurate vision of human-nonhuman relationships that were predicated upon power and use.

Whether it appears in his poetry, *Memoranda*, or correspondence, when Whitman uses “slaughter-house,” it is a vivid image—but ultimately, it is a false metaphor. In a broader statement about reactions to the pain, trauma, and dismemberment of the war, written texts and
photography were a means of mending the loss by “re”-membering the human body; representation was (and still is) a fertile path to restoring, at the least, a semblance of “wholeness.” Importantly, this provided (and still provides) a sustained visibility for these individuals. Human-to-animal comparisons in texts such as Memoranda emphasize Whitman’s sentimentality for Romantic nonhuman animal qualities in certain representative “specimen” soldiers, yet this does little for remembering the nonhuman animal subject. And while he may find beauty and reverence in maimed and disfigured human forms, he remains notably silent about the death of those nonhuman animals that “[he] could turn and live awhile with.” As the American Civil War comes to a close, actual nonhuman slaughter moves further out of sight and forgotten, and there it remains to this day. The grander statement, again, about the relationship between the reaction to the myriad death of humans in the Civil War and the industrial-scale death of nonhuman animals in the nineteenth-century: one becomes “re”-membered while the other remains “dis”-membered.
CHAPTER 4:
VIVISECTING TWAIN’S “ANIMALS”

As we’ve seen in the previous chapters, the nonhuman animal appeared as a metaphor device for much of the American nineteenth century. However, this lack of visibility began to change with authors like Twain in the later part of the century. Mark Twain, especially in the last two decades of his life, vehemently speaks out against vivisection (“Letter to the London Anti-vivisection Society”) and satirizes anthropocentrism into a farce (“Was the World Made for Man?”). In his essay “The Lowest Animal,” Twain renounces the Darwinian concept of the “Ascent of Man” from the lower animals. He states that “it now seems plain to me that that theory ought to be vacated in favor of a new and truer one” (176). Twain goes on to explain that this “new and truer” theory should be named “the Descent of Man from the Higher Animals” (176). These works, two essays and one letter, reveal a great deal. Many of his earlier perceptions and/or prejudices had begun to change towards the end of his life, a time when, as Anthony Brandt notes in the introduction to Following the Equator, Twain’s criticism was redirected to the white race’s “claims to moral superiority,” “greed,” and “arrogance” (xxiii). An important addition to Brandt’s observations lies in Twain’s identification of the despotic relationship between human and nonhuman animals, an association which can be directly observed in “A Dog’s Tale.” Furthermore, this story encapsulates the duality that the domesticated dog as both loyal “friend” and dependable scientific “instrument” denotes. Twain paints a dark portrait of humankind’s association with “beast.” Additionally, the story presents much more than a simple anthropomorphic tale. Although the nonhuman narrator has humanlike characteristics, one is always aware that Aileen Mavourneen is a dog—which is quite a change
from earlier anthropomorphism in the previous chapters. Nowhere is this divide more apparent than in the narrator’s failed attempts to “understand” the language and behavior of the human characters. The tale epitomizes the dogma of human rule over “lower” creatures, but it does not fully reaffirm these accepted beliefs. Rather, the story (unlike the previously analyzed authors) problematizes our position to these “lower creatures,” most notably through the inconsistencies between language, interpretation, and physical response; the story also forces readers to confront the inconsistent treatment of “man’s best friend” as well as humanity’s privileged locus as reasoning animals.

In 1911, Killis Campbell attempted to trace the story’s inspirations by drawing parallels between “A Dog’s Tale” and numerous tales of folklore; Campbell is quick to point out, though, that this is “his child’s story” (43). Likewise, John H. Davis, in *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia*, mentions that the story might have been for Twain’s daughter Jean, who, according to Davis, was staunchly against vivisection (223). While the initial motivation or spark of inspiration might have come from Twain’s daughter, in the historical context Twain is working among a growing number of individuals who give significant consideration to the cruelty toward nonhuman animals. The creation of the London Anti-vivisection Society in 1875 provides clear evidence of this increasing demographic, as does Twain’s own “Letter to the London Anti-vivisection Society.”

“A Dog’s Tale” begins with the first-person narrator introducing herself. She states, “My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian” (165). The story consists of three parts, and this opening section is full of wonderfully comedic scenes, many of which center on the narrator, Aileen Mavourneen, recalling her mother’s (mis)understanding of human language. The second section focuses on Aileen’s separation from her mother. Then, the
third and final section contains both Aileen’s dramatic rescue of her owner’s baby from a house fire and the vivisection of her own child by the hand of her “master,” Mr. Gray. Words and the comprehension of language appear impish in the opening section. Later, the irony of these early playful scenes transform into the narrator’s own struggle to understand the actions of her human “companions.” This first section evidences a foundational trust from dog to human being, a trust which appears to be confounded by the discrepancies between word and action.

Human language intrigues Aileen’s mother. She listens to her owner’s conversations in order to memorize choice words and phrases; then she uses these chestnuts to impress all of her canine acquaintances. When her friends question the meaning of these words, she gives a different definition each time. The acquisition of language becomes mostly sounds without meaning, a mimetic function, and as Aileen expresses, “[Her mother] wasn’t interested in what [the phrases or words] meant, and knew those dogs hadn’t wit enough to catcher her, anyway” (166). To the other dogs in this tale, with the exception of Aileen, her mother possesses an elevated knowledge of human expression and, in effect, human knowledge. So in this regard, the mimicry of words becomes a status symbol which raises Aileen’s mother above the other “simple” hounds. Her “knowledge” is illusory, but others unknowingly laud her under this false pretense.

Steve Baker’s Picturing the Beast traces the use of “talking-animal” narratives. He observes that there is a common perception that these types of narratives are not about nonhuman animals at all. Baker notes that this type of notion “is quite consistent with the far wider cultural trivialization and marginalization of the animal” (138). At first glance, it may appear that Twain’s story falls into this same general pattern of anthropomorphic representation. Twain’s depiction of these linguistically floundering nonhuman characters can be viewed as paradoxical.
On the one hand, Aileen’s mother functions as a faux analogue to her human “superiors,” a subtle critique of a human propensity to value words over comprehension. On the other hand, Twain expresses, slyly, the “absurd” idea that dogs can understand human language by having them misunderstand it. And yes, we can laugh at these “simple” characters in this opening section. The dogs are noble in their actions, but these hounds lack a proper understanding of language and higher reasoning skills, two characteristics which are used as common justifications for humanity’s rule over lower creatures. It is a paradox because these nonhuman characters reflect a negative characteristic of their human cohorts, while also highlighting that these dogs are not human. He provides an example of common preconceptions that dogs are “simplistic” creatures that, at best, can only mimic without comprehension.

Soon, the story challenges this divide in intellectual capacity between man and dog. This happens not by proving that the nonhuman animal characters are somehow intellectually “superior” or equal to the human characters. Rather, Twain shifts the focus from a dog’s intellectual capacity to a moral one. Aileen understands the vanity of her mother’s trickery and goes on to elucidate how her mother’s virtuous traits far outweigh this one small vice. Her mother instills Aileen with admirable qualities such as gentleness, kindness, and bravery in the face of danger. Aileen is quick to add that her mother taught “not by words only, but by example, and that is the best way and the surest and the most lasting” (167). The time eventually comes when Aileen is sold to another family, and her mother reiterates the importance of doing “right without reward” (167). Since Twain already establishes that words are problematic, it is important that Aileen learns her moral behavior by example. In the narrator’s later selfless actions, one can clearly see this early maternal influence predicated on the alignment and/or direct relation between physical action and words.
In the third section, Aileen arrives at her new home, and she describes her new family as sweet and loving. “And I was the same as a member of the family” she says, “and they loved me and petted me” (168). This kind of treatment of Aileen continues for many months. Then winter comes and a fire begins in the room of the family’s young infant. Aileen, noticing the immediate danger, first attempts to flee. The memory of her mother’s words holds her back, and she drags the baby out of the fire. Twain seems intentionally to make Aileen first act on what one could call an “instinctive” flight reaction to danger, only then to overcome this “instinct” by a moment of self-reflective thought. Interestingly, she recalls her mother’s words, not her actions. This may be because at this point, for Aileen, word and action each represent the same idea. These two terms are not yet confused by human inconsistencies. Mr. Gray, upon seeing Aileen carrying his child, does not stop for one moment to think. Rather he yells, “Begone, you cursed beast!” and delivers a harsh blow to Aileen with his cane (170). By juxtaposing the actions of a nonhuman animal and human in distress, Twain not only brings into question the moral “superiority” of human beings, but he also provides an example of man acting in a purely instinctive manner, thus further countering the common assumption that humans are somehow intrinsically superior to nonhuman animals. Aileen recalls words; therefore Twain also gives her something exclusively human while stripping a layer of this same characteristic from his “human” character. Gray misconstrues the situation, but one might assume that a man of science, and scientific method, would first ask, “Why is my dog dragging the baby down the hall?” No, the natural reflex to correct a dog’s “bad” behavior is physical abuse. Mr. Gray’s brief, albeit violent, consistency between language and action shows clear lack of understanding. Gray misinterprets Aileen’s actions, and she cannot verbally speak in her own defense. Aileen’s
position as a “loving pet” remains dependent on the whims of her owner. It is not until moments later when the maid alerts the family to the fire that he understands his error.

This scene resembles Twain’s account of a German tourist in Bombay who strikes a “native” for some unknown “dissatisfaction” (Following the Equator 217-18). Like Aileen, the servant takes the blow “saying nothing.” In this extract from Following the Equator, Twain is quickly reminded of an early memory of the violence perpetrated against a slave. The thread that weaves these excerpts resides in the hierarchies of “personhood” and the inability to “talk” back. There are socio-cultural divisions that contribute to such ideological fallacies. An even more plainly put example of this sentiment can be found in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court. The narrator makes an analogy to an elephant in a menagerie in order to explain “inherited ideas.” He writes:

[Humans] are full of admiration of [the elephant’s] vast bulk and his prodigious strength; they speak with pride of the fact that he can do a hundred marvels which are far and away beyond their own powers; and they speak with the same pride of the fact that in his wrath he is able to drive a thousand men before him. But does that make him one of them? No; the raggedest tramp in the pit would smile at the idea. He could comprehend it; couldn’t take it in; couldn’t in any remote way conceive of it. (46)

Twain’s knack for understanding the hypocrisy of American culture, particularly that which disguises hierarchical power imbalances, has made his work popular into the present. The lines between who can and cannot speak are demarcated by the culture itself, and to “the raggedest tramp in a pit,” imagining one’s self as a nonhuman animal becomes a laughable joke.

62 To again recall Thomas Jefferson’s sentiments between the races: “[W]hatever be [African Americans’] degree of talent it is no measure of their rights” (Thomas Jefferson to Henri Gregoire). No matter a nonhuman animal’s degree of talent, it is no measure of their rights.
In stories like “A Dog’s Tale,” instead of assuming a strictly anthropocentric premise, Twain expresses the inequities of such relationships, the abuse inflicted on those without a voice. He does the seemingly absurd work of imagining how the world would look through the eyes of a dog. And, of course, unless there is a breakthrough in modern technology, humans will never truly be able to “know” definitively what a dog is thinking. Humans, however, can become aware and responsive to inequality between species. The issue requires one to go beyond the obvious, such as the maltreatment of these creatures. As Peter Singer, in Animal Liberation, explains, “The extension of the basic principle of equality from one group to another does not imply that we must treat both groups in exactly the same way, or grant exactly the same rights to both groups” (2-3). Singer continues, “Whether we should do so will depend on the nature of the members of the two groups. The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment; it requires equal consideration” (3). A great deal of the story’s effectiveness derives from Twain’s identification of the inconsistent “treatment” toward these “lower” creatures. This might appear contradictory to Singer’s passage, which promotes not equal treatment but equal consideration. Twain works indirectly toward this consideration by, first, showing the harsh and inconsistent treatment that dogs endure from the human species, and then pairing this with the inability to communicate.

Gray’s reaction might appear reasonable given this particular circumstance, which is predicated on a misunderstanding; however, his attitude toward Aileen can be described by what Singer calls “speciesism.” Singer defines this as “a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species” (7). Paramount in an anthropocentric worldview is the mentality that nonhuman animals are below human beings, so therefore it is “natural” to use and/or abuse these nonhuman animals. Singer
also identifies a key question that can be applied to Twain’s story. In a line which Singer 
borrows from Jeremy Bentham, he states, “The question is not, Can [nonhuman animals] *reason*? 
nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?” (8).

Twain’s understanding of human indifference to nonhuman animals leads to what Shelley 
Fisher Fishkin identifies as a “part of this broader disillusionment and despair” about American 
imperialism (“Introduction” 33). Fishkin also briefly mentions the possible metaphor between 
nonhuman animals and African Americans during the pre- and post-Civil War America era (28). 
The trope linking blackness with animality has already been addressed in Chapter 2, and aside 
from reiterating slavery’s reliance on blurring the lines between “slaves” and “animals” 
(“Slavery and the Gothic Horror” 103), I’d resist reading Twain’s animals in this way, even 
though “A Dog’s Tale” could be seen as a metaphor for the self-sacrificing “mammy,” or a 
broader representation of the denigrated position of blackness in nineteenth- and twentieth-
century America. Importantly, more than any previously discussed text or writer, Twain grants 
space and consideration to the nonhuman animals themselves. Assuming that the nonhuman 
animals must ultimately represent humans exposes a perpetual problem when trying to read such 
stories, especially since these nonhuman animal characters are literally speaking “our” language.

When speaking of the African American slave, Lindon Barrett provides another 
connection between Twain’s animal narratives and the importance of language. Barrett notes, 
“Literacy provides manifest testimony of the mind’s ability to extend itself beyond the 
constricted limits and conditions of the body” (419). While Barrett focus on African American 
slave narratives, he makes an important association. He remarks that within American slave 
narratives there are “inexorable connection[s] between literacy and African-American 
corporality” (415). That said, the connection between corporality and literacy can also apply to
corporeality and the ability to communicate. The further one moves away from literacy, the lower he/she measures against an established “gold standard,” or the only standard (i.e., human). The problem one encounters once again is the hierarchical relationship embedded in and around language, or a lack thereof, as a means of separation. Hence, metaphoric or real nonhuman animals are often used as a means to further separate one “kind” of human from another.

After the fire incident in “A Dog’s Tale,” a physically hurt and emotionally wounded Aileen contemplates running away. She cannot understand why Gray abused her for saving the family’s baby. The sole reason she decides to stay is Robin, her own child. Once Aileen returns from her hiding, the family showers her with praise and affection. She states, “The days that followed—well, they were wonderful. The mother and Sadie and the servants—why, they just seemed to worship me” (172). Aileen’s trust toward her human companions restores itself. When a friend of Mr. Gray compliments Aileen’s exquisite “instinct,” Gray is quick to correct him. He states, “It’s far above instinct; it’s reason” (172). It appears that Aileen is again a member of the Gray household. Mr. Gray believes in Aileen’s capacity for reason, and this acknowledgement removes the common justification of animal experimentation. *Reason*, however varied individuals choose to define it, is used by many to support a position of superiority over other “lower” animals.

By digging down further into human and nonhuman animal relations, one can also identify the firmly rooted subject/object dichotomy between human and nonhuman animals. Mark Bernstein comments on this in *Without a Tear*. Bernstein notes that humans are thought of as having a “worth” that does not come from any service(s) they afford; rather, humans have an “intrinsic value” (4). Both Singer’s and Bernstein’s philosophically grounded ideas seem to work
in tandem, and both can further our understanding of the subversive notes present within Twain’s text.

The fact that the dog-narrator is given a name and humanlike qualities might seem like an attempt to “humanize” her; but perhaps rather than this, it “individualizes” Aileen. Different from the stock, generalized repetitions of stereotypical nonhuman animal representation (often to modify the human), this individualization allows readers to move toward recognizing what Bernstein calls “intrinsic value,” and one can move beyond identifying Aileen as purely an object. Then, as Singer says, one can determine that this “individual” can (and does) suffer. A reader remains aware throughout the story that Aileen is a dog, yet in the process of naming and developing her as a character Twain makes Aileen more than a mere faceless, identity-less dog. She is Aileen Mavourneen, a half St. Bernard, half collie canine; she is the mother of Robin. Simultaneously, Twain creates what Joe Fulton calls a “switching” effect. Fulton explains:

Twain allows the characters themselves to become like “another conscience” inside each other, and to create, to a sometimes surprising degree, consciousness itself. Twain’s attempt to “be authentic” encompasses the ethical interaction of these voices and the aesthetic attempt to create a realistic literature by making them “talk as they do talk.” (23)

While Fulton is referring to Twain’s use of regional dialects, this can be taken a step further and applied to the nonhuman narration of Aileen. The southern dialects that Twain uses throughout much of his work gives his readers access to these alternative consciences, one of which is a piece of the southern black experience; he breathes life into characters like Jim in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and, in turn, invites readers into another conscience. Additionally, Twain gives a voice to “others” who normally do not have the ability to be heard—nonhuman animals. While
dogs do not speak in an articulate language, outside of fictional stories they do suffer. Twain identifies this and gives a voice to a voiceless nonhuman animal. He makes the nonhuman visible and heard. Because Aileen is unable to verbally communicate with the human characters in the story, the “ethical interaction” occurs between the narrator and the reader; it becomes empathy caused by the recognition of suffering.

Another of Twain’s stories, “A Horse’s Tale,” presents a nonhuman animal raconteur. The opening narrative by the horse, Soldier Boy, evidences a nonhuman narrator who shares Aileen’s voiceless position. Soldier Boy notes all his useful skills and traits, yet he cannot directly communicate with humans. When he mentions that he can name any Native American tribe simply by looking at their moccasins, he adds that he can only name the tribe “in horse-talk, and could do it in American if [he] had speech” (197). Like Aileen from “A Dog’s Tale,” Soldier Boy cannot speak to his owner(s), and like Aileen, his “tale” does not end well on account of his exploitation by his multiple masters. Boy has only brief sections of narration, leaving the rest to be filled by human narration (mostly in the form of letters). Regardless, Boy’s voice is heard both at the beginning and end of the tale, and this has a similar individualizing effect as Aileen’s first-person narrative in “A Dog’s Tale.”

There are a number of other memorable scenes and stories from Twain’s corpus of writing that deal with nonhuman animals. In a majority of these, the animals are not narrating. Granted, a reader knows that Twain lurks behind all narration, human or nonhuman, but the overall result of animal stories told by a human narrator seems to reduce what Fulton names the “switching effect.”63 In “Baker’s Blue-Jay Yarn” for example, the narrator possesses an omniscience that affords him/her access to the bird’s thoughts and feelings. The first line starts, “When I first begun to understand jay language correctly,” thus explicitly noting that the bird’s

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63 “From the horse’s [or dog’s] mouth,” no doubt, is ideal.
language is being interpreted (87). The bird does “talk”; however, a “talking” bird brings to mind a parrot, which can learn to mimic words and phrases. This speech does not seem to interest the narrator. He/she is more fascinating by the bird’s tireless efforts placing acorns in a hole in a roof, even remarking, “He laid into his work like a nigger” (89). Action takes primacy over words, perhaps because, again, the vocalizations of birds are mimetic and therefore seem to lose their authenticity or legitimacy (both for the reader and the fictional narrator). But “understanding” jay language is not a means of understanding the bird’s actions. Rather, it gives the narrator a means to laugh at this “simple” bird.

Likewise, in an early scene from Pudd’nhead Wilson, one may recall how David Wilson gets his eponymous name, Pudd’nhead, after hearing a dog “yelp and snarl and howl” (25). The voice of the dog is distanced from a physical body. As the text clearly states, these noises were heard from an “invisible dog” (25). Wilson jokingly makes the comment about wishing to own half of the dog so he could kill his half, but the humor of his remark is lost to the “simple” townsfolk. A reader understands the miscommunication, yet the other characters do not. The townsfolk try to reason through Wilson’s joke, finally deciding he is a “Pudd’nhead.” Again, Twain confronts his readers with a disembodied representation of a nonhuman animal and evidences another example where words and actions conflict.

In the final scenes of “A Dog’s Tale,” Mr. Gray takes Aileen’s puppy into the laboratory. Aileen watches with pride, unaware of the events which unfold. Her puppy, bleeding from his head, stumbles and then falls to the floor. The experiment causes Robin to go blind. Gray’s associates praise the experiment, stating, “It’s so—you’ve proved your theory, and suffering humanity owes you a great debt from henceforth” (173). Robin dies a few moments later, and Mr. Gray orders a servant to bury “it” in the far corner of the garden and continues his
conversation with the rest of his colleagues. Aileen cannot understand why Robin will not grow like the seed that they plant earlier in the story.

In his 1899 “Letter to the London Anti-vivisection Society,” Twain mentions Claude Bernard, a “notorious French vivisector” (139). Lori Gruen, Peter Singer, and David Hine also mention Bernard in Animal Liberation: A Graphic Guide, explaining, “The growth of animal experimentation gave another boost to the movement of animal welfare because of the horrific—though entirely accurate—details that emerged about what was being done to animals” (41). Bernard himself argues, “A physiologist is no ordinary man. He is a learned man, a man possessed and absorbed by a scientific idea. He does not hear the animal’s cry of pain. He is blind to the blood that flows. He sees nothing but his idea” (qtd. in Gruen, Singer, and Hine 41). Clearly Twain knows of Claude Bernard and this type of “deaf” man of science during the time “A Dog’s Tale” was written in 1903. One can easily identify something akin to Bernard’s “physiologist” within Twain’s fictional representation of Mr. Gray. More generally, Bernard illustrates a prime example of scientific exploitation of animals as well as the disconnect between human and nonhuman suffering.

Twain Among Other Writerly “Animals”

In her introduction to Mark Twain’s Book of Animals, Shelley Fisher Fishkin makes the important point that “Mark Twain came of age as a writer at a time when Western culture was struggling to assimilate and grasp the significance of the links that Charles Darwin posited between humans and other animals” (1). Much of the friction and discord in the literary representations of nonhuman animals during nineteenth-century America appears to arise from the fundamental implications of Darwin, most specifically that humans are animals, too.
American writers like Mark Twain were working within a larger community of humans who saw nonhumans as beings deserving of or entitled to our serious consideration; some-things that had a right to a life outside of their material or emotional human equity. Contemporaneous with Twain’s late-animal-orientated work, one finds Marshall Saunders’s wildly popular and influential Canadian novel, *Beautiful Joe* (1893), which tells the heroic story of the eponymous self-sacrificing canine. Even earlier, the British writer, Anne Sewell tugged at readers’ heartstrings with her novel highlighting the dark commonalities of equestrian use and abuse, *Black Beauty* (1877). Unlike Whitman’s more idealistic human relationships with nonhuman animals, these post-War writers move toward exposing the darker side of human behavior. Such stories of abuse can easily be written off as cheap sentimentalism—a view held by some reviewers when these stories were published. Yet Twain (in addition to Sewell, Saunders, and other writers using their skills for such purposes) remains an important counter-force during a period that tries to settle earlier anxieties brought about by Darwin. In turn, some writers at this time still relied on the repetition of more “traditional” nonhuman animal representations.

For example, published in 1900, L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* portrays a clear division between species. Certain nonhuman animals have the gift of speech and what appears to be a quasi-human subjectivity (e.g., the Cowardly Lion and the Queen of the Field Mice) while others are enslaved (e.g., the Winged Monkeys, who are spellbound by the owner of the Golden Cap). Others remain silent, wild, and dangerous (e.g., Kalidahs). Baum’s story privileges those “naturally” occurring species like lions and mice, but other, “unnatural,” exotic, exotic,

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64 It seems more than a coincidence that Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* encountered similar critiques of overt “sentimentalism.” For example, Twain’s representation of human abuse upon nonhuman bodies and Stowe’s representations of human violence upon black bodies were written with the intention to garner a (human) reader’s sympathy for these disempowered and exploited beings. Moreover, both of these cases, the authors were writing to a racist/speciesist audience with the hope of making them “see” these humans/nonhumans as subjects.
or hybrid creatures are cast out to the margins of the narrative because these beings pose a threat to the established order of this fictional realm. These outlying creatures must be ruled or killed, and one need look no further than the opening description of the Kalidahs to confirm this belief. They are “monstrous beasts with bodies like bears and heads like tigers” with long, sharp claws (69). These odd hybrids cannot be tamed and are viewed as cantankerous and dangerous. The Kalidahs are swiftly killed by the Tin Woodman’s axe, sending these nonhumans plummeting to their death in a ravine. Baum casts his characters with clear boundaries separating human and nonhuman animal. Furthermore, it is quite clear which nonhumans are “good” or “bad,” “domestic friend” or “wild animal.” There are few character ambiguities in Baum’s novel, and this might make sense considering Baum’s infamous racism, which called for the annihilation of Native Americans.

Hunter Liguore has recently written on the controversy surrounding Baum’s racist sentiments towards Native Americans. Those who are attempting to downplay Baum’s racism, according to Liguore, hang on to fragments of compliments toward the Lakota Sioux. However, it is difficult to supplant such poignant passages from Baum’s early editorial work, remarking that “The Whites, by law of conquest . . . are masters of the American continent, and the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians” (qtd. in Liguore 79). In another early editorial, Baum’s uses techniques of animalization that would later be projected much more subtly in The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. He writes:

The Pioneer has before declared that our only safety depends upon the total extermination of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these
untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth. (qtd. in Liguore 79; emphasis added)

His evocation of “untamed and untamable creatures” seethes of settler colonialism, and importantly, it also previews those “wild” characteristics (in need of either domination or extinction) that he later uses to establish a “natural order” in the fantastical land of Oz. Since his Oz novels have grabbed a place in our contemporary American ethos, it seems inevitable that there will be voices that attempt to salvage Baum’s legacy. Regardless, he gives us a prime example of those writers, against whom Twain must compete, who continue to disregard actual nonhuman animals. Instead, the appearance of nonhuman animals serves the anthropocentric (and racist) purpose of de-humanizing other humans.

In addition to Baum’s reiterations of past animal tropes, the rise of Naturalism in literature came with an interest in seeing “nature” realistically. A prominent example of naturalism and nonhuman animals receiving close attention can be found in Jack London. London’s tendency to centralize his nonhuman characters and develop powerful narratives around both the human and nonhuman captured wide attention at the turn of the century and continues into the present. John Burroughs, in his 1903 “The Real and Sham Natural History,” charges London with “nature-faking.” Burroughs (and others such as President Teddy Roosevelt) questioned London’s anthropocentric representations and the human-like intelligence that is given to some of these nonhuman animal characters (e.g., reason and level of general intelligence).

Indeed, such animal-centered narratives, I think, remain a problem tied to the divided ways in which Americans viewed/view their own relationship(s) with other animals. For John Burroughs, such nonhuman animal depictions were not accurate representations of “nature.”
Writers like London were dangerous not because they did not represent nonhumans to a high degree of accuracy, but because, similar to Twain, they constructed rounded nonhuman animal characters that readers could emotionally connect with; this invited readers to question who or what was a legitimate life. Furthermore, London did not simply privilege one type (i.e., human) knowledge. Instead, he provided multiple kinds of valuable and legitimate nonhuman knowledges.

For example, in *White Fang*, the narrator often embraces animal difference—not as a means of (re)establishing a hierarchy, but to simply express these differences. After a dramatic fight scene with a lynx, the narrator notes, “[T]he cub did not think in man-fashion. He did not look at things with wide vision. He was single-purposed, and entertained but one thought or desire at a time” (157). The passage reflects a degree of human interpretation and imagination about how and to what degree nonhuman animals think, but at least he is humoring the idea that nonhumans possess such abilities (albeit with a degree of anthropocentrism). In his essay, “The Other Animals,” London explains that he created his “two books about dogs [. . . ] in order to hammer into the average human understanding that these dog-heroes of mine were not directed by abstract reasoning, but by instinct, sensation, and emotion, and by simple reasoning” (238).65 London, and literary Naturalism in general, places humans and nonhumans both in a position that leaves them driven by a combination of instinct and reason (a divergence from other naturalists, who left reason out). As London writes in *White Fang*, “[White Fang] recognized in man the animal that had fought itself to primacy over the other animals of the Wild” (159-60).66

Important to note, however, London and this new literary naturalism movement were more keen

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65 The two “dog books” referenced here are *Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906).
66 The title of Emile Zola’s *La Bête humaine* (or, “The Human Beast”) from 1890 should give us a clue to how Naturalist writers tended to think about humans in relation to nonhuman animals.
to point out that humans are animals rather than to claim that other animals are “human”-like.

**Twain’s “Dog People”**

In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway discusses Jacques Derrida’s lifetime struggle against the idea that “response” is limited to humans and that animals possess only the ability to “react” (77-78). As Derrida states, “The question of the said animal in its entirety comes down to knowing not whether the animal speaks but whether one can know what respond means. And how to distinguish a response from a reaction” (389). Susan McHugh, in “Literary Animal Agents,” expands on Derrida’s struggle. McHugh explains:

So often applied to examples of existing canon, this formulation of nonhuman traces as deconstructing human attempts at self-representation elaborates the logic of substitution through which the animal’s sacrifice (i.e., its real and representational consumption) supports the human. But it creates more problems than it resolves [. . .] This implies that animal subjectivity remains significant only as an essentially negative force against which the human is asserted—hence the appeal of metaphoric animals. (489)

In the case of Aileen, in Twain’s “A Dog’s Tale,” one has the fortune to know what her “responses” mean. Do these beings exist only to reaffirm what constitutes a human (e.g., those beings which are not animals)? Moreover, Haraway makes the good point that “the problem is actually to understand that human beings do not get a pass on the necessity of killing significant others, who are themselves responding, not just reacting” (80). In addition to voice, Twain inverts human response by illustrating Mr. Gray’s propensity to act in a reactionary manner.

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67 I feel impelled to reiterate that Haraway, particularly in *When Species Meet*, supports scientific testing on *certain types* of nonhuman animals (but not, of course, her faithful companion border collies).
Again, these serve to support Twain’s comment, in “The Lowest Animal,” that Darwin had it all wrong about man’s ascent from lower animals (at least in a moral sense). The poignant line from Huck, in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, that “human beings can be awful cruel to one another,” perhaps underpins Twain’s later feelings toward the maltreatment of “lower” animals (321). This cruelty persists when those being hurt do not possess the ability and/or the opportunity to “talk” back and merits a connection to the other forms of dehumanization, such as slavery and racism, which Twain observed throughout his life. It also merits reiteration that these behaviors of the past were facilitated, in part, by making this violence and trauma unseen.

Gray’s hypocrisy is apparent from his inconsistent behavior toward Aileen. One moment he treats her as a member of the family, and the next moment he vivisects her child. As a (privileged) human acting upon a “lower” species, he need not have consistency in the cultural matrix of power relations. In the story, Aileen’s moral behavior far outweighs the actions of her human counterparts. Gray exclaims, oblivious to the irony of his own words, “There, I’ve won—confess it! He’s as blind as a bat!” (175). When an associate of Gray announces that “suffering humanity” owes him a great debt, one cannot overlook the cost of this frivolous “experiment.” This phrase also carries a dark causticness because the only beings who suffer in the story are not human. But what seems obvious to the men of science is not apparent to the canine narrator. Once again, the interpretation of human language becomes problematic when words and actions conflict with one another.

May we for a moment ponder: When a human strikes a dog, does the dog not respond? As Aileen drags the “screaming creature” from the fire and is assaulted for her valor, she retreats to a dark corner of the house (170-71). She remarks how she resisted the urge to whimper, “though it would have been such a comfort” (170). Likewise, when Mr. Gray blinds Robin, the
puppy “shrieked” (173). A dog will “yelp” or “whimper” in times of pain. One might venture to guess that David Wilson (aka Pudd’nhead Wilson) wished he had not heard, or commented on, the yelps and howls of a hound. In times of extreme emotion, humans will also resort to pre-linguistic forms of expression. In moments of overwhelming sadness one may cry; in instances of gaiety one may laugh. The speaker reverts to Whitman’s “barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (76). In other words (irony intended), there are limits which human language cannot reach. The “barbaric yawp,” then, can communicate between species, albeit primal and inarticulate, if one is not too deaf to hear these cries. Unfortunately for much of the nineteenth century, these cries often fell on deaf (or absent) ears.

Perhaps an unexpected outcome of Twain’s use of “talking” canines is that it might not have seemed a threat to those, like John Burroughs or Teddy Roosevelt, seeking to represent the natural world with the semblance of reality. Twain’s anthropomorphic “Dog people” are imaginative representations that make no claims to reflect naturalism’s “nature,” although, Twain makes readers question the human’s privileged place among other animals. His use of anthropomorphic dog people is indeed tapping into the predominant anthropocentrism of his wider audiences, but this is a common ground strategy rooted in suffering. It is a suffering that finds a voice and makes itself visible by Twain’s ability to make us feel for these characters.

Twain’s story, therefore, can be viewed as a move beyond the objectification of animals, yet this movement is located outside this fictional context. It provides no transcendental movement within its human characters. For fin-de-siècle and modern audiences, such representations make nonhuman animals visible in a way that highlights their autonomous subjectivity, a position deserving consideration in their own right. Twain’s animals, which some dismiss as “sentimental” and/or “pathetic,” do evoke a certain pathos within readers, but the
emotion is not simply “pity” or “nostalgia.” He uses anthropomorphism as an effective tool to reach his (human) audience as well as to give cause for questioning our own place as the “highest” species. Perhaps the feelings evoked by Twain’s animals could be labeled an empathy that crosses species, a “barbaric yawp,” which echoes in our ears long after the stories have ended.
CONCLUSION

“Dismember me this animal, and return him in a basket to the base-born knave who sent him; other answer have I none!”—Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*

“If slaughterhouses had glass walls everyone would be vegetarian.”—Sir Paul McCartney

To the general American public throughout the nineteenth century, the boundaries between “human” and “animal” appeared both necessary and fixed. More to the point, categorical definitions such as “race,” “ethnicity,” and “species” were stable—*until they needed to be revised*. In actuality, the nineteenth century was certainly a period of flux, and this fluidity reached its most critical and precarious node in the ascribed boundaries between “human” and “animal.” In general, the nonhuman animal held a symbolic significance through which the human exercised a position of heightened authority and autonomy. For much of the century, literary representations of nonhumans as well as the historic traces of *actual* nonhuman animals were often replaced by the abstract *figure* of the nonhuman. In other words, the nonhuman animals that do emerge from a vast majority of nineteenth-century American literature are reductive representations which rely on anthropocentric tropes; consequently, the glimpses of nonhuman animals in all but a select few American authors exist to modify human characters. This is an important reason why it is difficult to understand the nonhuman animal throughout the nineteenth century: animals who are “seen” are anthropomorphic substitutes and/or abstractions.
Either way, the nonhuman animal’s visibility remains predominantly obscured by such reductive representations.

Prior to the Civil War, American writers leaned heavily on these symbolic qualities of nonhuman animals. As we saw in the first chapter, James Fenimore Cooper’s use of the nonhuman animal functioned as a means to perpetuate foundational ideologies of a “natural” order (in “nature” but also, importantly, within American society). Nonhuman animals existed in the literature to amplify various human characters. Within the reviewed antebellum slave narratives in Chapter 2, we observed nonhuman animals, again, used as a means to modify human characters, although, instead of reinforcing social hierarchy as during the Early Republic, nonhuman animals within the examined slave narratives were used to push back against earlier claims of a “natural” racial order. Moreover, the ways in which these early black writers strategically paired nonhuman animals with human characters highlighted as well as resisted their own dehumanized statuses, moving themselves closer to “personhood” and slave profiteers toward the category of “animal.”

Unlike these earlier anthropocentric ideologies, Walt Whitman seems as if he moves beyond the human in his poetry and prose. His attention to nature and its nonhuman dwellers, at first glance, appears to provide what was lacking in earlier American writers. However, the trouble with Whitman is what he chooses to omit: our less ideal nonhuman animal relations. By focusing only the ideal, romantic human-to-nonhuman interactions, Whitman participates in a larger contemporaneous ideological erasure of actual nonhuman animals following the war. With the rise of the industrial slaughterhouse and progressive urbanization (population migrations from country to city), encounters with nonhuman animals in literature or in life were increasingly obscured by the physical state of the animals themselves. It became increasingly less likely,
generally speaking, for the city dweller to encounter live nonhuman animals and more likely to encounter the dismembered pieces of various edible species. This fundamental shift following the war has continued to affect our contact with the billions of nonhuman animals that modern Americans encounter in their supermarkets or on their dinner plates while we, without the slightest acknowledgment of hypocrisy, invite other species into our families or attempt to eradicate those species deemed “invasive” or “pest.”

Certain “animals” have received meager degrees of protection under our current legal system. The problem with these laws is that they largely ignore the largest populations of nonhuman animals—particularly those animals manufactured for consumption or used for scientific experimentation. These immense nonhuman animal populations have become increasingly difficult for the average American to observe (alive, at least). For example, on September 9th, 2014, United States District Court, D. Idaho upheld the Idaho statute that criminalizes undercover investigations in “agricultural production facilities,” making it a felony offence to participate in such activities (“Animal Legal”). A number of other states have either already passed similar “Ag-gag” bills or are in a current process to push one through. On January 15, 2013, Nebraska passed the similar LB204, which requires video and/or photos to be submitted no less than twenty-four hours after taken (“Legislative Bill 204”), thus an abridged attempt to curb such material from coming to light. When such “undercover” videos reach the general populace, there are often visceral reactions. Roughly 56 billion nonhuman land animals are killed each year for human use and consumption (Rowland). Neither we nor the meat industry want us to see the complete process that allows us to enjoy a cheeseburger or T-bone steak.

68 The most protected nonhuman animal groups are companion species and endangered species.
Additionally, nonhuman animal experimentation has become a ubiquitous practice of “advanced” cultures, yet like agricultural slaughter, it remains out of public view. Not surprisingly, in 2017 the U.S. Department of Agriculture decided to stop providing their “Animal Welfare Report,” a report that listed statistics on the quantity and type of animals used for testing each year. Animal welfare organizations finally pressured the USDA to reinstate this report (and repost previous reports); however, these new reports were made more difficult to analyze. According to the USDA’s “Animal Welfare Report,” a total of 820,812 in 2016 and 792,168 in 2017 nonhuman animals were used (i.e., killed) in the name of science. Additionally, these figures reflect usage only within the United States, and they do not include the most common species used in scientific experimentation or testing, rats and mice.

Paul Outka remarked that the metaphor connecting slaves to nature became a literal “truth” for many Americans, inevitably expressing itself physically upon the world. Prior to the Civil War, the primary use of the nonhuman animal in literature was metaphorical. Then, a fundamental turning point occurred in this question of the “animal” following the war. Not too unlike Outka’s claim, the dismembered, or fragmented, representations of nonhuman animals ultimately began to materialize physically. Put somewhat differently, patterns of literary metaphoric nonhuman animal representations, along with the systematic removal of nonhuman animals from the gaze of city denizens (especially with regards to nonhuman animal slaughter) contributed to these metaphoric dismembered representations being expressed in the real, physical world.

As Derrida and the other poststructuralists remind us, linguistic representation structures the way we conceptualize and understand the world around us. Likewise, these same linguistic clues can help us now gain a better understanding of human-to-nonhuman dealings throughout
the nineteenth century. Tension between humans and nonhuman animals seems consistent throughout the century, and there appears a consistent need to distance the nonhuman from the human animal. This project has worked to expand those cultural reflections and refractions to other artifacts in addition to literature. The image that begins to materialize is a historical legacy of nonhuman animal separation and fragmentation. We have observed how, why, and to what extent the nonhuman has been used to either bolster or demean specific literary human characters as well as the common ties between real human exploitation/marginalization and the nonhuman animal. Understanding the ideological functions of this separatism across the century and acknowledging the fundamental shifts in “animal” visibility that occur over the century can help us better understand our current problematic relations with nonhuman animals.

In an interesting turn, Mark Twain (as well as others such as Jack London and Ernest Thompson Seton) began to pay more attention to nonhuman animals themselves. What’s more surprising is the way in which writers like Twain allowed readers to engage with these nonhuman animal characters. Like the early-American writers, Twain anthropomorphizes nonhuman characters (e.g., Aileen Mavourneen and Soldier Boy), yet in doing so, he provides human readers with characters that can speak across species. Thus it would be unwise to dismiss such characterizations simply because they fall under anthropomorphic representation. Anthropomorphism, in and of itself, can work positively on behalf of nonhuman animals, or it can perpetuate the marginalization of the “animal.” In sum, Twain’s use of anthropomorphism shows the potential of such literary representations to move toward multispecies awareness, allowing human readers to (re)see the nonhuman animal through his use of individualized

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69 These writers that give the nonhuman animal more consideration, as previously mentioned, also includes people such as Marshall Saunders in Canada and Anna Sewell in England (to name a few). Moreover, these were the exceptions to the rule. More often, nonhuman animals remained trapped in stereotype and trope (e.g., Baum’s animals).
nonhuman characters. On the other hand, Whitman attempts to convey his own version of the nonhuman animal, but fails on account of his romantic, one-dimensional representations of the nonhuman world. If the human reader cannot “see” beyond representational trope, faceless or idealized figures that blur into the landscape, or better yet a fragmented “piece” of bone, meat, or hide, then the task of gleaning a deeper understanding of the nonhuman will remain a Sisyphean task.

As I have argued throughout this project, the visibility of nonhuman animals across the century contains a paradox. While nonhuman animals are ubiquitous throughout the century (literature et al), most actual, or real, nonhuman animals often are reduced to their metaphoric values, and this fictional and fragmented representation consequently becomes expressed in the material world. Power, hierarchy, and exploitation continue today to thrive within a matrix of low visibility conditions between species—despite an increased mainstream dialogue over the treatment of nonhuman animals. In this regard, we may once again reflect upon Derrida’s poignant line, “The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there,” and then ask: can we see the “animal” before us when real animals continue to remain dismembered figures?
ENDNOTES

[Figure 1] “Feejee Mermaid,” *The Life of P.T. Barnum Written by Himself*, 1855, 234.

[Figure 2] “What is it?” Exhibit Advertisement (Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library), 1860.
[Figure 3] Thomas Cole. *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836, oil on canvas, 51 1/2 x 76 in. (130.8 x 193 cm). New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
[Figure 4] John Trumbull, *The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton, 3 January 1777*, ca. 1789-1831, oil on canvas, 21 x 30 3/4 in. (53.3 x 78.1 cm) framed: 27 1/4 x 37 x 2 5/8 in. (69.22 x 93.98 x 6.67 cm). New Haven, CT, Yale University Art Gallery.
[Figure 5] John Trumbull, *The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton, 3 January 1777* (unfinished version), ca. 1786-88, oil on canvas, 26 x 37 in. (66 x 94 cm). New Haven, CT, Yale University Art Gallery.
[Figure 6] Edward William Clay’s “America,” lithograph, 1841.
[Figure 7] *The Scourged Back*, photograph, 1863.


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Brown, William Wells. *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave.*


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“U.S. Inflation Rate, $100 in 1846 to 2018.” *CPI Inflation Calculator*.


*ILLIAD*.


---. "Walt Whitman to Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, 7 June 1864." Letter to Louisa

“What is it?” Exhibit Advertisement (Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library).


