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Animal Consciousness from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century

"Animal consciousness," like all compressed phrases of its kind, opens itself to two interpretations. On the one hand, it refers to an objective human awareness of the animals that cohabit our world, while on the other it suggests an inward, empathetic consciousness that tries to perceive that world as animal subjects might. Each in turn has an associated literary approach. The first informs the bestiary lore that inspects animals for the lessons they are perceived to embody, as well as the tradition of fable, which conscripts animals for its presentation of human truths. The second, subjective sense of "animal consciousness" issues in those moments of negative capability when writers suspend their own human presuppositions and prejudices, and disinterestedly enter the lives of other creatures. I shall argue that both traditions were present in the literature of antiquity, even though the fabular mode of animal consciousness prevailed, but that the rise of Christianity issued in the sidelining of the second, which came into its own only with Romantic Revival. From this point on, the external, moralizing tradition lost its primacy, and its perceived limitations led to its comic exploitation, by Dickens, for example, or it was enriched and transformed, almost out of recognition, by the infusion of the "new" empathy, as in the verse of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Needless to say, covering a topic as vast as this, I have been forced to play hopscotch over the centuries, and have omitted the twentieth altogether for reasons of space and expediency. And although Aesop and his avatars are probably read more frequently in the nursery than in the study, limitations of space have also meant the

exclusion of children's literature, an important mediator in our time of both kinds of consciousness.

As Keith Thomas has pointed out, many ancient authorities preached the ordained subordination of animals to humankind:

In Tudor and Stuart England the long-established view was that the world had been created for man's sake and that other species were meant to be subordinate to his wishes and needs. This assumption underlay the actions of that vast majority of men who never paused to reflect upon the matter. But those theologians and intellectuals who felt the need to justify it could readily appeal to the classical philosophers and the Bible. Nature made nothing in vain, said Aristotle, and everything had a purpose. Plants were created for the sake of animals and animals for the sake of men. Domestic animals were there to labour, wild ones to be hunted. The Stoics taught the same: nature existed solely to serve man's interests. (17)

Needless to say, these unchallenged axioms took their toll on the literary presentation of animals. We see it for example in the work of Aelian, who in the first century AD produced a survey of animal lore entitled *De Natura Animalium*: "that dumb animals should by nature possess some good quality and should have many of man's amazing excellences assigned to them along with man, is indeed a remarkable fact" (I: 9). The old Protagorean notion of humankind as the measure of all things informs the way he *assigns* the excellences: animals, it seems, would justify a treatise only because they approximate human norms in aspects of their behavior. The result, even in an encyclopedia of zoology, is often as fabular as anything in Aesop and his anthologers. Look, for example, at the *quid pro quo* tacked on to the paragraph on drones, much like the epimythia of fable-writers: "The punishment which he suffers none can censure: he pays for his gluttony and voracity with his life" (I: 25). Observation (rough and unempirical as it often is) has to be moralized, and the creature thus turned into an exemplum. Alternatively, the observer invests the animal with human consciousness, and arrives at his epimythium by a different route: "Enmity and inborn hate are a truly terrible affliction and a cruel disease when once they have sunk deep into the heart even of brute beasts, and nothing can purge them away" (I: 51). This fabular method is so ingrained in ancient writers that we find it even in Pliny's *Natural History*. His observation often blends into anthropo-

morphic anecdote, which in turn generates a moral. The elephant, for example,

possesses virtues rare even in man, honesty, wisdom, justice, also respect for the stars and reverence for the sun and moon. Authorities state that in the forests of Mauretania, when the new moon is rising, herds of elephants go down to a river named Amilo, and there perform a ritual of purification, sprinkling themselves with water, and after thus paying their respects to the moon return to the woods. (III: 3)

It is clear therefore that efforts to present animal consciousness in a disinterested, unhumanized way are no more to be found in classical zoologists than in fabulists such as Babrius and Phaedrus, for whom animals are ancillaries of their fiction and nothing more: "Should anyone choose to run it down, because trees too are vocal, not wild beasts alone, let him remember that I speak in jest of things that never happened" (191).

Ancient poetry, while it does not escape this moralizing habit of thought, manages to treat animals with greater empathy than we find in the ascriptive procedures of the apologues and compendia of animal lore. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* we often have the sense of what it is like inwardly to inhabit an animal's body. It is true that the experiences are rendered through the human consciousness retained in the transformation, but at least they are sensuously realized—a far cry from the flat ventriloquism of Aesop and his successors. Here, by way of illustration, is the metamorphosis of the crow in Book II, which Ovid projects as the frustration of human effort by animal form:

As I stretched my arms towards the sky, they began to grow dark with downy plumage: I tried to throw my robe back from my shoulders, but it too had turned to feathers, with roots deep in my skin. I made to beat my bared breast with my hands, but neither breast nor hands were bare any more. When I ran, the sand did not clog my footsteps as before: instead I skimmed along the surface of the ground. Then I soared up into the air, and was appointed Minerva's blameless attendant. (71)

Even though a human sensibility is tracking the transformation, Ovid manages, in the detail of the rooted feathers, to create a fleeting sense of "omithicity," of an integument as familiar as that of human skin, yet experienced from the inside. Even so, the unfamiliar, inward view seems

to spring more from an imaginative virtuosity that serves its own ends than from any desire to extend the readers' own consciousness of, and empathy for, crows in general. Indeed the greater part of the *Metamorphoses* approximates the fable mode, since fables often show the etiological bias we find throughout the poem, and the majority of the stories are punitive, sentencing the inhumanity of hubris or murder with a loss of human form. This fabular morality is obviously not Ovid's chief concern, but it is embedded in his material, and he cannot avoid addressing it. When, for example, Juno turns Io into a cow, he gives a retributive force to the transformation by stressing the fission between the animal body and the consciousness forced to inhabit it. Whereas the daughter of Coroneus acquiesced in her transformation, Io resists hers:

Leaves of trees were her food, and bitter-tasting grass. Instead of a bed she lay on ground not always even grassy, and for drink, poor thing, she had the muddy rivers. Even when she wished to stretch out her arms in appeal to Argus, she had no arms to stretch. When she tried to complain, a lowing sound issued from her lips, and she was afraid, terrified by her own voice. Moreover, when she came to the banks of Inachus' river, where she often used to play, she saw her gaping jaws and her strange horns, reflected in the water. Frightened and dismayed, she fled from herself. (49)

The profound self-division, already evident in Io's terror at her own voice, reaches its climax in the paradoxical desire the human feels to flee her animal self. Because Ovid has projected the being of a cow as it registers in the consciousness of a woman, the empathy is not wholly disinterested, affected as it is by the writer's sense of metamorphosis as punishment. The effect is very different from the fabulists' way of going about things, but it is none the less conditioned by human values and perceptions.

This superimposition of human and animal feeling engenders pathos in the *Metamorphoses*, but it obviously has comic potential as well, since comedy often deletes the will and automates the subject. Apuleius makes good use of the conflict between animal and human selves in *The Golden Ass*. He is indebted to Ovid for the careful notation of change, but even here the pathos is subverted by the countervailing ribaldry, which renders Fotis more bestial than human in the scope of her appetite:

All that happened was that the hair on them grew coarser and coarser and the skin toughened into hide. Next, my fingers bunched together into a hard lump so that my hands became hooves, the same change came over my feet and I felt a long tail sprouting from the base of my spine. Then my face swelled, my mouth widened, my nostrils dilated, my lips hung flabbily down, and my ears shot up long and hairy. The only consoling part of this miserable transformation was the enormous increase in the size of a certain organ of mine; because I was by this time finding it increasingly difficult to meet all Fotis's demands upon it. I was obliged to face the mortifying fact that I had been transformed not into a bird but into a plain jackass. (90-91)

As in Ovid, the continuity of self is ensured here by the possessive pronouns, which retain the features for the subject even as they undergo transformation. But Apuleius develops the possibilities of metamorphosis in a way that Ovid chooses to ignore. In *The Golden Ass*, the narrator has an animal's experience of human brutality, which extends the scope of the empathy beyond the experience of animal form to animal suffering as well. In these terms, animal instinct becomes identified with human judgment. The animal kicks because the human has the good sense to defend himself:

As I walked hesitantly towards the bush, a young man who must have been the owner of the vegetable patch ran angrily at me with a big stick. he beat me so hard in revenge of the damage I had done that he might have killed me if I had not had the sense to defend myself by raising my rump and letting out with my hind legs. I got my own back with a succession of such hard kicks that I left him lying helpless on the slope of the hill. Then I bolted. (95-96)

This is inverted later in the tale when civilized customs are taught to the ass, and human instinct becomes equated with animal intelligence:

First, he taught me how to recline at table, leaning on one elbow; next, how to wrestle and even how to dance on my hind legs; finally—and this won me peculiar admiration—how to use sign language. . . . I was a quick and docile pupil, which was not very remarkable, because I could have performed all my tricks without any training at all. But I had been afraid of behaving like a human being without any previous instruction: most people would have taken it as a portent of sinister events, . . . (253)

The animal is being reconstituted—in the worst traditions of the circus—as a parodic human being, and yet the animal *is* a human being and needs no reconstitution. Even if Apuleius's romance is not, like Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, a tract-novel, designed to protest the maltreatment of animals, there are moments at which the author, under sheer constraint of his plot, cannot help registering such abuse.

Any effort at rendering animal consciousness instead of ventriloquizing human responses through the animal, as in the apologue or beast fable, is likely to issue in empathy, no matter how flickering and intermittent the effort might be. There are instances of this in the animal epitaphs of *The Greek Anthology*, some of which are spoken by the occupant of the grave. Here, for example, is Nicias's epitaph on a cicada, which manages to convey the quality of cicada life in a remarkable way. The anthropomorphic dimension is minimal; much more striking is the empathetic projection of life on a bough, which seems to anticipate the bee-like cavortings of Shakespeare's Ariel: "No longer curled under the leafy branch shall I delight in sending forth a voice from my tender wings. For I fell into the hand . . . of a boy, who caught me stealthily as I was seated on the green leaves" (II: 113). Less remarkable from this point of view, but still affecting, is the epitaph by Agathias Scholasticus on a pet partridge. The fact that the bird has been domesticated, and therefore to some extent denatured, prompts the writer to an anthropomorphism hardly present in Nicias's little poem. The bird's cosy coop, set in opposition to the exposure of its native rocks, the tender but condescending use of the second person, and the inverted funeral rubric work against the empathy that momentarily enters the poem through the detail of the sun-warmed wings:

No longer, my poor partridge, exiled from the rocks, does thy plaited house hold thee in its bright withes, no longer in the shine of the bright-eyed Dawn dost thou shake the tips of thy sun-warmed wings. Thy head the cat bit off, but all the rest of thee I seized from her, nor did she satisfy her wicked jaws. Now may the dust lie not light on thee but heavy, lest she drag thy corpse from the tomb. (II: 115)

Much the same can be said of Meleager's epitaph on a hare, though here the first person helps reclaim the animal from the human consciousness that has refashioned it as a pet. It is the animal's own sense of things that dictates the violent participle "tom":

I was a swift-footed leveret, torn from my mother's breast while yet a baby, and sweet Phanion cherished and reared me in her bosom, feeding me on flowers of spring. No longer did I pine for my mother, but I died of surfeiting, fattened by too many banquets. Close to her couch she buried me so that ever in her dreams she might see my grave beside her bed. (II: 117)

It is because the animal has become the surrogate child of Phanion that the whole epitaph, cousin of Catullus's on Lesbia's sparrow, has been written at all. Even so, beneath the graceful amatory fancy there is an animal's sense of being smothered by misplaced human affection.

These and other classical attempts at penetrating animal consciousness were not however consolidated. With the rise of Christianity, animism of any kind came under a doctrinal cloud. Indeed Lynn White, Jr. has gone so far as to suggest that it is to the anthropocentric nature of Christianity, especially in its Western form, that we must trace the environmental disasters of our century (155ff). This is not the place to contest the full truth of this claim, though one can remark in passing that if the Church has erred, it is by misunderstanding her founder. When Christ established the comparative worth of humankind by reference to sparrows and ravens, it was always on the assumption that such birds none the less meant something to God. Nor should we forget that Jesus exalted animal rights above legalistic interpretations of the Sabbath, and that Christianity brought with it the abolition of animal sacrifice. Even so, there can be no doubting that its advent had a marked impact on the literary presentation of animals. Almost all efforts of empathy were now to be canalized toward reliving or re-creating the Passion, and as, the great chain of being was forged link by link, so the sort of animal perspectives we glimpse in Ovid, Apuleius and *The Greek Anthology* vanished from sight. When St. Anthony preached to the fishes and St. Francis to the birds, not only were they guilty of an unempathetic anthropomorphism, but they were also transgressing the established position of the Church. Here official doctrine designated creatures as the gift of Providence, placed on earth to cater to human needs. "Man" does not live by bread alone, it seems, but also by meat. And even before their slaughter, animals functioned as vehicles for moral edification as well. In the *Physiologus* and other popular bestiaries, for example, animals are not so much observed as moralized, confirming the triumph of the fabular mode whose ascendancy we noted even in the

work of Aelian and Pliny. This is how the friar Thomas Waleys went about composing his *moralitates*: "Suppose that his text of the Bible refers to a *bird*; he turns to the *Historia animalium* of Aristotle or to some encyclopaedia, and moralises what he finds about the habits of birds" (Smalley 83). Doing so, he overlaid what was already a secondary source with a tertiary sediment of symbol: the animal itself was stylized out of recognition. We have already noted how the fabular element of punishment affects the sense of the creature in Ovid's treatment of Io, but how much *less* bovine the treatment of the same narrative in the *Ovide moralisé*, where it is forced on to a Procrustean bed of anagoge, and Io becomes "a symbol of the Ascension" (Tuve 309). Even as vivid and realistic a poet as Chaucer cannot wholly escape the dominant habits of thought. He is ready enough to depart from Courtly Love conventions when he gives Criseyde converging eyebrows, but his vision of the animal kingdom, as it is attested, for example, by *The Parlement of Foules*, seems altogether more custom-bound and moralizing. At one point he so far forgets the vector of his allegory as to have a turtle dove blush: "'Nay, God forbede a lovere shulde chaunge!' / The turtle seyde, and wex for shame al rede" (317).

These external modes of presentation persist right through to the seventeenth century, where Herbert's animals in "Providence" tax the zoologist's credulity by saying "Eat me" (117) and Dryden's hind and panther are simply Aesopian creatures engaged in a Platonic dialogue. Even so, it is in the seventeenth century that the first moves were made toward a different literary treatment of animals. The rise of empirical science discredited the bestiaries once and for all, and also the *modus videndi* which gave birth to them. In *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon deplores the mythic element in writers such as Pliny, an element that centuries of argument *ad verecundiam* had endorsed without question:

So in natural history, we see there hath not been that choice and judgment used as ought to have been; as may appear in the writings of Plinius, Cardanus, Albertus, and divers of the Arabians; being fraught with much fabulous matter, a great part not only untried but notoriously untrue, to the great derogation of the credit of natural philosophy with grave and sober kinds of wits. (186-87)

This is a beginning, but it was not sufficient. The "grave and sober kinds of wits" who laughed such documents as the *Physiologus* to scorn no longer ventriloquized human concerns through animals; they simply supplanted one kind of externality with another. Science has always been notoriously uncompassionate towards the animals it investigates, and it was in the seventeenth century that vivisection became widespread in scientific circles. The objectification of animals had to be qualified by empathy before literature could properly engage with the idea of subjective animal consciousness, and such empathy—as an extension of the imagination—came into its own only when the Romantic revolution was under way.

However, we ought not to forget the various John-the-Baptist voices that sounded throughout the eighteenth century, even though the empathy they proclaimed co-existed with, and even undercut, the older modes of vision. Here, for example, are two extracts from Pope's *Windsor Forest*:

See! from the Brake the whirring Pheasant springs,
 And mounts exulting on triumphant Wings;
 Short is his Joy! he feels the fiery Wound,
 Flutters in Blood, and panting beats the Ground.
 Ah! what avail his glossie, varying Dyes,
 His Purple Crest, and Scarlet-circled Eyes,
 The vivid Green his shining Plumes unfold;
 His painted Wings, and Breast that flames with Gold? (199)

and

Oft, as in Airy Rings they skim the Heath,
 The clam'rous Lapwings feel the Leaden Death:
 Oft as the mounting Larks their Notes prepare,
 They fall, and leave their little Lives in Air. (200)

Pope is ideologically bound to Leibniz's notion of a best of all possible worlds: its ordinances are to be celebrated rather than queried—"Whatever IS, is RIGHT" (515). His beasts might not say "eat me" as they do in Herbert's "Providence," but they are there to be eaten, and the hunt serves to render them edible. Yet even as he sets up his confident hunting tableaux, partly dictated by the conventions of a chorographic poem, his sympathy comes close to deconstructing them. He delights in the flight of the pheasant with an almost Hopkinsian intensity, and then—painfully

and ignominiously—confines those flying motions to earth: "Flutters in Blood, and panting beats the Ground." It is not a line of thought he can comfortably pursue, and he has to force himself to applaud what inwardly he deplores. That is why he at once externalizes the presentation of the pheasant, treated with the same painterly sumptuousness that Chaucer lavishes on Chauntecleer in *The Nonnes Preestes Tale*, and tags on as fabular aenos or epimythium, the notion of *sic transit gloria mundi*. Pope's account of the lapwings and larks does not even have that ideological insurance-cover, for here he simply presents the pathos of their slaughter after having shared the exultation of their flight. Those "Airy Rings" show how far we have come from Chaucer's lapwing in *The Parlement of Foules*, distorted out of recognition by the spectacles of *moralitas*: "The false lapwyng, ful of trecherye" (314).

The eighteenth century also sees the high noon and eventual eclipse of the beast fable, but even here the form is undergoing subtle reformation from within. Something approximating animal consciousness is admitted from time to time, and fables such as those of Gay reveal an infinitely richer imaginative effort than that found in Phaedrus or Babrius. Take the opening of this Babrian fable, which cuts impatiently to its moral concern, and denies the reader any sensuous access to the animals. All the fabulist needs for his purpose is two creatures set apart in the great chain of being:

A bull fleeing from a lion entered a deserted cave used by mountain-ranging shepherds. There a goat who had remained behind without the herdsman assailed the bull with his horns and sought to keep him out. Said the bull: "Since it's not you but the lion that I avoid, I will put up with your insolence for a moment or two. Just let the lion pass me by; then you will learn how much difference there is between a goat and a bull. (113)

Now compare Gay's spaniel in *The Spaniel and the Cameleon*. He might start out as an Augustan beau as he "takes the air," but the poet takes care to caninize him, conveying the dog's thorough, sniffing investigation of his environment, and his voluptuous contact with the grass:

The wind was south, the morning fair,
He ventures forth to take the air;

He ranges all the meadow round,
And rolls upon the softest ground. (II: 304)

The fact that the poem modulates at once to Aesopian dialogue no way impairs that empathetic moment: for an instant we know what it is to be a spaniel in the summer countryside. Indeed Gay's epimythium of *The Two Owls and the Sparrow* urges owls to behave like owls and not like emblems, an irony that deftly pulls the rug from beneath the fabular form. There is something gloatingly strigine in the reference to "sleek mice":

Would ye contempt and scorn avoid,
Let your vain-glory be destroy'd;
So shall ye find delicious fare,
And grateful farmers praise your care,
So shall sleek mice your chase reward,
And no keen cat find more regard. (II: 345)

This modified form of the apologue can be found also in Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes." As in Gay, the externality of emblem is being inwardly enriched by touches of animal consciousness. The blazon that systematically lists Selima's charms brings Chaucer's treatment of Chauntecleer to mind, for both concentrate on decorative surface. Yet, even while the cat is being converted to a bestiary emblem of vanity, all but lost in the overlay of rich mineral substances, Gray relays the description through its own mind. It thus becomes zoologically plausible that Selima might purr at the sight of a cat that shares her genes, even if the design of the fable requires her at the same time to applaud her own beauty:

Her conscious tail her joy declared;
The fair round face, the snowy beard,
 The velvet of her paws,
Her coat that with the tortoise vies,
Her ears of jet and emerald eyes,
 She saw; and purred applause. (82)

That sudden annexation of the description to the cat itself is a master-stroke. So is the systematic oscillation throughout the poem between the fantastical-fabular and the observed, which gives us a bifocal sense of the cat as cat (and responding as cat), and the cat as emblem, channelling the

poet's judgment: "What female heart can gold despise? / What cat's averse to fish" (84). Even at the poem's most heartless moment, when the mock-heroic enlargements play down the real distress of the animal in the water, the unheroic animal verb strikes the reader with the force of a *memento mori*: "Eight times emerging from the flood / She *mewed* to every watery god" (my italics).

With Gray we have arrived at the Age of Sensibility, a period which, as Northrop Frye has pointed out, was characterized by a "curiously intense awareness of the animal world which, except for some poems of D. H. Lawrence, is unrivalled in this period, and is expressed in some of its best realized writing: in Burns's *To a Mouse*, in Cowper's exquisite snail poem, in Smart's superb lines on his cat Geoffrey, in the famous starling and ass episodes in Sterne, in the opening of Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*" (150). Some of these poets made important contributions to the rendering of animal consciousness, and must therefore be considered in greater detail. In his poem "To a Louse, on Seeing one on a Lady's Bonnet at Church" (I: 193), Burns shows himself the heir of Donne (his witty excursus on the flea) and ultimately of Berni, but even though the stanza pattern is identical, its spirited, conceited manner is far removed from the pathos of "To a Mouse, On turning her up in her Nest, with the Plough, November, 1785" (I: 127). The sort of empathy that figures fitfully throughout Gay's fables is here taken one step forward—so much so that until the epimythia are set forth, one is scarcely conscious that the poem has taken form as a fable. The animal does not speak, but is spoken for by the poet, who projects himself into the mouse in such vivid stanzas as this:

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' wast,
An' weary *Winter* comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
 Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel *coulter* past
 Out thro' thy cell.

Gone is the condescension and, above all, the premeditation of traditional fable narrative. The poem is not set up in advance to illustrate the aenos; it arises from the occasion. And the animals are not conscripted to serve the ends of authorial wisdom; the author simply claims parity with, and even disadvantage to, his subject: "At me, thy poor, earth-born compan-

ion, / *An' fellow-mortal*"; "Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' *me!*" Leigh Hunt's *The Panther* is also relevant in this regard. It versifies an incident from the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, keeping very close to its source until the end, where the poet unexpectedly produces an epimythium. Because this has been latent in the material but never articulated, it presents itself as a spontaneous *trouv e*, a retrospective acknowledgement of pattern rather than a fabular imposition:

Now what made the panther a prisoner be?
 Lo! 'twas the spices and luxury.
 And what set that lordly panther free?
 'Twas Love!—'twas Love!—'twas no one but he. (53)

Although Burns came close to reconstituting the fable, Cowper's efforts with the form are more conventional, closer to Gay than to the Scottish poet. "The Snail," for example, has nothing of the acutely realized snailiness in we find in *Venus and Adonis*, "the snail, whose tender horns being hit, / Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain, / And there all smother'd up doth sit, / Long after fearing to creep forth again" (Shakespeare 56). Cowper's poem is in fact a translation from the Latin of Vincent Bourne—a good-natured, riddling effort much more in the manner of Symphosius. And a lyric like "The Doves" turns out to be the epithalamium of an emblematic turtle dove, which Cowper fails to invest with any animal consciousness. His undoubted empathy declares itself less in his fables than in his epitaphs. Here is the opening stanza of that "On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in His Cage":

Time was when I was free as air,
 The thistle's downy seed my fare,
 My drink the morning dew;
 I perched at will on ev'ry spray,
 My form genteel, my plumage gay,
 My strains forever new. (305)

We are back in the world of *The Greek Anthology* and the sepulchral epigrams of Nicias, Agathias Scholasticus and Meleager. Perhaps because elegy often compels the poet to reconstruct the rhythm of what has passed away, it is on elegiac occasions such as these that Cowper recalls the quality of an animal's life. In the "Epitaph on a Hare" it is the animal's

sensibility that informs the diet list, too bland to excite a human palate, and for that very reason the testament of a quiet but passionate *Miteinführung*:

His diet was of wheaten bread,
 And milk, and oats, and straw,
 Thistles, or lettuces instead,
 With sand to scour his maw.

On twigs of hawthorn he regal'd,
 On pippins' russet peel;
 And, when his juicy salads fail'd,
 Slic'd carrot pleas'd him well. (352)

Cowper's Evangelical orthodoxy prevented him from taking animals as corrective norms in the treatment of human folly. They might be enlisted to this end in fables, but they do not in themselves constitute a more desirable mode of being. Traditional dogma insisted that humankind was *capax rationis*, and that this privileged position allowed it to subordinate animals to its needs.

Christopher Smart, on the other hand, felt no constraints of orthodoxy during the time of his mental disturbance, as his strange and fascinating *Jubilate Agno* shows. Both Fragments A and B begin processionally with a list of patriarchal figures, each bearing an animal. These the poet treats in the emblematic terms of a bestiary until, in Fragment B, we come upon the hymn to his cat Jeoffry. Here he compounds the formal, hieratic treatment of animals with something altogether more inward, so that the roll call of animals gives way to real, attentive observation:

For first he looks upon his fore-paws to see if they are clean.
For secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there.
For thirdly he works it upon stretch with the fore paws extended.
For fourthly he sharpens his paws upon wood. (I: 87).

This is perhaps too tabular to seem empathetic, but observation is always the first step towards sympathy. Jeoffry is not only a cat, however; he is also a prophet, and "*purrs in thankfulness, when God tells him he's a good Cat,*" and knows "*that God is his Saviour*" (I: 88). Smart thus swivels between the sort of attributive method of works like the *Physiologus* and his empirical sense of the cat in its cathood. The two

modes, taken in conjunction, allow him to set the creature up as the measure of fallible humankind. The animal thus intermittently becomes the yardstick for the human, as when "*he is hated by the hypocrite and miser. / For the former is affraid of detection. / For the latter refuses the charge*" (I: 89). This is fable of a kind, since the cat supplies a lesson—but by being itself, not by means of a ventriloquial sermon. The judgment proceeds from the bottom up, and the great chain of being thus given a good shake. It is perhaps the first of a line of poems which reproach humankind for its failure to be like animals, and which leads towards utterances like D. H. Lawrence's "Lizard": "If men were as much men as lizards are lizards / they'd be worth looking at" (209).

The inversion of animal and human incidentally present in this poem of Smart can be observed in a more developed form in Keats. To yearn for "a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts" (*Letters* 68) is after all to yearn for animal consciousness of sorts. And it would be a mistaken reader who saw those sensations simply in terms of voluptuousness and hedonism. Let us take some famous lines from *I Stood Tip-Toe*:

Where swarms of minnows show their little heads,
 Staying their wavy bodies 'gainst the streams,
 To taste the luxury of sunny beams
 Temper'd with coolness. How they ever wrestle
 With their own sweet delight, and ever nestle
 Their silver bellies on the pebbly sand. (*Poetical Works* 4-5)

At first glance one might simply consider Keats to be projecting his own appetite for sensuous languor upon the fish until one becomes aware of the strenuousness of "wrestle" and the hard abrasion of "pebbly sand," which reveal the disinterestedness of the poet's imagination. That "pebbly sand" is of a piece with the uninviting texture of the gravel on which, in another letter, he skips about in sympathy with a bird: "if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel" (*Letters* 69). As he notes in a letter to Fanny Brawne, memory is a human residuum that impairs an otherwise happy animal existence:

I do not know how elastic my spirit might be, what pleasure I might have in living here and breathing and wandering as free as a stag about this beautiful Coast if the remembrance of you did not weigh so upon me. I have never known unalloy'd Happiness for many days together: the death

or sickness of some one has always spoilt my hours—and now when none such troubles oppress me, it is you must confess very hard that another sort of pain should haunt me. (353)

It comes as no surprise therefore, that the subordination of animal to human habitual in Western thought until the eighteenth century should be replaced in Keats by a sense of their parity:

The greater part of Men make their way with the same instinctiveness, the same unwandering eye from their purposes, the same animal eagerness as the Hawk. The Hawk wants a Mate, so does the Man—look at them both they set about one in the same manner—they get their food in the same manner—The noble animal Man for his amusement smokes his pipe—the Hawk balances about the Clouds—that is the only difference of their leisures. . . . I go among the Fields and catch a glimpse of Stoat or a fieldmouse peeping out of the withered grass—the creature hath a purpose and its eyes are bright with it. I go amongst the buildings of a city and I see a Man hurrying along—to what? the Creature hath a purpose and his eyes are bright with it. (*Letters* 316)

In the light of such utterances, of sympathy so intense and outward-beaming, it comes as a shock when, in another letter, Keats admits unremorsefully to having shot a goldfinch on Hampstead Heath. This suggests that while the rise of animal compassion was accelerated by the imaginative heightenings and intensifications that Romanticism brought with it, it cannot be said to have sprung wholly from the personal enlightenment of the key writers.

Leigh Hunt, if he was not the most imaginative, was certainly the most compassionate of the Romantics—as a boy he wrote an essay presenting kindness to animals as a Christian duty, and throughout his adult life he practised kindness to all creatures. Indeed, one of the "Rules of Life and Manners" in *The Religion of the Heart* is "To inflict no pain on any creature for the sake of pleasure" (18). The full range of his sympathy can be gauged from a little squib addressed *To a Spider Running across a Room*, which satirically exalts the animal above his critical adversaries. As in the case of Jeoffry, its creaturely forthrightness arraigns the faults of humankind:

Now, now it comes;—one pang,—and thou wilt lie
Flat as the sole that treads thy gorged impurity.

Yet hold:—why should I do it? why should I,
 Who in my infidel fidelity,
 Believer in the love, though not the wrath,
 Have spared so many crawlers o'er my path,—
 Why should I trample here, and like a beast,
 Settle this humblest of them all and least?
 The vagrant never injured me or mine,
 Wrote no critiques, stabbed at no heart divine,
 And as to flies, Collyer himself must dine. (159)

It is ironical that, even at the point of overturning traditional hierarchies, Hunt lapses into traditional habits of thought, and attributes bestiality to the beasts he has begun to rank above humankind ("and like a beast"). The reason for this must be sought in the genre, for satire and comedy, centred as they are on human failings, always necessitate a human view of things.

We see this above all in the fiction of Dickens. His rich, inclusive imagination might at first sight invite comparison with that of Keats—and yet his comic faculty, so much more developed than the Romantic poet's, often makes it difficult for him to penetrate the being of other creatures. Although he boasts a virtuoso gift for animizing things, he always works in terms of *human* consciousness. Keats deletes the full range of human response to explore the haecceity of a billiard ball; Dickens, had he done the same thing, would have worked in reverse. In Dickens the object is subsumed to authorial wit; in Keats consciousness is projected *into* the object. If we had to seek an antecedent for many Dickensian creatures, then, we would find it not in Romantic but in seventeenth-century verse. Dickens offers us extensions and adaptations of the Metaphysical conceit. Look, for example, at the way in which Mr. Casby's bird in *Little Dorrit* is mechanized in an almost Bergsonian way to conform to the governing motif:

There was a grave clock, ticking somewhere up the staircase; and there was a songless bird in the same direction, pecking at his cage, as if he were ticking too. The parlour-fire ticked in the grate. There was only one person on the parlour-hearth, and the loud watch in his pocket ticked audibly. (186)

This is typical of Dickens's way with animals, whose inner being remains inscrutable, and accordingly becomes a Rorschach blot for whatever

authorial fancy is at hand. The "as if" formula recurs in the treatment of the Garlands' pony in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, who like its successor in *Bleak House*, defies any imposition of the human will:

This pony had a little phaeton behind him, and a man in it; but neither man nor phaeton seemed to embarrass him in the least, as he reared up on his hind legs, or stopped, or went on . . .—just as the fancy seized him, and as if he were the freest animal in creation. When they came to the notary's door, the man called out in a very respectful manner, 'Woa then,'—intimating that if he might venture to express a wish, it would be that they stopped there. The pony made a moment's pause; but, as if it occurred to him that to stop when he was required might be to establish an inconvenient and dangerous precedent he immediately started off again, rattled at a fast trot to the street corner, wheeled round, came back, and then stopped of his own accord. (485)

Our delight in this description centres not in the plausible projection of the pony's being, but rather in the authorial whimsy that attributes a *principled* stubbornness to the creature. But even so, the effect is very different from that of fable. Dickens, living in the age of Darwin, cannot incorporate the Romance tradition of speaking and thinking animals into a realistic novel. When he anthropomorphizes the pony, he does so with extreme tact, taking care to bracket it off from the narrative as an exercise in simile ("as if it occurred to him").

Early in *Bleak House* there is a similar passage in which the animals at Chesney Wold think about the weather by a narrative sleight of hand, for all the time Dickens falls back on the subjunctive to stress conjectural nature of the exercise. While human beings *are* depressed by persistent rain, animals *might* be. Here is a representative sample:

The turkey in the poultry-yard, always troubled with a class-grievance (probably Christmas), may be reminiscent of that summer-morning wrongfully taken from him, when he got into the lane among the felled trees, where there was a barn and barley. The discontented goose, who stoops to pass under the old gateway, twenty feet high, may gabble out, if we only knew it, a waddling preference for weather when the gateway casts its shadow on the ground.

Be this as it may, there is not much fancy otherwise stirring at Chesney Wold. (82)

Even so, while Dickens's subjunctives rather ostentatiously avoid the Aesopian motif of the talking, thinking animal, they function as a blind for an attitude to animals that does not differ very markedly from the fabulists'. We almost fail to notice that the goose is discontented only because the author has made it so, following the social satire of the dispossessed turkey, and that it is he who characterizes its outthrust neck as a stoop ludicrously made before a twenty-foot obstruction.

If we move from *Bleak House* to *Anna Karenina*, we find that whereas in his treatment of animals Dickens had disguised extravagant fancy in impassive, "scientific" narration, Tolstoy does the reverse: he has the dog Laska converse with Levin as though in some apologue, and yet the effect is realistic where Dickens's is stylized. This is partly due to the empathetic description that precedes it, and also to the convention (taken over by cartoonists of the twentieth century) that attributes dialogic *thought* rather than speech to animals:

'Go, Laska, go!' shouted Levin, giving her a shove from behind.

'But I can't go,' thought Laska. 'Where am I to go? I can scent them from here, but if I move I shan't know where they are or what they are.' But now he pushed her with his knee, and in an excited whisper said, 'Go, Laska, good dog, go!'

'All right, if that's what he wants, but I can't answer for myself now,' thought Laska, and rushed forward at full tilt between the hummocks. (624)

The reader assents to the imaginative truth of this passage because it is as plausible as the ruminations of Dickens's geese and turkeys are extravagant. There attributions are made without physical evidence; here Tolstoy extracts credible "thought" from cogent evidence, viz. the dog's reluctance to run.

Although the fabular treatment of animals came more and more to be associated with the art of comic writers, whether great novelists like Dickens or minor poets like Barham, it did persist in serious contexts as well. The poetry of Hopkins provides a case in point, for there the two modes of animal consciousness converge in a rich, cross-fertilizing union. We should not be surprised to find that "The Windhover," emanating as it does from the Catholic revival, works partly within a modified bestiary mode. For example, in *Physiologus*, a twelfth-century bestiary by Bishop

Theobald, we find a perfunctory—and, it goes without saying, inaccurate—account of an eagle's behavior:

Then, too, the sight of his eyes is renewed in a wonderful manner,
 Losing the dimness of age, cleared by the heat of the sun,
 Now with a rush from the sky he descends to plunge in the waters,
 Quick as the fall from the nest, so the renewal of youth. (9)

Theobald is all too eager to begin his emblematic gloss, and read off the data in soterial terms:

As is a man to his sins, which are from the source of his Mother,
 (Thus is the Eagle in kind, seeking his youth to renew.)
 Soaring above earth's clouds, and seeking the sun in the heavens,
 Now despising the world, ever refusing its pomps. (10)

In "The Windhover," on the other hand, there is no mechanical severance of the animal from the interpretation—only a seamless transition between them. Hopkins observes the hawk in a way that Theobaldus, caught up with his hermeneutic purpose, fails to observe his eagle, and is so far indebted to the revolution recorded in *The Advancement of Learning*. As important as the poet's accuracy is his Keatsian readiness to participate in the being of the creature: "My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing" (73). Then comes the effortless elision of vision and symbol, so that for the moment we are uncertain whether the sestet apostrophizes bird or Saviour: "AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion / Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier." Here is the perfect synthesis of animal and human consciousness—a fluent, cursive movement from the one to the other, as though an Ovidian metamorphosis were being reversed, and the speaker finding human form after soaring in the dawn.

Animal consciousness of the inward, empathetic kind, then, is a legacy of the Romantic movement, though some of its imaginative feats had been anticipated by classical poets. While the advent of Christianity redirected imaginative efforts of humankind away from animals toward theological matters, a slow change took place over the centuries, precipitated, as such changes often are, by factors outside the austere confines of orthodoxy. The rise of empirical science reconstituted the human vision of animals, and made the moralizings of the bestiary

increasingly untenable. But that in itself was a necessary but insufficient step towards full animal consciousness, since for Descartes and many after him, animals were mere automata, and therefore incapable of suffering. The new scientific objectivity had to be supplemented by compassion, that vicarious projection of selfhood into otherness—and it was this capacity that Christianity had kept alive by its rich heritage of contemplative exercise. The synthesis of the internal and external animal-sense that we find in Hopkins marks the culmination of a centuries-long process—a process that one can encapsulate in St. Bernard's aphorism, though he would no doubt be surprised at the context of the application: *Non magister, sed magis mater*—not a master but more a mother. That is a paradoxical key to the "achieve of, the mastery of the thing."

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