“The Worlding Game”: Queer Ecological Perspectives in Modern Fiction

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“THE WORLDING GAME”: QUEER ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES
IN MODERN FICTION

A Dissertation Presented

by

SARAH D’STAIR

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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Department of English
“THE WORLDING GAME”: QUEER ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES
IN MODERN FICTION

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SARAH D’STAIR

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DEDICATION

To Pablo, Sebastien, and Lucian, my loves
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First, I thank my advisor, Laura Doyle, whose mentorship has meant the most to me in my academic career. Your kind, incisive guidance has made so many things possible for me, not the least of which is in these pages. Thank you for seeing my potential as a scholar, and then patiently showing me the path to get there.

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ABSTRACT

“THE WORLDING GAME”: QUEER ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN MODERN FICTION

SEPTEMBER 2019

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Cultural and literary theorists have been increasingly advocating for a posthuman ethic that challenges oppressive binaries of all kinds. In turn, the field of queer ecology, which investigates discourses of sex and nature for implicit heterosexism and androcentrism, has come to the fore. This dissertation, rooted firmly in this newer branch of ecocriticism, focuses on various inter-species environments imagined by early twentieth-century queer women writers. Each of their works, in different ways, challenges the naturalization of social hierarchies based on gender, sexuality, race, class, and species being reinforced in the burgeoning fields of sexology, psychology, and evolutionary biology. Their novels imagine worlds in which humans de-privilege spoken and written language as a primary method of ontological understanding, and instead use stylistic techniques to model a more inclusive and dynamic cross-species awareness. Djuna Barnes’ Nightwood challenges the scientific rationale that underpins trait-based social hierarchies, and in so doing, destabilizes social Darwinism’s gender-, sexuality- and species-based oppressions. The novel first exposes violence inherent in systems of social control, and then suggests an alternative model in which dynamic motion and
collaboration define human-animal interactions. Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* invokes the new field of sexology to suggest more inclusive possibilities for intra- and inter-species relating. By narrating multi-species relationships marked by kinetic body play, her novel suggests that eroticism can be a harmonizing force, traversing deeply-ingrained social boundaries that sever communion for animals of all kinds. Virginia Woolf’s canine satire, *Flush: A Biography*, mocks human forms of social organization such as race and social status that rely on the classification of bodies across species. *Flush*’s narrative shows the extent to which these forms of sociality depend on the exploitation and mutilation of nonhuman animal bodies, and imagines a multi-species environment instead based on other relational elements such as energy, rhythm, and spirituality. Finally, Katharine Burdekin’s *Proud Man* argues that the human capacity for abstract communication is one of the root causes of all trait-based oppression, including speciesism. Burdekin’s utopia envisions cross-species communion absent of all social hierarchies, and proposes a radically progressive model of “worlding” predicated on true equity for all creatures.
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INTRODUCTION

“Species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect. That is the play of companion species learning to pay attention […] I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind.”

-- Donna Haraway, When Species Meet

“The Worlding Game,” a phrase from Donna Haraway’s foundational text on cross-species becoming titled When Species Meet, captures the spirit of the relational project at the heart of each work under investigation in this study. I chose the phrase as the title of this dissertation for its connotations of play, sport, strategy, competition, challenge, and even conniving, as in “gaming the system.” “Games” can be a child’s friendly backyard activity, or a desperate risk taken with millions of lives or dollars on the line. There are winners and losers in games, rules set by long-established systems out of one’s control, but within which one must reach for both joy and struggle. Games entail collaboration, alliance, dependence, agreement about the conditions of play, friends or enemies operating from the same basic understanding of how the system works and how to function within it. A game, in effect, is an ecology itself, organisms relating and debating, relying and competing, forming co-constitutive networks called teams that must find ways to communicate across difference in order to compete well. As we think of this term “worlding,” the “game” metaphor makes sense, for we are all, every last creature regardless of species, in the process of gameplay together, forming alliances, learning the rules of play within ecosystems both harsh and delightful, destructive and creative, sustaining and decaying. We simultaneously constitute and defer to environmental and mechanical systems outside ourselves; we co-participate in maneuvers
that compel us together and tear us apart. We creatures are constantly “worlding” together, co-shaping environments, sensing each other’s presence, adapting, seeing, touching, and desiring alongside and within each other in a long and vast history of living. As for winners and losers, some species proliferate, others go extinct, some build vast structures to displace or destroy the habitat of others, some share resources indiscriminately. I am not referring only to human beings. An invasive species of thistly, thorny, spiked, very tall plant has overtaken the wildflowers that used to line the path I walk each morning. Underfoot along the same path, a network of deep and strong tree roots transfer nutrition to each other regardless of species. Someday, likely soon if developers get their way in my town, those tall thorny thistles, and the trees as well, will be bulldozed to make room for neatly manicured apartment homes. It is a brutal and wonderful sport, this “worlding game.”

As the animal studies turn has taken root in humanities departments, these questions of co-relating and cross-species world-making have enlivened studies of art and literature, drawing in to focus forms of knowing that challenge human exceptionalism. Nonhuman animal subjectivity has been investigated in terms of Kristeva’s theory of abjection, Marxist perspectives on nonhuman animal ownership and transactional value, critiques of anthropomorphism, and relational models of interconnectedness that might redefine human encounters with the animal world. Often, this work dismantles divides between nature and culture, arguing that any phenomenon categorized as “natural” will also have social or “cultural” implications. Haraway’s work has become a central in defining these arguments; indeed, she coins the nonbinary term “naturecultures” as a more accurate reflection of the interplay between human and nonhuman co-social
behaviors, arguing that animals of all kinds are placed “together in situated histories, situated naturecultures, in which all the actors become who they are in the dance of relating, not from scratch, not ex nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages both before and lateral to this encounter” (25).

Literary theorists who draw on critical animal studies have largely been concerned not necessarily with the nature/culture debate, but with challenging the humanist tendencies in discourse about the nonhuman. Cary Wolfe, a major voice in animal theory, writes some of the earliest cross-disciplinary advocacy of a posthumanist ethics. By ontologically separating humans from nonhuman animals, Wolfe argues, Western philosophy has cruelly dismissed the subject positions of animals as beings unto themselves. His writing has the aim of “properly decentering the human […] from its privileged place as the transcendental signifier to which all other phenomenological differences are referred for meaning” (4). In response to Wolfe’s advocacy, some scholars have begun to study works that formally acknowledge the epistemological difficulties posed by human attempts to narrate animal consciousness. Jutta Ittner views the shift toward this new form of representation as a refusal to link animals solely to human consciousness, thereby depriving nonhumans of individual agency, to a form of “new anthropomorphism” that views the animal as a distinct, separate, and ultimately unknowable entity, integrating the impasse that comes from human perceptive limitations into its varied inquiries on animal consciousness (182).

Other critics have drawn from the work of Haraway and Wolfe to de-legitimize the bifurcation of “animal” and “human” as separate categories of being. In one iteration of this view, Timothy Morton calls the human tendency to overlook the vast
scope of interspecies relations as “ecologocentrism,” and outlines methods for seeing animals as not on the other side of community from humans, but on the same plane of “social collectivity” (73). In response to this general turn toward the animal across the humanities, literary theorists such as Marianne DeKoven and others recognize animal studies as part of a growing effort to end the destructive reign human beings have held over the planet, and argue that within the academy animal rights issues must garner at least as much critical attention as human rights.¹

Despite its aims for equity across species, animal studies experts in the last several years have begun to notice the omission of queerness from scholarship in the field. At the same time, critics working within the relatively new field of queer ecology began to establish important models for questioning heteronormative assumptions embedded within discourse of the “natural,” and advocating for a more inclusive sexual politics that explores gender and sexual performance in the nonhuman animal world. In this way, queer ecology provides methodological practices for examining the consonance between queerness and animality, for interrogating the harm caused by linking sex and sex practices with a biologically-determined “nature,” and for challenging the pervasive emphasis on reproductive sex in a way that “calls into question heteronormativity itself” (Mortimer-Sandilands “Introduction” 5).

Although queer ecology engages in critical inquiry extending beyond animal studies, most queer ecologists place themselves at intersections between queer theory and critical animal studies in that both challenge normative attitudes that perpetuate

¹ For an outstanding genealogy of animal studies, along with notes about major works in the field, see introductions in Carrie Rohman’s *Stalking the Subject* and Sherryl Vint’s *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal.*
oppressions of all kinds, including speciesism. Both queer ecologists and animal studies experts argue against paradigms that define nonhuman animals as devoid of individual consciousness, a destructive mindset that objectifies animals into beings solely existing in terms of human values and pleasure. Morton, who has become a key figure in this burgeoning field, argues that queer ecology views all forms of life as “constitute[ing] a mesh, a nontotalizing, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environment” (275-6). This dissolution of boundaries between human and nonhuman will result, in Morton’s view, in a necessary “ecological humiliation” wherein human’s power to name loses its grasp – simply because we have words for animals does not make them what we say they are. This version of connectivity dissolves restrictive forms of community such as hierarchy, subordination, and power, and instead acknowledges the inter-related modes of consciousness that inform the lived history and culture of all others, continuing an endless circulation of vital energies that shift and pulse in each creature. More recent queer ecologists such as Nicole Seymour have argued that any critical perspectives on environmental action need to connect ecological views with queer possibility: 

[…] with a queer ecological perspective attuned to social justice, we can learn to care about the future of the planet in a way that is perhaps more radical than any we have seen previously: acting in the interests of nameless, faceless individuals to which one has no biological, familial, or economic ties whatsoever. This kind of action operates without any reward, without any guarantee of success, and without any proof that the future inhabitants of the planet might be similar to the individual acting in the present - in terms of social identity, morality, or even species. (11)

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2 See the introduction to Seymour’s Strange Futures for a detailed genealogy of queer ecology, including analysis of the frequent antagonism between queer studies and ecocriticism.
Queer ecologists have been successful at acknowledging the need to incorporate animal sexualities into the larger project of queer environmental justice. As a response to the omission of queerness as a form of coterminous human-animal oppression, queer ecologies have explored the multiplicity of sexualities in the animal world as a challenge to human forms of heterosexism, and have begun to examine new modes of relationality that correct a human-centered hierarchy of co-habitation. However, queer ecologists have implicitly distanced the human from the nonhuman animal by focusing their efforts on either 1) arguing for the existence of queer animal sexualities in order to normalize queer human sexualities; or 2) arguing that human beings in general need to acknowledge co-forming moments of “being-with” the nonhuman animal world. The first interrogates queerness and the animal; the latter interrogates humanness and the animal. Though these two forms of inquiry have taken queer ecology to new vistas, critics have yet to explore what happens in representations of human-animal togetherness in queer human environments. This kind of investigation extends queer ecology past its bifurcated origins to explore the ways in which queer spaces inform an inter-species ethic of relating. I argue in this dissertation that attention to the dynamics of human-animal interactions within queer human environments, though still unavoidably attuned mostly to human perceptions, nonetheless engages a way of knowing that extends the limits of human ontological understanding, allowing us to visualize possibilities beyond human reason, beyond human language, and beyond human modes of hierarchical social

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organization. Undergirding my argument is the supposition that perhaps only queer environments are truly capable of expanding our view of species co-worlding to the point of destabilizing even the most fundamental of human world-building practices. My analysis draws the queer and the animal into closer proximity, into a cross-fertilization informed by lived moments when deep intimacies take place between people and between species. My intervention argues that in order to fully dissolve oppressive hierarchies and structural binaries, queer ecologists need to theorize the dynamic, co-constitutive, world-forming multispecies interactions within human queer environments to see alternative visions of equitable, empathetic co-habitation for animals of all kinds.

Drawing the queer and the animal into closer intimacy might also allow for further investigation into artistic representations of queer environmentalism that consider “oppressed humans […] and oppressed non-humans (degraded landscapes, threatened natural resources, and other flora and fauna) to be deeply interconnected, and […] promote politicized advocacy on behalf of both” (Seymour 1). Many of these artists and writers, including the writers studied in this dissertation, ask questions about where humans with nonbinary or fluid gender identities and/or traditionally nonreproductive romantic attachments fall along the hierarchical “chain-of-being” that serves as the foundational ethos for Western social organization. Scholars might also benefit from studies of species abjection represented by writers and characters who themselves struggle through trait-based abjection. These beginnings into the many intersections of queerness, animality, and environmentality allow for more productive exploration of ways in which writers and artists represent the “other,” including the animal, to challenge
deeply-internalized, unquestioned social hierarchies that allow dominant groups to humiliate, abuse, and exile any subjectivity considered subordinate.

From a literary studies perspective, the works of early twentieth-century lesbian writers such as Djuna Barnes, Radclyffe Hall, Virginia Woolf, and the relatively unknown speculative fiction writer Katharine Burdekin present useful landscapes of human-animal interactions that might inform a queer inter-species aesthetics. These four women writers exemplify the complex cultural dynamics during the interwar period: they challenged an entrenched patriarchal culture, exhibited varying forms of financial and sexual independence, and posed public challenges to cultural norms governing gender and sexuality. These women navigated the nebulous cultural politics surrounding same-sex desire, including the undefined legal status of the term “lesbian,” and their work was also often influenced by a burgeoning sexual science attempting to find physical and psychological causes for non-normative gender and sexual expression. Additionally, the privileged status in Europe of these writers as white, middle-to-upper class women granted them certain advantages in terms of their relative freedom to represent fictionalized queer environments. In relation to my goal of drawing the queer and the animal closer together, the work of these women writers, both in content and in form, opens possibilities for examining a culturally-informed inter-species dynamic. Within the literal and symbolic spaces the works interrogate, nonhuman animals are not represented along merely metaphoric (anthropocentric) lines, but rather are given a "queer" identity in themselves as co-forming inhabitants alongside their human friends.
Naturalizing Trait-Based Oppression

The interwar fiction and nonfiction of Barnes, Hall, Woolf, and Burdekin also engages with intense cultural and geopolitical shifts across Europe and the world. In all of Europe, but in England most pertinently, social anxieties regarding increasingly liberal gender roles for women, public advocacy for homosexuality, and new theories about the biology of gender nonconformity were folded into a more general cultural nervousness about changing political dynamics both locally and globally. In England, Britons watched their monarchy destabilized as Edward III chose an American mistress over the throne. Unionized labor efforts across Europe were gaining strength, and ideological wars were being waged between proponents of communism, capitalism, socialism, and anarchism. Europeans were becoming witness to the gradual rise of Hitler, along with propaganda efforts toward populist nationalism across the continent, both of which would eventually lead to World War II. These rising tensions, both on the national and the world stage, seem to have led each writer under consideration here – Barnes, Hall, Woolf, and Burdekin – to put forth their reimagining of ideological paradigms that might replace the destructive patterns they saw all around them. Each work presents imagined worlds that reveal possibilities for non-binary thinking, for true co-habitation with all creatures, both human and nonhuman, and for the dissolution of “herd” mentalities that elevate some and subjugate others. Burdekin herself outlines the central problem in the large-scale political landscape that all these writers attempt to counter in their prose. She writes in Proud Man, “Until all the herds are broken up, all of them – nations, churches, fascists, communists, trade unions, the B.M.A., the Great White Race, and Nordic Myth, the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, the gangsters, the priesthoods of all religions – until all
these herds are scattered there can be no humanity on earth” (147). Virginia Woolf expresses a similar sentiment in *A Room of One’s Own* when she proclaims that “the androgynous mind,” which might be translated as the denial of binary identity regimes, provides a much more profound intellectual engagement with the world than the “single-sexed mind” (102). Each writer under consideration advocates, in fiction and nonfiction, for inter- and intra-species communication that accounts for shared histories, dissolution of binaries, environmental symbiosis, and social dependencies outside traditional taxonomic hierarchies responsible for perpetuating violence as a form of repression and control.

The stringent emphasis on a hierarchical social order in the human world inevitably results in a deepening oppression of those considered lower on the proverbial “chain-of-being,” including nonhuman animals but also including individuals who exhibit nonconforming gender and sexual identities. According to Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, “in the early twentieth century, sexuality became naturalized; an individual’s sexual desires were recoded as expressions of an inherent sexual condition, and that condition was understood in strongly biologized terms” (8). The result of these moves to biologize sexuality in terms of the “survival of the fittest” ideology was to give “scientific” credence to already deeply-entrenched homophobic and transphobic social conditions. Carrie Rohman, another insightful scholar of the animal in modernism, enriches our understanding of how the early twentieth-century cultural

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appropriation of “survival of the fittest” discourses from evolutionary biology brought about new kinds of oppressive social practices that marginalize identities along sexual, racial, gender, and species lines. Rohman argues that one effect of the rise of Darwinian and Freudian thought was to create conditions for a post-Victorian ideological “coping mechanism” that supported “a residual humanism [that] helped them process and mitigate evolution’s challenge to human privilege” (3). In Rohman’s view, “social Darwinism itself, with its clinging to traditional notions of power and the development of civilizations, can be understood as a reinstatement of human privilege projected onto racial and gendered taxonomies” (5).

In fiction and essays critical of species- and identity-based hierarchies, Barnes, Hall, Woolf, and Burdekin each engage with a long tradition of scientists and philosophers who have argued for and against such regimes of control. Giorgio Agamben tracks the foundations of human exceptionalism within Anglo-European traditions of thought back to Linnaeus and other Enlightenment thinkers who began the obsession with dividing forms of life into endless schemes of trait-based distinctions. Caroline Merchant traces such developments in Europe back even further, to the sixteenth-century when scientists such as Francis Bacon began to see natural phenomena as part of mechanistic processes subject to human regimes of classification and control.5 As centuries passed and as scientific discourse reified its own underpinnings, arrangement of matter by traits became a central epistemological thread within the natural sciences. Over time, the system that used physical traits merely to label and classify

became a method instead for determining the relative “supremacy” of species within their environments, perhaps most famously illustrated by Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” model of evolution. The Victorian era, continuing the turn toward biological determinism, combined Enlightenment principles of organization with medical advances in anatomy and physiology in attempts to legitimize the relegation of various identity groups, including those based on gender, race, and social class, to positions of subservience to white European male rule. In fact, nineteenth-century science was dominated by studies that supposedly “confirmed” theories that “natural” physical traits present at birth (including height, hair color, and intelligence) determine one’s place in the social hierarchy. These theories then made their way into the early twentieth-century eugenics movements that attempted to eliminate “lower races” of people with the twin goals in mind of expanding British empirical rule and of legitimizing racial discrimination in the U.S. Embedded in Western intellectual history are these long-held “scientific” principles that hold the very concept of “nature” captive, relegated to serve human impulses toward social hierarchies that elevate some and devastate others.

**Legislating Gender and Sexuality**

Alongside the reification of so-called “natural” social and species hierarchies, the women writers under consideration in this dissertation also responded to dramatic cultural shifts in views about gender and sexuality during the first part of the twentieth century. In response to larger cultural debates in academic and public circles, Barnes,

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6 Chapter 3 of Laura Doyle’s *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture* provides an extensive analysis of these primary source studies, and examines the prevailing scientific principles of social Darwinism, phrenology, and paedomorphism (the belief that women, on account of their smaller frames and lower intelligence, belong to the “lower races”).
Hall, Woolf, and Burdekin seem to respond directly to a persistent cultural obsession with trait-based hierarchies based on race, gender, and sexuality, often seeing those oppressions as correlates to the tyrannies of species-based taxonomies that place animals on the lowest level of the “chain of being.”

During the years these four openly-queer women were writing, the oppressive legal, cultural, and biological "non-entity" status of lesbian identity was being challenged via publicized indecency trials, lesbian representation in new forms of mass media, and changing attitudes toward women's independence in the era of equal suffrage. From 1918 to 1928 in England, several libel, slander, and obscenity trials centered on suggestions of lesbian interaction, and in 1921, the British parliament debated whether to criminalize sexual acts between women. Yet they did not use the term “lesbian” in their deliberations. Despite visible moves to legislate female sexuality, the term "lesbian" had not yet entered the realm of formal public discourse.

The term “lesbian” was used variably, though, among early twentieth-century academics and social scientists. In contemporaneous critical discourse, the term applied not only to those involved in same-sex romantic relationships, but also to describe female behaviors, desires, and practices considered “perversion” or “deviance” according to traditional patriarchal culture. Early sexual scientists use the term synonymously with terms such as “sexual inverts” or “masculine women;” indeed, the term “lesbian” had become a pejorative to label any female behavior that defied gender norms. These “deviant” behaviors also included moves toward gaining freedoms women had begun to demand for their public lives, including attempts to gain equal political and economic rights. According to Jodie Medd,
early twentieth-century sexual politics implicated female gender and sexual 
deviance with the self-exhibiting turn-of-the-century ‘public woman,’ a term first 
applied to prostitutes soliciting on street corners and actresses performing on 
stage, but which also came to include suffragists protesting in the street and the 
figure of the New Woman emerging in the public sphere. (16)

The term was applied to women who challenged “separate spheres” ideology, and who 
became more culturally visible during the “gender disruption” of World War I. 
Lesbianism was associated with female deviance in all its forms, was considered a threat 
to civilization, and was therefore legislated as a kind of public warning to women who 
may want to behave outside their proscribed roles as wives and mothers. 

Numerous high-profile legal cases, along with the work of many female artists 
and performers, brought into public consciousness the cultural anxieties surrounding 
women’s sexuality. For example, Maud Allan, an actor in Oscar Wilde’s Salome, 
brought a libel suit against right-wing publisher Noel Pemberton Billing after a member 
of Billings’ staff wrote an article accusing Allan and 47,000 other women of “moral 
degeneracy,” a euphemism for lesbianism. The article, called “The Cult of the Clitoris,” 
claimed that the women’s behavior threatened national security by spreading debauchery 
during wartime (Medd 28-9). In another example, Radclyffe Hall was charged in 1928 of 
“obscene libel” for the depiction of same-sex female relationships in The Well of 
Loneliness. As a result, a protest letter was signed by forty-five cultural leaders in the 
arts, religion, and science, and then sent to numerous national newspapers (Doan Sapphic 
91-92). In addition to these public legal proceedings, popular women writers and artists 
such as Sylvia Beach, Vita Sackville-West, and Romaine Brooks were also broadening 
the scope within which the European public encountered lesbian personae, often creating 
works that fused intellectual endeavor with an openness about their own sexuality
(Winning 22). In addition to these public displays, the popular press also raised consciousness and to some degree acceptance about desire between women. Major mass market Sunday newspapers became an outlet for the expression of lesbian and gender nonconforming identities during the interwar period in stories about the world of female-female desire, set largely in wealthy circles amid moneyed scandals, or alternatively set in the bohemian world of the arts and theatre, which has long been associated with more liberal sexual expression (Oram 169).

As many scholars have noted, the four women represented in this study also contended with critical attention paid to early male sexologists such as Otto Weininger and Sigmund Freud despite, and perhaps because of, the overt misogyny and homophobia inherent in their views. As an example of the rather perverse views on women perpetuated in these early studies, Weininger’s 1903 *Sex and Character* argues that women in and of themselves have no inherent sexuality because femininity is a form of “sexuality itself” and therefore has no capacity for transcendent self-consciousness. His theories regarding gender account for a kind of absence of female identity except as subsumed by maleness: “as there is no such thing as one-ness for [women] there can be no plurality, only an indistinct state of fusion with others” (qtd. in Greenway 30).

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Likewise, Freud initialized behavioral therapy as a treatment for homosexuality, which he considered an unconscious form of “arrested development,” a regressive phenomenon indicative of an individual “falling back” into an earlier developmental stage (Waters 168). Although these kinds of views gained traction in the patriarchal system that privileged male scientists, there were a number of female social and biological scientists challenging theories put forward by their male colleagues. For example, Karen Horney became an outspoken critic of Freud’s views on sexuality and gender. She outlines an alternative to Freud’s theory of “penis envy,” arguing that women in a patriarchal culture are not envious of the male anatomical part, but rather are covetous of the power granted to men as a result of the established social hierarchy.

**Species Discourse and Queer Ecology**

As these four writers advocate for more progressive models of togetherness across human identities and across species, they each take aim in different ways at the privileging of human language as an indicator of evolutionary superiority. The language of each novel plays with form, voice, and structure to challenge the "elevated" status of the human aesthetic sense, and in so doing opens linguistic possibilities for inter-species communion beyond language into the many nonverbal and kinetic forms of connectedness that happen between creatures. What develops is a kind of queering of cross-species consciousness via devaluation of the "human" poetic impulse, a more complex value system that attends to "non-languaged" proximity between human and nonhuman. In this way, these writers anticipate Derrida’s critique of Western philosophy for omitting the animal from its discourse, writing about Descartes, Heidegger, Levinas,
and others: “Their discourses are sound and profound, but everything goes on as if they themselves had never been looked at...by an animal that addressed them” (383).8

To outline the overall project of these writers in critiquing scientific discourse of the “natural,” my first chapter examines Barnes’ representation of human and nonhuman animals in violent strivings for hierarchical domination. One of the central questions in Barnes’ Nightwood is whether social hierarchies, including those based on gender, sexuality, and race are part of, or antithetical to, what we would call “nature.” As her characters suffer social oppressions, displacements, and dismissals based on race, gender, and sexuality – Robin and Nora in their lesbian coupling; Matthew O’Connor in her transgender body; and Felix Volkbein in his orphaned Jewish lineage – they each behave as combatants in an undefined war, a battle born of classifications that place them at the lowest rungs in a social order they desperately clamor to survive. In these narrative moments of struggle, Barnes argues for alternative ways to structure the being-togetherness for all creatures so that the social Darwinian model loses its power to destroy the lives of both human and nonhuman animals. Barnes does not merely represent these oppressive structural ontologies; she also transforms them through a recasting of and challenge to one of Western philosophy’s most deeply-held indicators of humanness, the reliance on language as communicator of symbolic meaning. By the end

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8 Carrie Rohman offers a brief genealogy of links between human subjectivity and speech, noting Aristotle’s belief in “language capacity as a criterion of moral worth,” and tracing such thinking to Descartes who “compared animals to machines and insisted they have no capacity for reason” (21). For Levinas, according to Rohman, the “face of the other” is undeniably human in its “inseparability from the linguistic exchange between interlocuters” (10) and for Heidegger, “Being, world-making, the privilege of questioning, or the spiritual, separates the human from the rest of the living in general” (14).
of the novel, as the characters become more closely integrated with nonhuman animals, the stylistics during these encounters become characterized by dynamic motion, kinetic synthesis, and a kind of choreography of relating shared by life forms in all their iterations.

I then turn in chapter two to Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness for its representation not of violent comings-together as in Barnes, but rather for its engagement with erotic sensualities between creatures as they co-shape social networks that refuse culturally-proscribed separations based on sexuality and species. Hall critiques systems of trait-based oppression, including the use of the term “natural” to characterize some identities over others, by using contemporary sexual science to contextualize her protagonist’s homosexuality and masculine gender performance. Stephen Gordon suffers intense injustices as a result of her intersecting identities as a female “invert,” (a term taken from contemporary sexual science), an openly-lesbian writer, a financially self-sufficient “new woman,” and a former World War I ambulance driver representative of women unwilling to return to second-class citizenship after war service. As she negotiates her own complex desires and relationships, Stephen seeks comfort in the space she shares with nonhuman animals, including two horses, Collins and Raftery, and a spaniel named David. These human-animal connections are especially charged with mutual co-worlding energies while Stephen also bonds with or mourns over her female lovers. As she infuses these queer cross-species scenes with erotically-charged language, Hall seems to argue that only by acknowledging the role of sensuality in our shared social entanglements will we ever be able to traverse deeply embedded hierarchies that sever possibilities for communion. Although some of her advocacy is marred by racialized
language that subverts her more egalitarian goals, Hall’s eroticism presages models of queer ecological thinking by countering discourses surrounding sex and nature that reinforce heterosexist and transphobic structures of power.

In chapter three, I examine Virginia Woolf’s animal fiction, focusing on her satiric novella *Flush: A Biography*, for its visionary architecture of communal experience. The novel narrates the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s dog Flush largely from the dog’s point of view, tracing his early days in the rural English countryside, to his coming of age on wealthy Wimpole Street in London with Miss Barrett, to his more liberated moments in a rustic Italian village. As he learns each new environment, Flush must re-negotiate his social arrangement with the humans in his life, with noted attention to his place within human class delineations. As Flush and his human friend Miss Barrett are caught within corruptive dynamics of race, class, and gender, Woolf engages in the same kind of critique of Darwinian thinking as Barnes and Hall did in their work. Woolf’s novel builds on those criticisms by demonstrating that despite the binary markers of “human” and “animal,” creatures of every kind are always actors and reactors in the same web of history, impacted by the same economic systems, and caught within kinship and cultural practices that both foster inter-species connections and sever possibilities for communion. Although her narrative foray into animal consciousness raises questions about the unavoidably anthropomorphic nature of the project, Woolf also uses her text to present alternatives to anthropocentric social systems based on species distinctions, class hierarchies, and genealogies of nobility. Instead of these human-centered structures, she queers the dimensions of relationality by privileging what Peter Merriman calls “other […] ontological elements” such as force, energy, affect, and spirituality as they “erupt
into being” and define the co-forming dance of world-making between and across species (24).

Finally, in chapter four I will explore Katharine Burdekin’s *Proud Man* as a visionary model for equitable inter-species environmentality. Burdekin’s speculative fiction spans the interwar period, often exploring dystopian totalitarianism and feminist models of gender and sexual freedom in which all trait-based oppressions have been eliminated. *Proud Man*, published in 1934 under the pseudonym Murray Constantine, critiques the strict cultural norms governing race, gender, sexuality, class, and species that permeated early twentieth-century British society. Her narrator, called “The Person,” is a documentarian sent from thousands of years in the future to explore an early form of humanity, whom she quickly labels “subhuman” for their relatively primitive forms of social organization. The narrator’s future world is populated by individuals who have evolved out of artificially-inscribed identity constructs such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, who oppose eating animal flesh of any kind, and who communicate telepathically with fellow humans and nonhuman creatures alike. Like the novels of Barnes, Hall, and Woolf, Burdekin’s imagined queer environment challenges the scientific rational for so-called “natural” identity traits, and in so doing, destabilizes hierarchies of social Darwinism that result in multiple layers of oppression for both human and nonhuman animals. In de-aestheticized prose, Burdekin’s narrator argues that the subhuman capacity for and reliance on abstraction as a valued cognitive paradigm is one of the root causes of oppression, especially in the obsession over classifications regarding gender and sexuality. As the Person becomes enmeshed in subhuman culture, her more literal ethnographic language “de-evolves” into symbolic association and
metaphor, implicitly arguing that figurative communication obfuscates and causes separation between the subject and those in their world. Burdekin’s vision suggests that perhaps the only recourse for ending abjection in all its iterations would be to envision a world in which human beings de-privilege the word as a primary indicator of evolved consciousness, and instead begin to foster cross-species inclusive awareness that exists outside the circumscribing effects of human language.

All four writers under consideration use their writing to navigate a matrix of cultural attitudes that reinforce an entrenched system of trait-based oppressions across identities. Their queer sensibilities allow them each to imagine new forms of being in the world beyond proscribed expectations for heteronormative, anthropocentric sociality, and beyond the racism, homophobia, transphobia, and speciesism that characterizes early twentieth-century public discourse. Barnes, Hall, Woolf, and Burdekin, through their fictionalized human-animal environments, engage in a complex dialogue about the ways in which social oppressions impact human and nonhuman animal experiences, and in turn put forth their own respective visions for equitable cross-species exchange absent of such hegemonic regimes. As part of this conversation, each writer struggles to represent the nonhuman using human forms of communication, acknowledging in various ways the inescapable anthropocentrism of their radical projects. Ultimately, their queer spaces and cross-species encounters allow us to envision forms of co-habitation outside of corruptive hierarchical norms, imagining forms of relating instead characterized by an ecology of sharing, mutuality, openness, and co-constitutive “worlding” that celebrates the dignity of all animal selves.
CHAPTER 1

“A WORD…AND NOT ITS ALCHEMY”: DJUNA BARNES’ LANGUAGE OF UNBORDERED ANIMALITY

“As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself. And in these moments of nakedness, under the gaze of the animal, everything can happen to me…”

-- Jacques Derrida, “The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow)"

Djuna Barnes’ work almost always transgresses ontological boundaries, blurs the borders between male and female, human and animal, space and time, living and dying, consciousness and unconsciousness, becoming and having already been. Emblematic of this tendency, in 1914, the journalist Barnes voluntarily submitted herself to the physical torture of being forcibly fed, spotlighting one of the more gruesome acts of domination forced on women who attempt to gain agency in an unyielding patriarchal system. She published her account in unflinching detail with the aim of telling the stories of women all over the world who resorted to hunger strikes to gain the right to vote, or to gain basic human rights. With her arms and legs bound tightly to her body, and without anesthetic, doctors threaded a long tube down her nose, along her esophagus, and into her stomach, then pumped into her a cold liquid that she could feel entering her body. In her short tract about the experience titled “How it Feels to be Forcibly Fed,” she writes, “It was the most concentrated moment of my life” (37).
Barnes’ description of the event reflects what Emma Heaney calls the “dispossession of the body, a loss of control over the meanings attached and treatment afforded to bodily structures, that defines female experience” (141). As the patient involuntarily copes with the duress, her eyes become “wandered outcasts in a world they knew” and the body loses cohesion, existing merely in “unbroken lines as any corpse” (Barnes “How it Feels” 37). After several minutes, she enters a state of paralysis, her body limp from fatigue and pain, while objects in the hospital room begin to channel the psychic energy her body can no longer circulate. Above her, the “electric light…took a hazy step or two toward the clock,” and the windows to her side “could not keep still” (38). Her enervated consciousness gives way to the unconscious vitality of the room, almost as if the space itself dances and plays with her presence. Soon after these moments of coalescence with her environment, she loses consciousness entirely and wakes only after the procedure is complete.

As the boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness is destabilized, another kind of energy takes over, brought about through violence to the body and therefore powerful in its effects toward self-preservation - a force of limitlessness, of possibility, of enlivened transference in which objects in space become animated with the extinguished activity of the body. Reminiscent of Julia Kristeva’s definition of abjection, Barnes’ description renders the very life force of the body as the material excreted at the hands of invasive doctors, thereby revealing a disruption in states of being we assume to be stable as the mind/body/spirit trinity loses cohesion. The space around her body exhibits a paradoxical “worlding” of its own; that which appears lifeless engages in
spirited motion, and the moving human figures in the room become associated with stillness and a loss of awareness.⁹

Barnes’ essays, poetry and prose often cast scenes of violence, humiliation, and traumatic loss as the troubling catalysts for new forms of awareness, especially awareness regarding systems that degrade the lives of the marginalized and disempowered. Often her narrative techniques systematically de-privilege modes of hierarchical control, including trait-based ranking schematics traditionally associated with so-called “natural” phenomena. Barnes’ avant-garde novel Nightwood (1936) accomplishes this task by presenting characters who challenge the “chain of being” model of social dominance, and whose life patterns undermine rigid social rules imposed on them based on their gender, race, class, and sexuality. Examples of this contestation abound in the novel: Felix and Guido construct and perform their identity narratives in defiance of codified rules governing blood lineage; Hedwig establishes her own definition of motherhood in the few moments before she dies during childbirth; Robin and Nora proclaim their lesbian coupling and love each other through obsessions, betrayals, and fraught reunions; and the transgender figure of the doctor’s numerous speeches work to reverse the silencing of those with non-binary identities.

Yet these defiant strategies come at a cost. Each character suffers in some way severe physical and emotional neglect at the hands of unforgiving masses, or they live as social outcasts who must steel themselves for the humiliation their identities would cause them if displayed in public. These everyday traumas result in a pervasive feeling of

⁹ The scene illustrates what Erin Edwards in The Modernist Corpse sees as the effect of the numerous images of corpses in American modernism - “a trenchant re-examination of who - and what - counts as human and as ‘alive’ in the early twentieth century” (2).
assault, as if each character is a cultural combatant determined to clamor their way up the social hierarchy despite the violent challenges they encounter. The novel’s logic seems to suggest that just like the force-feedings suffered by activist women, it is always violence - physical, emotional, psychological, and political - that enforces systems her marginalized characters must navigate as they live out their identities. Yet these forces of hierarchical dominance do not only impact humans in the novel. As she outlines the struggles of her human characters, Barnes begins to draw nonhuman creatures into many of the traumatic scenes as well. This kind of species synthesis establishes the paradoxical notion that the very methods of classification that separate human and nonhuman creatures simultaneously draw them together in moments of mutual suffering. Also implicated in these coercions, the novel suggests, are human language patterns that cognitively construct and reify oppressive circumscriptions into trait-based classifications. As her criticism of trait-based hierarchies across species delves further into its root causes and corruptions, Barnes anticipates queer ecology’s argument that alternative modes of social equilibrium must be sought for the benefit of all creatures.

Perhaps in response to many of the problems outlined in early sections of the novel, later scenes intimate new possibilities for togetherness as human and animal characters are brought into closer proximity. Inter-species intimacies begin to characterize many scenes, including descriptions of shared experiences and unclear pronoun references that disorient the reader’s ability to place human and animal in separate spheres of subjectivity. This kind of mutual “worlding” happens especially toward the end of the novel as urban landscapes and performative “circuses” are replaced with rural settings that operate under less direct pressure from human regimes of control.
As the novel progresses, Barnes’ stylistics remain almost aggressively disorienting, yet by the end her narrative also suggests an alternative system of cross-species co-habitation in which dynamic motion, collaboration, synthesis, and sharing characterize human/animal interactions, a system in which species-based hierarchies dissolve in favor of what Haraway calls a “dance of relating” (25).

Barnes critics have often examined these kinds of generative connections, barrier crossings, and expressions of multiplicity in her poetry and prose. To do so, many have drawn attention to the linkage between queer subjectivity and linguistic experimentation, mostly in Nightwood since it is her longest and most known work, arguing that the unconventional prose style reflects a queer artistic practice that allows for representation of multiple possibilities all at once.\(^{10}\) Nightwood has also been studied for its overt recognition of traditionally silenced identities as a form of advocacy for inclusive social awareness, with particular focus on characterizations of race, gender, and sexuality.\(^{11}\) Some critics, though, have also begun to examine representations of animality in Barnes’ formal experiments. In the early 1990s, Bonnie Kime Scott presciently argued for the significance of animals in works like Nightwood, uncovering evidence that the original title of the novel, Night Beast, was only changed because Barnes noted the “debased meaning now put on the nice word beast” (qtd. in Scott 41). Decades later when animal

\(^{10}\) For examples of studies that link form and queer themes in Nightwood, see Mary Galvin, *Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers*; Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-Garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis*; and Julie Taylor, *Djuna Barnes and Affective Modernism*.

studies became more prominent in literary criticism, scholars started to examine animal scenes as representations of human engagement with the “other,” and as Barnes’ attempts to break down binary categories such as nature/culture and human/animal that buttress normative, and therefore oppressive, domestic and cultural attitudes.\textsuperscript{12} Most recently, Carrie Rohman argues that unlike other Modernist writers such as T.S. Eliot, H.G. Wells, and D.H. Lawrence, Barnes “refuses the disavowal of animality onto marginalized others” (133). Rather than abusing animal selfhood in service of a flailing human ontological supremacy, Barnes introduces “nonidentity as a form of subjectivity…where the nonlinguistic, the undecidable, and the animal serve to revise what counts as human” (133). Although these studies have effectively considered queerness and the animal separately, none have yet examined how the two marginalized subjectivities, when brought together, reveal productive cross-fertilizing vitalities that challenge corrupt taxonomic hierarchies. And perhaps more significantly, none have yet grappled with the violence embedded in Barnes’ imaginative efforts to forge these more productive environments for creatures of all kinds. I argue that attention to both aspects of Nightwood – the queer/animal consonance and the violent qualities of the narrative – are necessary to paint a fuller picture of Barnes’ cross-species advocacy.

**Self-Definition and Social Taxonomy**

The opening chapter of Nightwood, titled “Bow Down” for its emphasis on cruel social hierarchies, introduces us to the doctor, a transgender Irish gynecologist living in Paris where he has settled after traveling around the world unattached to any physical

\textsuperscript{12} For examples of these arguments about the animal in Nightwood, see Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud’s Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film*; Juliana Schiesari, *Polymorphous Domesticities*; and Andrew Kalaidjian, “The black sheep: Djuna Barnes’s dark pastoral.”
location. He represents the liminal space that exists between homes, between genders, between languages, between environments, and even between his vacillating desires for a public life and a private self. The first words the doctor speaks in the novel (and he speaks many, many words) are significant for the kind of deconstructive work Barnes undertakes. He proclaims as a form of generalization, “We all may be nature’s noblemen” (18). In this one utterance, the doctor has revealed perhaps the central tension in the novel. The statement underscores the incongruity between “nature,” a conceptual space ostensibly devoid of human political or economic designations, and the term “noblemen,” a word with the primary aim of designating one’s place within the hierarchy of human class and political structures. The nature / culture divide becomes a ubiquitous concern in all the doctor’s speeches, even compelling him at times to advise others about difference between “natural” and culturally-inscribed desires and identities. It is important to note that the doctor does not proclaim human beings as definitively “nature’s noblemen,” but rather suggests that “we all may be” overseers of the highest order, the governing species of the natural world. In this one opening remark, the doctor renders uncertain several tenets in Western ontological discourse – that human beings are the ruling class of animal within all of nature, that trait-based hierarchies are a valid form of social organization, and that the natural world exists somehow in a separate realm from the human. The earliest scenes operate as a kind of coded invitation to read the novel as a series of destabilizing moments wherein conventional beliefs are challenged in favor of what “may” happen if we allow for alternative possibilities.

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13 I use masculine pronouns to mirror Barnes’ pronoun use for the doctor throughout the novel.
As if fulfilling this promise to question hierarchies based on “natural” identities, Barnes’ first chapters explore the precarious racial identity of Felix, the husband Robin leaves to pursue a romantic life with Nora. Felix’s story destabilizes so-called “natural” positionality based on race and birthright as genetic markers of social ranking. He exists without a defined genealogy, a social outsider in every way, having descended from a Jewish-Italian father, Guido, who had fabricated his identity as a member of the Austrian aristocracy after being exiled from Italy because of his Jewish heritage. Both Guido and Felix, “heavy with impermissible blood,” surround themselves with the material products of their invented ancestry: coats of arms, symbols of “Old Europe,” two massive portraits purported to be their royal progenitors that Guido had purchased from some unknown “dusty corner” (5, 9-10). In Barnes’ formulation, Guido, and Felix as his son, embody the psychological effects of racial classification as a governing principle: “Guido had lived as all Jews do, who, cut off from their people by accident or choice, find that they must inhabit a world whose constituents, being alien, force the mind to succumb to an imaginary populace” (5). The internal landscape of Guido’s identity becomes symbolic of what Mia Spiro calls the “spectral Jewish other,” a state in which the subject’s real identity is “erased” in service of reductive stereotypes that support anti-Semitic cultural and political structures (140). Spiro further argues that novels like Nightwood contribute to a literary canon that “normalized and legitimized stereotypes in a manner that was politically and psychologically damaging to Jews at the time” (142). Spiro’s observations certainly hold some truth in terms of Barnes’ characterization of Guido and Felix as obsessed with class status and genealogical ranking; however, I would argue that it is precisely this “erasure” of identity that also allows her characters to adopt a fluid
multiplicity of traits, marking their social standing outside genetic circumscriptions, and to claim instead a class status and racial classification of their own definition. The choice of Guido and Felix to “pass” as Gentile aristocracy does indeed reveal the anti-Semitic political climate operating on their psyches, yet the fact that they function socially and politically outside their Jewish lineage, performing instead a racial identity crafted regardless of genetics, de-legitimates the so-called “natural” race-based hierarchy upon which oppressive political conditions rely. Guido and Felix live out their days as wealthy Barons simply because they have decided to do so, and, unquestioned by their community, are part of a long history of racial “passing” that destabilizes the systematic ranking of human beings based on superficial characteristics.

The tragic conditions of Felix’s birth, and his mother Hedwig’s simultaneous death, also undermine intersecting classifications of race and motherhood as socially-determined identities used to dominate and control. Hedwig’s Jewish identity contextualizes the racial dynamics surrounding Felix’s conception; indeed, Barnes indicts eugenics culture by describing Hedwig’s pregnancy as synonymous with “a well-founded suspicion as to the advisability of perpetuating that race which has the sanction of the Lord and the disapproval of the people” (3). The novel opens with these politically-fraught moments simultaneous birth and death, perhaps symbolic of the “death” of any organic form of motherhood within an environment so concerned with white racial purity. Barnes’ narrative is one of many modernist experimental novels that begin with “mothering” as a signaling trope for themes of domination and control. Appropriately, numerous recent studies have explored the politics of motherhood and reproduction in the

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14 For a brief accounting of modernist novels that open with mother figures, see Laura Doyle, *Bordering on the Body*, pp. 3-4.
modernist era, especially in terms of the expanding roles of women outside the domestic sphere, the propaganda linking reproduction with a woman’s patriotic duty to the British empire, and the changing birth and contraception practices between the wars. Laura Doyle sees these numerous mother figures as culturally and bodily encoded with historical identities of oppression, forms of control that have been lived physically and mentally by the racial and gender groups to which the mother and child belong. In the framing of motherhood as the “perpetuation” of an oppressed group, not only is the child Felix imprinted with his mother’s group-based identity, but the mother “is also the cultural vehicle for fixing, ranking, and subduing groups and bodies” in her role as the creator of individuals who are linked to either dominant or subordinate groups (Doyle Bordering 4). Juxtaposed with the inherently “natural” acts of childbirth and physical death, which exist independent of socially-constructed identity designations, Hedwig’s birth/death scene renders race-encoded language as corruptive, absurd, even profane in the context of such a life-in-death moment. Yet another layer of awful complexity arises from the fact that Hedwig dies before we even know her as a fully-developed character; one could argue, as Doyle suggests about other modernist novels, that Barnes “excises the racialized mother figure and, along with her, an entire history and set of memories embedded in the protagonist’s body” (Doyle Bordering 8). In the logic of Barnes’ novel, social hierarchies, especially those based on notions of “natural” laws, almost always

result in the violent removal of individual subjectivity, either by physical death (as with Hedwig) or by national exile (as with Guido) or by the severing of ties to an inherited social history (as with Felix).

In chapters that follow Felix’s genealogy, Barnes turns her criticism to puritanical norms governing the “nature” of gender and sexual identity. Just as racial designations were grounded in biological determinism at the turn of the twentieth century, the social sciences expanded their appropriation of evolution’s theories into nascent classification systems governing gender expression and sexual orientation. The fact that sexual “deviance” was increasingly publicized by the new mass media and by campaigns to legislate homosexuality during the time only worsened the impact of a now “legitimized” method of social exclusion. As Doctor O’Connor’s oratory permeates the narrative, Barnes crafts a vocal inhabitant of sexual theories that define nonreproductive unions as “deviant.” Dr. O’Connor, his Irishness also relegating him, like the novel’s Jewish characters, to a position among the “lower races,” lives the truth of his transfeminine gender identity largely in secret, crossdressing while secluded within his Parisian apartment. However, he often voices his preference for the amorous attentions of men, and he does not hide his queer identity from those who enter the private space of his bedroom. Additionally, his speeches celebrate same-sex desire as he counsels two

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16 See Chapter 3 in Laura Doyle’s *Bordering on the Body* for a discussion of modern scientific studies that label Irish, Jewish, and Asian identities as “lower races.”

17 Emma Heaney, in the “Note on Usage” from *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory*, defines “transfeminine” as “MAAB [male assigned at birth] people who avow a female or feminine gender identity,” often accompanied by “a range of practices (styles of dress, makeup, and grooming); vocabularies and ways of speaking….available to gay men who might only inhabit the category for a period of their life or exhibit certain trans feminine qualities while not identifying with the category” (xiv).
women to proclaim their love for each other despite having forsaken their proscribed roles as wives and mothers to do so. Barnes’ characterization of the doctor as a verbose pseudo-gynecologist who presents in traditionally feminine clothing in the presence of his friends challenges the framing of sexuality in terms of “survival of the fittest” ideology that privileges reproductive unions.

Yet far from presenting characters who are entirely liberated from strict social norms, Barnes also chronicles her characters’ suffering, their detachment from each other and their social worlds, and the many emotional traumas they experience as a result of their natures being deemed “deviant”. By documenting the corruptive effects of contemporary discourses surrounding sex and nature, Barnes’ literary advocacy anticipates the larger goals of queer ecology, anticipating the many methods by which scholars critique society’s insistence on the Darwinian model of evolutionary selection.

As many critics have noted, Nightwood represents queer experience through negation, through many moments of characters being severed from each other and from their places of origin, and through weakened states of resistance that leave characters exhausted in their strivings.18 Just as Felix and his father are cut off from physical connections to their human past, Robin and Nora are severed dramatically from each other as lovers, and are also separated from their geographic origins – Nora from America, Robin from Europe,

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18 See Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, “Queer Melancholia” for an exploration of the doctor’s melancholic loss of self; Scott Herring, Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History for the novel’s commitment to “unintelligibility” as a form of antirepresentation of homosexual identity; Ery Shin, “Djuna Barnes, History’s Elsewhere, and the Transgender” for Barnes’ work as expressive of “the historical impossibility of queer being in terms of failure, specifically a failure of self-knowledge and of social acceptance”; and Robin Blyn, The Freak-Garde: Extraordinary Bodies and Revolutionary Art in America for a discussion of characters who understand desire only in terms of absence.
and both from the home they shared together in Paris. The two women in their same-sex desire, and Doctor O’Connor in his transgender corporeality, all suffer involuntary separation from their own sexual and sexualized bodies as a result of knowing themselves only as “deviant” from an impossible “norm” that is validated by the biological sciences of the time. Emma Heaney describes this condition as symbolic of a “universal female experience of bodily dispossession” characterized by “suffering that detaches the female from her body and forces her to encounter that body as thing apart from herself” (101). Cis-women are conditioned to understand their bodies only in terms of reproductive labor, and trans feminine women are likewise taught to see their bodies only in terms of abnormal difference. As sexology, including concepts within the psychoanalysis of Freud, made more visible the homosexual and transsexual body, femininity itself was being set forth as an aspirational goal unattainable by those with “inverted” sex and gender traits. Barnes’ queer characters, in their long speeches and stifled cries, provide access to the emotional violence of female disembodiment, and, as Heaney argues, brings that experience of suffering to a wider range of female-identified bodies.

**Violence and the Animal**

Social Darwinism project of trait-based classification takes a violent psychological and emotional toll on all of the human figures in the novel. However, another violence, one that many critics have overlooked, also exists at the species level as Barnes writes nonhuman creatures into scenes that depict the raw suffering of her characters. Nonhuman animals in *Nightwood* appear in various ways associated with violence - animal enslavement in service of human entertainment, wartime militarism, racial humiliation, and the active cultural denial of certain subjectivities. At every stage
of Barnes’ embattled characters’ attempts to live out their racial and queer identities, animal scenes call attention to the strict hierarchies that put the queer and the animal at the bottom of a long chain of social identities. Carrie Rohman acknowledges Barnes’ critiques of evolutionary models “that designated white men the ‘superior’ species and descended through racialized others and women only to bottom-out at the level of the animal” (Rohman 30). Yet as this taxonomic list shows, even critics attuned to Barnes’ methods of dismantling human-animal species structures have not included queer identities, nor the violence her characters suffer, in their arguments about Barnes’ project. The moments that bring animal proximity to scenes of human brutality, especially in the “Bow Down” chapter, again show Barnes’ anticipation of more progressive aims of queer ecology as she laments the precarious subjectivities of all creatures that fill her pages.

Barnes sets much of the “Bow Down” chapter at the circus, in many ways the epitome of human brutality justified by so-called “natural” species-based hierarchies. Such enslavement of animal bodies for commercial enterprise seems an example of what Barnes describes as “cold yet hysterical abandon” of justice, exactly the kind of false hierarchy that the novel attempts to counter (4). Although Robin and Nora are featured in the circus scenes in their first moments of romantic feeling toward each other, it is Felix who initially defines the complex power dynamics between humans and the animal performers. Felix is drawn to the circus precisely for the controlled instability the activities under the tent represent:

He loved that old and documented splendor with something of the love of the lion for its tamer – that sweat-tarnished spangled enigma that, in bringing the beast to heel, had somehow turned toward him a face like his own, but which though curious and weak, had yet picked the precise fury from his brain. (14)
The pronoun confusion at the heart of this passage reveals Felix’s multiple positionalities: he aligns himself with the tamed lion who recognizes that his master is both “weak” and yet has discovered some “precise fury” that grants the master dominance; yet Felix himself also might be the one regarded by the tamer who has “picked the precise fury” from Felix’s brain as he enthusiastically observes the lion’s subjugation. In either case, Felix projects onto the lion and tamer a very human understanding of the master/slave dialectic in which each respective positionality is entirely dependent on the other for its own meaning, interestingly using the word “love” just before suggestions of sensuality in the image of the “sweat-tarnished spangled enigma.” As Felix contemplates the lion’s taming, he places himself within the power dynamics of sensuality, unaware that just beside him Robin and Nora are forming their own amorous encounter, certainly a threat to his position of patriarchal marital power. Felix’s subjectivity as both tamer and lion, powerful and powerless, consciously aware and unconsciously deceived, sensually engaged and kinetically detached from his wife, is mirrored in the grammatical slippage that disallows an exact understanding of whom in the scene Felix more closely identifies. Carrie Rohman sees the lion as mirror to Robin’s “stultification by humanist power structures that repress animality,” yet I would argue that Felix and the lion are just as aligned in their complex relation to the power structures at work on their lived experience (Rohman 145). Rohman overlooks the intense intersubjectivity that Barnes dramatizes in the meeting of “faces.” Felix, in his complicated “love” for the spectacle of the circus, both distances himself and identifies with the animal that shares space with him under the tent. Their shared “taming,” even while both maintain respectively more physical and
social strength, illuminates the interconnections and convergences between human and animal characters that define the cruel “worlding game” all creatures play.

Barnes again draws attention to the violence inherent in “natural” social hierarchies in the shared moments of trauma that impact all inhabitants of certain scenes regardless of species. In perhaps the most touching example, in one of the doctor’s earliest speeches, he invokes animals repeatedly to parallel his own state of being, which is infused with trauma as a result of his proximity to violent battles in the Great War. The doctor describes a moment during his military service when, in the midst of a bombing raid, a terrified cow refuses to enter a bomb shelter at the urging of soldiers, and as a result loses its life. The doctor gives the animal a fully-realized individual consciousness on its own terms, describing with a fitting sense of the unknown what seemed to happen to the cow at the moment of refusal: “there are directions and speeds that no one has calculated, for believe it or not that cow had gone somewhere very fast that we didn’t know of, and yet was still standing there” (26). Despite the ontological impossibility for true inter-species understanding, and despite the fact that the soldiers might doubt the cow’s undeniable sentience, the doctor nonetheless describes the animal in terms of a full, complex consciousness that cannot be either decoded or controlled by the human presence. The cow communicates, to use Derrida’s phrasing, “in a language of mute traces” that the doctor, as a co-habitant within this terrifying moment, imagines as traumatic dissociation (Derrida 387). By acknowledging the animal’s experience without claiming firm knowledge of the cow’s mind, the doctor overcomes what Derrida calls “the other violence or stupidity...that which would consist in suspending one’s compassion and in depriving the animal of every power of manifestation” (387). In her
rendering of shared wartime trauma, Barnes again asserts the centrality of violent contact as a fitting set piece for the kind of barbarity imposed upon both humans and nonhumans as they attempt to cross barriers of classification that deny possibilities for co-shaping experience.

In this scene and others, Barnes presents a series of disrupted symbolic associations that re-imagine the “natural” world as one predicated on combativeness, disorder, and aggravated loss. The aggression inherent in the modern Darwinian social experiment creates violence at the atomic level, as if attained only by inevitable seizing of self-determination and coerced self-effacement. Even Hedvig’s birthing scene, a moment that should be filled with tenderness and closeness, is marked by war-like language. Hedvig herself is described during her entrance into motherhood as “a Viennese woman of great strength and military beauty” (3), as if the mother is already embattled, already in the act of severance from the soft-hearted, impassioned loving as she anticipates her newborn’s arrival. The birthing room itself is also militarized, suggesting that Felix is born into battle, into the perversions of nature that make even his entrance into the world a kind of preparation for a lifetime of clambering to maintain one’s place amid unyielding cultural expectations: “Turning upon this field, which shook to the clatter of morning horses in the street beyond, with the gross splendour of a general saluting the flag, she named him Felix, thrust him from her, and died” (3). The “field” puts Hedvig and Felix on the front lines, as it were, of the struggle for survival, where only the “fittest” will find their way up the social ladder, while the rest are left judged, circumscribed, and suffering a continual slaying into acquiescence. The horse, with its “clattering” hooves, “shook” the “field” as if the battle has already begun, the street
outside Felix’s birthing room roaring with the coming onslaught, horses themselves in combat gear, already militarized even as the “general” makes her final “salute.” The scene politicizes the birthing process, intimating that humans are not the only ones coerced into battle by the “mandate of reproduction” and by seemingly inescapable heterosexist binaries “whose meanings are determined by military, medical, and religious authority” (Edwards 163). The whole creatural world suffers under such systems of totalitarian control; all species fight on the same battlefield against the same trait-based ideologies that elevate some and subjugate others. Here again, Barnes narrative framework enlivens the co-constitutive nature of human-animal world-making even as she places her creatures into systems that would drive “competing” species apart.

As a correlative to continuous reminders that “natural” hierarchies can devastate equally across all species, Barnes also questions the traditional social Darwinian association of animality with the basest of human behaviors. Her critique seems to anticipate animal rights philosophies that see the basic connections between objectification and abjection: “negatively conceptualizing and treating a person as an animal, a thing, or an instrument is to some degree predicated upon understanding animals, things, and instruments as devalued, mechanistic entities whose misuse has no reciprocal impact upon the user” (Edwards 10). Felix’s racial ancestry, especially the traumatic past recalled by his father Guido, which is filled with the ghosts of exiled and racially humiliated Jews in a congress of people that exemplify Mia Spiro’s invocation of “the spectral Jewish other,” reveals Barnes’ subversion of such denunciations of animality.

The autumn, binding him about, as no other season, with racial memories, a season of longing and of horror, he had called his weather. Then walking in the
Prater he had been seen carrying in a conspicuously clenched fist the exquisite handkerchief of yellow and black linen that cried aloud of the ordinance of 1468, issued by one Pietro Barbo, demanding that, with a roe about its neck, Guido’s race should run in the Corso for the amusement of the Christian populace, while ladies of noble birth, sitting upon spines too refined for rest, arose from their seats, and, with the red-gowned cardinals and the *Monsignori*, applauded with that cold yet hysterical abandon of a people that is at once unjust and happy, the very Pope himself shaken down from his hold on heaven with the laughter of a man who forgoes his angels that he may recapture the beast. (4)

Guido embodies the accumulated oppression of his ancestors, even holding in his hand a symbol of their historical degradation in a perversion of a modern circus scene with humans made to run like “animals” for the entertainment of a cheering audience. The display of human depravity described, in which presumably “refined” women, and even the Pope himself, take part in a ritual of violent racial humiliation ends with the holiest among them forsaking his “better” nature to resume a state of “beast”-like animality. The word “beast” has come to connote brutality, cruelty, unchecked predatory behavior, and the deep-seeded instinct of human beings toward perversion. Who, Barnes seems to ask, is really the “beast” in this scenario? Might we re-think the evocation of the animal to describe such a gross display of moral decrepitude? At the end of the passage, even the move toward embracing one’s “beastly” qualities is infused with violence and coerced possession; the Pope figure does not merely allow his animal instincts to take over, he “recapture[s] the beast” in a brutal reclamation of ownership. Guido’s “racial memories” of this painful event allow for the re-consideration of arbitrary social hierarchies that place some at an advantage over others. Perhaps, Barnes seems to argue, albeit in binary fashion, it is not the *beast*, but the *human* within us, that causes such abominations.

This supposition becomes even more trenchant when place alongside another kind of violence within the novel: the human use of language to deceive, control, humiliate,
and abuse. Almost as if Barnes subjects her readers to a “force-feeding” of disorientation, the notoriously difficult prose style in *Nightwood* implicates language itself as another system that perpetuates a violent erasure of subjectivity for her human and animal characters. In fact, numerous scenes express anxiety about the inherent instability of human language while human characters are in the presence of abused animals. In one of the earliest examples, Nora’s first spoken words are directly aligned with the oppressive taming of creatures at the circus where she and Robin meet. Nora overhears Robin and the doctor talking, and asks, “Are you both really saying what you mean, or are you just talking” (21)? Nora’s question arrests them as they speak, and essentially intimates an underlying distrust in the value of words as indicators of meaning. Spoken language raises suspicions of obfuscation, or, at the very least, words become the vehicle for human disconnection since language is just as often used to subdue meanings as it is used to foster understanding. As a correlative to these more insidious possibilities for human speech, Nora’s utterance takes place just within reach of animals being dominated, oppressed, silenced, and physically tormented for the purposes of human entertainment. Additionally, Nora’s role as a publicity agent for the circus gives her direct control over the human language used to advocate and advertise this infrastructure of animal enslavement.

In the “Bow Down” chapter, the doctor’s lengthy speeches instrumentalize animals to describe deprave human behaviors as correlatives to social Darwinism’s requisite forms of competition, domination, and control. These early metaphoric invocations of animals render creatures into mere words, without any sentience of their own, existing only as nonsensical, anthropomorphized habits. For example, in the
doctor’s first long speech, he meditates on heresy, megalomania, and denominational divisions within the Christian church. In doing so, he describes Martin Luther as “bawdy an old ram as ever trampled his own straw” who “went wild and chattered like a monkey in a tree and started something he never thought to start,” and calls churchgoers “as soft as a goat’s hip” (23-4). For these images to make sense, we must objectify the animals, imbue them with invented, arbitrary sets of behaviors that pertain more to the human listener than the animals themselves. Later in the same chapter, the doctor’s use of animals becomes infused with images of mutilation and bondage, animal bodies metaphorically contorted, traumatized, and destroyed as a way to name the human experience of oppression. In one of the doctor’s more abstract descriptions of amorous affection, he says: “if one gave birth to a heart on a plate, it would say ‘Love’ and twitch like the lopped leg of a frog” (30). The amputated frog is associated with the “twitch” that indicates the beginnings of love; in this way, the prose connects the mutilated animal body with an image of love that resembles trauma more than it does satisfaction. Love, a fundamental form of relationality that all creatures need to thrive, is recast here as the power of severance. This re-framing of love reminds us of Felix’s birth, which immediately cut him off from the loving body of his mother so that he, like the frog, now struggles to survive on a “plane,” or “field.” It foreshadows the many isolations of Robin and Nora, cut off from each others’ loving bodies as their fraught relationship evolves. In this first chapter of the novel, human spiritual and emotional experiences are metaphorically described as destroyed animal bodies, mere tools for abuses made possible by a profound and humiliating disconnection from the inherent value of all species.
Rohman states precisely Barnes’ dynamic project to destabilize language when she claims that in *Nightwood*, “The word as stabilizer of identity comes under consistent abuse” (134). It is true that each character both suffers from and presents radical challenges to the cultural necessity of naming, especially in terms of racial, sexual, and gender identity. Perhaps, the novel seems to suggest, an incessant emphasis on classification is the cause of most of our sorrows, for strong is the need to struggle against categorization. Nowhere are these struggles more apparent than in the doctor’s small bedroom apartment, his transgender body in repose surrounded by the myriad accoutrements of his desire to be “a bride” (36). During a visit from Nora, who aches for the lost Robin, the doctor attempts to answer Nora’s plea for help. She wants him to share the secret of overcoming emotional trauma, and she wants to know why Robin has decided to hurt her. The doctor has many words, but none that can ease her pain. Instead, he says, “Yes, we who are full to the gorge with misery should look well around, doubting everything seen, done, spoken, precisely because we have a word for it, and not its alchemy” (90). His speech intimates Barnes’ Lacanian approach to language, which calls out the chasm between signifier and signified, the symbol and what is symbolized, the names we allow each other and the “alchemies” those names fail to understand. As she works to reveal the inherent violence within systems that deny a more interconnected set of relations between humans and animals, Barnes begins at the source. She disempowers linguistic modes of bordering, designating the “word” as the ultimate betrayer of coalescence, confidence, and productive mutual dependency.
**Worlding Together**

Treatment of the animal in early sections of *Nightwood* generally corresponds to most critics’ readings of Barnes’ imagery, as either metaphoric representations of negative human qualities, or as methods to excoriate systems of domination and control. However, later chapters of the novel, I argue, move past these traditional interpretations, and instead begin to present models of cross-species cooperative world-making that progressively confounds ‘human’ and ‘animal’ as ontological categories. The destabilized binary reflects a shared, interactive form of sociality, one characterized by dynamic motion between and toward others, an informal choreography that marks, in Haraway’s words, an inter-species “dance of relating.” As mentioned earlier, some studies have addressed Barnes’ tendency to obscure boundaries regarding gender, sexuality, and racial identity, yet these studies have largely addressed this tendency in her human characters only. Barnes’ project is much more radical than these critics acknowledge. Her project does indeed aim to liberate human beings from these rigid categories, but she also aims to release both human and nonhuman animals from oppressive stratification in an outmoded humanist chain-of-being.

Barnes’ linguistic shifts toward species crossings and interconnectedness begins in the second chapter, titled “The Somnambule.” No longer imagined as tortured and mutilated, animal bodies instead begin to appear wholly formed and aligned in simile with the emotional state of human characters. Although still anthropomorphized in many

19 See Juliana Schiesar, *Polymorphous Domesticities*; and Andrew Kalaidjian, ”The black sheep: Djuna Barnes’s dark pastoral.”
ways, the use of creatural imagery begins, ever so slightly, to subvert the boundary between categories of difference, a move appropriate for a chapter about the “somnambule,” a figure who is both asleep and awake, part of the dream world yet still moving about within reality. This chapter is less about exposing systemic hierarchies, and more about Robin, the Doctor, and their animal representations existing between identities, somewhere between oppressed and oppressor, between their fixed social roles and the roles they must adopt in order to break free. Barnes’s narrator seems to endow each creature with its own singular consciousness, creating a type of representation that denies neither participant a wholly individual self that is capable of purposeful communion with others. In one example, the doctor walks alongside the church walls before Mass and is described as bathing in holy water “as if he were its single and beholding bird, pushing aside weary French maids and local tradespeople with the impatience of a soul in physical stress” (33). The simile both creates distance between, and draws in confluence, the doctor and the bird who are both breaking the moral customs of the human society in their midst. The doctor, “impatient” and seeking shelter in a community likely quite hostile to his transgender identity, is likened not to a mutilated animal body, but to a “beholding bird,” looked on, judged, and regarded as polluting the “holy water” with its impure body. Yet the simile, the “as if,” allows us to see difference as well. The diminutive creature, unlike the doctor in many ways, claims its own space regardless of its denigration by the humans in its midst, acts with dignity and confidence, and anchors the “beholding” of the onlookers as if in command of the scene. The bird, just as regarded and transgressing in its own way, seems nonetheless free of the “physical stress” the doctor feels in proximity to his oppressors.
Dr. Matthew O’Connor is later compared to a dog, not using the language of control as in earlier sections of the novel, but rather in terms that call out tenderness for both creatures. The animal here becomes much more revelatory of the doctor’s personal identity than earlier chapters; indeed, his transgender physicality and suffering body are invoked as the narrative belies contemporary norms of masculinity.

His hands (which he always carried like a dog who is walking on his hind legs) seemed to be holding his attention, then he said, raising his large melancholy eyes with the bright twinkle that often came into them: ‘Why is it that whenever I hear music I think I’m a bride? (36)

The dog, made to perform on “hind legs” as in a circus act, is presented as a singular being; he is referred to using the male pronoun, and as “who” instead of “that.” Importantly, the parenthetical indicates the presence of the third-party narrator, the interlocutor who editorializes and mediates our perspectives, perhaps allowing us a glimpse into Barnes’ stake in this personal advocacy. The doctor’s wrists and hands maintain a posture similar to the performing dog, made to walk “unnaturally” on two legs, bringing to mind also the pejorative stereotype of the queer male figure who reveals his homosexuality with a lilt of the wrist. The comparison, then, is complicated in that in her simile, Barnes both represents and mocks the doctor’s social body. The doctor and the dog each suffer similar performative conditions - both must contort themselves to uphold a set of rigorous social expectations, and neither has the cultural permission to feel comfortable in his own body. Barnes draws the dog into the doctor’s “melancholy” and sense of loss as the music calls to his mind the impossibility of ever becoming a “bride”; yet simultaneously, the “bright twinkle” and dance-like quality of the scene suggests an optimistic fantasy life that lives outside the stultifying effects of social control.
These scenes reflect the queer ecological ideal that Timothy Morton describes as the “mesh” of inter-species relating, an “open-ended concatenation of interrelations” between creatures of all kinds as they co-constitute the meaning within shared environments (275). This sense of togetherness evolves even further in Barnes’ intimate description of Robin Vote’s dressing room. As the doctor calls on his patient, birds no longer merely represent human qualities, but rather they embody physical space alongside the human characters, notably similar to the doctor’s wartime story about the traumatized cow. The birds are literally present, in motion, feeling their own pain and neglect while Robin Vote lay supine,

surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly over-sung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten – left without the usual silencing cover, which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives. (37)

Unseen and forgotten, yet present, heard, and uncloaked, the characters and their animal friends each attempt to make themselves known by others whose attentions elude them. In the Parisian back rooms of the novel, all of Barnes animal characters - human and nonhuman - fight against invisibility, and are “caged” by those who follow the dictates of sexual and gender norms. Robin especially relates to the “unseen” birds in her identity as a lesbian woman, hidden from public view both legally and socially, who has forsaken her role as the “good housewife” in order to pursue sexual desire. Likewise, the doctor’s position legally, culturally, and even professionally is precarious at best as a result of his transgender identity. The doctor, Robin and the birds each struggle in their own way to appear fully in the world, drawing them all together in a shared “silencing” that exists across species.
This section of the novel progressively blurs boundaries between the ontological categories of “beast” and “human,” thereby deepening Barnes’ expression of a cross-species aesthetic. Robin Vote, described in various states of an evolutionary trajectory, begins as an untamed “beast” and ends with only the visceral memory of her animal past. Early in the chapter, Robin is “timeless behind the lids – the long unqualified range in the iris of wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye” (41). In her “timeless” state of pre-domestication, Robin’s animal self exists in a liminal world of becoming “tamed” enough to commune with the human world. The human-animal binary is strong in these descriptions, yet the passage also reflects a tone of mourning as Robin’s cultural conditioning draws her “focus down” to meet the corruptive human world, shrinking her “range” of vision into a progressively tunneled perspective. Later in the chapter, Barnes describes Robin as “a woman who is beast turning human” (44). The progress toward the human has depleted her creatural energies, as if to say it is the “human” in her that limits her creative consciousness, leaves her abjected and judged by her human counterparts. Robin exhibits “the quality of the ‘way back’ as animals do;” she is fully human in body, yet marked by the social memory of her beastly ancestors who, in Barnes’ estimation, live their memories as a “quality” rather than a “past” (44). Barnes’ narrative choices both re-inscribe and dissolve the human/animal binary within Robin. She is imagined as simultaneously “woman” and “beast” and “human,” yet she is also defined by her defiance of all categories. In Rohman’s reading, “Robin cannot be described with one word or term. She defies the power of the signifier to represent the implied signified” (143). Barnes’s destabilizes ontological states precisely by destabilizing the language used to reinforce them, and by removing the power of
linguistic circumscription that admit to a being’s sentience only when defined within specific categories.

Cross-species, communal world-making also happens during the coming together of Robin and Nora under the circus tent. The animal performers themselves bring Nora and Robin into each other’s awareness; Nora had not yet noticed Robin sitting next to her, yet when animals begin to encircle the ring, “the orbit of their light seemed to turn on [Robin]” (59). As the “light” focuses on Robin’s figure, Nora turns and notices her for the first time. The animals in this scene are the “actors” in more ways than one; not only do they perform their feats at the behest of their human tamers, but their energies also coalesce with the two women in one grand “enmeshment” given center stage in the “orbit of their light.” As one critic notes, “Robin and Nora’s relationship emerges through their mutual recognition of the currents that run between human and animal” (Edwards 170).21 Edwards’ reading becomes perhaps most clear in the moment the two women’s eyes first meet, which happens just as a lion emerges from its cage to position itself directly opposite Robin. The rest of the passage recalls the ambiguous pronoun references reflected in other circus moments between Felix and the lion. In this section of the scene, though, the pronoun “her” is undefined – the “her” could be Robin, or it could refer to the lion who just enters the scene. When “her eyes flowed in tears that never reached the surface,” we are unsure whether they are tears of the lioness, or of Robin, especially given that they are their both in many ways “tamed,” “caged,” and made to perform a mockery of their identities. This seemingly purposeful grammatical slippage allows the narrator to frame this moment as one of unitary consciousness, not by way of metaphor,

21 Erin Edwards in The Modernist Corpse argues that both animals and corpses exist as abject cultural forms, and provide posthuman challenges to what constitutes sentient life.
which renders one entity absent of tangible form, but rather by linguistic indeterminacy, which gives both characters a bodily presence, but draws them together in a much more profound set of co-forming psychic resonances.

As the novel concludes, the setting shifts away from the urban landscapes marked by human architecture, and toward the countryside which is less directly manipulated by human forms of environmental control. In these later scenes, the animal characters no longer suffer extreme forms of human cruelty; they are no longer caged, tamed, or silenced. Barnes’ poetic voice instead crafts a much more complicated set of physical interactions between human and nonhuman. Both species are seen “in the wild,” so to speak, inverting the environmental dynamics seen in in much of the novel. This marked change appears through the “America” section of the novel as Robin and Nora hunt each other down, seek each other almost as prey, each willing to sacrifice themselves to play their part in the blinded dance of charged desire. In one scene, Robin has left Jenny to travel on foot toward “Nora’s part of the country” (177). As she roams the countryside, sleeping in the woods, foraging for food, allowing her animal self to take charge, she looks to the animals around her for guidance. She speaks in a “low voice,” rendering almost mute her human sounds, and seems to desire a shared emotional violence: “Those that came near, she grasped, straining their fur back until their eyes were narrowed and their teeth bare, her own teeth showing as if her hand were upon her own neck” (177). Robin forces the creatures in her path to match her own bodily form, consumed, threatened, kinetically enthralled with another’s unreachable body. Her form of domination involves direct touch, a physical contortion of the animal’s body as her own body is contorted in their likeness. Robin seems to dissolve as a consciousness in this
scene, allowing the animality within her to rise up, to coalesce with the living bodies that surround her, to formulate a web of intimacy in which she is both spinner and the one caught, wriggling with “bared teeth” as she tries to get free from her own trap, struggling “as if her hand were upon her own neck.” She is certainly engaging in a domineering animal entanglement here, yet Robin’s coercion has little to do with species-based social hierarchies; instead, she seems to operate “in the wild” herself, forging a material coexistence with the life forms in her environment. The human animal is not an interloper in this wild scene, but rather a vital force in its co-creation.

The final coming together of Robin and Nora in the woods begins with the sound of a dog’s “barking and whining.” Both women hear the dog sounding its language, warning Nora of an intruder on her land, and calling Robin further toward the house. Indeed, “It is an animal tongue, rather than a human tongue gifted with speech, that dominates the end of the novel” (Edwards 171). Eventually, the three creatures come together in the tiny white chapel adjacent to Nora’s home, a fitting space for the forging of spiritual communion. Robin’s body “goes down,” in another inversion of the “bowing” to hierarchy that begins the novel, and becomes locked in bodily struggle with the dog. Robin performs the canine herself in the engagement; she and the dog mirror each other, and finally collapse in mutual exhaustion.

Then she began to bark also, crawling after him – barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. The dog began to cry then, running with her, head-on with her head, as if to circumvent her; soft and slow his feet went padding. He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (180)
Robin’s voice takes canine shape, while the dog begins to perform a human “cry” - the “dance of relating” finally rests not in words, but in exchange, a crossing of sounded borders as the two consciousnesses blend in a choreography of interwoven energies. Human and nonhuman bodies align in a clash of subjectivity, at first violent, as if in chaotic battle, “weeping,” and frenetically going “this way and that.” The dance is not peaceful; nor is it easy. It exhausts, distorts time and space, depletes both participants until they come to rest together, touching each other as they “lay down” alongside each other in a moment of fraught sharing. Edwards sees this final scene as a “trans-specied birth of something unknown and rich with possibility between the human and the nonhuman” (171), while another Barnes critic notes that this closing moment “exceeds the text’s perceptual capacities, leaving its mysteries suspended and unknowable” (Rada 177). Yet these “unknown” moments full of “mysteries” are knowable, I would argue, when we look beyond the mere human, when we step outside our anthropocentric perspective to read the scene as a “worlding game” carried out between creatures in that tiny woodland chapel. Only then, as we begin to realize the extent of these choreographies of coalescence, perhaps then we might realize what Derrida reminds us, that “in these moments of nakedness, under the gaze of the animal, everything can happen...” (381).
“The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.”

--Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic”

The storied history of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) includes sensationalized trials for indecency that brought notoriety to its author, hero-worship of its protagonist who lived openly as a lesbian woman with unabashed pride in her relationships, and its citation within sexual science literature of the time as an in-depth study of a masculine-identified woman. However, one of the most fascinating aspects of the novel is its dedication to the enigmatic trilogy called “Our Three Selves.” The triptych refers to Hall and two of her female lovers, one of them deceased, and one with whom Hall lived until her own death in 1943. The fusion of the three lovers into the one body of the author illuminates Hall’s mystical sensibility and her unflinching celebration of same-sex connections that transcend the physical nature of romantic union. Indeed, Elizabeth English cites Hall’s spiritual beliefs as “operating on the premise that the nature and boundaries of human existence and reality are not fully accounted for by rationalist
or materialist modes of thinking [and therefore] offered a compelling relevance for
lesbian women’s lives” (60).22

The first of these two lovers, Mabel Batten, was twenty-three years Hall’s elder
when the two women met. Batten was married at the time, but when her husband died in
1910, she and Hall began living together in a domestic partnership. During the few years
of their life together, Hall began writing poetry and short prose, converted to Catholicism,
adopted the name “John,” and for a time, worked as a recruiter for British military forces
during World War I. These years were productive for Hall’s career as a writer and for
her evolving advocacy of queer identities and relationships. However, over time, Batten’s
health began to suffer from age-related illnesses, and in 1914, after a car accident left her
unable to walk, her health declined even more rapidly. Batten’s medical problems
frustrated Hall, and when Batten’s younger cousin Una Troubridge came to visit in 1915,
she and Hall began an affair that would eventually lead to their declaration of marriage.

After Troubridge’s visit, the partnership between Batten and Hall deteriorated into
violent arguments despite Batten’s ill health. During one particularly vehement
disagreement, Batten suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died immediately. Hall
witnessed the moment of Batten’s death, and afterward experienced feelings of intense
guilt that would remain with her for the rest of her life. As a result of her deeply
superstitious outlook, along with her belief in mysticism and the paranormal, Hall felt
Batten’s ghostly presence for many years, even as she built a new life with Troubridge.
In Jodie Medd’s view, “paranormal communications provided Hall with not only a means

22 For a list of other works that represent female-centered relationships after the death of
one partner, see Elizabeth English, “‘Ghost Desire’: The Lesbian Occult and Natalie
Clifford Barney’s The One Who Is Legion or A.D’s After-Life.”
of maintaining, even deepening, her relationship with her dead beloved, but also the
‘medium’ for Hall and Troubridge to develop their relationship” (Medd “Seances” 205).
Perhaps as a result of their close proximity to death and encounters with the spirit world,
Hall and Troubridge together began a program of psychical research, eventually co-
authoring articles on the paranormal.

Their research, along with their same-sex union, led academic contemporaries of
Hall and Troubridge to level against them accusations of gross indecency and immorality.
In response, Hall brought a libel suit in 1920 against St. George Fox-Pitt, a fellow
member of the Society for Psychical Research. The outcome of the trial was
inconclusive, but in defending herself from the accusations, Hall began her lifelong
public defense of lesbianism, and in the process aimed to validate publicly her
relationships with both Batten and Troubridge. These efforts, as Medd argues, confirm
Hall’s central place within the history of legislating lesbianism, and combined with
obscenity trials over homosexual content in The Well of Loneliness, increasingly brought
lesbian experience into public view, which in turn created a need for British parliament to
debate whether to criminalize lesbian behavior (Medd 212). As a direct result of Hall’s
efforts, the term “lesbian” entered public and legal discourse during an integral time
when queer identities were also increasingly represented by a burgeoning mass media
culture.

Hall’s social advocacy is directly connected to the novel’s dedication, a
proclamation of her cosmic, deeply-felt union with both Batten and Troubridge, one in
death and one in life. The artist subsumes the two lovers, refashions them into more than
mere memories or impressions, but rather into her own bodily form, her own individual
sense of self, three separate entities that comprise the substance of one single consciousness. Medd describes the lovers as “mystically intertwined” in a corporeal and spiritual union that made them each indistinguishable from the writer herself (210).

Hall’s dedication reflects her belief in the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings, and in the centrality of erotic desire in her vision of such communion. As our bodies and minds touch and influence each other, each one listening and responding to the other within the mutual choreography of romance, human beings, too, experience what Haraway calls the “dance of relating” between individuals within a shared social history. The dedication in essence represents the same kind of inter-being that Barnes so deftly captures in her prose; the “three selves” represent an experiential connection that is predicated on a deeper sense of sharing than mere bodily proximity. In this way, Hall’s erotic sensibility mirrors Audre Lorde’s description of sensual joy between two creatures acting as a “bridge” that “lessens” the “threat of difference” (56). In Hall’s expression of this idea, bodily energy, motion, and spiritual intimacy all combine to create a matrix of fused consciousness, and in so doing present possibilities for interconnectivity between all creatures. This concept of intimate awareness not only presages Lorde’s understanding of the erotic, but also connects to Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy of circulation and relational exchange and foreshadows more modern theories of relationality that emphasize dynamic, rather than static, networks of sociality as constitutive of lived experience. Hall’s dedication also challenges binary thinking in its very three-ness and defies contemporary beliefs that queer unions exist only in the physical realm.

Just as Djuna Barnes centered her challenge to social norms within the inherent violence of social hierarchies and the often brutal kinetic energies required to break free
from those structures, Hall bases her own similar social advocacy not in violent comings-together, but in the intense sensuality between beings as they refuse to accept artificially proscribed physical and psychological separations. Hall, like Barnes, uses her work to re-frame cultural views on so-called “natural” identities; yet unlike Barnes, who provides a counter-argument to Darwinian social formations, Hall remains rooted in the realm of the erotic by invoking advances in sexual science to contextualize her female protagonist’s homosexuality and traditionally masculine gender performance. In her engagement with the erotic as a harmonizing force, Hall also writes numerous scenes wherein characters from across divides based on class, race, and species reach out to each other physically, and seems to intimate that only the erotic (as Lorde articulates it) can traverse deeply-ingrained social markers that sever possibilities for communion. Hall’s social advocacy also engages with queer notions of futurity during scenes of inter-species communication, seeming to argue that inter-connectedness between all creatures relies on willing trust in hopeful visions for the future. In this way, Hall presents an apt model for queer ecological thinking; indeed, environmental advocacy relies on a hopeful imagination to act on behalf of unknown future generations.

**Social Advocacy and “Natural” Identity**

In her attempts to forge new social dynamics that challenge contemporary conceptions of what is “natural,” Hall might be one of the earliest twentieth-century queer ecologists. In *The Well of Loneliness*, she actively engages in debates over so-called “natural” forms of gender and sexual expression, and uses her protagonist to advocate for progressive theories of queer identity within cultural and sexual studies. Stephen Gordon represents a female “invert,” to use the term from contemporary
sexology, and suffers intense spatial injustices as a result. She is ejected from her childhood home and is unwelcome in both London and Paris where she attempts to establish herself. Stephen also presents the image of the “new woman” who is self-sufficient financially and engages in traditionally masculine occupations. She is not only an openly-lesbian writer, but also drives an ambulance during World War I, and expresses many anxieties typical of women unwilling to return to second-class citizenship after war service. Hall purposely appropriates the term “invert” to challenge its inherent bias that presupposes the overthrow some “natural” order governing gender and sexual identity. This “natural” order, of course, is hierarchical, predicated on the Western patriarchal cultural norm of dominance and control. Indeed, in Hall’s advocacy for queer identities, she employs both animals and human “inverts” to illustrate the displaced, caged, hunted, and domesticated creatures that suffer as a result of an unbending “natural order.”

Scholars of Hall’s fiction have largely overlooked such investigations into the concept of “natural” identity. Most critical studies have instead focused on her advocacy against evolving moves to legislate homosexuality and her work’s place within rising patriotic nationalism during and after the Great War. Scholars have examined the many trials for libel, slander, and indecency that centered on elements of Hall’s life and work, arguing that these ordeals created conditions for a more liberal public consciousness toward narratives of lesbian desire. It is true that The Well of Loneliness was published during a time when changes to penal codes on both sides of the Atlantic punished homosexual behavior in increasingly severe ways; however, Hall’s advocacy extended

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23 Emma Heaney expands the phrase “New Woman” to include trans women and “masculine women.”
well past the legal realm. According to Richard Dellamora, Hall’s biographer, the litigious nature of Hall’s world led her toward conscious advocacy for the acceptance of queer identities; indeed, her work became a kind of call to action to “enable the public existence of sexual inverts” (186). Dellamora quotes from the book jacket of the first edition of *The Well of Loneliness*, likely written by Hall herself, as an indicator of her role as a social revolutionary:

> The novel handles very skillfully a psychological problem which needs to be understood in view of its growing importance. In England hitherto the subject has not been treated frankly outside the region of scientific textbooks, but that its social consequences justify a broader and more general treatment is likely to be the opinion of thoughtful and cultured people. (qtd. in Dellamora 189)

Dellamora explores Hall’s belief that the institution of marriage should be extended to same-sex unions, even when many of her Sapphic friends disagreed. Other scholars of Hall’s work, such as Gretchen Busi and Jodie Medd, have explored Hall’s many forms of social advocacy of queer inclusivity, arguing that many of her representations of queer gender and sexual identities foreshadow more modern views about socially-inscribed gender performativity and the fluidity of sexual desire.

While these studies have provided much useful context for the power of Hall’s work in her cultural moment, scholars have not yet examined Hall’s engagement with the erotic as a form of social re-conditioning beyond what contemporary science deemed “natural” sexual behavior. This task is ultimately an ecological one; by examining the ways in which organisms relate to one another sexually, and the way they perform their gendered selves, Hall invites her readers to see the rigid social and moral codes that govern such activity as the interloper, the force that keeps humans (and animals) from expressing the relational identity that holds to internal truths beyond social convention
and anticipated negative outcomes. As she stakes her claims in what we would now call queer ecology by exposing heterosexist ideologies within rhetoric about the natural world, Hall makes no secret of her interest in contemporary sexual scientists who were presenting theories that explore queer identities and same-sex desire. In an early scene in the novel, Stephen’s sympathetic father, Sir Phillip, pores over the work of the sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in an attempt to understand his daughter’s masculine behavior, and the influence of sexual scientists such as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Havelock Ellis can be traced throughout the novel as well.24 Ellis even wrote a short forward praising the novel for its accurate and empathetic portrayal of a sexual “invert.”

The relatively new science of sexology offered the public a more clinical view of same-sex desire than they had received over time from religious and other conservative organizations. Furthermore, due to a burgeoning mass media, fairly obscure academic work of scientists and psychiatrists made its way into the public sphere via publicized trials that used their theories to either criminalize or to gain acceptance for nontraditional behaviors. Sexual scientists attempted to understand sexuality not simply as a segment of one’s identity that can be changed by choice, but as a constitutive social and biological force that cannot be chosen by the individual. In this way, many sexual theories became crucial messages for advocates working to decriminalize homosexuality and to educate physical and mental health professionals. As a result of a more public sexual science, many gains were made in separating same-sex desire from associations with “sinful” behavior denounced by religious conservatives. Hall’s novel presents a model of these

24 For an in-depth review of contemporary sexual science of the early 20th century, see Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, *Sexology Uncensored* and *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desire*; and Laura Doan and Jane Garrett, *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Culture.*
new ideas - a character of strong moral substance who exists outside rigid social codes formulated from conceptions of the “natural.”

Social scientists that influenced Hall’s work held many different theories regarding the origins of same-sex desire. Some held to Victorian models of homosexual consciousness in which a female “soul” is trapped in a male body, or vice versa. This “third sex” model was put forward by sexologists Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebing but was given a broader audience in Britain by the influential sexual scientist Edward Carpenter (Waters 166). In his widely-distributed study The Intermediate Sex (1896), Carpenter writes,

It is beginning to be recognized that the sexes do not or should not normally form two groups hopelessly isolated in habit and feel from each other, but that they rather represent the two poles of one group – which is the human race; so that while certainly the extreme specimens at either pole are vastly divergent, there are great numbers in the middle region who…are by emotion and temperament very near to each other. (48)

Krafft-Ebing’s work Psychopathia Sexualis, published in twelve volumes from 1886-1903, provides the foundation for much early twentieth-century sexual science. In this vast study, he argues that sex and gender are encoded involuntarily into the identities of individual human beings, and therefore are irreversible. As progressive as his theories were, his analysis of what he termed the sexual “invert” conflates gender and sexuality, and thus (mis)directs his readers to associate same-sex desire with gender nonconformity. He also outlined a “four-stage typology” of individuals transitioning into their homosexual identity. First, individuals experience sexual feelings for his or her own gender; next, personality begins to conform to social expectations for the gender “opposite” from the one assigned at birth; next, physical sensation, including sex acts, “feel” more associated with the new gender identity; and finally, the subject changes their sexuality completely amid a state of “paranoia” regarding their sexual identity (Storr 16).
Krafft-Ebing’s influence led many women authors, including Radclyffe Hall, to present queer characters who follow this trajectory, and as a result many of these creations exhibit traditionally masculine physical and psychological characteristics.

Although Krafft-Ebing’s theories became widely known via public trials and print media, many other sexual scientists put forth theories of their own. Havelock Ellis, another major voice in the burgeoning field of sexology, believed homosexuality to be a congenital condition, and as such looked to endocrinology to explain hormonal anomalies that result in homosexual desire. In his foundational *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897), Ellis attempts to dissuade psychologists and others from attempting to “cure” homosexuality:

> Sexual inversion, therefore, remains a congenital anomaly, to be classed with other congenital abnormalities which have psychic concomitants […] The treatment of homosexuality must be approached with discrimination, caution, and skepticism. Nowadays we can have but little sympathy with those who, at all costs, are prepared to ‘cure’ the invert. (57)

Ellis, as do most of his colleagues, conflates gender and sexuality, but nonetheless he was a vocal advocate for gender and sexual nonconforming individuals.

Otto Weininger, a contemporary sexologist who has been heavily criticized for anti-Semitism and extreme misogyny, nonetheless put forward theories that were used often during the first half of the twentieth century by those advocating for the decriminalization of homosexual activity. Weininger argued that “man” and “woman” represent “ideal” rather than real types; therefore every individual contain aspects of both genders, both anatomically and psychologically. He also argues that all individuals exhibit traits of both heterosexuality and homosexuality, and because of this belief, he firmly rejects all practices established to “cure” homosexual behavior. Weininger
presents an early model for understanding gender and sexuality as part of a spectrum of
identity, and is an early advocate for individuals to be granted rights according to their
specific traits, rather than according to membership in any gender-based group
(Weininger 58). These and other theories on the pioneering edge of contemporary sexual
science influenced Hall’s literary imagination, and as part of her advocacy, she crafts
characters emblematic of “natural” queer identity.

This brief outline of sexological studies that influenced Hall is meant to provide
some context for her engagement in conversations about the construction of gender and
sexuality, and the need to re-evaluate social hierarchies predicated on trait-based identity
markers. Critics have examined her advocacy for queer identities based on contemporary
sexual science, and in turn have missed Hall’s movement toward cross-species relating in
her writing about animals. In The Well of Loneliness, Hall challenges the hierarchical
chain-of being system by presenting both human and animal bodies in sensual contact
with each other and with the physical world. Animals in Stephen’s life do not function as
mere metaphors for the human character’s state of mind, but rather each has an identity in
its own right, forged through the body even more than via thoughts and emotions. As her
animals receive and return Stephen’s love, and simultaneously engage with their
surroundings, through touching, kissing, petting, and shared movement, Hall avoids
assumptions about the animal’s identity, inner world, perceptions, or capacity for world-
making. The animals are written as sentient beings with whom Stephen interacts on a
sensual level without the authorial voice claiming ownership of relationship. In this way,
Hall’s challenge to social status based on traits, including species, becomes rooted not in
violence, as in Barnes’ work, but rather in the eroticism that “forms a bridge between the
sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and [that] lessens the threat of their difference” (Lorde 56).

Although often neglecting environmental concerns, several critics have examined animal characters in Hall’s fiction. These studies are the closest Hall scholars have come to an ecological approach, yet so far they have accounted primarily for the role of horses as proxies for Stephen’s sexual desire for women, which cannot be expressed in public for fear of humiliation or ostracization. Although they have rightly noted the sensuality in the cross-species connections, these critics have missed opportunities to draw conclusions about Hall’s erotic aesthetic and about her larger ecological project of reclaiming perverse appropriations of the “natural.” For example, Natalie Hansen argues that in Hall, “horses nurture alternative trajectories for female embodiment and subjectivity,” and that Stephen Gordon, as the proverbial young girl emotionally attached to her horse, “both sexualizes the cross-species relationship and co-opts riding as a form of training in female domesticity” (1). Similarly, Mary Armstrong argues that horses in The Well of Loneliness “operate as ersatz objects of desire” and as such, connect a love for animals to a new kind of “inversion” that seeks alternative forms of expressing desires for emotional attachment. While these critics have hinted at Hall’s queer ecological view, they tend to relegate animals to their roles as substitutes for unattainable sexual companionship, rather than staking claims about Hall’s overarching vision for queer advocacy. Animals in Hall’s fiction serve a more profound purpose than as stand-ins for forbidden romantic desire; indeed, the ubiquity of animals within Stephen Gordon’s queer social world allows us to explore inter-species relational dynamics that might model progressive ways of inclusivity for all creatures.
Stephen and the Aesthetics of Desire

As a child, Stephen Gordon becomes deeply attached to a horse named Collins, a relationship that establishes the novel’s logic of inter-species communion. Throughout her story, Hall’s gender nonconforming protagonist experiences pervasive spatial injustice, at home, in her village, in London and Paris, during her military service, and even in the spaces where she pursues her professional goals as a writer. Perhaps as a result of persistent feelings of alienation and isolation, Stephen consistently seeks the company of animals – namely horses and dogs – as she attempts to negotiate her identity within the surroundings that confine her. These cross-species communions progressively dissolve the human-animal binary, not only in the profound emotional connections Stephen feels for her animal friends, but in Stephen’s language, which does not distinguish between species, and which creates an equivalency between her romantic partners and the animals that populate her environment.

This series of animal co-habitations begins with Collins, who is named after a female house servant with whom Stephen had become infatuated at the age of twelve. Collins, who only learns about the infatuation after seeing Stephen’s violent jealousy when she develops an interest in a young man, was dismissed from the household after Stephen’s feelings became known. The horse, as a gift from her sympathetic father, was meant to replace for Stephen that traumatic loss of companionship. Soon after the horse arrives, Stephen begins to spend all her free time with her new horse friend, gradually overcoming the feelings of despair she felt at the ending of her first, though unrequited, romantic attachment. Over the course of her connection to the horse, Stephen’s language
during her descriptions of Collins begins to lack any sense of species-based
differentiation between the animal and the human the horse was meant to replace.

For Collins now had a most serious rival, one who had lately appeared at the
stables. He was not possessed of a real housemaid’s knee, but instead, of four
deply thrilling brown legs – he was two up on legs, and one up on a tail, which
was rather unfair on Collins! (39)

Stephen knows the horse is meant to replace the subject of her forbidden amorous
affection, so she begins the mental process of exchanging one for the other almost
immediately.

In these comparisons, Stephen focuses solely on bodies, her diction often
revealing an erotic, almost visceral spontaneity; the woman’s “housemaid’s knee”
becomes Collins’ four “thrilling brown legs,” a daring and irresistibly playful description
that renders the horse almost “sexy” in its evocation of sensation and movement. The
conflation of horse and housemaid begets what Stephen deems a “rivalry” at best “unfair”
since, of course, Collins the woman could never hope to compete with the horse’s four
legs to her two, and the horse’s possession of a tail only confirms his superior status.

Stephen gives little thought to species in her comparisons; the two Collins occupy equally
the same devotional space within Stephen’s affections and consciousness. In the absence
of human romantic companionship, Stephen quickly allows the nonhuman body to garner
the same “thrill” she felt at the sight of the desired woman’s body.

Hall’s narrative becomes problematic when considered from a class perspective;
in fact, the conflation of servants and animals as subjects of a common “master’s” desire
might seem downright insulting. Especially when viewed from the perspective of
traditional species-based hierarchies, ones that place human beings in the upper echelons
of a hypothetical “chain of being,” the substitution of servant for animal indicates a
dismissal of the basic humanity of the female housemaid.\textsuperscript{25} This interpretation is reinforced by what we know about Hall’s overt social conservatism, which is often at odds with her activist fiction, and her “support for the patriarchal system that upheld the class structure that privileged her (Doan “A Woman’s” 93). Hall often proclaimed the superiority of bourgeois women, and appreciated the English class system that allowed upper class women to define themselves against the “mediocrity” of lower-class women (Todd 22).\textsuperscript{26} At first glance, this scene of transmutation reveals in Hall a tendency to use the servant class woman as a mere “erotic prop” who is “idyllically posed on the margins of narrative space” to arouse the sexual desire of the protagonist (Levy 52). In concert with Hall’s conservatism, this interpretation seems plausible, and perhaps even unassailable. Yet restriction of the servant/animal conflation in Hall’s novel to such an equivalency misses a chance to place this scene in the larger context of Hall’s social advocacy, which challenges those who relegate non-normative erotic connections to categories of perversion and sexual deviance. If Hall seeks to reclaim modes of social connection beyond the cis-gender heterosexual union, then perhaps Stephen’s love for both horse and woman reveals a more nuanced attempt by Hall to envision sets of erotic

\textsuperscript{25} Very little has been written about class and lesbian eroticism in Hall’s fiction; however, many studies of Virginia Woolf engage in this kind of inquiry. Such studies provide valuable insight into ways in which class and lesbian desire intersect. See Heather Levy, “‘Julia Kissed Her, Julia Possessed Her’: Considering Class and Lesbian Desire in Virginia Woolf’s Shorter Fiction” and “‘These Ghost Figures of Distorted Passion’: Becoming Privy to Working-Class Desire in “The Watering Place” and “The Ladies Lavatory”; Stuart N. Clarke, “‘Betty Flanders [Is] of a Lower Class than Mrs. Barfoot’: Discuss”; Nick Hubble, “Common People: Class, Gender and Social Change in the London Fiction of Virginia Woolf, John Sommerfield and Zadie Smith”; and Laura Doyle, “Introduction: What’s Between Us”.

\textsuperscript{26} For an exploration of the seemingly paradoxical movement of “conservative modernism” see Laura Doan, “‘A Woman’s Place Is the Home’: Conservative Sapphic Modernity.”
relations beyond such limiting hierarchical structures such as class and species. Additionally, both Hall and her narrator hold an intense, unconditional love for the animals in their worlds; if Stephen is allowing the servant woman into that realm of devotion, the narrative move seems to dissolve class boundaries, rather than to reinforce them. Both Collins the woman and Collins the horse enter the deepest corners of Stephen’s as yet unearthed romantic desire; in this way, intimacy takes on the character of what Irigaray might term an “ethical relation,” one that does not subsume or usurp the individual definition of the “Other,” but rather “makes otherness intimate and procreative” as two bodies recognize and respond to each other in shared erotic space (Berman “Ethical” 152-3). In fact, the social marginalization of each of the three characters – Collins the woman based on her class status, Collins the animal based on his species, and Stephen based on her sexual “inversion” – allow all of these identity markers to create “creatures of imagined possibility [within] features of fierce and ordinary reality” (Haraway 4). In other words, this triangulated erotic system that incorporates several trait-based identity configurations allows for what queer theory in general, and queer ecology specifically, hold in very close focus: those “patterns of attachment we hadn’t even yet known to notice, patterns in which sexuality and intimacy are enacted in a broad field of social relations that anchor us to life” (Micir 347).

As the friendship between Stephen and the horse Collins grows, the narrative eros allows for Stephen’s queer identity to flourish. Soon, rather than merely accepting, Stephen decides that she prefers her equine companion over the departed woman: “she grew to adore the smell of the stables; it was far more enticing than Collins’ perfume” (39). The inherent sensuality of the passage is notable; the stables metonymically become
the natural “smells” of hay, excrement, and animal leather, while her former infatuation becomes the much less “enticing” scent of artificially-applied chemical “perfume.”

Stephen is drawn here not only to the horse himself, but to the stables’ association with organic matter, a state of nature that defies the more socially-acceptable smells expected of young women. Stephen’s increasing adoration of outdoor spaces, traditionally associated with masculinity, cause Stephen’s mother to question why her daughter spends so much time grooming her horse, rather than caring for her own hair, body, and clothing. Stephen’s attention to the stables becomes a source of anxiety in the household as the young girl disassociates herself from expectations of femininity, and instead begins to speak and dress in ways appropriate for outdoor physical labor. After being scolded by her mother for her desire to spend more time in the stables, Stephen herself begins to question her gendered identity. She starts to realize that her desires do not coincide with the feminine concerns and activities she is expected to perform, most clearly from her mother but also from her father and families in nearby estates. After much anxious analysis of her own desires, Stephen expresses the psychic exhaustion of such abstract investigations when she proclaims, “It was dreadfully worrying, all this hard thinking, when you wished to enjoy a new pony!” (39) Stephen’s break into the second person here at the precise moment of meta-cognitive awareness reveals a subtle slippage in her self-identification. She is not an “I” here, but rather she refers to herself as the more abstracted “you.” Stephen’s closeness to Collins, the horse, allows her to start separating herself from the identity she has been culturally instructed to perform, and from the traumatic feelings that come with seeming out of place in one’s own home environment.
This moment becomes the first of many in which Stephen distances herself from the emotional trauma of her own displacement.

**Dynamic Intimacies**

Many of Hall’s human characters experience social exclusion that sends them searching for physical spaces, both intimate and geographical, where they can live out their identities without fear of harassment or dislocation. As they move from home to home, city to city, country to country, these queer characters present a state of constant circulation that perhaps allows them a *more* natural vision of communicative exchange between those with whom they decide to dwell. Their attempts to find connections outside a system of social classification invariably lead them to special friendships with animals – horses and dogs, primarily - in intimacies of social exchange marked by common bonds of oppression. In *The Well of Loneliness*, queer space and animal space become synonymous; wherever Stephen finds a place for release from anxiety, or a sense of well-being and comfort, undoubtedly one of her horses or her dog will be present to receive her affections. Stephen’s connections to two horses, Collins and Raftery, respectively, and a Welsh Spaniel named David illustrate a vision of co-forming experience *not* modeled on Darwinian hierarchy, but shared within an equitable environment of lateral circulation, a dance of energies as bodies move together in an exchange of caring and empathy.

In the case of the horse Collins’, this kind of interconnectedness happens on a spiritual, almost mystical level and in a sense, both reinforces and problematizes Hall’s goal of presenting an equitable series of exchanges that challenge the human/animal binary. Stephen asserts profound imaginative control over the horse Collins’ narrative
identity, not only by naming the horse Collins, but also by dictating that the horse is no longer himself, but rather, in Stephen’s mind, the horse has become the departed housemaid. This central episode pivots on the term “transmigration,” or the movement of one soul into another body after death.

Then one morning [Stephen] had a bright inspiration: ‘Come up, horse!’ she commanded, slapping the pony. ‘Come up, horse, and let me get close to your ear, ‘cause I’m going to whisper something dreadfully important.’ Laying her cheek against his firm neck she said softly: ‘You’re not you any more, you’re Collins!’

So Collins was comfortably transmigrated. It was Stephen’s last effort to remember. (40)

Stephen’s command that the servant’s soul take up residence in her horse complicates the novel’s insistence on non-hierarchical inter-species exchanges. Stephen asserts hegemonic control, and in so doing essentially effaces the horse’s individual consciousness. Within the narrative logic of the novel, the horse does not exist as a unique, separate individual on equal footing with human counterparts, but rather exists solely as a corporeal frame for Stephen’s mourning. Even the words “slapped” and “commanded” reveal exertions of physical and verbal force as Stephen shapes the moment to her own purposes. Later in the novel, Hall’s rendering of Stephen’s animal engagements become less anthropocentric than exhibited here, but in this passage the very fact that we are in Stephen’s point of view implicitly acknowledges a narrative consumption taking place, an ironic imbalance of power by which Stephen’s moment of communion with the horse also represents an attempt to assert her human dominance.

On the other hand, however, the very concept of “transmigration” depends entirely on a circulation of identity, an exchange of souls, a sense of abstract kinetic movement between two beings as their energies transfer from one body to the other.
Despite problems with her subsuming the horse’s perspective, Stephen nonetheless does not see human and animal as separate forms of species identity, or as trajectories along an evolutionary chain. Rather, she sees both as housing the same physical requirements for an individual soul. This tender act of transference occurs just as Stephen touches her check to the horse’s neck in a moment of shared intimacy. Physical space between the two species collapses, perhaps signifying the beginnings of a crossed boundary between human and nonhuman as Stephen aims to equalize both in an act of mystical transference.

After the “transmigration” scene, Stephen’s interaction with Collins becomes even more emblematic of inter-species co-forming awareness; the bond between the two exists outside the structures of ownership and domination, and instead allows each creature to seek agency in their identities and control over their physical environments. As their relationship deepens, Stephen’s impressions become increasingly separated from the imagined thought patterns of Collins, and the two often experience the same moment in very different ways. Instead of an anthropocentric and exclusive catalog of the protagonist’s experience, Hall’s omniscient narrator envisions the horse’s own sensory engagement with his world. Collins’ state of mind is almost always presented alongside a circulating exchange of experience with Stephen within the spaces the two co-shape together, so that the two constantly reach out toward each other, listen to each other, and respond to each other’s sensual awareness.

The pony tugged hard and fought at his bridle; he was trembling with pleasure for he was no novice; he knew all about signs and wonders in stables, such as large feeds of corn administered early, and extra long groomings, and pink coats with brass buttons, like the hung coat Sir Philip was wearing. He frisked down the road, a mass of affectation, demanding some skill on the part of his rider; but the child’s hands were strong yet exceedingly gentle – she possessed that rare gift, perfect hands on a horse.
‘This is better than being young Nelson,’ thought Stephen, ‘cause this way I’m happy just being myself’. (40)

These communicative efforts between horse and rider illustrate a moment of unitary exchange between the two bodies, which occurs within the erotic “pleasure” emanating from the repeated experience of riding and being ridden. The two creatures, within the stables and roads that envelop them into intimacy, seem to become one living being in “wonder”-filled motion, allowing corporeal proximity and the movements of hand and head to create a single, unified mass of energy. The underlying emotional communion between Stephen and Collins reveals a mutual experience of both “wonder” and deep friendship. Their environment takes its meaning within the minute expressions of affection gestured toward the other, and in the act of interpreting each motion as a symbol of shared knowledge of each other’s skill. As Hall has us imagine it, the horse claims increasing agency to perform his own “affectations” and takes pleasure in the sensations of his own world – the “feeds of corn” and “pink coats with brass buttons.” Meanwhile, Stephen herself becomes more confident in her own burgeoning identity. No longer dreaming of acting out the adventures of a young Edward Nelson, Stephen feels “happy just being [her]self.” As the horse demands ownership of his own space and motions, Stephen also gains comfort in and awareness of her own sense of belonging, taking pride in herself as someone with “strong yet exceedingly gentle” hands. The horse’s “pleasure” mirrors Stephen’s “happiness” as the two become mutually confident alongside the other, as they dance and prance in the world of stables and vast open fields, helping each other gain sensual awareness of the environments they occupy together.

These moments between Stephen and her animals reflect a cross-species awareness that privileges shared spaces and new possibilities for intimate
communication. Hall seems to anticipate ideas about human and animal interaction that are later articulated by Donna Haraway in *When Species Meet*. Haraway argues that the myriad and profound nonverbal exchanges shared between human and nonhuman creatures reveal the need to de-prioritize spoken language as the most elevated form of communication. She often focuses on horses and riders to illustrate her points, describing an affectionate interface carried out though muscle twitches, grunts and sighs, tensing and relaxing of the body, slight turns of the head, and other non-verbal cues that create mutual understanding and shared experience. Haraway’s argument calls for us to value alternative modes of exchange that release both human and nonhuman animal from the linguistic imperative, and that might allow for new communicative structures to develop organically based on communal spaces and shared moments of unitary awareness. For humans to begin perceiving nonhuman animals as conscious beings in their own right, Haraway argues, we must limit our reliance on spoken language as the primary indicator of a species’ ability to communicate, not only with members of their own species, but with members of other species as well.

In describing the relationship between Stephen and yet another horse in her world, named Raftery, Hall’s narrative offers a kind of preview for the nonverbal modes of conversation that Haraway argues must be given primacy. Attempting to ease his daughter’s feelings of alienation and isolation, Stephen’s father purchases a horse, whom Stephen names Raftery after one of her favorite poets. She spends much of her youth roaming the countryside, caring for her new horse, and developing a sincere and profound relationship with Raftery as years together go by. No “transmigration” of spirit is necessary for Raftery; he arrives at the family stables already, in her mind, a being with
whom she communes wholly and with direct communication, “in a quiet language having very few words but many small sounds and many small movements, which to both of them meant more than words” (59). Hall seems to understand implicitly what Haraway sees as necessary for equitable sharing of environments between all creatures. The “small sounds and many small movements” Stephen and Ratery share are integral to their communal “dance of relating,” to use another of Haraway’s phrases. Perhaps, these writers seem to argue, if we attend to the bodily communion between all beings, we might ultimately structure a new mode of inter-species “language” that de-privileges human speech as the purveyor of an evolutionary superiority.

Stephen and Ratery, each of them experiencing their own kind of identity-based displacement, Stephen based on gender and sexuality, Ratery based on species, provide yet another model for shared world-making emanating from a constant circulation of communicative energies beyond signs and symbols of the spoken and written word. Stephen does not own her animals; rather, her animals co-exist with her in a mutual generosity of communicative attention. In essence, The Well of Loneliness becomes a model for theories put forth by philosophers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Timothy Cresswell, and Doreen Massey, who argue that shared motion does not happen within space, but rather such movement comprises space itself. Shared intimacies between two creatures cannot be defined without the dynamic interrelating that give shape and substance to their spoken and unspoken connections.

Hall’s language in the last third of the novel continues to revel in the emplaced possibilities for sensual communicative exchange. The prose amplifies the bodily motion and unspoken kinetic momentum as human and nonhuman characters become co-
constitutive actors within the intimate domestic spaces they share. In the novel’s final act, Stephen has left her childhood home at Morton to take up permanent residence in Paris with her partner, Mary, and a dog named David. Stephen had left Morton originally to join the war effort as an ambulance driver, and in her occupation finds a sense of independence and satisfaction as a woman entrusted with the responsibilities of a wartime medic. After the war, she lives as an exile from Morton and from England as a whole, largely due to the death of her sympathetic father and the cold distance of her mother, and remains instead in Paris, a city that largely accepts her regardless of sexuality or gender performance. After they find him abandoned in the city streets, Stephen and Mary bring David into their home to live, an act of empathy that already reveals a reaching across the species boundary. In the initial moments of David’s entrance into the women’s home, the text transposes to the canine’s point of view, attempting to channel David’s bodily sensibility and perspective as he navigates his new space and his new human friends:

The dog looked gravely from one to the other for a moment, then he lay down at Mary’s feet, dropping his chin on his bandaged paw, and closing his eyes with a grunt of contentment. And so it had suddenly come to pass that they who had lately been two, were now three. There were Stephen and Mary – there was also David. (333)

The exchange of glances between the dog and the two women reflects David Harvey’s notion of space – the kinetic energy that exists between bodies, the emotions and sounds that pass between them, and the minute communicative motions all come together to define the spatial composition of the room. Within this small domestic drama, David’s individual agency takes an active role in creating the scene; while the women seem to sit in silent contemplation, the dog’s eyes provide the movement of the scene, he places himself decidedly at their feet, and his body signals his voiced satisfaction with the
arrangement. Rather than the two women controlling the outcome, David himself decides where and when and how his environment will take shape according to his desires and needs. Furthermore, his “bandaged paw” then takes center stage as the emblem of caring, acceptance, and love that Stephen and Mary have extended out to him, the injured paw symbolic of an injury to the sense of touch that has been “repaired” by the kindness of the two women.

Directly after Hall establishes this exchange of glances and symbolic movements, the language briefly becomes reminiscent of religious texts with the phrase “it had suddenly come to pass,” as if the moment represents a kind of creation story fashioned from the co-forming energy of the three living bodies in the room. Reminiscent of the novel’s opening dedication, the three creatures dwell together in mutual acceptance of the others’ individual agency, creating an alternative kind of family unit that models the circulation of “small sounds and…movements” so central to the novel’s vision of inter-species communion. Yet Hall does not disregard the fundamental, species-based ontological differences between the threesome; David’s place within the trinity does not reflect sameness at the cost of his canine experience of the moment. In fact, the grammar of the final sentence attempts to capture David’s own plane of existential beingness – it groups Stephen and Mary, and separates David in an acknowledgement of the inescapable boundary between species. The friendship established in these first moments of David’s stay grants him an equal partnership in the domestic arrangement, yet also acknowledges deeply significant differences that must be celebrated, rather than avoided, to genuinely honor the spirit of individual being-ness emanating from all participants.
Hall’s Problematic Logic of Race

The connections embedded within moments between Stephen and her animals illustrate a nuanced awareness that new conditions of togetherness might be possible between human and nonhuman animals. However, Hall’s text is not entirely free from racist and colonial themes that complicate her advocacy for mutual co-sharing between creatures across social identities. I have argued that Hall’s text presages the queer ecological goal of countering oppressive discourses surrounding sex and nature that reinforce heterosexist, transphobic, and androcentric power structures. Yet her corrective model also reveals an implicit reification of destructive racial hierarchies rooted within British imperial ideologies. Hall, in similar ways to the other authors in this study, cannot “undo her imperial Englishness,” to use Laura Doyle’s phrasing about Woolf, despite deep criticism of contemporary forms of social discrimination, and despite her own personal suffering at the hands of these oppressive trait-based hierarchies (Doyle “Introduction” 5).

To put Hall’s imperial influences in context, many studies of The Well of Loneliness and other homosocial works from the period reflect extensively on ways in which the legislation of “immorality” was linked to the preservation of a conservative British identity and support of wartime patriotism, both during World War I and during the period leading up to the Second World War. For example, the presence of women in traditionally male professions during the Great War led to cultural clashes that pitted the necessity of filling labor shortages with willing female workers against patriarchal pre-war ideals that circumscribed women’s roles to wives and mothers. Nadine Tschacksch argues that Stephen Gordon represents new kinds of community building in her bonding
with women workers while an ambulance driver during the war. These new kinds of women-identified connections created conditions for heightened political anxiety about lesbian desire and the maintenance of conservative British cultural ideals. Tschacksch writes that by “tying homosexual identity so tightly to national identity and patriotism, Stephen’s right to existence, as she sees it, is precariously tied to the opportunities given reluctantly by a shaken and churned up wartime society” (462). Additionally, according to Tschacksh, Stephen’s fairly traditional outlook in terms of domestic gender roles represents the precarious position of many queer women who were not accepted by conservative society, but who also might not identify as the kind of “sexual and artistic ‘misfit’” that might have championed progressive gender ideals” (466).

Scholars of these linkages between representations of homosexuality and the maintenance of conservative cultural ideals have begun to trace more closely the racially-charged discourse so often embedded within otherwise progressive narrative texts. Robin Hackett in her study of what she terms “Sapphic Primitivism” writes that in cultural productions of all kinds, “Western Europeans repeatedly sought to define their own humanity in opposition to a monolithic usually dark-skinned being who was imagined to be supremely savage, barbaric, natural unnatural, exotic, or some contradictory combination of these” (10). She argues that images of culturally-prohibited female sexuality are often represented alongside “figurations of blackness or colonial places,” and that these inherent associations link acceptance of colonial aims with the acceptance of lesbian identity (61). 27 Deborah Cohler argues similarly that Stephen’s seemingly

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27 See Robin Hackett’s *Sapphic Primitivism* and Deborah Cohler’s *Citizen, Invert, Queer* for detailed genealogies of primary sources texts that show linkages between sexology and racial science studies.
fractured cultural values signal a transition in queer British literature written during the Great War that closely links nationalism with the policing of homosexual identity. Cohler traces the way in which the “production of modern lesbian subjectivity in the interwar years stems from racial and imperialist anxieties as well as from shifts in wartime gendered possibilities for women” (x), and argues that when read in concert with contemporary public discourses of racial protectionism, “masculine women” presented more of a “eugenic threat” than a danger to the morality of women on the home front (x).

*The Well of Loneliness* certainly gestures toward a reification of the very forms of trait-based classifications that overall her novel attempts to subvert, even in Hall’s characterizations of animal characters. Raftery’s Irish heritage links him with a “wild heart” and a “courage…as bright as an Irish sunrise” (59), while David, as a result of his mother’s presence in colonial Africa, is described in fraught racial terms as “clumsy and inarticulate” and often desirous of making “the kind of noise wild folk make in the jungle” (336). David’s Welsh lineage is also described in condescending, primitivist language encoded with trait-based classifications, for it is “the Celt in his blood” that is described as the cause for his desire to romp and play in the park when he is taken out for a “civilized” walk with his English friends (341). Hall’s narrative clearly delineates David and Raftery as “wild” not because they are animals, but because of racial stereotypes that link colonial “others” to a more “primitive” state of being. The discourse of nationalism permeates the novel, providing insidious reflections of racial bias that

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28 For more on interwar expressions of queerness and nationalism, see Elise Swinford, *Theatres of War: Performing Queer Nationalism in Modernist Narratives*. 

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supports the English colonial project, and protects a sense of English identity at odds with the “uncivilized” colonized subject.

At the same time, Stephen’s animal friends are perhaps the only characters who accept her love unconditionally, without expecting her to follow alienating cultural norms governing her gender and sexuality. While this narrative move may recuperate Hall’s text from its more racist overtones, in fact, Hall may have been relying on a more nuanced form of racial classification as she decided to endow the animal characters with this seeming generosity of spirit. Cohler notes that Havelock Ellis, in his foundational sexology text titled *Sexual Inversion* (1896), includes “schematic progression of homosexual behaviors, from cultures and times most ‘distant’ from the British ruling class to those closest” (5). Ellis links species and race with acceptance of and engagement in sexually permissive behaviors, beginning with nonhuman animals, then moving to “lower human races” such as “The Eskimo” and “The Tribes of the North-West United States,” moving to the “European Lower Classes,” including the prison population, and ending with “Men of Exceptional Intellect and Moral Leaders,” all of Anglo-European ancestry. Cohler draws attention to the coalescence between sexology and racial classification in Ellis’s work: “‘lower’ cultures and races seem to encourage or tolerate same-sex behaviors; whereas more “civilized” cultures and times more easily reveal a distinction between temporary behaviors and inborn inversion, given their social prohibitions against homosexual behaviors” (5-6). As previously mentioned, Ellis’s sexological studies provided Hall with “scientific” support for her sympathetic representation of a gender and sexual “invert,” so it would be logical to infer that perhaps Ellis’s schema influenced her decision to use animal characters as the most permissive in
the novel. Even though Raftery and David provide Stephen with friendship outside oppressive human forms of sociality, and show themselves to be “unrestrainedly loving” (Hall 336), the presence of Ellis’s work, and his written support of her novel, suggest that even this positive gesture may be tinged with the same colonial objectives her more queer ecological aims would reject.

In addition to being fraught with the racist discourse of British imperialism, Hall’s language also shows a certain ambivalence about her investment in ideologies of “stock” and race. Hall acknowledges that animals too have a history, a genealogy, and a web of social practices that constitute their way of world-making, a move that many queer ecologists and critical animal theorists would celebrate as advocacy for animals to be treated with the same dignities as their human counterparts. Yet even this more egalitarian ideal as Hall expresses it is permeated with primitivist ideas that one’s country of origin determines physical and personality traits. These ambiguous connotations are shown in the fact that both David and Raftery, their Irish and Welsh identities associating them with “wildness,” have countries of origin, established family trees, mythos surrounding ancestors, and genealogies that connects them to British colonial rule. Their complex animal histories are intimated even in the minute gestures of affection shown toward Stephen, and in the case of David, toward Stephen’s partner Mary. Soon after David is accepted into the household, the three of them – Stephen, Mary, and David – sit comfortably in the living room together in mutual joy at the family they have forged for themselves. David’s “wildness” compels him to desire expressing his affection with loud noises and jumping around the room, but “instead he abruptly licked Mary’s cheek – it tasted peculiar, he thought, like sea water” (336). This act of licking operates in two
contradictory ways: it becomes an indicator of Hall’s belief that restraint is the only possibility for the more “primitive” traits of the Welsh spaniel, and it also becomes a gesture of sensual and kinetic sharing of affection, itself infused with history, one that David might not be able to communicate linguistically, but that nevertheless impacts his perspective on his experience. The taste of “sea-water” on Mary’s cheek, presumably from her tears of joy at David’s presence, intimates a set of historical possibilities outside the dog’s specific meeting with the two humans who have come into his world, for evidently, David has not spent his entire life in land-locked Paris since he knows the salty taste of the sea.

**Hall’s Cross-Species Grammar**

Hall’s representations of the intimate dance happening between humans and nonhuman animals happen not only by way of the “small sounds and movements” shared between Stephen and animal characters, and not only in her reflections on a shared web of historicity, but also, and more subtly, within the grammatical forms used in moments of inter-species communication. The linguistic nuances of Hall’s writing reveal a deft hand molding language itself into new possibilities for the circulation of shared dynamic energies. In many of these scenes, most often involving Raftery communicating outward to Stephen, Hall often implements the conditional – Raftery “would” say this, or Raftery “would” do that. The conditional as a grammatical construct is symbolic of the almost paradoxical nature of human-animal communicative exchange; the action is not quite happening between the two, but at the same time *is* happening in some imagined future world that is dependent on the precise actions and attitudes taking place in real time. In other words, the conditional presents a shared event as both a hypothetical and as a
probability, both of which rely on an act of imaginative foresight. In English, even
defining the conditional presents a symbol of possibility; is it a “mood,” in which case it
carries the emotional content of the speaker, or is it a “tense,” which indicates a
relationship between the action and the temporal conditions under which it behaves? The
answer, in many cases, depends on the perspective and linguistic background of the
speaker, thereby opening possibilities for meaning not in some pre-determined set of
defined structures, but based on the immediate needs of the two beings who are reaching
across to find the other in a moment of inter-relating.

In Stephen’s case, the conditional is inseparable from the kind of erotic
connections she forges with numerous animal and human characters. Hall’s narrative
moves during Stephen’s intimate conversations with Raftery, arguably the closest
connection between two creatures in the entire novel, envision an imagined future in
which Stephen and Raftery bridge the perceptual chasm between them that exists as a
result of their innate being-ness as two different species. Many of these exchanges begin
when Stephen arrives in the stables feeling anxiety and despair over her own identity,
difficulties with her disapproving mother, or desperate lamentations about her bullying
neighbors.

In spite of her newly acquired book learning, Stephen still talked quite
often to Raftery. He was now ten years old and had grown much in wisdom
himself, so he listened with care and attention….

And Raftery, who was not really thinking of the corn-bin, but rolling his
eye in an effort to answer, would want to say something too big for his
language…; would want to say something about a strong feeling he had that
Stephen was missing the truth. But how could he hope to make her understand
the age-old wisdom of all the dumb creatures? The wisdom of plains and
primeval forests, the wisdom come down from the youth of the world. (71-72)
Hall places the narrative firmly in Raftery’s point of view, again demonstrating a problematic attempt to use human written form to express the horse’s individual subjectivity outside of human influence. This passage might be read, however, as Hall grappling with this inherent irony. Raftery negotiates the inadequacy of the “eye roll” to express the abstract, complex web of meaning that he wants to share with his beloved friend. In an acknowledgement that sometimes “small sounds and movements” are not enough for things “too big” for the body, Hall’s language shifts to the conditional, indicating not what Raftery wants to say, or what Raftery thinks, but what he would do if the conditions for communication with Stephen were different. Hall’s technique attempts to base Raftery’s speech on his “strong feelings” and “age-old wisdom,” rather than on Stephen’s desires for him to express a human form of compassion. The use of the conditional shuns a more anthropocentric style that might make assumptions about the animal’s thoughts based on the mindset of the human character. The narration refuses to subsume Raftery’s state of mind to Stephen’s; indeed, his own “wisdom” guides their interaction. Yet at the same time, Hall’s narration reflects the anthropocentric limit of such a goal. Raftery wants to communicate something “too big for his language;” Hall does not indicate that the statement would be too big for Stephen’s language, but rather that even if Raftery’s had a more human form of speech, it would still not be sufficient to express the truths he wants to share. Hall seems to recognize that Stephen’s perceptive abilities would be too limited to understand the Raftery’s animal “wisdom,” but it is precisely within this limitation that the communicative gulf is bridged. The horse’s inability to find language for such “big” truths mirrors the “age-old” human predicament that renders language entirely inadequate to express “big” emotional or spiritual truths.
What results is a meeting of the two creatures not within language, *but within the inadequacy of language itself* to provide the means for expressing “primeval” ideas not only across species, but between any two individual beings.

The conditional allows for an exchange of meaning independent of the words used in the utterance; rather, meaning arises from a continual, unending circulation of energies toward imagined outcomes that may or may not result in a moment of precise understanding. And the point of this uncertainty is, in fact, the uncertainty itself. The grammar relies on hypotheticals - the “if” and the “then.” *If* Raftery could use human language, *then* he would lecture Stephen about the “truths” she is “missing.” Neither, of course, is actually happening; it is only Hall herself, the human author and by extension the omniscient narrator, who imbues the horse with such thoughts. The end goal of Raftery’s thought processes as narrated is not to understand the horse’s thinking, but rather to de-prioritize our incessant need for an exact meeting of the minds. Hall’s language challenges us to become comfortable with the impossibility of cross-species understanding, in essence altering the fundamental goal of inter-species communication. Rather than presuming the lack of common verbal language as a predetermined failure, the emphasis on spoken language dissolves into a more truthful sense of inter-species communality. Intimacies are established via “small sounds and movements,” which allow transference to take place within and between bodies touching and moving in each other’s infinite possibilities for togetherness. In Hall’s novel, the conditional allows for what John Keats terms “negative capability,” the ability to take comfort in *not knowing*, and as such intimates a profoundly nuanced way to live within the dynamic intimacies that all creatures share.
In this way, the conditional, with all its open possibilities for shared outcomes, and with the knowledge that we accept Raftery’s feelings as true simply because they are possibly true, presages visions of queer futurity that scholars have been debating for the past two decades.29 Some scholars have focused on impossible social futures for queer individuals; for example, Lee Edelman envisions “reproductive futurity” as hostile cultural conditioning that reinforces heteronormativity and establishes queerness as “the place of the social order’s death drive” (3). Other have traced the kinds of flashbacks, reversals, delays, anachronisms, and other temporal irregularities in queer texts for ways such “non sequential forms of time” allow for the disruption of an established order so that a new queer order might be envisioned (Freeman xi). More recent scholars, including Nicole Seymour in Strange Natures, see queer futurity as a positive model for linking the imaginative realm to discourse about environmental subjects. Rather than critiquing queer futurity as disjointed or impossible, Seymour sees the future’s dependence on imagined outcomes as having

great resonance for queer ecology: since humans cannot always see the consequences of their actions on the environment immediately, nor the intricate interrelationships among all components in an ecosystem, they must be able to imagine them in order to act empathetically and ethically. (12)

As mentioned, the passage between Stephen and Raftery does not transcribe a conversation that actually takes place, as in Raftery says this, Stephen responds thusly; rather, Hall’s language reflects a conversation from an imagined future arranged in the

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29 See Carl Feccero, Queer/Early/Modern; Elizabeth Grosz, The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely; Judith Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives; Annamarie Jagose, Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence; Jose Esteban Munoz, Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity; Valerie Rohy, Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality; and E.L. McCallum and Mike Tuhkanen, eds., Queer times, queer becomings.
case that Raftery “would want to say something” as he “listen[s] with care and attention” to Stephen’s complaints. Uncertainty in this case reveals a trust in a future outcome that cannot be codified, but rather must rest entirely in a hopeful imagination, just as any vision of a sustainable future necessitates action for the benefit of future generations that we might not even be alive to observe. Futurity, in this case, allows for queer interconnectedness in its very fluidity, and in the sense that inter-species connections must be willingly attained only through a trust in hypothetical imagined outcomes.

After Sir Philip purchases a motor car and teaches Stephen to drive, time spent with Raftery increasingly fulfills the desire for pleasure, rather than meeting utilitarian requirements for transportation. As both horse and rider are released from their traditional roles as master/servant, what is left is pure love, an emotional connection freed from the relational complications that result from species-based hierarchy. Stephen has “the lure of horseflesh in [her] very bones,” the word “lure” engendering their communion with a powerful erotic pull toward each other. Here again, Hall seems to presage Lorde’s understanding of the power of erotic sharing; Stephen and Raftery experience themselves as dynamically charged with the energies of the other, and that attraction, in Lorde’s language, “forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them” (56). Desire itself is a future-oriented system; one wants in the immediate future that which is craved; one does not yet have it, for then it would transform into the “attained,” rather than the “desired.” In this way, Hall again frames Stephen and Raftery as models for a kind of queer futurity

30 For more information on early 20th-century women and motorcars, see Georgina Clarson, “‘The Woman Who Does’: A Melbourne Motor Garage Proprieter”; Sean O’Connell, The Car in British Society: Class, Gender, and Motoring, 1896-1939; and Virginia Scharff, Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age.
predicated on erotic power in the touching of bodies, in the “small sounds and movements” that circulate between them and form the basis for a shared comfort with the uncertainty of the other’s being. Finally, all this craving and desire and listening and touching gives way to an uncomplicated communion between the two creatures: “and then there was Raftery, and Raftery loved Stephen, and Stephen loved Raftery” (67). Again, Hall’s narrative intimates an inter-species intimacy achieved within the dynamic fluidity of uncertainty, allowing for a new kind of shared language that circulates by way of a peaceful acceptance that we can no more truly understand the perceptions of another than we can be sure of the imagined future on which our hopes for communion rest.
CHAPTER 3

“ALONE TOGETHER”: SOCIALITY AND THE ANIMAL IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S FLUSH: A BIOGRAPHY

“My point is simple: Once again we are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down. Response and respect are possible only in those knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories.”

-- Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*

“Between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another. She spoke. He was dumb. She was woman; he was dog. Thus closely united, thus immensely divided, they gazed at each other.”

-- Virginia Woolf, *Flush: A Biography*

Virginia Woolf reveals throughout her oeuvre an interest in the perceptive dynamics of animal minds, and in the ways human and nonhuman worlds coalesce in a vast choreography of shared vitalities. Essays and stories such as “The Death of the Moth,” “Kew Gardens,” and “The Mark on the Wall” are just a few of Woolf’s shorter forays into insect and animal cognition. Her longer works often frame nonhuman animals as central characters within the lively worlds of their human counterparts. In one humorous scene from *Orlando*, the poet Nick Green is punished by Orlando for his incessant chatter about publishing by finding the mastiff “unloosed… because it never saw the poet without biting him” (94). Other scenes allow Woolf to condemn human prejudice through animal characters: after Orlando transitions from male to female, the animals on her estate do not register the change in gender, but rather accept Orlando as the same human who had left them to reside in Turkey several years earlier, “for the
dumb creatures, as is well known, are far better judges both of identity and character than we are” (170). In Between the Acts, Woolf describes animal bodies and behaviors as nearly indistinguishable from her human subjects. For example, young, married Isa and the older, married Mr. Haines, with whom Isa is infatuated, become emblematic of two swans “entangled” by the detritus of their environments: “But his snow-white breast was circled with a tangle of dirty duckweed and she too, in her webbed feet was entangled, by her husband, the stockbroker” (5). Woolf’s most playful cross-species worldmaking appears in Flush, her biographical narration of the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s spaniel, named Flush, from his early life in England until the Brownings’ relocation to the bucolic Italian countryside.31

Although many of Woolf’s more canonical works engage in cross-species relational dynamics, I have chosen to focus on Flush, a lesser-known novel, because it most directly approaches animal subjectivity as a distinctly “non-human” realm of perceptual understanding. Unlike animal characters in many of Woolf’s other writings, Flush does not exist merely as an anthropomorphized stand-in for a female protagonist’s isolation and social exclusion. Rather, Woolf attempts to narrate the imagined sensuality of animal “worlding” by crafting prose almost entirely attuned to Flush’s bodily experience, his movement, his tastes, smells, and sights, his fidgeting and his full bladder, his flea-ridden fur, his panting in fatigue or in rage, and the relative cold or warmth of his various environments. True to the novel’s subtitle, “A Biography,” the narrative voice

31 For reviews of the numerous insects and animals in Woolf’s fiction and essays, see Jamie Johnson, “Virginia Woolf’s Flush: Decentering Human Subjectivity through the Nonhuman Animal Character”; Derek Ryan, Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life; and Caroline Hovanec, Animal Subjects: Literature, Zoology, and British Modernism.
maintains the detached tone of the researcher, the documentarian collecting and reporting events from the dog’s life. Indeed, Elizabeth Barrett Browning did have a dog named Flush when she met Robert Browning, and the couple took Flush with them to Italy. Woolf drew much inspiration from Barrett Browning’s diaries and letters, infusing numerous quotations from these documents into Flush’s story. 32 Yet Woolf mitigates each of Flush’s impressions in some way by the dog’s corporeal role in the social scene. If Flush is irritated by Mr. Browning’s presence, it is because “Mr. Browning brushed him off [the sofa] with a flick of his hand” (63), and Flush’s meditations on poetry are heightened by the smell of “roses on one hand, and dung on the other” (130). Woolf’s attention to Flush’s canine body as it navigates shared space with humans also delivers an extraordinary crystallization of many themes found in Woolf’s longer works. As we learn about Flush’s classed and gendered history, we are also invited to ruminate on the oppressive qualities of rigid class distinctions, the destructive effects of patriarchal culture, the gendered divisions of intellectual labor, the impact of increasingly urbanized landscapes, and the devastating effects of an economy built solely on institutions of power and greed. All these themes are central to our engagement with the diminutive spaniel as he sometimes plays and often suffers on both city streets and in pastoral landscapes.

Woolf wrote *Flush* after completing one of her longer, more ambitious novels in order to “ease [her] brain, knotted by all that last screw of *The Waves*” (qtd. in Ritchie ix). Perhaps because Woolf herself never considered *Flush* to be a serious work of fiction, many Woolf scholars until recently have dismissed the novella as well. Until the recent animal studies turn, and despite the novel’s status as a bestseller upon its publication, little has been written about *Flush*, and even now, the novel appears almost exclusively in Woolf scholarship written from a critical animal studies perspective. *Flush* was, in fact, the most financially successful novel of Woolf’s career, selling almost 19,000 copies in its first six months, and selling even more once the novel was chosen for several national book clubs throughout the UK. Yet despite (or perhaps because of) its popular success, Flush has been dismissed as a work of light pleasure, rather than as a work of “serious” fiction worth the same attention as novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse*. Indeed, criticism before the animal studies turn often labels the work as simply feminist anthropomorphism in its representation of an oppressed Victorian woman. The social satire in the novel goes largely unnoticed; instead, critics generalize the work as a weakened critique of patriarchal social structure in early twentieth-century Europe.  

Far from offering “light” entertainment, and although often witty in tone, *Flush* exposes readers directly to oppressive scenes nonhuman animals must navigate to survive within anthropocentric social configurations, including systems of commodity exchange, and seems to argue that without systemic changes to those dynamics, animal bodies will

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33 For examples of early studies that recognize Flush only as a feminist mirror for Victorian women, see Louise DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*; David Eberly, “Housebroken: The Domesticated Relations in *Flush*”; and Ruth Vanita, “‘Love Unspeakable’: The Uses of Allusion in *Flush*.”
always suffer torture and enslavement. Woolf describes in vivid detail numerous spaces where animal bodies are grotesquely imprisoned, killed, displayed, consumed, and exploited for labor by human economic systems. From butcher shops to the back alley warehouses where dog kidnappers hold their prey for ransom, Flush’s environs are replete with endangered or mutilated animal bodies. Even Flush’s early life on a farm, spent romping and playing in the wilds of the countryside, are impacted by money concerns when his “owner,” a term itself charged with capitalism’s refrains, experiences a financial downfall. Not knowing how she will feed or care for Flush, the dog is offered as a tender gift to Elizabeth Barrett (not yet Browning) who lives on Wimpole Street in the posh area of London. His social class now “elevated” to the status of a lady’s canine companion, Flush’s movements are restricted to one tiny room at the back of the home where Elizabeth, infirm from an undefined illness, spends her days reading, writing, and welcoming visitors. In this more confined environment, Flush must reconsider his own sense of body sovereignty as he contorts himself to fit along the sofa at his new companion’s feet and as he is taken on short-leashed walks only on occasion to relieve his swollen bowels. Once Robert Browning starts to visit Elizabeth, Flush must again re-negotiate his space-sharing arrangement as a new human replaces him on the sofa with his beloved Miss Barrett. Woolf’s social critique of England’s brutal class system is made most clear when the newlyweds relocate to the relatively “classless” Italian countryside. Flush again must re-frame his understanding of how gender, class, sexuality and species constitute his new environment, yet he finds joy and a sense of liberation as he and his human family are released from the stringent, suffocating systems that governed their lives on Wimpole Street.
Most early scholarship about Flush focuses on the anthropomorphic aspects of the novel, both in terms of Woolf’s political commentary about social and gender dynamics, and in terms of how the novel accounts for nonhuman cognitive awareness. Anna Snaith, one of the first critics to give the work serious consideration, began what would become a much longer critical conversation about Woolf’s political motivations in Flush by placing the dog’s experience in the context of rising fascist movements in Britain and across Europe during the time of its composition. Snaith argues for the novel’s value in studying the social networks that create false and oppressive hierarchies according to class, race, gender, and species that in turn allow for totalitarian ideologies to flourish (Snaith 615). Critics after Snaith continue this line of investigation by examining the various power structures that Woolf as author, and that Flush and Elizabeth Barrett, must negotiate as they perform their gendered and species-based social roles. Karalyn Kendall-Morwick argues that the Bildungsroman genre “underwrites the phallocentrism of the literary canon,” so by narrating the experience of both woman and animal in her short text, Woolf challenges an androcentric social experience, both in the genre itself, and within Western literature as a whole. Payal Taneja sees the fact that Flush was given as a gift from one woman to another as evidence of Woolf’s challenge to male-dominated forms of material capitalism, highlighting “the subversive roles women play against the commodification of their pet…and to the notion of monetary self-interest” (130).

Later critics see Flush as presenting an alternative paradigm for representing animal alterity, including forms of what Jutta Ittner terms “new anthropomorphism.” Ittner sees in Woolf a writer who appreciates ontological difficulties posed by human attempts to narrate animal consciousness, and who integrates this impasse into her
inquiry into Flush’s lived experience (182). Building on Ittner’s study, Anna Feuerstein argues that Woolf challenges traditional forms of writing animal alterity by privileging the sense of smell and de-privileging sight as the central mode of experiential knowledge, indirectly challenging Freud’s theory of evolutionary psychology. Freud argues for sight as the apex of evolutionary sense experience, yet Woolf’s novel validates the olfactory sense as equally important.  

Critics over the past several years have continued to investigate ways in which Woolf’s fiction decenters the human perspective as the sole indicator of social “truth.”  Woolf studies have become interdisciplinary, with forays into cognitive ethology, cross-species ecologies, evolutionary psychology, environmentalism, and engagement with the natural sciences as a whole. Jane Goldman argues that *Flush* was written as Woolf’s response to the publicized outcry against laboratory vivisection, and further sees the novel as Woolf’s attempt to create what Haraway calls an ‘[im]properly registered’ being that ultimately resists representation (qtd. in Goldman “Ce chien” 169).  Christina Alt finds that in nature essays such as “The Death of the Moth,” Woolf implicates scientific discourse in the “imposition and maintenance of wider regimes and hierarchies” by its insistence on classification, “the naming and ordering of organisms within a system,”

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35 For early views into the interlacing discourses of gender, race, and species in Woolf’s work, see two essays by Jane Goldman: “Ce chien est a moi”: Virginia Woolf and the Signifying Dog” and “Woolf, Defoe, Derrida: Interdisciplinary dogs—or the canine aesthetics and (gender) politics of creativity.”
which Woolf sees “as a more insidious form of control” (251-2).³⁶ Derek Ryan and Melanie Micir astutely describe the intimate interplay of sexuality and animality in moments of interspecies physical affections in *Flush*, arguing in various ways that such confluences create “multiple modes of queering: time, history, language, genre, and the natural world all escape stable categories and fixed meanings by twisting conventions” (Ryan 110).³⁷ In addition to these studies of *Flush*, numerous critics have also examined Woolf’s oeuvre for its animal advocacy and ecofeminist philosophy, which have become key components of her works’ larger cultural impact into the twentieth century.³⁸

As these more recent scholars have begun to note, much of Woolf’s work, including *Flush*, largely escapes what Timothy Morton calls “ecologocentrism,” a nearsightedness stemming from and anthropocentric inability, or often unwillingness, to acknowledge independent consciousness outside of the human realm. In her attempts to challenge deeply-formed human ontological structures, Woolf might have been termed an early “deep ecologist,” a term applied to those who seek fundamental ideological change, rather than surface-level policy revisions, to address the problem of environmental

³⁶ Alt reviews numerous works by Woolf that warn against classification, noting that Woolf views specimen collection “as an image of violence and domination” (252). See also Alt, *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature* for a detailed history of the natural sciences from the 18th to 20th centuries.

³⁷ For an account of the critical uses and subsequent rejection of anthropomorphism as a theoretical tool in evaluating *Flush*, see Derek Ryan, “The Question of the Animal in *Flush.*”

degradation. Although critics have examined the ecological and environmental themes in Woolf’s work, including ways that her fiction “queers” ontological categories, they have yet to explore ways in which Woolf actually enacts the kind of value shifts that deep ecologists advocate. They have acknowledged Woolf’s project toward new perceptual understanding, but have not yet examined the shapes these new forms take as they appear in her fiction. I argue that Flush presents a clear view of Woolf’s vision for human-animal worlding; and further, that the primary perceptive realities she attempts to undermine are materialism, capitalist exchange, and unbridled class consciousness, each of which burden her characters across species.

One way to conceptualize Woolf’s animal project in Flush and in her other fiction is to call on Morton’s argument that human beings must begin to see nonhumans as operating within the same plane of “social collectivity” (73). Woolf accomplishes this goal by casting her canine character into the same web of history as his human friends, equally impacted by economic systems, similarly connected within kinship and other social relationships, and having an inter-connected set of cultural practices just as intricate as the humans in his world. Yet rather than “social collectivity” predicated on human systems of exchange, which favors the commodification of bodies, land, natural resources, and animal labor, Woolf envisions a revised sociality based on the inter-species circulation of what Peter Merriman frames as “energy, force, and rhythm” (24). As we follow Flush’s changing views on humans and his environment, these new ontological elements take precedence. Class distinctions dissipate, traditional markers of

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39 For an early outline of deep ecology, see Arne Naess, “The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects.”
time and space are destabilized, material and spiritual energies become indistinguishable, and the land becomes infused with both human and nonhuman animal vitalities. As Elizabeth and Robert Browning move from the wealth and power symbolized by London’s Wimpole Street to the bucolic villages that characterize the Italian landscape, new ways of perceiving community develop for both Flush and his human counterparts.

While the beginning of Flush’s story describes his place within intra-species class hierarchies, genealogies of nobility, and regionally-based markers of exquisite breeding, the end of his biography explores his freedom from such constraints as he encounters dogs of mixed breeding and undefined class distinctions. In other words, Woolf’s satirical, witty, and somewhat irreverent mock-biography enables us to conceptualize inter-species “social collectivity” outside the hierarchical “chain-of-being” system devised by the human mind.

In addition, the narrative structure itself challenges long-held Western beliefs in the primary of linear space and linear time as fundamental ontological categories. The novel presents a twentieth-century invented biography of a nonhuman animal’s life from the nineteenth century and is infused with verbatim excerpts from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s actual diary entries about her dog. The narrative weaves together fiction and nonfiction, fuses the past and present, moves in and out of traditional geographic spaces, and fuses human and animal consciousness in the voice of Flush’s documentarian. By modelling these extrications from numerous deep-seated Western ontologies, Woolf’s novel illuminates new ways of performing inter-species exchange in a way that de-privileges human cognitive paradigms.
Flush and Social Class

The first part of the novel seems designed to deconstruct various anthropocentric “planes of social collectivity” that affect the lived experience of Flush’s identity. Woolf’s satirical tone mocks human methods of classification such as class status, and exposes the absurdity of using stratified lineage as a meaningful marker of individual identity. The earliest passages reflect on historical possibilities leading to the designation “Spaniel” for Flush’s breed, which in turn allows Flush to place himself along a genealogical timeline indicating rank and nobility, social class, and in-bred behavioral habits. As the biographer accounts for the origins of the term “Spaniel,” the mock etymology uses the language of scientific classification to note possibilities for the derivation. One possibility is that when Carthaginians first landed in Spain, soldiers found a vast rabbit population, and since the Carthaginian word for rabbit is “span,” dogs who controlled the rabbit population were called Spaniels. Another possibility is that the dogs were simply named for their geographical location of origin, so when the Carthaginians landed in Spain, they named the dogs there “Spaniels.” Each possible reason involves human endeavor, from colonization to controlling animal populations to mapping territories, as if the process of human naming defines the creature itself, or, in Derrida’s words, these etymologies demonstrate an arrogant belief in the validity of “a word that men have given themselves the right to give” (Derrida 400). By calling in to question the use of human language as anything other than an absurd impulse to define all creatures according to the creature’s fulfillment of human desires, Woolf humorously destabilizes emphasis on the breed’s name as the marker of the dog’s identity. Flush’s mock-genealogy aligns with Woolf’s use of the “taxonomic method as a symbol of a limited mode of representation” (Alt
Instead of scientific classification, Alt argues, Woolf focuses on new ecological studies that concentrate on “the observation of living organisms as analogies for new methods of seeing and describing life” (Alt *Virginia* 168).

Later in the passage, the mock-biographer connects Flush’s history with the large-scale evolution of the natural world: “Ages passed; vegetation appeared; where there is vegetation the law of Nature has decreed that there shall be rabbits; where there are rabbits, Providence has ordained there shall be dogs.” (3) Flush’s origins are no longer merely anthropocentric, but rather become part of the entire scope of planetary evolution that is intimately connected to the spiritual realm. This mock-Providence notably includes both plants and other species upon whom canine survival depends. Woolf’s satire takes shape as she telescopes Flush’s tiny world into the spiritual realm of “Providence,” yet also quite soberly allows his canine history access to the world of religious belief alongside his human counterparts. Although one might argue that the very act of infusing human religious narratives into the dog’s existence presents a blatant form of anthropocentrism, when taken in the context of Woolf’s refusal to circumscribe her protagonist’s history into a narrow set of classifiers, the move makes sense. The biographer here exhibits an ecological view by outlining the interconnectedness of all creatures – rabbits and dogs and the landscape and the spiritual energies that enliven the “laws of Nature” into a dynamic choreography of creation, rather than a stultified series of taxonomic categorizations.

By narrating Flush’s canine history as part of the system of social rankings based on birthrights, genealogy, and consolidation of wealth, Woolf’s satire might also be aimed at early twentieth-century eugenics movements and groups that would seek to
establish racial homogeneity. The biographer outlines “famous Spaniel families” in a passage that reads like an official decree, family historiography, or proclamation of royal descent:

By degrees, as English history pursues its course, there came into existence at least seven famous Spaniel families – the Clumber, the Sussex, the Norfolk, the Black Field, the Cocker, the Irish Water and the English Water, all deriving from the original spaniel of prehistoric days but showing distinct characteristics, and therefore no doubt claiming privileges as distinct. (5-6)

The list of breeds aligns with English geographical boundaries, indicating a human presence that in some way disrupts the organic process of canine evolution. The implications here are twofold: first, nonhuman animals absorb the spatial boundaries of their humans; and second, without human interference in the reproductive practices of the dogs, certainly there would not be such “distinct characteristics” traced to the animal’s geographical origins. In both cases, the pompous style of the passage, made even more so by the invocation of a distinctly “English” historicity, seems to link eugenics discourse to a kind of treacherous racial snobbery that renders sickeningly absurd such claims to racial “privilege” both in human culture and as assigned to canine bodies. In this way, Woolf aims her satire at systemic methods of racial categorization and control.40

Though Woolf clearly employs the language of eugenics to discuss trait-based social positioning, her acceptance of both positive and negative eugenics has been a contested site of inquiry for scholars. Laura Doyle explicates the nuanced and complex

uses of racialized language in Woolf’s fiction, but ultimately posits that Woolf expresses an “explicit resistance to the racial and sexual discourses of her day” (Doyle Bordering 140). Donald Childs, however, argues that Woolf accepts the eugenic premise as a valid method of bettering the “English race,” “regarding it as a literally unremarkable response to certain problems in the modern world” (Childs 25). Linden Peach tempers such conclusions by arguing that instead of supporting or refusing eugenics philosophies, in Woolf’s work, “eugenicists did provide a discourse which assisted Woolf’s thinking about heredity and provided a vocabulary which Woolf employed occasionally unquestioningly and sometimes critically” (440). Although these critics and other have made persuasive cases for either side of the issue, the question of Woolf’s moral code regarding the science behind human breeding becomes much more complicated when taken in context of her dog fiction. Flush expresses Woolf’s opposition to human claims that they have the right to restrict and manipulate animal reproduction, especially in the hypocrisy of those who would simultaneously find it morally reprehensible to do the same for the human population: “But, if we now turn to human society, what chaos and confusion meet the eye! No Club has any such jurisdiction upon the breed of man” (Woolf Flush 7).

Woolf infuses her descriptions of human characters with the same language of “breeding” as would traditionally be reserved for animal subjects, a technique not insignificant given the novel’s publication during the rise of Nazi empowerment. Much of Flush’s early biography seems to present the question, at what point does the reproductive manipulation of animal bodies end and morally corrupt eugenic philosophies begin? Human characters from Flush’s young life on the farm become the
actors in what seems to be Woolf’s drama of eugenic logic, thereby adding another layer of class-based complexity to her engagement with movements toward racial homogeneity.

But the mating of Dr. Mitford’s ancestors had been carried on with such wanton disregard for the principles that no bench of judges could have admitted his claim to be well bred or have allowed him to perpetuate his kind […]. Furthermore, if Dr. Mitford had been judged based on the same qualifying traits as the breeding dogs in the Spaniel Club, he would have been branded as a mongrel man unfitted to carry on his kind. But he was a human being. Nothing therefore prevented him from marrying a lady of birth and breeding, from living for over eighty years, from having in his possession several generations of greyhounds and spaniels and from begetting a daughter. (8-9)

The passage is peppered with “dog” language – “mating,” “breeding,” “mongrel” – almost as if Dr. Mitford is being subjected to the same kind of judgement as would a dog competing for Best in Show. Although Woolf implies that humans and canines operate under different mating rules, the matter is complicated by the confluence of rhetoric and the ironic pretention with which Woolf outlines the doctor’s relatively unsophisticated “breeding”. Woolf seems to be satirizing eugenics philosophies for both dogs and humans, for if such a “mongrel” man as Dr. Mitford could “possess” such dog royalty as greyhounds and spaniels, then the entire system is illogical, only relying on human exceptionalism to justify its claims to be a proper method of stratifying populations. At the same time Woolf parodies this very “English” mode of classification, she also makes the queer ecological move of placing dogs and humans within the same web of class-based social practices governing reproduction. In effect she is castigating the English class system by linking it linguistically with the practice of animal breeding. In a culture that places nonhuman animal bodies at the lower ends of the “chain of being,” her satire seems to suggest to readers that the English are “lowering” themselves to the position of
the animal by engaging in breeding practices no less corruptive than those who would breed dogs for the Spaniel Club.

These eugenics-infused passages reveal Woolf’s complicated relationship with her social world’s obsessive attention to hierarchical ranking along class lines and along species lines. *Flush* in many ways reflects what Jean Mills notices in Woolf’s work: “her diaries, her essays, and her fiction point to a woman grappling with the disparities of class and the consequences and frustrations of both trying to resist and yet being forced to be contained by the demands of a class-bound patriarchal society” (220). I would add that Woolf is also contending with the tangled and entangled networks of human and nonhuman animal communal linkages that both reinforce and challenge hierarchies embedded in the Darwinian worldview. *Flush* simultaneously presents two oppositional viewpoints toward animal subjectivity: first, the novel shows such deference to Flush’s canine consciousness that it fundamentally challenges deeply-ingrained binary thinking along creatural lines; and second, it appropriates that very same animal being-ness to reinforce cultural codes that separate “civilized” human society from nonhuman animal forms of social organization.

**Flush and his Environment**

Woolf’s critique of the social conditions under which human and nonhuman characters attempt to interact can be further analyzed in terms of the physical spaces Flush inhabits over the course of his life. Most chapter titles correspond to specific locations, each of which presents a different human/canine relationship; indeed, descriptions of Flush’s environment often reveal the most compelling qualities of his engagement with the human world. Numerous critics have written about spatial
experiences of knowing in Woolf’s work, and in modernity in general, but these studies have been largely anthropocentric, with very little attention paid to the inter-species relationality that constitutes lived spaces in her writings. Suzana Zink, in her study of the many rooms within Woolf’s work, concludes that the “referential instability – the shift from material to textual to metaphorical space” is what makes Woolf’s work so modern; however, without clear attention to the added dynamic of cross-species environmental collaboration, researchers are only seeing a small part of the larger picture Woolf creates about mutually shared world-making (10).

Our canine hero begins in the country with the debt-ridden Mitfords, then moves to Wimpole Street in upper-class London where he resides with Elizabeth Barrett, and finally ends his story in Italy with the married Brownings in their rural home. In each of these locales, Flush and his human friends navigate varying degrees of class-based difficulties, including the stultifying effects of debt, the social circumscription of unmarried women, the underground system of animal abduction and ransom, and the psychic deflation that results from losing one’s class status in a new environment. Almost every section of the novel in some way grapples with the effects of a capitalist system that places monetary value on bodies and spaces, often captured within numerous locations of capitalist production, from butcher shops to darkened back alleys, from downtrodden industrial avenues to the pristine boulevards of wealthy London, from the sitting room of Miss Barrett to the dungeon-like rooms Flush must navigate when he is stolen for ransom from his Wimpole Street home. Almost all spaces described in the

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41 For two recent treatments of spatial configurations in Woolf and in modernism in general, see Suzana Zink, *Virginia Woolf’s Rooms and the Spaces of Modernity* and Andrew Thacker, *Modernism, Space, and the City*. 
novel are defined by the circulation of capital, until, that is, the airy streets of Italy allow Flush to re-orient himself away from any class-based social hierarchy. The disorienting model of sociality in London continually forces Flush to re-envision his identity and species-based status in the human world; in fact, the forces of human exchange of capital often seem to be the very thing “battling to keep Flush and Miss Barrett apart” (Woolf *Flush* 98).

Flush’s money-ridden existence asks us to consider how the circulation of capital, an implicitly human form of exchange, impacts cross-species dependencies and interconnections. In all of Flush’s worlds, market forces represent the central governing architecture within which his experience is built, and therefore, must be considered as a component of the ecological webs that weave his life together with the humans he encounters. Jean Mills argues that Woolf’s class politics were guided in many ways by Marx’s philosophy, “that national boundaries are determined by capitalism’s demands on and the oppression of the working classes, much in the same way […] that patriarchy depends on women’s poverty and financial subordination” (220). I would argue that Woolf understood inherently that in order to investigate ecologies across species, one must consider capital’s role as the prevailing system of circulatory exchange in the Western industrial world. Rather than treating ecology as merely relationships between organisms within shared spatial configurations - the city park, the sitting room, city streets, woodland paths – Woolf’s short novel anticipates contemporary theories that see class-based anxieties as fundamentally inextricable from the myriad environments that humans and nonhumans enliven and co-shape together. Thus far, queer ecology has
largely, with a few notable exceptions, relegated the effects of capitalism to the human world, yet Flush’s canine life is also severely impacted by the corruptive need for humans to accumulate wealth. This short canine biography engages in the same kind of investigative work that Haraway advocates in When Species Meet:

Add to those many more proliferations of natural/social relationalities in companion-species worlds linking humans and animals in myriad ways in the regime of lively capital. None of this is innocent, bloodless, or unfit for serious critical investigation. But none of it can be approached if the fleshly historical reality of face-to-face, body-to-body subject making across species is denied or forgotten in the humanist doctrine that holds only humans to be true subjects with real histories. (66-67)

Descriptions of the early days of Flush’s life introduce these cross-species Marxist themes. He spent his youth in “Three Mile Cross,” a country home in many ways removed from the demarcations of class, species, breed, or systems of ownership that take firm root in Flush’s life on Wimpole Street with Miss Barrett. The Mitfords, his first human family, come from modest means, and have few material items in their home that are not “made by Miss Mitford herself and of the cheapest material” (11). In fact, the Mitfords represent the debt-ridden class of working families who meet their own basic needs through handiwork but nonetheless must find new ways of raising capital in order to “pay their bills and settle their debts” (11). The capacity for “ownership” is limited at Three Mile Cross, so that even Flush himself becomes less an “owned” animal property, and more a co-habitant with the Mitfords as he lives out his own personal experience of the surrounding natural world. Woolf’s language in these portions of the novel present

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42 Nicole Shukin traces the convergence of animal life in contemporary capitalist society in Animal Capital: rendering life in biopolitical times; see also Jason Moore, Capitalism in the web of life: ecology and the accumulation of capital.
Flush’s senses, instincts, desires, and psychology as the primary narrative makers of meaning within his environment.

As [Miss Mitford] strode through the long grass, so he leapt hither and thither, parting its green curtain. The cool globes of dew or rain broke in showers of iridescent spray about his nose; the earth, here hard, here soft, here hot, here cold, stung, teased and tickled the soft pads of his feet. Then what a variety of smells interwoven in subtest combination thrilled his nostrils; strong smells of earth, sweet smells of flowers; nameless smells of leaf and bramble; sour smells as they crossed the road; pungent smells as they entered bean-fields. But suddenly down the wind came tearing a smell sharper, stronger, more lacerating than any – a smell that ripped across his brain stirring a thousand instincts, releasing a million memories – the smell of hare, the smell of fox. Off he flashed like a fish drawn in a rush through water further and further. He forgot his mistress; he forgot all humankind. (12)

In this landscape relatively free from the confining effects of domestication, no human hand attempts to subdue Flush, but rather, he becomes a vibrant circulating body consumed with and taken over by his sensory experience. His freedom to follow his sensory instincts where he chooses, suspended in a state of pure ecstasy, removes Flush from species-based denigrations that might otherwise cause him to repress these organic desires for “the smell of hare, the smell of fox.” His “million memories” juxtaposed with his forgetting of “humankind” happen when he is free from the confines of ownership, when his body is released from the transactional value placed on him as a piece of human property. Miss Mitford so considers Flush outside a system of money exchange that she finds it “unthinkable” to sell him, even when the family finances require her to find a new home for the dog. Flush “was of the rare order of objects that cannot be associated with money,” and so she decides to offer Flush as a gift to her friend, the London poet Elizabeth Barrett (14). In a sense, Flush’s existence outside capitalist flows allow him to develop associations with human beings based on an organic desire for affection, removed from domestication and the perverse sense that his body is owned by another
species. It will only be within the money-laden contours of Wimpole Street where he will begin to understand himself as a creature defined by human systems of capital exchange.

After Flush makes the transition to Miss Barrett’s house in London, he confronts a new ontological situation in which he and his human caretaker must define each other within a set of structures that run contrary to the natural instincts he developed at Three Mile Cross. He must accept himself as an “owned” creature, must identify himself within a social hierarchy based on his breeding and his owner’s social class, and must re-figure his bodily urges to conform to the small, enclosed spaces that comprise his new living environment. Miss Barrett, already a celebrated poet, “lies secluded all through the summer months in a back bedroom in Wimpole Street” (15). In this “back bedroom,” Flush must curl himself, uncomfortably, on a corner of the sofa, must hold in his urges to relieve his bowels, and must follow the orders of the humans who enter his space.

Early in these scenes, Woolf satirizes the pomp and circumstance of Wimpole Street culture and the associated claims to global power assumed by its wealthy inhabitants. Indeed, Miss Barrett and her sitting room seem to embody the very Wimpole Street values that Woolf’s satire parodies – class-based opportunity and education, although meted out irregularly according to gender, and distant engagement with masses of adoring followers who rely on the moneyed class to provide cultural entertainment and artifacts to worship. These early passages reveal a kind of disdain for value systems predicated on money, including beliefs that the higher classes should be the purveyors of “civilization” and artistic enterprise.

Even now perhaps nobody rings the bell of a house in Wimpole Street without trepidation. It is the most august of London streets, the most impersonal. Indeed,
when the world seems tumbling to ruin, and civilization rocks on its foundations, one has only to go to Wimpole Street; to pace that avenue; to survey those houses; to consider their uniformity; to marvel at the window curtains and their consistency; to admire the brass knockers and their regularity; to observe butchers tendering joints and cooks receiving them; to reckon the incomes of the inhabitants and infer their consequent submission to the laws of God and man – one has only to go to Wimpole Street and drink deep of the peace breathed by authority in order to have a sigh of thankfulness that, while Corinth has fallen and Messina has tumbled, while crowns have blown down the wind and old Empires have gone up in flames, Wimpole Street has remained unmoved and, turning from Wimpole Street into Oxford Street, a prayer rises in the heart and bursts from the lips that not a brick of Wimpole Street may be re-pointed, not a curtain washed, not a butcher fail to tender or a cook to receive the sirloin, the haunch the breast, the ribs of mutton and beef for ever and ever, for as long as Wimpole Street remains, civilization is secure. (15-16)

The very notion of “civilization” is associated with tightly structured “uniformity” that defines the architecture of London’s upper-class neighborhoods. The melodramatic language mocks residents who embrace their supposed power, while lower-class onlookers – the butchers, cooks, and maids – supposedly “marvel” at the deified aristocracy. Yet even in her overt satiric tone, Woolf attends to the grotesque realities upon which reified social rituals depend, for while Miss Barrett and her high-class friends luxuriate in their ostentatious sitting rooms and feast at suppertime, the servant class is defined in large part by their tactile engagement with the animal flesh the rich people later consumer. Indeed, accumulation and consumption of animal carcasses may be one of the central indicators of wealth on Wimpole Street, certainly a purposeful grotesque irony in a novel that argues for the consciousness of a nonhuman animal. The imagery of animal bodies being mutilated for consumption – the ribs, the breasts, the loins, the joints – symbolizes the methods by which the rich maintain power, which necessitates the subjugation and neutralization of bodies lower on the social hierarchy, both human and nonhuman.
As Woolf turns her descriptive pen away from the exteriors of Wimpole Street, and toward the interior of Barrett’s home where the poet rests as an invalid, the imagery takes on Marxian overtones, wherein the dim “back rooms” of capitalism symbolize a loss of human agency at the hands of socio-economic machinery that subdue the individual in service of its own aims. In their shared captivity in the tiny room, lying on cushions, stroking and petting and comforting each other, sharing irritations and anxieties as well as excitements and joys, Flush and Miss Barrett are linked in a companionship of domestication.\(^\text{43}\) Both suppress desires in order to fulfill the social obligations they have to one another and to the world beyond the confines of the poet’s room. As part of a family from the upper echelons of England’s class system, both woman and dog are expected to make themselves very small and quiet in order to maintain the “dignity” of the house. Flush is struck by this new way of seeing himself in his environment as soon as he enters his new home. In the grand rowhouse, he notices “daggers and swords hung upon wine-dark walls; curious objects brought from his East Indian property stood in recesses, and thick rich carpets clothed the floors” (18). These emblems of empire and violence startle Flush as he is led further into the house, into Miss Barrett’s room, where he is overwhelmed with sights and smells akin to “a crypt, crusted with fungus, slimy with mould exuding sour smells of decay and antiquity” (19). Miss Barrett herself, psychically represented by the room in which she lives and writes, becomes symbolic of patriarchal degradation. As an invalid and as a woman, the poet lacks control over her

\(^{43}\) For scholarship on domestication, power relations, and multi-species environments in ecological scholarship, see Heather Anne Swanson et al., *Domestication gone wild: politics and practices of multispecies relations*; and Harriet Ritvo, “Calling the Wild: Selection, Domestication, and Species.”
own body and her own economic outcome. Tucked away with Flush at her side, she sits still as a formidable emblem of gendered subjectivity within hierarchical systems of domination and control. Just as Miss Barrett has become inured to her surroundings, over time Flush himself learns to navigate the mausoleum-like room, wherein he lay at her feet moving very rarely, performing his role at the very bottom of this species chain of being. In his tenure as Miss Barrett’s lapdog, Flush learns the same lessons that all members of the “lower rungs” of capitalist society must learn: “To resign, to control, to suppress the most violent instincts of his nature – that was the prime lesson of the bedroom school” (34-35). In essence, both Flush and Miss Barrett are victims of psychic decay within the cramped, unlit, musty dens to which they are relegated.\(^{44}\) In Marx’s spatial metaphor, impoverishments of all kinds exist within these “back rooms” so that the fantasy allure of capitalism’s promise is maintained, a deceptive necessity to keep the population willing to expend labor for the benefit of those with economic power. In her invocation of Marx’s “back room” symbolism, Woolf seems to desire a remedy for the neglect of the nonhuman in theories of capitalism’s destruction.

At the same time, both Flush and Miss Barrett benefit from their status and relative comfort within their Wimpole Street home. Flush embraces his new social identity as the lapdog of a wealthy landowner, strutting down the streets of London turning his nose up at “lesser” canine breeds. Yet almost as a corrective to the more ego-boosting moments in Flush’s experience, Woolf soon turns her attention to impoverished

\(^{44}\) Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, argues that for Marx, capitalism’s spaces reveal the unrepresentable "horror or pity" of impoverished human degradation, "a search which [...] moves from statistics and regions to towns, streets, houses, rooms, and finally that last glimpse of the nothingness in the back room, blinding, unbearable, from which we must avert our eyes" (126).
areas of East London that exist just a few blocks over from Wimpole Street. In the “Whitechapel” section of Flush’s biography, he experiences the extreme discomforts of poverty and desperation when he is stolen for ransom and chained in a dark cellar with other suffering dogs. As the narrator follows Flush into the hands of his kidnappers, the biographer’s voice becomes more prominent, quoting excerpts from Barrett Browning’s actual diary entries, as if to lend a special note of reality to these devastating scenes. It turns out, in fact, that Elizabeth Barrett wrote in her diary that she did pay twenty pounds to dog thieves to retrieve Flush. And in descriptions of Whitechapel, the narration again turns to primary source data as a method of storytelling, this time citing a work titled *The Rookeries of London a survey of London’s poorest quality housing* published in 1850 by Mr. Thomas Beames.

Splendid buildings raised themselves in Westminster, yet just behind them were ruined sheds in which human beings lived herded together above herds of cows – “two in each seven feet of space.” [Flush] felt that he ought to tell people what he had seen. Yet how could one describe politely a bedroom in which two or three families lived above a cow-shed, when the cow-shed had no ventilation, when the cows were milked and killed and eat under the bedroom? (78)

The section continues with descriptions of families living in extreme filth, dilapidated buildings, tenement housing, and drinking green, polluted water, rationing their resources so that survival was extraordinarily difficult. The nonhuman animals unfortunate enough to reside in Whitechapel live in squalor alongside humans, and even further, in this passage, their bodies suffer as they are used for food and labor. Indeed, it is proximity to housing and butchering of cows that reveals the depths of East End poverty, no doubt a purposeful inverted equivalency to the display of animal bodies indicative of wealth on Wimpole Street. In both rich and poor areas of London, the corruptive effects of capitalism become known by the imprisonment, mutilation, and killing of animal bodies.
In narrating this parallel universe alongside Flush’s upper class home, Woolf seems to suggest that as long as money is the central method of understanding one’s subjectivity, human and nonhuman animals will never live within a just, co-shaping environment since the pursuit and display of wealth will always result in the desecration of one species over another.

“Worlding” Against Capital

The remaining sections of the novel offer an alternative method of exchange wherein the corruptive forces of capitalism are replaced by what Merriman calls “other […] ontological constituents” such as energy, force, and affect (24). The riches of Wimpole Street, the poverty-stricken tenements of Whitechapel, and even the debt-ridden country home at Three Mile Cross are left behind as Flush and Miss Barrett (now Mrs. Browning) relocate to an Italian social landscape that cares little for their class-based identities. In their new town, shared social values are felt across species in terms of the circulation of spiritual energies, animal bodies not hung as carcasses but alive together socially in village lanes, and a sense that space belongs to each creature not based on their relative wealth but simply based on their proximity to a shared scene. By the end of the novel, the model of sociality that Flush finds in Italy removes from his frame of reference the use of animal bodies as both labor and as commodities to be used for exchange.

As the Browning family, which includes Flush, find their way around Italy’s dusty streets and winding paths, there is no need for chains or “park-keepers,” who are, to Flush, emblematic of the “corrupt aristocracy” of Wimpole Street (117). The “worlding game” between creatures takes on a new shape unbridled by the stifling influence of class
stratification. The Brownings no doubt benefit from the wealth that allows them a comfortable home abroad, yet Woolf gives very little notice in her canine biography to the experience of the human characters once the novel shifts to Italian landscapes. In fact, Miss Barrett almost disappears from the novel entirely, except as a presence that becomes increasingly a mystery to Flush. Instead, our spaniel hero roams the streets of town without human companionship, meeting dogs of all breeds who behave not according to their human’s social class, but according to canine instincts and desires. Flush starts to become “daily more and more democratic” (117) as the absurdity of class-based hierarchies is revealed in the care he feels for his new dog friends, “the spotted spaniel down the alley and the brindled dog and the yellow dog – it did not matter which” (119).

As Flush separates from his human friends, sharing social space more often with nonhuman animals with whom he finds intimacy and camaraderie, Woolf’s narrative creates a mode of human-animal cohabitation that celebrates, rather than laments, what is framed earlier in the novel as Flush and Miss Barrett living “alone together” (33). Rather than suffering a similar circumscription in the unlit back bedroom on Wimpole Street, Miss Barrett and Flush live along parallel paths, Miss Barrett with her human companions, and Flush with his new canine friends. Although Flush undergoes a period of adjustment as his human counterpart began showing him less attention, he soon spends his days “devour[ing] whole bunches of ripe grapes largely because of their purple smell; he chewed and spat out whatever tough relic of goal or macaroni the Italian housewife had thrown from the balcony – goal and macaroni were raucous smells, crimson smells” (131). The emphasis in these sections is on communal sharing of property, so that doors are left open, Flush crosses village streets as confidently as a human pedestrian might,
and the outdoors is no longer an escape from a circumscribed indoor existence, but becomes integrated into the lived spaces that Flush occupies according to his conscious desires. In this way, inter-species relating no longer relies on systems of ownership and wealth, but rather on social collectivity that de-emphasizes anthropocentric forms of hierarchical distinctions between forms of life.

As Flush and Miss Barrett acclimate to their new environments, instead of their lives being intertwined in a kind of mutual suffocation, both dog and the newlywed poet find an equilibrium in spending their lives side by side, each learning the world according to his or her own individual sensibility: Mrs. Browning wrote, while Flush “wandered off into the streets […] to enjoy the rapture of smell” (131). And once they had been in Italy for some time, she “no longer needed his red fur and his bright eyes to give her what her own experience lacked; she had found Pan for herself among the vineyards and the olive trees; he was there too beside the pine fire of an evening” (118). They are separate, yet together, sharing space and situation, yet doing so without subsuming the other’s experience. This kind of independence does not contradict the sense of co-forming interdependency that queer ecologists have been describing; rather, it presents a form of co-being, world-forming togetherness that does not subjugate one species to the whims, proprieties, and cultural norms of the other. Instead, each is given space within which to express and explore their own perceptual engagements with the tactile world, to struggle with defining their own place within the multi-specied social dynamics they must navigate, alone, yet together with the myriad life forms – both human and nonhuman - that populate their daily encounters. Such individuality allows each of them to establish their own “naturecultures,” as Haraway would call them, that remove binary treatment of
what might be Flush’s “natural” canine behaviors as opposed to his “unnatural” performances for human cultural acceptance. This blending of mutual “worldings” anticipates the queer ecological perspectives that scholars and writers are just now beginning to theorize.

The biographer-narrator in *Flush* continually reminds us of the complexities the language causes for Flush and Mrs. Browning, so often impeding communication, yet also forming a special intimacy between them that exists outside the abstract symbolization of the word. As the story increasingly shifts to Flush’s perspective in Italy, the narrator more fully expresses the canine sensory point of view, while much of the poet’s thoughts are presented as direct quotations from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s actual journal entries. Additionally, part of Flush’s changing attitudes in Italy begin as a result of Mrs. Browning continually ignoring him in order to attend to her writing:

In those far-off days he had only to leap on her sofa and Miss Barrett started wide-awake and looked at him. Now, once more, he leapt on to her sofa. But she did not notice him. She was writing. She paid no attention to him. She went on writing. (156)

Jane Goldman sees the numerous scenes of reading and writing as evidence that “the letter is always and already in the company of the companion species, entangled in what Haraway identifies as ‘material semiotic node of knotted beings’ (Haraway 2008:17), including human and non-human animals” (170). Yet in *Flush*, as in all the works studied in this dissertation, Woolf writes a very clear distrust of “the letter,” or the “word,” as a reasonable form of intimacy between creatures of all kinds. What Woolf seems to seek instead is an alternative “semiotic node” that reaches across cognitive and perceptual alterities, especially in works like *Flush* when the relating is between two different species. In effect, Woolf’s narrative searches for what Rohman calls “linguistic
modalities outside the human” (17), such as those Merriman identifies as “ranging from movement, sensation and affect, to energy, force and rhythm” (24). Indeed, Flush at one point sees in Miss Barrett, a poet of words, frustration at the futility of language to bridge the species divide: “‘Writing,’ – Miss Barrett once exclaimed after a morning’s toil, ‘writing, writing….’” After all, she may have thought, do words say everything? Can words say anything? Do not words destroy the symbol that lies beyond the reach of words (20)?” Woolf echoes Djuna Barnes’ sentiment that “we […] should look well around, doubting everything seen, done, spoken, precisely because we have a word for it, and not its alchemy” (90).

Perhaps as a fitting marker for the new energies that will characterize Flush’s world in Italy, the first place they visit in Italy is Petrarch’s Fountain in Vaucluse, itself a symbol of the word rendered silent in the form of a famous poet’s speechless statue. As Flush adapts to his new surroundings, he makes meaning of his environment less by imagining the thoughts of Miss Barrett, and more by taking into his experience the numerous material forces around him, the rhythms of his own feet as he bounds across the house, the food scents of street vendors and the sounds of their customers, the tactile feeling of being touched by a woman selling fruit, the sense of anticipation before the birth of the Browning’s baby, and perhaps most profoundly, spiritual energies that encompass the Barrett home as Elizabeth regularly invites a medium in to establish a connection with the dead. Flush is initially skeptical of the spirits Miss Barrett seems to see out windows and in the shadows of the house, but over time he becomes fascinated by the table where the medium sits, for only when she is there, it seems to rest only on one leg. The role of language as a mediating force in Flush’s world is quickly replaced
by sensory and extrasensory experiences that define Flush’s environment. He becomes a communal participant not only in the goings on of the household, but also in the activity on the streets outside. In this way, Flush’s dog biography queers the ecological framework within which interactions between humans and nonhumans are defined. Human modes of sociality are decentered and de-privileged, while the undefined, unnamed world-making energies shared between species instead constitute Flush’s consciousness.
CHAPTER 4

“THE ANIMALS AND BIRDS WERE LEFT IN PEACE”: KATHARINE BURDEKIN’S QUEER UTOPIAN ECOLOGY

“We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand.”

-- Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*

Katharine Burdekin’s utopian fiction presents an alternative sociality that models the kind of inter-species equity that animal studies experts and queer ecologists seek. Her fiction, almost voracious in its search for novel ways to change the trajectory of human enterprise, explores her vision for socially conscious cultural evolution, futures inhabited by the fair-minded, and the elimination of social hierarchies that corrupt possibilities for genuine community. Writing some of the first speculative fiction penned by a female author, Burdekin used the genre as a space to investigate gender and sexual fluidity, the destructive potential of unchecked capitalism, the nature and rise of totalitarian governments during times of increased globalization, and the myriad ways trait-based classification contributes to the corrosive elements of human sociality. Her characters travel through time as anthropologists to study human futures and pasts, and cross identity lines along racial, gender, sexuality, and even species lines to expose the destructiveness of socially-constructed systems that contemporary social and biological sciences would lead her readers to believe are “naturally” occurring phenomena. In this way, Burdekin’s ideas presage modern attempts to deconstruct politically-charged power dynamics that buttress deep-seated cultural beliefs, including Butler’s theories of performativity, Foucault’s critiques of the human sciences, Chomsky’s theories of state power, and Haraway’s intimate cross-species ecologies.
What little we know about Burdekin’s life has come from her life-long partner, who has chosen to remain anonymous, in a series of interviews granted to Daphne Patai, a scholar who in the 1990s argued for the inclusion of Burdekin’s work in studies of early twentieth-century literary production. As a result of Patai’s advocacy, the Feminist Press published several of her novels, many of which had gone unpublished in her lifetime. Burdekin was born in 1896 in the UK, worked as a nurse in England during World War I, and had two daughters with an Australian barrister whom she divorced soon after she wrote her first novel, Anna Colquhoun (1922). Upon her return to the UK, she met the woman with whom she would spend the rest of her life, and she began writing antifascist fiction with a prescient sense of where European civilization was headed during the lead-in to the Second World War. According to the family mythos, Burdekin adopted the pseudonym Murray Constantine in order to protect her daughters from repercussions they might suffer as a result of her controversial fiction, which not only advocated for antifascist ideologies during a rise in nationalist populism, but also for radical theories about the fluidity of gender and sexuality. After World War II, Burdekin abandoned writing, working instead in a shoe factory until her health deteriorated many years later. In her later years, she took up the pen once again, this time turning her storytelling eye to spirituality and mysticism.

As an active speculative fiction writer in the 1930s, Burdekin’s world making transcends the oppressive power structures of her time and place, often excoriating political systems that inevitably leave some groups subordinate to others. Her feminist utopia titled The End of This Day’s Business, written in 1935 but unpublished until 1989, describes a society from 4000 years in the future in which twentieth-century sex roles
have been reversed – women are in power and men are relegated to an inconsequential “second sphere.” Burdekin’s polemic addresses feminist visions that, taken to their logical end, would result in power imbalances that merely change the gender of the oppressed. Another speculative work turns away from critique of women’s movements and instead offers an eerie premonition about Hitler’s rise and the devastation the Nazi occupation would bring to Europe. *Swastika Night*, published in 1937, became an immediate success, selling over 17,000 copies in its first year and providing the framework for dystopian novels to come, especially, as critics have noted, George Orwell’s *1984*. The novel imagines a future society governed by Nazi ideology and its misogynistic horrors; caged women serve merely as reproductive labor, existing entirely as subjects of male desire, rape is encouraged, and Nazi soldiers turn to homoerotism as a method of denying women a role as social or sexual beings. Daphne Patai recognizes in *Swastika Night* Burdekin’s ability to “think the unthinkable”: “She faced what was happening in a highly ‘civilized’ European nation, imagined its consequences, and represented in fiction what the world around her, judged by contemporary tendencies, might well be like in the future” (Patai “Afterward” 338).

While these future dystopian worlds are intriguing, I will focus this chapter on Burdekin's utopian novel *Proud Man*, published in 1934, which suggests an alternative to the tyrannies that characterize early twentieth century Europe. The narrator, a documentarian called the “Person” from thousands of years in the future, investigates a society modeled after 1930s Britain, which is full of “creatures… neither animal nor human, but in a transition state between the two” (14). These “primitive” creatures are called “subhumans” because they represent a less evolved form of the human species that
populates the Person’s future utopian world. The narrator comes from a society of androgynous, vegetarian, telepathic individuals who have eliminated all forms of identity classification such as race, class, sexuality, and gender. Each chapter of the novel corresponds to a subhuman with whom the Person spends time learning about contemporary life, starting with a country priest, then a struggling female writer in London, and finally a convicted serial killer, each of whom offer their own perspectives on subhuman cultural norms and social values. Using primarily the formal style of ethnography, the Person documents the rituals, uses of language, and trait-based hierarchies that guide subhuman life, and over the course of the novel, begins to adopt many of the behaviors that at first seems alien to her more egalitarian ethic. In descriptions of the narrator’s future queer utopia, Burdekin imagines a radically progressive model of “worlding” predicated on true equity for all creatures. Just as Barnes, Hall, and Woolf employ violence, eros, and collective sociality, respectively, to destabilize social Darwinian hierarchies and challenge scientific rationales for so-called “natural” identity traits, Burdekin purposefully employs de-aestheticized prose to suggest that the human capacity for abstract communication is perhaps the primary cause of oppression along gender, sexuality, and species lines. Proud Man imagines a world in which human beings de-privilege language as a method of ontological understanding, and it champions a cross-species inclusive awareness for all.

Perhaps as a result of the general neglect of genre fiction in academic circles, Burdekin’s speculative fiction has garnered relatively little scholarship since its re-publication in the 1990s. Only in the past decade has her work begun to appear within

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45 I use the pronouns “she” and “her” since the narrator adopts a female persona for most of the novel.
modernist studies, primarily in terms of her work’s feminist, anti-Fascist, and queer elements. Many critics, including Lucie Armit and Karen Schneider, use Burdekin’s fiction to legitimize female contributions to the male-dominated genres of science fiction and war literature. Each argue that Burdekin’s work undermines androcentric linguistic tendencies in sci-fi and war fiction to challenge patriarchal power structures that keep women underrepresented in those genres. Other have focused on her fiction’s response to extremist ideologies on the rise during the interwar period in Europe. Some see Burdekin’s utopia/dystopia narratives as responses to the threat of totalitarianism and to the misogynistic outcry over re-structured gender roles after the First World War.46 Others argue that Burdekin’s extended commentaries on social hierarchies were less connected to her critique of fascism, and more illustrative of her positive response to progressivism regarding gender and sexual freedoms.47 More recent scholars have investigated queer themes in Burdekin’s fiction, including her complex reactions to contemporary sexual science and her employment of the future utopia trope to reconstruct paradigms governing queer political and cultural landscapes. Elizabeth English and others argue that genre fiction presented writers such as Burdekin with opportunities to

46 See Raffaella Baccolini, "Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler"; and Loretta Stec, "Dystopian Modernism Vs Utopian Feminism: Burdekin, Woolf, and West Respond to the Rise of Fascism."

47 The last decade has seen much growth in studies of sexology and modernist culture. See two works by Lucy Bland and Laura L. Doan: Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires and Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science; Anna Katharina Schaffner, Modernism and Perversion: Sexual Deviance in Sexology and Literature, 1850-1930; Benjamin Kahan, The book of minor perverts: sexology, etiology, and the emergences of sexuality; Chiara Beccalossi, Female sexual inversion: same-sex desires in Italian and British sexology, c. 1870-1920; and Janie Irvine, Disorders of desire: sexuality and gender in modern American sexology.
create worlds that normalize sexual and gender fluidity, and to navigate tense social limitations placed on their creative expression.48

These scholars have succeeded in bringing Burdekin’s work to the forefront of early twentieth-century genre studies, especially in terms of the queer themes in her fiction. However, no study has yet considered the role of the animal within the past and future worlds she envisions. This omission is surprising given the recent surge in critical animal studies in literary criticism as a whole, and even more surprising given the central position that ontologies of animal being-ness hold in Burdekin’s imagination. Critics have begun, however, to pay attention to the animal in speculative fiction as a genre, including Sherryl Vint in her book-length work called Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal. Vint’s premise is that science fiction and animal studies share similar epistemologies: “Both are interested in foundational questions about the nature of human existence and sociality. Both are concerned with the construction of alterity…. Both take seriously the question of what it means to communicate with a being whose embodied, communicative, emotional and cultural life – perhaps even physical environment – is radically different from our own” (1). By allowing each mode of inquiry to inform the other, Vint argues, we are able to better “grasp animals as beings in their own right rather than as beings defined through their place in human cultural systems” (6). Using a similar methodology, Veronica Hollinger finds liberating compatibilities between science fiction and queer studies in that both are well suited to challenge “the smoothly oiled technologies of heteronormativity” (200). She sees

“utopian queer” space as “inhabited by subjects in process who are not bound by reifying definitions and expectations. In this utopian space, bodies, desires, and sex/gender behaviors are free floating and in constant play” (207). Vint and Hollinger rightly note that speculative fiction, animal studies, and queer theory each have the potential to hypothesize about alterity, to open new avenues of investigation into subjectivity and social relations. Certainly the utopian future in Proud Man proposes a radically alternative discourse surrounding queerness and the co-existence of human and nonhuman animal bodies. However, it does so in a much more complex way than merely providing models for thinking through “othering” or commenting on the limits of knowing others. Burdekin’s novel does not present animal characters as a way to infiltrate the inner worlds of queer and nonhuman subjects; rather, she examines animality as a condition of being that challenges fundamental ontologies at the root of human social formations, including binaries regarding gender and sexuality, and belief in the primacy of language as an indicator of evolved consciousness. By constructing an evolutionary timeline that includes animals, subhumans, and future humans, Proud Man teases out many complexities inherent in linear social hierarchies modeled on Darwinian thinking, often entangling her narrative in animal-to-human progressions that undermine her cross-species egalitarian ideals. Finally, Burdekin’s utopian vision anticipates theories of queer futurity wherein cis-gender heterosexual reproduction is only one of many possibilities for securing continued existence, and wherein human beings have given up their insistence on species superiority in favor of an equitable inter-species community.
Sex, Gender, and the Animal

Many of Burdekin’s utopian visions seem to be direct responses to the political milieu of the time, including the rise of fascism throughout Europe, the struggle for women’s suffrage, the increased visibility of individuals with non-normative gender and sexual identities, and vast changes in mass media, telecommunications, and transportation. These changes for Burdekin represented not a model of progress, but rather an indicator of civilization itself as a system destined to destroy itself. She advocates a new ecological paradigm wherein “herd” mentality has been abolished: “Until all the herds are broken up, all of them – nations, churches, fascists, communists, trade unions, the B.M.A., the Great White Race, and Nordic Myth, the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, the gangsters, the priesthoods of all religions – until all these herds are scattered there can be no humanity on earth” (147). Burdekin was suspicious of all ways of thinking that rely on stratification and classification. In her view, social theories, including those put forward by contemporary sexologists, that reinforce false binaries inevitably contribute to the fascistic nationalism on the rise in the interwar period. She predicted that theories of biological difference, such as the “separate spheres” ideology and labels for sexual “perversions,” would lead the public to an intense fear of any kind of “Other,” and in time, widespread paranoia would lead to the proto-theory at the root of the Nazi obsession (Patai “Afterward” 336-7).

Speculative novels like Proud Man seem designed to offer alternatives to the kind of categorization represented in contemporary social and biological sciences, offering a utopian vision in which identity taxonomies have become obsolete. English and others see Burdekin’s project as complicit in such discourses surrounding gender and sexuality,
claiming that *Proud Man* is full of “sexually dissident identities…replicating the widely disseminated and recognizable paradigm of the sexual invert” (English 95). However, I would argue that the narrator in *Proud Man* is not an “invert” at all; rather Burdekin challenges such dualistic thinking by presenting a future being with neither male nor female gender traits. The protagonist, in fact, is forced to choose one gender over another in order to commune peacefully with the species of subhumans who rely on gendered behavior to understand their social world. Burdekin’s character surpasses the creations of other queer writers, such as Djuna Barnes’ transgender doctor and Radclyffe Hall’s Stephen Gordon, each of whom embody an “inverted” gender and/or sexuality, to challenge the very notion that gender and sexuality are anything more than social performances governed by the perspective of the observer. The Person in *Proud Man* is not an “invert” because there is no a priori gender or sexuality to subvert; the narrator exists outside of gender identification and does not claim any sexual orientation or even sexual desire. Burdekin seems to suggest that even the most progressive of views on identity traits inevitably circumscribe individual existence into categories that benefit not the individual, but the culture who depends on rote classification in order to function.

The rejection of both gender and sexuality in the construction of the novel’s protagonist fulfills multiple purposes within Burdekin’s utopian ideal. First, the narrator’s adoption of a female gender performance allows for critique of the masculinist environmental prejudices that women must navigate in early twentieth-century England.

49 Several Burdekin scholars claim her work represents contemporary ‘invert’ sexology. For two representative examples, see Elizabeth English, ‘The Book is a sort of touchstone to other people’: Sexology, the Invert and Desire in Katharine Burdekin’s Utopian Fiction”; and Glyn Salton-Cox, *Queer communism and the ministry of love: sexual revolution in British writing of the 1930s*. 

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Assumed to be female because of the length of her hair, the Person learns to behave as a woman, wearing constrictive clothing and learning “to move slowly and feebly” so she can move in social circles without her performance being challenged (92). She takes the name Verona, and over time notices in subhuman women an intense self-loathing born of the denigration they must willingly accept as a condition of being. During her long conversations with the country Priest who teaches her about subhuman culture, she asks why females experience such self-hatred. The Priest responds with an ironic critique of his own: “If women stopped despising themselves, Verona, the world would turn upside down. Do not suggest such a thing” (113). The Person’s performed female body becomes a dramatic satire that exposes the lengths to which patriarchal power must exert control over all aspects of a woman’s being. Second, the removal of the erotic from the female identity of the narrator is also a form of resistance to the ubiquity of sexualized female bodies in Western culture. Finally, and most importantly for this study, the asexuality of the protagonist rejects the erotic as a mode of existential understanding, placing Burdekin’s text in direct confrontation with the contemporary scientific discourse of Darwinian biology, Freudian psychology, and especially within the burgeoning field of sexology. According to Anna Schaffner and Shane Weller, the impact of sexual studies on writers in the modernist era cannot be overstated; indeed, Freud “placed Eros at the very heart of human experience, positing it as the force behind civilization itself” (3). Burdekin’s asexual, gender-less narrator challenges the increasing tendency within these early studies to pathologize sexual behaviors deemed “deviant,” thereby exposing individuals to medicalization and destructive behavioral therapies; and opposes the
taxonomic impulse to label sexualities in a way that allows behaviors to be legislated and controlled.

These contestations against underlying methodologies within scientific and psychological discourse most often occur as the narrator traces an evolutionary trajectory that begins with the animal, continues with the subhuman, and ends with her own future society. Rohman reminds us that it is not Darwin’s work itself that reinforces social hierarchies, but its “reception […] that translates it into palatable notions of hierarchy and morally driven development” (4). Burdekin sees in subhumans this cultural interpretation of evolutionary biology as evidence of a middling state of incipient consciousness, neither fully aware nor fully unaware of their own mode of world-making. Indeed, it is their very beliefs about gender and sexuality that keep them from evolving beyond a tendency toward cruel social hierarchies, warmongering, and the need to colonize the bodies and lives of all other creatures on the planet. In Burdekin’s imagination, subhumans are closer to being in a primitive animal state precisely because they each identify with only one gender:

    The idea that one individual should be both male and female, wholly and practically and conveniently within itself, was repugnant to them, even though their bisexuality was the cause of unbelievable pain, discomfort, and grief. They were not persons, and they did not want to be persons; they were males and females, or, as they preferred to call themselves, men and women. (23)

Burdekin defines “bisexuality” as a negative form of binary thinking; subhumans are incapable of thinking beyond such dualisms, choosing instead to operate within a system that circumscribes each individual to a narrow set of social customs and rituals. In order to gain full “personhood,” subhumans must evolve past the need for such rudimentary terms such as “male” and “female” and the associated hierarchies and behaviors. As she
writes to her human friends, the narrator even outlines a trajectory of evolution that reaches far past the subhuman on the bases of sex: “If evolution is a fact, the whole course of human evolution would seem to be from a single-sexed unconscious being, such as an amoeba, to a single-sexed fully conscious being such as you or I” (22). The novel pushes back against the exceptionalism that allows humans to see themselves as more evolved than animals, seeming to argue that until gender and sexuality are no longer seen as traits that allow for social control, existence as fully realized “persons” will never be achieved. In fact, Burdekin’s castigation of the arrogance in subhumans’ scientific moment extends beyond the human belief that they are “evolved” creatures. Her narrative suggests that despite sexological studies and the popularization of corresponding social sciences, human culture in the twentieth century still operates within a haze of half-knowing, intellectually deficient in their awareness of their own organic states of sexualized being. The narrator claims to have found the “root cause of all the subhuman wretchedness” in the fact that they “are not happy in their bisexuality, because they have not become conscious of it” (23). The Person sees only about “a third of their minds” as fully conscious, yet they use that partial consciousness to try to force the fluidity of gender into bifurcated identity traits, and sexuality into categorized types. Burdekin sees these attempts to become conscious of that “which is still animal and should be unconscious” as contributing to so much of the misery that results in some social groups exerting dominance over others (Burdekin 23).

Burdekin’s narrator spends a great deal of time critiquing subhuman gender and sexual binaries, most often relating these more “primitive” dynamics to animal sexuality. This very schema relies on the same kind of binary thinking – human and animal – that
Burdekin’s novel challenges in almost every other way. At base, designating all nonhuman life as fitting into the general category of the animal “does a reductive violence to the multiplicity of life forms outside the human” (Rohman 17). But even further, the protagonist often assigns nonhuman creatures a set of emotional responses to sexuality that are anthropomorphic at best, but also function as an existential threat to any creatural subjectivity. Just before she describes the misery of subhuman sexuality, the Person supposes the thoughts of her unnamed future readers: “Now you may think, Well, if they are still so near to animals as to have two sexes, then like animals, they must be happy in their primitive sex life, finding it enjoyable and unconscious of its slavery” (23).

From the point of view of animal studies, this kind of anthropomorphizing represents a denigration of animal agency, and certainly Burdekin’s writing seems unconscious of these damaging effects. Yet I would argue that there is a deeper level to the narrative alignment of subhuman and animal perspectives. In Burdekin’s logic, the reason that subhumans are miserable is not because they are “enslaved” by their need for gender and sexual binaries, but rather the discomfort arises from a general confusion about the state of evolution they have reached. Subhumans believe that they have surpassed a “primitive” animal state and take pride in their more “civilized” state of being; yet at the same time they are still beholden to a basic biological need for binaries that reinforce sex as merely a tool for reproduction. The narrator seems to present the paradox to subhumanity: how can you believe in a linear evolutionary trajectory that places you at the apex while also refusing to believe that sexuality might evolve past the limited “two sexes” ideology associated with the existential raison d’être of plant and animal life? Indeed, the Person’s more evolved population can “self-fertilize” and reproduce only
when desired “alone and without help” (23).\textsuperscript{50} While on the surface Burdekin seems to be appropriating the animal to critique twentieth-century human culture, that reading misses her subtle mockery of rising allegiance to Darwinian science that inherently denudes gender and sexuality of any meaning beyond mere tools for the survival of the species.

Challenges to the rising popularity of Darwinian thought also appear in Burdekin’s de-emphasis on evolutionary characteristics that tend to favor the human, especially in terms of sight as an elevated form of sensory awareness. Burdekin seems to be responding in many ways to Freudian psychology as it appropriated evolutionary discourse to explain human psychological development. Cary Wolfe outlines Freud’s privileging of human sight in \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents}, wherein:

\begin{quote}
the origin of humans is located in an act of “organic repression” whereby they begin to walk upright and rise above life on the ground among blood and feces. These formerly exercised a sexually exciting effect but now, with “the diminution of the olfactory stimuli,” they seem disgusting, leading in turn to what Freud calls a “cultural trend toward cleanliness” and creating the “sexual repression” that results in “the founding of the family and so to the threshold of human civilization.” All of this is accompanied by a shift of privilege in the sensorium from smell to sight, the nose to the eye, whose relative separation from the physical environment thus paves the way for the ascendancy of sight as the sense associated with the aesthetic and with contemplative distance and sensibility. (Wolfe 3)
\end{quote}

In Wolfe’s extrapolation of Freud’s work, Freud considers the human privileging of sight as a marker of evolutionary development, yet for Burdekin, this reliance on the visual represents an evolutionary failure because images remove us from the visceral sensations that draw us closer to the thing regarded. Sensual commingling has been replaced by

\textsuperscript{50} The collection titled \textit{The Sex is Out of this World: Essays on the Carnal Side of Science Fiction}, edited by Sherry Ginn and Michael G. Cornelius, includes numerous essays that explore the possibilities opened by speculative fiction to re-imagine modes of sex, sexuality, and reproduction.
distant observing, especially in subjects of sexual preference. As the Person learns more about subhuman sexuality, she concludes with a sense of hopelessness for the species that “instinctive animal knowledge of sex seems to have been lost by subhumanity, and they cannot recognize their possible mates except by sight” (98). As an evolved trait, Burdekin seems to argue, an upright body structure only leads to a removal from the sensual erotics of bodily communion with other creatures, and even within their own species. We see another across the way and are visually attracted, therefore we emphasize physical appearance and even the elimination of body scents in order to attract mates. Yet the sense of sight requires no bodily contact in order to be triggered, and therefore operates out of disconnection, spatial incongruity, and a fragmented dissociation from the corporeal presence of the observed. In Burdekin’s logic, the privileging of sight as a sign of existential superiority reveals a fundamental misreading of the effects of human attempts to extricate from our animal selves. Here again, the novel seems to reify a human/animal binary by designating “animal knowledge of sex” as outside human insight. Yet ultimately, Burdekin argues that we must dismiss insistent messages that we are evolutionarily superior. Unless we are able to do so, we will continue operating under a nefarious appropriation of the animal as an ontological category that falsely buttresses our belief in humans’ advanced evolutionary state, a system that inevitably allows for cruelties in the use of nonhuman bodies for food and labor.

**Language, Sex, and the Animal**

Though the narrator herself professes asexuality, *Proud Man* nonetheless advocates for a fundamentally erotic sensibility – sexual freedom, gender fluidity,
asexual reproduction, sexual pleasure between people irrespective of gender identity.

The progressive views put forth by Burdekin’s mouthpiece align with the modernist emphasis on the sensual as a “privileged realm of existential significance” (Schaffner and Weller 4), and also conform to what Schaffner and Weller identify as a primary characteristic of the modernist erotic: “the emphasis is primarily on deviant sexual desires and the so-called sexual perversions, with the distinction between ‘pathological’ and ‘normal’ forms of sexuality being challenged” (4). Schaffner and Weller also see the representation of the erotic in early twentieth century literature not just at the level of content, but at the level of style. They invoke Roland Barthes’ ideas in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) to argue that modernist writers achieve an eroticism “through a literary style characterized by gaps, intermittence and semantic slippage” (11). These experimental forms create a kind of sensuality in the text itself as formal structure gives way to more fluid grammatical linkages, and as readers must grope between signs looking for truth denuded of conventional meaning. Yet in Burkdekin’s prose, these more unconventional stylistics seem conspicuously absent, perhaps as a further dismantling of the era’s beliefs about the primacy of sexuality in the biological and social sciences. By adopting the academic tone of sociological study throughout the text, Burdekin experiments with style not by eroticizing her prose, but by flattening the prose into a stale, almost banal tone. Critics of modernist speculative fiction have argued that women writers employ the genre to obscure progressive ideas about gender and sexuality, or to champion feminist or ideals in the form of utopian/dystopian world-making. *Proud Man* certainly confirms these arguments; yet Burdekin’s anti-erotic stylistics also work on other seemingly paradoxical levels: she uses a flat affect to conceal her disaffected
views toward conservative ideologies, and to challenge the era’s increasing emphasis on sexuality as a codified foundational identity construct.

Even though Burdekin’s narrative schematic seems to place animals and the Person at opposite ends of an evolutionary trajectory, this linearity is undermined by the linguistic changes that take place as the Person becomes more deeply integrated into subhuman culture. As she acclimates to subhuman ways of being, the Person becomes more comfortable first in using spoken and written language instead of telepathic communication, and then in using figurative and symbolic language characteristic of “elevated” subhuman speech. In this way, the underlying logic of the novel seems to follow a Freudian view of language, animality, and the unconscious. As Rohman outlines, “Freud’s narrative suggests that an attempted rejection of humanity’s own animality created the human unconscious” (23). One possible conclusion to draw is that since primary expressions of the unconscious appear in the form of dreams and symbols, then symbolic language must reflect that attempt to dismiss our animal origins. Correspondingly, as she uses metaphor and other linguistic forms associated with the unconscious, according to Freudian analysis, the Person rejects her own animality just as subhumans rejected their own. The linguistic structure of the novel allows us to follow the Person’s detachment from animality by tracking her use of “unconscious” forms of symbolic language, and even in her interpretation of subhuman dreams. Since the Person in Proud Man represents the utopian ideal, Burdekin seems to argue that the only way to achieve peace and equity across all humankind is to re-embrace our animal selves, a process that begins at the linguistic level as we surrender the idea of human cognitive superiority.
The novel’s evolutionary framework establishes language, both spoken and written, as a sign that subhumans have not yet evolved enough to communicate meaningfully with their own species and with nonhuman animals alike. As a corollary to this theme, over the course of the novel the Person experiences a form of devolution as she becomes increasingly habituated to subhuman linguistic patterns. In a world that anticipates Lacan’s structuralist view of language, the Person comes from a future society that shares thoughts and feelings telepathically, without the need to reduce them into signs and symbols separate from the impulses themselves. Yet since the Person must navigate subhuman social situations while on her travels, she must first learn to communicate using the more rudimentary form of communication to which these “lesser” beings are accustomed; indeed, writing is deemed a “primitive occupation” in the Person’s fully-human culture (1). In the first months of her visit, the Person learns from the country priest to speak, read, and write, initiating her into a way of being that relies on these less sophisticated forms of exchange. During these sections, the narrative voice maintains the tone and style of ethnography, with descriptions absent of any figurative language or stylistic flair. However, as the Person leaves the countryside to explore city life in London, she meets a woman novelist named Leonora who guides her into a more nuanced perspective on the role of language in subhuman culture. Leonora lives alone following the death of her young daughter, and uses writing as a form of escape from the traumatic loss she has experienced. At first, the narrator cannot fathom such a form of escape: “I could not understand this subhuman business of writing any more than I could understand their thinking about God, and not so well as I could grasp their sexual activities, for there they were at least in touch with the animals, which I could
understand” (181). Here again, the narrator establishes a correlation between the subhuman need for written language and an inorganic separation from the animal world, resulting, in the Person’s mind, in an isolation from other species that leads to a capacity for cruelty. Yet during this section, Burdekin writes into the narrator a creeping capacity for figurative language, a form of communication she had thus far seen as only obfuscating. In a conversation about Leonora’s anxiety about sending her novel out for publication, the narrator refers to a metaphorical staircase as a symbol for ambition. The narrator tells her friend, “You finished the novel. That was a stair, wasn’t it” (237)? This marked change in the Person’s language represents an incipient facility with subhuman speech.

By the end of the novel, Burdekin’s protagonist is entirely capable of understanding the role of symbolic thinking in the subhuman intellect, and seeks to dismantle metaphor from the subhuman lexicon so that things might be understood as they are, rather than as we imagine them to be. In this final section, the narrator interacts with a prisoner named Gilbert who has been convicted of killing two young girls. Although the narrative style remains in the detached tone of the documentarian, the Person speaks with the convict as a lay practitioner of psychoanalysis, interpreting his dreams, examining his traumatic childhood, investigating the impact on his development of the early death of his mother, and analyzing symbols such as his childhood home and the weapon he used to murder the children. In the manner of Freudian practice, the Person navigates the inner world of the killer to discover the “root cause of Gilbert’s madness and his consequent unsocial behavior,” and does so with a compassion that speaks to advocacy for fair treatment of the criminally insane (304). The Person helps
the man to denude symbols of cruelty from their malignant associations in order to begin the process of rehabilitation; for example, the knife used to perpetrate the murder, when held by the Person, becomes to the man “only a little knife, just nice for cutting bread and apples. Nothing significant. No symbolism” (290). She does the same for his childhood home, where he admits he must have been happy for a time, happy and “good, like an animal. Not worried or frightened. He must be there still, somehow. I must find him” (292). As the narrator describes these encounters with the man, she consistently suggests that the root cause of such abhorrent behaviors by subhumans, not only murder but all kinds of cruelties based on privilege and social hierarchies, is their capacity for metaphorical abstraction. As we force our organic individual selves into the fracturing, circumscribing form of linguistic signs and images, and as we perpetuate an incessant need for verbal communication, we corrupt the possibility for truly meaningful connections between ourselves and each other, and certainly between ourselves and other species.

In essence, Burdekin’s novel accomplishes what Frederic Jameson identifies as one of the primary characteristics of representation in science fiction – “to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own present, and to do so in specific ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization” (Jameson “Progress” 216). The narrator, sent from a peaceful utopian future in which no one is subject to forms of oppressions or social cruelties, systematically dismantles the foundational beliefs about the evolutionary superiority of early twentieth-century human beings, including the Cartesian model of thought as the very confirmation of existence. In the narrator’s view, the subhuman tendency to worship the intellect represents a juvenile tendency to indulge in an activity
without questioning the value of the activity itself. Again anticipating later twentieth-century structuralism, Burdekin’s narrator claims that such valorization of the intellect results in a “state of confusion as to the true relation of the self to the not-self” (14), or in other words, subhumans have difficulty separating their personal identity from their social identity, including the myriad linguistic, economic, and political structures of power that oppress and obscure. In place of intellectualizing, which requires on the cognitive level one to blur boundaries between themselves and external stimuli, the narrator advocates an engagement with the world through feeling, both in the emotions and in the body, and through sensory perceptions that send signals to other creatures and to our own experience via nonverbal communicative energies. Only by privileging these other forms of knowing will subhuman society ever evolve past the need for apparatuses of hierarchical power based on species, race, gender, sexuality, and class; indeed, the narrator confirms that in her future culture there are no such concepts as “privilege,” “freedom,” “normal,” “war,” and even notions of “better” or “worse.”

**Utopian Ecology**

Burdekin’s utopian imagination presents a set of ideals that seem so distanced from the reality of twentieth-century culture that readers, even today, might see those ideals as impossibilities, a nice set of egalitarian, non-languaged dreamscape, but entirely illogical considering what we know of human language, psychology, and social relationships. Her worlds correspond to what scholars of utopia have defined as an “impulse” or “process” toward betterment, ineffable and abstract, a continual state of societal mapping that will never be fully realized (English 110). Yet I wish to suggest that the future society that Burdekin outlines in *Proud Man* provides a model of queer
futurity that is entirely possible. Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell have begun a
critical conversation about “two claims which have been detrimental to the field of
utopian studies: first, the idea that the signifier ‘utopia’ necessarily refers to something
that is impossible; and second, the assumption that utopianism inevitably means trying to
transcend human nature” (5). Their volume pushes back against those negative views of
utopian fiction, and argue that the “utopian potential” might be reformulated as less a set
of logical possibilities, and more a set of writers “self-reflexively probing the natures of
different communities, and the socio-political conditions required for their
transformation, in manners by turns challenging and exquisite” (5). This more
progressive view of the utopian imaginary allows us to read a novel like Burdekin’s as a
form of knowing, an investigation of world-making, a vision of social relations informed
by ecological thinking as opposed to economic or political thinking. This new kind of
ecology extends past understanding ontological difference, radical alterity, or re-
conceptualizations of social identity; rather, Burdekin’s speculative vision provides a new
way of thinking about the coalescence between the myriad networks of life and the
environments that support them, or in more precise terms, allows us to see environment
itself as a dynamic and infinitely immense living organism comprised of all elements –
rock, soil, water, mineral, insect, amoeba, fox, canary, daffodil, television, iPhone, chess
piece, matchstick, cactus, Styrofoam cup – all of it, every last atom and electron as part of
the aggressive, vital enterprise of life on Earth.

Perhaps this totalizing project is why Burdekin’s primary critique of “subhuman”
life involves their use of religious, cultural, and geopolitical institutions as forms of
escape from the “misery” caused by those very institutions they wish to forget. The
narrator sees social hierarchies, patriarchal systems, and sexual repression as the primary culprits for much subhuman suffering, especially when informed by a sense of religious guilt:

The misery is very real. The operation of their partially conscious brains upon their animal desires sets up an appalling mental torture called a sense of guilt, a conviction of sin. All subhumans who are sane, and many who are not, are guilty or sinful…. Sometimes they worship their animal sexuality and fuse it with their religions. Sometimes they hate it, and pretend as far as possible that it does not exist at all. Sometimes they try to ease their tortured minds by excesses and singular practices no animals would indulge in; then again they may try to get rid of the sex altogether by living lives of loneliness for which they are physically quite unfitted. This distortion of sex completely poisons the natural relation of the females to the males, leading to sex privilege, sex dominance, sex antagonism and other subhuman difficulties” (24-25).

The organizing structures that inform much of subhuman life, especially “religion, art, and war,” establish regulatory regimes that constrict possibilities for individual identity development, resulting, in the Person’s view, in a lack of consciousness about their “natural” role in the web of human and nonhuman life (25). In Burdekin’s future utopian ideal, “nature” is a state of existence denuded of what we would term, ironically, as the “naturalizing impulse” to categorize traits into types. The “natural relation of the females to the males,” therefore, in the Person’s view, is a state of communion absent of classifying or hierarchical structures, born of the human mind, that lead to patriarchal or any other kind of hierarchy.

In fact, when the narrator first appears in subhuman society, she begins to identify it as a dystopian nightmare precisely because subhuman people have separated themselves from the animal world. Most of the early descriptions of subhuman rituals revolves around the disturbing and cruel relationship they seem to have developed toward the nonhuman animals who share their space. When she enters the rural house of the first
family she meets, the Person is repulsed by dinner smells from “the dead cooked flesh of a domestic animal called a pig” (67). Over time, the Person concludes that subhumans “are far more cruel to the beasts than they are to each other” (120). She is appalled by the proliferation of “beast labor” and “enslavement” for the purposes of subhuman agriculture and transportation, noting that these cruelties are perhaps representative of the most barbaric quality of subhuman society (41). She notes that irony of the subhuman “worship” of machines, which seems to be concentrated on devices used to increase subhuman comfort, convenience, entertainment, and leisure, rather than on equipment that might relieve the suffering of animals used for agriculture and food production. The commodification of animal bodies for food and labor, in the Person’s perspective, enforces a false, inorganic set of environmental conditions that denies them their natural instincts, often requiring them to exist as “degenerate and distorted creatures” as they attempt to survive in the subhuman world (89). After much consideration, the narrator concludes that in its current state of development, unable and unwilling to seek equitable forms of being in the world, the planet and all the life on it would benefit from the disappearance of subhuman society:

[…] the animals and birds would be much happier without you. You do nothing for them but kill them, imprison them, enslave them, torture them and make parasites of them. There is only one human way of treating the other inhabitants of the world, and that is to leave them alone. If you cannot leave them alone then it couldn’t be anything but good that you should vanish. (218)

Though this statement seems an extreme form of environmental correction, bordering on the genocidal, Burdekin’s utopian sensibility is in fact concerned only with ecological parity, giving “subhumans” the same treatment they grant to “other inhabitants of the world” in their social activities. The Person is unattached to beliefs about the superiority
of the subhuman species, and so is able to suggest, quite pragmatically, that since they seem to be the species causing so much waste and destruction, they quite reasonably should be removed from the ecological equation.

_Proud Man_ presents an early form of queer ecology in that Burdekin’s novel imagines a world wherein the discourses of sex and nature do not reinforce, but actively discourage, power structures based on speciesism, heterosexism, patriarchal governance, and transphobia. The result of abolishing such destructive modes of cohabitation would be the disappearance of fear by those who are the subjects of such modes of power. In the Person’s future world, sex and gender have been eliminated as identity constructs, and animals exist outside the dominion of human endeavor. At one point, Leonora asks her new friend about animals living in fear of her people, to which the Person responds: “Why should they be frightened? They are never hurt and never killed by humans. And never enslaved, never castrated, and never robbed of their children” (194). On the contrary, animals in the future humans’ world maintain their own space, a “reasonably large portion of [the] world where the animals and birds [are] left in peace to live their own lives without interference and interruption” (17). She describes a system in which half of all land is allotted to humans, and half to animals, with a barrier in between the two so the animals stay away from human food, and humans do not encroach upon resources the animals need to survive. Though this geography seems to contradict the novel’s claims that future animal selves live in harmony together, in fact this formulation makes sense in terms of a practical necessity of distributing resources equitably among all residents of the earth. Such an “evolved” way of seeing both personhood and geography present an aspirational goal for twentieth-century Europe, which is mired in
the same subhuman problems that Burdekin outlines in her novel. Ultimately, Burdekin’s utopian vision imagines a world in which human beings see themselves not as “the unquestioned centre” of the universe, but instead conceive of themselves as part of the infinite, unending, dynamic energy that comprises all life on the planet (55). In this imagined equitable space, animals and humans live unencumbered by social institutions predicated on trait-based classifications, chain-of-being hierarchies, and the circumscribing effects of human reliance on language as the primary indicator of consciousness.

Burdekin’s novel mocks her social world’s tendency, especially within the burgeoning fields of sexology and psychology, to justify arbitrary and oppressive hierarchies on the basis of so-called “biological” traits, a conceptualization that draws out the “animal” qualities of human beings, especially when associated with gender and sexuality. *Proud Man* exploits the paradox that although subhumans use their connection to the animal kingdom to support these systems (such as basing gender on genitalia and assuming sex is for the purpose of reproduction), yet at the slightest provocation will distance themselves from “animal brutes” when the association does not correspond to their self-concept as cultivated social creatures. This dichotomy results in a nefarious appropriation of the animal as an ontological category used to serve the purposes of human intellectualizing, ultimately allowing unimaginable cruelties to be imposed on animal bodies. Burdekin’s novel exposes the failure of human logic of the animal, arguing instead for a the kind of “worlding game” animal studies experts advocate, in which all creatures implicitly understand possibilities for a co-historical, co-forming, co-constitutive, non-hierarchical web of being-together. Such a way of interacting, in
Burdekin’s future world, does not result in what Timothy Morton calls “ecological humiliation” for human beings, but would encourage an even more “evolved” consciousness that renders us fully human, existing beyond a juvenile subhuman need to control and manipulate via intra-species and inter-species tyrannies.
CONCLUSION

“I am I because my little dog knows me.”
--Gertrude Stein, *The Geographical History of America*

“…how ready we are to ignore things we cannot imagine.”
--Dr. Lars Peter Neilsen, *New York Times*, July 1, 2019

“The needed morality, in my view, is culturing a radical ability to remember and feel what is going on and performing the epistemological, emotional, and technical work to respond practically in the face of the permanent complexity not resolved by taxonomic hierarchies and with no humanist philosophical or religious guarantees.”
--Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*

In her brief articulation of writer-canine identity play, Gertrude Stein gives expression to perhaps *the* central argument of all writers studied in this dissertation. In many ways, her remark returns us to the metaphor of the “worlding game,” that ecology of marksmanship, both whimsical and strategic, that characterizes the relational identity landscape across the network of lives that intertwine and influence the living of others. The precise wording of her comment about interconnected states of dog-ness and human-ness reveals the kind of narcissism inherent in human perceptive structures about animals. She writes, “I am I because my little dog knows me.” The “I,” the “my.” and the “me” take center stage in this brief identity drama. The “little dog” is diminutive not only in stature, but also in the space she consumes in the sentence, one small word buried between the numerous human self-reflections, an owned thing nestled in the crook of her human sense of entitlement. Integral, yet unacknowledged – that is the unfortunate role nonhuman animals are forced to play in this “worlding game” of hierarchical control, wherein human enterprise dominates by manipulating landscapes and bodies of all kinds.
Stein’s statement, in simple, profound, amused wordplay, wrestles with the same questions contemporary queer women grasp at in their fiction. Djuna Barnes, Radclyffe Hall, Virginia Woolf, and Katharine Burdekin each theorize impossibilities inherent in representing nonhuman subjectivity; they imagine ways in which alterity could be a productive measure of co-forming environments; they each in their own ways, and with varied success, try to escape destructive anthropocentric thinking; they acknowledge the ineffectiveness of human language as an apparatus of communal sharing; and they each argue for seeing beyond limited human perceptions in order to envision new kinds of intra-and inter-species togetherness absent of structural hierarchies that oppress most for the benefit of very few.

What I have attempted to illustrate in this dissertation is that each writer presents visionary alternatives for “worlding” together across species. Their queer sensibilities, in concert with their narrative critiques of contemporaneous scientific and sexological theories, challenge the codified chain-of-being hierarchies that trouble the lives of their characters, both human and nonhuman. Their radical collective project might be characterized as an attempt to systematically delegitimize rhetoric that uses identity traits of any kind – gender, race, sexuality, species – to classify and categorize into taxonomies of social control, especially as they saw such rhetoric extending into theories of social Darwinism, eugenics, and the popularization of sexology’s claims about so-called deviant gender and sexual behaviors.

Djuna Barnes saw within these structures of power an incessant cycle of violence perpetrated on human and nonhuman animal bodies, a violence that permeates every encounter in spaces both intimate and public. As her characters, marginalized by race,
gender, and sexuality, struggle to find spaces where they can live their identities freely, their stories are infused with the language of coercion, combat, militarism, and struggle. Barnes’ restorative vision, itself infused with violence, unfolds as her characters become increasingly intertwined with nonhuman animals; her language then takes the shape of choreography between creatures, a dance of communion forged by way of guttural sounds while characters drag themselves down on all fours to collapse in the presence of other living animal bodies.

The cruelty inherent in social structures that authorize trait-based oppressions, including speciesism, finds another kind of rehabilitative vision in Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness. As her protagonist suffers isolation and heartbreak born of human homophobia, Hall writes into Stephen Gordon’s encounters with animal friends a series of sensual communications that bridge seemingly impassable divides of difference, that reaches across radical species alterity to establish communion at peace with the unknown of the other. Her vision for an erotics of cross-species communion seems to thrive within the spaces between which we can truly know another, in those crevices of incongruity that allow “othering” to occur. Ultimately, in Hall’s vision, the power of human language dissolves in the face of the myriad “small sounds and small movements” that more effectively communicate satisfaction, eagerness, anxiety, fidelity, fear, love between and across all forms of life.

Virginia Woolf’s radical animal project delves even deeper into animal alterity as she imagines new forms of sociality via a diminutive spaniel named Flush. Her foray into canine beingness draws attention to the brutality of a system of capital exchange that relies on the mutilation and enslavement of animal bodies for its accumulation of power.
Ultimately, Flush physically leaves London, emblematic of environmental imperialism and social hierarchies based on race and class, and in so doing becomes attuned to more intimate systems of communal exchange outside such systems of control.

And finally, Katharine Burdekin offers perhaps the most profound set of visionary possibilities for social organization across species. Burdekin’s narrator describes a future utopia built on equity and equanimity made possible by the dissolution of binary thinking in all forms – male/female, hetero/homosexual, human/animal, nature/culture. Burdekin’s text envisions a world in which identity categories such as gender and sexuality hold no power to humiliate and abuse because they have disappeared from human cognition entirely. The very notion of privilege has lost its meaning because humans have evolved beyond the need for such “primitive” social hierarchies based on gender, race, and class. The dissolution of intra-species power structures has organically led to a species equity in which human and nonhuman animals share resources according to their needs instead of according to a system of anthropocentric entitlements.

As a number of later twentieth-century animal theorists and ecofeminists have explored, systems of domination based on biological traits do not exist independent of one another, but rather intertwine and fold into each other in a vast, inextricable web of systematized oppressions. The release of one oppressed group fundamentally relies on the release of all others, for as long as identity-based groupings of any sort are classified according to their respective similarities to a vaguely-defined “norm,” then the human capacity for tyranny still exists, and will make itself known one way or another. In other

words, the release of the animal from the subjugation of the human will only be possible when human beings release each other from the same vice of trait-based hierarchies. In Greta Gaard’s framing, nothing less than the liberation of “nature” itself will result in the freeing of subordinate groups from domination by the politically empowered. As the writers studied in this dissertation have explored, the liberation must first come from a deliberate human project of eliminating ontological structures at the root of human exceptionalism.

Yet what would it mean in a practical way to “liberate nature?” There seem two distinct ways of conceptualizing the phrase, each of which concretize an important aspect of dismantling oppressive species ideologies. First, human beings must begin to literally “free” nonhuman animals, along with landscapes and topographies, from industrial development, destruction, slaughter, and enslavement for labor and consumption. But second, and perhaps more importantly, we must begin to liberate our own epistemology of the natural world away from its deeply embedded use as a method and justification for systems of classification. In other words, we human animals must collectively conspire to become agents of our own undoing, an undoing not in the negative sense, not in what Morton’s frames as “ecological humiliation,” but rather in the positive sense of freedom, a letting go of compulsions to control, dominate, abuse, mutilate, and demand satisfaction from those nonhumans with whom we share the planet.

Queerness, for each of these writers, becomes a theoretical apparatus that allows for rehabilitative possibilities on a grand biosocial, environmental and political scale for equitable co-mingling between humans of all identities, and between and across species. We might look to their imaginative visions as we struggle with the troubles of our own
historical moment, for they, too were living during times of increased fascistic impulses globally; they too saw a drastic increase in the burning of fossil fuels to fuel an increasingly gadget-obsessed population; they too were acclimating to new forms of media and the proliferation of mass culture through technology which changed the way individuals communicated and accessed information; they too were seeing increased public awareness of queer identities, which in part led to extreme polarities between conservative and progressive ideologies.

These parallels speak to the overarching goal of this dissertation, and the goal of those studies of human-animal togetherness from which it draws inspiration. Some of the questions this study asks are seemingly impossible to answer; however, as these four writers have shown, we must continue to ask them for the benefit of future human and nonhuman animals alike. How can a rapidly changing global culture fundamentally alter ontologies responsible for the denigration of bodies and identities across species? How can we find ways to “world” together in playful exchange without cruelty, without the hierarchical apparatuses of domination, without the need to mutilate some bodies to serve the consumptive habits of others? How can we escape the human exceptionalism that leads to outright dismissal of animals as fully conscious beings engaging in the co-shaping, co-forming, co-constitutive world-making alongside humans in every iteration of life on the planet? Perhaps, if we look to writers who have navigated these same waters, asked these same questions, we might find the smallest hints toward a solution; perhaps, as we look to their past visions, we might find our own future ideal relations; perhaps, as we allow their fictional visions to inform our own, we might even find as yet unimagined possibilities for harmonious life together between and across species.
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