“The Prelude to Barbarism”: Animality and the Narration of History in Late Modernist Fiction, 1936-1941

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Abstract

This thesis explores the importance of animality in constructing historical futures in writing between the years 1936 and 1941. I argue that, responding to what seemed to be an approaching end to human history, Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes and Sylvia Townsend Warner interrogate the boundaries of the category 'human' and its differentiation from other animal life. I consider these writers' engagements with insurgent fascism in Europe, as racial violence and theories of eugenics urgently politicized the question of what constitutes viable human life. Although the three authors present contrasting perspectives on the human, negotiating human proximity to animal life shapes all of their narrative forms and the historical trajectories they envision. This study ultimately locates a crisis in humanism in the period preceding the Second World War, as these writers sought to imagine alternative models of human civilization and history to escape a situation Woolf described as "the prelude to barbarism" (qtd. in Lee 718).

Résumé

Cette thèse explore l'importance de l'animalité dans la construction à termes historiques dans l'écriture entre les année 1936 et 1941. Je soutient que, en réponse à ce qui semblait être une fin prochaine de l'histoire humaine, Virginia Woolf, Djurna Barnes et Sylvia Townsend Warner ont questionné les limites de la catégorie « humain » et sa différenciation des autres vies animales. Bien que les trois auteur présentent des perspectives contrastantes au plan humain, la négociation entre l'humain et sa proximité de la vie animale façonne toutes leurs formes narratives et leurs trajectoires possibles pour l'histoire qu'ils produisent. Finalement, cette étude localise une crise de l'humanisme dans la période précédant la Seconde Guerre mondiale et que ces écrivains ont cherché à imaginer des modèles alternatifs à la civilisation humaine et la lecture historique dans le but d'échapper à ce que Woolf à appelé « le prélude à la barbarie » (cité. Lee 718).

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Introduction

> Hitler has his hounds only very lightly held. A single step – in Cheko Slovakia – like the Austrian Archduke in 1914 & again its 1914
>
> — Virginia Woolf, 28th August 1938

> I said I had been feeling the future cut off for some time. We all agreed it was queer to feel the past so cut-off, everything had a different meaning now…Robin said all my tastes were pre-war! And they all began saying things were pre-war
>
> — Naomi Mitchison, 3rd September 1939

In the midst of the European crisis of the late 1930s, the potential for historical development seemed to have been snuffed out. Naomi Mitchison's diary entry, written immediately after the declaration of the Second World War, records a shift in historical epoch, but one that is marked principally by its separation from narrative understandings of history: with both the "pre-war" past and any potential post-war future "cut off," the present of wartime emerges as an empty impasse. Both Mitchison and Woolf register "the sense of foreknowledge" that Sarah Cole charts in the prelude to this conflict; for these writers, "world war" was "something already imaginable" (198), with the current situation heralding a return to thinking in terms of a "pre-war" era and even appearing to be a direct repetition of the outbreak of the First World War. Woolf's diaries from this period often evince such a fear of historical reversion, as she worried in May 1938 that "the 4th of August [1914] may come next week" (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf* V: 142). For her, this return to war is consistently linked to a triumph of violent animality, of an uprising of the "hounds" of fascism. Her critique of what she terms in *Three Guineas* "the false and unreal positions taken by the human form" (322) in fascist regimes strikingly demonstrates my central claim: that renegotiating what separates "the human form" from its animal others becomes integral to writers' efforts to conceptualize historical futures in the crisis leading up to the Second World War. By examining texts from or written about this period by

Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes and Sylvia Townsend Warner, I hope to show how and why 'the animal' and 'the human' became contested sites in the 1930s. From widespread concerns about atavistic violence to the brutal dehumanization being enacted in eugenics programs, constructing the boundary between these categories forms a central part of competing visions of human progress and continuance. Lyndsey Stonebridge argues in *The Writing of Anxiety* that the 1940s "was characterized not only by the shocks of history, but by a demand that the imagination should continue to discover new ways of being in history – or perhaps ways of *staying* in it" (5). Her formulation proves apt for the previous decade as well: faced with "the slow, excruciatingly evident return of war over the course of the 1930s" (Whittier-Ferguson 233), Woolf, Warner and Barnes all try to imagine "new ways of being in history" that depend upon narrating the relation between humans and other animals.

Indeed, Stonebridge's work on the anxiety attendant upon "a history that seems incomprehensible" (4) in the 1940s resonates strongly with recent work on the literature and culture of the 1930s. In *The Twilight Years*, Richard Overy makes a convincing case for the interwar period as a time in which "the prospect of imminent crisis, a new Dark Age, became a habitual way of looking at the world" (3). The image of the 30s he presents is reminiscent of Max Nordau's fin-de-siècle *Degeneration* (1892) in its stark morbidity: he argues that the feeling that "civilization was at the point of a possibly terminal crisis" (19) was not confined to the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war, though it increased as 1939 approached. The works I will consider were published between the years 1936 and 1941, with the exception of Barnes's *The Antiphon*, published in 1958 but written over a protracted period and set at the start of the Second World War. Each registers on some level the atmosphere of "pronounced fatalism" Overy discusses, in which war and catastrophe

seemed "in some sense preordained and unavoidable" (217) and all historical potentiality looked to be overshadowed by a predetermined slide towards another mass conflict. Indeed, the critics Marina Mackay and John Whittier-Ferguson have identified a sense of historical repetition as central to the writing of this period: in Mackay's words, "the characteristic aesthetic of the Second World War is recursive" ("Doing Business With Totalitaria" 735), recalling Woolf's fears of a return to 1914. The impasse these writers address shares much with Paolo Virno's theories about the "paralysis of history" in *Déjà Vu and the End of History* (26), in which he tries to refute a fatalistic philosophy of history that denies new historical possibility. He associates this fatalistic perception that "the historical scansion of events is suspended" with the experience of déjà vu, in which the present appears to be repeating the past and the future "seems prescribed even down to the last detail" (8). Virno counters this model of 'the end of history' by asserting the continuous existence of "the temporality of potential," the non-actualized "capacity to be" which always "intersects the linear, chronological succession of time" but is not reducible to it. At a time when the linear progression of time seemed to be moving only towards the return of a state of war already known, it is precisely this possibility of reorienting historical development that these writers engage with and struggle to imagine.

In his elucidation of this post-historical condition, Virno refers to Alexandre Kojève's famous argument about "the disappearance of Man at the end of History," in which "Man becomes an animal again" after having attained "the limit and the aim, that is, the *end*, of Man's historical evolution" (Kojève 158-160). Kojève's vision of the end of history, in which humans "live amidst abundance and complete security" with no possibility for revolutionary upheaval (159), is rather different from the catastrophic end feared in the 1930s. However, his alignment of an absence of

potential for historical change with a reversion to animality is strongly correlative to the visions of a crisis in human history that I will be analyzing. At a time of anxiety about the possible "end of civilized life and the triumph of barbarism" (Overy 173), the threat of historical reversion was often figured as a return to animalized savagery, the disappearance of the civilization that, for Freud, comprised "the sum total of those achievements and institutions that distinguish our life from that of our animal ancestors" (*Civilization and its Discontents* 34). The post-Darwinian concept of animal origins was increasingly cast as a threat to a precarious human civilization; narrating this charged proximity to the animal emerges as a key mode through which these three writers seek to meet such fatalism by envisioning alternative courses for human history.

Such delineations of human animality also formed an integral part of other, more sinister narratives of historical progress in the period: scientific racism and the eugenics programs it justified in fascist regimes. Recent studies of Nazism have identified the centrality of "the strategic blurring of the boundaries between animals and people" that served to justify human extermination in the Third Reich (Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich* 123). Boria Sax and Mark S. Roberts both probe the decision of the National Socialist government to enact "one of the most stringent and comprehensive laws in Europe to protect animals" in the early 1930s (Roberts 95); Roberts concludes that such measures allowed "certain types of human life" to be "considered not only non-human, but also less than animal" (96). This lends credence to Anat Pick's thinking of the Holocaust as "a test case for the deployment of the human" (7) in which "the human itself" emerges as "an embattled zone" (25): as the line between human and animal was being re-drawn in the modeling of fascist national futures, engaging that boundary took on urgent political resonances. Such

developmental historical thinking enters into all three writers' constructions of the human, whether through Barnes's anti-developmental fatalism or Woolf and Warner's nuanced re-orientation of progressivist ideals. Paul Sheehan makes a case for the "fundamental role" that narrative production plays "in defining our humanity and, as it were, keeping us human" (9-10); in light of his work, I will attend throughout to the complex ways in which these writers' engagements with animality shape the currents of their narrative forms and the visions of history they produce.

Accordingly, my focus will fall primarily on the animal as a discursive category used to define aspects of the human, rather than "the specificity of nonhuman animals" privileged by scholars working in the field of animal studies (Wolfe 567). Of course, these lines of enquiry do not have to be mutually exclusive: in line with Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen's recent effort to forge links between "an awareness of dehumanization" and "a deliberate transgression of the boundaries of the human" (186), I will foreground challenges to anthropocentrism where they arise, particularly in Sylvia Townsend Warner's wartime short stories. Although I am indebted to Carrie Rohman's useful exploration of a "crisis in humanism vis-à-vis the animal" in modernist literature (21), her search for evidence of "the uncertainty of the species barrier" (23) gives primacy to the concerns of recent theory, whereas my work tries to historicize the specific meanings that accrued to that boundary in the years preceding the Second World War. Similarly, even as the work in Paul Sheehan's *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism* guides my argument in important ways, I am hesitant to accept his conclusion that "in the modernist novel the struggle with narrative is really a struggle with the human" (191). The late modernist works I am concerned with present a more complex relationship between narrative and 'the human': experimental, non-linear forms are found to encode not solely "antihumanist

discourse" (191) but also reconstitutions of a broadly humanist ethic in Woolf's *Between the Acts*, while Sylvia Townsend Warner's more traditional narrative forms give rise to some of the more radical challenges to the integrity of 'the human' in this period.

The writers constellated in this study do not fit into established critical frameworks for addressing writing of the 1930s or about the Second World War. Woolf and especially Barnes are generally held at a remove from "the large field of thirties politicized writing" that Kohlmann views as opposing high modernism (11), and consequently their responses to the political culture of that decade are not often explored. Warner, on the other hand, is included in some revisionary accounts of 30s writing by women (Montefiore, Ewin), but scholarly literature on her work remains thin on the ground. Although the American Barnes might seem removed from the British political context in which Woolf and Warner were both actively involved, as Mia Spiro writes, she "identified with a British and cosmopolitan cultural coterie" while in expatriate Paris (10) and set *The Antiphon*, her only published work to engage explicitly with the war, in an English country house. Indeed, Spiro's recent book *Anti-Nazi Modernism* sets some precedent for my own work, as she considers Woolf alongside Barnes in the context of antifascist resistance. Woolf, Barnes and Warner also feature prominently in Maren Linett's *Modernism, Feminism and Jewishness*. Although the 30s are not her main focus, Linett provides insight into the impact on these writers of the anti-semitism that was so prominent in that decade, helping to pave the way for more work on the various ways in which they responded to the political crises preceding Second World War.

This project, then, is aligned with the work of scholars such as Alice Wood, whose recent work on Woolf's 'late cultural criticism' seeks to destabilize "familiar

divisive narratives" of the literature of this period, which range the younger, allegedly anti-modernist 'Auden generation' against an older guard of apolitical modernists (3, 9). As Janet Montefiore has argued, traditional historiographies of 30s writers have followed on from Samuel Hynes's *The Auden Generation* in effacing women's writing from the aesthetic and political landscape (*Men and Women Writers of the 1930s* 22); as a result, divisions between politicized 30s writing and late modernism have led to the removal of writing by women from discussions of that decade's social crises. My own motivation is similar to that of Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick, who makes a claim for considering "female civilian authors as legitimate war writers who presented alternative perspectives on thinking and writing about war" (4). The "alternative perspectives" provided here on 30s politics and the course of history are often indirect and surprising, recalling Woolf's resolve in *Three Guineas* for women to try to "prevent war" by "remaining outside your society…finding new words and creating new methods" to avert oncoming disaster (366). Indeed, this position of exclusion from patriarchal national-historical narratives informs each writer's contestation of teleological history, further reinforcing Jean Radford's argument that writing by women in the 30s displays a "resistance to a particular view of history – as linear, progressive" (36). Woolf and Warner pointedly associate such a view with patriarchal fascism, which, in Warner's words, "says to its women, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the battlefield" ("Review and Comment by Dorothy Parker and Sylvia Townsend Warner" 22). All three writers problematize the linear continuity of generational succession; in doing so, they work against what Lee Edelman terms "reproductive futurism" (2), which equates all possible political futures with the image of the heterosexually-conceived child, at this time effectively locking women into the role of reproducing to "replenish the battlefield." Furthermore, one of the

means by which they do so is by undermining and repurposing the language of dehumanization, which, in addition to serving fascist discourses of racial purity, has long been used as "the ideological justification for women's alleged inferiority" by consigning them to the position of the 'natural' and the animal (Adams and Donovan 1).

It is through reversing such bestializing processes on the wielders of sovereign power that Woolf attempts to imagine possible alternatives to the drift towards war that seemed so inevitable, as I will be arguing in my first chapter. Initially, I draw out Woolf's construction of wartime violence and fascist masculinity as savage and bestial in *Three Guineas* and her diaries. I go on to advance a reading of *Between the Acts* (1941) as registering Woolf's struggle to balance such an idea of degenerative animality with a concept of the primeval that would allow for the regeneration of human culture and the ability to shape history.

If Woolf's novel represents an effort to write historical potential back into 1939, Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936) seeks relief from the morbid anxiety that accompanies historical consciousness in the 1930s. Animal figures become the focus of a complex mixture of anxiety and desire in this novel, seeming to promise an escape from the burden of history that can never be fulfilled. The anticipative desire for an end to the human and to historicity in *Nightwood* is reworked in Barnes's later text *The Antiphon* (1958); in this retrospective account of personal and historical trauma set during the war, inevitable disaster blots out desire, and the position of the animal is instrumentalized in patriarchal domination.

By contrast, Sylvia Townsend Warner's work from this time locates revolutionary futurity within that animalized state. Her rewriting of the *Bildungsroman* in *Summer Will Show* (1936) imagines an upper class

Englishwoman's alignment with the animalized position of a Jewish revolutionary in the Paris of 1848. The link between Warner's deconstruction of dehumanizing processes and her projection of radical change in history becomes clearer in *The Cat's Cradle-Book* (1940), which reimagines the source of storytelling as coming from a 'civilized' culture of cats. Her response to the imminent threat of war, then, is to undermine humanist claims to superiority and thus to undo the hierarchical logic driving fascist domination.

Thus, human proximity to the animal does not have to portend an 'end of history'; rather, these three writers suggest that thinking through the boundaries between humans and other animals can help to formulate ways of remaining in history as it seemed to hurtle towards apocalypse. It has almost become convention in animal studies to dismiss modernist fiction's engagement with animal life as being "an essentially negative force against which the purportedly post-Darwinian human is asserted" (McHugh 9). Work such as Steve Baker's *The Postmodern Animal* insists that animals never appear as beings with integrity in themselves in modernism, and as such cannot threaten the centrality of the humanist subject (20). Yet reading works from this period closely reveals a startling volatility in the coherence and stability of the category 'human,' a volatility precipitated by an intensifying crisis of faith in the development of human history and civilization. As writers sought to address fears of degeneration into total war, then, they engaged in complex redefinitions of the human/animal boundary that might help to produce alternative historical trajectories and models of development.

Reconfiguring Humanism and Narrating Futures in Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*

In her notebook for *Pointz Hall* (to become her last novel *Between the Acts*, 1941), Virginia Woolf writes of the blackout conditions of "London in War" as a return of the animal to the city: "Nature prevails. I suppose badgers and foxes wd. come back if this went on, & owls & nightingales. This is the prelude to barbarism" (Monk's House Papers A 20; qtd. in Lee 718). The encroachment of wild animals upon the metropolis is seen as the opening "prelude" to a narrative of degeneration, as a seemingly savage 'Nature' returns the ordered civilization of the city to a pre-cultural state. In her opposition between wild animals and developed civilization, Woolf seems to be in accord with the Freudian definition of civilization as "the sum total of those achievements and institutions that distinguish our life from that of our animal ancestors" in which "wild beasts" must be controlled and "the breeding of domestic animals must flourish" (*Civilization and its Discontents* 34-37). This fear of regression to violent, animal instinct is recurrent in Woolf's apocalyptic visions of the Second World War: "at night its so verdurous and gloomy one expects a badger or a fox to prowl along the pavement. A reversion to the middle ages…in this forest of black houses"; "war broken out…then the statement that all poisonous snakes at the Zoo would be killed, & dangerous animals shot – Vision of London ravaged by cobras & tigers…with Hitler baying and the Germans howling; then the composed & cultured voice breaking in, say about not taking pets" (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf* V: 242, 178). The threat of the "baying" and "howling" Germans is imagined as a triumph of dangerous wild animals in London, as the control of the "cultured voice" over violent, regressive forms of animality is loosened. Woolf at this time was being reminded of the various kinships between human and animal in her reading of Freud and rereading of Darwin (Lee 722), and, as I will argue, the maintenance of

boundaries between human and animal becomes an increasing imperative in her wartime writing, which seeks to alter the course from regression by critiquing bestialized, imperialist masculinity. Sarah Cole has noted the urgency of "the question of whether violence ultimately expresses humanity…[or] whether those binding inevitabilities can be loosened, and a better future can therefore be envisioned" (206) in British writing of the late 30s. Woolf's effort to imagine a "better future" in *Three Guineas*, *Between the Acts* and her wartime essays and diaries hinges upon an embattled separation of violent instinct from her revisionary image of civilized humanity, and the animal becomes the discursive site of this struggle.

My attention to Woolf's use of the discourse of animality differs somewhat from the recent proliferation of work on animal representation in Woolf's oeuvre. Scholars drawing on insights from animal studies have gravitated towards her neglected biography of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's spaniel, *Flush* (1933), which speaks to their concerns with animal perspective and critiquing anthropocentrism (Hovanec, Ryan, Weil). Both Weil and Ryan have claimed Woolf's text unsettles anthropocentric perspective through a reflexive, critical anthropomorphism; in Weil's words, Woolf works "to dislodge the reader and author from an objective standpoint from which to judge what is exclusively human or animal" (83). While these arguments are engaging in the context of the playful *Flush*, it seems that as the 30s advanced and Woolf's attention turned increasingly towards how best to combat fascist impulses at home and abroad, she became more invested in upholding the integrity of the category 'human' as excluding aspects of animality. The boundary blurring of the domesticated *Flush* in "the heart of civilization" (*Flush* 20) becomes the willed differentiation from the "bark" of Hitler and "his hounds" in diary entries from 1938 (*D* V: 164, 169). Indeed, where *Flush* parodies the maintenance of "the

purity of the human family" (*Flush* 8) in upper-class civilization through analogies with dog breeding, Woolf's later writing sees a strategic animalization of violent impulses identified with fascist masculinity, opposing them to a renewed human civilization. Colleen Glenney Boggs's work has demonstrated how the power of biopolitics, which discriminates between viable and non-viable forms of life in the political sphere, is exerted through "the differentiation between human beings and animals" (11). With this in mind, we can see how Woolf in her last works seeks to reverse this biopolitical process, as she renders the impulses driving the fascist, sovereign male as themselves non-civilized and non-human.

Indeed, this shift in Woolf's thinking appears in *Three Guineas* (1938) as a turn away from the equivalence between human and animal bodies enacted by war's indiscriminate violence: in a photograph from the Spanish Civil War, a casualty's body is "so mutilated that it might…be the body of a pig" (p.164). Discussing the paintings of Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze writes, "every man who suffers is a piece of meat. Meat is the common zone of man and beast, their zone of indiscernibility" (*Francis Bacon*, 21). It is precisely this registration of the violated body as "meat" that for Woolf necessitates differentiation between man and animal: the unrecognizability of that human casualty seems intimately connected to her numerous returns to Wilfrid Owen's words on "the inhumanity, the beastliness, the horror, the folly of war" (275). This is why, then, Hitler has to be a "tiger" for Woolf (*D* V: 132), as the aggressive impulses that reduce a human body to a "pig" can only be conceptualized as originating from a similarly bestial realm. Even Freud, for whom aggression is unambiguously one of humanity's primary "instinctual endowments," describes innate human aggression in terms of the animal: "*Homo homini lupus*…cruel aggression…reveals man as a savage beast" (60-61). At the very

moment Freud asserts man's innate disposition towards violence, he linguistically distances that disposition from the proper domain of the human; violent instincts liken man to "a savage beast," whereas untrammeled sexuality is consistently associated with an "infantile" (p.52) stage of development. Freud, writing here in the shadow of "the Great War" that spectacularly revealed the "beast" in man (p.61), seems to share with Woolf an investment in upholding a boundary, however thin, between aggression and the fundamental nature of humanity.

In spite of this similarity, Woolf found reading *Civilization and its Discontents* troubling. Disturbed by Freud's insistence upon the "retention of the primitive" in "the realm of the mind" (6), she wrote in a diary entry from December 1939, "Freud is upsetting…If we're all instinct, the unconscious, whats all this about civilization, the whole man, freedom &c?" (*D* V: 250). Christine Froula has described the "'cause'" of the artists and intellectuals termed 'Bloomsbury' as "not the grand one of 'saving' civilization but the more modest one of fighting for its possibility" (9), a cause that becomes increasingly urgent with the advent of the Second World War**.** The ideal of a civilization that fosters a "whole man" becomes in *Three Guineas* the generative force behind Woolf's critique of fascist masculinity, which she insistently casts as civilization's other: as barbarian, as animal. In 1939, Leonard Woolf registered the urgency with which notions of civilization were being defined and defended in this time of crisis: "How often have we not read in books and newspapers during the last few years that 'civilization is breaking up' or that 'if things go on much longer in this way, civilization will be destroyed'" (*Barbarians at the Gate* 10-11). Both Virginia and Leonard Woolf "turned on its head the common assumption that our civilization had to defend itself against the barbarism of Fascism" (Lee 680) in that they both stressed the pernicious "subconscious Hitlerism" ("Thoughts on

Peace in an Air Raid," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* VI: 243) on native shores, the danger of "the barbarian…in the citadel and in the heart" (*Barbarians at the Gate* 169). Where Alexander Henderson, writing in the Marxist journal *The Left Review*, asserts that actions in Germany "have caused other countries to regard *Nazi* as a synonym for barbarian" ("What the Nazis Have Done for Culture 325), the Woolfs both confound the nationalist logic of the civilization/barbarism dichotomy, refusing its claim that fascist impulses were culturally and linguistically other to a bounded "citadel" of English civilization. Indeed, much of the rhetorical work of *Three Guineas* is directed towards representing the "educated man" within the "citadel" of that civilization as "a barbarous, a displeasing spectacle" (180), who is "decorated like a savage with feathers" from the institutions of government and education (308), aligned with the "solid block of unbaked barbarians in Germany" (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf* VI: 366) in nurturing "a disposition towards war" (*Three Guineas* 181).

However, if Woolf is eager to assert the presence of fascist impulses of violence and domination within England, she is just as eager to shore up a renewed discourse of civilization by consigning those impulses to 'savages' or animalized humans, categories linked by their implied atavism. Discussing letters in newspapers recommending the exclusion of women from the professions, Woolf writes:

> There, in those quotations, is the egg of the very same worm that we know under other names in other countries. There we have in embryo the creature, Dictator we call him when he is Italian or German…One is written in English, the other in German. But where is the difference? Are they not both the voices of Dictators, whether they speak English or German, and are we not agreed that the dictator when we meet him abroad is a very dangerous as well as a very ugly

> animal? And here he is among us, raising his ugly head, spitting his poison, small still, curled up like a caterpillar on a leaf, but in the heart of England (*Three Guineas* 228-229)

Here the discursive function of animality is vividly apparent: Woolf places fascism in "the heart of England" and in an animal form in the same stroke. Moreover, the work the passage does in eliding differences between aggressive voices at home and abroad allows Woolf to bracket those voices together within a non-human framework. The otherness of the fascist is further written into Woolf's polemic by the slipperiness of the non-human figures that appear: the "egg" of a "worm" becomes a generalized "creature" and "ugly animal," before returning to a more specific insect reference in the exaggeratedly threatening "caterpillar on a leaf." Woolf seems to reverse the animalizing strategies Roberts has analysed in racist forms of power, which usually place "the animal directly (morphologically) within the human so as to render certain types of humans truly animalistic and therefore justify their maltreatment, confinement and exploitation" (26). In *Three Guineas* it is those who wield the power of such exploitation who are rendered "truly animalistic" and so must be excised from the civilization that Woolf entreats her readers to interrogate and change. By calling for women to "fight that insect" (229) she is, as Christina Alt has claimed in her study of Woolf's engagement with contemporary biological science, "recommending the extermination of dangerous ideologies through the analogy of pest control" (144). Fascism may not be foreign to England, but it does exemplify one of "the false and unreal positions taken by the human form" (322). By linking international ideologies through the animal, Woolf can not only render them alien to viable human life but also implicitly make a claim for civilization's ability to root them out.

The discourse of animality becomes central, then, to Woolf's call in *Three Guineas* to begin "emancipating men from the old 'natural and eternal law' that man is essentially a fighter," thus effecting "some alteration in the hereditary constitution" of dominant males (*Three Guineas* 412-413). Expressing similar thoughts in a letter of 1940, she asks, "how can we alter the crest and spur of the fighting cock?" (*L* VI: 379). Jane Garrity aptly describes Woolf's "primitivist caricature" of masculinity in *Three Guineas* as functioning to posit the role of the female 'outsider' as a "civilizing force" (49-50). In her consignment of fascist impulses in men to the realm of the savage and animal, Woolf taps into language charged with colonial implications of a progressivist narrative from violent, animalistic atavism to developed humanity. Thus, the "hereditary constitution" of man as a "fighter" becomes dislodged from static essentialism, appearing not as a normative expression of masculinity but as an aberration of development. In a text that explicitly couples desire for "our splendid Empire" with "our splendid war" (208), Woolf nevertheless deploys the language of imperialism in an effort to 'civilize' the violent masculinity she perceived as driving both war and colonial expansion. Although she satirizes her masculinist society's claims to superior cultural development, she is drawn to its civilizing rhetoric's promise of a developmental narrative, in this case one in which war can be avoided and a future for humanity imagined. Woolf's doubts about the benefits of women entering into flawed social institutions lead her to complain, "it seems as if there were no progress in the human race, but only repetition," returning twice to the children's dance "round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property" (249, 261). In *Three Guineas*, a text that itself circles round and round the central question of how to avoid the oncoming war, a potential future can only be envisioned by rhetorically

marking contemporary masculinity as degenerate, whether the hypnotic "dance" of conformity be led by infantilized men or a circle of "caterpillars head to tail" (261).

This struggle to imagine future development powerfully shapes Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, her depiction of a rural community's annual pageant that is so famously shadowed by the impending outbreak of the Second World War. At the same time Woolf herself was worrying in June 1940, "I can't conceive that there will be a 27th June 1941" (*D* V 299), she had William Dodge register "the doom of sudden death hanging over us," as "the future shadowed their present…a criss-cross of lines making no pattern" (*Between the Acts* 114). True to its title, *Between the Acts* is marked by a quality of alternation between contrary elements of past and future, unity and dispersal and Isa's "two emotions: love; and hate" (90); in this novel, Woolf seeks to conceptualize a rhythm that will balance these polarities into a form of "peace," the "third emotion" (92). It is the middle generation who feel "the future disturbing our present" (82), pitched between Bartholomew Oliver and Lucy Swithin, both wrapped up in the past, and the rarely glimpsed children of Giles and Isa. In the novel's effort to imagine a "pattern" of development for the ominous future that can accommodate irreducible ambiguity, nature and especially the animal world become "the heuristic ground for 'a re-created world'" (Froula 297).

Between the Acts is permeated with the images of animal savagery and primitive regression that so haunted Woolf's wartime imagination; however, in this novel Woolf also tries to pull the discourse of the primitive towards the regenerative, finding in the English pastoralism of Pointz Hall a potential resource for the renewal of a specifically human, and humanist, culture. Readings of the novel attentive to animals and the natural world generally depict Woolf as trying to undermine human

separation from and supremacy over animality[1]. Instead, I argue that the novel both selectively blurs "the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute" (*Between the Acts* 184), and attempts to orient itself towards civilized differentiation from specific traits marked as animal. Sam See's lively reading of *Between the Acts* usefully emphasizes the importance of Darwin's theories of atavism in *The Descent of Man* to Woolf's thinking at this time. However, his alignment of the comic elements of the novel with a "camp aesthetic" in a "queer social world" seems to overstate Woolf's engagement with degeneration as only subversive parody (644). Thus, he claims that Woolf's characters are "in a universal state of degeneration" and that "such degeneration is salvific" in that it provides access to an "infinitely heterogeneous and transformative" natural world (642-643). My own reading finds both a "salvific" and a destructive potential in Woolf's images of primitive reversion. It is ultimately not in "the atavistic human" that Woolf finds "transformative possibilities" (643), but rather the human that acknowledges the continued necessity of reckoning with this animal inheritance for the development of human culture.

The principal heuristic function of nature in *Between the Acts*, then, is to posit, in Jed Esty's words, "competing fantasies of historical reversion: in the first, modernity collapses back into destructive barbarism; in the second, modernity is salvaged by the presence of immemorial folkways" (*A Shrinking Island* 88). Alongside these fantasies, in which the natural world plays a mediating role in the course of civilized humanity, is an unsettling absence of meaning. The novel's strong

[1] See Louise Westling, "Virginia Woolf and the Flesh of the World"; Vicki Tromanhauser, "Animal Life and Human Sacrifice in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*"; Sam See, "The Comedy of Nature: Darwinian Feminism in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*." Westling's ecocritical approach casts Pointz Hall as a "participatory community of life" with humans, animals and their environment "irrepressibly intertwined" (865-866), while Tromanhauser argues that the work communicates "the inescapability of the animal within the domain of the human, and conversely humanity's place in the animal's open field" (86).

urge to have nature give shape and interpretive meaning to human history, even if that shape is one of degeneration into extinction, seems prompted by its registration of nature's blank indifference to the current precarity of human civilization. While the guests at Pointz Hall exult in the landscape's ability as a static "view" to assert that "1830 was true in 1939" by being oriented towards human perception and recorded in a guidebook (*Between the Acts* 52), its restorative continuity becomes at times a threatening emptiness: "'What a view!' she exclaimed…Nobody answered her. The flat fields glared green yellow, blue yellow, red yellow, then blue again. The repetition was senseless, hideous, stupefying" (66-67). Without interpretation, the fields reflect back to human eyes the same stultifying repetition from which Woolf desired to escape in *Three Guineas*. There is no narrative to be found in this "senseless" landscape, and the "pattern" is not the form-giving one Dodge sought for the impending future but a confirmation of deadening, "stupefying" lack. The constancy offered by nature threatens to exclude humanity: early in the novel, the narrative voice extends to a region of the sky the colour of which "had never filtered down…had escaped registration. It…disregarded the little coloured ball of earth entirely" (23). The "immortal marble" of the highest cloud and the "pure blue" beyond it provide a posthistorical perspective, in which a wider natural atmosphere pre-exists and will post-date the fragile human species. Lucy Swithin's words that the view is "so sad…and so beautiful" because "it'll be here…when we're not" seem to have implications for the whole species in *Between the Acts*, chiming with the novel's attention to the separation of the landscape and its animals from concerns with human development: "there had always been lilies there, self-sown from wind-dropped seed," next to the "self-centred world" of the fish (43).

Woolf responds to human disconnection from this "self-centred world" by strategically recuperating the natural world's place in figuring the course of human development. Gillian Beer's scholarship has demonstrated the important influence of Darwin on Woolf's work: like Sam See, she refers to *The Descent of Man*, a text found in Pointz Hall's library in the early typescript of the novel (*Pointz Hall* 54), as being crucial to Woolf's concern with prehistory in *Between the Acts* ("Virginia Woolf and Pre-History" 114). As Beer has argued elsewhere, *The Descent of Man* "shifted the focus of evolutionary debate on to man's specific inheritance and future" (*Darwin's Plots* 170). The title's "descent" could refer either to progressive development in genealogy or to degeneration, and both possibilities are contained within a text which insists that "the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind" (151). Humanity's animal inheritance makes its future development potentially unstable: Darwin also stresses that "all civilized nations are the descendants of barbarians" (170), noting "the abnormal reversions to which he [man] is occasionally liable" (676). For Darwin as for Woolf, the animal and the savage cannot be removed from the history of human progress; crucially, this notion allowed Woolf to balance her representation of the "abnormal reversions" of violent masculinity with a progressive pattern of development that seemed to arise from the very same primitivized origins.

In *Between the Acts* as in *Three Guineas*, it is the men in positions considered most exemplary of developed civilization who reveal the potential atavism of the human species, a potential drawn out by their interaction with animals. Bartholomew, who served in "the Indian Civil Service" (4), has an Afghan hound, Sohrab, and his relationship with the dog undercuts his claims to developmental superiority as a civilizing force. Although he satirizes his sister Lucy's flights of imagination,

Bartholomew's consciousness is rarely far from "youth and India" (18), "his spice islands, his youth" (41); indeed, he vividly dreams "with the dog at his feet" of himself as "a young man helmeted…in the shadow of a rock, savages; and in his hand a gun" (17). It seems no mistake that Woolf pointedly asserts the proximity of Sohrab, who resembles a "Crusader's dog" (17), at this moment. As Bartholomew dreams of his domination of "savages," he is closely aligned with a dog rather different from Flush, a dog whose breed marks him as a geographical other and whose "wild yellow eyes" show how he "never admitted the ties of domesticity. Either he cringed or he bit" (18). The civilizing force of domestication seems to have failed here: Sohrab's 'wildness,' his unbridled animal instinct, means he relates to humans only on a register of power and domination, either attacking or submitting. This is far from the "co-evolution, and embodied cross-species sociality" outlined in Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto* (4); indeed, Bartholomew and Sohrab's relationship replays the scene of colonial domination to which Bartholomew returns so often in memory. He yells at the dog to heel "as if he were commanding a regiment," referring to him as a "brute," a "wild beast" and a "bad beast" (12). Bartholomew's militarized mission to tame the "wild beast" is shown to fail on two accounts: Woolf asserts the persistence of 'wildness' in the dog, while also having Bartholomew appear to the child George as "a terrible peaked eyeless monster" (12) just before he restrains Sohrab. The analogy between the 'savagery' of Bartholomew and his "familiar spirit" Sohrab (116) is most forcefully asserted at the novel's close: "As a dog shudders its skin, his skin shuddered. He rose, shook himself, and stalked from the room. They heard the dog's paws padding on the carpet behind him" (218). Our final image of Bartholomew is one in which his movements seems isomorphic with the "beast" he asserts his dominance over; as he "shook himself, and stalked

from the room," it is momentarily difficult to determine the species of the masculine pronoun. As in *Three Guineas*, Woolf reverses the rhetoric of civilization and barbarism back on the wielders of imperial power. Through his close association with his "wild" companion, Bartholomew and the colonial aggression he idealizes become marked as atavistic. This is not the "salvific" atavism Same See finds in the novel, but instead appears as an aberration in the development of fully civilized humanity.

Sohrab's "wild yellow eyes" are recalled by the presence of "something fierce, untamed in the expression" (47) of Giles Oliver, who is the partial inheritor of his father's imperialist aggression. Indeed, the two are linked by their association with mastering the animal in fishing: Bartholomew is "still so very particular" about his "fishing tackle" (21), and Isa and Giles meet and fall in love on a fishing trip: "the salmon had leapt, had been caught, and she had loved him" (48). While catching and killing salmon seems to shore up his masculinity and erotic appeal, Giles himself uses animalizing rhetoric to consign others to the status of non-viable life: on meeting the gay William Dodge, Giles asks, "what for did a good sort of woman like Manresa bring these half-breeds in her trail?" (49). Like Bartholomew, Giles seeks to wield power over forms of life he deems regressive, exploiting the association between homosexuality and backwardness (Love 6) that William seems himself to have internalized: "I'm a half-man, Mrs. Swithin; a flickering, mind-divided little snake" (73). Thoroughly involved though he is with Woolf's critique of "untamed" masculinity, it is crucial for her hope to change the "hereditary constitution" of violent males that Giles be presented as stunted by his circumstances. Mrs. Swithin's bewilderment at him wanting to take a job in the city "selling – ploughs? glass beads was it? or stocks or shares? – to savages" is countered by the claim, "given his choice, he would have chosen to farm. But he was not given his choice. So one thing led to

another; and the conglomeration of things pressed you flat; held you fast, like a fish in water" (47). Ironically trapped like the kind of fish he had previously caught, Giles feels, Woolf occasionally suggests, as "abortive" as his wife Isa (15), forced into an existential cul-de-sac by the "conglomeration" of patriarchal institutions analyzed in *Three Guineas*. Shadowing her representation of 'savage' masculinity in Giles is the potential for change, for a different future from the linear movement from "one thing to another" that ends in impasse: Giles dreams of the same vocation as the "gentleman farmer" who attracts Isa's attention (48), the desires of the consistently opposed couple ironically cohering around a fantasy alternative future, curtailed by circumstance.

The 'full' man to William's "half-man" is seen himself to be in a state of arrested development; consequently, Giles desires directional "action" above all else. In an infamous scene, Woolf consolidates her critique of violent masculinity as belonging to a pre-civilized, bestial stage of development:

> He kicked – a flinty yellow stone, a sharp stone, edged as if cut by a savage for an arrow. A barbaric stone; a pre-historic. Stone-kicking was a child's game…one stone, the same stone, must be kicked to the goal… The first kick was Manresa (lust). The second, Dodge (perversion). The third, himself (coward)…He reached it in ten. There, couched in the grass, curled in an olive green ring, was a snake. Dead? No, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow; the toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round – a monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But

it was action. Action relieved him. He strode to the Barn, with blood on his shoes (98-99)

Giles's rage at his forced inactivity during the wartime crisis finds an outlet in the stone-kicking game, which provides an ordered structure and linear progression towards a "goal." However, the active motion of the initial, isolated transitive verb "kicked" precedes a remarkably static passage. Several of Woolf's clipped, elliptical sentences lack main verbs: the clauses "the first kick was Manresa" and "there…was a snake" structure two subsequent sentences each, as any attempted motion seems to peter out. Giles's resolution is spurred by the repeated inability of the animals to render active the infinitive verbs "to swallow" and "to die," locked as they are in a grotesque state of arrested development; his violence attempts to re-impose sequence and order: "So…he stamped on them." Throughout the passage, Woolf ironically casts this desire for "action" as regressive: Giles's rage can only find an outlet in a "child's game" with a "barbaric stone." The language of savagery gives way to an exaggerated image of brutality in the animal world: as with Bartholomew's interaction with Sohrab, Giles's encounter with the snake and the toad positions atavistic, violent instinct in the animal world in order to assert its presence in patriarchal masculinity. Giles's effort to reassert developmental civilization on this "monstrous inversion," which distils his rage over William's "perversion" of heterosexual "birth," rather shows the regressive stain in his own constitution. The "blood on his shoes" lingers, later prompting Isa to dismiss him as a "silly little boy, with blood on his boots" (111).

Woolf, then, does not only find "assurance" in "the untransformed nature of human experience" and "the constancy of the primeval" (Beer, "Virginia Woolf and Pre-History" 121). Indeed, the constancy of impulses marked 'savage' in the men of

Between the Acts seems to endanger human continuance, drawing out the threatening aspect of the "barking monsters" Lucy Swithin imagines when reading about the "primeval forest" of the world in "The Outline of History" (8-9). Nevertheless, Woolf does draw "assurance" from "the primeval" by reinscribing it as the regenerative source of human culture and civilization, at once emphasizing human closeness to the animal and bringing about cultured separation from that very proximity. She repeatedly forges visions of harmony between La Trobe's pageant of English history and the ecosystem in which it is staged: it is "the very place" (57) for the play, with trees forming "an open-air cathedral" in which the swallows' flight produces give a regular "pattern" (65), as "Red Admirals gluttonously absorbed richness" from the colours of costumes and sets (63) and "real swallows darted across the sheet" (164). The natural world and the animals inhabiting it enable La Trobe's shaping of history, her ability to produce a "re-created world" from the "amorphous mass" of collective voices (153), allowing her to "leave out the British Army" (157) and satirize the colonizing impulses of the Victorian era. In this formulation, proximity to the animal doesn't threaten human continuance with violent instinct but rather allows for the imagination of a cultural narrative that mitigates the force of 'savage' aggression. Paul Sheehan has asserted the foundationally humanist character of narrative, describing it as "a uniquely human way of making order out of the raw material of existence" (9). It is worth noting that Sheehan's claim that the "endlessly mutable consciousness at the centre of Woolf's writing" disrupts narrative flow and means the human forms "provisional ties with the nonhuman" (16) is grounded in analysis of *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. As I have been arguing, the political climate of the later 30s spurred in Woolf a renewed desire to differentiate human consciousness from aspects of the nonhuman. Indeed, in *Between the Acts* she attempts to render

"ties with the nonhuman" as part of a rhythm of regeneration, in which the humanist ability to give shape to experience and history is bolstered by continuous contact with and differentiation from the pre-historic non-human world.

At the same time as she was revising *Between the Acts*, Woolf was trying to give shape to the history of English literature: she began work on a 'Common History' book that described a "Beauty" that was "primitive. not yet extinct" as the continuous source of literary inspiration ("'Anon' and 'The Reader'" 378). The opening essay of the project, "Anon," starts with a story of the "untamed forest" of ancient Britain that is strikingly congruous with Lucy Swithin's reading from "The Outline of History." Woolf imagines the song of "innumerable birds" as the inspiration for the first anonymous poets (382), making primeval animality function as the origin of literary culture. In an earlier draft of the essay, Woolf called the enjoyment of song "the most deep rooted, the toughest of human instincts…It is indeed the instinct of self preservation. Only when we put two and two together – two pencil strokes, two written words, two bricks do we overcome dissolution and set up some stake against oblivion" ("'Anon' and 'The Reader'" 403). Planning this project allowed Woolf to create a healing alternative vision to the reversion to animalized violence she perceived in the Second World War, one in which an ancient instinctual link to the animal world births the human ability to construct connected patterns that help to resist "oblivion." Indeed, that link provides access to a "reservoir of common belief" in the universalized "anonymous world to which we can still return" (385). Marina Mackay has argued that in the period of the Second World War, under the threat of invasion, "idealised rural England once again became the literary mainstay of nostalgic longings for community and continuity" (*Modernism and World War II* 25), and Woolf's 'Common History' displays such an investment in finding unity and

persistence within a rooted, specifically English literary history. Both Jed Esty and Kurt Koenigsberger have argued that the ongoing dissolution of empire in the 30s made "national self-representation seem conceptually *possible*" (Esty, *A Shrinking Island* 10); however, where Esty describes La Trobe's pageant as "freezing history into Englishness" and presenting freedom from progressive motion (90), Koenigsberger claims the emergence of this nascent "postimperial holism" appears as "a kind of progress," progress that in *Between the Acts* takes the form of "a return to prehistory and the primitive" (181). Woolf's sketched plan for the work suggests an orientation towards the future and progress would have arisen from its assertion of the persistence of the roots of English culture: "Skip present day. A Chapter on the future" (375). The recovery of a unified Englishness and "instinct of self preservation" in the past allows for an escape from the absent gap of the uncertain present, as Woolf's narrative of the animal origins of human culture posits the renewed possibility of progressive narrative and futurity through contact with a 'frozen,' stable past.

This ideal of an unchanging culture that is "rooted in the local ecology" (Esty, *A Shrinking Island* 102) is what allows for a form of rebirth in *Between the Acts*, taking the form of a reversion to the primitive supports the assertion of human narrative order. Importantly, the cows that interject in La Trobe's pageant do so when the chorus's song, made "inaudible" by the wind, focuses on the destruction of human civilizations of the past:

> *Palaces tumble down* (they resumed), *Babylon*, *Nineveh, Troy…all fallen they lie… Where the plover nests was the arch*…even the great words became inaudible…Illusion had failed. 'This is death,' she muttered, 'death.'

> Then suddenly, as the illusion petered out, the cows took up the burden. One had lost her calf. In the very nick of time she lifted her great moon-eyed head and bellowed…The whole world was filled with dumb yearning. It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the present moment. Then the whole herd caught the infection…The cows annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion" (139-141)

The chorus's claim that "we remain forever the same" (139) seemingly cannot be communicated without recourse to the "primeval voice" of the herd of cows. The animals interject at a moment of transition, as La Trobe skips forward in time to the resolution of her narrative of the eighteenth century; indeed, the passage indicates that the primary effect of the cows is to help enable this narrative shift in time. As the song recounts the decline of ancient civilizations, it is not human voices but the pre-linguistic "dumb yearning" of the cows that, "in the nick of time," supplements the human narrative by asserting the persistence of life in the face of failure and "death." The collapsing of temporal distance between "the primeval voice" and the "present moment" is constructed as a reversion that preconditions an advancement: the cows' interjection appears to pave the way for human progression, as it "bridged the distance" and "continued the emotion." This is not the disruption of narrative that Sheehan argued resulted from ties with the nonhuman in Woolf's work (16); rather, interruption from surrounding wildlife reinforces the pageant's humanist narrative drive and La Trobe's ability to produce harmony across temporal vistas.

Moreover, this moment asserts the similarity between the human audience and a crowd of undifferentiated animals, an indiscriminate unity that Woolf works to problematize throughout *Between the Acts*. The scene provides a glimpse of an experience as "universal" as the rain that intervenes later in the pageant (180): as the

cows "lowered their heads," so "simultaneously the audience lowered their heads and read their programme" (141). Woolf repeatedly associates the blandly patriotic traditions that the pageant's accompanying songs draw upon with a kind of herd instinct: "music makes us see the hidden, join the broken…bid[s] us, like the starlings, and the rooks, come together" (120); "the tune trilled and tinkled, ineffectively shepherding the audience" (157). Michele Pridmore-Brown has convincingly argued that the nursery rhymes and military marches that seem to unite the audience throughout the pageant produce a kind of "tranquilized complacency" in the audience, as the patriotic music "reduces human beings to animal status, thus disengaging the mind from political issues and realities" (413-414). It seems accurate to perceive a desired differentiation from the indiscriminate quality Woolf projects on to the mass of animals that intervene in the pageant**.** The cows and the "real swallows" that assert an abstracted sense of unity and safety reminiscent of Lucy Swithin's idealized "one-making" (175): "not an aeroplane to vex us; all liberated; made whole" (183). The harmony Woolf finds in the singular, regenerative "primeval voice" must be supplemented by human differentiation, by unity that recognizes irreconcilable difference. Woolf's conception of the importance of disrupting the 'herd instinct' in humans may have come from her reading of Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* at the end of 1939 (*D* V 252), in which he claims Le Bon's work on the subject shows "a regression of mental activity to an earlier stage such as we are not surprised to find among savages and children," becoming a "horde animal…led by a chief" (62, 68). Woolf returns La Trobe's audience to that prior state of uncritical uniformity in order to disrupt it; the 'herd instinct' in humans, Woolf suggests, is only politically viable if it introduces and

struggles to accommodate a distinctly human discord, a separation from the "universality" she finds in the non-linguistic instinct of non-human animals.

Thus, at the moment when the swallows "barred the music" and gave a sense of everything "made whole," "the tune changed; snapped; broke; jagged" (182-183). Just as the swallows seem to help produce a triumphalist vision of "Civilization… rebuilt (witness man with hod) by human effort" (181), the steady, repetitive rhythm of the music is jarred, throwing the 'horde' of the audience back on itself as "scraps, orts and fragments" (189). This dissonance seems necessary for the assertion of forward motion for human history from this 'present moment' scene, as human continuance emerges somewhere between the twin poles of 'savage' violence and utopian harmony Woolf inscribes in the animal world. With the music's disruptive form, she projects a structure for the patternless future on a model of rhythmic motion between contradictory states. The gramophone's initially startling flaws coalesce into a form that can accommodate and balance violent polarization: "The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another," as the "melody of surface sound" combined with "the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder" ensure that "all" are "enlisted…they crashed; solved; united" (189). Here, the interruptions and discord that so mark the human experience in *Between the Acts* – from Isa's "interrupting" Bartholomew's fantasies (18) to the "torture" of the "interruptions" of La Trobe's pageant (79) to the more sinister "aeroplanes" that "interrupted" Mr. Streatfield (200) – are contained within the disjunctive music of the gramophone. The contrary forces of creation and destruction, unity and dispersal, that structure *Between the Acts* enter into an uneasy marriage that allows for resolution and forward motion rather than "abortive" cancellation. Even the discordant elements seem linked by causality in this

musical form, marked by the connective "then…then"; indeed, the 'crashing' of opposites is configured as a necessary step towards the final emphasis on unity. Instead of the repetitive, numbing tempo of a nursery rhyme or the national anthem, the gramophone emits contrasting temporal registers that "diverged" on "different levels" (189) before forming a faltering whole, "solved; united." This is what Sanja Buhn describes as the "irregular beat of Woolf's novel" (244), in which "history unfolds in a continuous recurrence of agons between conjoined opposites" (239). The image of jagged rhythm allows Woolf to conclude La Trobe's pageant with an emphasis on "recurrence" and continued sequence, as opposing forces are balanced by a constant shift from one extreme to the other, the gramophone resolving into "*Unity–Dispersity… Un… Dis*" (201).

In *Between the Acts*, then, Woolf tries to neutralize the destructive regression of "battle-plumed warriors" by placing it within a structured narrative of regeneration. Thus, engagement with the 'primitive' instincts of both violence and song becomes a necessary step towards reasserting the vision of humanist "Civilization…rebuilt" that closes the pageant. This desire for narrative form is not to be confused with a desire for teleology, a return to the dictates of linear, realist plotting Woolf spent much of her artistic career working to disrupt. Indeed, Woolf's regenerative vision is explicitly opposed to the linear model of history that during the Second World War seemed to be hurtling inescapably towards destruction. It instead takes the form of a continued wrestling with prehistory that renews the possibility of a future, as Woolf accepts the persistence of 'uncivilized' and undeveloped forms of life and finds in them the possibility for new developmental paths.

This concept is reminiscent of what Virno calls "permanent potential," the capacity-to-do or abstract faculty that exists alongside every actualized event and that

forms “the foundation of historicity” (151). Faced with the impasse of present history, Woolf attempts to write such unactualized potential into the eve of war, having La Trobe imagine a new narrative after the pageant’s close. An encounter with starlings “syllabling discordantly life, life, life” prompts the vision of “two figures” outside on the landscape that now seems like “no land in particular”; struggling to form “the first words,” La Trobe once more hears the tree “pelted with starlings” and “heard the first words” (209-212). The ending of the pageant sows the seeds for the beginning of a new one, one that comes, like the first song in “Anon,” from the ‘discordant’ singing of birds. In order that La Trobe may reassert the humanizing force of narrative, she must return to a vitalist source of “life” in the primitive animal and “fertile” mud (212). Indeed, her narrative vision itself seems like a dramatization of rebirth, a return to the first “two figures” of humanity on an undifferentiated mass of earth, the words remaining “without meaning,” pure potential (212). Virno echoes Woolf’s conclusion here when he claims that “the essence of potential…is pre-historic: a past that does not belong to any epoch of its own, but rather accompanies each actuality” (117), meaning that “the historicity of experience postulates the permanence of pre-history within history” (186). Ultimately, then, asserting the presence of pre-historic instincts in the present day of *Between the Acts* allows for the renegotiation of those instincts. Pre-historic animal impulses produce the foundation of human historicity, of the potential for history to be formed differently in opposition to the inevitability of destruction.

This desire for the possibility of a regenerative narrative is keenly felt in the closing pages of the novel, in which Woolf attempts to shift the narrative’s orientation from the static atmosphere after the pageant towards futurity. The repeated uncertainty about ending (“how to make an end?...Was that the end? [194-195])

becomes an all-too closed off past, as Woolf's tenses increasingly drift towards the perfect aspect. Isa's feeling of "abortive" potential is registered by the repeated conditional perfect constructions: "he would have liked to hold on for a moment longer…but the end of the sentence was cut short" (202); "had we met before the salmon leapt…had we met, she was crying…had he been his son" (208); "if they had understood her meaning; if they had known their parts…it would have been a better gift" (209). The present is only marked by memories of the pageant "drifting away…becoming invisible" (213); the human control over temporal order and narrative is imminently fading from consciousness, and as it does so Woolf has her characters protest the passage of time that carries away the possibility of shaping circumstances and positing alternative futures. Indeed these impossible wishes in the conditional perfect run against the repetition of past perfect tenses concerning the finished pageant and the drawing in of darkness: "the little company who had come together at luncheon were left standing on the terrace. The pilgrims had bruised a lane on the grass" (201); "the actors have departed" (207); "the bells had stopped; the audience had gone; also the actors" (209); "shadow had obliterated the garden. Roses had withdrawn for the night" (217). The atmosphere of the present at the close of *Between the Acts* is one of uneasy suspension, principally marked by its distance from completed actions in the past, with the only future certainty that "the lawn would need a deal of clearing up. Tomorrow the telephone would ring" (201). The fragmented 'present time' that closed the pageant, which tried to force the audience into reflection on their complicity in making the potentially catastrophic future, leaves both Woolf and her characters at an impasse, labouring to imagine future progression from a deadening limbo, in which the "flash" (216) of aesthetic beauty in flowers all too quickly "had faded" (216), utterly lost to the present moment.

As a new daily paper arrives that "obliterated the day before" (216), Isa returns to the news story of the assault on a girl that has been circling her consciousness all day: "she had screamed. She had hit him…What then?" (216). Walter Benjamin, writing his famous "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in 1940 under the shadow of Nazi rule, struggled to assail the rigidity of ideas of "historical progression…through a homogeneous empty time" (*Illuminations* 260), protesting against "the 'eternal' image of the past" in historicism and privileging "a unique experience with the past" that can "blast open the continuum of history" (262-263). For Benjamin as for Woolf, a progressivist model of history that shuts off the past as an "eternal" image leading inevitably up to the present seems only capable of ending in oblivion. La Trobe's pageant, filled as it is with gaps and intrusions of the actors' present selves into their period characters, marks an attempt to dislodge this static historiography, creating a personalized constellation from historical time that strives to alter the audience's 'present time' through its pointed flouting of the patriotic, militarized conventions of pageantry (Miller 146). As *Between the Acts* draws to a close, the availability of past events to present interpretation and modification rapidly seems to fade, voiding the present of potential and leaving it a blank instance of "homogeneous empty time," both past and future once more unavailable to the pattern-making possibility of narrative, the "new plot" for which Isa so wishes (215).

It is from this deadening atmosphere that Woolf's ending struggles to produce a model of rebirth, not perhaps exemplifying this "new plot" but trying to imagine its possibility. There is a striking concentration of animal images in the final pages of the novel: "like a fish rising to a crumb of biscuit, Bartholomew snapped at the paper"; the group reading appear as "the grasshopper, the ant, and the beetle"; Bartholomew is likened to his dog, "as a dog shudders its skin, his skin shuddered"

(216-218). The animalizing images that were in Woolf's notes "the prelude to barbarism" here assume an organizing role in the construction of her narrative: Lucy Swithin returns to the "Outline of History" that she read at the novel's outset, filling the room with images of "mammoths, mastodons, pre-historic birds" in the "swamp" of pre-historic England (217-218). This bookend, which links the close of the novel with its beginnings, works as part of Woolf's overarching pattern of trying to produce futures from a return to prehistory, which appears in condensed form in this final passage:

> 'Prehistoric man,' she read, 'half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones'…The old people had gone up to bed….Left alone for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.
>
> Isa let her sewing drop. The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers had watched from some high place among rocks.
>
> Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (218-219)

The return to primitive instinct again is posited as a necessary stage in and resource for developmental renewal. The lapse into animal violence here is placed within an ordered narrative that, like the disjointed gramophone music, tries to create harmony from discord through the healing presence of sequence and rhythm that can connect

such atavism to an ameliorative "embrace" and "life." Indeed, Lucy Swithin's reading the "Outline of History" comfortingly gives the start of the development of civilization, as the "half-human, half-ape" figure begins progression towards full humanity through starting to build with "great stones." The rhythm of alternation that Woolf has written into the fabric of *Between the Acts* obtrudes here more than ever, as the polarities of "enmity" and "love" are placed into parallel units, forming "the rhythm of PH. (the last chapter)" that she found "so obsessive" (*D* V 339). This allows Woolf structurally to balance destructive 'savagery' with creative, human 'life,' syntactically forming a recurrent sequence of "before…after…but first…then" that is weighted towards future progression from animalized violence. As Isa and Giles become the abstracted figures of La Trobe's next pageant, and what was "the heart of England" (16) becomes "the heart of darkness," Woolf attempts to narrate a return to barbarism as essential for the beginning of restoration, placing all hope for "another life" of civilized peace on the uncertain, faltering modal "might": "another life might be born."

The animal aggression that appeared to be an aberration of masculine development in *Three Guineas*, then, seems to have become an inevitable reality for Woolf during the writing of *Between the Acts*, as the desire to prevent war in the earlier text moves towards an attempt to imagine a future that acknowledges and contains such violence. To do so, Woolf returns to the rhythm of the triumphant close of *The Waves*: "Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again" (199). With the approach and outbreak of a war that seemed to threaten all human life, Woolf's reassertion of this "eternal" curve upwards is marred by uncertainty, shadowed by the conflict and dissonance that has preceded it in the novel. With the continent doomed to what looked to be a descent into "barbarism," Woolf

struggled to present this uprising of primal instinct as part of a pattern that included continuance and development, shifting colonial narratives of civilizing progress into "the heart of England." *Between the Acts* closes with an uneasy orientation towards the future, the promise of "another life" from heterosexual union, the "next generation" Woolf emphatically tried to imagine in her essay "The Leaning Tower" (1940): "the next generation – there will be a next generation, in spite of this war and whatever it brings" (*E* VI 274). This tentative hope is predicated upon a vision of imaginative regeneration, as "literature, as we know it, is always ending, and beginning again" (275). As the curtain rises at the close of *Between the Acts*, Woolf stakes her claim on the continued possibility of "beginning again," of forming "another life" from the "hereditary constitution" of violent humanity, of shifting from the 'death' of returning to pre-historic barbarism towards renewed, humanist civilization.

"Be Simple as the Beasts in the Field": Desiring Animality and the Sense of an Ending in the Works of Djuna Barnes

> Consider the cattle, as they pass you by: they do not know what is meant by yesterday or today…This is a hard sight for man to see; for though he thinks himself better than the animals because he is human, he cannot help envying them their happiness…he cannot learn to forget…man says 'I remember' and envies the animal, who at once forgets and for whom every moment really dies, sinks back into night and fog and is extinguished for ever. Thus the animal lives *unhistorically*: for it is contained in the present
>
> — Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*

> 'Ah,' he added, 'to be an animal, born at the opening of an eye, going only forward, and at the end of day, shutting out memory with the dropping of the lid'
>
> — Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

For Nietzsche as for Barnes's Dr. O'Connor, the animal occupies an enviable position because of its ability to forget: constructed as free from the limiting pressures of historical time, of the weight of past and future, the animal becomes the locus of desire for the human figure who is barred from the immediacy of the present. It is the animal's freedom from history that seems to allow for motion, "going only forward": as Nietzsche goes on to write, "forgetting is essential to action of any kind" (62). Indeed, in his *Untimely Meditations* (1876) Nietzsche claims that in the presence of an excess of historical consciousness, "life crumbles and degenerates" (67); thus, it is "the great fighters *against history*" who can "found a new generation of this race" and impel it "ceaselessly forward" (106). Where Nietzsche envisions a revitalized 'race' of humanity that comes from access to 'unhistorical' animality, no such future is proffered in *Nightwood*, Barnes's 1936 novel centred around the enigma of Robin Vote and those who love and lose her. The world of this novel seems to suffer from Nietzsche's degenenerative surplus of history, held suspended at a moment of crisis; however, O'Connor's idealized construction of the animal proves to be as hollow as any promise in *Nightwood*, with such forgetfulness and simplicity definitively located

outside the bounds of the human. If animal figures allowed Woolf to posit alternative futures, for Barnes they can only provide the form for an end to the human. Throughout the text, animal images are a principal means by which characters attempt to understand their obscure traumas, most notably in relation Robin; ultimately, they can provide no knowledge but only a final descent that closes the novel's frozen narrative. While the novel does, as Katherine Fama argues, use "melancholic dialogue" as "a disruption and a displacement of narration" (42), its representation of human descent into animality provides a peculiar form of narrative motion and finality in relinquishing the human. *Nightwood*, consonant in many ways with Tyrus Miller's formulation of 'late modernism,' presents "an image of subjectivity 'at play' in the face of its own extinction" (Miller 64). Even as the novel's 'play' with the dazzling potential of baroque metaphor anxiously evades movement towards a catastrophic future, those very motionless images encode an exhausted desire for the 'extinction' of the human through a return to ahistorical animality. This image of bestialization is taken up and revised in Barnes's later text *The Antiphon* (1958), in which it is explicitly linked with patriarchal domination in her re-staging of multiple traumas "during the war of 1939" ("The Antiphon," *Selected Works of Djuna Barnes* 80). This play maintains *Nightwood*'s logic of the terminal orientation of human life, but instead of imagining an escape from history through a return to the animal, it stages life negated through a fatal return to maternal origins.

The extent to which Barnes's texts seek to evade the historical conditions of their own production has been a vexed question in Barnes criticism, particularly in relation to the political climate around the Second World War. Early formalist critics of *Nightwood* stressed its aesthetic autonomy: Joseph Frank asserts that the novel is structured by a self-contained imagistic pattern, meaning "the relation of this vision to

an extra-artistic 'objective' world has ceased to have any fundamental importance" (30). Subsequent feminist and historicist readings have taken pains to refute this assumption. Bonnie Roos has recently made the opposite case by claiming that *Nightwood* is an allegory of "international economic history" and politics between the wars (201), unconvincingly equating Barnes's characters with particular historical figures in order to convey "how her seemingly abstract art touches on issues that affected 'real life' and everyday, ordinary people" (19). These divergent readings indicate the continued problem critics have in teasing out the relationships between Barnes's texts and the politics and events of her day, with perhaps the most contentious problem being the question of *Nightwood*'s relationship to fascist politics. Most critics find evidence of antifascist resistance in the queer figures who populate the novel: Jane Marcus has famously called *Nightwood* "a kind of feminist-anarchist call for freedom from fascism" (221), while more recently Mia Spiro has placed Barnes alongside Woolf and Isherwood in her study *Anti-Nazi Modernism*. However, both Marcus and Spiro seem to acknowledge the lack of direct evidence for Barnes's committed antifascism, arguing rather that the novel's political force derives from an anticipatory power: for Marcus, *Nightwood* is "a prophecy of the Holocaust" (248), a sentiment echoed by Spiro's comment that Nazism is "lying in wait for the alienated outsiders portrayed in the novel" (70). Although it seems difficult to attribute it directly to the context of German fascism, both critics seem to be gesturing towards the apocalyptic tenor of the text, the "quality of horror and doom" that Eliot related to Elizabethan tragedy in his preface to the novel (*Selected Works of Djuna Barnes* 231) and that seems to shut off futurity for all of Barnes's characters.

Ironically, we might locate part of Barnes's response to the interwar period in this abstract sense of 'doom,' which in many ways recalls the apocalyptically "morbid

expectations" about oncoming war that Overy argues plagued that time (p.177). As Sarah Cole argues, this period saw the term 'total war' gain currency as a way of describing the impending conflict as a "repeated and intensified" cataclysm that extended the destruction of the First World War (198). Barnes registers this kind of unbounded experience of conflict in her letters of the period: in December 1935, she wrote "I think there must be something physically wrong with me…I am weighed down. Probably it is a reaction from all the trouble now in the world, the coming war, apparently war all over the place, the smell of death is already hanging in the clothes of the nations" (Guirl-Stearley 126). Barnes extrapolates from personal, somatic malaise to a generalized "war all over the place," which produces "the smell of death" before it even begins. This depiction of "the coming war" strongly resonates with *Nightwood*'s terminal atmosphere, lending credence to Miller's assertion that "the counterhistorical thrust of the work" constitutes a profound if indirect "address to Barnes's historical situation" (147). Barnes's desired escape from historical contingency, then, can be seen as a bleak expression of an environment of 'total war,' recalling Adorno's discussion of lyric poetry, in which "the more heavily social conditions weigh, the more unrelentingly the poem resists" through the "idiosyncrasy of poetic thought" (214-215). Barnes's novel seems poised before the end of history, with historical consciousness leading only to "the smell of death," and it is with what Brian Glavey has called the "dazzling estrangement" (752) of metaphor that her narrative seeks to delay progress towards such catastrophe.

It is partly this idea of a "universal malady" (*Nightwood* 32) that leads Erin Carlston to claim that *Nightwood* "cannot be said to have a purely oppositional relationship to fascism" (43). Carlston convincingly argues that "the buzzwords of liberal humanism – rationalism, individual freedom, progress – are, for fascist thought

and for Barnes, derisory and illusory" (68). Barnes mounts an unremitting assault on the humanist subject, in which non-human figures appear as desirable escapes from the overdetermined 'malady' of the human condition. This lack of faith in the humanist subject means that *Nightwood* remains recalcitrant to identity-oriented readings such as Jane Marcus's, which seek to recuperate Barnes's abject queer characters. More recent critics such as Monica Kaup and Daniela Caselli have come to recognize the novel's positionlessness, its refusal to valorize any subject position: as Caselli asserts, "Barnes's work is both a resource and a problem for feminism; it offers an uncompromisingly ruthless analysis of sexual politics, but it also refuses to produce a model for redressing past wrongs" (*Improper Modernism* 247). If this negation of the human means *Nightwood* cannot be recuperated as an antifascist text, it also means that it evinces no hope in a cleansing alternative to the condition it depicts. The discourse of human degeneration is one of the principal topoi Carlston identifies as aligning *Nightwood* with fascist modes of thinking, but, in Dana Seitler's words, "in *Nightwood*, everyone is degenerate" (545). The novel invokes degenerative rhetoric in order to generalize it, ultimately refusing the possibility of distinguishing between viable and non-viable forms of life; thus, Robin's regression to an animalistic state appears as a logical outcome of the terminal human condition. Although it is difficult to advocate for a reading of the novel as a "recuperation of animality" and a "post-humanist triumph" (Rohman 26, 157), animality does become desirable in *Nightwood* as providing a possible "closed account" ("The Antiphon" 219) for the narrative and existential impasse of the human.

Although the significance of the novel's infamous final scene, in which Robin 'bows down' with the dog, has been the subject of many divergent readings, critics attentive to the formal aspects of *Nightwood* have long recognized it as "the only

possible ending." Joseph Frank argues that it is insistently prefigured in the novel's tapestry of images, which recurrently depict a downward trajectory for its human figures (Frank 51). This inevitability is thematic as well as imagistic: from its opening sentence, *Nightwood* forecloses all potential development or continuance for human life. Fittingly, the novel begins with a birth that is profoundly belated, launching a trajectory that will end with the degenerate figure of Felix and Robin's son, who is "born to holy decay…an addict to death" (90). Not only does Felix's overdue birth kill his mother, but it is also prefaced by Hedvig's "well-founded suspicion" about "perpetuating that race" (3). Moreover, the long sentence's dense syntax displays a recurrent feature of Barnes's prose: the extended delay of main verbs, which are buried underneath the baroquely detailed sub-clauses that precede them. Here, the beginning of human life is characterized predominantly by contingency: before we learn directly that Hedvig "gave birth," we are told of the "disapproval of the people" concerning her child's "race," while Hedvig herself seems to disappear into her extravagantly described "canopied bed." Joseph Boone aptly calls birth in *Nightwood* "a violent act of orphaning, that is simultaneously a *descent* into human consciousness and decay" (238); that "descent" appears through the predetermination embedded in Barnes's style, in which markers of human action emerge impotently in a suffocating environment of pre-modifying textual excess. The death of a parodically masculine mother with "military beauty" (3) begins Barnes's satire of Felix's struggle to "make a destiny for himself" (40), to "pay homage" to the past of his father's false aristocratic title by having a child who will to secure him a "future" (38). *Nightwood*'s environment is comprehensively sterile, with Felix's failure echoed by the Doctor's maternal "wish for children and knitting" (78) and the trope of the doll as "the life" that lesbian lovers "cannot have" (118); desire for futurity through reproduction and

patriarchal lines of descent gives way only to the inescapable "destiny" of decline, as *Nightwood* violates all forms of developmental logic.

Crucially, Barnes mounts her critique of the desire for procreative succession through the stereotyped figure of the Jew, obsessed with "the great past" (9) and unable to achieve autonomous action because of an overdetermined history. Indeed, Barnes writes that "exact history stopped for Felix" until the time of the novel, attributing his character solely to his inheritance of "the sum total of what is the Jew" (4): "From the mingled passions that made up his past, out of a diversity of bloods, from the crux of a thousand impossible situations, Felix had become the accumulated and single – the embarrassed…He felt that the great past might mend a little if he bowed low enough" (9). The Jewish Felix becomes the prototype for the rest of Barnes's characters in *Nightwood*, for whom history is a menacing abstraction that voids potential for individual action. The novel categorically refuses to produce a model of an autonomous human subject who might be able to direct its narrative. As a result, Felix's "exact" personal history is supplanted by "racial memories" (3), so that his "single" self is riven by the "accumulated" victimization and "embarrassment" Barnes associates with Jews. Felix's condition is a static one, as Barnes's style again only allows the subject to appear faintly from a complex network of prepositional phrases. His condition arises from the intertwining of multiple causes ("from…out of…from"), each in itself plural, the complex 'mingling' of a "diversity" of prior events and people, with the result a passive accession to an essentialized position in the past perfect tense. In short, Felix "had become" what in Barnes's text he could only be: a self-erasing repetition of his cultural inheritance. Lara Trubowitz has convincingly argued that in *Nightwood*, Jews become "a narratological category," as Barnes extends those qualities marked as distinctly Jewish in the opening chapter to

her non-Jewish characters (312, 328). Felix's melancholic consignment to the past is taken up in the "early Christian" Nora's salons, which seem like a re-enactment of "early American history" (47), in Jenny's collecting of "the emotions of the past" to "make them historical" (57-59) and in the Doctor's "prehistoric memory" (135). In a work fixated upon the catatonic Robin, the "infected carrier of the past" (36), each character seems, like the Doctor in his tiny, cluttered room, "condemned to the grave" of a futureless end of history, with only the "utmost abandon" of O'Connor's linguistic excess to guard against awareness of their state (68).

Indeed, characters' desire for Robin produces a profound anxiety about an undefined yet threateningly foreclosed future. Teresa de Lauretis has described this feeling in Barthes' words as "the terror of uncertain signs," experienced by both characters and readers in the face of the unknowable, "the 'inhuman' element in language" (117-118). The world of *Nightwood*, like the Doctor, seems to have been "created in anxiety" (65), saturated with loss and always on the verge of calamity: Robin has the face of "an incurable, yet to be stricken with its malady" (39), is "a catastrophe that had yet no beginning" (45). Robin's degenerative atmosphere has a peculiar temporality, as vague, anticipated events seem already to have wreaked destruction in the present, producing a terminal "incurable" who is denied even the fulfillment of "its malady." It is an atmosphere akin to Barnes's sense of "war all over the place," recalled in her description of military men "prepared for participation in a war not yet scheduled" (5), in which potential is denied but so too is definitive closure, leaving only an anxious morbidity.

This comes from pursuing an object of desire who is always already lost: observing Robin, "Felix experienced a profound apprehension" (40), and he later reflects that the "most formless loss" he felt with her gave him "at the same time

pleasure and a sense of terrible anxiety" (94). Similarly, for Nora "the walking image of Robin" is "fixed…in an appalling apprehension…all catastrophes ran towards her, the magnetized predicament" (51). Interactions with the inexplicable Robin form only "an image of a forgotten experience" (36), a sense of a powerful but inaccessible past that results in future-oriented dread. The word "apprehension" haunts *Nightwood*, later associated with the "fear" that "destiny and history are untidy," the "disorder" Robin seems to bring forth (100). Its double meaning forms an aptly Barnesian paradox: Robin can never be 'apprehended' in the sense of being physically laid hold of or known mentally; as a result, she makes others feel a "formless," incomprehensible fear of looming disaster.

Barnes's characters' anxiety, so reminiscent of the Overy's catalogue of interwar fear in *The Twilight Years*, is rather different from the affect as it is analyzed in Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings*. Ngai describes how anxiety becomes a structuring principle in "'philosophically stylized' quests for truth, knowledge and masculine agency…precisely as a way of rescuing the intellectual from his potential absorption in sites of asignificance or negativity" (246). Like the future of patriarchal lineage, progression and "masculine agency" in the quest for knowledge of Robin, "the site of asignificance" *par excellence*, are completely shut off. The future orientation of anxiety instead seems to cast Barnes's characters further into such negativity; indeed, if in Caselli's words "*Nightwood*'s linguistic eroticism…lies in the inability to grasp one's object of desire" ("The 'Indecent Eternal'" 162), anxiety and desire enter into tense symbiosis in the novel, as characters both fear and draw towards Robin's "catastrophe that had yet no beginning."

Any form of ordered narrative "beginning," then, would seem to necessitate "incurable" termination; if, in Sheehan's terms, "narrative…is *human-shaped*" (9),

the "universal malady" of *Nightwood*'s vision of humanity requires that all narrative be fatal disaster. Where Woolf sought a regeneration of the ability to posit narrative futurity in order to escape from catastrophe, as many scholars have noted, Barnes seems to want to evade narrative progression altogether. Joseph Frank, in his theory of 'spatial form,' has asserted that *Nightwood* is "a static situation, not a narrative," structured by a 'spatial' arrangement of images that evades any linear temporality, with each chapter of the novel "illuminating the same entanglement of the human spirit" (34). Queer readings of *Nightwood* have nuanced this analysis of stasis: Joseph Boone's argument that the novel's "suspension of forward motion" through dense metaphor is "radically nongenerative and, by implication, productively queer" (240-241) is echoed by Kathryn Bond Stockton's claim that metaphor forms "an intensity that is a motion, an emotion, and a growth, even though from conventional angles it may look like a way of going nowhere" (113). These critics depict the failure of narrative progress as queerly generative, as Barnes's extravagant language produces forms of movement, growth and beauty in an aesthetic realm. However, the 'productivity' of this "lateral growth" (Stockton 107) can only have a limited yield in Barnes, and its recuperative potential should not be overstated. O'Connor's peculiar version of "the contemplative life" is after all admitted to be "only an effort…to hide the body so the feet won't stick out" (113). O'Connor and his interlocutors cannot evade the suspense and anxiety of suspension, cannot fully "hide the body" of an existential impasse over which they drape images of startling beauty. The comic "abandon" with which the doctor occupies his "grave" cannot suture the gap at the centre of *Nightwood*; thus, the possibilities of moving suspension are placed under ever greater duress over the course of the novel, and the onset of deferred catastrophe starts to resemble an appealing relief.

Indeed, the very images that seem to halt motion recurrently suggest a desire for fulfillment. Thus we see repeated images of characters appearing to come together without fully meeting: Nora and Robin freeze in "an agonized embrace," in which they are "so strained together that the space that divided them seemed to be thrusting them apart" (52). This recalls the description of the "static" Robin as being like "the converging halves of a broken fate, setting face, in sleep, toward itself in time…parted only by the hesitation of the hour" (36-37) and also anticipates Barnes's lengthy description of Jenny and Robin's coming together:

> Jenny leaning far over the table, Robin far back…thus they presented the halves of a movement that had, as in sculpture, the beauty and the absurdity of a desire that is in flower but that can have no burgeoning, unable to execute its destiny; a movement that can divulge neither caution nor daring, for the fundamental condition for completion was in neither of them; they were like Greek runners, with lifted feet but without the relief of the final command that would bring the foot down – eternally angry, eternally separated, in a cataleptic frozen gesture of abandon (61)

In spite of these frozen images' evasion of progression, they are all oriented towards an anticipated yet inaccessible end. The semblance of a narrative is retained, with "fate," "embrace" and "movement" appearing through their incompleteness, the impossibility of their attainment. If Jenny and Robin become art objects here, they are aligned with the other statues and dolls of the text, in that each "resembles but does not contain life" (123). Just as the Doctor's expositions of the night syntactically resemble the logical argumentation that they do not contain (Kaup 103), Barnes's static figures represent narrative currents of "fate," movement and desire that can never reach "completion." Her aestheticized language proliferates around these

figures of unrealizable desire, registering at once sculptural "beauty…and absurdity" and the loss of "burgeoning" climax, the "relief of the final command" that would end the suspension that composes *Nightwood*'s 'spatial form.' Frank Kermode refuted the attribution of the word "spatial" to literary structures, arguing that plots cannot dispense completely with a structure of "temporal integration" that "humanizes time by giving it form" (52, 45-46). His analysis of modernism's apocalyptic structures, tied as it is to Nordau and degeneration (97), is especially apt for Barnes in its discussion of Beckett, in whose work "the signs of order and form are more or less continuously presented, but always with a sign of cancellation" (115). Nora reaches a similar state to the purgatory represented in *Endgame*, with its opening sigh "it must be nearly finished" (Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* 93) and Clov's despairing "when I fall I'll weep for happiness" (132): "there is no last reckoning for those who have loved too long, so for me there is no end. Only I can't, I can't wait for ever!" (129**).** *Nightwood* does not dispense with the notion of a "last reckoning"; rather it makes faith in its existence untenable. Barnes's characters come to desire Kermode's "temporal integration" in some form of ending, as the tension of anxiety and desire before narrative and historical paralysis becomes unbearable.

It is in this environment that animal figures seem to provide a potential escape from the stasis of humanity. Fittingly, when Nora mourns "every hour is my last, and…one can't live one's last hour all one's life" O'Connor voices his desire "to be an animal, going only forward, and at the end of day, shutting out memory with the dropping of the lid" (113). This construction of the animal diametrically opposes the human situation in *Nightwood*: the ability to 'shut out memory' and consciousness allows for linear, directed movement, "going only forward." O'Connor earlier claimed that, in relinquishing the keen sense of smell by which animals "find their

way about," humans only gained "a tension in the spirit which is the contraction of freedom" (101). Human evolutionary development from other animals limits "freedom" of motion and produces only the "tension" of the anxiety that pervades *Nightwood*. O'Connor's view of the animal's mobility anticipates Bataille's assertion in his *Theory of Religion* (1973) that, from the perspective of human consciousness, "animality is immediacy or immanence…For the animal, nothing is given through time…nothing is posited beyond the present" (17-18). If most of Barnes's characters are arrested in states between retrospection and apprehension, this vision of the animal as ahistorical, present immediacy appears to render accessible the motion that eludes them. This is the source of the persistently animalized Robin's appeal: as "beast turning human" (36), the "wild thing caught in a woman's skin" who is "outside the human type" (121), she "can go anywhere, do anything…because she forgets," whereas Nora can move "nowhere, because I remember" (126). The "cataleptic calm" that is Robin's "only power" (42) comes from her somnambulistic elusion of the "tension" of consciousness, her inability to remember or to enter historical time. She appears as the mobile "eternal momentary" (107) because of her distance from "the human type," as Barnes ironically locates the only potential for movement and change outside of human historical consciousness and memory.

The animal and the animalized human, then, become the locus of an impossible desire to escape the human; as Robert Azzarello argues, in Barnes's work "human is banished from animal being by selfconsciousness, but it is also barred from divine being by incomprehensible lack" (101). The emptiness of the hope offered by the animal is dramatized in O'Connor's story in which he tries to follow Father Lucas's advice to view life as "a simple book…read and be simple as the beasts in the field…be simple like the beasts and yet think and harm nobody" (110). The Doctor's

conscious effort to be "simple like the beasts" is comically inadequate, taking the form of failed masturbation in a church, as he "had to embarrass" 'Tiny O'Toole,' who "was lying in a swoon" (111). Even the sexuality repeatedly associated with the bestial is only a weak "swoon," as the Doctor seems blocked both from full sacredness and full profanity, the human condition caught impotently between the two. Indeed, the injunction to be "simple like the beasts" is self-negating, in that it is tied to a language-oriented conception of life as a "simple book" that one can "read"; hence the paradox to "be simple like the beasts and yet think," to strive consciously to become unselfconscious. This is a paradox Bataille places at the centre of philosophical enquiry, the question of "how to get out of the human situation" through language (13). Boundedness within the human means that "the animal opens before me a depth that attracts me and is familiar to me," which is "also that which is farthest removed from me…*that which is unfathomable to me*…which plunges me into night" (22-23). From the perspective of human language, the 'night' of the animal is registered at once as recognizable simplicity, a kind of naïve immanence, and as such incomprehensible, remaining impossibly other to the language-based "human situation."

In spite of this, the animal remains a privileged mode of dressing "the unknowable in the garments of the known" (114) in *Nightwood*, generating a semblance of narrative coherence out of its incomprehensible night world. Indeed, animal images are one of the most significant vectors by which Barnes, as Brian Glavey writes, "gives shape to estrangement, making it…recognizable if forever unknown" (761). Images and narratives of animals proliferate around "the unknowable" elements of the text, chiefly the traumatic experiences of Robin's lovers and O'Connor's memories of violence in the war. Indeed, these personal and

historical traumas are related in the text, as O'Connor often turns to stories of animals wounded or upset in the war with reference to Robin's abandonment of Felix and Nora. In the face of Felix's "formless loss" he refers to the premature birth of "the horse who knew too much…in mourning for something taken away from her in a bombardment in the war" (94-96), and he compares Nora's memory of Robin to a headless horse he saw in the war: he claims "my memory weighed for the lost body," advising her "we all go down in battle…my war brought me many things; let yours bring you as much" (107-109). Lost love and war wounds are linked by the shattering effect of absence, the embodied 'weight' of memory; such indefinable loss can only be approached through reference to the non-human. As Sarah Cole outlines, this is a common strategy for writers addressing war violence, and for such analogies to have force "it simultaneously requires that the animal seem human and, at the same time, remain obviously and significantly non-human" (17-18). This dynamic of similarity and difference is foregrounded in O'Connor's first wartime anecdote, about a cow:

> the bombs began tearing the heart out of you…the poor beast trembling on her four legs so I knew all at once the tragedy of the beast can be two legs more awful than a man's. She was softly dropping her dung… I saw the cow turning her head straight back so her horns made two moons against her shoulders, the tears soused all over her great black eyes… I put my hand on the poor bitch of a cow and her hide was running water under my hand…as if she wanted to go, standing still in one spot; and I thought, there are directions and speeds 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 (19-20)

In a scene with three human figures (O'Connor is in a bunker with an Irishman and an old woman), the physical and affective impact of the war is registered primarily with reference to the cow. The Doctor seems to connect to the cow, "talking to her" (20) and touching her, with the animal's trembling, leaking body manifesting the traumatic fear of "bombs tearing the heart out of you." Yet, like the Doctor's comparison of the horse's head and love leaving "a memory of [their] weight" (108), the otherness of the cow means that its experience of "tragedy" can only be understood as an incomplete analogy. The familiarity of its running tears is countered by the morphological difference that renders its predicament "two legs more awful than a man's." Narrating the war through the animal, then, becomes as much about displacement as comparison, as O'Connor's vision of the 'simplicity' of the animal's motion gives way to an experience of profound alterity, an unfathomable movement that "no one has calculated" and that can only appear in language as a negation that "we didn't know of."

The oft-noted animalization of Robin produces a similar paradox, providing both a semblance of form and an intimation of formlessness. As Karen Kaivola has argued, Barnes employs primitivizing discourse primarily in other characters' perspectives on Robin, as they seek a frame for her otherness (175). Moreover, that discourse is explicitly artificial, with the immediacy attributed to animals belied by Barnes's figurative representation of them: Robin's initial appearance in a form of "jungle" is likened to an artificial "painting by the *douanier* Rousseau" (34), and the animals that appear in Barnes's text are rendered in exaggerated, anti-naturalistic forms, as when the horse's hide is imaged as "a river of sorrow" (96) or when the circus lion's eyes are filled with "tears that never reached the surface" (49). These constructions tend, then, to emphasize the distance between human metaphorical

language and the 'natural' animal. This trope becomes the primary means by which Barnes's characters attempt to arrest the enigma of Robin, allowing the text to "clutch at her as she falls away" (Glavey 761). In a section from the drafts of the novel, O'Connor declares "I went all about her and knew I should never know her nor lose her, - it's that way with a horse" (285); though animality can never be known, it allows the other to be recognized *as unknown*, and as such not to be lost completely. On the level of narrative, Robin's encounters with animals provide a framework that dramatizes her elusiveness: her descent with Nora's dog is prefigured the first time she meets Nora in the audience at the circus, providing a trajectory for their relationship that recalls O'Connor's prophecy, "though those two are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both" (89). This patterning presents a similar simplicity of motion to the one O'Connor attributes to animals, as the lion in the circus "went down" before Robin, who "rose straight up" and claims "I don't want to be here" (49), a situation reversed in the final chapter as Robin "began going down," appearing intentionally to pursue the dog who "seemed to be rising from the floor" (139). If the novel's language tries to catch Robin "turning human," as she initially rises away from the lion that threatens to exceed the bounds of the circus ring, its artificially wrought structure of animal images and encounters can only chart its failure to contain or understand that which appears "outside the human type."

The coherence of Robin's final return to the animal, then, comes from both the novel's depiction of the terminal stasis of the human condition and its interrogation of the structures of language used to depict it; the movement towards a close that is desired in the novel's latter half takes its only possible form in a relinquishment of the human. Paul Sheehan has argued that the perceived material immediacy of animals means "the animal is used to imagine a being devoid of the repressions and strictures

of narrative logic. To 'animalize' the human, therefore, is to denarrativize it, and to envisage it as fact rather than as value" (27). However, for both Woolf and Barnes, animalizing the human renews some possibility of narrative direction in the face of historical impasse. Where for Woolf it provided the possibility of *re*narrativizing human life, in Barnes Robin's animalization completes the novel's degenerative arc, cementing the impossibility of her being envisaged as either simple "fact" or "value."

Several critics have registered the stylistic shift that occurs in *Nightwood*'s final chapter: for Elizabeth Pochoda, "there is nowhere for the prose to go. The end is factual and brief" (188), while Erin Carlston notes the irony that in 'The Possessed,' "Barnes comes as close to a mimetic style as she ever will…As it approaches mimesis, the text goes down, like Robin, not into semiotic bliss but into animalism and then silence" (79). Robin seems to enter into "narrative logic" at the very moment that she definitively escapes it; Barnes's prose is at its most directly representational when it is describing a fall away from human language and comprehension. Robin seems to be absorbed into animal immanence: her "intrusion" on "insect and bird" as she sleeps outside is "forgotten…obliterating her as a drop of water is made anonymous by the pond into which it has fallen" (138). As Robin recedes from human understanding into a profusion of animal life, becoming "anonymous" and "speaking in a low voice to the animals" (137), her motion takes on the structural appearance of causality: she "began going down" precisely in concert with Nora reaching the door, and the description of her bizarre pursuit of the dog is written as a complete sequence connected by conjunctive adverbs, "then he stopped…Then head down…Then she began to bark also" (139). The anxiety and desire that has driven the metaphorical pursuit of Robin here fades, as the "catastrophe that had yet no beginning" reaches a conclusion in the exhaustion of figurative language, with the queer potential of

Nightwood's dazzling images supplanted by a fall into narrative and away from the human.

Indeed, this descent is depicted as a form of surrender: both Robin and the dog "gave up" (139), recalling Matthew's plea to Nora, "can't you be done now, can't you give up, now be still, now that you know what the world is about, knowing it's about nothing?" (105). Robin's descent is consonant with the images of automatism Miller locates throughout the novel (163), in that it registers a relinquishment of all pretense of human agency. This is foreshadowed in Matthew's drunken failure to stand up at the close of the penultimate chapter and Nora's dream experience of her view of Robin "withdrawn…by the falling of her body," as she feels "the intolerable automatism of the last 'Ah!' in a body struck at the moment of its final breath" (57). It is this negation of the human and of meaning that makes it difficult to accept fully Carrie Rohman's reading of the "posthumanist triumph of Barnes's novel," which "*revises* the category 'human'" (157). If *Nightwood* imagines a "posthumanist" world it is not one of "triumph" but rather of rejection, seeking to end the pretense of the potentiality of 'the human'; as Monica Kaup argues, "the verbal spectacle of *Nightwood*'s extravagant narration only affirms the failure of language and representation" (102). Whereas the animalization at the close of *Between the Acts* formed a tentative prelude to "new life" in the future, the degenerative fall that closes *Nightwood* seems only to end the future-oriented dread that structures the text by foreclosing any subsequent progression or change. Furthermore, Barnes's depiction of generalized malaise and static anxiety renders this dehumanization desirable, in that it provides the novel's sole form of directionality, movement and partial fulfillment, "the relief of the final command" in a world suspended before cataclysm.

Instructively, Barnes's reflection on the historical catastrophe of the Second World War in her later text *The Antiphon* replays the scene of human bestialization as a form of patriarchal violence against women. Dudley and Elisha, returning to their ancestral home Burley Hall, seek to use "the lucky anonymity of war" (101) to execute vaguely destructive designs on their mother and sister. They insistently cast both women as animals: Miranda is recurrently figured as a "vixen" (99, 140) sexualized prey, and Dudley responds to Augusta's question "what's a woman?" with "a cow, sitting on a crumpled grin" (140). As they don masks of a pig and an ass and violently taunt and push both women, it becomes clear, as Richard Espley argues, that the foundation of patriarchal oppression in *The Antiphon* is "the metaphor of the female beast" (190):

> ELISHA [*Pushing* MIRANDA *from behind with his knee, still holding her arms*]:
>
> Now then, my somewhat well-used spinster…
>
> You'd never listen to your brothers, would you, Toots?...
>
> [*Raising his knee*]
>
> Let's see, if by your scumber, you are fox!
>
> DUDLEY [*Over his mother's shoulder, to* ELISHA]:
>
> Slap her rump, and stand her on four feet!
>
> That's her best position!
>
> ELISHA: The damned and dedicated 'victim' (176)

This scene replicates *Nightwood*'s downward trajectory into animality, as the brothers steal Miranda's cane, "stand her on four feet" and Dudley commands his mother "old crow, downward to the feast" (180). However, what was formerly associated with automatism and relief becomes a brutal exercise of domination in the context of "this

knock-about of general war" (91), as the brothers exploit the power of animalizing rhetoric to sanction the exercise of power and violence. Scholarly work on earlier drafts of *The Antiphon* suggests an even more thoroughgoing association between dehumanizing language and female trauma in the text: the revelation of Titus's arrangement of Miranda's rape is rendered as animal slaughter, as Titus "offered to exchange her for a goat" and left her like "heifers dangling from an hatter…while he charged the rape-blade in" (qtd. in Taylor 44). Miranda's abuse is justified by the reduction of her life to the status of an exchangeable "goat"; furthermore, in the second draft of the play, Jack claims she "cried out like a ewe" as Augusta and Titus made her bedroom like "an abbatoir where…reindeer stretch out the throat for slashing" (qtd. in Curry 292). Where the animalized woman in *Nightwood* represented an inaccessible, 'wild' immanence that resisted human capture and propelled desire, the most common implication of such discourse in *The Antiphon* is of caught, victimized prey, as fascination with animal otherness gives way to the representation of systemic violence.

Barnes's earlier investment in the alterity of 'the beast' all but fades in *The Antiphon*; animals feature solely as constructs in human discourse, instrumentalized in the characters' rhetorical struggle for power. Daniela Caselli has asserted that for Barnes, "the great advantage of writing a play can be seen precisely as shedding the burden of having a narrator…the dramatis personae are defined by their stories, and the stories told about them" (*Improper Modernism* 224-225). The mimetic authority implied by a narrator is a "burden" for Barnes, one she undermined in *Nightwood* and dispenses with in *The Antiphon*. As a result, the question of the categories of human and animal becomes a matter of linguistic negotiation and dominance. As the brothers discuss their opportunity for violence against Miranda and Augusta in wartime,

Dudley wonders "if they saw me backward in a mirror, / I'm not so sure what sort of beast they'd see" (99). Dudley seems to acknowledge the role of perspective in the construction of human and "beast": before attempting to animalize the women in his family, he opens himself up to precisely the same process, which Elisha quickly shuts down: "turn them to the wall, your mirror's blank" (99). Dudley and Elisha repeatedly seek to control the "mirror" of metaphorical language, constructing an authoritative discourse that removes Miranda and Augusta from the realm of the human. Their donning of animal masks as they force the women to bow down, which Alex Goody relates to Jonson's *Volpone* (353), seems like an assertion of their effort to control the 'play' of species identity, fooling Augusta into participating in what she thinks is "a game" (175) but which is a form of rhetorical violence.

However, the chaotic surplus of the play's animal reference undermines the brothers' attempt to secure the definition of human and animal life, ensuring there is "no possible certainty" in any single "non-human image or metaphor" (Espley 198-199). Unlike in *Nightwood*, the animal metaphors used by characters in *The Antiphon* provide no structural symmetry or sense of causal narrative motion; rather, overseen by the carnivalesque "gryphon, once a car in a roundabout" (82), the play's animal references slip into formless multiplicity. From Miranda's image of a young Augusta "bawling and baaing out her natural glee" like "a kid" (86) to the licentiousness of "Bull Titus" (156), "that old Ram" (151) who "said he was the stud to breed a kingdom" (161), to Augusta's description of her husband's mistresses as "creatures" (143) and "a rowdy pack of bitches" (127), the promiscuous sexuality associated with the animal is constantly being resignified. The play closes as mother and daughter die on the griffin, which has been brought together to form "an excellent stage" (192) and an "undivided bed" from a "divided beast" (189). The structural closure and certainty

of the "undivided bed" that would seem to heal the text's "rip in nature" (82) remains, like the hybrid griffin that is superficially brought together, an artificial, mythical "stage."

In the time between *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon*, then, the structural and political resonances of Barnes's engagement with animal life shift significantly. Finished well after the conclusion of its setting in "this knock-about of general war," *The Antiphon* dramatizes and undermines the efforts of male "myopic conquerors" (91) to control the boundaries of viable and non-viable life through the discourse of animality. Its quality of recursiveness, its restaging of both the macrocosmic trauma of the war and the microcosmic trauma of the Burley family's past, gives the shapeless "catastrophe that had yet no beginning" in 1936 a definite form. As a result, *The Antiphon*'s fatalism is absolute, throwing into relief the future-oriented tension of the earlier work, the anxious uncertainty that allowed desire to gravitate towards dehumanization.

Barnes's ending here seems to be a complete reversal of the curtain that rises on 'new life' at the close of *Between the Acts*, as Augusta's refrain "let us play…Come, play me daughter" (193) results in the belated cancellation of life, as each of mother and child is "brought to child-bed of the other" in death (223). In this work, the negation of human life that provides "the nice matter of the closed account" (219) takes the form not of a descent into animality but of a reformulation of birth as death. This is the governing trope of the play's final act, providing the structure absent in its creaturely images: Miranda's vision of her birth is accompanied by the "lashing noose" of "hissing milk," as "a door slammed on Eden, and the Second Gate, / And I walked down your leg" (195). *Nightwood*'s critique of generation and human reproductivity is maintained, but its discourse of degeneration is replaced by a more

rigid foreclosure of life, the "perambulator rolling to the tomb; / Death with a baby in its mouth" (219). In the earlier text, animals offered the false hope of an escape from historicity and doom-laden impasse, bearing out Lyndsey Stonebridge's claim that anxiety "has an inventiveness that allows the ego to survive" and form "some kind of relationship with the future" (8), even if that relationship is one of anticipative desire for its end. By setting her play "during the war of 1939" (80), Barnes returns to the opening year of the Second World War in order to prevent any sense of possible alteration of or control over historical cataclysm. *Nightwood*'s motivating desire, the enigmatic "sustaining power of…withdrawal" (*Nightwood* 47) and alterity fully gives way in *The Antiphon* to déjà vu, history as repetition and the equation of motion and death, the "perambulator rolling to the tomb."

"Try to Clear Your Mind of Humanism": Revolutionary Change and the Rhetoric of Animality in the Works of Sylvia Townsend Warner

Writing in the late 1930s under the threat "at any moment [of] a declaration of war, an air-raid," Sylvia Townsend Warner produced *The Cat's Cradle-Book* (published 1940), a text that purports to be the transcription of an oral tradition of feline stories and that playfully urges both narrator and reader "to clear your mind of humanism" (33, 28). Warner's introduction to the collection of fables radically revises the usual distinction between humans and other animals by ascribing language and "cultural heritage" to "highly civilized" cats (19-21). In this lengthy prelude, narrative and culture no longer act as markers of human exceptionalism. The narrator's encounter with the unnamed young man who studies the cats decentres a "humanistic approach" that attaches "far too much importance to nationalities" (25) and that would seek to confine viable culture within geographic and species boundaries. Few critics have approached *The Cat's Cradle-Book*, which appears as an oddity even within the context of such a queer, marginal oeuvre as Warner's; those who have tend to pass quickly over its central conceit, casting it as a continuation of the writer's "old joke of defamiliarising the familiar" (Harman 192) or gesturing briefly to the plague that kills all of the cats as "a warning about the possible fate of the different in the late 1930s" (Bingham 33). However, its engagement with animality forms a central part of the Communist Warner's antifascist thinking at this time: in the context of its explicit acknowledgement of a potential outbreak of war, it imagines a culture that "transcends mere racial accidents" and that has "a clearer notion of the social function of literature" than "Soviet Russia" (22-25). Examining *The Cat's Cradle-Book* alongside Warner's other work from the period, it becomes clear that, more than either Barnes or Woolf, she displays a sensitivity to the uses of animalizing rhetoric to justify racial domination and abuse. This rhetoric is central to her depiction of Sophia

Willoughby's transformation from aristocratic English mother to a revolutionary in the Paris of 1848 in *Summer Will Show* (1936). The novel's critical take on the *Bildungsroman* sees Sophia initially denigrate and finally come to identify with the position of the Jewish storyteller Minna, whom she consistently renders in animal terms. Warner's attempt to imagine Sophia's revolutionary conversion hinges upon a reconfiguration of this language of bestialization. In Étienne Balibar's words, this "systematic 'bestialization' of individuals and racialized human groups" is "the means specific to theoretical racism for conceptualizing human historicity" as necessitating a constant progression away from those cast as animal (57). However, in Warner's work the process of deconstructing this logic is the precondition for imagining modes of revolutionizing that historicity by removing hierarchical social barriers.

"Apprentice," a story from Warner's wartime collection *A Garland of Straw* (1943), illustrates the stakes of engaging with these modes of dehumanization. Stripped of the elements of fable and fantasy prevalent in Warner's earlier work, the story, set in a German war camp in Poland, follows the 'apprenticeship' of the child Lili in exerting power over the impoverished residents of a Polish village. It presents a bleak negative image of the forms of ethical education Warner tries to enact in *Summer Will Show* and *The Cat's Cradle-Book*: Lili's perception of the world is shaped by a fascist environment in which the Polish woman who cleans their house is denigrated as "a pig…no better than an animal" (26). In this culture of ethnic and national purism, in which Lili will "develop from a model baby into a model woman" as "no Jewish blubber-lips had befouled a healthy German maiden" in her conception (23-24), animalization justifies the abuse of humans who exist outside the tightly policed boundaries of the "model" human subject (Roberts 26). The conflation of non-German others with forms of animal life is the principal means by which this

regime, as Warner wrote in a 1939 article in *New Masses*, "teaches race hatred to children" ("Review and Comment by Dorothy Parker and Sylvia Townsend Warner" 22). Lili resolves to feed Polish children from the wall of her summerhouse, as "she had had a little dog, and she always enjoyed feeding it" (27). The story is laden with animalizing language for the children Lili feeds: they run "just like the little dog" and "even barked" (27), she describes them as "like little monkey mothers" and recurrently compares their hands and feet to "rats' claws" (28). She begins to relish the "sport" of lowering food on a string and pulling it away, as "back in Germany Lili had learned in school how what you fight for and take from others is the sweetest of all" (29). This inculcated taste for domination leads her to target one "proud" boy "who would not beg" (29); after questioning whether he "had gipsy blood" or "if he were not a Jew" (30), Lili gets him to jump for a cinnamon bun and he falls to his death. Where initially the child had "nursed a violent impression of the contrast between them and herself" (28), the boy's death produces a subtle shift towards empathy and identification: "dozens of them were dying so; but hearsay is one thing, seeing with one's own eyes another. Poor boy!…It must be really terrible to die like that, really terrible to be dead" (34). This fault-line in Lili's fascist education appears as the abstract death of this impoverished population becomes concrete. The bestializing process that produced the differentiating barrier of "contrast between them and herself" is thrown into sharp relief, as Lili briefly places herself in the position of the "poor boy" whose death gestures towards the atrocities justified by fascist dehumanization.

In the earlier *Summer Will Show*, the potential for a revolutionary future is premised upon identification of this kind, as Warner depicts Sophia's political education through shifting the meanings of her animalizing rhetoric from abjection to

desire and identification. Sophia's initial disgust at the "Jewess" and "escaped bitch" Minna (29) gives way as she enters into a passionate relationship with her husband's former mistress; correlatively, animal reference alters from being a marker of inferiority to suggesting a desirable state of vulnerable freedom that Warner associates with the revolutions of 1848. A scene in the novel's first section sets up this transformation: estranged from her husband and having just lost their two children to smallpox, Sophia resolves to find an outlet for her "love of dominance" (67) through hunting on her estate. This manifestation of her "desire to leave a mark" (47) ends in failure, as "Sophia discovered in herself a growing impression that she was out on false pretences, having in reality an assignation with the fox. If you'd hunt *me*, she thought…I'd give you a run for your money" (78). This shift in Sophia's identificatory position from hunter to hunted is one of the novel's guiding metaphors; the class resonances of this scene, in which the aristocratic protagonist imagines a clandestine "assignation" with the fox she is to pursue and purge from her estate, carry over into Sophia's gradually increasing involvement with the revolutionary cause in Paris. The position of hunted animal, which Sophia will later ascribe to Minna and other revolutionaries, appears here as an enviable opportunity for enlivening action and escape from Sophia's stultifying environment, which offers only "lifelong imprisonment" as "a beloved wife" (77).

The metaphorical breaching of the species barrier in this episode aptly suggests the completeness of the transformation Sophia seems to undergo in what Wendy Mulford has called an "unlikely *Bildunsgroman*" in which she moves "from heiress to humble revolutionary" (118). Although critics often refer to *Summer Will Show* in terms that resonate with the *Bildungsroman*, discussing Sophia's "political education" (Montefiore, "Listening to Minna" 205) and the "radical and irreversible"

character of her "conversion" (T. Castle 86), Mulford's passing comment is the only direct reference to the distinctive intervention Warner's novel makes into the genre. Critics have more readily identified the work with the historical novel,[2] the "broad panorama" of which traditionally stands in opposition to the *Bildungsroman*'s focus on "the development of a single protagonist" (Kontje 18). Heather Love discusses the difficulty critics have in characterizing the novel, with responses generally polarized between reading the novel as Marxist political realism or as a "sapphic text" with strong currents of romance and fantasy (132). In Lukács's terms, they describe the novel either as interested predominantly in the broad, "essential driving forces of history" or in "the exclusively private individual experiences of characters" (206). Love persuasively demonstrates how the novel falsifies this dichotomy by "opening history to currents of speculation, fantasy and desire" (135), and so making these 'private' longings form part of the "essential driving forces of history." As she argues, the novel pushes for "a rethinking of history as itself bound up with fantasy…[as] a medium for dreaming about the transformation of social life" that seeks "to transform not only sexual relations but all aspects of the social" (133). The social "transformation" dreamed of by way of revisiting 1848 is focalized through the individual transformation of Warner's protagonist, itself bound up with the historically impossible narration of lesbian desire. As Thomas Foster writes, the possibility of Sophia's education by and love of Minna is both allowed by the atmosphere of revolutionary Paris and curtailed by its inevitable historical failure in the June days (548**).** For Warner, a failure in the past does not foreclose potential for change in the present, instead propelling desire for it. Unlike Barnes's replaying of the doom of 1939 in *The Antiphon*, Warner's unconventional *Bildungsroman* uses 1848

[2] See Janet Montefiore's work on the novel in *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s*, as well as articles by Chris Hopkins and David James.

to open up possible modes of altering the course of history, chiefly by developing away from the dehumanizing lines of thought that Warner will come to associate directly with fascism.

Furthermore, Warner handles the *Bildungsroman* so as to try to undo many aspects of its conventional logic of progression: Sophia's education sees her try to join the revolutionary cause of people whom she "had been brought up" to consider "as an inferior race" (234), aligning herself with a position she once regarded as developmentally "inferior." If, as Gregory Castle demonstrates, the classical *Bildungsroman* reproduces the "most stultifyingly normative forms" of "the self, subjectivity, social or national identity" (4), then Sophia's trajectory stands in direct opposition to much of the genre's foundation. Moreover, the form has traditionally offered scant opportunities for women's self-cultivation: Susan Fraiman characterizes the Victorian novel of female development as primarily one of frustration and uncertainty, as the heroines have "a clearer sense that formation is foisted upon them, that they are largely what other people, what the world will make of them" (6). This is precisely the constraint from which Warner projects Sophia's escape, as she abandons the "single, all-determining 'choice' of a husband" (6) and even supplants her husband's role as Minna's lover. Sophia also becomes anathema to the concept of "steady, organic growth" Todd Kontje describes as central to the German origins of the form (4-7), which presents a vision of national-political life resistant to revolutionary change (4-7). Esty uses the term "national closure" for this model of stable individual identity and "bounded nationhood" in the ideal *Bildung* (*Unseasonable Youth* 45); *Summer Will Show* seeks to unravel such continuity on an individual and a collective level, as its protagonist fights against the bourgeoisie in a foreign country's revolution. Her development is an attempt to shed the very social

and political values associated with the classical *Bildungsroman*, which, in Franco Moretti's famous phrase, narrates "how the French Revolution could have been avoided" (64). The novel seems to anticipate Rita Felski's exploration of the feminist variations on the genre later in the century, in which "a process of *separation*" from a stultifying environment is "the essential precondition for any path to self-knowledge" (124). In Warner's novel this involves Sophia's attempt to cast off her stable aristocratic status and to identify herself with the 'hunted' position of the animalized others she formerly considered "an inferior race."

However, in this context the potential of this subversive *Bildung* cannot be fully realized, and the failure of the revolution coincides, I will argue, with the incompleteness of Sophia's transformation, her inability completely to shed the conventional roles and prejudices that have defined her life. Although "generic failure" does seem to be "structurally necessary" for the social critique in Sophia's incomplete *Bildung* (G. Castle 71), Warner avoids the narrative innovations Castle considers central to modernist reconfigurations of the *Bildungsroman* (192-193). Unlike the novels of both Barnes and Woolf, Warner's narrative structure does not "violate a progressive logic" representative of "a linear historicism that is in part projected back onto Victorian realism" (Esty, *Unseasonable Youth* 18). Rather, the implausibility of Sophia's "assignation with the fox" conflicts with the normalizing force of Warner's narrative. The historical and formal dictates of her novel inhibit the fantasy of Sophia's revolutionary *Bildung*, as the linear, realist plot must accelerate towards the June Days and the end of her ecstatic time with Minna. Ultimately, then, Sophia's attempt to join the revolutionary "menagerie" (*Summer Will Show* 96) struggles against the constraint of an all-too stable aristocratic education and novelistic framework; if these forces cannot be fully overthrown, Warner continues to

insist upon the possibility of such revolutionary change, a transformation "that cannot and yet must take place" (Love 137).

Warner takes pains to establish the normative continuity of Sophia's position in the novel's first section. At this point, her consciousness is solely directed towards efficient care for the growth of both her estate and her children: she feels that in her maturity she has "done with blossoming…I live for my children" (12). Warner sets her character up as a model of "the existential fixity of the mature individual" that Esty argues is analogous with the stability of "the modern nation" in "the mainstream *Bildungsroman*" (44). In her twin capacities as "a landowner, and a mother" (21), she works to consolidate her aristocratic family's hold on Blandamer estate, monitoring the growth of her children and her crops alike to ensure the former are "ripening" and the latter are "productive" (12-13). Indeed, her concern with healthy breeding that avoids "the poor, the imperfect, the superfluous growths" (23) shares currents with eugenic thinking, with humans 'bred' (and by extension, potentially slaughtered) like other animals: proud that "Blandamer house had not produced a more vigorous or better-trained animal than she" (9), Sophia laments that her horses "were everything that her children should have been: strong, smooth-skinned, well-trained, well-bred" (23). Now that she is no longer "the point advancing on the future" of the "Aspen triangle" (7-9), her own possibilities for development are subsumed by her maternal role in tending to the next generation. Her life is dedicated to what Lee Edelman has termed 'reproductive futurism,' the heteronormative means by which the child figure comes to embody "the telos of the social order" and all possible futurity (11): "futurism thus generates generational succession, temporality and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but instead of perpetuating sameness" (60). Sophia's focus on development and growth has as its aim "perpetuating sameness" in

literally reproducing her upper class heritage: her children, christened after her parents as "the new Damian and Augusta" (10), have "the system which had strengthened her childhood…faithfully imposed upon [them]" (10). This, Warner's novel suggests, is the sole possible *telos* of "narrative sequence" for Sophia within the narrow confines of her upbringing. For a woman in this setting, futurity is bound up with the repetition of familial inheritance, as the potential of education is reduced to a rote "system" intended to maintain social hierarchy.

However, with the death of Sophia's children Warner reveals the paucity of opportunities for women within her nineteenth century framework and begins to imagine an alternative *Bildung* for Sophia, in which she takes up her "assignation with the fox." For Warner as for Barnes, procreative succession cannot guarantee a viable future; furthermore, both writers alight upon animal figures in the search for desirable alternatives. Where in Barnes's antidevelopmental work this entails relief from the sterility of her conception of the human, in *Summer Will Show* Sophia's changing perception of and identification with animalized others becomes the means by which Warner projects revolutionary alternative futures. After her children succumb to smallpox, Sophia comes to a narrative impasse, feeling "the impotence of her life" in which "all her doings were barrened" (47). Losing her maternal role and so "the motivating end" of reproductive futurism (Edelman 7), Sophia feels all her potential for action "barrened," and her occupation with "the tillage of her lands" seems devoid of meaning: "everything would go on, though to no end" (66). Resigned to her "life-long imprisonment" under the Biblical "sentence" that "'the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house'" (77), Sophia departs for Paris to remedy "the impotence of her life" by having another child with her estranged husband. It is this aim to reinstate a narrative of heterosexual succession that

Warner's plot directly replaces with Sophia's affair with Minna and involvement with her "menagerie" of revolutionaries. This shift is prefigured by the fox hunt scene and by an earlier fantasy involving the same animal; walking alone in Cornwall, Sophia feels

> that air, so pure and earthy, absolved one back into an animal, washed off all recollection of responsibilities; one waft of the wind there would… demolish all the muffle of imposed personality loaded upon one by other people, leaving one free, swift, unburdened as a fox (33)

This vision acts as preparation for the freedom Sophia finds with Minna in Paris, as a return to a 'natural' animal state is described as a form of purification and escape from inherited narratives of development. The "unburdened" fox prompts romantic imaginings of being "unsexed and unpersoned" (33-34), of shedding the social codes that confine Sophia to her maternal role and reduce all narrative possibilities to childrearing. This is the projected form of Sophia's *Bildung*: relinquishing a prior "imposed" education in order to attain to the state of the hunted fox, the freedom of which is inextricably bound up with its vulnerability and marginality.

While these images anticipate the alteration of Sophia's prejudiced viewpoint, early in the novel Warner carefully outlines the primitivizing cast of her protagonist's mind when she comes into contact with people of other classes and races. Warner and her lover Valentine Ackland compiled newspaper cuttings of contemporary social and political struggles from the mid-1930s, including the spread of fascism and anti-Jewish laws in Germany (Mulford 55-56); this concern with the state of German fascism seems to have informed her depiction of Sophia's initial anti-Semitism, as she thinks of Minna as "a byword, half actress, half strumpet; a Jewess; a nonsensical creature…with a rag-tag of poets, revolutionaries, musicians and circus-riders

snuffing at her heels, like an escaped bitch with a procession of mongrels after her" (29). As with her later comparison of the storytelling Minna to "a Jewish shopkeeper" presiding over her listeners like "money-bags" (105), Sophia reduces the other woman to a "byword." The rhetoric of dehumanization serves to render her "nonsensical" to Sophia's world, ethnically and sexually othered along with the impure "mongrels" in her wake.

It is with the introduction of Caspar, Sophia's uncle's "illegitimate son, a half-caste" born on his estate in the West Indies (32), that such rhetoric begins to move from abjection to a similarly exoticized romanticism. Thinking at first that he "might well be no more than a woolly negro" (34), Sophia is entranced by "this dusky piece of romance" (35) who appears "not more of a stranger than a phoenix" (37); however, when she briefly thinks of adopting him, she resolves she could not "endure to have this pretty soft wagging spaniel in the place of my children" (68). His presence acts on Sophia as "a kind of unbinding spell" (39), as contact with this fantastical "phoenix" recalls the "unburdened" fox in its promise of a similarly enchanting freedom from convention. Sophia's restrictive "world policed by oughts" (237) produces this perception of Caspar's alterity: in the context of her upper class role of reproducing sameness, his otherness becomes desirable. The fact that he, like Minna, is "nonsensical" to her cultural languages means that he seems to offer a magical, pre-cultural alternative to Sophia's stifling aristocratic environment. Her romanticizing notions index the absoluteness of her coming transformation, as the undoing of her traditional education can only be imagined in the form of fantasy, the "enchantment" with which her development in Paris is also charged (207).

Moreover, the rigidity of her prejudicial barriers is reasserted when Caspar is rejected as a "wagging spaniel" when placed within the "impossible" context of being

"a black heir to Blandamer" (67); it is against such rigidity that Warner tries to imagine Sophia's progression to having "changed my ideas" (327). Robin Hackett argues that, although Warner is "sharply critical of romantic and primitivizing notions that work to keep hierarchies in place" (87), she relies upon exoticizing tropes including "animalism" to depict "access to sexuality" (95). However, it is precisely through Sophia's relationship with Minna that Warner reworks those tropes: as Maren Tova Linett asserts, Sophia "never quite abandons her anti-Semitic responses to the woman who becomes her lover," but the novel as a whole undermines those responses, "using Jewishness to disrupt dominant stereotypes" (83). Sophia's *Bildung* is largely played out on the level of her "ideas," the patterns of thought in which she casts others as "an inferior race" (237) and justifies the domininace of the upper class. Sophia's othering metaphors attest to the fact that her life in "the English landed gentry…does not easily let go its hold" (139), yet Warner suggests that it is through reconfiguring such attitudes that Sophia might access an alternative trajectory.

The first step towards such transformation occurs in Sophia's shift from denigrating Minna to pitying and trying to care for her, as animal reference works to produce "Jews as almost archetypal victims" (Linett 102). In Sophia's first encounter with her, Minna is recounting her escape from a pogrom in Lithuania to a rapt audience. The centrality of dehumanization to this abuse anticipates "The Apprentice," as the Christians pursue the Jews "like cattle-drivers" (109), with Minna's frenzied response "like an animal gone mad…like a mad dog" (110). Later, pursuing an impoverished Minna like "quarry" in order to give her money, Sophia's susceptibility to identification with this victimized position proves to be stronger than Lili's:

> if a hind were to be walking in the rue de l'Abée l'Épée it could not

be more alien, more unmixing than such despair as I saw in her looks. And with the idea of Minna being like an animal her wavering ineffectual pity was abruptly changed into a deep concern, as though it had taken on flesh and blood. A hind would not pass unremarked (170)

Here, Sophia's image of Minna in her desperation as an "alien" animal serves not to marginalize her but rather to bring Minna closer to her own "concern" as a being kin to herself. Ironically, animalization engenders a shift from abjection to recognition, as Sophia's affect becomes substantially realized as "flesh and blood." Making Minna analogous to an animal invests her apparent victimhood with meaning and embodied "flesh," generating "deep concern" through the bodily vulnerability Anat Pick has made central to a shared ethics in human-animal relations (10). Sophia has come with the intention of relieving Minna's dire financial straits, of ensuring she doesn't "perish" in "this mangy republic" along with "that prancing little cur" (174), but Warner enacts a reversal here also: Minna places the money in a collecting box, symbolically making Sophia "as poor as I" (175). At this point the "hunted" (130) Minna opens "a new world" to Sophia, who begins to live with her and aid the revolutionaries (175). As in the pogrom narrative, the experience of vulnerability and oppression is coupled with freedom. It is through giving up her means and joining with Minna in the "mangy republic" that Sophia turns the other woman's "unmixing…despair" into positive affect: the pair become equally 'unmixing' by being "carelessly joyful" in spite of "those lean days" (175).

The animalized position Sophia once denigrated thus comes to represent the interdependent experience of precarity and ecstatic freedom that Warner writes into the 1848 revolutions. This change in meaning is made explicit as Sophia watches Ingelbrecht, modeled on Engels, walking in the city: "as, watching Minna in the rue

de l'Abée l'Épée she had thought of an animal, Ingelbrecht reminded her of an animal too…seeming to trot on some intent personal errand, true to his own laws and oblivious of all else" (222). The "alien" quality of singularity that once inspired pity now seems more in line with the earlier image of the fox that was free from "imposed personality." Ingelbrecht, who "even among revolutionaries…was considered to go too far" and who wishes Sophia had "been born one of [her] own poachers" (203), appears outside of the restrictions of human society, able to fashion and live by "his own laws" that seek to undo existing social structures. This is the kind of freedom that Sophia finds in her "new world" with Minna, who claims "though you may think you have chosen me…it is the Revolution you have chosen" (227). As Gay Wachman argues, "Sophia is delighted to become a sexual and social outlaw" (174), and as her relationship with Minna leads directly to Sophia collecting metal for ammunition and dispensing revolutionary tracts, ideals of sexual and social liberty are depicted as inextricable. Minna retains her association with animals throughout: her "unalloyed pleasure" is "as absolving as any caper of triumph from a menaced and eluding animal" (132), and "one could love her freely" because "she made no more demands upon one's moral approval than a cat…her flashes of goodness were as painless as an animal's" (238). The "eluding," hunted animal position is again seen as purifying, "absolving" Sophia of the repressive codes of her aristocratic upbringing and granting access to an idealized, liberationist "pleasure." Minna's animalized otherness, her existence outside of the "moral approval" that used to govern Sophia's life, is now the source of unburdened love and identification. Indeed, it is this subject position, simultaneously "menaced and eluding," oppressively pursued and joyously free, that Sophia comes to desire and occupy as the revolution turns violent: seeking Minna, she finds herself "bending all her powers to be an animal, an animal that twists and turns

and keeps on its way" (301), later finding herself isolated from the other revolutionaries, "wary as a hunted animal" (318).

Summer Will Show, then, traces Sophia's effort to shed the normative maturity that upholds the traditional *Bildungsroman*: jettisoning her heteroreproductive role for a lesbian affair and an existence as an exile supporting a foreign revolution, Sophia's progression and education take as their *telos* the deconstruction of Esty's " plot of national closure" that "gives the nation the organic coherence of a person and gives the individual the apparently objective continuity of a nation" (*Unseasonable Youth* 40-44). Warner tries to substitute unbounded revolution for the *Bildungsroman*'s convention of "bounded growth" (41), undoing the "coherence" of an aristocratic Englishwoman's position through her relationship with a Jewish refugee. Sophia's progressive identification with an animalized position seems especially apt in light of Paul Sheehan's claim that, with the genre's theme of "human potentiality," the "clearest link between the humanist tradition and the novel is the *Bildungsroman*" (2), a point taken up in Helena Feder's work on the *Bildung* as "humanism's origin story of culture" (2). In this novel, Warner locates "potentiality" in the movement away from conventional subject positions. Sophia's journey from hunter to "hunted animal" sees her strive to leave behind stable, pre-existing models of social and political life in order to strain for the precarious ecstasy of Minna and the revolution, the "improbable happiness" that comes from "everything that Sophia had previously disapproved" (238).

Moreover, it is through those very primitivized tropes that seem inimical to the *Bildungsroman* that Warner imagines forms of "human potentiality" and futurity. Unlike both the "abortive" temporal impasse that Woolf tries to overcome in *Between the Acts* and the static, terminal orientation of *Nightwood*, the broadly linear, realist

form of *Summer Will Show* does not entirely dispense with traditional structures of narrative progression and teleology. Rather, in Thomas Foster's words, the novel places in its realist historical narrative "desires for emancipation that European society was not ready to fulfill" (548), forms of sexuality and subjectivity that Warner imagines as taking the place of the normative plot Sophia initially pursues in her attempt to restore her maternal role. If the novel does evince what Robin Hackett has termed 'Sapphic primitivism,' it does so to different ends from Barnes's bestialization of Robin Vote: rather than consigning the animalized Minna to the "eternal present which mirrors the past of Western civilization" attributed to 'primitives' (Torgovnick 46), Warner links her to the possibility of a revolutionary future. Opposing the logic of degeneration theory, present in terms that resonate with her own historical moment in the man who is writing "a book which was to prove that the Jews were the great impediment to civilization" (260), Warner writes revolutionary potential into queer figures traditionally considered "a backward race" (Love 6), and who, as she knew, were currently being scapegoated across Europe. It is from such an environment that Warner writes possibility into a historical moment marked by failure and disappointment. *Summer Will Show* is replete with images of the horizons of other worlds: after first hearing Minna, Sophia feels "as though she had never opened her eyes before" (120); listening to Minna and Ingelbrecht, she is "able to feel and follow the workings of a different world…that irrefutable force and logic of a different universe" (219); Minna in the mirror looks like she is in "the innocence of a different world" (246). As with Sophia's animalizing rhetoric, the alterity of a "different universe" from her own is revalued as giddy potential, an "innocence" that can possibly be remade in the "new era" (142) that the revolution promises.

However, Sophia and Minna's relationship, exoticized as the "Aladdin's lamp" that unlocks "undreamed-of riches" (188), remains within the romanticized context of this primitivizing register even as it is called upon to index futurity. Terry Castle, arguing eloquently for "strongly fantastical" qualities in the novel (86), asserts that Warner "dismantles the real, as it were, in a search for the not-yet-real" (91). Yet the utopian possibility of the love plot and the revolution remains bound to the "real" of the separation of these 'other worlds,' the rigid barriers between classes and races, and indeed the continuity of Sophia's aristocratic position. Revolutionary potential in the novel is undercut by an insistence upon stability and cyclicality that intensifies as the June days approach. This is what creates the peculiar mixture of "hope and despair" that Heather Love identifies in the "attachment to such an impossible object," as both love plot and revolution drift towards inevitable failure (143). The novel, split into four sections, takes place over the course of almost exactly one year; in spite of Minna's hopeful narrative of freedom in "the spring flood" (121), the novel's repeated reference to the passing seasons insists upon a cyclical temporality that opposes radical aspirations towards a "new era." Seasonal progression gestures towards the invariable disappointment contained within the novel's historical framework, which necessarily limits the ecstatic optimism released when Minna and Sophia meet at the outbreak of the February revolution. Sophia's initial prediction that "no mortal frame, could long endure the ardour of this fantastic freedom from every inherited and practiced restraint" (128) becomes a more concrete fear of the "impending ruin of that queer existence in which she knew such happiness" (282), a feeling of coming "disaster" Minna feels is "all over Europe" (291). Warner's linear structure necessitates the curtailment of Sophia's "queer existence" in the revolution, her "strange holiday from [her] natural self" (132), as she registers the sense of a

morbid ending to this "fantastic freedom" reminiscent of the atmosphere of Barnes's novel and the fear of "impending ruin" Overy charts in the 1930s.

There is a corresponding note of doubt about the temporary quality of Sophia's commitment to revolutionary ideals, the persistence of "the original Aspen in her" (209) that renders her current situation "so alien to her character and upbringing" (186). As Gillian Beer has argued, "the utopian reach of her fictions of the 1930s is, over and over again, undermined sardonically from within" ("Sylvia Townsend Warner: The Centrifugal Kick" 76). This extends to Sophia's *Bildung*, as the fantasy of her complete transformation and "assignation with the fox" pushes against Warner's continued emphasis on the stubborn coherence of "the original Aspen" and her aristocratic education. This doubt is foregrounded in the novel's final pages: having briefly felt "I have no place here" on the barricades (304), Sophia is isolated from the doomed revolutionaries because the officer "cannot consent to the death *of a lady*." To cement the irony, this occurs at the very moment she first voices her newfound class consciousness, excoriating him for his indifference to 'ladies' "dead of starvation…dead in the workhouse and the hospital for venereal diseases" (317). With Minna dead, the possibility of Sophia's *Bildung* falters, as she runs up against the blockage Fraiman locates in the female *Bildungsroman*: unable even to die for the revolution because of her social position as "a lady," Sophia experiences the fact that her options for "formation…are largely what other people, what the world, will make of them" (6). Additionally, she worries that her refusal to join her aunt Léocadie and reassume her aristocratic position is built upon uncertain foundations: after having asserted "I have changed my ideas. I do not think as I did" (327), she fears her motivation was solely "the pleasure of disagreeing, the pique of being thought shabby and deplorable" (329). As the controlling power of the bourgeoisie is

brutally exercised in the June days, the certitude of Sophia's class boundary-crossing journey falters and the restrictions of both historical context and the plausibility of novelistic realism reassert themselves.

With the triumph of counterrevolutionary forces, the development of Sophia's revolutionary education can only be projected into an alternative future, the desire for which is produced by failure: *Summer Will Show* closes as she opens the document she has been distributing around Paris, *The Communist Manifesto*. The curtailment of Sophia's development is crucially linked to her own failure in handling the education of Caspar. Originally charged with placing him in "some moderate establishment" for "a sound commercial education" (32), she finds "it was impossible to dismiss this being to the Trebennick Academy. Yet she did nothing" (39). Although she claims she "would not be so vile" as to dismiss him after he travels to find her in Paris (240), Sophia is desperate to be rid of the boy who, drained of romance, seems to her "the lamest dog of all" (243), a "tiresome cub" (245) with "rough paws" (240). Maren Tova Linett and Robin Hackett agree that Sophia's dismissal of Caspar and his subsequent killing of Minna form a critique of Sophia's persistent racism, in spite of her newfound class politics (Linett 108, Hackett 118); handing him over to her husband Frederick, Sophia leaves him, in the words of a revolutionary, to be "trained by the government to savagery like a pack of trained hunting-dogs" in the Gardes Mobiles (308). Returning to the rhetoric of animality as abjection, Sophia inadvertently causes Caspar to take on the "hunting" role to her and Minna's status as 'hunted' revolutionaries: he stabs Minna on the barricades. Caspar's development provides an interesting departure from Jed Esty's theory of the 'uneven development' revealed by colonial subjects in modernist novels, whose "arrested development" goes against "residual but still normative progress narratives" (22). Caspar, sent from the

West Indies to get a normative English education that puts no "false ideas into his head" (32), is ironically assimilated into the very institutions of national stability and progress that Sophia comes to work against. He returns to Sophia obsessed with "the glories of Blandamer" and her aristocratic prestige (243), and is taught to "beware of the Jewess" by Madame Coton before being "trained by the government" to counterrevolutionary violence. The figure conventionally seen as 'underdeveloped' finally quashes the revolutionary futurity Warner has worked to invest in that primitivized position, as Sophia's failure to alter her perspective on the "tiresome cub" Caspar serves to foreclose the joy of her "queer existence" with Minna.

It is such failures in education and perspective that Warner seems to be trying to avoid in her turn to the fable form in *The Cat's Cradle-Book*, which continues her effort to deconstruct bestializing rhetoric. Between the publication of *Summer Will Show* and the writing of *The Cat's Cradle-Book* in the later 1930s, Warner had become deeply involved in the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War (the introduction to her fable collection takes place at 'Spain Hall'), after which the necessity of fighting fascism seemed at once more urgent and more difficult. Rather than focalizing this through the development of the individual as in the *Bildung* of *Summer Will Show*, here Warner turns to a collective, folk form that, like the collection of fairytales she reviewed in *Left News*, has the potential to "bring up a generation of little socialists" (qtd. in Jacobs 18). The fable provides Warner with a short, didactic framework in which to exercise her satirical wit and try to counter the kind of fascist education provided for Lili in "The Apprentice." She does so through feline stories that guarantee "kittens are trained up in a catly frame of mind" in the same way that "little Christian imperialists of a century ago in this country were taught how to manage subject races by reading *Little Henry and His Bearer*" (22).

This "catly frame of mind" works directly to undermine the racist justification for abusing "subject races," as Warner uses this feline culture to project an ideal of universalism: ironically studied by a human formerly in "the diplomatic service" (16), the cats' culture "transcends mere racial accidents" (25), with the stories remaining "objective…unvarying" in different geographic contexts (28). Writing against the spread of fascism and the imminent threat of "a declaration of war, an air raid" that would cause the kind of mass death that strikes the cats in the form of a "murrain" (33-36), Warner abandons realism. This enables her to dispense with the inconsistencies that marked Sophia's development and to imagine ways of being that overwrite the conflicts that were driving Europe towards war.

She does so by ascribing the origins of narrative to the "highly civilized" culture of cats (19); consequently, Warner renders moot the humanist question of "what counts as culture" that Helena Feder argues is "key to the process of colonization" and racial domination (145). In contrast to Woolf's strategic mobilization of the civilization/barbarism dichotomy, Warner's satirical ethnography refuses this distinction, setting out with greater urgency and didacticism than in *Summer Will Show* the need to dispense with such hierarchical divisions. Indeed, the short fable "The Two Mothers" explicitly links such cultural classifications with the justification of war violence. A wild cat, mourning the death of her litter at the hands of a polecat, is shocked to discover a ewe's resignation to the fact that her lamb must soon go to the butcher. The ewe pities the cat for having been "robbed of your young by an animal rightly classed as vermin" (131) and glorifies her children's killers thus: "your children are taken by a common low polecat. Mine are taken by the eagle, who is King of Birds, or the butcher, who is a man and Lord of Creation. Such deaths are splendid and honourable. *Dulce et decorum est*" (132). The ewe's faith in a stable

hierarchy of species allows her to construct senseless deaths as "honourable," as the dominant species of eagles and humans are granted power over the life of lower species. The parallel metaphor of racism and war violence is suggested by the reference to Wilfred Owen; Warner places the slogan of war propaganda in the mouth of an animal that espouses the superiority of sovereign forms of life, 'kings' and 'lords' among subject species.

Warner's educative introduction satirically undoes such claims to authoritarian power, encouraging the reader to "clear your mind of humanism" (28). In the fables that follow, she goes on to imagine alternative modes of ethical relation through complex interspecies interaction. Contemporary critics in animal studies generally dismiss the fable form, tending to accord with Colleen Glenney Boggs's assertion that "the fable tradition used animals as stand-ins for human beings, it was not interested in animals as such" (33). However, Warner's introduction pays acute attention to individualized descriptions of the materiality of its "pewter-grey, short-furred, and cobbily built" (10) feline figures; moreover, its insistence that "the proper study of catkind is man" because "cats have chosen to live among us" and thus their stories have also impacted "our children" (29), presents too thoroughgoing a critique of anthropocentrism to be dismissed as mere fantasy. Rather, its attribution of a humanized 'culture' to cats seems more in line with Kari Weil's discussion of anthropomorphism as not solely a problem but also "a potentially productive, critical tool that has similarities to empathy within recent historical research" (19). While Warner's interest is predominantly human-focused at this time of European crisis, her antifascist thinking through the rhetoric of animality also creates a space for reconceptualizing human relations with and abuses of other animal life.

True to the claim that this culture "transcends mere racial accidents," Warner's fables decentre human subjects by presenting them as one of many species, intertwining different species to the extent of depicting the story of a man's marriage to a woman whose "blood is one-quarter cat" (153). While some stories undermine human differentiation from and superiority over other animals, others such as "The Phoenix" condemn atrocities committed on those grounds. Recalling Sophia's exoticizing view of Caspar as a "phoenix," this fable depicts a wealthy capitalist's efforts to make a tourist attraction of the Orientalized bird, surrounding it with "exotic perfumes" and declaring it "as capricious as Cleopatra…as heady as a strain of wild gipsy music" (102). After the man has jeered at the bird and deprived it of nourishment in order to have it die and rise from its ashes, the consequences of exoticization emerge with even greater clarity than they did in *Summer Will Show*: all those gathered to watch "perished in the blaze" of the phoenix's death (103). This mass death here and the disease that kills the cats and means "all was at an end" (40) indicate a more drastic crisis than the failed revolution of Warner's earlier novel, a crisis that produces a leap into didactic fantasy that seeks to undo fascist modes of thinking and the domination attendant upon them. If Warner sought in *Summer Will Show* to project a revolutionary *Bildung* through reconfiguring the rhetoric of bestialization, in *The Cat's Cradle-Book* her effort to imagine an antifascist future is enacted through a deconstruction of the very grounds of that rhetoric. Her questioning of the integrity of the humanist subject, then, ultimately serves as her opposition to the violence inflicted on those groups fascism places outside of its boundaries.

Conclusion

With Warner's civilized cats we arrive at one extreme of the various contestations of the category human I have been tracing in the late 1930s; at the other is Barnes's Robin, the "beast turning human" who evades human intelligibility and communes with the dog. This stark polarity illustrates the extent to which, for writers of this time, the definition of 'the human' was not a certainty but a vexed problem. As I have argued, with the rise of fascist ideologies and another world conflict looming, the boundaries of what was regarded as viable human life were placed under intense scrutiny and strain. The power to control such boundaries would be exercised to horrific effect in the Third Reich: in Giorgio Agamben's terms, the Nazis' creation of a subject "who may be killed and yet not sacrificed" (8) allowed Jews to be "exterminated…exactly as Hitler had announced, 'as lice,' which is to say, bare life" (114). In their contrasting engagements with animality, the writers in this study all in different ways countered the logic of that brutal process of dehumanization and national 'purification.'

Woolf's thinking uses the structure of selective discrimination found in eugenics to reverse its aims, marking the dominant, fascist male as degenerate and bestial. To combat her fears over growing 'barbarism,' Woolf tries to project a model of the human subject in *Between the Acts* that can accommodate and develop away from 'savage,' violent animality. Barnes and Warner instead bring human life closer to its animal others in their work, rendering any meaningful hierarchy of a sovereign human subject over animalized 'bare life' impossible. Barnes does so by draining all potential from human existence: in *Nightwood*, degeneration becomes a generalized principle, and the lapse into an animal state that closes the novel appears as a desirable but impossible relief from the impasse of the human situation. Warner, on

the other hand, revalues the bestial position as a potential source of revolutionary change for human civilization. Thus, her take on the *Bildungsroman* in *Summer Will Show* imagines human development through closer alignment with an animalized position, which she associates with the ability to cast off restrictive human social codes. Finally, in *The Cat's Cradle-Book* Warner playfully strips the humanist subject of the grounds for claiming developmental superiority, undermining efforts to assert greater viability of one form of life over another.

These writers narrate the inclusion or exclusion of animality within the domain of the human with arresting variability, indicating that this was a time of strong anxiety concerning the disputed limits of the human subject. If Woolf, Barnes and Warner sought to envision alternative trajectories for history through reckoning with humanity's proximity to its animal ancestors, the postwar drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) marked an effort to prevent the repetition of the war's atrocities by trying "to legislate for a concept of the human" (Stonebridge, *The Judicial Imagination* 127). In recent years, scholars such as Joseph Slaughter, Lydia H. Liu and Lyndsey Stonebridge have spotlighted the effort of the UDHR to produce "a newly updated standard of civilization" and universal humanity that would guard against such dehumanizing abuses as took place during the Second World War (Liu 393). These critics have emphasized the importance of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel in the debates that took place among the drafters of the UDHR on how to form its "model of the human person" (Stonebridge, *The Judicial Imagination* 123). Joseph Slaughter's *Human Rights, Inc.* convincingly links the developmental narrative of the traditional *Bildungsroman* to the 'free and full development of personality' enshrined in the UDHR. For Slaughter, the law and the novel of development work to "universalize and naturalize the normative image of

the human in human rights" through projecting narratives of "humanistic socialization" (328). According to these scholars, the *Bildungsroman* projects an ideal form of an individual harmonizing with the wider community of the nation state, providing a "fiction of self-determination" amenable to the subject imagined in human rights discourse (Potter and Stonebridge 5). Where the novels I have discussed problematize and re-orient such developmental ideals to postulate alternative forms for the human, Lyndsey Stonebridge argues that the postwar moment saw "the re-invention of the novel as a medium for the re-assertion of a universal humanity" (*The Judicial Imagination* 126), one which seeks to overwrite the crisis in humanism I have been examining.

Much of Stonebridge's recent work has been directed towards exposing the fissures in such universalism, principally through the figure of the rightless, stateless refugee, a person who has "nowhere from which to exist in civil, political, cultural and, we might add, linguistic terms" (109). There are both resonances and significant differences between this condition and the animalized positions I have foregrounded. This is especially true in the case of Warner's Minna, the Jewish refugee whose exclusion from civic life prompts the fantasy of revolutionizing such social structures. Minna's death in the reassertion of normative French society suggests the abject nonexistence in Stonebridge's analysis of statelessness; however, this 'hunted' woman's "queer existence" (*Summer Will Show* 282) outside of national and political institutions is given imagined space in which to flourish in the novel. Part of Warner's project is to dissolve the boundaries of those structures: in *The Cat's Cradle-Book*, the narrator admonishes the "humanistic approach" that attaches "far too much importance to nationalities" (25). The hope of her late 30s work, which is crystallized in her revaluation of the animalized condition, is to undermine the differentiation

between citizen and stateless, reinvesting the latter position with revolutionary viability.

Warner's hopeful construction of the refugee Minna appears to have been produced by a distinctly unstable moment in humanism. Importantly, it was a moment prior to the full extent of the atrocities of the Second World War, in which the ability to consign people to such "a place outside politics and law" (Stonebridge, *The Judicial Imagination* 113) would be mobilized to such horrific effect. This project has focalized a different problem from the gulf between rights-bearing citizen and stateless refugee; before even the problematic implementation of a universal standard of human rights, these writers reckoned with the integrity of the very concept of the 'human' and its distinction form other species. Rachel Potter and Lyndsey Stonebridge have recently stressed the importance of understanding "modernism's contribution to the history of rights in the twentieth century," especially because in the UDHR drafters' debates on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature "it was as though modernism had never happened" (5-6). The late modernist works I have discussed present no unified consensus about the constitution of a human subject upon whom rights can be conferred. Rather, as Rachel Potter argues, from "a position in which politics has failed," these works "stage human rights as an ideological battleground" (9-10). With fears of human degeneration and even extinction casting doubt over the future of humanity, the boundaries of that species were placed under profound duress. It is in defining this limit that these writers sought to envision models for the human that might alter the course of history, which seemed to be drawing inevitably towards destruction.

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