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OIKO-LOGIC IN LITERATURE

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree

School of Literature, Writing, and Digital Humanities
in the Graduate School
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May 2023

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

OIKO-LOGIC IN LITERATURE

by

Elias J. Taylor

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

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in the field of English

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November 4, 2022

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Elias J. Taylor, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English, presented on November 4, 2022, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: OIKO-LOGIC IN LITERATURE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. George Boulukos

My study utilizes ecocriticism, eco-Marxism, and posthumanism to discover how the sympathetic practices of both reading and ecology provide us with what I call an oiko-logic. Specifically, I read Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and John Williams' *Butcher's Crossing*. In *Gulliver's Travels* we see Gulliver as an ecological threat in every journey, and Swift says that this is because we forget ourselves and deliberately choose to not attune—sometimes even choosing destruction. For Swift, we bungle things no matter which system we try, and we create degenerative devolution despite the fact that we can help. Sterne's fundamental ecological question is how people and the entities they dwell with (living and non-living) have real interactions—which means considering domestication's bilateralism. Humans and animals can interact beneficently in Sterne's work, and individualism becomes oiko-logically untenable since calculations of value and affordability must include others. In *Moby-Dick* the whale's values are more moral than Ahab's, and through comparisons available in the text of *Moby-Dick* we begin to see inside Melville's eco-values to the impact of a heroic animal agency as Moby-Dick follows his values—while our conscience hangs in crooked corridors. In *Butcher's Crossing* and representations of buffalo slaughter, correlative human-animal experiences of thirst, ferality, and slaughter are contrasted with western bison hunters on the plains and aliens in such a way that the alien is between humanity and itself. In oiko-logic, literature and ecology share a sympathetic practice similar to the Native American sensibility of Mitakuye Oyasín: “all my relations.”

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CHAPTER 1

OIKO-LOGIC IN LITERATURE

Introduction

In Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*, there is a certain Dr. Blau who is fascinated by the exposure of organs (e.g., the *Human Body* exhibit that made the rounds a few years ago). Blau finds himself in the study of a famous (recently deceased) researcher who pioneered methods for preserving bodies that baffled the scientific community. Blau faces a preserved cat, and as he touches it, he is conscious of working with his body to read the animal body. The late doctor's wife, who is with Blau, discloses that he can not only feel the weight and apparent warmth of the very dead animal he is holding, but he can also open its abdomen and dive into its peritoneum. Suddenly, Blau feels, "...as though the cat were a book made out of precious, exotic material for which there is no name yet" (157). Dr. Blau reads the cat's precious, exotic material with his hands, gathers data from reading this dead cat with his body, and feels fascinated by it precisely because he recognizes an ignorance in himself that he can learn from. Tokarczuk's phrase, in a very compact space, packs into itself almost everything that interests me in terms of ecological reading: the animal (i.e., a cat), the material (i.e., a book), and the labor associated with the fact no name exists for this material yet—despite its having already existed for quite some time—so that we are compelled to learn.

I feel a correlation between Dr. Blau reaching into this cat and the work of literary criticism. Indeed, there are certain literary materials that have earned a spot in history's eye by virtue of just how much plunging around in their depths scholars have done. My most general argument is that the real, felt force of a great deal of literature (much as Dr. Blau's cat) comes from an ecological sensibility that authors have for the importance of how things interact. In this

case, we are going to look at *Gulliver's Travels*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Moby-Dick*, and representations of buffalo slaughter. While there is not a historical or ideological fitness to this array of authors and subjects, they are linked by an ecological sensibility which I call oiko-logic. Felix Guattari refers to an eco-logic in *The Three Ecologies*: "Eco-logic, is concerned only with the movement and intensity of evolutive processes" (44), and oiko-logic or eco-logic is a mode of thinking that involves analyzing the inter-relations, inter-being, and inter-woven-ness of the people, animals, and objects across a space as irregularly defined as "the household"—with the belief that this analysis will direct us to ways our species can interact and evolve with more virtue. Oiko-logic will be defined more thoroughly below, but I begin with a brief discussion of the cross-section of fields (i.e., ecocritical animality, eco-Marxism, and posthumanism) that makes up my research. I will finish by discussing the authors and images of interest to my work.

My argument generally will be that Swift, Sterne, and Melville all had important and keen ecological intuitions that manifested themselves at different scales, and the scale of the buffalo slaughter shows us how far away from ecological intuitions we can be. Laurence Sterne's focus is most directly on the home-scale oikos. To say that Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is obsessed with the home-space might be an understatement. The relations within the Shandy household, the relations it makes possible, the feelings animals and things make us have (from Yorick's horse to the window sash that accidentally circumcises a young Tristram—because of his uncle's desires), and the sympathy *Tristram* finds amongst the most improbable things make the novel a veritable catalog of oiko-logical possibilities that calls us to reconsider our place in the world. Swift is less concerned with the household-sized oikos than he is with the island-sized oikos. The island-sized oikos differs from the household-sized oikos because it draws our attention to the way larger entities like countries interact with each other: although similar to the way that a man

and a horse interact on the home-front, if one country were to start flogging another in the name of labor (as we could literally say of the trans-Atlantic slave trade), then we must begin to ask ourselves a different set of questions about how we interact with large-scale neighbors. Gulliver travels to a variety of islands and finds that different islands form different relations with their spaces, their flora and fauna, and their neighbors. Melville, in *Moby-Dick*, does the most to extend the oikos to the whole of the planet: we are inter-connected with the ocean and its denizens as much as we are with the land and our own ideas. In the chapter on representations of buffalo slaughter, we will see how reading the environment, like reading a novel, creates a sympathetic practice in which we learn to feel with the world around us.

Ecocriticism, Eco-Marxism, Posthumanism

My primary concern is ecocritical. Specifically, I am concerned with a version of ecocriticism that focuses on animality and seeks out the animals in stories, but also makes sure to consider the animals' interactions with their environments because animals should not be thought outside of their environment. The environment, for its part, is an odd combination of both a conditioning agent and material that abides alteration. Truly ecocritical animality, for Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature*, is "a form of radical commitment, a shutting-down of choice," and the study of animals in our world and literature is imperative because, if we don't study them, if we don't labor over our understanding, we risk being dangerously wrong about everything (203). Cary Wolfe says something similar in *Zoontologies*: "The discourse of animality... has historically served as a crucial strategy in the oppression of humans by other humans" (xx). If we do not study the discourse of animality, we wind up dismissing the ways we are currently oppressing people. Humanity's ignorance and habitual over-confidence when faced with animality means that misunderstanding animality is to some degree pre-determined;

however, that also means learning about animality is important because how we interact with animals (and how far we include humanity in kingdom animalia) winds up determining how we interact with humans. The real upshot for humanity is, “the new political terrain” these animals’ relationship to humanity implies, because they “present a profound challenge to power and the status quo, including scientific humanism” (Feder 230). Various readings of animality strike chords with humanity because of animality’s tethers to the nexus of power, authority, and knowledge.

Beyond ecocriticism, I have found it necessary to employ an eco-Marxist understanding of laboring materials where the laborers and the resources utilized are affecting both themselves and others. The primary term of art, which comes from the eco-Marxism of thinkers like John Bellamy Foster and Jason W. Moore, is “metabolic rift”—a disturbance in the metabolism between humanity and nature. Foster says in his article “Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift” that Marx uses “metabolism” to “describe the human relation to nature through labor” (380). He goes on to describe “metabolic rift” as “the central theoretical construct” at a couple of points in *Capital*, and the construct, “is that of a ‘rift’ in ‘the metabolic interaction between man and the earth,’ or in the ‘social metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life,’ through the removal from the soil of its constituent elements, requiring its ‘systematic restoration’” (380). Moore explains that in Foster’s rendering “the original argument suggested... rift as reconfiguration and shift” rather than as rupture (91). Indeed, in *Kapital* Marx writes:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates and controls the material reactions [the metabolism] between himself and nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hand,

the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. (115)

Foster and Moore find in Marx a reminder that humanity's labors, as the process by which we mediate our relationship to nature, not only affect the marketplace, but also (sometimes without being fully recognized) our relationship to the environment that provides the material for the market and our relationship to ourselves. Humanity works on and changes nature; however, working with nature simultaneously affects humanity in unexpected ways. A lack of awareness or disregard for the effects of our labor outside of the intended pursuit can create a dangerous situation wherein we must recognize that "we know not what we do," while simultaneously knowing that we can and do cause metabolic shifts in an environment—sometimes dramatic ones. If there is something that we can call a metabolism between humanity and nature, the call should be to find ways of laboring that benefit the metabolic relationship and work tirelessly for ecological equilibrium, rather than, for example, profit.

Finally, my work will also show evidence of a posthumanist thread that investigates relations and relationships to explain humanity's experience amongst the things of the world, with the emphasis on the idea that we are merely one species amongst many things. Cary Wolfe tells us in *What Is Posthumanism?*, "When we talk about posthumanism, we are not just talking about a thematics of the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates... we are also talking about *how* thinking confronts that thematics, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges" (xvi). Posthumanism does not merely ask us to consider a world in which humanity is not central, it asks us to consider how our thinking ought to shift in the face of such a reality. In James Williams' posthumanism, "A simple

ethical responsibility” in which humanity takes care of the world, “is replaced by a joint ethical task in a shared ecosphere; we move from questions of what is right for us humans to questions of how to care for an ecology as a complex series of interdependencies” (107). De-centering humanity does not diminish humanity, but rather amplifies the world around us. N. Katherine Hayles, in *How We Became Posthuman*, notes that “the posthuman” signals “the end of a certain conception of the human,” but “a conception that may have been applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice”—a conception we can probably do without (286). Instead of focusing, in other words, on the interests of a small group of disconnected humans, posthumanism sheds light on natural spaces, animals, and machines as co-creators of the world that deserve our consideration when we make decisions.

Ecocriticism and eco-Marxism cross paths in the world of labor to the extent that humanity tends to exploit nature’s labors by extracting natural resources, but they separate when it comes to who or what they concern themselves with: ecocriticism tends to stay focused on the natural world, while eco-Marxism tends to be drawn into the world of capital and economics. Similarly, ecocritical animality and posthumanism share some cross-threads, but many ecocritics are concerned that a truly posthuman environment might obscure the human contribution and make it difficult to accurately evaluate what, if anything, humanity itself needs to do differently. While posthumanism and eco-Marxism seem generally at odds with each other—to the extent that Marxism is largely concerned with the actions of humans and their marketplace—they do meet at the point where the market takes on a life and a logic of its own. While I recognize that ecocriticism, eco-Marxism, and posthumanism all have varying interests, in my research, reading the animal and its attendant environment as laboring in various circumstances for and with a

humanity subsumed within kingdom animalia is crucial for understanding oiko-logic and literature teaching us about humanity's relationship with our environment.

Oiko-logic

Oikos is an ancient Greek word that translates roughly to our modern English prefix “eco-.” Any time we are considering either economy or ecology, we are poking at the oikos, but the oikos, as succinctly defined by José Luis Cendejas, begins with “the domestic community” (5). Josine Blok defines the ancient oikos as she is attempting to distinguish between the ancient understandings of ‘household’ and the ‘estate’: “The oikos as ‘household’ was a shell holding, at a certain point in time, the people who lived in the house (oikia), the family lines they represented and all its real estate and moveable goods, protected by the household gods” (103). This is a deceptively short description, and probably more of a tribute to Blok’s conciseness than anything else, because a house and all of its stuff includes not only the husband/wife, master/slave, parent/child relationships, and their historical lines, but any relationship that contributes to domestic felicity: the animals that provide the foodstuffs and materials for sale/trade/barter, the land that provides the opportunity to grow food, the labor required to bring the food and opportunity to fruition, the tools or machines that make the labor more effective, and even the beliefs or gods that abide there.

The history of the oikos goes back a long way, and there are no clear usages. Aristotle’s definition in *Politics* usually gets rendered “a husband, a wife, and an ox for the plough,” so that animals and the machines are included as well as humans (*Pol.* 1.1252b). In Hesiod, however, oikos almost always had to include a building of some kind (Edwards 35). At any rate, there is enough contention on the matter of “ancient household management” that Thornton C. Lockwood, Jr. directs the reader to “an overview of interpretative problems concerning the household in

antiquity” in a long note (2). Guattari mentions in a note to *The Three Ecologies* that he uses “eco-” “in its original Greek sense of oikos, ‘house, domestic property, habitat, natural milieu’” (91). For our purposes, the oikos includes: the physical domestic residence, political relationships, and the environment; domestic labor in praxis; natural materials; and the knot of relationships that defines domesticity. The oikos is a constant, collaborative effort in which the relationships are all knotting together to create to an ever-changing entity which has exceedingly ill-defined, literally airy boundaries—just as there is nothing separating humanity from the vacuum of space but layers of atmosphere, yet escape is quite difficult. Humanity’s contributions are constrained within the oikos because we are only a small part of its relationships.

The stuff that makes up relationships (e.g., feelings, accidents, intentions, and desires), then, is a primary concern for the oikos and ecology because disregarding relationships (especially bilateralism in relationships) is precisely what runs us into the risk of “metabolic rift.” Seeing the planet as humanity’s oikos gives us an opportunity to see our species’ relationship to the natural world in terms of, for example, our intentions or desires. The problem is, of course, that this stuff that makes up our relationship to nature is not only always already plural, but also always already composed of such disparate components as labor relations, ecological inter-connectedness, mis-matching beliefs, and miscommunication. To avoid the dangers of metabolic rift with nature, humanity must begin to see itself as part of planet-sized domestic community. We must become workers in conjunction with, functional components of, as well as the beneficiaries of, our environment—instead of as the paternalistic all-knowing tyrant that we sometimes make ourselves. Yet, this seems to be difficult.

The benefits we receive from the natural material world seem, oiko-logically, to put our species in nature’s debt, or at least give us an ethical imperative to use our place in nature to

work with natural materials to benefit all. Ignoring this ethical imperative would be enough to challenge humanity's imagined supremacy in the oikos by showing our horrific lack of sympathy. Our actual response is even more unimaginable: we produce an unmanageable mass of pollution—which is oiko-logically outrageous. David Harvey first sensed the problem of this mass when he realized that it was possible that the significant quantity that has already been produced and pumped up into the atmosphere—some 400ppm of CO₂ (when nothing above 300 ppm has been “seen” in 800,000 years)—has become a problem to itself, on top of the rate of production of greenhouse gases (140-141). Harvey is quite clear that 400 ppm of CO₂ is a result of labor relations (to the extent that it comes from factories expelling carbon dioxide into the air in order to produce saleable goods), ecological work (to the extent that environmental raw materials were required to produce it), mismatching beliefs (about whether this CO₂ is even a problem) and the general feeling of boredom produced by what has been referred to as “slow violence” (“violence that occurs gradually and out of sight... an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2)); however, the problem is that we have already produced a mass sufficient to generate Marx's “metabolic rift,” so we have, instead of one problem, two simultaneous problems. First, we are still producing too much pollution at too rapid a rate. Second, and simultaneously, we have been focusing on the rate of production for so long that we have neglected to notice the mass that we have already produced. What really interests me, however, is that Harvey suggests a fix for this problem utilizing shellfish, because shellfish turn CO₂ into shells. Working with animal material in the oikos presents itself as option for ameliorating the metabolic rift.

Harvey's potential solution to the problem of a mass of CO₂ involves what I call oiko-logic because it invokes an older version “sympathy” as an effective agent between and organism

(or entity) and its environment. Lars Spuybroek discusses this sympathy in terms of the animal—in this case the *Ammophila* wasp. The wasp stings the caterpillar “with nine successive stings” that coordinate with “nine nerve centers,” which “paralyzes the caterpillar completely,” and allows the wasp to drag the body to its nest, where it will “lays its eggs on top of it, so that when the eggs hatch the larvae will have fresh food” (119). The wasp does a lot of domestic labor for its offspring, but then Spuybroek explains why this stinging process is “sympathy”:

In short, the *Ammophila* knows *something*; at least, its instinct is slightly *elastic*, so that simple inborn instructions can be stretched and broadened by experimentation, though not generalized into pure symbols. The variability of outcomes and conditions cannot be handled by simple instinct but requires a form of knowledge between intelligence and instinct, between pure abstraction and pure bodily response. Bergson defines this in-between as intuition or sympathy: but there is no need for such a view if we suppose a sympathy (in the etymological sense of the world) between the *Ammophila* and its victim, which teaches it from within, so to say, concerning the vulnerability of the caterpillar. The sympathy “teaches it from within,” that is, through a form of internal copying, the wasp feels the other’s external bodily movements internally, in its own body, giving it an immediate knowledge.” (119-120)

The interconnectedness of the wasp and the caterpillar is nowhere more apparent than in the elastic understanding that allows the wasp to paralyze the caterpillar without knowing caterpillar internal physiology. Spuybroek describes the ribs of a gothic column braiding together for the purposes of both strength and beauty because the components react to one another as if they were teaching each other from within. In the sympathetic and malleable, yet still very material,

relationships between “things” we can find a confusion and frustration of boundaries that accords with a post-human ecology because that is where we unintuitively find great strength. Where does the wasp end and the caterpillar begin? Where does Blau end and the cat begin? Where does the reader end and the book begin? The wasp, using its senses, feels the data from inside the caterpillar and internalizes this data to coordinate a series of movements which have as their goal a future realization, but there is nothing clear-cut in the data, the movements, or their realization. The wasp does not even always get it right because there is a tangled mass of relationships that must be dealt with first. Oiko-logically we must utilize this older form of sympathy, or a “feeling with” and “teaching from within” (and not the modern “pity” it has devolved into) as our initial approach and a sympathetic practice we can apply to problems arising in the oikos.

Part of the difficulty with eco- or oiko-logic is, however, that it does not necessarily run along the same lines as a strict logical analysis, which “endeavours to completely delimit its object” by characterizing whatever it analyzes—effectively boxing something up (Guattari 44). “Logic... is concerned with form” and whether or not “an argument is logically valid, its conclusion is a logical consequence of its premises, its premises logically imply its conclusions” (Burgess 2). Logic imposes structure by evaluating arguments ex-post-facto against pre-existing logical forms, but oiko-logic takes note of how our relationships with the nature world are affecting both us and nature—learning to see what eventually emerges. Ole Möystad tells us that “oikos-logos” considers “the relationship between organisms and objects, on one hand, and their environment, on the other,” but also includes, “Land management... and the practice of changing land-use patterns” which rely on “the knowledge of how infrastructure and land relate to each other” (69). Oiko-logic engages with considerations of the effect of un-reasoning entities such as land, infrastructure, and how they interact, to learn and understand how we all affect each other.

Finally, oiko-logic draws no hard lines between where one organism or entity ends, and its environment begins: the environment is as much a part of the organism or entity as the reverse. The environment conditions the organisms, and when the environment changes, the organisms change; however, because the changes to the environment can oftentimes be attributed to the organisms in the environment, we find that nature operates by virtue of material interpenetration, inter-connection, and stimulus-response. Although these relationships might be knotty, complex, and dizzyingly un-intuitive, we can approach them with an oiko-logical sensibility. Instead of assuming that humanity holds special cards in the abstract competition we are apparently in with our planetary oikos, the oiko-logical outlook espoused in the following pages suggests that we are an attribute of nature capable of instigating changes in the natural world, and we should not take this lightly because instigating changes in our natural world amounts to a massive responsibility. Clear-cutting rain forests, dumping plastic into the oceans, and pumping CO₂ into the air is not only humanity avoiding its ethical responsibility to the natural world, but positively provoking metabolic rift. David Layfield tells us the ethic of eco-Marxism simply says that “as human individuals are able to flourish... so should nature” (89). The oikos and its consequent oiko-logic of labor and sympathy is, at least in my work, therefore a way to prick our species’ conscience into questioning how everything can be helped to flourish. To do this work, we might need to question “The whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations, whose sweeping progress cannot be guaranteed to continue as it has for the past decade,” but humanity’s way forward must insistently pursue our intimate relations in an oikos (Guattari 52).

Swift, Sterne, Melville, and Buffalo

Swift, Sterne, and Melville each have an oiko-logical sensibility running through their works that powerfully identifies humanity as a problem for the natural world. Oiko-logic always starts from the environment. What oiko-logic shares with traditional logic is that, as logic attempts to determine whether a line of reasoning is correct or incorrect, oiko-logic attempts to determine whether an action involving an oikos is beneficent or destructive, and the distressing reality we find in Swift, Sterne, Melville, and the American buffalo slaughter is a body of evidence outlining humanity's consistently harmful actions in its home environment. While there is no mention of the term oikos in the works we will look at, in one way or another (at various points), each of them considers the formulation of a household. Sterne invokes it in *Tristram* when Walter Shandy is working on his *Tristrapedia*. As early as Lilliput, Gulliver thinks it would be interesting for the reader to understand his "domestick" situation, and each voyage can be thought of as Gulliver entering a new oikos. Melville shows us the oikos in *Moby-Dick* both when Ishmael is squeezing sperm and imagines household felicity and when the fishermen encounter whales in a domestic situation. The men in *Butcher's Crossing* create a pop-up oikos after they get trapped for the winter in a mountain pass where they have massacred a bison herd. Each of these works invokes the oikos as an apparatus for understanding our place in the world.

The most immediate ecological reason for investigating *Gulliver's Travels* was the critically famous fourth voyage in which Gulliver encounters two unique animals: the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos. The Noble Houyhnhnms are possessed of poise, reason, and elegant language skills. The Yahoos are a breed of no-account, ape-like savages that fling dung and try to procreate with anything that moves. Much has been said about these animals, but Gulliver's disregard of the services rendered by the Yahoos (sledge-pulling, their very skin, etc.)

is probably also best viewed as characteristic of a paternalist animal exploitation relationship. In fact, the ecological vision that Swift offers throughout *Gulliver's Travels* offers a biting critique of humanity as Gulliver represents an eco-crisis in every species, so that humanity becomes a prideful species whose gradual destructiveness comes from forgetting that natural systems are wider than we can understand, that natural systems provide our resources to us, that we should limit what we take because resources are finite. My ecological reading of *Gulliver's Travels* sees Swift asking how we are supposed to trust the collective conscience of people in positions of power when we know that individuals pose eco-crisis by making questionable decisions (that put humans, non-humans, and their environments in danger) based on inaccurate perspectives, unsympathetic reason or imagination, unaccountable mind-body co-ordinations, and accumulations of systemic forces. The posthuman challenge of Swift's oiko-logic involves our species' conscience: reorient our systems of thought, politics, economics, and culture with an ecological sensibility, because the virtuous thing to do now is begin ameliorating the problems we have already caused.

Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* was published in nine volumes over the course of the years 1759 to 1767. The animals in Sterne have a decidedly different flavor than they do in Swift. When Dr. Slop is un-horsed by Obadiah, the strength and speed of the coach horse Obadiah is riding created, "A vortex of mud and water moving along with it, round its axis" (85). The horse's strength and speed cause Dr. Slop to fall off his horse, so that when Dr. Slop arrives at the door of Shandy Hall, and because he was so mud-covered, "It was hard to determine whether Dr. Slop's figure, or Dr. Slop's presence, occasioned more surprize to them" (86). The incident with Obadiah's horse caused a situation in the Shandy oikos in which the imaginations of Toby and Walter Shandy were short-circuited:

they could not imagine how Dr. Slop had arrived so quickly, and they could not imagine what he was doing arriving there covered in mud. Another way to put that would be to say that their faculty of Reason was incapable of immediately touching the sympathetic aspects of Nature. Sterne will give us an oiko-logic that asks us which is more likely: that the human species is so perspicuous that we are capable of fully understanding its eco-relations—when humans cannot even understand the state of man who has just fallen off a horse—or that our ecology is endangered by our fallible, ignorant reasoning. The challenge of Sterne’s oiko-logic pricks our conscience with the suggestion that avoiding our sympathetic relationships with the various entities in our oikos dangerously avoids reality, to the point of suggesting that humanity itself involves consideration and regard for the entities in our oikos—especially if we wish to make possible the extension, intension, and intention of human virtue.

Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* is an entire novel about the whaling industry, and, as such, makes an obvious point of departure for any ecocritical, posthuman, Marxist-leaning reading of American literature, because the entire point of whaling is the exploitation of an animal (particularly against its will) to produce the various articles that that exploitation makes possible. *Moby-Dick* depicts animals in their home territory, humans as an invasive species, and an awkward ecological heroism in *Moby Dick* that elevates animal values above those of human morality. Reading Melville’s text ecologically allows us to see: a powerful call to the reader to compare their own values to other humans’ values and the values of animals in their home space, a version of *Moby Dick* as a whale that presents us with awkwardly heroic animal values (like vulnerability, assisting, warning, and defending), and the suggestion that we might successfully harness the positive aspects of these animal values to improve our conscience. To accomplish his goals, Melville will invoke various kinds of comparisons that demonstrate various possible

outlooks on value in natural relations—some of which do not require humanity’s values at all, but he will ask us to start our thinking from the animal in its oikos or home territory, and then follow the trail of those values for evaluating humanity’s place in the world. When a-whaling, the problem is thinking of humanity as an invasive species in the whale’s home territory that has every intention of harvesting the whale’s body. Reading the situation in this way challenges us to think of humanity as bringing the fight to Moby Dick, and, consequently, how trouble boils to the surface as soon as humanity introduces itself into the home territory of the whale, but also how the whale’s heroics might provide our species with a possible escape hatch from our self-involved self-destruction.

Oddly, but intriguingly, Swift, Sterne, and Melville all wrote sermons on conscience. Sterne and Melville went so far as to include their sermons in the body of their novels. In *Tristram Shandy* the parson Yorick’s sermon was “accidentally” found in Uncle Toby’s copy of *Stevinus*, which comedically mirrors readers finding Sterne’s sermon in *Tristram*, but conscience becomes a big part of Sterne’s lesson for readers as he asks them to think of their conscience as unruly, but also an indicator prefiguring God’s judgment: having a crisis of conscience can be considered “an anticipation of that righteous sentence which will be pronounced upon thee hereafter” (106). In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael stumbles into a chapel and gets a sermon on the combination of Jonah and conscience which becomes a direful warning about not only the state of captain Ahab’s conscience, but also the state of humanity generally, which suffers conscience as a “wound, and there’s naught to staunch it” (47). Swift points out that conscience, without some external apparatus (like religion), is incapable of working properly because, when we control our conscience ourselves, we can make evil a matter of good conscience, so for Swift, “unless men are guided by the advice and judgment of conscience founded on religion, they can

give no security” (“Conscience” 270). For these authors, when conscience malfunctions, the real danger becomes being unaware of how evil we are actually being.

Having received these several suggestions from historical literature that the conscience of our species might be faulty, easily persuaded, or generally inaccurate, we will turn to an instance where humanity demonstrates the malfunctioning of conscience. Over the course of one hundred years (from 1800-1900), the bison population of North America was reduced from tens of millions to about three hundred. In some versions of the story, this slaughter was committed with the malicious intent of not only destroying the bison, but also the Native Americans that relied on the animal. Although modern people might struggle to imagine it, the herds of bison constituted part of the oikos of Native Americans. In other versions, such as *Butcher's Crossing* by John Williams, slaughtering buffalo becomes an instance of humanity invading the animals territory, and then being unable to extricate ourselves from the rationalizations required for our use of the animal. In fact, through images and films, we have several representations of what humanity is capable of when we go about achieving an end that includes slaughter, and we do so in full conscience—believing that what we are doing is both morally acceptable and reasonable. Reading the situation between humanity and bison ecologically, we find ample reason to doubt our species' ability to make appropriate decisions regarding the components of an environment that we invaded. Humanity has a history of making quite gruesome, quite wretched decisions.

The one space where Swift, Sterne, and Melville all find some escape hatch from whatever their cultural milieu, is therefore their oiko-logical considerations, and this is because ecology is important and available to all, from humanity to buffalo, winged creatures to sea creatures, plants to soil. Swift and Sterne, for example were keenly aware of the care required by their horses by virtue of their ministerial duties in Ireland, and Melville would know of

horsepower, too, but he also got the power of the whale infused into him through labor on the high seas. These authors see ecological encounters as not only relevant, but integral, and precisely because determining the subtle effects the environment has on humanity can be quite difficult. Their projects are all tied up with the virtue of our species. If we cannot, for example, be bothered to properly sympathize with the bison—and we see plenty of instances of this of daily—what guarantee can there be that this attitude will not seep into one’s relationships with other humans?

Conclusion

Conscience will be a major theme of my readings and conclusions, and conscience is why something like *Robinson Crusoe* (another iconic eighteenth-century island/travel narrative) did not find its way into this study. Over the course of my research, Swift, Sterne, and Melville began to congeal around conscience as a genuinely affective agent (whether for good or ill), while Defoe’s conscience was more of a passing nuisance or a “fit” on the way to a more economical outlook. In Defoe’s novel we read of conscience convicting the young Crusoe as he begins his journey, but only so long as the “storm” lasts, and he falls to carousing “the old way of all sailors” immediately afterward (9-10). At a point further on, we read that conscience “extorted” a “prayer to God” from Crusoe, but the next day, “the fit being entirely off,” it was time to return to work (72-73). The last time conscience is mentioned in the text, we read that Crusoe “allowed liberty of conscience throughout” his little kingdom, including cannibalism among his list of what is allowed (188). For Defoe, conscience falls into that category of things which he considers utterly unsettled by perspectivism:

How do I know what God Himself judges in this particular case? It is certain these people do not commit this as a crime; it is not against their own consciences

reproving, or their light reproaching them; they do not know it to be an offence, and then commit it in defiance of divine justice, as we do in almost all the sins we commit. They think it no more a crime to kill a captive taken in war than we do to kill an ox; or to eat human flesh than we do to eat mutton. (134)

What we can read as Defoe taking laissez-faire to the nth degree, can also be read as an unwillingness to engage with the difficult questions of value that conscience brings to our attention, and if we never engage with the problems, we can never stay with the trouble long enough to find the best solutions. In *Robinson Crusoe*, because we cannot immediately know what others consider to be a “crime” or an “offence,” there is no point in even trying to consider it, which renders up a conscience that amounts to a nuisance, so conscience is almost summarily abandoned as a principle capable of guiding humanity. In short, the current state of the human-planet relationship tends to make me think that abandoning conscience completely when thinking of the oikos might not be the best move, so, while an altogether different study might begin with *Crusoe*, I have focused instead on authors who caution us about conscience, and try to help us educate it, while not abandoning it completely. Swift, Sterne, and Melville all seem to feel that, although our conscience can be corrupted, misguided, and affected by our own crookedness, value comes from learning how to utilize it as a tool, precisely because learning to use a conscience necessarily involves an affective education and learning *how* to feel.

Swift, Sterne, and Melville’s work has been enormously effective and affective throughout English literary history, in my view, precisely to the degree that they disrupt our comfortable assumptions, point us to the oiko-mess we have made, and educate our conscience—giving us the opportunity to see problems with new eyes for values and imagine alternative solutions. One primary “comfortable assumption” that Swift, Sterne, and Melville are

all keenly aware of is how we assume that we completely understand the relationships in our world; however, as we will see in representations of buffalo slaughter, the mess we make with this comfortable assumption is one that really ought to impact our conscience. The upshot of all this, however, is that though we might be ignorant, and though we might be dangerous, and though we might make bad decisions, this is neither a shortcoming in us, nor a call to greater control, but rather a clear opportunity to learn. Oiko-logic is not perfect, but the stewardship and ethics of care it suggests allow us to investigate and learn about relationships in a useful and manageable form. Oiko-logic can be restricted to the relationships we encounter every day, but it can also be scaled down to a raccoon den or up to a home-sized universe. The squeak of an old door, a pack of feral cats outside, our own moody contributions, and the climate or atmosphere of a space all contribute to feelings our oikos gives us. The oikos gives us feelings, but rarely what we imagine they would be. We must begin to think of relations as real things because they are felt material that existence needs. These relations can be felt keenly (like the strange, exotic material of the cat Dr. Blau is investigating), have multiple points of departure, radiate out from various nodes, and pull us in.

Although it might seem a bit odd, what I am suggesting is that we extend our imaginative capacities to include the idea that, because animals, plants, and machines are all parts of what we experience every day, doing them justice increases the potential that the virtue of our species will be improved. Alfred N. Whitehead says something similar about a rock in *Symbolism*:

A rock is nothing else than a society of molecules, indulging in every species of activity open to molecules. I draw attention to this lowly form of society in order to dispel the notion that social life is a peculiarity of the higher organisms. The contrary is the case. So far as survival value is concerned, a piece of rock, with its

past history of some eight hundred millions of years, far outstrips the short span attained by any nation. (64-65)

If we are considering relationships oiko-logically, the rock has a place inside of the ecology it is discovered in, just as a human or the cat. In an oiko-logical understanding of the rock, the relationships that the rock has with itself and the world around it allow us to see that the molecules of the rock, continuously interacting with each other, are what keep the rock, well, rocking; however, the rock's interactions with the environment also cause changes to the rock—wind can blow the rock off a mountain, splitting it into pieces. The point here is two-fold. First, oiko-logic does not restrict agency to humanity: non-conscious entities and animals can be agents. Second, and related to the first, agency can be effective without intention. Nature does not always intend to be effective (the wind does not intend to displace the rock), but a lack of intention does not make nature ineffective. Unintentional agency is sometimes even worse than intentional agency (homes destroyed by tornadoes, for example). These two considerations, working together, constitute the post-human ecology in my work. The Yahoos and the dogs the projectors explode with gas in *Gulliver's Travels*, the window-sash and Yorick's horse in *Tristram Shandy*, the whales and other denizens of the deep in *Moby-Dick*, and bison on the plains all act agentially, even as the intentionality of their works is highly questionable.

One of the thornier problems presented by my work is, therefore, that objects are seen as active agents in the world of our collective experience. To take the view that objects are somehow inferior to subjects is to take an oiko-logically untenable position. Subject and object are two lateral viewpoints from which to experience a set of circumstances or situation. An object is not merely a diminished subject. Legends from all over the globe are awash with stories of humans being turned into glorious animals like eagles, panthers, and bears, with nary a sense

of negative objectification. In oiko-logical terms, we are all simply caught up in these webs of interbeing whether we want to be or not. The real culprit must be said to be not objectification, but the abstraction *of* the object into that which is subsequently subjected to the market. Everybody knows the market can be brutal. We disturb our metabolism with nature when our ecology merely serves our economy.

For the above reasons and more, humanity does not always come off well in these pages, and much like Swift perhaps, I might face charges of misanthropy, but there is no active hatred. Rather the understanding that we can do better, and a certain compassion that wants us to accomplish being better. The fact that, in this case, we both can and should do things otherwise, simply makes us look bad as a group when we do not, and sometimes being truly proud of humanity is difficult. There will be, like with Sterne, some comedy in the following pages, and, like Melville, there will be some contemplative moments, but my primary purpose, like Swift, is to vex: to disturb. To disturb us from our comfortable assumptions, to disturb our notions of primacy, and to disturb our reading of material into a sense of shared ownership of the world. What we find in the cat's guts or the buffalo entrails might not be pretty, but we are the ones with our bloody hand inside them.

CHAPTER 2

HUMANITY AND ECOLOGY IN *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

Introduction

Throughout *Gulliver's Travels*, the threat of ecological crisis, usually centered in Gulliver himself, looms large. In every voyage but the third, Gulliver threatens to undermine the local ecosystem, and in the third, Gulliver witnesses a series of threats that humans present to the sustainability of their own communities through their over-commitment to their own contemplation, technology, innovation, and scientific curiosity. One of the starkest threats he presents is when he offers to teach the ways of gunpowder to the King of Brobdingnag. The king was "struck with horror" at the capacities Gulliver related, much like discovering one was in the presence of a dark magician (123). What we find is that when Swift considers gunpowder ecologically, humanity is immanent *to* the natural system, and taking the powers of life and death, thunder and lightning, destructiveness and disaster into our own hands seems at least presumptuous for what Swift would call a prideful species. More importantly, eventually, the natural system will experience a negative cumulative effect, a devolution, when we do not apply ecological thought. The ecological vision of humanity that Swift offers in *Gulliver's Travels* is one of a prideful species whose eventual perniciousness is a result of the fact that we forget how natural systems have a wider scope than humanity can immediately comprehend, that these systems provide for us, and that there are not only limits to what these systems can give but also limits to what we should take.

The benefits of gun powder that Gulliver touts to the king are examples of how we can lose a sympathetic relationship to nature by focusing on human concerns because shattering houses, cutting people in half, destroying boats, and destroying whole ranks of an army are

counted as benefits, but they are objectively horrific. In black powder's promised violence, destruction of life, and needless destruction of domestic structures, Gulliver offers the king an instrument capable of creating ecological disaster and, thereby, creating the space for power. The king's horror results from his ability to sympathize with those being destroyed, his recognition that the violence Gulliver describes creates an unsustainable relationship between our species and the natural world, and his understanding that we have chosen to do destroy instead of, as Timothy Morton has recently called it, attune. "Attune" is Morton's word for his contribution to *Veer Ecology* and amounts to the conduct of the "asymmetrical chiasmus" that develops "between myself and me, between me and you," when "I am playing the tune called myself to which you are attuning, but which is itself attuned to you" (161). Attunement is possible, but we bafflingly, frequently choose destruction.

In "attunement," "things" can attune to each other: a rock can attune to a mountain in a kind of non-human agency. "Things," Morton says, "are exactly what they are, yet never as they seem, and this means that they are virtually indistinguishable from the beings we call people" (161). Notably, throughout *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver never really attuned: in Lilliput he was too big, and the environment could not support him; in Brobdingnag he was too small, but, while his environment presented him with many dangers, his human mind was capable of combining the elements necessary to make black powder and wage war; in Houyhnhnmland the Noble Horses were concerned that he would start an uprising of Yahoos because of what Greg Garrard calls "ferality"—a "condition of existing in between domestication and wildness," that, in fiction, manifests itself as an "existential condition" and/or a "developmental vicissitude befalling our most intimate symbiont" ("Fertility Tales" 248)—and thereby disrupt the entire social fabric of the island; and in Laputa, Gulliver observed humanity's foibles—for instance, in

humanity destroying their environment with fad agricultural methods and a vast human history of socio-ecological non-attunement. Investigating the ecological crises we find in each voyage, we will see how Gulliver's inability to attune can bring our focus to how our human systems—whether social, political, religious, or economic—make it difficult for us to see rightly.

My reading of *Gulliver's Travels* therefore focuses on man-made ecological crises, or what Marx called “metabolic rift,” that result from humanity's self-deception. John Bellamy Foster wrote “Marx's Concept of Metabolic Rift” at the turn of the twenty-first century, and he says that “Marx's entire theoretical approach” in ecology amounted to a “social-ecological metabolism (Stoffwechsel),” that was a relationship between our species and humanity which was modified by labor (380). Metabolic rift is a disturbance in the metabolism between humanity and nature. Man-made ecological crisis is a synonym for “metabolic rift” to the extent that, through our labors, we consciously or accidentally create unsustainable relationships and disturb our metabolism with our environment. We find humanity-induced eco-crises lodged in every voyage of *Gulliver's Travels*. What we find, in other words, is an ecological Swift who claimed that sourcing materials from nature, laboring over those natural materials, and the risk analysis for extraction and use all had a greater impact than the individual effect, because human systems (like societies, cultures, and corporations) are the ones that wind up mediating our relationship with nature. When Gulliver described the “benefits” of black powder, the king of Brobdingnag considered them the costs, and the king's true horror comes from the fact that Gulliver did not see things that way. If, however, as Marx contends, “Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt,” what Gulliver describes is the basic form of capitalism's metabolic rift with nature (377). Human-generated violence, cruelty, and destruction in the name of capital profit is inherently a source of “imbalance,” as Foster puts it in “Marxism and

Ecology,” and produces disturbances to the relationship between our species and the environment which provides so abundantly (7).

Swift implicated both Gulliver *and* humanity, both the individual *and* the society, simultaneously in the deterioration of humanity’s species-environment relationship, and the result was a biting critique that speaks to modern eco-Marxist concerns. I intend to show how Swift made Gulliver the center of an ecological crisis in Lilliput, Brobdingnag, and Houyhnhnmland, but made humanity itself the central cause of ecological crisis in Laputa, and that he did this to present his readers with the unfailingly poor ethics of our systems—which fail because they tend to occlude the width of scope necessary for understanding the breadth of nature. Swift was able to arrive at his ecocritical awareness of the humanity-environment crisis for at least two reasons. First, especially in *Gulliver*, we can point to Swift’s awareness of non-human agency, or how non-human entities (plants, animals, soil, etc.) perform impactful acts on humans and humanity: black powder could tear apart houses, a monkey almost kills Gulliver, animals provide fodder for humanity’s experiments, and horses can be wise. Just prior to composing *Gulliver*, Swift traveled hundreds of miles on horseback through a variety of backwoods, non-English speaking parts of Ireland and through difficult mountain terrain (Fox, “Biographical,” 18). Swift was incapable of performing this task alone, but, with his horse, he visited many places where civilization looked different. Joseph McMinn found enough of interest in these trips to turn them into a study called *Jonathan’s Travels: Swift and Ireland* (1999). Swift, in short, was aware at some level of the unintentional yet profound environmental impact of non-human agents on human life. In my reading, Swift uses the Yahoos to indicate a very thin, very messy boundary where what constitutes human and non-human gets blurry. Humans are not fully Yahoos, and Yahoos are not fully humans; however, by providing us with

Yahoo characteristics (physical descriptions), values (the female yahoos lament), and actions (feces flinging), he gives the reader, if not a full Yahoo civilization, enough of the Yahoo social ecology to compare it with human social ecology. In the ensuing comparison, it seems likely that Swift would have agreed with Timothy Morton that, in their eco-social relationships together, “Humans are more like nonhumans, and nonhumans are more like humans, than we like to think” (“Attune” 161). The Yahoos will have a profound impact on Gulliver’s life.

The turn of the screw is, of course, that when non-human agents become the yardstick for humanity, humanity’s attitude toward the gift of natural provisions becomes an ethical issue. Because humanity is provided for by nature, our response to the provision is an indication of what values our ethical systems hold dear. Near the end of the voyage to Houyhnhnmland, Gulliver tells us that he had clay for his walls, feathers for mats, animals for food and clothes, honey, and no necessities unmet (258). Swift has an opportunity to show us a version of humanity’s true colors, however, when this beneficence of nature is set next to the destructiveness of humanity. In fact, a transitional sentence after Gulliver’s acknowledgement of the prodigal gifts of nature, shows the reader that Gulliver can move from nature’s beneficence to the treachery of humanity without missing a breath. Gulliver says, “I enjoyed perfect health of body, and tranquillity of mind; I did not feel the treachery or inconstancy of a friend, nor the injuries of a secret or open enemy” (258). After this transition Swift yields up a very, very long list of human treacheries.

The embarrassingly generous gifts of nature, when juxtaposed with the destructiveness and depravity of humanity, brings us to the second component of Swift’s ecocritical awareness: his disappointment in the general effects of humanity’s agency—his misanthropy. Swift was interested in non-human agents, but, like Timothy Clark in *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, he could

also see that humanity is experienced “en masse” as a non-human agent itself: “a Leviathan more like a geological force than a reflective being” (147). Furthermore, through the king of Brobdingnag we know that Swift could imagine humanity as capable of causing Rob Nixon’s pernicious *Slow Violence*: ecological threats which “remain imperceptible to the senses, either because they are geographically remote, too vast or too minute in scale, or are played out across a time span that exceeds the instance of observation or even the physiological life of the human observer” (15). Swift’s project is important, therefore, because our brains are not wired to view humanity ecologically, to think how we impact the environment, to think how our environment impacts us, or to imagine how our collective force can be marshaled into a greater impact than any individual force could be. See, for example, Daniel Goleman’s recent book *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence* (2013) where he talks about how our brains can be “equipped with razor-sharp focus on smiles and frowns, growls and babies,” but, at the same time, “have zero neural radar for the threats to the global systems that support human life” because “they are too macro or micro for us to notice directly,” which means that “when we are faced with news of these global threats, our attention circuits tend to shrug” (148). Swift was disappointed with what he saw as humanity’s poor performance as a species, when faced with ecological questions.

In response to his disappointment with our species and his recognition of the effect of non-human agents, Swift presented us with an ecological perspective in which any creature whose necessities are greater than the environment can provide is a hazard to that environment because creatures who use up resources necessary for others to survive and thrive, necessarily present a danger to others. In Lilliput and Brobdingnag, Swift even manages to place individual human agency in brackets by generating uncertainty about where the human actually is in these interactions. Is the human Gulliver or the Lilliputians? Can the human body *really* be such a

massive, destructive, consumptive machine? Is Gulliver the human? Are the Brobdingnagians? Can the human body really be so diminutive and ineffectual? In Laputa, at the Academy of Projectors, Swift puts humanity's ridiculousness on display, and he does this by effectively cutting the projectors off emotionally from the animals and non-human agents which are exploited and destroyed over the course of humanity's failed experiments. The results at the Academy are disastrous not only because the projectors fail at their experiments, but because they demonstrate the breadth of humanity's cruelty: blowing up dogs and keeping hundreds of pigs on one acre of land are all "projects" of the Academy that are abusive and destructive. In Houyhnhnmland, on the other hand, Gulliver feels like he has found a balance amongst non-human agents, but his human agency makes him a danger to their ecology.

In our species-environment relationship, non-human agency makes an unintentional yet profound impact (i.e. of plants and animals) on human life, and eighteenth-century European culture would have given Swift plenty of reason to consider people who were not considering environmental, non-human agents. William Edward Harpole Lecky's volume on Ireland in *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century* says that, "Drunkenness and extravagance" amongst the gentry in Ireland lead to "a passion for gambling, sporting, drinking, cockfighting, acting, and dancing" and "a general love of ostentation and extravagance" (320). The fact that the gentry in Ireland had arrived at their property "from violent and recent confiscations" and "was not derived from the accumulated savings of industrious ancestors," meant that they understood themselves that they "held that property under the sense of perpetual insecurity," so a "reckless extravagance" was natural, "and it was equally natural that the traditions of that extravagance should descend to their successors" (320). The plants and animals needed to support this extravagant manner of eating and drinking over several generations seems to have

been no part of the eighteenth-century Irish gentry's concerns, but definitely seems to be part of Swift's concerns because he saw that the environment could not support this manner for long. Carole Fabricant notes that Swift often proclaims the primacy of one relation over another, but only in order to eventually undercut his own statement because his "narrative edifices" were "designed to self-destruct"; however, the ecological Swift presented below was so interested in demonstrating the destructive capacity of humanity's collective, non-human, systemic agency to affect the environment that, unusually for Swift, he does not employ this method of undercutting himself, and rather employs a method of proliferating examples and combining (15).

Gulliver's Body in Lilliput

One of the first considerations in the novel is ecological: because Gulliver was the third of five sons, his father's resources could not support him. Gulliver tells us that, for his dad, "The charge of maintaining" him (i.e., Gulliver) was "too great for a narrow fortune"—even though he had "a very scanty allowance" (15). Swift began *Gulliver's Travels* with a statement about the relationship between the environment that provides and the ecological requirements of the individual that will be thematic throughout the first voyage—and largely because the natural system cannot always support a particular mode of being. We do not always choose our mode of being; however, Swift also saw humanity's "mode of being" as constantly beyond a reasonable ecological extraction, so that the widespread nature of humanity's actual physical needs combines with the extravagant manner of acquiring them and puts us on the brink of an ecological crisis—i.e., causes metabolic rift. In Lilliput, Gulliver's body both causes and represents an ecological crisis. When he is as tall as a seven-story building, Gulliver tells the reader that "it may perhaps divert" them if he were to "give some account" of his "domestick,"

and his “manner of living” in the country of Lilliputians. The thought project extends domesticity to its limits because Gulliver tells us how he lives as a giant in his current oikos.

Gulliver’s description as his oikos, his household economy and ecology, and the relationship he has to the resources of the island is useful because employs a logic which tends to downplay the ecological crisis that his mere presence necessitates—much as pirates or colonial forces tend to downplay the crisis of their presence. Gulliver’s description of his relationship to the resources of the island proceeds in a seemingly objective and disconnected manner, but the description reflects his individual values. Gulliver thinks nothing of the fact that “two hundred sempstresses were employed to make” his shirts (56). He seemed to think nothing of the “three hundred Taylors” who were “employed” to make his clothes, or the other “three hundred cooks to dress his victuals,” and the more than a hundred waiters to serve him his food (57). In fact, he was so busy bragging, that thinking about the ecology or economy of this situation was simply not on his radar. We read about what he ate, that the Lilliputians were surprised to see him chew through bones, that their beef was very good (though their mutton was not as good as England’s), and that “their geese and Turkeys... far exceed ours” (57); however, even when his “way of living” draws the attention of his Imperial Majesty, Gulliver does not think on his relationship to the environment because he is too focused on “human” relationships. When Flimnap, the Lord High Treasurer—usually considered Robert Walpole (Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer (1721-1742))—attended a banquet and “often looked on” Gulliver “with a sour countenance,” Gulliver “would not seem to regard” it, and, furthermore, would “eat more than usual” for the “honour” of England (and to “fill the court with admiration”) (58). Gulliver only discovers that the extent of his consumption is a problem just before he leaves. In a private meeting with a “considerable person at court” (that he had done some previous service for), he

learns that one of the reasons put forth for getting rid of him is that “the charge of maintaining” him while he is living “would soon grow insupportable” (63).

When Gulliver is “set free” in the third chapter, he is allotted support equal to 1,728 Lilliputians, and only later finds out they had done some math (albeit some odd math) to reckon out how many Lilliputians could fit in his body (39). Then, in the middle of a conversation about the war with Belfescu, we read how Lilliputian “philosophers are in much doubt” about whether there could be lands filled with people like Gulliver, “because it is certain... an hundred mortals of” Gulliver’s bulk, would, in a short time, destroy all the fruits and cattle of his majesty’s dominions” (43). Gulliver must be some kind of alien (“dropt from the moon, or one of the stars” (42-43)), and his destruction of their fruit and cattle registers as dangerous, so the oiko-logical fact is that the charge of maintaining his physical reality was simply too great for the narrow fortune allotted to the Lilliputians. We have good reason to say that Swift is pointing to the notion that ecology should determine economy, not the other way around, and the problem is how unaware of our ecological impact we might be. Much as with his father, Gulliver’s experiences with the Lilliputians were determined by their perception of how he interacted with the non-human agents that affect their society (foodstuff supply), and Gulliver’s overwhelming humanity put the non-human (and human-like) agents in this situation into danger. Gulliver’s systems blindness served to emphasize how the consumption and destruction of non-human ecological elements determined his fate.

Resource management forms a large part of the reasoning the Lilliputians used for wanting Gulliver dead: they saw that maintaining his mere presence represented an ecological disaster; however, the Lilliputians were concerned not only about what he could consume, but also about what his body was capable of doing. As part of his stay in Lilliput—which Gulliver

seems to view as a kind of lark—he signs “Articles of Freedom” which, apparently unironically, say that he cannot leave Lilliput, and also that he cannot go into the capital; he cannot walk in fields or lie down in meadows, but he can walk on the high road, and he must be careful to not trample anyone or anything; he must assist with the express mail; he must be an ally against the kingdom’s enemies; he must use his strength to help raise stones; he must measure the island using his strides; and that he will be given an allowance for all of this labor. The Lilliputians seem oddly unconcerned with the idea that Gulliver might decide to simply destroy their kingdom, and even more so after Gulliver suggests to the king “a project” he “had formed” wherein he would “seize the enemies whole fleet” (45). Whether wittingly or unwittingly, Gulliver makes clear that his gigantic body is capable of not only consuming extraordinary quantities of resources, but also of physical destruction on a scale that would reduce “the whole empire of Blefescu into a province... of destroying the Big-Endian exiles” (47). Again, perhaps Gulliver was just using his body to brag about his capacities, but when he decides to micturate on the Lilliputian queen’s royal chambers, his physical capacities can be a benefit or a curse.

Between his consumption and possibilities for physical destruction, the Lilliputians recognized that Gulliver had to go, and they figured that gradually decreasing Gulliver’s provisions was the solution: “by gradually lessening” Gulliver’s “establishment,” he would “decay and consume in a few months” (64). Because they were afraid of the pernicious long-term effects of the metabolic rift Gulliver’s maintenance entails, they decided to starve him by withholding food—i.e, environmental resources. Again, Gulliver’s effect on and attitude toward non-humans determined his place in the Lilliputian system, but Gulliver’s regard of this fact seems misplaced. As he was leaving the islands of Lilliput and Blefescu he tells us that he “had the tallow of three hundred cows” for greasing his boat, “the carcasses of an hundred oxen, three

hundred sheep,” “as much meat ready dressed as four hundred cooks could provide,” “six cows and two bulls alive, with as many Yews and Rams,” and that his intention was “to carry them into my own country, and propagate the breed” (69-70). Gulliver had every intention of extracting a profit from the animals he did not consume. Gulliver did not even get home before giving one Peter Williams “a present of a cow and sheep big with young” and losing a sheep “that the rats on board carried away” (71). These acceptable losses of life, however, did not disrupt Gulliver’s scheme. As he tells us, “The short time I was in England, I made a considerable profit by shewing my cattle to many persons of quality, and others: and before I began my second voyage, I sold them for six hundred pounds”—an astonishing quantity in early eighteenth-century England that, according to the British National Archives “currency converter,” could pay a skilled tradesman for 6,666 days of work (71). While Gulliver’s desire for profit clouded his capacity for beneficent humanity, what is important for us to see here is the effect these non-human agents had on Gulliver and the ecological gift they represented for Gulliver’s profit.

At the end of the “Voyage to Lilliput,” there are some final considerations of the relationship between the environment and the charge of maintaining creatures. Indeed, Swift seems to be setting the stage for Gulliver’s experience in Brobdingnag because the small animals he took with him put his “revenue” to “great streights” on the voyage home. Gulliver took a lot of animals with him when he left the Lilliput/Blefescue archipelago, and he supplied himself with “a good bundle of hay, and a bag of corn” to “feed them on board”; however, the voyage winds up protracted, so after he arrives home, Gulliver describes the transplanted life of the Lilliputian animals “grazing in a bowling-green at *Greenwich*,” but he also tells us, somewhat out-of-sequence: “Neither could I possibly have preserved them [maintained them] in so long a

voyage, if the captain [environment he found himself in] had not allowed me some of his best biskit [ecological resources], which... was their constant food” (70-1). Even though the bodies of these animals were tiny, the demands their sheer being placed on the environment was almost their very own ecological crisis, so that when extravagance and overwhelming demand are not the issue, there must be other problems to address.

The problem with having a giant in a land of tiny people is that the tiny people could spend all their time maintaining and supporting the giant, and the giant will nevertheless bring the extinction of their race closer. Swift began *Gulliver’s Travels* by asking how to balance humanity’s destructiveness with the resources nature provides. Gulliver, for his part, seems to have been only partially aware of his destructive capacity. When he arrived in Lilliput he confesses to thinking about snatching up forty or fifty of natives and dashing them against the ground, but as the voyage moved on, we see that he could directly produce destruction by using his body—e.g., when he micturates on the queen’s chambers—or he could destroy indirectly via consumption—i.e., his necessary consumption would deplete Lilliputian resources. The physical realities of Gulliver’s body were, much as they were with his father, too great for the little island of little Lilliputians (or Blefescutians – who are also glad to see him go). In Brobdingnag, the problem is not that the environment cannot provide, but quite something else.

Gulliver’s Mind in Brobdingnag

We read at the end of the voyage to Lilliput of Gulliver’s “insatiable desire” to see new lands, and, indeed, at the very beginning of the second voyage, he sets out after two months because of an “active and restless” disposition. Gulliver, in other words, has not made a rational decision, but, guided by his human assumptions and desires, he wound up in Brobdingnag, so the voyage to Brobdingnag starts with Swift considering how a foundation of human assumption and

desire could lead us to places we could not have imagined. One of Gulliver's more telling assumptions is that: "As human creatures are observed to be more savage and cruel in proportion to their bulk" (78). There is no reason to believe that a "proportion to their bulk" makes any creatures, human or otherwise, "more savage and cruel." Some of the biggest creatures on the planet, both elephants and whales, spend their lives in groups, trying their best to get on in the world with some grace, so we have plenty of reasonable counter-arguments to the idea that bulkier creatures are more savage. In other words, the relationship between big and savage does not matter so much as how our desires and assumptions interact in our mind that forms the basis of the Brobdingnag voyage. Swift seems to want to remind us that our mind often governs our desires through assumptions built on our human systems of politics, economics, and culture, which makes our minds dangerous places.

The irrational assumption that bigger is crueler is simply the beginning for Gulliver. His imagination then proceeds to spin out the scale framing that he got a taste of in Lilliput. Before long, Gulliver has an epiphany:

Undoubtedly philosophers are in the right when they tell us, that nothing is great or little otherwise than by comparison: It might have pleased Fortune to let the Lilliputians find some nation, where the people were as diminutive in respect to them, as they were to me. And who knows but that even this prodigious race of mortals might be equally overmatched in some distant part of the world, whereof we have yet no discovery? (78)

Gulliver puts himself on a scale between the Lilliputians and the Brobdingnaggians, but he also intuitively understands that the scale must extend beyond these narrow bounds. The point is not necessarily the place where Gulliver finds himself on the scale, but the discovery of the scale itself, because

Gulliver intuits that, beyond the Lilliputians are societies “were as diminutive in respect to them, as they were to me,” and beyond the Brobdingnagians there are societies where that “prodigious race” would “be equally overmatched.” For Gulliver’s assumption about the relationship between size and savagery, if there are creatures even larger than these giants, then surely their savagery must be increased proportionably with the size of their bulk. In my reading, Swift was here more thoroughly addressing the issue of how systems built on assumptions cannot adequately explain experience and reality because assumptions rule out the need for comparison, and how, at some point, we start following our assumptions instead of thinking through the problems, but we do not necessarily recognize when that point was. We simply look up to find that we have been following our assumptions for some time and that our realities do not conform to our assumptions. We are thus often self-deceived as a species. Gulliver’s reflection, however, does start to hint at a way out of this mess, because instead of seeing things on a cold, bipolar, black-and-white field where there is only big and small, we must begin to understand how life exists on various spectrums that do not always fit our assumptions and desires—e.g., sundews are carnivorous plants and leaf slugs indirectly perform their own photosynthesis.

The assumptions we see Gulliver holding in Brobdingnag are self-deceptions that do not proceed from physical or natural reality, but rather from his social reality. Gulliver’s body is continually ridiculed throughout the Brobdingnag voyage (a bird, a dog, and a dwarf all serve him ill turns), but there was an incident with a monkey which leads to the king “rallying” Gulliver and a discussion of social reality’s place in forming our assumptions (and desires). Gulliver speculates that the monkey grabbed him, carried him to a rooftop, held him like a baby, and stuffed “victuals” into his mouth because he was taken “for a young one of his own species” (111). The event caused such injury in Gulliver that he was “forced to keep [his] bed a full

fortnight” (111). After this incident, and Gulliver’s recovery, the king began to “rally” Gulliver, and Gulliver defends himself by saying that if he were his right size, and the monkey was the right size, he could deal with a dozen of them together. The king’s robust laughter at this claim lead Gulliver to reflect:

How vain an attempt it is for a man to endeavour doing himself honour among those who are out of all degree of equality or comparison with him. And yet I have seen the moral of my own behaviour very frequent in England since my return; where a little contemptible varlet, without the least title to birth, person, wit, or common sense, shall presume to look with importance, and put himself upon a foot with the greatest person in the kingdom. (112)

This reflection places the “little contemptible varlet” in a relationship with “the greatest person in the kingdom,” and Gulliver reads his situation through the lens of the varlet because he sees that “doing himself honour” with the king of Brobdingnag puts him in a position comparable to the contemptible varlet. Gulliver knows that because his position in their country is low, the assumed social rubric of his environment puts him “below” the people he is trying to impress, and his reflection winds up saying that convincing people the social rubric they have been handed is inaccurate is difficult (if not impossible)—especially when the reason given for the inaccuracy is the ubiquitousness of human assumption. Humanity oftentimes thinks its way through social situations using rubrics against which the details and reality of the current situation have no bearing. The human mind is not useless in the voyage to Brobdingnag, but, rather, because the human mind is trained on habit, assumption, and desire, it winds up being unreliable when left to its own devices. Human systems of thought are contracted by the social, cultural, and political norms they come from, and they are therefore always tainted with assumptions and desires.

Even though he considers the place of contemptible varlets among the assumptions of social hierarchies, we soon read of Gulliver defending the mind despite its assumptions. He alters somewhat his assumption from earlier: “Reason did not extend itself with the bulk of the body: on the contrary, we observed in our country, that the tallest persons were usually least provided with it” (116). Gulliver’s assumptions tell him that, not only are bigger people “more savage and cruel,” but this fact is a result of the further assumption that bigger people are dumber, so he turns to an ecological argument to convince the king that small things can also be desirable: “among other animals, bees and ants had the reputation of more industry, art, and sagacity than many of the larger kind” (116). The scale framing of a small component of the environment like bees and ants being beneficial to the larger environment is the ecological setup that begins the long discourse between Gulliver and the king about European politics, law, custom, religion, economics, military, and business. Gulliver delivers his discourse “under five audiences,” but the sixth audience is entirely composed of the king’s very real, very difficult observations, and ends with the king’s statement—which Gulliver “shall never forget”: “I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives, to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth” (121). The king of Brobdingnag looks at Gulliver as a representative of humanity, but, unlike in Lilliput, he looks at him both in the sense of being an ambassador and as a representative example, and he says to this representative human that if the representation is faithful, then the danger he poses is not an immediate physical imperilment, so much as the prolonged and extended harm such a small creature could do to our environments as a result of our assumptions. At this point, we can say that Swift did not make Gulliver’s body the immediate eco-crisis in Brobdingnag, but rather the human mind which directs the body.

Gulliver's reaction is to immediately tell the king of Brobdingnag about black powder in a move almost too ridiculous to think about. Gulliver, in an attempt to recover the value of his own people, tells the king of iron balls that "would not only destroy whole ranks of an army at once; but batter the strongest walls to the ground"; of "an engine" that could "rip up the pavement, tear the houses to pieces, burst and throw splinters on every side, dashing out the brains of all who came near"; and of "tubes" that "charged with the proper quantity of powder and balls, would batter down the walls of the strongest town in his dominion" (123). Swift's intention, from our eco-critical perspective, could thus be summed up: not only do humanity's desires and assumptions manage to create dangerous social situations and institutions that seem gradually harmful, but humanity's imagination is capable of inventions with enormous destructive capacity. The king of Brobdingnag was "struck with horror at the description" Gulliver gives him of "those terrible engines" and "amazed how so impotent and groveling an insect... could entertain such inhuman ideas" (123). The stakes of our social reality are quite apparent when humanity can entertain inhuman ideas with nature. Physically, Gulliver's human body in Brobdingnag is irrelevant, but his mental or intellectual capacities—especially when annexed to their natural perversion by assumption and desire—are a genuine eco-crisis.

The King of Brobdingnag's true horror was, however, that somebody could "appear wholly unmoved at all the Scenes of Blood and Desolation" (123). Much as how in Lilliput Gulliver consumes resources and physically destroys structures, in Brobdingnag Gulliver's mind can create destruction, and he chooses to valorize destruction over sympathy. In fact, the King is so appalled by Gulliver's description that he said, "he would rather lose half his kingdom than be privy" to the secret of "a certain powder" (124). Gulliver sincerely offers black powder as a pre-emptive solution to problems that do not exist for the king, but the king sees this black powder as

an ecological crisis on the same level as genocide, and he does the “humane” thing by rejecting it. Gulliver ironically describes this rejection as “a strange effect of *narrow principles and short views!*” (124). Humanity amongst non-human agents (in this case black powder) in Swift’s Brobdingnag paints a picture in which our species appears small, but our impact can be massively dangerous. Humanity’s eco-crisis in Brobdingnag is that we are dangerously capable of rationalizing our destructiveness into a perceived (although erroneously perceived) good because of desires built on assumptions, and this might be why the Brobdingnaggian book of “morality and devotion” not only “treats of the weakness of human kind,” but also makes the claim that, “Nature was degenerated in these latter declining ages of the world” (126).

Humanity in Swift’s day was solidifying the assumption that we were the peak of existence, and decidedly because of our ability to Reason; however, the king’s analysis allows us to see that Swift saw human reason as capable of causing gradual decay because we reasonably produce desires and systems that are ruled by assumptions. This is why the king says, “Whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together” (124). The king’s sentiments here are an echo of the “Drapier’s Letters”: “Few politicians... are half so useful members of a commonwealth, as an honest farmer; who, by skillfully draining, fencing, manuring and planting, hath increased the intrinsick value of a piece of land; and thereby done a perpetual service to his country; which it is a great controversy whether any of the former ever did, since the creation of the world” (202). This is, perhaps, Swift’s flirtation with anarchism (see Edward Said’s “Swift’s Tory Anarchy”), but the question for Swift is not about the value of government or its officials, and rather the cost-benefit analysis of activities like husbandry compared to governance. Swift is simply of the

opinion that in the social cost-benefit analysis, the farmer's natural concerns put him far ahead of the politician in the world of virtue, and we are thereby asked to take this alternative system of co-ordination and valuation into serious consideration.

Gulliver's Mind-Body in Houyhnhnmland

At the beginning of the voyage to the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver left his wife and children (again) because he could not learn "the lesson of knowing when [he] was well," and then his ship met with a "Captain Pocock"—who was "a little too positive in his own opinions" (which was the cause of his destruction)—so both Gulliver's ignorance and Captain Pocock's over-confidence offer us examples of how humans can be ill-equipped to determine when they are wrong. As with the other voyages, Swift immediately announces yet another problem with humanity: we exhibit a dangerous, simultaneous combination of over-confidence and ignorance. While enslaving people should be intuitively wrong, Gulliver's "trade" as a surgeon is an example of how his confidence in social systems and structures were influencing him, because, as Hugh Thomas reminds us the surgeon of a colonial vessel was charged with picking the best slaves: "The surgeon on the slave ship was in charge of all matters relating to health... and was always involved in major decisions about the voyage," and "a German surgeon" gave a vivid description: "As soon as a sufficient number of the unfortunate victims were assembled... they were examined by me. The healthy and strong ones were bought, while the magrones (the weak) ... were rejected" (397).

The ecological crisis in Houyhnhnmland is, however, not merely that individuals often cannot determine for themselves when they are wrong (e.g., enslaving people is wrong), but also that people frequently have dispositions, or mind-body coordinations, that tend to skew the physical data we receive bodily from our environment. That is, the mind and body are inevitably

combined, but they do not always see things the same way, which is why Swift believed (much like Laurence Sterne later) that an individual human conscience was unable to determine what was good, that humanity's conscience is inevitably tainted (if even by mistakenness), and that humanity therefore needed data from the church to evaluate situations properly. Anne Gardiner tells us that, for Swift, "Conscience" was a "Judge" that was best "controlled by evidence from sacred texts and church history" (22). Gulliver frequently mis-evaluates situations on the island of the Houyhnhnms because of a lack of coordination between the physical and mental realms. When a female Yahoo makes advances toward Gulliver, he does not respond how she expects, and, "she quitted her grasp, *with the utmost reluctancy*, and leaped upon the opposite bank, where she stood gazing and howling all the time" (249). The Yahoo female *wants* to hang onto Gulliver, but Gulliver's human incompatibility with Yahoo society, combined with his (over-)confidence in his humanity, makes him react in an anti-social manner. The voyage to Houyhnhnmland demonstrates that in humanity the body and mind combine to create a creature that does not know its impact as a species, and even goes so far as to reject nature's advances.

Again, Gulliver mis-reads several situations in Houyhnhnmland because he evaluated physical realities for himself, and his evaluations are almost always wildly flawed. Gulliver saw some Yahoos when he first arrived on the island, and then he decided to observe them secretly. His description is lengthy, but worth quoting at length because of the detached cognitive objectivity it seems bathed in:

Their shape was very singular and deformed... Their heads and breasts were covered with a thick hair, some frizzled, and others lank; they had beards like goats, and a long ridge of hair down their backs, and the fore parts of their legs and feet; but the rest of their bodies was bare, so that I might see their skins,

which were of a brown buff colour. They had no tails, nor any hair at all on their buttocks, except about the anus, which, I presume, nature had placed there to defend them as they sat on the ground, for this posture they used, as well as lying down, and often stood on their hind feet. They climbed high trees as nimbly as a squirrel, for they had strong extended claws before and behind, terminating in sharp points, and hooked. They would often spring, and bound, and leap, with prodigious agility. The females were not so large as the males; they had long lank hair on their heads, but none on their faces, nor any thing more than a sort of down on the rest of their bodies, except about the anus and pudenda. The dugs hung between their fore feet, and often reached almost to the ground as they walked. The hair of both sexes was of several colours, brown, red, black, and yellow. (209)

From a scientific standpoint, the physical appearance of these non-humans was attended to with objective calm. He describes their “thick hair,” their “beards like goats,” the “long ridge of hair down their backs,” their “brown buff skin,” their “strong extended claws,” and the various colors of their hair. He goes on to be almost amazed by their abilities. He says they could “spring, and bound, and leap, with prodigious agility” and they could climb trees “as nimbly as a squirrel.” His description reads like it could be from a scientific journal outlining the characteristics of a new species, but what I want to emphasize is that nothing in this description is *necessarily* off-putting if he is describing an animal—excepting perhaps the subjectively determined “deformed.” Gulliver’s emotional response, which comes later, was, however, “Upon the whole, I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal, or one against which I naturally conceived so strong an antipathy” (209). The physical sense of sight that formed the first

encounter with these animals was responded to with social disgust, but the physical description does not at all make clear why Gulliver thought them so disagreeable—for the moment—beyond a simple disposition toward them. He had a response that he felt was appropriate, but there is a mismatch between the physical and the cognitive precedent for the response. The matter only seems to get worse when his response was “confirmed” as the Yahoos hurl feces at him. Gulliver sees their feces hurling as a confirmation of his evaluation of the Yahoos, but the event in question resulted from the fact that he used his sword to strike a Yahoo who was not threatening him (209). Gulliver physically strikes first, whether through fear, ignorance, or confidence, and then, when they respond in the manner suited to their society, he judges the Yahoos to be filthy, savage beasts.

Gulliver’s discussion with his Houyhnhnm master about the effects of black powder is a further indication that humans have trouble cognitively assessing physical reality. Strikingly similar to the one he gave to the King of Brobdingnag on the effects of black powder (to wit: “Dead bodies drop down in pieces from the clouds, to the great diversion of the spectators” (230)), Gulliver’s Houyhnhnm master urges him to stop his description and tells him that he could see a Yahoo intentionally engaging with the destruction that Gulliver described, but he does not blame a Yahoo for being a Yahoo. If humanity is anything like Gulliver’s description, then the Houyhnhnm master is horrified. The master’s argument against trusting reason as a human faculty (which the king of Brobdingnag set the stage for) is that, if humanity’s version of “Reason” could be “capable of such enormities” (as the destruction Gulliver described), then perhaps the “Corruption of that faculty might be worse than brutality itself” (231). If “reason” defines humanity, in other words, we might be in trouble when “reason” evaluates a physical situation and determines that the destruction of peoples, animals, and lands is probably fine. The

king of Brobdingnag is appalled that Gulliver or humanity can even imagine doing these terrible things. While the Houyhnhnm master is appalled at the carnage, what truly gives him “a Disturbance in his mind,” in an echo of the conversation with the king of Brobdingnag, is that Gulliver could call doing these things reasonable (230). Gulliver might have learned from the King of Brobdingnag that he was wrong about black powder in sympathetic terms, but he tried the same information on his Houyhnhnm master in terms of reason, only to find that the Houyhnhnm master agreed with the king of Brobdingnag: humanity’s primary version of systematic thought from physical sense data both causes unsympathetic systems blindness and rationalizes needless destruction.

Swift gives us two problems in the first half of the novel (Gulliver’s individual mind and his individual body—both capable of generating ecological crisis), but only in order to compound those problems when they combine on the island of the Houyhnhnms: a destructive human body combined with a destructive human mind. Gulliver not only looks like a Yahoo (which consequently somewhat looks like a human), he is also a feral character who is capable of rudimentary reasoning—as the Houyhnhnms might have put it. What generates the potential ecological crisis for the Houyhnhnms was not Gulliver’s humanity *or* the fact that he looked like a Yahoo, but rather the combination. By virtue of the fact that he looks like the Yahoos, and by virtue of the fact that he can reason himself into leading a potential insurrection—capable of disrupting both the balances of power and ecology—he is asked to leave Houyhnhnm island: “It was to be feared, I [i.e., Gulliver] might be able to seduce them [i.e., Yahoos] into the woody and mountainous parts of the country, and bring them in troops by night” (261). We know that the Houyhnhnms were concerned about the “natural pravity” and ravenousness of Yahoos (261), and they were quite certain that the Yahoos presented such a potential danger—certain enough that

the only “debate” they ever had at their Grand Assemblies was whether the genocide of the Yahoos would be valuable. So, Gulliver’s proximity to Yahoo-ness is a major concern. At one point in Houyhnhnm history they had to have a “a general hunting” of the Yahoo in order to thin their numbers because the Yahoos were becoming too numerous while being known to be violent. If Gulliver can marshal them into troops, this presents a real danger.

The Houyhnhnms are well aware of the danger presented by the Yahoos en masse. In the Grand Assembly, a “speaker for the affirmative” (i.e., affirming that the Yahoos should be exterminated) says that they were violent enough to “kill and devour,” they were “filthy, noisome, and deformed,” and that they were “restive and indocible, mischievous and malicious” (253). The Houyhnhnm discussion of the Yahoo genocide has been treated at length by Claude Rawson in *God, Gulliver, and Genocide*, and he makes the point that the “final solution” of the Yahoos is always “deferred” by the Houyhnhnms (273). What I want to point out particularly, however, is that the reader is never actually presented with a “speaker for the negative”—i.e., that the Yahoos should *not* be exterminated. The savvy oiko-logical reader can, however, gather some arguments that the Yahoos are important components of the Houyhnhnm oikos because the Houyhnhnms keep Yahoos like farm animals who labor. The Houyhnhnms keep the Yahoos in kennels. Yahoos pull sledges. Gulliver uses Yahoo skins for his shoes, and he uses Yahoo “tallow” (rendered fat) to grease his boat before he leaves the island. Neither the Houyhnhnms nor Gulliver can make appropriate decisions regarding the Yahoos because neither the Houyhnhnms nor Gulliver can think the ecological reality of the Yahoos properly. In this way, Swift manages to show us that both Gulliver and the noble Houyhnhnms can be affected by systems blindness because of the way we reason through physical data. The Yahoos represent a situation in which the cost-benefit analysis of an ecological component does not tend toward

noticeable beneficence (although some benefit is unnoticeably derived from their presence) and our systems blind us to their alternative effects.

To the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver might be a unique Yahoo, but he is a Yahoo nonetheless (his master calls him “a certain wonderful Yahoo” (254)) because he physically resembles one, and their system for determining Yahoo-ness is based on a pre-determined form. Once this matter is settled for the Houyhnhnms, there is not really a way for Gulliver to convince them that they ought to stop using their socio-cultural rubrics. There was apparently nobody to speak on behalf of the Yahoos at the assembly, and there is no Houyhnhnm available to argue that Gulliver is not a Yahoo. The fact that he is, to all Houyhnhnm intents and purposes, a Yahoo, albeit one in possession of a decidedly different mind-body coordination, forces the horses to consider how a Yahoo with a smattering of Reason would be affected by a “natural pravity” and natural dispositions toward desiring unregulated consumption and away from “honest” labor. What the Houyhnhnms reason is that there is only one natural course this combination could take: increased destructive capacity. While the eco-crisis presented by the genocide of the Yahoos might not have registered at the Houyhnhnm Grand Assembly, the genocidal capacities of a Yahoo with a smattering of reason swayed by ravenous desire is registered fully, and the danger Gulliver presents is why the Houyhnhnms ask him to leave.

Swift knew that dispositions like confidence, self-confidence, over-confidence, ravenousness, and ignorance are all mind-body coordinations that churn out faulty systems of thought, so he highlights yet another arena humanity makes in-roads toward causing ecological crisis: if we are not causing eco-crisis with the body’s needs and possibilities or the mind’s ability to conceive of destructive engines, we are also affected by dispositions of mind-body coordination that come from who-knows-where and often lead us astray. The Houyhnhnms were

worried that Gulliver might be able to coordinate the Yahoos into an uprising against them, and Swift worried that humanity might be a greater danger to its ecology than we can know. Gulliver's Houyhnhnm Master even goes so far as to say that humanity, when using its fallible version of "Reason" (which, according to him, can be ignorant and dangerously or even inherently corruptible—like the Yahoos) to coordinate itself with nature, will always distort reality. Gulliver's various relations to animals, culminating with the Yahoos, have been part of the narrative engine driving us toward what Swift wants us to learn about non-human agents: we are integrated into physical systems with them whether we desire, recognize, or assume otherwise, and to disregard that fact amounts to a species-wide madness. In Laputa, he will turn from non-human agents to a focus on human agents, where the situation only gets worse.

Gullivers in Laputa

Laputa was the final journey composed, the third journey in the text we received, and most widely panned journey in the *Travels*. John Arbuthnot said in a letter: "I tell you freely, the part of the projectors is the least brilliant," and Swift acknowledge it in a letter to Pope, "Dr. Arbuthnot likes the projectors least" (Swift, *The Writings* 586, 590). But at the beginning, as with the other voyages, Swift tells us what will be of interest in this voyage because he showed us Gulliver being convinced by another human ship's captain that he should do something ecologically disastrous: become another ship's surgeon and pick slaves. In other words, Swift's compositional "coup de grace" was that, though humanity's individual bodies and minds are dangerous (separate or coordinated), the larger problem, literally, is that the whole of humanity tends to be the same in these regards. Gulliver meets himself in the persuasive captain. Swift extends the argument from the island of the Houyhnhnms to show us how humanity is capable of fooling itself as a species into assuming we have a complete understanding of the humanity-

environment relationship. In Laputa, humanity's problem is that, though we are a group of bodies that need ecological resources, we nevertheless tend to provoke ecological crises *as a species*, and, for Swift, this exemplifies a species-wide madness.

The Laputans are a whole culture of humans so wrapped up in mathematical thought that they require a “flapper”—one who “tells” the Laputans when they should talk by “flapping” them on the mouth or that they should “listen” by flapping them on the ear—to rouse them from their intellectual stupor in order to participate in social life. They require environmental stimulation to bring them out of the mind. Gulliver confesses that he felt a little unusual in Laputa, and basically because they simply disregard him—much as he did the animals in Lilliput. After a while, Gulliver says (essentially), that Laputa is boring, the food is bad, and the music is bad, so he left. The Laputans are closer to humanity than anywhere else Gulliver has visited because they are roughly the same size and roughly as reasonable as the humanity we know. The only problem is that they are anti-social because of how they utilize their humanity and their ability to reason. The anti-social effect of a humanity which focuses intensely on its various systems is precisely what Swift will ask us to consider with the island of Laputa, the zoo of human scientific projectors, Balnibarbi (over which Laputa floats), Glubbdubdrib, Luggnagg, and Japan. I argue that humanity is the principle of the voyage to Laputa, and Swift asks us to consider the “nature” of humanity when we are all essentially like Gulliver.

In the Academy, all human scientific conceptions of “nature” are infected with both social and individual imaginings and inaccuracies, so that we are never sure of what “nature” we are actually talking about—Timothy Morton reminds us in *Ecology without Nature* that “Nature” might just be an “arbitrary rhetorical concept” (22). In fact, the non-human animals that appear in this voyage are primarily working animals or animals that were being experimented on—

sometimes to death—yet Gulliver went from enclosure to enclosure in the Academy and learned about the individual humans inside. All the projectors at the academy fall victim to the trap that was presented during the voyage of the Houyhnhnms (i.e., disregarding the fact that we might sometimes be *incapable* of knowing when we are wrong because of a faulty mind-body connection), but the disposition that resulted is ironically always some form of constant confidence that drew them further and further away from “reasonableness.” The indefatigable scientific confidence of the Laputans—which ought necessarily to be fleeting—is their own un-making. The projectors’ experiments were not doing what they claimed, but their experiments all wound up doing the same thing: gathering data that supports their assumptions—though faced with contradictory data. Forcing air into dogs kills them, language is not a random collection but a constantly developing development, and six hundred pigs on an acre of land is abusive. As the projectors and their terrible scientific plans blur together, Swift seems to be saying that this is humanity. We are associated with the very same people who are doing completely asinine, sometimes very dangerous things, especially in terms of our ability to cause ecological crisis.

The voyage to Laputa, however, is not merely about these scientific projectors. It starts with the mathematically inclined Laputans, but he moves to Balnibarbi at the beginning of the fourth chapter of the voyage, where he considers humanity’s versions of ecology. Lord Munodi takes Gulliver on a tour of Lagado (Balnibarbi’s capital), where “the houses very strangely built” were also “out of repair,” where “the several methods used by farmers in managing their lands... were wholly unaccountable,” where Gulliver “could not discover one ear of corn, or blade of grass,” and where “professors contrive new rules and methods of agriculture and building” (162-164). Lord Munodi’s estate (his *oikos*), on the other hand, had “neatly built” farmers cottages, “vineyards, corngrounds and meadows,” and a “delightful prospect” (163). The oiko-logical

method espoused by most of the Balnibarbians yields nothing but barrenness, and yet they seem to have doubled down on their belief in its efficacy. The oiko-logical method espoused by Munodi, though “ridiculed and despised” by his countrymen, yields up bounties from the natural world. Munodi, however, and even though his method is more ecologically successful, will need to yield to the social pressures of his fellow-citizens or risk “the censure of pride, singularity, affectation, ignorance, caprice” (164). The humans of Balnibarbi, though probably having the best intentions, nevertheless are compelled by their social ecology to diminish the values of their environmental ecology by using their mental ecology inappropriately. Fracking and drilling for oil in nature preserves seem modern equivalents.

Then Gulliver goes to the academy of projectors, but the academy of projectors with their scientific innovations are only two chapters of the voyage. Though they may be the most remembered of the voyage, after the academy of projectors, Gulliver winds up on the island of Glubdubdribb where “the governor and his family,” through his skills in “necromancy” are “served and attended by... the dead” (181). The island is an island of sorcerers. The reader has now encountered human systems of math that leads to anti-social behavior, ecology that leads to unproductive nature, science that leads to nothing, and now magic—that will lead to uncomfortable realities for humanity. The governor’s skills in necromancy do not wind up helping humanity so much as they wind up providing a litany of reasons why humanity can be considered terrible because Swift uses the necromancy of the islanders to call up characters from history. In local history, Gulliver asks how Glubdubdribbian families got wealthy and powerful. He finds that, “Perjury, oppression, subornation, fraud, pandarism, and the like infirmities, were among the most excusable arts they had to mention...” (187). Of what he calls “modern history” he discovers that “a whore can govern the back-stairs, the back-stairs a council, and the council a

senate...” (186). He discovers that “perjury, oppression, subordination, fraud, panderism, and the like infirmities were” the most “excusable arts” for achieving greatness amongst humanity, but there are others who achieved greatness through “sodomy or incest,” “the prostituting of their own wives and daughters,” and even “betraying their country or their prince” (187). Human history, in other words, fares no better than humanity’s attempts with math, science, ecology, and magic. In the Laputa voyage, we bungle things with whatever system we try to approach them.

Toward the end of his stay on the island of Glubdubdribb, Gulliver noticed that “every person called up made exactly the same appearance he had done in the world,” the effect was to give him “melancholy reflections” about “how much the race of humankind was degenerated among us within these hundred years past” (188). Far from a progressivist evolution, Gulliver in Laputa, much as the philosopher in Brobdingnag, notices a degenerative devolution or a historical tendency toward degeneration. Gulliver notices that “the pox” had “altered every lineament of an English Countenance: shortened the size of bodies, unbraced the nerves, relaxed the sinews and muscles, introduced a sallow complexion, and rendered the flesh loose and rancid” (188). Gulliver says just before this that, “truly informed of the springs and motives of great enterprises and revolutions,” he comes to have a “low” opinion “of human wisdom and integrity” because “of the contemptible accidents to which they owed their success” (186). The syphilis epidemic (the pox) in England (an accident resultant from, possibly, Christopher Columbus’s contact with the New World (Smith 265)) is an example of an “accident” caused by human interference in the world which nevertheless lead to a degenerative devolution. We are not always marching toward better, toward greater, and toward superiority, and this is precisely because there are elements of chance in the world which can cause the opposite tendencies.

The immortal Struldbrugs of Luggnagg Island are a perfect example of not marching toward “better” because their birth was “a mere effect of chance,” but their life “had not only all the follies and infirmities of other old men, but many more which arose from the dreadful prospect of never dying” (195, 197). When the islanders of Luggnagg ask Gulliver what he would do if he were immortal, he tells them he would become rich, intelligent, and “a living treasury of knowledge and wisdom” (195); however, the islanders inform him that “the system of living” he had contrived “was unreasonable and unjust” precisely because he assumed perpetual youth (197). The human systems of math, ecology, science, history, magic, and plain old living are apparently all based on assumptions—which we may or may not be aware of—and these assumptions color our understanding of the world. In Laputa, although the “scientific projectors” are probably the most remembered, Swift takes down not only science, but math, environmental management methods, magic, and history with the notion that we bring our human assumptions to all of them. On top of everything, there does not really seem to be an upshot. For Swift, that is just the lot of our species. Gulliver tells us that after seeing the Struldbrugs become “dead in the law” at eighty, “lose their teeth and hair” at ninety, not understand each other because “the language” is “always upon the flux,” and wind up “despised and hated,” his “keen appetite for perpetuity of life was much abated” (198-99).

In the final chapter of the voyage, Swift adds religion to the list of human systems that need to be considered carefully. Gulliver tells the Japanese that he will not trample on the cross because he wound up there accidentally with no intention to trade. In fact, Gulliver gets away with the ruse only by accident. The king tells his officers to let Gulliver pass the cross, “As it were by forgetfulness” (202). Gulliver almost meets his end by virtue of his dedication to religion. Another version of this religious “close call” happens on shipboard when “a malicious

rogue” tells everybody that he did not trample on the cross (203). Gulliver gets lucky because they decide to whip the tattletale instead. Swift was even capable of seeing that, while humanity’s systems of religion might be worth the potential danger, it was nevertheless the case that humanity’s systems of religion can put us in some dangerous situations.

So, throughout the voyage to Laputa, almost all of humanity’s systems are taken to task. Mathematics can be a mere distraction, our social desires can effect our environmental realities, our science can lead us down unnecessary trails, our history seems to only teach us how terrible we are to each other, our systems of living proceed from assumptions, and even our religions can put us in danger. Furthermore, Swift found humanity’s pernicious degenerative devolution on display when he saw that, although we could be finding ways to benefit ourselves and others, on average, there is nevertheless something pernicious about our cumulative effect. Swift, like a modern-day “dark ecologist,” saw the natural tendency of humanity as a gradual tendency away from virtue, and, bafflingly, as a species, moving slowly toward the harmful or hurtful. Humanity became more monstrous for Swift when he recognized that we could help yet tend toward hurt and harm. The fact that we can help each other but we choose to hurt each other is unforgivable for Swift—particularly if that cruelty is arrived at reasonably. Swift’s misanthropy, therefore, came from a detestation of the species utilizing its gifts and abilities in a manner contra-instinctual: to harm its environment. The problem is precisely that while humanity ought to view the violent extraction, use, and abuse of natural resources as appalling, many humans seem to think that the natural world is simply theirs for the taking.

We must think of the force that human social systems exert on an environment because societies have vastly greater needs than an individual. The natural world is not in some abstract competition with our species, and belief in this abstract competition amounts to our species

deceiving itself. Our ecological reality literally *provides* for our species. Furthermore, ecological reality provides us plenty of examples how cooperation can be every bit as powerful as competition when dealing with the creative advance of societies. The “nasty, brutish and short” version of Hobbesian social systems quite simply does not have to be the way we go about things. Humanity can choose to be a great threat to the human-environment relationship or an active participant in a cooperative becoming *with* nature. Language might be what some see as setting humanity apart from animals, but no animal knowingly goes about destroying its environment. Humanity’s ability to cause eco-crisis *or* eco-benefit sets us on another plane.

Conclusion

The island of Laputa moves by virtue of an “adamant” base and a magnetic loadstone that is shuttled hither and thither to move the island around and raise it up and down (154). The Laputans use this technology to literally maintain and utilize the high ground, which, in an interpolated story (left out of the original 1726 version and the 1735 Faulkner edition because the story tells the story of the seditious “The Drapier’s Letters” and the controversy in Dublin and Ireland against Wood’s poor quality of copper currency), is precisely what the king would do if the people on the island below were causing problems: he would block out the sun and threaten to crush them in imminent eco-crisis. When the people below are unanimously devoted to their cause, however, this “high ground” techno-island is assailable. The citizens on the island below (Ireland) “broke entirely the kings’ measures” by building towers to keep the island from crushing them, storing up provisions (so that the island blocking the rain and sun does not affect them), and finding a way to reverse the magnetism—which makes their little domestic space even more magnetic and endangers the floating island (and its inhabitants) with being pulled down and stuck on the ground below (160). Laputa (England) was forced to concede. In this

brief story, Swift shows us that our human technological systems are not saviors, because humans, especially those in power, as frequently use the technology they have for destruction as they do for advancement. The ecological question that can be posed from these considerations amounts to: how do we trust the conscience of our species, especially the collective conscience of those in power, when we know that individuals make dangerous, questionable decisions—based on inaccurate perspectives, unsympathetic reason or imagination, unaccountable mind-body coordinations, and accumulations of systemic forces—that put other humans, non-humans, and their environments in danger? We know we endanger our own oikos.

To read *Gulliver's Travels* and maintain the confident assumption that humanity makes appropriate ecological decisions seems difficult. Swift, at every turn, demonstrated how the view from within a human system (economic, social, or political) was responsible for the occlusion of some other reality. As we have seen, Swift recognized that the environment cannot support just any mode of living, that non-human agents have no necessary truck with humanity's assumptions about needs or production, that our environment suffers from our modes of being and our assumptions, and that we tend toward this end as a group. What eco-crisis meant to Swift was that humanity has been the cause of and is currently causing problems with the provider of its means of subsistence, which demonstrates a kind of species-wide psychosis, or an inability to attune that is not demonstrated in other non-human agents. That is to say, Swift saw that humanity was the cause of metabolic rift, so he concluded that humanity itself was deeply flawed, and our species has opportunities for improvement.

For several reasons, his misanthropy was a concern with our species' flaws and (im)possibilities for improvement. First are Swift's religious and spiritual reasons: humanity's species-wide foibles are an effect of humanity's natural depravity. Ecological crises that we

cause just by being us are a demonstration (for Swift) of the inherent wrong-headedness of the entire species. Swift was, of course, fighting against the oncoming “individualism” being promulgated by the the Earl of Shaftesbury where “human nature is naturally benevolent” (Fox, “Introduction,” 3). Swift could look around the troubled world and conclude that we are absolutely not naturally benevolent, and a lot of this conclusion would come from his religious background: “As a moralist, he inherited a tradition that saw human nature itself as inherently self-serving and corrupt, and the original sin, pride, as a “main cause of psychological distortion”” (Fox, “Introduction,” 2). Now, the truth is probably that we are neither naturally depraved or naturally beneficent, but rather that we possess both capacities, so we take Swift’s point to be: as your system tells you to believe, so you shall believe, so be wary of your systems.

Second, Swift was concerned with eco-crises because of Ireland/England relations. From the so-called “Beef Act of 1667” (i.e., the “Importation Act”) to the “Wool Act of 1699,” England controlled the ecological reality of Ireland with devastating consequences to the Irish people because the control came from afar. The English people were ruining Ireland, much like the situation in Laputa, by referring to their systems of governance first and legislating foreign environments. As Swift once put it in “On the Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland”:
“The first cause of our misery, is the intolerable hardships we lie under in every branch of trade, by which we are become as hewers of wood, and drawers of water, to our rigorous neighbours” (106). Indeed, Swift calculates that there are enough natural resources on the island to support four times Ireland’s population, but because of England’s oppressive laws, absentee landlords, and how English style/taste (disposition) affects Ireland’s desires, the British were unable to see Ireland as anything other than an ecological slave state. As demonstrated here and above in the peasant’s breaking of the king’s measures, Swift and the Irish people saw things differently.

Third, and most importantly for the research presented here, whether or not he was consciously aware, Swift concerned himself with eco-crisis whenever he needed a weapon for harassing people out of their comfortable, confident assumptions. Displaying humanity-caused eco-crisis allowed him to blame the entire group of humans without necessarily offending any particular individuals, while, at the same time, still making all individuals culpable. Holding humanity itself accountable for ecological systems blindness allowed Swift to simultaneously vent his spleen at “that animal man” and hopefully provoke (i.e., vex) some individuals into a fit of conscience. As he says in his sermon “On the Testimony of Conscience”:

Whenever our conscience accuseth us, we are certainly guilty; but we are not always innocent, when it doth not accuse us: for very often through the hardness of our hearts, or the fondness and favour we bear to ourselves, or through ignorance or neglect, we do not suffer our conscience to take any cognizance of several sins we commit. (44-45)

While eco-crisis might not be necessary for our individual salvation, by presenting eco-crisis as a problem for our species, Swift offered its amelioration as a means to a better future relationship with our planet, and implied that humanity can no longer allow our economic, political, and social systems to determine our view of an ecological reality just because our conscience has not been activated. Swift’s notion of the conscience, that it does not always accuse us, even when we are guilty, makes an even question of whether we can trust our species’ collective conscience. We are enmeshed with each other and a variety of non-human agents, and sometimes we need to investigate our own systems of understanding to see whether those systems might not be hardening our hearts, making us self-involved (instead of thinking about the species), or promoting ignorance and neglect.

Through the investigation of humanity and ecology in *Gulliver's Travels*, the modern reader can find an upshot: though we might be like Gulliver, we can choose to *not* be like Gulliver. Like Gulliver in Lilliput, we can use our bodies to consume our resources, and we can use our bodies to destroy, but we can also use our bodies constructively. Like Gulliver in Brobdingnag, we can use our minds to generate destructive possibilities like black powder and certain forms of government, or we can use our minds to produce sustainable alternatives. Like Gulliver in Houyhnhnmland, we can accept that our mind-body dispositions are accurate, or we can thoroughly investigate our own assumptions—although we would have to accept them as assumptions before we start investigating them. Like Gulliver in Laputa, we can recognize that all of humanity's systems for approaching the world present us with the flaws of humanity, but then we can take the next step and search for something better on behalf of our species. The point is that we get to choose which capacity of our species we will activate. We can activate our depravity and recklessly, or we can activate our beneficence. If we focus on the latter, we can attune with our environment and we can prick our conscience into activity with the recognition that we are culpable for metabolic rift as a species. A few individuals go quite far in directing the species, so, lest we end up like a world of Lagado's projectors, we must all take up responsibility for our species' actions.

When Swift saw eco-crisis, he saw possibilities for humanity to be a better species, and, through Gulliver's adventures, he roundaboutly gives us various ways to think how we can accomplish that. We can work toward attuning to our surroundings like Gulliver does not do in Lilliput. We can make compassion and benevolence intuitive—even if they are not “natural”—like Gulliver does not do in Brobdingnag. We can remember to maintain a *healthy* skepticism of “Reason”—like Gulliver does not do in Houyhnhnmland—because it is produced by the systems

we are working from within (even the noble Houyhnhnms reasonably consider genocide). We can beware of any species, even our own, that is so taken with its own accomplishments that it disregards ecological reality for some abstract cognitive or economic advancements.

CHAPTER 3

STERNE'S SURPRISING OIKO-LOGIC:

SYMPATHY ETHICS AND SUSTAINABILITY IN *TRISTRAM SHANDY*

Introduction

Tristram Shandy is not intuitively going to be considered an ecocritical novel because it does not directly address itself to any pressing ecological concerns of the eighteenth century; however, it does directly comment on Aristotle's *oikos*—the “eco” root of ecology, economy, and ecocriticism—and Sterne does, as I will argue, have an ecocritical vision. While reading the *Tristram Shandy*, Walter sounds remarkably like he's reading through the definition of *oikos* in Aristotle's *Politics*: “A husband, a wife, and an ox for the plough”—please note the animal and the machine (Pol. 1252b13-15). In *Tristram Shandy* Walter is “satisfied” that “the original of society” is “nothing more than the getting together of one man and one woman;—to which, (according to Hesiod) the philosopher adds a servant;... —and a bull” (312). When Yorick reminds us that there is a real difference between a bull and an ox (i.e., the bull is troublesome, but the ox is patient and useful), fortifications unsurprisingly spring to Toby's mind, and he tells us that once the patient ox, working for the people, had cultivated the land of the *oikos* and made it *worth* inclosing, so it becomes easy to see how constructing fortifications must have been an early human consideration (312). The ox does not metaphorically, but rather literally helps with constructing and advancing the local society, so Walter accepts the suggestion offered by Yorick and Toby, and he changes the word in the *Tristram Shandy* from bull to ox. Walter is not immovable. Toby moves him through the science of fortification, and thus, as Melvyn New put it, Toby's “cannons” moved Walter's “language” (65). Which might drive Walter nuts, but it also allows Sterne to show us how Yorick and Toby's discussion helps Walter think about inter-

relations in such a way that the primary consideration is how people and the entities they dwell with (living and non-living) have real interactions—which means considering precisely how we are domesticated by the ox as we domesticate it. It is a fundamentally ecological question.

All of which is to say that part of Sterne's oiko-logical vision oftentimes defined domestic space in terms of human-animal interactions, and Greg Garrard points us to two noteworthy ecocritical branches that spring out of this domestic space defined by human-animal interactions. First, he refers to "ferality" as the, "Condition of existing in between domestication and wildness" —meaning that "feral" animals in stories can move from domestication to ferality or from wildness to ferality; however, "ferality" is always a result of an having contact with the oikos ("Ferality" 249). For Garrard, if domestication is an integration into the oikos, then both ferality and domestication involve fundamental, unforeseeable changes that result from unexpected interactions and unintuitive inter-relations over the course of the processes (251-252). The unintuitive inter-relations between Toby and his famous fly ("this world is surely wide enough to hold both thee and me" (91)) and unexpected interactions (Toby lets him go) do not necessarily change Toby or the fly so much as they open up the possibility of ethical social change for an entire reading, witnessing public that to this day still compliments gentleness by saying someone "wouldn't hurt a fly." Second is the discussion between Garrard and John Claborn in *ISLE* about how notions like pastoralism and Heideggarean dwelling can smuggle in tyranny: the former paints the picture too neatly and the latter strongly imposes a human vision. Toby's fortifications and terraforming are, in other words, a testament to human ingenuity, but that building often has a strongly human vision. Similarly, Sterne addresses this tension with Yorick's horse. Yorick's economic reasoning is a testament to human ingenuity, but it also demonstrates how we cannot help imposing ourselves on our reasoning. The surprisingly

enmeshed, enfolded, and messy relations Sterne investigates between humans and animals qualify him as an ecocritical novelist.

Sympathetic Feral Space

Language and representation, particularly as manifested in Tristram's "hobby-horse," might be what a lot of people remember about Sterne's novel, but they are not what is of primary concern for this chapter because both Sterne and Ecocriticism take Aristotle's concern with the *oikos* as a basic political unit seriously, and they make the consideration of the *oikos* a primary concern because an *oikos* is also a set of domestic and domesticating relationships that ethically require the investigation of sympathetic relationships. Oiko-logically, domestication is not necessarily a human characteristic. As Garrard puts it in "Ferality Tales": "It makes just as much sense to think of it [i.e., domestication] as something certain plants and animals have done to us, a clever evolutionary strategy for advancing their own interests" (257). Who domesticates whom, and how does this affect the next stage (i.e., ferality)? After domestication, something happens that is not domesticity (which, for our purposes can be described as "how we abide in a domestic situation") and is not a return to wildness, but rather the blooming into existence of a previously unrealized and unrecognized space. Donna Haraway uses the term "critters" for beings that "are always relationally entangled rather than taxonomically neat," so when we read ferality and domestication, we are reading fundamentally about the effects of "critters" interacting (330). Haraway will go so far as to say that she uses "critter" in order "to remind us that kingdom animalia includes not only the big "famous" animals (lions, tigers, bears, elephants, monkeys, etc.), but also "a motley crowd of living beings" that includes "microbes, fungi, humans, plants, animals, cyborgs, and aliens" (330n3).

One of Sterne's most ecocritical qualities is his understanding of the affective, sympathetic, relational entanglement that opens up between "critters" when they interact with one another. After all, "critters" interacting is what makes ferality and domestication possible, and Haraway's version of interacting is probably best summed up by her statement that: "Insofar as I (and my machines) use an animal, I am used by an animal (with the attached machines)" (262). Sterne, like Haraway, saw that when humans and critters interacted, the potential value of those interactions is that both parties can experience benefits (e.g., like extended life and survival), and this is particularly the case when we value the animal. Uncle Toby's interaction with the fly is an example of this. When Toby releases the fly and acknowledges that there is plenty of room in the world, he is acknowledging that the effects of human-critter interactions can take various routes based on choice, and his version of an ethical choice is to let the fly live. The fly lives longer, Toby has less stress, and Sterne opens an ethical space between humanity and animals that asks the reader to reference their own experience in order to assess the value of the messy sympathetic feelings. Although Toby is "tormented" by the fly throughout his dinner, and only after "infinite attempts" does he catch it, in the end, as we know: "*Toby* had scarce a heart to retalliate upon a fly" (91). The fly is wild, but it has wandered into Toby's oikos, and Toby *feels* strongly about it. In his "thee and me" we can see how Toby's sympathy stays his hand because he (Toby), through the additive conjunction, considers them (Toby and the fly) a unit or a kind of pack ("we" or "us"), and the reader is faced with wildness and domestication combining to create a feral space between them.

Several famous scenes open with this affective, sympathetic, feral space. Yorick's "horse-as-good-as-the-rider-deserves" and its rider were, as Tristram tells us, "centaur-like,—both of a piece" (17). The horse and man may have been individually domesticated, but the

moment the rider and horse are fused into a single, sympathetic unit, there is a ferality in both of them, even as there is a mobile domestic unit. The brief, tragic story of Maria and the little goat near the end of the book also causes Tristram to experience a sympathetic “enthusiasm” (sentimentalism) in which everything he “saw, or had to do with, touch’d upon some secret spring either of sentiment or rapture” (522-523). Maria is impotent here because she is unable to let go of sadness, but her little goat is her companion nonetheless, and Tristram’s participation in the melancholy, sympathetic scene draws him out from himself and places him amongst ecological elements that he recognizes are affecting his being.

This mess of possible relations, their uniquenesses, and their particularities are what make the animals present in Sterne’s literary spaces essential for unraveling the relations between subtle characters who have a profound impact on how the story is received. These relations between subtle characters are at the heart of what Greg Garrard in *Ecocriticism* calls the “mission of the environmental humanities”: explaining and understanding how “animals... make us human... just as we affect the evolution of both domesticated and wild species” (151). Although we too often think of how the environment affects a critter’s adaptation, we do not often think about how the critters affect the environment which is affecting them (or the simultaneousness of this affect). Yet in the reciprocal exchange between the environment and its components, the ecocritical fact about animals making us human becomes clearer because they affect our environment, and our environment affects our humanity. Sterne frequently displays animals in a way that emphasized the sympathetic relationship between humans and animals because, even though it might be easy to overlook, the sustainability and the ethics of the relationship’s environment are affecting it as necessarily as any economic relationship. Yorick’s environment was his parish, and considering that fact affected his horse, his decisions, and his

parishioners. Tristram rushing into the scene with the melancholy Maria and her goat imposed himself on the environment, and his lack of consideration created a palpable awkwardness.

Humanity is not always the protagonist in the environment.

Sterne was so uncertain of humanity's protagonist status that he sometimes emphasizes a non-progressivist de-volution. Sterne saw that in nature things do not necessarily evolve forward or in excess (i.e., enough for profit), and nature is sometimes ready to spill a lot of seed on the hope of only one taking root. The primary entry for "evolution" in the Oxford English Dictionary says: "A movement or change of position" ("evolution, n1"). For Sterne, this is not necessarily forward. A lateral move can be tactical. Furthermore, "evolution" includes, "Military and Navy. A manoeuvre executed by troops or ships to adopt a different tactical formation," as one of the earliest definitions for "evolution" ("evolution, n1a"). Naturally, we think of Uncle Toby and his military hobby-horse here. Walter even accidentally uses the "change" sense of the word "evolution" when talking about the death of civilizations and his son's death, and Toby's ears prick up. Walter that says he misspoke, that he meant to say "revolutions," and that what he said, "was nonsense," but Toby says, thinking of military evolutions, "'Tis not nonsense" (284). With evolution's new meanings post-Darwin, history grants a level of humor to the scene that Sterne could not have intended, but managed to achieve nonetheless.

Humanity and animals... together

Sterne, like the version of ecocritical animal studies I am advancing here, does not ask why animals need to us to save them because this implies a mercenary, anthropocentric, teleological desire in the relationship. Guy Cook shows us that animal rights activists and hunters can be diametrically opposed ideologically, but linguistically akin in their use of language to suit their own mercenary desires to demonstrate language's primacy over animals, but clearly we

need them at least as much as they need us. Nor is Sterne necessarily asking what animals “mean” in literature (we have the option of interpreting them to death or letting them be important as animals in the oikos), but rather investigates animals (including humans) interacting to see the ethical heft carried by an ecology that is modified both by sympathetic forces and considerations of sustainability. Sterne is known as a sentimental writer, so he was very interested in sympathy, and the sympathetic relationship between humans and animals that Sterne seems to favor is a shared relationship in which valenced cost-benefit analyses are subsumed by un-valenced input-output analyses, and a relationship in which the ethics are in environmental, as opposed to individual, terms. To avoid what Hadas Marcus refers to as “a highly reduced view of animal life on earth” (602), perhaps we need something like Stacy Alaimo’s work on the “new materialisms,” which touches the sympathetic vein, and asks us to start, “Considering creatures from microbes to jellyfish as “ecosystem engineers,” because this “not only stresses the lively interactions in watery worlds but emphasizes that the physical environment is never mere background or abstract space” (563).

A human being involved with sympathetic relations, animals, environment, and ethics is the crux of “Toby and the fly,” which is a scene given to us particularly by Tristram not as a part of Toby’s “hobby-horsical” likeness, but rather because, as Tristram says, “this is a part of his moral character” (91). The fly “torments” Toby all through dinner. Yet, when Toby eventually catches the fly, he speaks directly to the fly and tells him that he isn’t going to hurt him. “Go, poor devil,” Toby says, “get thee gone, why should I hurt thee?” (91). Sterne, while highlighting Toby’s kindness, gentleness, and humanity in this scene, simultaneously dramatizes making the fly a worthy subject and that sympathetic human-animal inter-relations can carry a hefty ethical load. Toby does not loathe the fly. When the fly becomes a worthy subject, the tasks of

determining, appreciating, and appropriately valuing what constitutes a worthy subject becomes a much stickier proposition. Through Toby's interaction with the fly, Sterne can demonstrate his ecocritical vision by showing us how valuing a critter based on its relationship to the environment (in this case a spatial relationships) or the household eventually brings us to critically thinking about how we are valuing. Tristram goes so far as to tell us that he owes "half" of his "philanthropy" to Toby's sympathetic, ethical interaction with a fly—and everyone involved gathered some advantage from the situation (91). Mutual exchange is one thing for Sterne, the greatest possibility of mutual advantage is quite another, and deciding what time is best for which approach is yet another.

Another scene displaying these sympathetic ethics between humans and animals occurs when Tristram finds an ass standing "with his two forefeet on the inside of the threshold, and with his two hinder feet towards the street" (419). I find this to be an excellent image for the between-ness of both domestication and ferality, and what Sterne gives us is Tristram's almost Dr. Dolittle-like communication with the ass. Tristram tells us humorously that "With an ass," he can "commune for ever," and he then proceeds to have an actual conversation with the animal. After "talking" with the ass and communing with it sympathetically, he can see that the ass will be beaten whether he comes in or goes out, so Tristram does not press the ass to move. "I understand thee perfectly well... A minute is but a minute, and if it saves a fellow creature a drubbing, it shall not be set down as ill-spent" (420). This comes only a few lines after he explains that he "cannot bear to strike" an ass because "—there is a patient endurance of sufferings, wrote so unaffectedly in his looks and carriage, which pleads so mightily for him, that it always disarms me" (420). In Tristram's sympathetic interaction with this domesticated animal, in which the two discuss the bitterness of human days, the mutual exchange is extended

by virtue of conversation, and both Tristram and the ass receive benefits—Tristram feels a sympathetic warmth for another living, the ass gets to relax a little bit and avoids a beating—although it cannot properly be accounted profit. In fact, one of the difficulties sympathetic human-animal interactions present to theories of economics is that the maintenance involved in sustaining the relationship can be a benefit without profit. One must only think about the benefit of taking your dog for a run every morning to understand that there can be benefits to all parties in human-animal interactions that are not necessarily profitable.

This beneficent, affective, sympathetic human-animal relation was a real concern of Sterne's because we find a similar scene in *A Sentimental Journey* when Yorick and La Fleur encounter a dead ass in their way. The horse La Fleur is coaxing on will not go near the dead ass. As a matter of fact, the horse runs away—which gives Sterne-Yorick a moment to digress into the nature of swearing—but after this humor we arrive at the true story. A German man who had lost two of the “finest lads in all Germany” was traveling to “St. Iago in Spain” to show gratitude to the Lord that his third one was spared, and he had been mounted upon the ass that La Fleur and Yorick had seen dead in the road for the entire journey (34). In Haraway's *When Species Meet*, she talks about the root of “companion” being “cum panis” (i.e., “together with bread” or “breaking bread together”), and in *A Sentimental Journey*, this German says that “it [the ass] had eat the same bread with him all the way, and was unto him as a friend” (34). He even goes on to claim that the ass loved him because they had looked for each other for days and days while lost in the Prenean mountains. Sterne makes his meaning clear at the end of this fellow's story when he says, “Did we love each other, as this poor soul loved his ass—'twould be something—” (35). I like to think this is more than a joke, and more than a wish because Sterne is suggesting that inter-human relationships could benefit from learning how sympathetic relationships produce

non-economical values between humans and animals. The man's reaction to the ass's death is an ethical value because of the ecologically sympathetic relationship, and here Sterne's ecocritical "ass" throws the ethics of stoicism under the bus.

Sterne might even be willing to go farther because, as Toby points out while Walter reads Aristotle, the society of oxen was necessary to building the structures that make society run, and their labor therefore informs our understanding of society—without our necessarily being aware of it. Animals formed societies long before humans did, so without animals and animality, the *oikos* is inaccurate at best and mutilates reality at worst because we have always already been living together socially. Understanding that we can be unaware of our always already social nature helps us understand that we have historically been too busy giving ourselves credit for putting the animal to work to recognize that animals have always been critical to building "our" human societies. The animal, in Heideggerian terms, installs the earth and all its manifold life into the fourfold—which drags the heavens, mortal, and immortals with it by virtue of the inextricability of their relationships. Perhaps this can be thought of as a mode of Gerrardian ferality in which we experience the effect on "us" after we have been affected by our relationship to an animal. "We" are feral because of how the animal impacted us. Sterne had a knack for creating scenes in which humans and animals interacting sympathetically could speak to society as they spoke to Tristram, who describes the scene involving Toby and the fly as an "accidental impression" left by "the lesson of universal good-will then taught and imprinted" (91).

The scene, for instance, where Tristram encounters the unfortunate, mute, young, virginal Maria sitting on a riverbank playing a flute became a cultural icon of the suffering individual yearning for social relations, to the point where it was reproduced on a variety of crockery and other household goods—as W.B. Gerard has impressively shown. But it should also be noted

that though Tristram is transported by her beauty, and we are rendered a visionary, enthusiastic portrait of love: Maria is sitting down with her goat and that little domesticated animal to some extent determines how the exchange between Tristram and Maria continues. When Tristram sits down with Maria (and her goat), she proceeds to look back and forth between Tristram and the goat until Tristram breaks the silence and the scene by asking her “what resemblance” she finds. This part of the chapter is called “The Invocation,” and what is “invoked” is the oikos: a man, a woman, an animal, and a machine—she has a musical instrument. Maria seems to be calculating the relationship between Tristram and the goat, and her version of this relationship involves her relationship to the goat as much as it does her (non-existent) relationship to Tristram. Tristram immediately assumes the relationship “man and beast,” and he tells the reader that he only asked her about the resemblance between him and the goat “from the humblest conviction of what a Beast man is;” however, by stating so directly that man is a beast, he stumbles on the ecocritical question of what it might be like to think about man and even the most savage beast as a conjunctive relationship in which each party contributes differently—like a centaur—for benefit without necessary profit (523).

Maria’s sadness is a result of the fact that she had “her banns forbid” and the church would not let her marry, so love has, in one sense, caused the maiden’s melancholy, mute, madness; however, love is also part of her relationship with the animal that she is dwelling with that relieves the melancholy (523). While W.B. Gerard’s work mentions how animals exhibit the empathic response (on several occasions), he does not spend any time with the relationship between the girl and her dog. On the contrary, Gerard’s work seems to have a strain of humanism that emphasizes the idea that human complexity means we should be able to empathize better than animals, but often do not (486-487). This might be, however, because the

animal's actual presence would break up the empathetic response a lone, crying girl would receive because, with the dog, she is not alone. Maria's animal is giving her community, society, and camaraderie. If the animal were not in the picture, the figure is not sentimental, only sad. In Tristram's story Maria not only has a relationship with her goat, but a powerful, sympathetic relationship in which her goat is helping with the sympathetic relief of melancholy.

Maria and her goat might be demonstrating what James E. Swearingen referred to as "dwelling" in a non-ecocritical sense (i.e., a time-mind connection), but it makes as much sense to think about the kind of "dwelling" in Heidegger's (in)famously ecocritical sense of it because she is experiencing an extremely conscious living and thinking in and with the environment around her. Heideggerean "dwelling," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* has a sense that Sterne would appreciate because it is produced as an effect of building or constructing, and "accomplished" by "the activities of cultivation and construction" because the building process is inherent to the dwelling (145). As Toby mentioned in the discussion of the oikos, building is also dwelling. While cultivation, construction, and "dwelling" seem to be prime interests for Heidegger, Sterne, and Tristram, Sterne intensifies the sympathetic dwelling-together to a point that might seem beyond our comfort zone. Layered onto the affective, sympathetic human-animal relations in Sterne's stories are calculations of value and affordability that are crucial to Sterne's subtle understanding of the role of conscience on sympathy-and-sustainability within households. The truly difficult, truly oiko-logical question in Sterne's text asks us: At what point does the value animals give to a society—calculated on their sympathetic relations—necessitate a change in our conscience? In *When Species Meet*, Haraway says that when we "see things that changed what we know," we must also change "how we must act as a consequence," and

Sterne's surprising oiko-logic suggests that *how* we go about calculating the change in our actions should be based on what our environment is communicating to us (260).

Sterne's reading and calculation of sympathy vis-à-vis domestic economy is quite sophisticated, and it manages to avoid becoming sensibility or mush or anthropomorphism by including considerations of sustainability. Sterne considers the oiko-logic of maintaining a hereditary dwelling with a version of Nature that seems to think it affordable, according to Henry Baker's (1744) *The Microscope Made Easy*, to expend "animalcules" numbering "ninety three thousand four hundred and forty millions" in the generation of a next generation of being (157). The problem of sustainability when extraordinary sacrifices for the purposes of generation are an oiko-logically sound decision, is that something like an individual, subjective, perceiving self, which is already a small part of an environment, can get lost. Laurence Buell assures us in *The Environmental Imagination*, however, that "the effect of the environmental consciousness on the perceiving self" does not intentionally dethrone human subjectivity, but rather finds possible methods for the proper valuation of other subjectivities, amongst which humans are an example:

The effect of the environmental consciousness on the perceiving self, as I see it, is not primarily to fulfill it, to negate it, or even to complicate it, although all of these may seem to happen. Rather the effect is most fundamentally to raise the question of the validity of the self as the primary focalizing device for both writer and reader: to make one wonder, for instance whether the self is as interesting an object of study as we supposed, whether the world would become more interesting if we could see it from the perspective of a wolf, a sparrow, a river, a stone. This approach to subjectivity makes apparent that the "I" has no greater claims to being the main subject than the chickens, the chopped corn, the mice,

the snakes and the phoebes—who are somehow also interwoven with me. To get this point across, environmental writing has to be able to imagine nonhuman agents as bona fide partners. (179)

In Sterne, this manifests itself in the centaur-like horse and rider: partnered together in crossing territory; Toby and the fly: partners abiding each other; and Maria and the goat: partners in sympathetic union. Animals do not relieve humans of the burden of subjectivity, but the burden is more sustainable to bear when the twin burdens of subjectivity and objectivity are shared with critters bearing those same burdens. Sympathetic micro-relations between animals and humans are effective, and avoiding the importance of microscopic inter-relations lead us to 2020—which will go down in history as the year a section of RNA floated around and shut the planet down. How we live with who and what we live with is an ethical decision of sustainability, and individualism, to the extent that it occludes others in an environment, is oiko-logically untenable.

Calculations with Animals

During the eighteenth century, however, it was the horse that had a very dramatic impact on most country towns. Not everybody could afford a horse, so, in the country, one or two horses could take care of most of the village needs, and the local gentleman or parson would supply their horse(s) for village use. Again, this was not unusual in eighteenth-century Irish or English country village life, and Ian Campbell Ross reminds us that Sterne was not excepted. We know that Sterne was himself perpetually pestered by his local parishioners for his horse, so the chapter in which Yorick would “insist upon it, that the horse was as good as the rider deserved” has tethers to reality (17). What I am interested in particularly, however, is how Sterne’s oiko-logic works to position Yorick’s logic as inaccurate because economical. We read that, “At different times he [Yorick] would give fifty humorous and opposite reasons for riding a meek-spirited

jade... In short... any cause but the true cause” (18). Tristram, in an unusually immediate turnaround, then gives us the true cause of Yorick’s riding a “meek-spirited jade”: the fact that Yorick prefers strong, well-trained horses combines with the fact that the nearest midwife was “seven miles” away and “in a vile country” to make a situation in which Yorick “was scarce a whole week together without some piteous application for his beast” (18). Yorick does some economic calculations:

Upon weighing the whole, and summing it up in his mind, he found it not only disproportion’d to his other expences, but withall so heavy an article in itself, as to disable him from any other act of generosity in his parish: Besides this he considered, that, with half the sum thus galloped away, he could do ten times as much good;----and what still weighed more with him than all other considerations put together, was this, that it confined all his charity into one particular channel, and where, as he fancied, it was the least wanted, namely, to the child-bearing and child-getting part of his parish; reserving nothing for the impotent, ---nothing for the aged,---nothing for the many comfortless scenes he was hourly called forth to visit, where poverty, and sickness, and affliction dwelt together. (19)

There is a primary question here of why Yorick might feel the need to protect and serve the impotent, the aged, and the comfortless over and above the newborns and the fecund. Impotence is, of course, thematic in *Tristram Shandy*: from Walter’s questionable parentage of Tristram to Toby’s disastrous amours with the widow Wadman, impotence (in various guises) is frequently considered throughout the novel. Yorick’s calculations about the horse and the townspeople stares at the full ability of the townspeople to procreate, measures its power, and determines that his sympathies should be instead with the powerless and those facing the power of death. Yorick

is using the horse to socialize with the people he wants to socialize with, so the horse carries the social burden in this situation.

The facts of the matter, then, are that Yorick is merely rationalizing himself into the decision he wants to make. There is not necessarily a reason for him to choose one group over the other, but Yorick brings his horse into the equation and, with this additional variable, manipulates the equation into the form most useful for himself—imposing himself on his calculations. The oddity of the situation, however, is that in this formulation Yorick seems to have sympathy for the horse and sympathy for the impotent, but an almost callous attitude to children and families, and the best reason that can be given for this is that the social reality of eighteenth-century Ireland could be viewed as a place not fit to bring children into, so it was reckoned sympathy to let them die. Yorick's assumptions come from hard socio-ecological realities that sometimes the most natural, best situation for something is for it to die—we put animals out of their misery after all; however, why this same logic is not applied to the old, impotent, and helpless can only be seen as individual choice. The important point is that Yorick's sympathies could have been otherwise. Economically his decision might be sound, but oiko-logically Yorick does not quite share the full possibilities of Sterne's ecocritical vision. If, as he says, "every body was left to judge what were his views in this act of charity," then, in the version of ecocritical awareness this chapter is attempting to demonstrate, Sterne is using Yorick to display a situation in which economic calculations are tainted by the individual desire, and the oiko-logical possibilities of the situation are at odds with the economic calculations, so that the reader is lead into considerations of how we are valuing (20). If everybody valued the sympathetic ethics displayed by Yorick in this scene, the results would be unsustainable:

economic decisions made from calculations that emphasize individual desires are inevitably at odds with oiko-logic.

Sterne offers us yet another example of a complex oiko-logical decision involving sympathy, ethics, and sustainability when “Aunt Dinah” leaves Walter a thousand pounds after she dies. A thousand projects come into Walter’s mind, but he settles himself into a dispute between two primary projects: enclosing the ox-moor and sending Tristram’s brother on his European tour—a Shandy family tradition that would treat Bobby “ten times worse than a Turk” if it were broken (266). The two projects are extremely difficult to reckon because they can be variously reckoned. The more economically inflected project involving the ox-moor would also create “a certain profit... so prodigiously” to Walter’s favor that Tristram felt sure it would win out (268). However, the oiko-logical project comes from the fact that it “had ever been the custom of the family, and by length of time was almost become a matter of common right, that the eldest son of it should have free ingress, egress, and regress into foreign parts before marriage” (266). The project with the ox-moor is literally domestication for economic reasons, while the project with the Shandy men is ferality-making for oiko-logical reasons, and what is interesting here is Sterne’s work with Walter’s deliberation between a sympathetic and a pragmatic household decision because it pits the value of domestication for economy against the value of ferality for oiko-logic, and the battle is so ferocious in Walter’s head that he never makes a decision. The decision is made for him by the untimely death of Bobby. Walter has trouble sorting out how to value a-rightly. Constantly updating the input-output analysis as relationships change is why, with the Shandys, as P.M. Spacks has it, “finality... is never the point,” and the text even “insists” that finality “should never be the point” (160).

The final textual example I want to offer of this valuation across an animal comes from the final book during Toby's "amours." As Toby and Trim make their way to Widow Wadman's house, Trim begins to tell the story of his brother and the Jewish sausage maker. In the middle of this story is the chapter when Trim asks "doubtingly" if "A Negro has a soul?" (493). The girl in question, in a replay of Toby's famous scene with the fly, is "flapping away flies—not killing them" (493). Toby's response to witnessing the scene is that "she had suffered persecution... and had learnt mercy" (493). Trim's response (knowing a bit more about her story) is that events and "nature" had worked together to create her goodness, and only then does the question of whether "a negro has a soul" pop into his head. Toby is no theologian, but he has a sense of justice and ethics, and his response is an echo of his earlier scene with the fly: "God would not leave him without one, any more than thee or me----," and Trim translates this into a valuation when he says, "It would be putting one sadly over the head of another" (493). While there are obvious post-colonial threads in this scene, the aspect that I want to emphasize is that once Trim and Toby determine that the thusly en-souled and valued "Negro" is not the social problem, they go on to discover the fact that some people, much like animals, simply do not have anybody to "stand up for" them though society is against them, meaning that the problem is not with somebody or something else, but with both society and ourselves. In Sterne's eco-ethical calculation of value, "a poor negro girl" not killing flies makes the standard relationship currency sympathy and love for (and with) our fellow creatures.

Conclusion

How we value is at the heart of Sterne's body of work. After all, one of his most famous pieces is his sermon on Conscience. A "found manuscript" in *Tristram Shandy*, the sermon is Sterne's, and it says that, however much of a role conscience plays in certain situations, a good

conscience cannot determine the extent of the situation on its own because its data is probably faulty (105). Sterne wants us to recognize that a human conscience is at least as fallible as a human being precisely because our data is generally inaccurate-because-incomplete. There simply is no way to have all the data all the time. Sterne's logic, drawing from the fact that we will always be ignorant, says that Conscience therefore requires a third party—e.g., Christianity (111). His suggestion is that the bosom of the church can attend to some of the areas where humans find themselves ignorant; however, his novel also suggest that animal-human interactions are ethical sites, and our investigation into them is also an investigation into the limits of human conscience (not necessarily consciousness), so that animals, to the extent that they help us understand our collective conscience, have as much of an ethical function in society as religion.

Furthermore, Sterne's novel draws from a worldview in which the evolutionary path is not perpetually forward to eventual glorious natural achievement because part of ecological calculation includes considering not only what other ignorance we might have—e.g., of animal subjectivity—and how what we are ignorant of nevertheless affects us, but also what constitutes sustainability under certain circumstances. As Swearingen says in *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy*, "A process of growth would be extraneous to the ontological character of the work" (99). Or, as Sterne himself says: "—————Endless is the Search of Truth!" (73). Or as Jonathan Lamb on Sterne's "double principle" says, "A perfect circularity, or at least a consistent nonpriority, exists between all aspects of his [Sterne's] work" (159). Now, I might agree with him more about "nonpriority" than about "circularity," but our inherent human ignorance making it possible for humans to be constantly improving is one of the things, as he put in his 1759 "Letter to Dodsley," which was "laugh-at-able." We barely know what our animals are thinking!

In Sterne's surprising oiko-logic, as J.T. Parnell put it, "the over-zealous desire of the prideful dogmatist to make the self the measure of all things" is very costly, especially when we can see that the patient laboring of the gentle ox is a relatively sustainable one, and it has helped us build civilizations (153). In exchange for some food, some attention, some shelter, some care, and, in short, some sympathy, animals can provide us with the labor, companionship, and sacrifice sufficient for building societies; however, we must also recognize they are not merely helping us build *our* society. We are building a society together with the animals. Let's think for a second what this might mean in terms of a current social institution like big factory farms. These farms are government subsidized and they do the uncomfortable work of killing a lot of animals every day. For example, we process over twenty million chickens per day in the USA. Some chickens are bound to be injured, some are bound to be handled cruelly, and some are bound to be outright abused—the business of killing animals is simply a messy business; however, from Sterne's ecocritical vision this is, surprisingly, not the ethical hinge because there will always be both outliers and cruelty. The vision Sterne offers us would not only agree that factory farms are unethical when they violate a sympathetic relationship, but it would also suggest that the bigger problem is how humanity demonstrates through these actions that we are not fit social subjects for animals.

To ignore the animal reading, to ignore how the animal is domesticating us, to ignore how relating to animals turns us feral, is perhaps the most dangerously unethical misperception of the humanity-animal relation. In *The Concept of Nature*, there is a moment when Alfred N. Whitehead asks us to consider the problem that "That there is no perception of physical objects without perception of sense-objects. But the converse does not hold" (40). That is, whenever we perceive physical objects (animals), our perception itself is sympathetic, and there is no escaping

this, but the turn of the screw is that, especially with animals in literature, the perception of the thing is not necessary to the perception of sympathy. This is a positive, social capacity that literature has. When we have words to describe the situation, we do not require the physical fly or the physical horse, yet we can perceive and learn from the sympathetic relations of social critters. Herman Melville will draw from this literary understanding of the animal's social function and complicate it further in his investigation of the oiko-logical whale and the negotiations required of maritime fishing, shipping, and trade. *Tristram Shandy* even anticipates how *Moby-Dick* values the ship (the tool), the animal (the beast), and the human in the day-to-day ethics and sympathy of their dwelling an adventuring. Sterne's surprisingly ecocritical insights join those of Swift and Melville in helping us extend the dialogue between British travel and post-colonial novels to domestic novels as well, and they give us new avenues to consider the ramifications of social and environmental justice.

CHAPTER 4

HERMAN MELVILLE'S OIKO-LOGIC IN *MOBY-DICK*:

COMPARISONS AND HEROISM

Introduction

The argument of this chapter will be that *Moby-Dick* contains an oiko-logic (or ecological sensibility) which calls the reader to compare the values of “a human” (i.e., Ahab) and “humanity” (as a group) with animals and asks us to consider the power of harnessing Moby Dick’s heroic animal values when making decisions of conscience. In her recent (2018) article about Moby Dick as the hero of *Moby-Dick*, Klara Stephanie Szlezák claims, “The heroization of the whale in the novel is achieved by means of a natural-historical discourse that lays the foundation for the animal’s superior powers” (41). Her article takes a traditional literary approach that locates Moby Dick’s power with established categories of “the heroic.” His power comes, as she says, “By means of ascriptions of agency, especially in the animal’s response to his human attackers; by means of such qualifications of the animal as majestic, dignified, or indomitable; as well as by means of the possibility of his immortality as an inherent characteristic of heroes” (41). Given agency and a host of powerful characteristics to overcome obstacles, Moby Dick’s heroism is seen in classic literary style.

Ecologically, we can add to this “heroization” that Moby Dick utilizes a history of interactions in his home territory, including interactions with humans hunting him in whaleboats, to respond to situations, and, in some cases, we can say that the whale’s responses represent more natural values than humanity often does—because our responses are often based on human socio-cultural assumptions. Richard J. King says that “all of the characters” in Ishmael’s story (excepting Queequeg) “are weaker, less just, more hypocritical, more frail and more flawed and

irrational than the animals they hunt (330). As Although not too much in the water presents a threat to Moby Dick, boats filled with whalers are one of his vulnerabilities. The sailor's mobile floating dwellings present (and have presented for some time) a real threat. Moby Dick already has a lance sticking out of him when the *Pequod* encounters him in the ocean, so he must know his vulnerability. Despite this vulnerability, Moby Dick, as we shall see, has a habit of freeing the "fast fish" (a fish that has been one way or another captured), delivering warnings, and defending himself from these boats. These are part of his animal values. Where Ahab's crooked conscience determines his purpose, Moby Dick allows interactions to determine his values. They have both been "attacked," but their responses are different. Ahab needs vengeance, but the whale, as we will see, sets others free and—though unjustly attacked—warns before fighting back.

In my ecological reading of *Moby-Dick*, Ahab presents the aspect of a man who has villainously decided to make hate a part of his conscience, while Moby Dick presents the aspect of a whale who decided to make heroism a part of its conscience. Ishmael, for his part, is trying to make sense of why a human who has an interaction with an animal, while in the animal's home territory, could react in such a way that demonizes the animal for doing what comes naturally to animals. When Ishmael has a near-death experience in "The First Lowering," his immediate reaction (in a chapter called "The Hyena") is to err on the side of caution and draft his last will and testament. Compared to Ahab's violent, hate-filled vengeance-seeking, being prepared in the event of tragedy is a more appropriate human response than violent vengeance-seeking. Melville asks his readers about the interactions we have and the jostlings we receive in the environment by forcing us to consider various kinds of comparisons that challenge whether our conscience can respond appropriately to being jostled. Reading Melville's text ecologically

will allow us to see a powerful call to the reader to compare their own values to other humans' values and the values of animals in the animals' home space. We will see a version of *Moby Dick* as a whale that presents us with awkwardly heroic animal values (like vulnerability, assisting, warning, and defending), and the suggestion that we might successfully harness the positive aspects of these animal values to improve our conscience. As Elizabeth Schultz once put it, Melville, "evolves an environmental vision with a conscience," and *Moby Dick*'s values and awkward heroics can show us that improving human conscience involves thinking animal (100).

Conscience is, after all, thematic in *Moby-Dick*. At the beginning of the novel, in Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah, we read of conscience as a light hanging in a room with crooked walls. In Queequeg and Ishmael's room at the Spouter-Inn we read of conscience as a peaceful experience, but in a conversation between Bildad and Peleg, conscience is possibly "leaky." Conscience shows up again in the chapter "Enter Ahab" where "the hot old man" Ahab runs hot because, Stubb surmises, his conscience aches him worse than a toothache (106). Later, Ishmael goes to sleep after changing his will, "like a quiet ghost with a clean conscience" (180). Further on, Melville describes the ocean heaving, "As if its vast tides were a conscience; and the great mundane soul were in anguish and remorse for the long sin and suffering it had bred" (184). Finally, Ahab mentions conscience in an episode with Starbuck where Ahab compares his conscience to the keel of a boat. The first and last of these will be analyzed in more detail below, but in this brief collection Melville compares conscience variously to the keel of a boat, the roiling waves of the ocean, and a toothache—with warnings that conscience can also be "leaky" and inaccurate; however, in a few instances, he also tells us that conscience can furnish us with a kind of ghostly peace. More of Melville's comparisons will be discussed in the second section.

The last time conscience is mentioned in the book, Ahab has refused to “Up Burtons and break out” (i.e., pull the barrels from the depths of the boat to check for leaks) because he feels himself getting closer to Moby Dick. Mr. Starbuck tries to persuade him by appealing to the owners, and Ahab responds, “As if the owners were my conscience... the only real owner of anything is its commander; and hark ye, my conscience is in this ship’s keel” (347). The episode ends with a gun to Mr. Starbuck’s head. The keel is the deepest, foundational joist, upon which the hull is constructed, and the component on which the integrity of keeled ships depends. Ahab says that his all-consuming passion for hunting Moby Dick *is* his conscience and that this is also enough for everybody aboard the *Pequod*. On the second day of the ill-fated chase, we read:

They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp—yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man’s valor, that man’s fear; guilt and guiltiness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to. (398)

The magnificence of these forces “welded into oneness” is tempered by the fact that the one “welding” them is Ahab, and Ahab’s values hardly offer us ecological values. His quest to avenge himself on the whale is ecologically villainous. Ahab’s prideful attachment to his own conscience as the only necessary component for guiding his way through life causes him to become, as Starbuck says, “the wilful murderer of thirty men and more”—which seems irreconcilable with the general thrust of conscience (371). Ahab, “their one lord and keel,” is positive that his conscience is enough, and we see one human’s values determining the

relationship between humanity and the environment on the *Pequod*. Just because one human's values *can* determine the relationship between our species and the environment, this does not mean that one human's values should. With Ahab's method, the result has been drearily foretold: there will be death. From an ecological perspective, one human's values should *never* be allowed to determine the group's relationship to the environment because grasping our environment requires the perspective and values of the animals we live with. The third section will discuss animals in home territories.

Not accidentally, in the chapter immediately following Ahab's threatening of Starbuck and his declaration of valuing a single keel (i.e., his own conscience) on which everything is built, Melville gives us, for comparison, Queequeg asking for a canoe/coffin that is "without a keel" (349). The value of a keeled vessel is that the keel keeps the vessel from being blown sideways and adds ballast to keep the boat upright, which makes steering easier. The problem of a keeled vessel is that continual, upright onward-ness makes us forget about the environment by homogenizing our experience. The problem with un-keeled boats is a difficulty with steering, so, in Ishmael's metaphor, we must be gentle with the past and give "much lee-way adown the dim ages"—because life itself might be a difficult-to-steer, un-keeled boat (349). Catamarans, dinghies, and the Pacific Islander Drua, however, are all successful, unkeeled vessels, so there must be some value in them, and their value comes from the attentiveness and responsiveness they require to differences in the heterogeneous environment. Danger attends inattentiveness on an unkeeled vessel. Because Ahab's keel is his conscience, he is more dependent on his conscience than attentive to his conscience, and we can therefore say that his keel-conscience steers him. The problem is that he steers everybody aboard the *Pequod* by this self-guided conscience that forgets its environment, so that the impact of his conscience becomes a matter of

social value. Moby Dick has no keel, and yet Melville does show us that he has some social values. Moby Dick's responses to being hunted will define those values in terms of aiding, vulnerability, patiently giving warnings, and self-defense when attacked—which challenge both Ahab's values and perhaps our own. By comparing animal values and interactions with humanity's, Melville will show us that we still have a lot to learn about what constitutes ethical action, so he makes looking at the animal's values (especially in its territory) an inquiry into the conscience of humanity. Moby Dick's "animal values" will be discussed in the fourth section.

Comparisons and values

The comparison between keeled and unkeeled vessels or reactions to trauma make up just some of the many comparisons in *Moby-Dick*. We will discuss three specific kinds of comparisons available in the text of *Moby-Dick* because these three kinds of comparisons yield up for readers a variety of social values, some of which can be ascribed to non-humans. While arbitrary, these comparisons can easily be recognized in the text: moments of Ahab utilizing comparisons for social purposes, moments when comparing humans and animals creates recognizable contrast, and moments when comparing things to other things (with an emphasis on animals) creates disorientation. These three kinds of comparisons will open the way to discussions of animals' interactions in their home territory—or, where animal social values come from—and how considerations of the animal in its home territory will question the validity of purely human values by offering us an alternative in the social, domestic values of animal life.

Philip Armstrong once described Melville's "unusual discursive technique" which "vividly juxtaposes a number of competing attitudes" (28). Maurice S. Lee says that Melville compares, "Well, almost everything" (63). In fact, *Moby-Dick* forces its reader to consider interactions between heterogeneous ecological elements. Cats, dogs, tigers, camels, elk, sheep,

wolves, buffaloes, elephants, corals, eels, snakes, eagles, crows, cattle, and rats are just some of the animals variously compared in this novel about seeking whales. One of the reasons to talk about these comparisons in *Moby-Dick* may be because the text contains such a bewildering array of comparisons, but another is how the comparisons get used. When Ahab uses animal comparisons for social purposes, the reader gets clues about Ahab's thinking about animality and a representation of humans imagining a unidirectional relationship between themselves and animals. Melville's other human-animal comparisons, however, emphasize what happens between animals and humans—particularly in terms how we affect and interact with each other. Melville's thing-thing comparisons (especially animals compared to other animals and other things), emphasize the activity between things—an unintuitive realm where objects act as agents with and upon each other. Investigating Melville's kinds of comparisons will produce a variety of responses to animality in *Moby-Dick*—against some of which, somewhat unsettlingly, humanity compares unfavorably.

The first set of comparisons we will look at come from Ahab, because Ahab at least recognizes the evocative power of the animal. Ahab remarks memorably that he is “an old man cut down to the stump... his body's part; but Ahab's soul's a centipede, that moves upon a hundred legs” (402). The comparison evokes an image of one hundred legs—ostensibly the legs of sailors—carrying this centipede soul of revenge along, and in this strong image Ahab and his quest for revenge are bound to his crew. Ahab feels fine about pressing the animal into his rhetorical service for the purposes of mystifying his crew; however, he also has no problem using animality as an insult. When Ahab first comes up on deck his peg leg knocks around, and Stubb suggests some wadding around the peg leg to dampen the sound and let the men who are sleeping rest. Ahab's responds, “Down, dog, and kennel!” Stubb does not like being called a dog

in this manner. Ahab's response? "Then be called ten times a donkey, and a mule, and an ass, and begone, or I'll clear the world of thee!" (105). The social effectiveness of the comparison between Stubb and a dog in Ahab's response might not stand rigorous analysis—many dogs are amazing—but, Ahab calls him a donkey, mule, and an ass, which, similarly, he intends to be effective by virtue of dehumanizing his interlocutor through an animal comparison. What we can gather from Ahab's comparisons is a tension that undergirds most of his character: while perfectly aware of the power of animals from his own experience with Moby Dick, he will not concede the fact. In his own words: "I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its... mastery" (367). Ahab uses animal comparisons for insult or mystification because the animal experience is, for Ahab (and many others), less valuable than that of the human experience. The problem is that this perspective occludes the educational and imaginative possibilities of the un-valenced or neutral exchange-based comparisons. Ahab's animal comparisons show us a vision of human primacy that can be set next to two kinds of comparisons that do not see humanity as primary: comparisons of humans with animals and comparisons of animals with other animals or things.

Melville draws general comparisons between humans and animals that tend to be unidirectional, but they can go either direction. When a group of men at "The Spouter-Inn" "seems an eruption of bears from Labrador" the humans are taking up bear characteristics, but the whale with the strength of "a thousand thighs" in its tail is taking up human characteristics—although those characteristics need to be magnified to fit the bulk of the whale. Humans can take up animal characteristics and animals can take up human characteristics, but the direction is recognizable. Cataloguing and categorizing all of these comparisons would be quite a project in itself (I have a list several pages long), but suffice to say that in these comparisons the readers

must consider what a “sharkish” harpooner might be like, what a “worm-like” man “who would craven crawl to land” might be like, what a “romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded...young Platonist” monkey might be like, what considering the whale tale’s strength in terms of “a thousand thighs” might mean, what thinking of whale babies nursing “as human infants” could teach us, and what we could learn from seeing as the heron—whose “vision was keener than man’s” (26, 80, 91, 128-9, 269, 289, 393). The dizzying heterogeneity of the animal terms seems overwhelming, but the necessary inclusion of humanity or human characteristics gives the reader a place to start in terms of values. We can more easily imagine the value of a baby whale nursing when compared with a baby human nursing, or how valuable the keen sight of a heron might be compared to our own, or the strength in a thousand thighs when we look at our own because we pull from our human experience. Melville knew that whoever his reader would be their humanity would give them an immediate frame of reference.

Through his human-animal comparisons, we see that Melville was at least sensitive to the fact that our humanity can limit our set of possible responses to a situation within a set of primarily human considerations. Human considerations are wider than Ahab’s mastery, revenge, and authority, because human considerations include the physical reality of our bodies as, in some ways, inferior to animals: we are not necessarily the most well-equipped species physically (and some animal characteristics would improve us); however, they also include the social realities of our bodies in “contact zones” with animals where “the human must respond to the authority” of the animal (Haraway 221). The ethical response to considerations like these recognizes how our humanity colors the interactions we have with animals. Our socio-cultural assumptions about value and possibilities pull on our understandings. While Ahab’s values pull his conscience to demonstrate mastery over animals, Melville’s human-animal comparisons

recognize humanity's place amongst the animalia of the world, and humanity's place amongst animalia makes it necessary for us to critique our own interactions with them. In many cases, human-animal comparisons in *Moby-Dick* intend no insult, but are, rather, an imaginative education: imagine human eyes like a heron's, human-bears, or how many thighs would fill up a whale's tail.

In some instances, however, Melville will remove humanity from the equation to compare animals to things (e.g., other animals or objects), and these are somewhat unique because they challenge our imagination with their lack of humanity. When we read that a whale "carries a surplus stock of vitality in him just as the camel crossing the waterless desert carries a surplus supply of drink" (278), the whale in the ocean is compared to the camel in the desert because they both characteristically carry personal supplies of important materials as they travel around their home territory. The ocean environment and the desert environment are about as far away from each other as can be, and no humans can be found anywhere, but we can certainly try to imagine an ocean of sand or a deserted ocean. In another example, the sea, "like a savage tigress... dashes even the mightiest whales against the rocks," and what we witness is the sea taking up the savagery of the tiger, and gaining enough force to not just move, but "dash" a whale against rocks, and all with nary a human in sight (214). Because the comparison is not to the whole animal itself, but rather to its organs, attributes, or characteristics, and humanity is not involved, Melville delivers his readers to a very different imaginative place than the Ahabian comparisons or human-animal comparisons, and this place is very slippery.

Melville's comparisons between things often come down to comparisons of characteristics such as "savagery" that do not have a direct physical correlation, and this is what allows him to deliver his readers into an ecological space where we find no necessary primacy in

social interactions—an odd form of egalitarianism made possible by humanity’s absence. When Melville removes the human from the comparison, the comfortable basis for comparison (i.e., humanity) vanishes. The background becomes the foreground, the environment becomes relevant to the interactions, and though humanity’s concerns are removed, a variety of others concerns (including the concerns of, for example, the wolf or the buffalo) emerge. Melville’s animal-thing comparisons offer us the value of considering the essential, natural, interwoven chaos of ecological relations. *Moby-Dick* does not ascribe to any mode of functioning because people, animals, machines, and things are always changing, always becoming different, and always moving around, so all modes, styles, and manners of social functioning are going to be local and (more or less) short-lived. In the animal-thing comparisons, with the absence of humanity, we recognize that insults are only incidental: we see no insult in calling the wave “a savage tigress,” the whales “sheep,” or the boats “wolves.” How comparing one animal to a wildly different one could be insulting challenges the imagination, because, in the ecological space where animals and things interact without humans, all social activity happens on the same plane. When humanity gets involved in the comparison, keeping our self-knowledge and hubris from coloring our understanding becomes difficult, but with humanity’s absence we have an opportunity to learn an uncomfortable fact: humanity is not necessary for values and ethics because animals have their own social lives and values.

In my reading, through his comparisons, as well as with *Moby Dick*, Melville takes us to this ecological space with no necessary primacy in social interactions (no classes, no social status, just social duties) to challenge our assumption that human values are primary and suggest that our consciences can utilize animal social and domestic values to solve ethical issues. Ahab’s comparisons challenge us to value animality appropriately: Ahab believes animals are useful, but

less important than humanity; however, Kyla Schuller reminds us that, “Nineteenth-century animals were widely considered capable of cogitation and emotional expression,” and “Zoologists generally found that animals manifested a broad range of mental and emotional experience” (6). Indeed, we will find that Melville’s human-animal comparisons challenge us to both see and master our species’ hubris. Melville’s animal-thing comparisons challenge us to consider animals as worthy comparisons of one another—without the necessity of humanity. These challenges also indicate three possible ethical responses to encounters with animals in their home territories (will we judge them as Ahab, as humans, or as animals), and those three responses will eventually beg two important questions. First, whether humanity is even necessary to the consideration of values, and second, if the values of an animal in their home territory might not be able to help humanity solve some of their problems. If we can imagine humanity physically improved by comparison with the characteristics or attributes of animals (e.g., the eyes of a heron), the social values of animals might likewise present an opportunity for improvement—even if we must travel with the animal to its home territory and the birthplace of its values. While our investigation here is mostly about human-animal comparisons and fighting Ahabian “mastery,” we cannot forget about the space in which animals are compared to each other, because when animals are compared to each other, we are reminded that humanity’s role in the environment can be tertiary. Our bias toward humanity as primary is what makes “fixing” or even completely thinking the ecological relations we investigate complicated. We must continue investigating how animals interact with each other in the hope that we will reveal crucial understandings about the creatures and entities we dwell with, to co-evolve together.

The animal in its territory

Melville was surprisingly sensitive to the fact that an animal's social assumptions are formed in much the same way as humanity's. Animals' social assumptions (humanity's included) come largely from a history of interactions in a roughly drawn home territory. When Ishmael tells us that the Nantucketer "lives on the sea, as prairie cocks in the prairie," that he "resides and riots on the seas," and "*there*" on the sea, "is his home; there lies his business," we not only get the idea that a human can dwell on the ocean—as the men aboard the *Pequod* do—but also that this dwelling does not altogether differ from the dwelling of the prairie cocks on the prairie (61). Ahab, in a quiet conversation with a whale head that is hanging on the side of the *Pequod*, says to the swaying head that its "most familiar home" is "where unrecorded names and navies rust, and untold hopes and anchors rot; where in her murderous hold this frigate earth is ballasted with bones of millions of the drowned" (238). Even the sky-hawk at the end of the novel gets pulled down from its "natural home" in the sky (409). Although perhaps difficult to imagine, the sky is the hawk's home territory, the prairie cock's home is the prairie, and the whale's home territory is the great swath of water constituting our oceans. The ocean is where Moby Dick dwells. Moby Dick's home territory includes everything from the ill-defined places where the ocean meets the land, to the depths of the Mariana Trench, and, sometimes, to upwards of forty or fifty feet of air. The interactions Moby Dick has had in that territory determine his responses to situations, just as, by comparison, a human's interactions in their home territory determines his or her responses.

To quickly distinguish between an *oikos* (i.e., household) and a home territory: only some animals go so far as to build structures we might call "households" (e.g., termites build massive mounds for their societies, bees build hives, and birds build nests), but all animals have a home

territory (e.g., a pride of lions on the Serengeti or bison on the plains). The *oikos* is a “household,” “dwelling,” or a smaller, local space inside the “home territory.” Melville shows us that he recognizes the *oikos*, i.e., household or “dwelling,” when Ishmael gives us a standard version in his enthusiastic experience squeezing sperm: “In all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity, not place it anywhere in the intellect of the fancy; but in the wife, the hearth, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country” (309). Man, woman, land, house, table, horse, and saddle are all there in Ishmael’s enthusiastic *oikos*: the people, the machinery, the space, and the animals are all ecological conditions for happiness in line with Aristotle’s formulation from so long ago (man, woman, and ox for the plow (*Pol.* 1252b13-15)). So while the *Pequod* has frequently been referred to as a floating “ship of state,” and Melville was certainly interested in the direction of the state—the “ship of state” has shown up fairly regularly in the history of Melville criticism (see, for example, Alan Heimert (1963), Michael Rogin (1983), and, more recently, B.R. Pellar (2017))—functionally, this “ship of state” can also be considered a floating *oikos*: a home environment (complete with animals and tools) across which things think and socialize with the natural world. Tom Nurmi will make a similar argument about “Bartleby,” in which he says, “Bartleby makes us re-think the close alignment of *eco-logy* with *eco-nomy*, where the “*oikos-logos*,” the law of dwelling (together), or the law of shared experience concerns itself with “the *relation to* human and nonhuman others,” and the “*oikos-nomos*” is concerned with “the *relation from* human and nonhuman others” (Nurmi 176). The various manners by which we think, socialize, and interact with the environmental elements around us constitutes ecology as *oikos-logos*, so that thinking in what we now call ecological terms allows us to reformulate how we read and interpret Melville’s work—particularly in

thinking the animal in its home territory or oikos. What does the animal household space bring to the table?

First, if the whale oikos does not present itself as imaginatively intuitive, Melville provides a moving image of a pop-up whale oikos in the chapter called “The Grand Armada.” In this chapter, the crew of the *Pequod* encounters an “extensive herd” of whales. Melville, in an early hint of overfishing, tells us that the herds had grown in recent times, not because of more whales, but because more fishing had caused the whales to group together in larger herds. The *Pequod* follows this herd for a while until, for whatever reason, they become “gallied”—i.e., in Melville’s note: “confounded with fright” (287n3). He goes on to describe them as sheep being chased by wolves and “buffaloes of the west” frightened of a horseman (287). Whether sheep in a pasture or buffaloes on the western plains, the animals are frightened in their home-territory because neither the oikos nor the home territory guarantees complete safety, sometimes simply by virtue of being crowded—like a coral reef. We read that the human reaction to this situation, being herded together as these animals were, will perhaps outdo anything these animals would do, because “at the slightest alarm” we humans will “rush helter-skelter for the outlets, crowding, trampling, jamming and remorselessly dashing each other to death,” which leads to the reflection that “there is no folly of the beasts of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men”—in which humanity compares rather unfavorably with animalia (287). The whales confounded with fright do not, however, stay so for very long, and in a short time they have marshaled themselves into “concentric circles... like multiplied spans of horses in a ring” (289). The rings of whales create “living walls” which function for protection just as the walls of a home do. Instead of rushing over each other for the exits, the whales use their bodies to establish a safe, pop-up home space or oikos inside their home territory. When the whalers move amongst

this space, some of the smaller whales even “evinced a wondrous fearlessness and confidence... Like household dogs they came snuffling round us... till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them” (289). We do not witness here a “sudden domestication” so much as the sudden awareness of animal domesticity and the animal oikos. After all, this herd of whales came together for domestic purposes. The young ones are playing in a supposedly safe place, so caretaking becomes a part of the whale domestic life. We see a young whale pup still attached to his mother, probably still recovering from labor, so parenting becomes a whales’ domestic activity. We learn of “Leviathan amours” in the deep, and physical intimacy becomes a consideration of the whale in its domesticity. Melville describes whales in their oikos through their performance of domestic duties (290).

Apart from these domestic activities in an oikos (of sorts), Melville also gives us a general social life of whales in their home territory. In their planet-sized, watery territory, the whale never leaves their wider ancestral family home—except when harvested by whalers and the brief moments of breaching. New whales are created and birthed in something like the pop-up oikos we saw in the “The Grand Armada.” Then, when the group disperses, the young stay with the females until they can take care of themselves, and the male and female whales form different schools. The unruly school of boys amounts to a “mob of young collegians” who are full of “fight, fun, and wickedness,” and will “abandon” their chums at the first sign of distress; whereas the school of young girls will gather round each other with “every token of concern”—to the point that the sympathetic young ladies themselves get caught (294). The mob of young collegians will eventually break up, and each of these lads will take on a harem of older ladies that must be defended from attacks by “unprincipled young rakes” attempting “to invade the sanctity of domestic bliss” (293). The male and females become communal domestic partners

much in the manner of a pride of lions. In the end, “almost universally, a lone whale... proves to be an ancient one,” and Moby Dick is just such a whale (294). The whale in its home territory has differentiated social duties throughout its life.

The social lives of whales in their home territory are, however, often interrupted by the presence of humans. Charles Olson tells us that humanity, in the form of a “whaleman,” presents the “only important enemy” that a whale like Moby Dick has, and the whale knows this from his vast experience with the rest of the things in the ocean (Olson 24). Indeed, when the *Pequod* finally encounters Moby Dick, they discover, “The tall but shattered pole of a recent lance projected from the white whale’s back” (392). We find out during “The Town-Ho’s Story” that the mates of that vessel were once “fast” (attached via harpoon) to the white whale. We know that Ahab once before battled the white whale. In short, Moby Dick and all the hunted whales beside him, have endured a history of humanity attacking them in their home territory and disturbing their general social ecology. When a-whaling, humanity approaches the whale in its home territory, and with every intention of harvesting the whale’s body. Reading the situation in this way can illuminate the fact that humanity brings the fight to Moby Dick. Melville saw that as soon as humanity introduces itself into the home territory of the whale, with the express intention of profiting, a whole lot of trouble boils to the surface.

While the whaleman might be the only “important enemy” of the whale, whales face other dangers in their home territory, too. Even Olson, in a note from *Call Me Ishmael* titled “Some Necessary Ecology,” admits that “the struggle” sperm whales have with the giant squid, “leaves sores and marks of the armed suckers on the whale’s skin” (25). The whale has other interactions with its home territory and wears them in crisscrossed patterns of scars on its skin. Sam Otter notes of these crisscrossed patterns on the whale that, “The keen observer recognizes

that they constitute sacred writing” (146)—by which he means writing on and in “private space” (25). Melville shows us how the skin of the whale indicates interactions with the objects and forces of a home territory, by describing the skin of a whale as “all over obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array” (235). In its ocean-size home territory, the markings on the whale indicate interactions with other objects or entities in that space:

Besides all the other phenomena which the exterior of the Sperm Whale presents, he not seldom displays the back, and more especially his flanks, effaced in great part of the regular linear appearance, by reason of numerous rude scratches, altogether of an irregular, random aspect. I should say that those New England rocks on the sea-coast, which Agassiz imagines to bear the marks of violent scraping contact with vast floating icebergs—I should say, that those rocks must not a little resemble the Sperm Whale in this particular. It also seems to me that such scratches in the whale are probably made by hostile contact with other whales; for I have most remarked them in the large, full-grown bulls of the species. (235)

Like rocks can bear scratches made by an iceberg, Melville says that so can a whale bear scratches made by “numerous” bumpings-into in the home territory—whether from rocks or other whales or battles with squids. The scars that make up the pattern on the whale’s back come from rocky shorelines and contests with other animals, but remain “hieroglyphical,” at least in *Moby-Dick*, because they represent an unknowable history (235). The whale wears a history of interactions in his skin, just as the rocks are changed by the icebergs. Moby Dick, and whales generally, have the world-surrounding oceans for their home territory, and, like all home territories, the oceans provide sustenance and survival, but comes packaged with a high

probability of danger. The animal's general lot in its home territory amounts to working to procure food, finding a way to protect itself, developing a social network (or understanding), and working hard to stay alive. The animal receives sustenance, safety, and, therefore, the ability to survive, for the price of some labor and relative vulnerability.

Ahab's part, then, amounts to bringing his human motivations into the whale's home and environment, and he changes the whale's environment by adding "supernatural revenge" (150). Ahab means to do battle with Moby Dick in Moby Dick's home territory for no other reason than to rid the world of Moby Dick. A Nantucketer might be at home on the sea in a floating human *oikos*, but the water is, as even Ahab will note, the whale's "most familiar home," and Moby Dick's at-home-ness in the water lends the nasty aspect of a home invasion to Ahab's hunt—if we are seeing Moby Dick as an old domestic hand in his home territory (238). Ahab's values are questionable at best. No amount of his pathetic "glad, hay-making suns, and soft cymballing, round harvest-moons" or striking "the sun if it insulted" him can overcome the fact that risking the hundred legs that purportedly carry his soul for his own personal, unhelpful, unecological reasons smacks of the unethical (340, 133). No special benefits come from killing Moby Dick. Ahab's desire for revenge is, in this reading, simply too human to account for the full scope of the situation, so we might have to look to non-human and ecological interactions to find a suitable set of values.

Melville's intuitive understanding of non-human interactions in a home territory affords us an opportunity to peer inside his ecological sensibility. In other words, Melville looked at a collection of whales involved in a variety of domestic activities and recognized domestic scenes. He catalogued and recognized the social lives of whales, and he attempted to do them justice as real social lives. Melville knew that the home territory brought both the benefits of social care,

but also the general vicissitudes and dangers of life. The landless whale, much as “the landless gull, that at sunset folds her wings and is rocked to sleep between billows,” has a precarious existence at best because of constantly moving through a dangerous home territory, yet “the sperm whale as a species is very much not a malignant monster, but a social, awe-inspiring animal with human-like emotions (61, King 324). The next stage of our investigation will look at the values that constitute Moby Dick’s awkward animal heroics in his home territory, and we will see how humanity compares.

Moby Dick’s Awkward Heroism

Even though Herman’s brother Allan Melville once wrote approvingly of Herman changing the name of the book from *The Whale* to *Moby-Dick; or The Whale* precisely because Moby Dick, in his opinion, “is the hero of the volume,” Moby Dick on his own hardly figures in the long-standing debate about the “hero” of *Moby-Dick* (Delbanco 177, King 330). Szlezák’s article is less than five years old, and its claim is unusual because the hero of *Moby-Dick* is generally said to be one of the human characters. Edward Said tells us in his “Introduction to *Moby-Dick*,” for example, “There are few novelistic heroes more clearly memorable, more original and well-fashioned than Captain Ahab” (356). Harold Bloom agrees, and goes farther, “Ahab... is magnificent in his heroism” (10). Walter E. Bezanson, on the contrary, once said that *Moby-Dick* “is not so much about Ahab or the White Whale as it is about Ishmael, and I propose that it is he who is the real center of meaning” (“Ishmael’s Voices” 663). C.L.R. James argues that the crew are the real heroes, and Lawrence Buell argues: “No act of creative or critical repossession of *Moby-Dick* can prove beyond refutation that it does or does not validate Ahabian force against Ishmaelian hedging or the virtues of multi-ethnic democratic egalitarianism notwithstanding their potential corruptibility” (387). No wonder, then, that James McIntosh once

said that perhaps “*Moby-Dick* has no single hero” (50). For our purposes, Wai-Chee Dimock put it best when she said, “Melville has ever reason, then, to call his book *Moby-Dick* (rather than *Ahab* or *Ishmael* or *The Fatal Voyage of the “Pequod”*), for as a literary model... the whale indeed has no match,” because reading *Moby Dick* in his home territory will provide us a heroic model against which we compare our values (113).

Reading *Moby Dick* in his home territory, he takes his agency and lawn-mower teeth tools and heroically defends himself from home invaders. He reaps Ahab’s leg and makes something that nobody could have imagined (Ahab’s monomania). *Moby Dick* defends himself by taking Ahab’s leg, and he inadvertently makes Ahab “a living instrument” by disturbing Ahab’s vision of the primacy of human agency and reinventing the environment: *Moby Dick*, an old, scarred whale somewhere in the ocean becomes an element of the environment capable of conditioning human experience from afar (149). *Moby Dick* whips Ahab into a frenzy, which dramatically impacts the sailors aboard the *Pequod*. When Ahab first encountered *Moby Dick*, he encountered a “living agent,” and this experience of animal agency starts his “broad madness.” The experience of animal agency was, for Ahab, the moment when his “special lunacy stormed his general sanity,” and the point where “that before living agent [Ahab], now became the living instrument” (149). Ahab has an experience with animal agency that seems to give him two options. First, accept that he has experienced animal agency. Or he can fight his own experience. Ahab chooses to fight his own experience and drives himself mad.

When Ahab recognizes the extent to which this animal, which might be swimming thousands of miles away from him, conditions his human experience and has power over him, he becomes infuriated, driven mad, and, ironically, becomes *Moby Dick*’s instrument of destruction. *Moby Dick* reaping Ahab’s raw agency and turning him into an instrument of death

was part of Moby Dick's domestic animal labor: a strong warning to go away. "What is it," Ahab asks, "What nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me? Is Ahab, Ahab?" (390). Ahab recognizes the power of Moby Dick's labor to "command" his reality, and yet he will fight this power. This bears repeating because we must diligently avoid Ahabian thinking here: Ahab recognizes the power of non-human ecological elements to condition his reality, and yet he psychotically chooses to fight this power—i.e., the values of mastery apparent in his sense of animality drives him onward—instead of attending to the cooperative possibilities with this power. Ahab, for whatever he might be (tragic hero, psychopath, eloquent-if-destructive leader), winds up antagonizing and attempting to bully Moby Dick, which, in at least one clear way, makes the whale the protagonist. We must therefore disagree with Olson, who says "Moby-Dick, antagonist, is only king of natural force" (12). Moby Dick puts an end to Ahab's tyrannical, villainous madness aboard the *Pequod*, he acts in self-defense, and he has Ishmael as a witness to this story of animal agency—much as Queequeg witnesses Ishmael's change of "will." In the first version published in England, Moby Dick alone (accidentally but literally) survives, and all humanity gets lost (Hayes 112-113).

In his role as successor to the story, Moby Dick not only survives the wreck of the *Pequod*, but he also survives the fiery hunt designed to kill him, and, based on the harpoons stuck in him, many fiery hunts before this one, so the question naturally arises of what drives this animal to such heroic lengths to survive—despite being harpooned several times. When the *Pequod* has a gam ("A social meeting of two or more Whale-ships" (189)) with the *Samuel Enderby*, Captain Boomer gives a hint. He tells the story of how "this old great-grandfather... runs all afoam into the pod" of whales they were chasing, "and goes to snapping furiously at my

fast-line,” and we see Moby Dick heroically trying to free his fellow-whales (323). We know Moby Dick does this frequently because Ahab’s response to this information is “Aye, I see!—wanted to part it; free the fast-fish—an old trick—I know him” (323). Moby Dick does not merely in this instance attempt to free what had already been captured, he has done this enough that Ahab calls this “an old trick.” But we learn even more, because in this same gam Dr. Bunger tells us that Moby Dick not only *cannot* digest a man’s arm, but he also goes on to say that he “knows it,” so what Ahab believes to be “the White Whale’s malice” is actually “only his awkwardness” (325). Moby Dick’s so-called malice can, alternatively, be attributed to an awkwardness that comes from doing something despite being aware of the difficulties involved. For Dr. Bunger, a whale’s animal drive does not naturally include malice and viciousness, but the animal drive might include an awkward heroism in which we see an active, ongoing ethics of freeing the “fast,” captive fish despite knowing (through many encounters) the dangers of the situation. Moby Dick chooses to keep freeing fast fish and defending himself, despite knowing that his vulnerability makes helping dangerous, and the values of this particular white whale seem to say: “liberate the unjustly captive though it cost our lives!”

We can almost imagine the white whale giving a “quarter-deck” speech in the manner of Ahab on these values before heroically thrashing away at the lines on the harpooned “fast” fish. Imagine, that is, a great white bulk shouting “Liberty!” and “Justice!” instead of “Vengeance!” and demanding the freedom of the unjustly imprisoned and enslaved instead of the murder of an innocent. Freeing the fast fish would have been a powerful image in the ante-bellum United States where slavery was the institutionalization of unjust imprisonment, and the image remains a powerful one today. In fact, the whiteness of the whale (and whiteness in general in *Moby-Dick*) has become a perpetual question of the novel precisely because of antebellum race

relations, modern race relations, and Melville's socio-political place in those relations (his father-in-law Lemuel Shaw was a Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court who held segregation and returning fugitive slaves to be constitutional), so a modern selected bibliography of secondary Melville research would not be complete without works asking after the question of race in *Moby-Dick*. As a favorite example, Fred V. Bernard explains why both Ahab and Ishmael seem to have a dread of whiteness with the provocative suggestion that, since Melville never mentions their race, both Ishmael and Ahab might be black or mulatto. Reading Ahab as a powerful black man and Ishmael as a black narrator necessarily reorients our thinking entirely. In other words, much important historical and social analysis has come from the questioning of whiteness and race in *Moby-Dick*, and more work remains.

The ecological question of whiteness, however, adds to the question of race the question of species, and, in this case, the ecological point of view on Moby Dick's whiteness can extend his heroism because the "Albino whale" overcomes the environment disability of albinism. Most animals, when born albinos, have significantly reduced life expectancy because color can make all the difference in an animal home-space—animals have developed color schemes by laboring with the environment around them. Albinism in animals generally comes packaged with shorter lifespans (because their traditional camouflage is not functioning properly), poor eyesight (because the lack of pigment means the iris cannot block as much sunlight), and difficulty finding a mate (because they have trouble participating in traditional mating rituals). So, while Moby Dick might be made the symbol of various entities from the snow-capped Andes to the polar bear and the white-frosted bride, the ecological reality of Moby Dick surviving the wild makes his advanced old age awkwardly heroic (157). Albino whales (of which we have pictorial record: "Migaloo" is a relatively famous white humpback) probably only need to survive until

they are fully grown, because by the time they are adults they are too large to attack, but the youthful period of an albino whale is more fraught with dangers than usual. In other words, despite being technically disabled, Moby Dick has overcome odds significantly stacked against him. The text mentions human assumptions about albinism when we read, “The Albino is as well made as other men—has no substantive deformity—and yet this mere aspect of all-pervading whiteness makes him more strangely hideous than the ugliest abortion” (153). Hideousness amounts to a human comparison (e.g., as against “natural beauty”) that nature does not register, and has nothing to do with the physical color realities that nature does register. In fact, Moby Dick does not let his disability keep him from the awkward heroism he displays in his efforts to free the fast fish and his determination to survive when attacked in his own home.

Moby Dick also has a heroic determination to survive, despite being unjustly attacked. After a lifetime of “repeated intrepid assaults” in which “the White Whale had escaped alive,” Moby Dick gains the reputation amongst whalers of being “immortal” (147). To linger on “repeated, intrepid assaults,” we must think of these assaults as, again, happening to Moby Dick in his oikos in what amounts to a home invasion: Moby Dick is pattering around the ocean, when, suddenly, humans break into his solitude and attack him. These assaults get regularly repeated by trained professionals. The crew of the *Pequod* attacks him on three successive days. When the *Pequod* first encounters Moby Dick, he responds as any threatened whale might: lifting his entire bulk out of the water, he breached, “Warningly waving his bannered flukes in the air” (393). Moby Dick warns them that he will not simply allow himself to be attacked in his own home. He will defend himself. Moby Dick issues another warning with the crushing of Ahab’s boat on the first day and a more serious warning on the second day when he smashes all the boats and takes Ahab’s leg... again. Moby Dick has apparently been assaulted enough to

figure out that the humans present less of a problem than their boats, because without boats, the humans have limited effectiveness in this environment. Their technologies (boats, harpoons, and the like) introduce more danger than their limited bodies. On the third day, Moby Dick gets assaulted carrying yesterday's lines (perhaps prefiguring the climax of "Harrison Bergeron"), and even still he, "Seemed combinedly possessed by all the angels that fell from heaven" (406). The whale has finished with warnings. He will now fight like a demon to defend himself. Moby Dick fights his assailants valiantly and wins. Moby Dick gave warning before activating his values of self-defense and freeing captives (in this case himself), and these values can be compared to Ahab's authoritarian will to mastery. Melville's text suggests that the whale, even though awkward, swims away more heroic than the dead, vengeful captain.

At the end of the novel, Ishmael witnesses the *Pequod's* final moments "floating on the margin of the ensuing scene," and when the *Rachel* eventually picks him up floating amongst "unharming sharks" and "the savage sea-hawks" with "sheathed beaks," the reader can be left pondering where the liberator Moby Dick has gone in his oceanic home (410). Perhaps the white whale frees more "fast" fish. Perhaps, off at a distance from a pod, he keeps an eye on things. Perhaps, swimming around and not worrying about the wicked world one bit, he enjoys some peace. Most of the human character (excepting Ishmael) that we met over the course of the book has been killed, and all we see is that the environment will survive us, but maybe by killing us. Not only have all the laborers aboard the *Pequod* been killed for the sake of and by this animal, that animal still roams free and at large at the end of the novel.

Conclusion

In *Moby-Dick*, the sailor-turned-minister Father Mapple warns us about the conscience of a particular kind of person in his sermon on Jonah's conscience at the beginning of the book.

This sermon continues an odd history of conscience sermons. Laurence Sterne once criticized conscience in a sermon (from later eighteenth-century England) by saying, “Conscience... does its office so negligently,—sometimes so corruptly,—that it is not to be trusted alone” (105). For Sterne, the problem amounts to the faculty itself. Prior to Sterne, however, earlier in the eighteenth century, Jonathan Swift’s “On the Testimony of Conscience” argues, “There is no solid, firm foundation for virtue, but on a conscience which is guided by religion” (57)—i.e., the faculty might be faulty, but can be guided. Indeed, in Father Mapple’s sermon from *Moby-Dick*, even if conscience does its job attentively, and even if guided, the problem remains the values of the person the conscience “hangs” in:

Screwed at its axis against the side, a swinging lamp slightly oscillates in Jonah’s room; and the ship, heeling over towards the wharf with the weight of the last bales received, *the lamp*, flame and all, though in slight motion, still *maintains a permanent obliquity with reference to the room*; though, in truth, infallibly straight itself, it but made obvious the false, lying levels among which it hung. The lamp alarms and frightens Jonah... and this thus far successful fugitive finds no refuge for his restless glance. But that contradiction in the lamp more and more appals him. The floor, the ceiling, and the side, are all awry. ‘Oh! so my conscience hangs in me!’ he groans, ‘straight upwards, so it burns; but the chambers of my soul are all in crookedness!’ (47 – emphasis added)

The lamp hanging in Jonah’s room becomes his emblem for conscience, but he notices that the lamp “maintains a permanent obliquity” to the room. Sterne said that the light itself was the problem, and Swift said that the light could be guided, but Father Mapple’s sermon on Jonah’s conscience says that even if conscience is faulty and in need of a guide, the real difficulty comes

from the degree to which the soul that conscience abides in recognizes the false, lying levels the conscience illuminates and responding appropriately to this knowledge. Father Mapple warned us that Ahab's purpose burns straight upward, but the chambers of his soul have been twisted by grief, anger, and vengeance. Ahab's conscience cannot do its job properly under such circumstances, and Melville suggests, by comparison, that if we can imagine our conscience looking like Ahab's, we might need to make some changes. As Starbuck says, "Say'st all of us are Ahabs, Great God forbid!" (371).

Again, Ahab allows his crooked values to determine his conscience. The crooked chambers of Ahab's heart can be compared to what we hear about Moby Dick (e.g., his awkwardness as opposed to maliciousness) and what we see him doing. As late as the third day of the chase, Moby Dick tries to get away from the fight. After being attacked again, he smashes two boats, and then he runs away. Starbuck recognizes this fact, and realizes Ahab's madness: "It is thou, thou, that madly sleekest him!" (406). Ahab soon launches the harpoon from Moby Dick's blind spot which causes him to wheel around and see the *Pequod*. Moby Dick does not attack the *Pequod*. He responds to being attacked in his home, and his response, from this perspective, seems justified and justifiable as self-defense. We cannot fault the whale for feeling vulnerable, trying to get free, trying to survive attacks, and trying to warn us of the consequences should we pursue our path. Unlike villainous Ahab, and despite what Ahab might try to make us believe, Moby Dick heroically does nothing wrong.

The argument of this chapter has been that *Moby-Dick* contains an ecological sensibility (or oiko-logic) which calls the reader to compare the values of "a human" (i.e., Ahab) and "humanity" (as a group) with animals—particularly the values of animals in their environment (an animal and its environment are a package deal)—and asks us to consider harnessing Moby

Dick's animal values (i.e., accepting vulnerability, providing assistance, giving warning, and a determination to defend when attacked) when making decisions of conscience. Many modern businesses, for example, hide behind their vulnerability to profit-loss to avoid providing appropriate assistance to their employees—even when nobody attacks them. Or in recent events, the Uvalde police department used their vulnerability as an excuse to avoid going into a school, despite the fact a gunman had trapped children. By comparing animal values and interactions with humanity's as an inquiry into the conscience of humanity, Melville shows us that we have a lot to consider in terms of what constitutes ethical action.

CHAPTER 5

OIKO-LOGIC AND REPRESENTATIONS OF BUFFALO SLAUGHTER:

HUMANITY AS INVASIVE SPECIES

Introduction

In the chapter of *Moby-Dick* called “Does the Whale’s Magnitude Diminish?—Will He Perish?,” Ishmael compares the sperm whale hunt to the buffalo slaughter that was happening and would culminate in the late nineteenth century, but he dismisses the comparison for a variety of reasons (the size of the whale, the nature of the whale’s home territory, and the difficulties of the chase) and proclaims the whale “immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality (339). Elizabeth Shultz calls this conclusion “both preposterous and glorious” (98). As Michelle C. Neely puts it, in terms of calculating the probability of the sperm whale’s demise, “Ishmael (and Melville, if Melville indeed endorsed this opinion) was wrong” (104). Ishmael is not wrong about the similarities and differences he mentions regarding whales and buffalo, but it seems like the option exists that Melville was using Ishmael to put the problem of species extinction on peoples’ radar. Melville is the kind of author who would bring up a topic in order to summarily dismiss it, precisely because the unspoken similarity that connects their slaughter is the insatiable drive of a capitalist economy to systematize production and always registers as destruction elsewhere.

Unlike the case of the while slaughter, with the buffalo slaughter, that modern drive to economic systematization can be usefully juxtaposed with the presence of an alternative: the Native Americans and the hunting methods they had used for the thousands of years prior to guns and horses being introduced to the United States. As Richard J. King reminds us in *Ahab’s Rolling Sea*, “Whales had nearly no predation threats for millions of years before humans were

able to enter their habitat” (254). As a bonus, when we did enter their habitat, we did so in, “A floating factory bent on exploiting a natural resource (sperm whale oil) for profit” (Neely 103). In other words, in the case of the whale slaughter, what we introduced to the whale was the very notion of systematic predation for profit; however, with the buffalo slaughter, we introduced a kind of predation that can be compared to a previous mode that had existed for some thousands of years without destroying the species. To be clear, in both cases the result of capitalism’s gung-ho production method is the destruction of a species; however, with the buffalo we are also afforded an opportunity to compare the western mode of predation for profit that utterly decimates a population (as an invasive species) with a mode of predation that, like most predators, does not decimate its resources. Following Melville’s call to consider species extinction, we can read the buffalo destruction in a way that we cannot read the whale destruction because we have a contrasting method to help us understand the thinking that undergirds such seemingly mindless destruction.

This study has aimed at reading texts with an eye on a very broadly conceived ecological or household logic in order to see what effect this has on the imaginative capacities of our conscience, but in this chapter, and roundaboutly at Melville’s suggestion, we are going to consider the destruction of the buffalo through a variety of representations in order to see how our conscience responds. Our goal will be to provide ground that might grow some imaginative alternatives to our current mode of being. Joshua Bennet describes Frederick Douglass’s 1873 speech “Agriculture and Black Progress,” as a call to envision a “more radical form of sociality, one grounded in the desire for a world without cages or chains,” and this goal is ours as well, but to do so we must acknowledge what Bennet mentions elsewhere: the necessary, extravagant violence that cages and chains necessitate (3). We are now, in short, going to utilize the oiko-

logical sense we have gathered from Swift, Sterne, and Melville (i.e., we seem to be quite insensitive to what we really ought to be valuing, individualism is unsustainable, and valuing animal social lives) to read the invasion of the buffalo's home territory by Americans. What we will find is a woeful shortcoming in the American socialization with the buffalo that is insensible to the value of the buffalo, values individualism despite its unsustainability, devalues the lives of animals, and, therefore, should work as a call to envision a new sociality—one consistent with a conscience that always hesitates before the threshold of violence.

The nineteenth-century bison slaughter in America eliminated tens of millions of animals from their home territory on the Great Plains. In some ways, my argument might be surprising, because my purpose here is not merely to bemoan the way white men slaughtered bison, although it will not therefore be claimed that white settlers were not a factor in the loss of bison: one cannot stand atop a mountain of bison skulls and not be guilty of “some” over-extraction. So, hunters, settlers, and politicians in early America are not “off the hook”; however, a true oiko-logic is undergirded by the understanding that a variety of factors are always variously contributing to a situation, and this is nowhere more apparent than in the destruction of the bison. What I will show in this chapter is how the many representations of bison slaughter demonstrate a general tendency with our species to mismanage our relationship to the environment which comes from an ability to rationalize away the destruction caused when we invade. Oiko-logic maintains that humanity is sympathetically related to the environment and its components, and in some cases we can make it a mutually beneficial relationship—though not without dangers and not in every case. In two film representations of bison slaughter, (*Dances with Wolves* (1996) and *Prey* (2022)), some surviving photographs from the nineteenth century, and a novel by John Williams (*Butcher's Crossing* 1960), we see this possibility obscured. In fact, this option is often

obscured because choosing mutual beneficence is only one (somewhat boring) choice among many, is not necessarily intuitive to anyone raised on the supreme value of humanity's reasoning ability, and it requires us to choose social values instead of profit values.

For example, in *Butcher's Crossing*, Williams' novel about a young man who sets out to find himself and winds up involved in the prospect of a for-profit bison slaughter, the first time Will Andrews tries to "dress" a bison for one of their meals, he reaches inside the bison's carcass and drags out the intestines. Andrews cannot believe how guts feel as they spill out the animal and around his feet. After his colleague casually reaches into the bison, cuts out the liver, and takes a bite of it raw, Andrews turns away to throw up because he is disgusted. After reflection, we read:

He had turned away from the buffalo not because of a womanish nausea at blood and stench and spilling gut; it came to him that he had sickened and turned away because of his shock at seeing the buffalo, a few moments before proud and noble and full of the dignity of life, now stark and helpless, length of inert meat, divested of itself, or his notion of its self, swinging grotesquely, mockingly, before him. It was not itself... that self was murdered; and in that murder he had felt the destruction of something within him, and he had not been able to face it.

So he had turned away (151).

Andrews discovers that he did not turn away because the texture was slimy, the blood was unsettling, and everything was gross. He discovers that he turned away because he was ashamed of and sickened by humanity's capacity to change an animal from what is nobly "full of the dignity of life" into "inert meat" for the simple reason that we need to eat. While Dr. Blau (from the discussion of Olga Tocarczuk's *Flights* in the introduction) sees the "precious, exotic

material” of preserved cat guts, Andrews sees a sickening mess. Even though Andrews is initially sickened by the situation, he is forced to accept a relationship to the bison in which the bison must die because he needs to eat; however, he recognizes that accepting this relationship changes him fundamentally and reorients his understanding of himself and the animals he encounters because he understands that he has rationalized the animal to himself. He now has a default mode for relating to animals, but, unfortunately, in this default mode, animals dying is generally okay. We see how his rationalization of the animal hardens Andrews’ humanity, and, later in the novel, we read of Andrews casually watching a colleague work a horse to death.

Before we begin looking at the representations of buffalo slaughter, we must begin by with some brief considerations regarding the introduction of horses and firearms as an invasion of the American environment. Horses and guns were brought by European invaders to North America during the colonial period. Horses and guns have unbelievably powerful potential when given direction by humanity. Horses and guns are, in this case, invasive pests from the oikological perspective. Indeed, what we find in the representations of bison slaughter in movies and photographs is a consistent, disturbing sense that this destructive invasiveness forms some fundamental part of humanity’s general character. Finally, when we read the representation of bison slaughter in Williams’ novel, we will see that humanity sets itself apart from animals by its ability to rationalize its own invasive, destructive impulse, and this ought to give use ample reason to pause and critique the singularly destructive possibilities of our species. Along the way, and for purposes of contrast, I will recur to instances of Native American ecological sensibility that can provide an alternative to the rationalizing force of western humanity.

Introduced: Animals and Guns

Animals and guns feature prominently in the representations of bison slaughter we will look at because the horse and rifle domesticated the west as much as any human contribution, and in oiko-logic, as we know, the animal and the machine play big community roles. We cannot truly discuss the destruction of the bison without at least mentioning the twin facts of the early American west: without a horse it was almost impossible to make the journey from east to west in the United States, and without a rifle it would have been very dangerous indeed. Let me be clear, however, and say that neither animals nor guns are inherently bad, wrong, or evil—just as no invasive species is inherently bad, wrong, or evil. My purpose here is not to say that people should not have guns or that we should not use animals for labor. What interests us here is that, when humanity gets hooked up with an animal or a gun, that which is bad, wrong, or evil suddenly becomes possible. Though good numbers for the bison slaughter are hard to pin down, James H. Shaw says, “west of the Mississippi River at the close of the Civil War bison numbered in the millions, probably in the tens of millions. Any greater accuracy seems unlikely,” but in the year 1900 there were only three-hundred American bison left, making it a genocide on a scale that can best be compared to the death of Native peoples in the Americas from the influence of germs and disease (150). Jared Diamond told us, “For the New World as a whole, the Indian population decline in the century or two following Columbus’s arrival is estimated to have been as large as 95 percent” (211). That genocide was not quite as effective as the genocide of the bison. Neither horse nor gun could commit a genocide on its own, but humanity, much like a germ hooked up with a host, hooked up with legitimate horsepower and firepower, and, unlike the germ, consciously chose to destroy. In humanity’s use of firearms and horses for the

purposes of bison slaughter we can see a devastating instance of how humanity rationalizes its understanding for destructive purposes, and somehow makes senseless destruction a “good idea.”

The domesticated horses that would eventually dramatically impact the plains bison did not arrive fully in the United States until the sixteenth century. As Peter Mitchell reminds us in *Horse Nations*, “Before 1492, horses were confined to the Old World... They were wholly unknown in Australasia, the Americas, or southern Africa” (2). Horses allowed white settlers to attack the mighty bison, and they gave the Native Americans not only new ways to attack, but new ways to transport what had been harvested. As Archie Fire Lame Deer puts it in *Gift of Power*: “Before we [the Sioux] had horses, dogs were our only beasts of burden” (35). For the Native Americans, that is, the horse allowed them to drag more bison carcasses to the village in one trip, but for the hide-mongers the horse provided the capacity to collect more hides. Horses, that is, made the destruction of the bison more possible by providing the much-needed speed and strength that humanity lacked. With the horse under us, it was not only possible to keep up with the charging bison herds, but it was also possible to drag dead bison away. Oiko-logically, it was not until horses, “one of the very few good things” brought to America, were brought into the plains environment that the bison slaughter was even possible, but horses would not have and could not have done this on its own, so that we can see the powerful effect of humanity turning the horse’s head toward human desires (Archie Fire Lame Deer 35).

Similarly, we cannot discount the role of firearms because the firearm allowed the user to end the life of a shaggy ruminant with one quick shot. The National Park Service tells us that, prior to firearms, Native Americans hunted bison largely by herding methods (either over a cliff or into a kind of “chute”), sometimes taking as many as 50 bison (“Bison Bellows”). With the introduction of the firearm into the environment, however, it became possible to eliminate entire

herds at will. Furthermore, over the course of the nineteenth century there were some remarkable developments in the firearms industry. Dennis Adler reminds us that, “When the American Frontier was being settled in the early 1800s, the revolver was little more than a fanciful idea” (1). By the mid-nineteenth century, not only was Mr. Colt making revolvers with astonishing efficiency, but we also find the development of the breechloading (as opposed to muzzle-loading) rifle, which was a development almost as revolutionary as the machine gun. Firearm development in America during the nineteenth century played a huge role in the destruction of the bison. Rifles generally do not fire themselves, so, much like the horses, humanity chose to utilize an introduced component of the environment to destroy another component of the environment, and, oiko-logically, this fact says more about humanity than it does about guns.

Between humanity’s management of the horse and the gun (and we could add, without much ado, the railroad), bison numbers dropped rapidly. Reading the situation with ecological sensibility, we can see how—especially when humanity can use them effectively to slaughter—the invasion of even a domesticated species and tools or weapons could dramatically impact the reduction to the bison herds when humanity directs their power. In other words, humanity invaded the bison’s home territory, and we brought with us organic and inorganic machinery capable of widespread destruction. Then, we used the machinery we had to decimate a population, and we called this reasonable. Sometimes humanity connects to environmental elements with such wildly destructive effects (e.g., the bison slaughter) that it ought to give us pause and an effective reason to critique the trajectory of our species on this planet. In the many representations of the bison slaughter, we will see various possible human attitudes toward animals which come from faulty rationalization. Humanity displays the shortcomings of reasoning in the representations of bison slaughter because we clearly see human reasoning

finding it acceptable and beneficial to use animals and firearms to destroy tens of millions of other animals without regard to environmental effect. We must utilize ecological sensibility to reckon with this senselessly destructive impulse in our species which, at times, can keep us from engaging compassion and sympathy.

Film Representations of Bison Slaughter

The most famous “modern” film representation of bison slaughter arguably comes from *Dances with Wolves*, and what we find are two contrasting bison hunts. In the first scene, we see Native Americans hunting. Even if we grant that the version involving Native Americans might suffer from romanticism and nostalgia, the version of Native American hunting in *Dances* is undoubtedly closer to the hunting practice of Native Americans when they got ahold of horses—again, they used to hunt by herding when they had only bows and arrows. The scene begins with a panning shot of the bison herd. Undoubtedly reduced from an unimaginable original mass, especially by the 1860s, the herd goes on as far as we can see. The Native Americans, who look like they are riding their horses without saddles, flow in a two-by-two line that splits off and forms two lines of hunters that will be used to herd the bison. As they get closer, the bison run, and as they ride along with the bison, they take a few down with their bows and spears. John Dunbar kills a couple with his gun. Eventually, the herd runs away, and the hunt dies down. Soon, the whole village shows up to start working on the animals—for their hides, their bones, and their meat (which will be drawn away by their horses). Later that night, the villagers have a big party. Tomorrow there will be work. An Oglala Sioux named Standing Bear also speaks of the community showing up after a hunt: “All over the flat, as far as I could see, there were men butchering bison now, and the women and the old men who could not hunt were coming to help”

(Black Elk 57). In these representations of Native American ecological sensibility, we recognize how the bison affects the community and therefore has social value.

Admittedly, we only get the aftermath of the contrasting bison hunt. Later in the movie, when the band of Native Americans (with John Dunbar) is on the move, they come across a valley strewn with the bodies of bison that have been stripped of their hides. The faces of the Native Americans register only shock because they cannot believe what they are seeing, and they cannot give expression to their experience, but they know *something*—much like the *Ammophila* wasp knows “something” about the caterpillar it stings and uses for its babies’ food (Spuybroek 119). The Native Americans and the bison are swept up in a sympathy apparent in the community activity involved with the hunt and their shock, which is utterly unapparent between the hide-mongers and the shaggy, rotting corpses they leave on the plains. As Dunbar says, “Who would do such a thing? The field was proof enough that it was people without value and without soul.” There is no reason to do such a thing, but, here, it has already been done. Some unknown entity has invaded this place and unsympathetically destroyed everything. The two hunts in *Dances with Wolves* therefore represent the contrast between humanity (here represented by Native Americans) having a sympathetic relationship with nature and humanity (here represented by the hunters) having an unsympathetic relationship with nature. There is a Native American story about each of us having two wolves inside: one good and one evil. They fight constantly. The winner, according to the story, is the one we feed. If we feed the compulsively invasive and destructive wolf inside of us, we risk losing the compassionate, sympathetic wolf.

In *Prey* (2022) we follow the main character Naru, a young Comanche woman, but what interests us particularly is how bison slaughter winds up at one end of a surprising spectrum of possible attitudes. In the first part of the movie, we again see the Native American attitude

toward hunting, because a tribe is engaging in the ritualistic hunt of a lion that has taken a villager (which reminds me, at least in part, of the story in Linda Hogan's *Power* where a sacred panther is ritualistically hunted and killed). Eventually, Naru's brother returns to the village with the carcass slung across his shoulders, and he presents it to the village elders (unlike in *Power*, where the elders must ask Ama when she's in tribal court for killing a sacred animal: "Did you know you were to bring it to us if one was killed?" (165)). Then, they celebrate. With the presentation of the lion to the village and its elders, the respect for the lion is not only in what the lion is capable of, but also its relationship to the community (like the bison): if the lion has a relationship to the community—in whatever form that might take—then the lion's death is also registered by that same community. The animal affects the community and is thereby a component that makes the community. Donna Haraway describes the situation this way: "To be a situated human being is to be shaped by and with animal familiars" (47).

Later, we see an alternative to this ritualistic hunting when Naru stumbles across a bison massacre. After crossing a small river, she sees that she is approaching a clearing. Looking up, she notices vultures. When she gets closer, she begins to see the bodies. She walks up to the first rotting corpses, and, at first, as in *Dances*, her face does not seem to register what she is experiencing because she cannot believe what is happening. Naru believes in Thunder Beings and the unknown more easily than she does this field of skinned bison. Unlike the utterly shocked Native Americans in *Dances*, however, she quickly glances around fearfully, because presumably: only something horrific could have done what she is seeing, she is alone, and whatever did this may still be there. She has recently seen a snake skinned in the same manner. After a moment, she approaches the nearest body and places some medicine on its head, and, with her hand on the corpse, says a prayer in Comanche. She reaches down and finds a bullet

casing, then looks down the long valley, where vultures hover and bodies are strewn as far as the eye can see. Something unknown had invaded the space and killed everything, and we discover later that this field of dead bison, killed in their home territory, was invaded by French hunters.

Intriguingly, the bloody work of the French hunters can usefully be set next to the Predator's bloody work because these hunters skin an entire herd, while the Predator (a literal alien invader) fights individuals and skins one snake. In this light, the work of the French hunters seems to become less honorable than the Predator's—despite the brutality of his labors—particularly because of what ends the brutality serves. For the French hunters, the end of their brutality is a paycheck (profit-value). The Predator's end, from its perspective, is the honor that comes from defeating a worthy opponent (social value)—it takes trophies of pride, not profit. The predator, furthermore, does not attack (at least in *Prey*) what it considers an unworthy opponent—such as a trapped or injured animal—so that we somehow get a sense of dignity and honor, even if we could absolutely fault the Predator with using extreme force on those who are ill-equipped to deal with that force. The profit-seeking, unsympathetic humans who destroyed a herd of buffalo sit at a farther extreme on a spectrum of attitudes than the Predator—who seeks a worthy opponent. We see, surprisingly, a modicum of sympathy in the Predator's methods, whereas, with the French hunters, from their bison slaughter to their later treatment of Naru when they capture her, we do not get that sense.

The French hunters and the Predator can therefore be set on a spectrum with the vision of Native American hunting that we get from the beginning of the movie. Instead of a comparison by juxtaposition a la *Dances*, we here find a spectrum in which humanity's sympathetic interactions with animals is given in terms of Native American oiko-logic occupying one end, of the Predator occupying a middle position, and of the French hunters occupying the opposite end.

We can think of it as three wolves inside us instead of two. The alien who is literally invading to fight, can occupy a sympathetic position that sits between one version of humanity and another, so that we get a vivid image of just how far away from itself humanity can be. The binary from *Dances* has given way, here, to a spectrum of possible attitudes, and thereby asks us to consider where our own attitudes toward animals might fall: do we rationalize them into destruction? Do we challenge them as they challenge us? Do we enter a sympathetic relation with them?

To answer these questions we will engage a sympathetic practice. As we turn to the final film representations we will look at, the almost unbelievable pictures of men standing with gigantic piles of bison bones, I would gently ask the reader to monitor their thoughts and feelings toward these images, while keeping in mind the horses and firearms necessary to generate such quantities of bones: every skull was removed from a nearly one-ton animal after its home had been invaded and it had been chased and shot. If a particular attitude creeps in, such as shock or awe or apathy, follow that feeling and try to figure out where it comes from. Does it come from an assumption, a rationalization, a sympathetic connection, or something else? In short, simply be curious about any attitude that might show up regarding the animals in the picture and try to think about the spectrum of attitudes outlined above. This sympathetic practice comes from the fact that there always seems to be a “human for scale” in these pictures, so that no matter which one we find ourselves looking at, we find our own humanity staring back at us. Oiko-logically, the question here is which version of the proliferating wolves inside humanity we plan to feed.

We see in fig. 1 below a gigantic pile of bison skulls that is going to be ground up and used to make fertilizer. A man is standing atop some several hundred thousand skulls, while another man stands over twenty feet below him at the base. This collected mountain of skulls, comprised of several hundred thousand dead animals, is a monument to the fact that people could

look upon their invasion of a place, and the death and destruction caused by that invasion, as appropriate and beneficent. There were piles of bones like this in many places—as the other pictures show. In fig. 2, a man is standing by a fence that is made entirely from bison skulls. In fig. 3 we see ten-foot piles of skulls tumbled around a train.



Fig. 1. Bison bones to be used for fertilizer; Gilbert King; “Where the Buffalo No Longer Roam”; smithsonianmag.com, 17 July 2012, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/where-the-buffalo-no-longer-roamed-3067904>



Fig. 2. A young man stands by a wall made of bison skulls; Sam Adams; “From Kings of the American Plains to Piles of Sun-Bleached Bones: How Mass Slaughter by Hunters Nearly Wiped out the Buffalo”; thedailymail.co.uk; 25 Jan. 2013; <https://www.dailymail.com>.



Fig. 3. Bison runners could kill 5,000 bison per day; Sam Adams; “From Kings of the American Plains to Piles of Sun-Bleached Bones: How Mass Slaughter by Hunters Nearly Wiped out the Buffalo”; thedailymail.co.uk; 25 Jan. 2013; <https://www.dailymail.co.uk>

One might ask, if this were a pile of human skulls, would we still be so proud? Early America’s invasion of the plains and the consequent destruction of the bison is an ecological mirror to what happened all over the world when European colonists introduced Old World germs to New World people. At first, germ warfare was probably accidental: nobody intended to obliterate an entire people using germ warfare. But then, through our experience, we began to see that these people had a weakness to diseases that Europeans did not. So, bafflingly, instead of sympathetically understanding how dangerous this situation was, we instead looked on massive destruction as an opportunity, and we decided to see how far we could push it. Only a cultural or species-wide disorder could make it possible for us to choose such wide-scale destruction, and a creature capable of such destruction needs to be very careful when making decisions about desires or profit charts that do not engage social-ecological values.

In all these representations of bison slaughter, as we document the effects of various attitudes toward animals, we also gather something we might call “unbelievable experience”: the Native Americans in *Dances* cannot believe what they are experiencing, Naru cannot believe

what she experiences, and the documentary photo evidence of bison slaughter seems almost as unbelievable as the genocide of New World natives. But we actually have experienced the senseless destructiveness that plagues humanity in the destruction of native peoples and the bison slaughter. Arguably, humanity should have learned caution from our history with horse and the gun, but what we find in the film representations of bison slaughter is humanity, for some reason, bafflingly, impulsively rationalizing pushing the limits of our destructive capacities.

Butcher's Crossing

In *Butcher's Crossing*, John Williams tells the “coming of age” story of William Andrews, who sets out after three years at Harvard to find himself, and winds up involved in a bison slaughter. Andrews does not even necessarily know what he is looking for, but he winds up getting himself involved with a prospect built on the sale of bison hides. After a perilous journey, Andrews experiences: the slaughter of several thousand bison in a couple of weeks by one man with two guns, the general messiness and waste of a venture that left thousands of bison corpses to rot, the difficulties of nature's fury, and the possibility that the trip was meaningless. Alternatively, instead of meaningless, we might say that he discovers something leading him to understand that we are given only this one infinite nothingness to construct something from, so we would do well to use ecological sensibility when considering how to use powerful entities (e.g., guns and horses). What I see as John Williams's ecological sensibility in *Butcher's Crossing* comes from his keen interest in using the human and animal experiences to intensify each other, which culminates in the relationship between the bison shooting massacre and the town itself. *Butcher's Crossing* tells us in no uncertain terms that animals and humanity have correlative experiences (hunger, thirst, unbelievable experiences, death, and destruction). When humans and animals can have correlative experiences, not only are we provided with a

sympathetic entrance into understanding them (e.g., in the shared experience of hunger), we eventually find a larger community of beings to connect with that have similar experiences to our own, and we learn more about ourselves.

The first example of correlative experiences in the novel is a long dry section of the trip across Kansas. At one point, the hunting party had turned away from the river, and their “skin man,” Mr. Schneider, says almost immediately, “I never have got over feeling put out when I saw horses and bull-oxes being watered and me with a dry throat” (88). Schneider has been in a situation prior to this one where the animals took water from the mouths of the humans, and he did not like the experience. The leader of the group, a Mr. Miller, does his best to mitigate the situation, but the men do eventually all have to turn their canteens over into a barrel to get the horses and the oxen water. In fact, the thirst of the oxen is given in some detail, because Williams wants to emphasize that these oxen are dragging a cart with two tons of lead shot across barren Kansas in the August heat. Schneider says of the oxen, “They look bad. Their tongues will start swelling next. Then they won’t be able to breathe and pull at the same time” (96). Both humans and animals are thirsty, and the concern with thirst goes on for nearly fifteen pages. The dark, swollen tongues of the oxen or the lethargy of their thirsty horses can be compared to the humans up on their horses, who are faring a bit better than the animals because they are not hauling or carrying a load—between the humans, the horses, and the oxen, the humans are the only ones *not* hauling or carrying something. The one-handed “camp man,” Charlie Hoge sits on a bench drinking whisky on the cart that the oxen are drawing. The animals are so thirsty that their bodies are responding in such a way that we know they might die. The humans are undoubtedly thirsty, but the primary concern here must be the thirst of the animal, because without the animal, the humans are incapable of accomplishing their goal. They cannot

haul the load. The humans need the animals, so their thirst must be prioritized above the human for the sake of eventual profit.

So, Miller waters the animals before the humans because he is practical: the watering keeps the swelling down long enough for them to find water, because he knows with a pragmatic certainty that the bison slaughter cannot be done without the animals' labor. Unfortunately, for Miller, this fact still does not raise them to be anything other than tools that need maintenance. Schneider, as should be apparent from above, does not care about the animals at all, but he is also the critique of individualism in the novel, and he winds up accidentally dying with his horse while crossing a river. Andrews is learning. He does not yet sense the extent to which they absolutely need the animals to do what they are going to do, but he certainly learns a great deal about animals over the course of the novel. The novel does, at various points, mention the relationship between the Native Americans and bison, so we can see in the novel, from the spectrum of human attitudes toward animals, something much like what we saw in *Prey*. At this point in the novel, Andrews does not have a place along this spectrum, but what we will see is that, over the course of the novel, he finds a position to occupy—which, in my reading, demonstrates how our attitudes toward animals are constructions from our experiences.

Another example of correlative experience happens after the long winter they have had to endure being snow-bound after a blizzard closed the pass into the valley of their slaughter. The hunting party had turned two of the horses and the oxen loose in the valley for the winter, but they kept one horse in a make-shift corral. When the winter lets up, they take the horse they have and go find the animals. First, they find the horses, but days are required to get the “wildness” out of them. When the horses are first hobbled, they rear and tear with wildness, but, after a few days, “civilization” gets back into them. Then, they take the horses out to get the oxen, and the

oxen are even more wild than the horses. They take days rounding them up, and weeks to get them pulling a load together. The domesticated animals were drawn into domestication, then back to the wild, and then back toward civilization (and the world of work from which they had been dismissed). This period where the animals are moving between wildness and civilization is an illustration of what Greg Garrard refers to as a “ferality”: a “developmental vicissitude befalling our most intimate symbiont” (248). Ferality is thus the state animals experience when they are somewhere between domestic and wild.

Will Andrews experiences ferality at the end of the winter, too. As the men are leaving their makeshift oikos—a lean-to where they huddled together all winter—Andrews experiences the strange feeling of having a desire to return, but he cannot figure out what he wants to return to, or what he wants to leave. “To what did he wish to return? From where did he wish to go? And yet the desire remained, for all its vagueness, sharp and painful within him” (209). Andrews, just like the animals, is being drawn both towards civilization and toward wildness. The process of ferality involves being pulled in two different directions at the same time, and what we see here is that ferality is not merely the purview of animality, but rather an unbelievable experience that humanity can have, too. At the end of the novel, when asked by the hide merchant McDonald what he had got for his troubles, Andrews cannot answer, but the unspoken answer is “unbelievable experience.” We can say this because, as they are leaving after the hard winter Andrews looks back on their valley and he:

...could not believe that this same valley had been the one he had seen pounding and furious with the threshings of a thousand dying buffalo; he could not believe that the grass had once been stained and matted with blood; he could not believe that this was the same stretch of land that had been torn by the fury of winter

blizzards; he could not believe that a few weeks ago it had been stark and featureless under a blinding cover of white... He could see the expanse dotted with the dark carcasses of the buffalo. He turned away. (213-214)

Andrews cannot believe what he has just experienced, any more than he could believe humanity could turn a dignified animal into inert meat. He looks back on his actual experience, and he cannot believe what he has experienced. The animals turned loose into the valley from their labors experienced something very similar because they went from being hobbled nightly and fed oats from a bag, to running around and nibbling at grass. Then, after a feral period, they settled into the wild end of the spectrum again. Only, of course, to be caught and go through another feral phase that lands them back in their previous experience. Ferality is, here, a correlative experience that humans and animals share, but the odd thing here is that experience does not require belief or understanding. It is simply had. If animals believed and understood their experiences, they would probably not choose to return to hauling humanity's stuff around.

The final example we are going to use of when we find the animal and the human as indexes of each other comes from the bison slaughter itself. As Michelle Latiolais says in the "Introduction" to *Butcher's Crossing*, "Certainly as one reads one wants the deaths of these great beasts to matter more, to be more difficult" (xiii). The reader wants the destruction to at least appear troublesome, but the men show up, find a massive herd of bison, and in the space of a couple weeks kill some three thousand animals. The first day's "stand" (where Miller kills one-hundred-thirty-five buffalo) takes up fewer pages than the considerations of thirst. Miller fires a shot every few minutes, and Schneider can skin the beast in about five minutes (with the aid of horse who helps peel the bison like an orange). They take out the leader, and the buffaloes bison move around in a circle, so Miller just picks them off one by one. This work goes on for days

and weeks, however, until only a few hundred are left of the several thousand that once stood there. The valley is so strewn with rotting bison carcasses that Charlie Hoge's wagon can't pass through to pick up hides without running over the odd leg. Massive carcasses litter the valley.

In this case, the correlative experience happens with the town of Butcher's Crossing itself. When the men return (minus Schneider, his horse, the oxen, the cart, and the hides) after their long winter, the town has effectively been destroyed. Almost everybody is gone who was there last year. McDonald had lost his business, and hides were down to ten cents a-piece—so their three thousand hides, months of work, and months of tribulations would have only been worth three hundred dollars. The town is abandoned, the railroad decided to punch through fifty miles north of the town, and, in less than a year, the town has been destroyed much like the bison were. A few stragglers remain, including the prostitute that Will can't get off his mind, but almost everybody has moved on, and the town is effectively dead. Miller, continuing the streak of mindless carnage we have seen regularly from him, decides in the wake of his disappointment to burn the hide man's home, and he destroys his own horse in the process. By the time the town arrives at the blaze, the horse's mouth is bloody from the bit as Miller pulls him this way and that, dragging bales of bison hides to throw on the fire. Will looks at the horse, and he impassively determines the animal "blown"—meaning that the horse will probably die before morning. He has found an unfortunate spot on the spectrum of attitudes towards animals because he registers working the horse to death with a shrug. Miller kills an animal recklessly and destroys a dwelling simultaneously—giving us another instance of humanity's senselessly destructive impulse. The bison they had slaughtered endured a forced destruction on the scale of genocide, the town is dead, and Miller's reaction to all this destruction is to add destruction. Maintaining the confident assumption that humanity makes the best decisions for the

environment is a hard sell when we see mountains of bison skulls, miles of stripped bison carcasses, and see Miller's reaction—which we can imagine from many, many humans (even if that hurts to think about).

The westwardly expanding settlers and their large-scale bison slaughters, the increase in Native American harvesting of bison, the fact that guns made the slaughter easier, the fact that horses made it possible to both hunt bison (and then carry the “goods”), and the strange intermixture of all those factors with the railroad and livestock industry were jointly responsible for the destruction of the bison. We wanted the land for cattle, or we wanted to destroy the Native Americans, or we wanted to participate in the marketplace, or we wanted to travel longer distances, or we wanted to carry heavier loads, but the animal, in each case (whether horse, oxen, or bison), is the one that pays the price for our desires. While somewhat grim, the important point is that we do not have to be this way. What a pre-market Native American ecological sensibility could teach us is how to interact with nature in a manner that does not default to considerations of market value. Humanity and the natural world can cooperate with each other for the improvement of both. In fact, when we focus on learning from our experiences with animals and their experiences with us, we are pointed toward a pre-market logic in which things, products, goods, and resources are not measured against some abstract monetary value, but the unbelievable experiences they provide.

To be clear, however, experience is not the solution, but rather a problem—particularly when we recognize that what we choose to do with our experience, what we choose to learn from what we have experienced, and how we choose to utilize our understanding are all moral questions that come from experience. We can choose to show sympathy and compassion for an animal when they experience thirst, because we have understood how bad thirst is. We can

choose to have compassion for animals (and other humans) that we push through various, unbelievable social experiences. We can choose to accept our destructive capacity, but not use it. Or we can choose any number of other destructive possibilities. Without the animals, the men in *Butcher's Crossing* have no trip, have no value to gather, and have no hope of achieving their goal; however, this does not detour them from pushing the animals toward destruction, and the extent of the destruction caused by humanity's unsympathetic rationalization is unbelievable.

Conclusion

Understanding experiences comes later. Understanding experiences as they happen is not possible because we are caught in the midst of them, meaning that they are not meant to be immediately understood—this is the primary shortcoming of experience. Perhaps, over the course of time, some understanding will come through, but experiencing and immediately understanding that experience simultaneously is probably asking too much from humanity, simply because they have different values. Experience and understanding, like ferality, pull us in different directions. One is not necessarily better than the other, but we do find a delay: we understand more about our experiences later. In the film representations of bison slaughter, we see a spectrum of possible attitudes toward destruction of the bison, and in *Butcher's Crossing* we see how Andrews' experiences with invasive destruction place him on that spectrum.

The representations of bison slaughter, in the end, show us how, as Cary Wolfe put it in *Zoontologies*, the animal becomes “a crucial strategy in the oppression of *humans* by other humans” (xx). In a now-famous statement, Interior Secretary Columbus Delano once said, “The Civilization of the Indian is impossible while the buffalo remains upon the plains... I would not seriously regret the total disappearance of the buffalo from our western prairie” (Brister 42). So long as Native Americans have their natural resources, in other words, they form a formidable

society. The way to destroy a people is to destroy their most intimate relationships to the environment (through the bison on the American plains), and never mind that using the environment to destroy an element of the environment is humanity choosing to destroy our own environment—a manner of acting that is not swept up in predator/prey, but rather seemingly psychotic relations. Like an invasive species, humanity overwhelms the bison's home territory and destroys both bison and other humans. Suddenly, for some reason, total destruction is possible when humanity gets involved, and largely because we do not understand the home territory we have invaded. Oiko-logically, in our representations of animals, we can find sympathetic practices, such as thinking of ourselves as an invasive species, that support the need for adjusting the trajectory of our species in its relationship to the environment by imagining the home of the animal we are invading.

In short, we both can and should do better. Perhaps annexing ecological sensibility into every human consideration seems like adding extra steps to every bit of reasoning we do, and I'm not going to say that it won't. Quite the contrary. I guarantee that addressing the ecological sensibility in literature will add steps to thinking. However, I am also going to guarantee that the added steps will create a more nuanced understanding of how humanity hooks up with components of its environment and gives us an opportunity make better choices regarding the paths we take with our most intimate oiko-logical cohorts. Oiko-logic places the people, the animals, and the machines as co-ordinates in a system, so that, as coordinates, we see flows of intensity between them, responses and reactions to interactions, and the relationships they allow or disallow with the environment around them. The choices we make with animals and machines affect our environment, which ultimately affects all of us.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

At the age of seventeen, and for a variety of unpleasant reasons, I left home and went to college out of state, certain that I would not be returning, which commenced an almost twenty-year period of relative homelessness. I say “relative homelessness” because I had a room to stay in (most of the time) and a steady job (sometimes), but, for me, home was where the backpack was, and this went on for many, many years all over the globe. Life, as it so frequently does, intervened in my plans, and I married a South African woman. When she became pregnant, we obviously needed to create a home for the budding family, so we moved to America and I started my PhD program. For a couple with essentially no reliable credit history, mixed immigration statuses, recently arrived in the country, and without a sufficient income for such an endeavor, buying a home proved no mean feat. After a few years of floundering and saving, we bought a house just before COVID hit, around the time I sat down to write a dissertation about the relationship of the *oikos* (i.e., household) to literature. I suddenly realized that I intended to write about something I knew very little about: household logic. However, owning a house and creating a home with my family caused me to live my work in ways that I never could have imagined: remodeling, battling raccoons, adopting a pack of feral cats, and watching the deer come out of their thicket were experiences that challenged my understanding of what constitutes a household. I consider my work a challenge to our species to utilize our ecological sensibility and conscientiously consider ourselves a small part of the *oikos* that provides our environment.

My literary argument, however, is that an ecological sensibility underpinning some of western literature’s more prominent novels serves as a vehicle for the authors to critique our species. Investigating *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Butcher’s Crossing* I

demonstrated that a unique sensibility to the natural world becomes available to the reader through the text which I call variously: oiko-logic or ecological sensibility. Deriving from a study of the oikos (a “household” that includes the humans, land, animals, and relations that are in, on, and around it) as a site of interactions where humanity is incidental, this unique sensibility challenges our conscience by suggesting the natural world might be more valuable (and moral) because of sympathetic relations than our world of rationally logical relations. My work has analyzed how humanity interacts with its environment as a species in an oikos, and, consequently, how the environment responds to our species’ actions in bilateral movement.

Gulliver’s Travels, for example, gives the reader various versions of Gulliver’s ecological insensitivity in each voyage to ironically point us toward the value of sensitivity to ecological circumstances, and winds up saying that, not only is humanity generally insensitive to ecological circumstances, but precisely those ecological circumstances ought to be what informs our decision-making—which is why our species’ decisions often wind up disastrous. The ecological vision of humanity that Swift offers in *Gulliver’s Travels* is one of a prideful species whose eventual perniciousness is a result of the fact that we forget: natural systems have a wider scope than humanity can immediately comprehend, these systems provide for us, and limits exist for both what these systems can give and what we should take. What we learn from *Gulliver’s Travels* is that the threat of ecological disaster resides within us all, and only a conscientious engagement with a sympathetic ecological sensibility can mitigate the effects.

Similarly, *Tristram Shandy* utilizes the sympathy and ethics of home and animal relationships (such as that between Uncle Toby and the fly he would not hurt) to suggest that individualism and sustainability are irreconcilable because sustainable action must necessarily include considerations of how we respond to others—animals included. Although famous for

language, representation, and humor, *Tristram Shandy* also provides an ecocritical goad to humanism by asking whether an individual can truly understand ecological relations. Sterne's ecological sensibility emphasizes how sympathy supports the conscience of our species, so his eco-question is not if we should change our relationship to the environment, but how to calculate the appropriate change based on ecological circumstances. Further, he asks that we remember to account for who is carrying the social burden: Yorick's horse, Maria's goat, and Toby's famous fly all carry an ecologically-based social burden for the humanity they encounter. In *Tristram Shandy* we see animal-human interactions are ethical sites, and our investigation of them is an investigation into the limits of human conscience, so that animals, to the extent that they help us understand our collective conscience, have a clearly ethical function in society.

Likewise, *Moby-Dick* depicts animals in their home territory, humans as an invasive species, and an awkward ecological heroism in *Moby Dick* that elevates animal values above those of human morality. I have argued that *Moby-Dick* contains an ecological sensibility which asks its readers to compare various kinds of values and consider them when making decisions of conscience and heroism. Melville's ecological sense is most prominent in the comparisons he uses, so I argue that the kinds of animal comparisons available in *Moby-Dick* yield up for its readers a variety of social values, not all of which are human. "Animal values" opens the way to discussions of where animal social values come from, and Melville's considerations of the animal in its home territory question the validity of a purely human set of values and offer us the animal's values as an alternative. The values apparent in *Moby Dick*'s responses to being threatened defines those animal values in terms which challenge both Ahab's values and our own. By comparing animal values and interactions with humanity, Melville shows us that we still have a lot to learn about what constitutes ethical action, so he makes looking at the animal's

values (especially in its territory) an inquiry into the conscience of humanity. Reading Melville's text ecologically allows us to see the positive aspects of animal values that can improve our species' conscience.

Finally, through various representations of bison slaughter I demonstrate how rationalizing the animal's utility can harden humanity's sympathetic possibilities. We used horses and guns to domesticate the west, and rationalizing their usefulness allowed us to realize some desires that seem quite horrific: the slaughter of tens of millions of buffalo. We have many film representations of this bison slaughter that we can learn from. In *Dances with Wolves*, we find a binary between the Native American ecological sensibility and that of the buffalo runners, but in *Prey* we find a spectrum on which an alien whose mission is destruction sits between the Native American sensibility and the senseless destructiveness of the buffalo hunters. The photographic images of buffalo slaughter from the nineteenth century are nearly incomprehensible, and quite moving, yet also a brute fact of American history that could be a symptom of a species-wide madness. That history is also displayed in *Butcher's Crossing* where we find that animals and humans have correlative experiences, and we find that the destruction of the buffalo and the destruction of the native people are results of an impulse in humanity to senseless destruction. Our ability to oppress animals becomes our ability to oppress humans as soon as one group of humans decides another is inferior, so monitoring our oppression of animals can be an indicator of how we are doing as a species, and we do not have a good track record.

The next phase of my research will have three prongs. The first and second prongs will be extensions of my research and investigation into the ecological sensibility of eighteenth-century British and nineteenth-century American literature. The first prong is further research

into Swift's oeuvre. From "the spider and the bee" in *Tale of a Tub*, to the almost hyper-oiko-logical *Directions to Servants*, and the ecologically disastrous "Modest Proposal," we find Swift consistently considering how ecological relations unfold, and unlocking why this might be could help us grasp a unique understanding of eighteenth-century eco-values. The second prong is an investigation of the household and ecology in Melville's *Pierre*, because *Pierre* is literally a book in which investigating the mysteries of household relations from horses to lost sisters seems to undergird the primary drive of the protagonist, and, in asking about the household, he finds a wealth of information he could never have imagined. The third prong will begin an investigation into and articulation of how the ecological sensibility found in many Native American texts (from *Black Elk Speaks* to Archie Fire Lame Deer's *Gift of Power* and Linda Hogan's *Power*) provides modern humanity with alternatives to resource-depleting modes of production. I am interested in thinking of the inhabitants of the New World as riding on advance, or a contemporaneousness with capitalist ecological relations, that we "rationally" rejected. By engaging with the ecological sensibility we find in many Native American texts and considering oiko-logic when making decisions, we might find we can live in a manner more commensurate with our sympathetic possibilities.

My research sits at the nexus of literature and ecology. When reading works of literature, I seek out moments where ecology is of prime importance and attempt to determine what factors and relationships contributed to its primacy. Ecology and literature makes sense as a unit to me because they can both be considered sympathetic practices. Hayao Miyazaki, the famous Japanese filmmaker describes a sympathetic practice when he says:

You could look at nature not as a human being but as if you were an insect... and think about what you could see if you landed on a leaf.

I'm sure you would see an entirely different world. By acquiring a sense of nature from this viewpoint, even if we cannot change our outlook on nature, at least we can expand our outlook on nature. (40)

Studying various manners of living, studying our natural home, and studying literature are all sympathetic practices to the extent that they are all capable of expanding our outlook on nature and human nature simultaneously when we engage with them. When we practice looking at the environment through the eyes of an insect, or the eyes of another culture (though perhaps in conflicts with our own), or the eyes of a character in a story, we are accessing our ecological sensibility. Each access point opens out into slightly different terrain, so studying them together expands our understanding of the topography and geography of experience.

Conscience has taken up a lot of space in my considerations about the relationship of literature and the environment in this topography and geography of experience, but when we see that interacting with a text or the environment always carries the possibility of activating our ethical radar, we can also see how engaging both literary and ecological studies as sympathetic practices would inevitably tend to invite questions of ethical decision-making. The authors under consideration in my work were all demonstrably interested in both oiko-logical considerations and considerations of conscience, and perhaps that is a coincidence; however, if novels are a method for sympathetically engaging ethical considerations, and if conscience is humanity's sympathetic home territory for ethical considerations (however faulty it might be), then interacting with a book or the environment always presents us with a possibility to engage our conscience in some exercise. While somewhat unintuitive, after investigating the sympathetic and ethical relations that interconnect literature, the environment, and conscience, they are actually quite inextricable.

What I hope these pages have provided is a demonstration that ecological access points in literary works provide us with a sympathetic glimpse into alternative sensibilities. When we read texts and focus on their ecological aspects (how animals are represented, how households function, or the bilateral impact of humanity and its environment), what we see are not merely the shortcomings of our species, but also viable alternatives—even if by negative example. We all have a stake in the environment, whether we believe we do or not, and we do find that the ecological sensibility is available to all races, creeds, religions, genders, and sexual orientations precisely because all these different kinds of people are together in our planet-sized oikos. We find ecological sensibility in Buddhist texts, Japanese films, Native American beliefs, historical literature, modern literature, the stories of Pacific Islanders, the sacred rivers we find around the world, young adult literature, Hollywood, plants, animals and everywhere the environment plays a crucial role in understanding our experience with the world. Ecological sensibility can bind our diversity together into a living unit, just as biodiversity binds together the natural world.

In the end, oiko-logic can be thought of in terms of the Sioux phrase “Mitakuye Oyasin,” or “all my relations.” I first heard the phrase when I heard the song “Mitakuye Oyasin” by Nahko Bear and Medicine for the People. It begins with an older man speaking of “Mitakuye Oyasin”:

That [“Mitakuye Oyasin”] seems to me an easy thing for us to say. You know, I think we can say that and mean it. And I think those are really great words and feelings and intentions because they all have to do with what nature wants and what spirit wants to happen through us. You know, we're articulating and being present and showing up for that next step, you know. Thank you, we are grateful, we are gathered to be able to receive a greater wisdom, so that we might be able to help all living things. I mean, that's a prayer. (“Mitakuye Oyasin”)

“Mitakuye Oyasin” invokes the interconnectedness of “every human being on this planet and every living thing—every animal down to the tiniest bug, and every plant down to the tiniest flower” (Archie Fire Lane Deer 132). Black Elk speaks of “Mitakuye Oyasin” when he begins his autobiography and says he will tell us, “The story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are the children of one mother and their father is one spirit” (1). Although the depth and breadth of all these two-legged, four-legged, winged, aquatic, and plant-based relations quickly becomes overwhelming, oiko-logic attempts to consider all our relations because the value of the attempt comes from the sympathetic understanding that develops and the disruption our habitual rationalizations. Reading literature through oiko-logic involves a self-consciously conscientious sympathetic practice that asks the reader to feel with all the relations they find in a story and requires an uncomfortable openness to the possibility that we, ourselves, are both the problem and the potential solution.

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