

REFIGURING THE ANIMAL: RACE, POSTHUMANISM, AND MODERNISM

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores the entanglements of racialized histories and experiences in America with conceptions of animals and animality and examines how African American and Native American writers render these intersections in early-twentieth-century American literature. While animals, with their physical and behavioral features and subordinate status within Western cultural frameworks, were fundamental figures in the US racial imaginary, which relied on dehumanization as a weapon of control, animals (and conceptions about them) also curiously offered a way around and outside of the categorically demeaning declarations of “the human.” Through literary explorations of the nonhuman, the writers in this project reveal forms of interspecies affinity and understanding that affirm biotic connection and also make fantastically strange creatures with whom humans share domestic and proximal space. The figure of “the human” as separate, above, and radically distinct from other life becomes not only strange as well through these readings, but becomes visible as a prominent obstacle to social egalitarian and ecologically cooperative ways of living. I build on research in animal studies and critical race studies approaches to posthumanism to observe how race inflects literary animal representations while also tracking how animality interacts with various notions of personhood. While animalization often coincides with racialized and

dehumanized personhood status, writers like Anita Scott Coleman and Zitkala-Ša rupture those associations and engage the animal (comparisons to it and becomings with it) as a fundamentally humanizing figure. On the flip side, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* demonstrates how a racialized animalization trope operates in the novel to defend the killing of a black man. These writers all collapse the binary between human and animal while demonstrating how that binary operates in concert with racial binaries in an American context that extols the human. Reading animals through a lens that acknowledges how race and animality intersect ultimately opens routes for rethinking what it means to be human and defining how we view the nonhuman.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The oft invoked “animal question” that circulates in scholarly critical examinations of human-animal relationships is—like the very subject it addresses—multiple. In mainstream discourse and practice, it may seem as though the question remains unresolved from that first posed by René Descartes: Can animals think? Unresolved, since animals in the twenty-first century on the whole experience exploitation and mechanization on an incredibly vast scale through factory farming, laboratory use, industrial fishing, habitat transformation, and state-organized animal control, culling, or hunting. Such practices imply the disposability of beings who must be unthinking if such treatment is to be justifiable. But even as such practices persist, “the animal question” continues to evolve. Its precursors in Western thought—Jeremy Bentham asking whether animals can suffer; Jacob von Uexküll conjecturing about animal perceptive worlds (their *Umwelts*); Jacques Derrida initiating more recent inquiries into animal being through the deconstruction of language—all proposed ways of approaching nonhuman being as valuable and important. Questions today (which often occupy monograph subheads) are no less fundamental, and in fact may be even more fundamental in that they not only speculate about animal experience, but interrogate the foundations of Western rationalist thought that historically relegated animals to a subordinate and inferior status in the first place.

In recent years, “the animal question” has become in some ways a flexible set of signs that can be filled in with different questions as they arise. Contemporary questions ask such things as: Why have animal studies in the humanities boomed in recent years?

What exactly is “the animal” (if it can be termed so simply and categorically)? How does human language manufacture a lack of animal agency? By what means does capitalism propel animal commodification as necessary and innocuous? How do social identities like race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class influence how animals are depicted, regarded, and ultimately treated? And should animals occupy a space of concern when human injustice continues to go on across the world? This project engages with some of these questions which, though they are multiple, are also inseparable. These questions also get at a root problem that stems from a common source: the hierarchical devaluation of Others as a matter of course that serves as a structuring element in Western social organization.

Most prominently, this dissertation asks how race and the animal intersect historically and culturally, and how this intersection becomes perceptible in early-twentieth-century American literature. African American bestialization in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Enlightenment-era Great Chain of Being hierarchies that position black people nearer to apes than to whites, and scientific racism at the turn of the century are histories that precede and inform the construction of blackness in the US, and which use animality as a tool of inferiorization (Kim 36-41).¹ These European and Euroamerican-authored histories invoke the animal to draw boundaries around the white human, and thus invent a human/animal binary that cooperates with and fuels logics of racialization. Dehumanization thus becomes a concept and practice that many African American writers in the early twentieth century devote enormous attention to refuting, with either direct confrontations to animalizing rhetorics or with the rhetorical adoption

¹ In 1900, Charles Carroll’s *The Negro a Beast* was a particularly disturbing contribution to the bestialization of black people that distinctly rejected both Darwinism and Enlightenment Christianity to invoke Creationism in its claim that Man and the Negro were created separately (Kim 41).

of W.E.B. Du Bois's ideology of racial uplift. At the same cultural moment, interesting things happen with conceptualizations of animals seemingly outside of racial terms. Following broader cultural acceptance of Charles Darwin's theories of evolution that recognize humans as animal beings with primate progenitors, writers begin exploring not only "the animal within," but the very nature of the medium commonly thought to separate human and animal: language. Assumptions about the superiority of human consciousness are also challenged and speculations about animal consciousness are investigated through modernist forms that move radically away from realist narratives and instead toward avant-garde experiments with textual expression and meaninglessness. At this juncture, the figurative animal materializes with distinct force in African American writing, where it is sometimes relegated to the background and other times brought forward in accompaniment with the racialized histories that entangle it. The African American writers that this dissertation engages—Zora Neale Hurston and Anita Scott Coleman—illustrate how the American legal system, for instance, is a salient setting for invoking narratives about animals because within it black personhood must still be distinguished and asserted. These intersections require more attention in articulating the full extent to which the American political and cultural imaginary relies on animality as a figurative eraser of personhood.

Much work waits to be done in thinking through race and animal representation in early-twentieth-century literature, and in addressing the urgent project of untangling rhetorics of subjugation around race and animals. This issue remains pressing because as animals continue to be exploited and subordinated, attempts to bring violent practices to an end through animal rights literature and activism still tend to rely on abolitionist and

civil rights discourses in framing how oppression operates in subjugating animals. This is perhaps not surprising since animal rights history in the US has ties to abolitionism; the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was founded shortly after the Civil War by those with abolitionist ties (Davis). However, recent invocations of civil rights discourse (by groups like PETA) that, for instance, compare chattel slavery and factory farming further reinscribe links between the subordinated status of racialized people and that of animals, even as they may seek to ascribe personhood broadly. These comparisons unwittingly repeat rhetorics of dehumanization that date back to the Enlightenment and then draw human-animal connections only through a disempowered commonality of oppression and injustice. As the writers in this project demonstrate, productive and salutary human-animal associations instead emerge more fully through routes like the avowal of empowered commonalities, kinship-based perspectives, and through an appreciation for radical otherness.

This project engages with animal studies, critical race scholarship, and most extensively with recent literature that takes up intersectional approaches to the animal question. Critically, in recent years animal studies as a field in the academic humanities has been (in large part) colorblind in its approach to envisioning interspecies relationships that point toward a posthuman future. Although the landscape is changing since critics like Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Maneesha Deckha, Bénédicte Boisseron, Tiffany Lethabo King, Alexander Weheliye, and Che Gossett take issue with posthumanism's presumption that we are past race, and particularly "past blackness in our considerations" of a universal human subject that can transcend its troubled relationship with the nonhuman world (Boisseron xxi). These scholars resolutely stake out ground around

black and brown subjects, resisting calls to venture forward into the mythical white posthuman. Instead, they seek connections that evade the Enlightenment human/animal dichotomy and, through a reconceptualization of the human, rediscover the multivarious ways of relating with those who share the planet.

By reading early-twentieth-century literature through this critical lens, connections between people and animals emerge that refute adherence to Euroamerican rationalist models of human-nonhuman understanding. Instead, ways of appreciating interspecies connection, and of understanding animals through terms not prescribed by hierarchical epistemologies, come forth and reveal how histories of racialization and animalization are deeply entangled, especially in post-slavery, post-Darwin, post-allotment America. The United States with its settler colonial histories of Native American genocide and African enslavement alongside the prescribed mass murder of endemic animals is particularly illustrative of the power of dominating ideologies to create persons who possess the right to subjugate or destroy those who are not granted personhood. Literary representations make appreciable the work of narrative in constructing the categories of human and nonhuman, as they also depict histories of racialization and animalization co-constituting one another.

This dissertation takes up recent conversations in posthumanism and animal studies that investigate not only the animal, but the human as well. Since posthumanist and animal studies critically intend to move beyond the human, or to decenter its triumphant place, it has proved problematic that the theories they engage and produce often imply “the human” to be a uniform category. In its broadest sense, the category of “the human” discursively implies an even and broadly applicable species label that

distinguishes “us” from other animals. It suggests a collective uniformity among individuals eligible for inclusion in its seemingly distinct ontological territory. Its legal, political, and philosophical applications defend the notion of—if not a superior subjectivity—then a distinct one at least. But as is excessively plain to those who experience the social, material, and political unevenness of the category “human,” this term is not only inadequate in reflecting its varied applications, but it also functions as a means of determining uneven executions of justice. The conceptual “human” in the twentieth century, as Sylvia Wynter notes, becomes overrepresented by the “hegemonic ethnoclass” of the Western white Man (262). Some critical race scholars object to posthumanism’s frequent elisions of “alternative versions of humanity,” meaning those who are not Western, white, and male (Weheliye 10). As scholars like Wynter and Weheliye describe, the human in Western thought is its own sort of species, not an absolute category. Weheliye’s examination of black feminist theories of what it means to be human observe that the fields of posthumanism and animal studies widely “presume that we have now entered a stage in human development where all subjects have been granted equal access to western humanity and that this is, indeed, what we all want to overcome” (10). Weheliye explains that the privilege to move beyond this designation is one available to those already in possession of its myriad exclusionary benefits. Rather than move beyond, Weheliye suggests a “focus on how humanity has been imagined and lived by those subjects excluded” from the domain of the “liberal humanist figure of Man” (8). An examination of different epistemologies, outside the domain of “the human,” provides a way of tearing open the category without denying its potential to transform its meaning.

Just as the “the human” functions often in critical discourse as a uniform category, the terms “animal” and “nonhuman animal” adopt this same lack of specificity determined by categorization. Recent work in posthumanism posits that humanism (or the humanist project), despite its multidirectionality and depth, nevertheless fails to explicate or emancipate the human, premised as it is on ideas of humanity as the hierarchical apex in creaturely being. Thus, studies of the “nonhuman animal,” often investigate animals from the vantage of an always present lack. Cary Wolfe writes that the human, in fact, remains the central orienting axis for understanding “the alterity of the nonhuman” (169). This signifier—“nonhuman animal”—for creatures of every stripe attempts to imply at once that, in fact, humans are by default thought of as animals so that the unqualified term “animal” might cause confusion, while it also suggests that animals may now be understood as unified beings in their nonhumanness. While this may long have been the implied meaning of the term “animal,” posthumanism now articulates this human deficiency as embedded in progressive discourse.

Similarly, more recent inquiry into the structure and function of language as determining thoughts about what it is to be animal, human, or thing suggests that language de-animates animals and thus empowers humanity by granting it greater vibrancy. In *Animacies*, Mel Y. Chen argues that “the figurative substitution of a human with an animal figure often accomplishes” an actual “displacement” of the human to what may be considered less animate states, or accomplishes a form of objectification (44). Chen identifies “humanity’s partners in definitional crime” to be “animality (as its analogue or limit)” and “race” (3). Thus, race is often animalized, while animality is invoked to define that which is not human. Claire Jean Kim also unravels the ways that

discourses around species are always implicated or inseparable from discourses of race when she argues that race has always been constructed as “a metric of animality, as a classification system that orders human bodies according to how animal they are” (18). Building on work by these scholars and others, this project engages animal representation at the start of the modernist period in America to observe how race influences these depictions, and how race intersects with routes that avoid the Human as end point.

Looking to early-twentieth-century American literature offers an especially instructive vantage point for reading race alongside the animal for many reasons, not least of which is the fact that animalizing racism marked the time period so prominently. At the same time, formal innovations of the modernist period invited explorations into articulating nonhuman being, and enabled an articulation of human animality through language and poetics. Following in the wake of Darwin’s theorizations on the evolution of all species, including human beings, artistic investigations of adaptation, transformation, and human continuity with the rest of the living world became modernist concerns. Meanwhile, the period marks the moment just prior to the anthropocene with its defining consequence of global mass species extinction through hunting, fishing, and colonization all made possible through technological expansion.² Moreover, the first forty years of the twentieth century constitute a time in the US when animals disappear quickly from people’s everyday experiences as urban migration and industrialization increase, so that encounters become less frequent and more peculiar. Fewer animal encounters coincident with aesthetic investigations into ‘the animal question’ emerge within a history that was also witness to the publication of literature promoting scientific racism

² Scientists mark 1950 as the start of the anthropocene (Carrington).

and primitivism that, for instance, equated black people with apes.³ In this context, I look at the ways that writers of color denied not a connection to animals, but instead proffered subtle and overt critiques of the racist underpinnings of political, scientific, and social structures in America that used animal subordination as an integral tool of racism.

Connection between human and animal is troubled by these histories, and yet, as the writers in this project show, animals offer opportunities for interspecies intimacies that spotlight the perverted machinations of Euroamerican subordinating hierarchies, pointing toward the possibility of their eventual dismantling.

This dissertation reads Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Zitkala-Ša's *Old Indian Legends* (1901), and a small sample of Anita Scott Coleman's writing (1926 and 1938) as literature that complicates understandings of what it is to be human, animal, and (less stably) both. These writers assert a rebuke to settled notions about the human/animal binary and other hierarchical categories. While the three chapters in this dissertation explore different intersections between humans, animals, histories, and traditions, and thus do not rotate around a single axis of study, they all maintain a focus on boundary-making and dissolution at the juncture of race and animality. By reading animals in three early twentieth-century works, this project approaches the convergence of animals and race specifically in African-American and Native-American literatures. While certainly other racialized literatures have historical contexts around animalization which warrant theorization and analysis, the rationale for

³ This racism manifested in myriad ways, as when in 1906 the Bronx Zoo held a human zoo exhibit which caged a 23-year-old Congolese man alongside an orangutan and a chimpanzee (Keller). That same man, Ota Benga, had been part of a 1904 exhibit at the St. Louis World's Fair that replicated traditional dwellings of Africans, Eskimos, and Native Americans (Keller). The staging of race and precolonial lifeways as consumptive displays points to a Euroamerican consumption of nonwhite bodies in its production of "civilized" empire—literally and metaphorically.

such a choice here is twofold. First, African-American literature was prominent and influential within modernism and offers much material for study, as does Native literature. Second, and more importantly, animalization as a tool of dehumanization has been a prominent means of oppression used against black and indigenous people throughout the history of the United States. Black/white as the organizing binary of the American racial imaginary means that racialization happens in its most extreme forms along this axis. For Native Americans, racialization and extinction through genocide have been historically related concepts and practices of control instituted by whites in the US. Native Americans have also been animalized through essentializing imaginaries that placed them closer to nature and the nonhuman world (Kim 43-44).

Histories of racialization that include animality as part of the racial matrix are relevant when reading both representations of race and representations of animals because by disentangling them, the constructions of both become more clearly visible. At the same time, through literatures that emerge in specific cultural contexts where animals function differently, their depictions demonstrate ways of encountering the human and the animal outside of the Euroamerican white positionality to which modernism often defaults. As Kirby Brown observes in a 2017 article on “New Modernist Studies’ ‘Indian Problem,’” early-twentieth-century formal and thematic innovations by Native writers and academia’s “increasing attention” to Indian production, philosophy, and myriad frameworks still “have not had an appreciable impact on the field’s engagement with American Indian writing” (289). Disappointingly, modernist studies continues to be a very white field, which Michael Bibby asserts as inherently “structural” to the field—a field he understands to be fundamentally “a racial formation of whiteness” (487). This is

not to say that the field cannot be transformed nor that much literature that has historically been excluded will remain so, but it does explain why nearly all studies of the animal in modernist texts focus on white authors and perspectives. Still, for this reason, I am hesitant to invoke modernism as the heading under which the works in this dissertation fall; early twentieth-century literature seems a more apt descriptor for writing that clearly counters a formation of whiteness.

The second chapter of this project reviews the critical landscape in terms of scholarly investigations that center race and multicultural histories in the United States as entangled with constructions of the animal and animality. Analyses that issue calls for posthumanism and animal studies to permanently integrate race into their interpretive matrices also constitute a significant portion of this introductory chapter. Decka's work that calls for postcolonial feminist approaches to animal studies, Jackson's appeal for posthumanism to move away from its Enlightenment rationalist foundations, Weheliye's theorizations of the human that draw on the work of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, and Lethabo-King's indictments of posthumanist discursive violence all inform this chapter's approach to reading the animal as constructed through or around racialized experience. Noting work on modernist representations of animals, going back to Margot Norris, Carrie Rohman, and Christopher Peterson, this chapter looks at interpretations of the animal as integral to being human, and assesses how race has been invoked or obscured in earlier scholarship. Reading Anita Scott Coleman's short story "Three Dogs and a Rabbit" and her poem "Idle Wonder" provides an opportunity for considering African-American constructions of personhood adjacent to situations of contact with animals that either confer humanity or rupture notions of the animal. This chapter goes on

to chronicle work that engages questions of race and the animal in other fields or literary periods, and traces the roots of thinking through these questions, back to Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Achille Mbembe, and Derrida.

The next chapter examines the varied depictions of animals in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, charting how voice adheres or vanishes according to an animal character's proximity to the community. In a novel examined extensively from feminist and critical race perspectives that find Janie's acquisition of her own voice and of the narrative itself either laudable, incomplete, or illusory, and analyses which also attend to Hurston's use of dialect as innovative and praiseworthy or disparaging and suggestive of minstrelsy, voice is a central concern within the novel. This chapter looks at how Hurston's particular interest in animals manifests in this context. Scholars like Sharon Davie observe that animal worlds within the novel "pull the cultural rug from under the readers' feet" by disordering a sense of mastery humans may have over the world (446). Matt Bonner's mule, the wake of buzzards that consumes his remains, and the rabid dog that bites Tea Cake all figure differently and with variously elaborated communication systems. Animal voice, acceptance, and killability hinge, in some ways, on the discourses they deploy. This chapter also follows Tea Cake's seeming transformation from man to "mad dog" after the rabid dog bites him and transfers the rabies virus. While this transmission suggests a living, cellular continuity between man and dog, the events that follow his infection, in effect, work to dehumanize Tea Cake in the eyes of the white justice system that acquits Janie for killing him. Hurston's depiction of an exasperated (and silenced) Black community during the trial scene, alongside Janie's exoneration, contests not the outcome of the verdict, but its basis that relied on a dehumanized Tea

Cake as killable. The novel makes plain the white judicial system's entrenched history of dehumanization as a means of rationalizing (or prescribing) death. Ultimately, language and voice emerge as troublingly deceptive, with the novel's final pages providing space for the alterity of silence.

The fourth chapter considers Zitkala-Ša's *Old Indian Legends* as a text that disputes notions of human superiority—and in fact of discrete human ontologies—through a combination of narrative and image that depict a world in which bodily forms alter interchangeably. Zitkala-Ša's interpretive translations of Dakota oral stories read alongside Angel De Cora's illustrations, which were included in the original 1901 publication, suggest human-nonhuman relationships to be essential to human life and connection to the world. Rather than threatening or devaluing, interchanges between humans and animals in the *Legends* point to kinship relationships between humans and nonhumans as constructive in the absence of species hierarchical ordering. Settler colonial depredation, allotment policies, and assimilation attempts are all metaphorized in this text that uses animal characters to enact human moral lessons around ethical behavior. Animality functions as a means of reversing anti-Indian racism in that animal characters who stand in for colonial agents are more emphatically and physically animalized. The story "The Badger and the Bear," for instance, describes a starving bear, once fed and strengthened by the badgers' hospitality, stealing their home and installing his own family. The bear's fur, paws, teeth, and unpredictable temper are all emphasized, while the badgers are depicted as more physically human. The antagonist characters guilty of greed, conquest, and lack of respect for the natural world are cast as not just more distinctly animal, but as trapped within a more rigid and inescapable bodily form.

The stories present a Dakota worldview that seeks justice through alliances with nature and between species, just as they demonstrate how a sense of relationality that functions through ideas of fluidity and non-hierarchy provides a means of enacting sensible coexistence with the rest of the living world.

Finally, the literature this dissertation reads ultimately asks more questions of the animal than it hazards to answer. Coleman's speaker speculates on the inner life of her housecat as she entertains the notion she may experience life in a way that mirrors that of a Black acquaintance who works as a housemaid, and whose employers assume her to be perfectly content in her isolation, just as the speaker assumes her cat to be. Hurston conjures an ornate ceremony the buzzards perform before the consumption of a mule that had received a town funeral upon its passing, so accepted was it by the townspeople. These scenes point to the potential for communal human-animal relationships and also to the unknowability of animal rituals and minds. Tea Cake's illness, which leaves him subject to the label "mad dog," provokes questions about the social, psychological, and political processes involved in efforts to dehumanize, to sanction killing through animalization, and to speak for another. Zitkala-Ša's stories pose conceptual and spiritual contentions that humans possess continuity with the rest of animal life, as these stories also question the sustainability of a culture that seeks hierarchical seclusion at the imagined top of an evolutionary chain. More questions, though they may not provide answers, do I hope point to the multidimensional complexities that rationalistic approaches to the animal efface, which then all too often enable violence and erasure. In the present moment in which the precariousness of much life on earth becomes ever more so, the flourishing of questions about the animal and the nature of its subordinate

construction suggest that curiosity and interest offer the strongest possibilities for altering our ominous course.

CHAPTER II
CATEGORICAL INTERSECTIONS: WHERE RACIALIZATION
AND ANIMALIZATION MEET

As of yet, the intersections of race, environmental justice, and animal studies have not been adequately addressed within modernist studies. Given how race directly figures into the animalizing ontologies that many modernist texts explore, focusing on how racialization and animalization intersect with modernist themes and aesthetics promises to reveal much about both of these constructions. Such investigations offer several promising outcomes. In addition to highlighting how modernist aesthetics that ostensibly elide race in depictions of animals actually work to reinscribe binary oppositions between humans and animals, studies that read race and animality as co-constructs offer a means of unravelling those entanglements while also locating the presence of interspecies alliances that resist white hegemonic subordination. This essay explores the need in modernist studies for a deeper critical engagement with how representations of animals and animality intersect with conceptions of race, and it also assesses work that examines these intersections in different fields outside of modernist studies.

A Review and a Reading

In looking at the intersections of race, species, and modernism, this essay will track a few key threads. First, it will review recent critical calls for more scholarship to investigate how the dehumanizing and animalizing work of racialization influences ideas about not only the animal, but “the human” as a universal construct as well. I then look at scholarly approaches to reading animals in modernist literature, reviewing how some studies have asked us to conceive of the animal through specific formal and thematic

depictions in modernism. Since many of these analyses, with notable exceptions, such as Christopher Peterson's *Bestial Traces*, focus on the modernist productions of white writers, race is typically elided in those critical discussions, implying its invisibility in the human/animal imaginary. Since histories of racism necessarily shape how animals are rendered, I look at two pieces of writing by Anita Scott Coleman, a Harlem Renaissance writer who resided in the Western US and published in many of the period's most influential African American periodicals. A short story and a poem of Coleman's that centralize animal characters and trouble depictions of animality in distinct ways provide opportunities for thinking through race and the animal. This essay then goes on to look at work that extensively charts race as "a vector" (to borrow Claire Jean Kim's term) that deeply influences representations of animals and real world relationships with them. It also looks at current work in animal studies and posthumanism, and at the postcolonial theoretical origins of scholarship that first interrogated the ways that human and animal subjugation emerged under colonialism. At the intersection of these two fields, in fact, sits a problem that until recently has maintained distance between the two fields: critical race theorists' reluctance to embrace the animal or connections to it when full membership within the category of "the human" has yet to be granted to all people by the US nation state—socially, culturally, or politically. This essay will address that tension as well.

The process of untangling how animal depictions are always deeply influenced by perspectives contingent on racialized positionality begins with the recognition that one does not apprehend an animal outside of a subject position—be it racialized or gendered—that influences how that animal is understood. Try as we might to recognize

the animal on its own terms, our cultural experience, language, history, place, subjective disposition, and many other factors besides cannot help but cloud our view of nonhuman beings and their possible experiences.¹ Positionalities that induce us to see in certain ways are all the more complicated when histories of racialized animalization are part of one's cultural and historical experience. And these histories—compounded by long-standing exclusions from certain codified ways of understanding nonhuman life (via scientific study, for instance, or a recreational orientation to the natural world)—necessarily affect how representations of animals differ because of racism. Furthermore, cultural contexts that vary accordingly by ethnicity have rich and specific dynamics through which human and animal relationships are conceived, which racialized histories may additionally shape. In beginning to work through the countless and nuanced ways that racial constructions have shaped ways of regarding animals, my hope is to further account for how subjugation and domination structure mainstream discourses of animality, while also finding routes around this authoritative centrum by reading works that render animals through race, perhaps reaching a place independent of white hegemony.

The fields of animal studies, environmental humanities, posthumanism, modernist studies, and critical race studies all stand to gain from approaches that regard the interplay of animal representation and racialized experience as crucial to further recognizing how dehumanization functions symbolically and how it may be confronted. As mentioned, critical explorations of the animal in literary and cultural texts of the modern period remain limited in their considerations of the role race plays in influencing

¹ One conception of animal experience is the *Umwelt*, a term proposed by Jakob von Uexküll. The very use of this idea in ascribing such an experience to animals is itself an example of Western conditioning.

animal representation and shaping thematic concerns with human animality. While recent critical attempts within modernist studies work to endorse animality, to protect animal lives, and to embrace the human as animal, they still commonly run up steadily against scholarly efforts oriented around critical race theory that work to reject animality and its associated reductions in subjective status. This conflict reflects what Zakiyyah Iman Jackson observes to be “the analytical challenges posed by the categories of race, colonialism, and slavery” that saturate discourses around the animal (671). Meanwhile, scholars interested in racialized experiences and representations in modernism have not eagerly approached nonhuman depictions either because they (perhaps) find examinations of political, social, linguistic, formal, and cultural features of such texts to be more productive. Although the nonhuman can be seen lingering slyly or prominently within each of these realms, attention to the work of race is still predominantly aimed at examining human relationships. Owing to this tendency, Jinthana Haritaworn warns that “there is a certain temptation to scapegoat critical race theorists as anthropocentric, correlationist dupes of the species binary with an irrational investment in humanity” (212). Such scapegoating inclinations, however, fail to appreciate the complexity that histories of dehumanization impart for people of color, so that writers and critics of color must contend with these histories when considering alliances with nonhuman subjects. But this complexity offers an opportunity for great potential in reading animal depictions by nonwhite writers, particularly as a way of seeing around whiteness as a filter and for appreciating how dehumanization and devaluation continue to go undetected in dominant cultural and discursive practices.

Calls for more work on the junctures between race and critical animal studies have emerged with greater frequency in the last several years, as a more sustained critical look at “the human” has opened alternative spaces for imagining animals via routes that venture away from a rationalist, Enlightenment-oriented perspective. Work by scholars like Jackson, Maneesha Deckha, Tiffany Lethabo King, Alexander Weheliye, and Che Gossett look at how forms of oppression that hold down people of color operate by similar logics as those that subjugate the nonhuman world. But more than this—since such analytical approaches date back to the 1980s with the works of Carol Adams and Marjorie Spiegel—current research adopts Sylvia Wynter’s call to scrutinize a formerly unexamined investment in the discursive deployment of broad terms like “the human.” Recent work by Bénédicte Boisserson also looks to “interspecies connectedness” forged by racialized histories that emerge through solidarity rather than through experiences of debased comparison (xx).

Since animal studies as a disciplinary field emerges most prominently as a branch of posthumanism, “the human” that the field seeks to leave behind still stalks about as a consistent sign against which animals are understood.² For the *posthuman* to fully embrace its animal self—to disassemble the structures of anthropocentrism, and to reassign itself a more equitable place within the larger nonhuman world—its drive to leave behind its former self must first reconcile the fact that “the human’s” jumping off point already assumes “mastery, autonomy, and dominance” in the world (Jackson 671).

² Cary Wolfe, for instance, insists that posthumanism is “posthumanist” in its rejection of humanism’s goals of escaping the animality and the materiality of human embodiment (xv). Thus, posthumanism resituates the human as animal. Jacques Derrida, in his poststructuralist work that examines human embeddedness in language systems that reinscribe Western humanism, at the end of his career explored the animal as a discursive figure and as a being outside of language. His inquiries advanced animal studies as a disciplinary focus within the humanities.

Theoretical calls for a posthuman future, such as those made by Cary Wolfe, Matthew Calarco, or Neil Badmington, often implicitly presume that all humans inhabit comparable positions within that category. Yet for such an assumption to be possible, all other positions within that category must go unnoticed or appear invisible by those resting comfortably on a humanistic foundation of power.

For the most part, posthumanism's theoretical take-off position is already grounded in the domain of the Enlightenment human by its founders who implicitly use the (presumably white) Western subject as equivalent to the universalized "human." To cite a more explicit example of this sleight of hand, Deleuze and Guattari's exploratory considerations of what it means to become animal state that "relationships between animals are bound up with the relations between man and animal, man and woman...man and the physical and microphysical universe," underscoring not only a gendered distinction between who occupies the place of "human," but also declaring that man meets the animal first and has a notable relationship with the universe (235). They go on to claim that "societies, even primitive societies" engage in becomings in order to finally "reduce them [animals]" to symbols (248). Implicit in this hierarchizing of societies that generalizes the relationships between "primitive" communities and animals is an assumption of Western knowing that lays claim to understanding how all humans encounter animals, with such declarations made from within a Western philosophical enclosure. In response, criticism has mounted in recent years against posthumanism as a field that has (for the most part) sidestepped questions of race in its move to envision theoretical (and potentially realizable) modes of living beyond the constraints of contemporary humanism. Critics (such as Jackson, Deckha, Lethabo King, Weheliye, and

Gossett) charge that such an elision fails on a number of grounds to recognize the inequity of an appeal to work towards *posthumanism* when many people globally and in the United States have yet to be accorded full human status, socially or politically.

As a field, posthumanism remains invested in both a *beyond-human* borrowed from Haraway's cyborg sense—a technological idea of progress towards lives and worlds unlimited by bodily fallibility—and in a *beyond-human* that does not anticipate teleological progress, but instead seeks to take apart the ideological structuring apparatus of anthropocentrism. The latter—which most prominently emerges under the critical awning of animals studies—is of interest here, though scholars' charges of color-blindness apply to both arms of the field.³ As I will explore, such blind spots go often unremarked in animal studies, where discourses on animals often assume a universal “human” as a counter-referent to animals, and where disjunctions of power go unrecognized. Thus, connections between the categories of race, animal, and human still demand to be exposed and ruptured, particularly in modernist studies.

Modernist Studies, Race, and the Animal Question

The entanglements of race, gender, and the animal are most productively encountered when taken together by scholars who explicitly acknowledge that race and gender cannot be set aside as separable constructs that do not influence how we apprehend the nonhuman world. And recognition of the ways that modernity maintains and reproduces existing structures, though racism, sexism, and capitalism among other forces is necessary if a genuine re-authorship of what it means to be human is to take hold. Thus, looking to literature that not only radically reimagines what narrative looks

³ Posthumanism with an interest in deconstructing anthropocentrism coincides with a number of distinct fields, including new materialism, object-oriented ontology, animal studies, and ecocriticism.

like, but also comes forward at a temporal cusp of sorts (as modernity accelerates and gains the seemingly unassailable momentum it maintains today) seems rich with the potential for insights on and new ways of thinking through the human, the animal, and the myths they promote and dispel.

Engaging with modernism and early-twentieth-century literature asks that we look at how modernist representation in texts not only devises new formal approaches to animal subjects, but also engages in fundamentally new ways with the figure and subjectivity of the human as an animal being. Since modernist and early-twentieth-century literature “straddles the legacies of Enlightenment rationalism and Darwinian revelations,” as Carrie Rohman observes, it engages—often radically—with the idea that animals have conscious lives, and that humans are animals as well (57). Nonhumans (and humans as animals) occupy significant textual territory in works by white canonical modernists like Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Joseph Conrad, Djuna Barnes, Marianne Moore, D.H. Lawrence, and H.G. Wells, all of whose writings animal studies scholars have taken up in examination of signifying and material practices around animals and animality.

Yet modernist texts emerging historically in the wake of not only Enlightenment philosophy and Darwinian instantiation, but also in the post-Reconstruction era as well, require a greater investment in analyses of nonhuman representation as inflected by racialized logics. During the Reconstruction period—marked as it was by scientific racism, political and social exclusion, and the bestialization of black men which contributed to lynchings and white mob action—racializing narratives that invoked animality as a tool of oppression became part of the national racial imaginary.

Modernism, coming on the heels of Reconstruction, confronts these narratives with challenges both subtle and overt. The omission, however, of race as a critical consideration among animal studies scholars in modernist studies is to some extent understandable since critics like Henry Louis Gates Jr. have exerted significant critical energy unravelling metaphorical associations between “slave/animal” and Great Chain of Being dictums that represented black people as “the lowest of the human races or as first cousin to the ape” (173, 181). And, as Alexander Weheliye notes, since “full access to legal personhood has been a systematic absence” for people of color, scholars studying the literary productions of ethnically marginalized people have hesitated in taking up posthumanism and studies of animal representation within a larger context of biopolitical dehumanization (11).

Depictions of animals in modernist literary productions by writers of color invites scholarship that investigates how legacies of dehumanization imbue these representations. Such work promises to shed further light on racialization as a process of dehumanization that instrumentalizes animals and animality to render lives less or invaluable by white sociocultural actors. More promising yet, however, is the potential for such studies to examine how individual writers imagine unique representations of animals within the climate of modernism’s myriad innovations. Zora Neale Hurston’s canonical *Their Eyes Were Watching God* includes a vast array of animal agents—a notable mule, a rabid dog, a flock of buzzards, and creatures endemic to the Everglades—that function metaphorically for human characters within the novel, and also assume their own agency within the text, such that they stretch its formal and linguistic limits beyond

the terms the novel seemingly sets forth.⁴ Assuming a relevance of their own, Hurston's animals move beyond anthropocentrism, or conversely (as in the depiction of the buzzards) become embellishments of anthropocentrism to such a degree that they render the *anthros* strange or other. While critics have engaged with Hurston's *Their Eyes* at length, only Sharon Davie (writing in 1993) devotes considerable attention to the worlds that animals open up within the novel. Since the book depicts a variety of nonhumans in strikingly different ways, it warrants the sort of critical attention that scholars of animal studies in modernism have lavished on white writers of the period.

In the last ten years, for instance, a number of books that take up depictions of animals in modernist works have appeared on the critical scene, almost all examining the work of white writers. Even earlier, Margot Norris's *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (1985) was the first to take up animals in the works of writers like Kafka, Lawrence, and Hemingway, claiming that their fictional animals were extensions of their own human animality. Significantly, Norris observes that our conceptions of animals developed in dialectic opposition to the false assumption that human beings are unique creators of culture (3). This observation stands decades later as a "problem" that scholars in animal studies still contend with as one that requires critical unpacking; it serves often as an analytical starting point, from which scholars proceed to demonstrate how literary depictions collapse these binaries. A series of monographs published more recently each confront animals in modernist literature as signified beings that manage to rupture their own signs. Philip Armstrong's *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (2008) approaches modernism as a literary movement with a long reach, and reads the works of

⁴ Animals appear with frequency in much of Hurston's work, even in short pieces like the story "Sweat" which features a snake as an agent of vengeance a wife deploys against her abusive husband; the story appeared in the magazine *FIRE!!* in 1926.

Jonathan Swift up through J.M. Coetzee in an effort to “locate the ‘tracks’ left by animals” in literature (3). He contends that modernity as a sociocultural force reshapes human and animal relationships so that conquest, followed by nostalgia for nature, followed finally by a disavowal of rationalism serve as the primary route modernity determines for humans as they regard animals; and in the end, he argues, sympathy for nonhumans eventually prevails. Carrie Rohman’s *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (2009) charts closely how writers like Lawrence, Barnes, and Wells represent animal subjectivity through new forms that resist the sorts of categorical discourse that formerly foreclosed questions of individual animal experience (17). Furthermore, she argues that texts like *Nightwood* reimagine human subjectivity as fundamentally nonhuman; she argues the novel “stages a recuperation of animality” in what may be “the most complex and atypical portrait of animality in modernist literature” (26). Since Robin Vote appears as a subject who does not succumb to the terms and logic of language as a means of defining her own subjectivity, Rohman states that Barnes erupts the animal question beyond the limited means language provides us in confronting it.

Although many more extended studies of animal representation in literature and film have come into print in the last decades, only a few focus on early-twentieth-century literature or modernism. And while a number of volumes approach modernist literature from an ecocritical or posthumanist perspective in a way that draws the animal question into focus, it still remains a largely peripheral concern within conversations that deal more centrally with larger environmental contexts. Meanwhile, since Norris, Armstrong, and Rohman focus their attention on literature produced exclusively by white writers, they in turn circumvent examinations of how race informs animal representation, and

thus they tend to universalize the conceptions of the human that they write against. An exception to this pattern is Christopher Peterson's *Bestial Traces: Race, Sexuality, Animality* (2013), which looks at how racist and antiracist discourses operate through a disavowal of the animal. Peterson takes a temporally broad approach to texts—reading Edgar Allen Poe, Coetzee, and Richard Wright, among others—and so does not center modernism specifically in his analyses. Instead he reads texts to locate the extent to which even antiracist arguments and language rely on a “repudiation of animality” (2). That racism seeks to *dehumanize*, Peterson writes, means that it operates as “a fundamental disavowal of human animality” (7). That is to say, when animality is refused as an integral aspect of human being, a hierarchical relationship to animal others is the inevitable result, and when race is animalized, this hierarchy is maintained. Peterson contends that human/animal hierarchical binarism maintains racism through a “pejorative metaphoric that animal alterity provides” (8). Ultimately, he champions a less hostile relationship to alterity, suggesting that literary depictions make clear that in Western contexts, otherness provokes violence and mortal devaluation.

Studies then that take on race and figurations of the animal in modernist literature remain limited to a few articles or chapters that catalogue how dehumanization structures the lives of racialized people and nonhuman animals. In his reading of *Native Son*, Peterson notes how Bigger's portrayal as a violent black man spurred reviews at the time that likened black men to beasts. But Peterson notes how Wright's novel emphasizes white dehumanization of black men as the central conditioning force of his behavior. Matthew Lambert, also writing about *Native Son*, proposes that Wright's use of animals in the novel—particularly rats—critiques the racist ideologies and material conditions

that deterministically limited the socioeconomic potential of African Americans in 1930s America. Through the figure of the rat, African American environmental confinement to slums is made clear—not only by the presence of rats, but by the fact that rats can slip into other neighborhoods undetected, while Bigger cannot. But what’s more, animals assume a place of dignity despite the precarity they withstand. The rat in the novel’s opening pages demonstrates a “dramatic ferocity” that illustrates the creature’s “strangeness” in a way that evokes empathy in the reader (81-82). Lambert writes that the novel demonstrates how all beings connect through “a kind of unknowability,” and finally illustrates how struggles against both racialized and anthropocentric “containment practices” are connected (78, 88).

Additionally, though she does not take up questions of race, Christina Colvin’s analyses of animals in modernist texts also find representations of strangeness to be central to the modernist project. With work on both Faulkner and Moore, she identifies how encounters with animal alterity are made even stranger by the “unnatural” conditions of modernity (3). Also writing about Moore, Cliff Mak states that her representational approach was authoritative in a way that did not assume “the territorializing self-importance of her male peers,” but instead engaged in “pluralistic, feminist intertextuality” (874). For Mak, an embrace of a comedic sensibility guides Moore’s curious approach to animal poetics. And Vanessa Robinson, also writing about Moore claims that modernism’s focus on interiority and an examination of the self actually led to “a new respect for nonhuman alterity” when rather odd things were found to stand at the limits of language. That Moore provides much material to scholars of modernism looking toward animal representation—and that Barnes also provides radical ways of reading

animal and human consciousness—emphasizes how gender figures significantly into the nonhuman imaginary in American modernist texts. This makes sense given that women’s partial exclusion from the human category and a more socially acceptable (and expected) orientation toward emotion and sympathy might open up alternative ways of articulating animality.

Anita Scott Coleman’s Writing

While much work in modernist studies around the animal question has thus looked at white writers of the traditional canon, greater potential awaits scholars of race, animality, and animal representation who choose to engage with texts of the Harlem Renaissance as well as those from Native writers of the period. Writers who have long been overlooked are justifiably looked to first for a project that aims to challenge systems of domination and categorization. Anita Scott Coleman is one such writer whose work approaches the multidimensionality of animal representation alongside experiences of race weighed down by histories of dehumanization. Coleman’s work suggests new possibilities for appreciating how reading race alongside questions of the animal (and reading animals while always considering racial constructions) opens ways of thinking around white normativity. Her short story “Three Dogs and a Rabbit” (1926) illustrates how race and animality are always ensnared in a Eurocentric American culture that seeks to devour nonwhite bodies. The story—one of her best-known works as a Harlem Renaissance writer—was an entry Coleman submitted to an annual fiction contest held by *The Crisis* for which she won third prize.⁵ It approaches the connection between human and animal as one that consists in both a shared emotional vocabulary and a shared

⁵ It was judged second place by H.G. Wells, who served on the contest judging panel along with Sinclair Lewis, Charles Chestnutt, and Mary White Ovington (Davis and Mitchell 23).

vulnerability to forces of dehumanizing domination, such that it insists on a reading of animality and race as co-constituting positions of violent debasement by forces of white domination. Interestingly, the story also points to an early-twentieth-century concern among black writers with representations of animals that differ markedly from other modernist depictions. The story describes a symmetry between a man and a rabbit that discursively merges their forms as a way of imagining a phenomenological connection between the two, while more critically illustrating how white sympathy seeks sentimentalized animals as it also creates bestialized humans.

In the story, a black girl enslaved by a white family travelling west rescues a rabbit from their three hounds sent to chase down dinner after some hungry days on the trail. The girl, observing the chase, catches the “terror-mad” rabbit when it bounds into her lap (91). She fends off the dogs and hides the animal in her skirt pocket even as her captor beats her when she claims not to know where the rabbit had gone. Observing this horrific scene, the master’s son “changed from that day” and later went on to marry the girl (92). Years later as an old woman, she is Mrs. Ritton, called to the witness stand for her part in harboring a black man fleeing three policemen. The third-person frame narrative appears largely in quotations as the listener/narrator quotes Timothy Phipps at length as he tells the tale. Phipps goes on to quote Mrs. Ritton at length in the verbal testimony she gives that relates the stories of both the rabbit and the fleeing man (who turns out to be Phipps, as the last line of the story reveals). Following her statement to the assembled “Gentlemen” in the courtroom in which she explains that her husband taught her “to forget the scars of serfdom” and to enjoy “the joys of freedom,” Phipps interrupts the narrative and her testimony to praise the “little old white-haired woman standing

alone” in “her loveliness” captivating the room with “the power of her beauty” (92). The story thus ties together the construction of Mrs. Ritton’s personhood in the eyes of the courtroom (and the narrator) by entangling her beauty, her seeming whiteness, and her demonstration of courage and compassion for the hunted rabbit. Her protection of the animal had, after all, transformed her access to distinguished personhood, which she was granted through her marriage to Colonel Ritton, such that she is not even identified beyond that surname. It demonstrates how race, gender, and animality are invoked together to construct certain versions of what it means to be human in the eyes of the law and white heteropatriarchal culture. The story uses this confluence to then demonstrate how the conceptual gymnastics required to receive legal justice and a “fair trial” while black in America hinge on pushing the proper buttons to activate white sympathy. Paradoxically, those buttons light up for charismatic and docile animals, even while such creatures are also subject to various exploitative and inhumane actions by that same culture.

The testimony resumes with Mrs. Ritton recalling that while sitting at home one day, she spied a black man fleeing three white policemen on foot, running down her street; as she describes from the witness stand, the man “who was running so wildly was only a little terror-mad rabbit”—he in fact “merged” and became one with the rabbit (93). The policemen, while three in number and chasing down “the rabbit” metaphorically correlate with the hounds, Mrs. Ritton explains that they and the mob that followed them all “had the visage of my master” (93). In the context of American and European histories of bestializing black men through comparisons to apes, animalization in this story partially inverts that logic by ascribing rabbit-like qualities to the man; he is little,

frightened, and outnumbered by beings ferocious and merciless, inhuman in their assumption of the master's face. Animality here does not function as a means of "othering" in the service of subjugating, rather its intention is to humanize both the small animal and Phipps, and link them through experiences of vulnerability, unjust entrapment, and bad luck.

On an impulse, Mrs. Ritton hides Phipps in her house when he bounds in, and like the rabbit, she never gives him over. These two acts are the consequence of "only two impulses" Mrs. Ritton ever answered, having not "been born so unfettered" as the white courtroom she addresses (89). The impulses and their consequent actions are protective, immediate, and responsive to life-threatening chases in which the hunted seem to lack any chance of escape. Yet this second impulse, because of its duplication of her protection of the "terror-mad rabbit" impulse, may be read as a repetition of the first—the immediate will to stand physically in the way of predation that hunts with hungry entitlement. "Three Dogs and a Rabbit" adopts animality as a means of engendering compassion in its gentlemanly audience, thereby inverting the dominating and oppressing ends that equating people with animals might otherwise pursue. Coleman's story, as an example of the need to read beyond the narrowness of the canon, generatively demonstrates how race and animality collide to yield productive insights around enmeshed ontological constructions.

Coleman's story also exemplifies how exclusion from full acceptance within the category of "the human" enables the text's two speakers to escape ways of seeing that are conditioned by Eurocentric fantasies of domination and supremacy. Yet they must both still navigate this terrain as a means of survival. Both the narrator and Mrs. Ritton in her

verbal testimony before a presumably white courtroom appeal not for recognition of their humanity vis-à-vis an ontologic equation with the white master or the policemen; instead both speakers turn away from “the human” and toward the rabbit as a redemptive counter figure to the unhinged ferocity of Man. Theoretical drives to move beyond, around, or within with the figure of the human (with the intent to disfigure it) prompt new readings of texts like Coleman’s that illustrate how people who inhabit historically disenfranchised positions have authored narratives that not only take place outside of the confined purview of “the human,” but that align solidarity with the nonhuman world as well. “Three Dogs and a Rabbit” illustrates how a steely protection of life in the face of white brutality and law enforcement depends on an impulse in which compassion eclipses fear. The story illustrates a connection between vulnerable individuals—both of them treated as prey by predatory creatures—and the propulsion to safeguard life because it is vulnerable. Yet the text attains this connection between a charismatic minor fauna and a fleeing man by traversing territories of animal sentimentality first.

Coleman makes the route from animal to person even more explicit in some of her poetry, as in the poem “Idle Wonder” published in *Opportunity* in 1938.⁶ The short verse poem draws a comparison between human and animal as it muses about animal consciousness and the assumptions of those who rationalize oppression and possession. The poem’s speaker begins by pondering her cat and assuming that it leads a life of satisfaction, but then questions that assumption by drawing a comparison between the cat and the subjugated position of a black acquaintance:

My cat is so sleek and contented;
She is a real house-cat

⁶ The only full collection of Coleman’s work published during her lifetime was a compilation of poetry titled *Reason for Singing* (1948); “Idle Wonder” appears in that collection.

She has not seen any other cat
since she came to live with me.

I wonder does she think,
I wonder does she dream
I wonder does she ever imagine
Herself out, among cats
I wonder is she like poor Agnes

Agnes lives with the white folks
And they think she is contented
And actually delighted with being
their house-maid. (Coleman 202)

The speaker begins by observing the cat's figure and presumed satisfaction. Despite or because of the cat's isolation from other felines, she is decreed authentic in her domesticated position; observed to be content and fit, she seemingly wants for little in the way of comforts or companionship, and so lives as she is meant to live. As the sentence runs on, it even suggests that her contentment correlates with a lack of contact with other cats, such that she can repose unbothered by their company.

But the speaker goes on in the next stanza to question further whether these assumptions of fulfillment and definition are misconstrued, pondering her cat's interiority and likening her to "poor Agnes." Through the imagined subjectivity of the cat and her potential personhood—she might after all, think, dream, and imagine—she brings to the speaker's attention Agnes, a black woman who works as a live-in maid for white people who, in their position of assumed powerful benevolence, believe her to be happy. Though they hold her in socioeconomic captivity, in service to their white desire, they assume she is "delighted" to inhabit that realm. The hyphenated connection the speaker draws between "house-maid" and "house-cat" not only links the two subjects by their house-boundedness, it also emphasizes the domesticating work that the enclosures of home do in ostensibly offering comfortable lives to those within, despite *how* they occupy that

space. “Idle Wonder” reveals how subjugation operates through privilege, and it illustrates how the drawing of assumptions about others’ happiness (whether human or animal) who reside inside a home they did not choose belongs to people who believe they possess the power to confer favors through the superiority of their position.

The poem goes even further than drawing attention to the privileged assumptions of those in domestic control in that it also draws a troubled connection between the isolation of the cat and that of Agnes. If the speaker views the cat as authentic and pleased in its isolation from other cats, it implies that Agnes’s employers attribute part of her delight to living away from black people and exclusively in a space of whiteness. But there is also evidence that Agnes has spoken of her thoughts, dreams, and imaginings of escaping those confines. This dissonance between her white employers’ false beliefs and the truth of Agnes’s desires are what compel the speaker to question her own assumptions.

The speaker’s wondering about animal interiority and speculating about the falsity of her own conjectures, interestingly takes its route through the animal to the person, just as Coleman’s story “Three Dogs and a Rabbit” does. Through the cat, an appreciation for its interiority emerges in concert with lamentation for Agnes’s position, so that the poem suggests the workings of white superiority and white innocence may creep into human-animal relationships unnoticed when assumptions about others’ experience glorify those who presume control. This brief study of Coleman’s writings suggest the potential for modernist studies to engage intersectionally with representations of animals and animality, and showcases opportunities for avoiding color-blind interpretations of animal representation.

Studies of Intersectional Animality

What follows is a review of critical work around race, posthumanism, gender, and animal studies that argues ultimately for a need to engage with multiple frameworks when considering the nonhuman world. The work examined in the following pages does not necessarily focus on literary productions, but engages broadly with philosophy, cultural studies, and linguistics. A running thread through much of this work is an explicit rejection (or at least awareness) of the influential work of “the human” as a construct is posthumanist discourse. As many feminist scholars working along the intersectional lines of race, gender, and animality suggest, approaches to nonhuman recognition that find ways outside of the destructive and devaluing patterns established by the exceptionalism of “Man” are likely to be most productive when they engage feminist theorizations like that of Deckha, Jackson, and Lethabo King, which complicate how race and animality co-constitute one another, and appreciate how racialized positionality might provide a stronger stance for coalition building outside the human hierarchies established by centuries of colonialism and racialization.

Postcolonial theorists who were some of the first to examine how discourses and cultural imaginings around animals could not be isolated from histories of colonial racialization establish the need to see through colonialism’s species logic. Writing in *PMLA* in 2009, Neel Ahuja proposes that tracing nonhuman circulation (both figuratively and materially) inside “circuits of imperial biopower” holds the potential to shed greater light on colonial histories and machinations (556). He writes that a critique of animalization (the ways that racialized people are subjugated through animal comparisons) offers the most promise in terms of deconstructing “speciated reason’s

influence” (Ahuja 557). And Deckha was one of the first to argue that race needed to be central in feminist and postcolonial approaches to nonhuman animals. In a 2012 *Hypatia* article, she notes that previous work, which assessed connections between gender and species oppression, largely failed to include race and ethnicity as part of this restrictive matrix. And since “forces that code and privilege whiteness” work to reinforce the human and animal binary just as “species-related dimensions of oppression” work to reinforce the gender binary, she insists that attention must fall on race in the work needed to disable these oppressive mechanisms (Deckha 530). Proposing that colonial violence functions through “the differentiating logic of animalization, racialization, and dehumanization,” Deckha argues for reconceptualizations of humanist hierarchies using postcolonial feminism as a theoretical framework to aid posthumanism (539). Namely, she argues in a separate article, that discourse which relies on the nonhuman as a signifier of what the human is not necessarily includes notions of superiority, exclusion, and exceptionality in its ideological framework. And since not all humans fall into the category in which such discourse operates most forcefully—as in the legal domain for instance—this Western distinction is manipulated to oppress those “cast as subhuman or even nonhuman” (Decka 46).

The discursive category of “the human” (deployed in innumerable contexts, but perhaps most forcefully in its assertion of the value of human lives) stratifies subjects through full, partial, and non-inclusion in its domain. Dehumanization, animalization, perceived associations with animals, or even a recognition of human animality render subjects vulnerable, then, to less protection since those lives are made to seem less valuable. Given the ways that racialized people and women have been historically

disempowered by animalizing narratives and figurations, one of the aims of current research is to revisit the “human” as the site where such trouble began.

Some critics who in recent years have called for work in the humanities to engage with animals in nonreductive ways—and to move away from rejections of human animality as a strategy for maintaining human supremacy—conclude that Western humanism is assembled through hierarchies that rely on ideas of superiority, subjugation, and inferiority. Scholars such as Deckha, Jackson, Lethabo King, Weheliye, and Gossett argue that Enlightenment humanism classification systems (whether explicit or culturally implicit) maintain inequalities at levels beyond the species, and that this sort of orientation towards nonhumans necessarily affects constructed categories among human subjects as well. These scholars charge that gradations in political status as assigned to human and animal cannot be dissociated from racializing logics since race is, as Weheliye puts it, “a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (4). Thus, the “human” of posthumanism and of humanism is never just that: race, gender, class, age, ability status, and other differentiating features are all implicated in a hierarchical matrix that affirm or threaten one’s full inclusion inside the term according to the Eurocentric taxonomy from which it emerged. Writing in *Polymorphous Domesticities*, Juliana Schiesari also claims that humanism’s bedrock is “inherently ‘speciest’” since it declares the “primacy and superiority of humans over all other creatures” (5). She writes that by rejecting animals—both without and within—humanity reveals its very inhumanity.

Recognizing how Enlightenment humanism saturates posthumanist frameworks is crucial if race and animality are to be understood as constructs that can break free of the

subordinating hierarchies implied by this framework. Though anthropocentric by design, humanism may still hold space for an epistemic reconceptualization that decenters the human. The nonhuman turn that posthumanism heralds holds the potential to fully realize its aims if it can embrace a humanity that extends beyond—to use Sylvia Wynter’s lexicon—“Man.”⁷ Jackson, writing about animals, race, and posthumanism in *Feminist Studies* (2013), asks if there might be a “(post) humanism that does not privilege European Man,” one that no longer demands its “peculiar representation of humanity” perform as the fixed standard of what it means to be human (673). Observing that posthumanism maintains firm ties to rationalist hierarchies borne in Enlightenment thought, she calls for a “transformation within humanism” that contests the goal of racialized inclusion within the domain since, by its definition and inception, the “human” category is always already one that questions and resists full inclusion (Jackson 672). Uri McMillian, writing in a 2015 issue of *GLQ* devoted to “Queering the Nonhuman,” writes that the ongoing omission of critical race critique in posthumanism’s theorizing does violence as it continues to ignore the ways black subjects have historically been barred from full consideration under the sign “Man,” and have instead been relegated by Euroamerican social and political praxis to the “not-quite-human” category—particularly black women (224). As Tiffany Lethabo King also observes, “black and Indigenous people have never been fully folded into the category of the human” (167). Full inclusion, she writes, would in fact “disfigure [the human] beyond recognition” as it would no longer be able to maintain its rigid barriers of exclusion (King 165). And Alexander

⁷ Wynter describes “Man” as the “overrepresentation” of Western, white man as representative of all human beings (262). The capitalized claims that Man makes through Enlightenment epistemologies rely on racial constructions to justify black subordination. Wynter explains that Man’s certainty in an “objective set of facts” that could explain the universe became a means of rationalizing racial oppression (305).

Weheliye proposes that it is “visible human difference” that the construct of “Man” exploits and uses to bar “nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west” (3-4). King, Jackson, and Weheliye all draw on the work of Sylvia Wynter whose extensive analyses over decades track the ways that racism and colonialism have worked to conceptualize the human. She finds that for black populations around the world, “systemic stigmatization, social inferiorization, and dynamically produced material deprivation [serve to] ‘verify’ the overrepresentation of Man as if it were the human” (Wynter 267).

Scholars in Black and Indigenous Studies argue that “reconstruction and decolonization of what it means to be human” are part of the project of abolishing Man as a culturally dominating concept that structures ways of being human (Weheliye 4). Weheliye asserts that “cultural and political formations outside the world of Man” are necessary for replacing that mode with “alternative versions of humanity” (10). And Jackson also writes that “resisting the lure of liberal human recognition as a potential salve” is critical to avoid legitimating its implicit and explicit presumptions and its deployment of “bestializing social logics” that necessarily rely on devaluation as an epistemic inevitability (674). Further, those with an interest in queer exclusion from normative categorizing of the human see potential in “displacing the centrality of the human itself” by disavowing any “demand for recognition within the circle of humanity” (Luciano & Chen 184). And Eileen Joy, writing in *GLQ*, notes that “so many marginalized groups have always been ‘less than human’” that promise resides in the decision to take that designation as “an opportunity to finally bid the human adieu” and to create, in its place, new practices of freedom, being, and ethics (222-23).

Yet while calls for the rejection of Man, “the human,” and all of the ideological baggage that remains attached to the compulsive hierarchizing inherent in those categories has increased in recent years, some scholars remain cautious about fully aligning with ways of nonhuman being. Haritaworn, for instance asks whether and for whom “identifying with the nonhuman [might] be too risky a move?” (212). Given the pervasiveness of white America’s assignment of animalistic characteristics to people of color (and to women and those of lower socioeconomic status), appeals to reject the human in favor of a more definitionally ambiguous nonhumanity remain fraught. Embracing the nonhuman does, after all, entail treading in waters contaminated with histories of animalization and dehumanization. Megan Glick, writing on race, criminality and “reversals of the human,” argues that “histories of dehumanization have long mapped racial categories onto the animal-human boundary” so that lives seen as “disposable become the justification for death” (641). And Haritaworn observes the presence of a dual-faced paradox of dehumanization logics that renders African-Americans, for instance, as “both animalistic and cruel toward animals” (212). Such logic has meant that those deemed not fully human could be “continually rendered disposable” (Haritaworn 213). In order to confront the human presumption that some lives are inherently more valuable than others, that some humans are more animal than others, that some humans are not animals, and that animalizing comparisons need be derogatory, posthumanism needs to integrate critical approaches that consider how racialization and animalization inform (or are absent from) the “post”- status that humanism pursues. Theorizing discourses of dehumanization and discursive correlations between race and animality emphasize just how extensively humanism’s foundations require chipping away. One

approach that Sharon Holland proposes is a purposeful avoidance of “defining the human against the animal other” such that they do not discursively exist in binary tension; she instead suggests aiming for “a potentiality for togetherness” that does not seek the lack in one to establish the greatness of the other (168).

Animal Studies in Context

So how does the animal figure in this critical context? Over the last decade, a critical focus on the animal as a subject (in itself, of language, and of ethical concern) indicates a striking increase in scholarly interest around nonhuman phenomenology, signification, and material, biopolitical, and environmental conditions. In *Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012), Kari Weil suggests that this sudden surge of attention results from an increased sense of our responsibility for the greatly imperiled biosphere and concurrent interest in the “posthuman sublime” (xx). She writes that animals, without a human language, provide a way of testing the limits of theories of ethics, power, and “otherness” (Weil 5). And she proposes that the predating of the ethical turn by both the linguistic turn and deconstruction spurred an interest in alterity while also exposing the narrow and precarious beliefs that undergird ideas of the human (Weil 17). Weil states that in contemporary thought, “the idea of ‘the animal’—the instinctive being with presumably no access to language, texts, or abstract thinking—has functioned as an unexamined foundation on which the idea of the human and hence the humanities have been built” (23).

Predating this recent and sustained interest in nonhumans, critical study of the animal in humanistic fields first exploded fifteen years earlier with Derrida’s extended analysis that took seriously the animal question. Derrida’s work, which many in animal

studies consider foundational to legitimizing a serious theoretical engagement with nonhumans, first made waves in a 1997 lecture presented at a ten-day conference in Cerisy, France, and was later published in book form as *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. In examining some of the forms that the “unprecedented proportions” of animal subjugation takes, Derrida notes the difficulty of the task where subjugation becomes “violence in the most morally neutral sense of the term” yet where no one can “seriously deny the disavowal that this involves” (25). An uninterpretable history, a disavowal of unexplored depths of violence, and regularized subordination are all aspects of the human-animal relationship that Derrida begins to take up, and which he is often cited as first rigorously exploring. Central to that exploration is the fact that violence against animals is linguistically located; he finds the grouping together of all creatures under one signifying category—“the animal”—to be a sign of erasure, one that removes *being* from consideration (25). It is a category—not dissimilar from “the human” category—that erases its subject as it linguistically creates a new one, and yet this creation contains the power to materially affect beings themselves. Derrida’s lecture (along with his other works exploring “the question of the animal”) launched the field into what would become more mainstream academic inclusion, though scholars like Donna Haraway, Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Cary Wolfe, Lynn Margulis, and Mary Midgley had been making inroads in the 1980s and 90s as well. Though less singularly focused on nonhuman subordination and the surrounding ethical landscape, Deleuze and Guattari, and Giorgio Agamben are also noted thinkers who trace what it means to be a human animal.⁸

⁸ Agamben in particular takes up the “reversal of the hierarchical relationship between man and animal” which he names Heidegger as having called into question (57).

Critical animal studies, before it could be called a field in its own right, was from the first a politically oriented project with an investment in altering the course of nonhuman treatment by the human world. Ethical commitments are prominent in Haraway's work from the start in *Primate Visions* (1989), which charts how efforts to understand nature are colonialist in their assertion that nature is somehow separate and apart from human life. Her work in *When Species Meet* (2008) and *Staying with the Trouble* (2012) continues to imagine ways of being among other species that are nonhierarchical and instead open to reconceptualization through our "response-ability" to "ongoing multispecies worlding on a wounded terra" (105). Meanwhile, Peter Singer's utilitarian philosophical approach proposed in *Practical Ethics* (1979) introduces the notion of "equal consideration of interests to nonhumans" insisting that their suffering be given the same weight as ours (51).⁹ Critiques of Singer, however, claim that his philosophy assumes a universal ethical subject that is all-knowing and disembodied. Haraway, in fact, critiques this tendency among scientists and utilitarians in "Situated Knowledges" (1988) in which she argues for "insistent embodiment" as a way of "unmask[ing] the doctrines of objectivity" (578). Along this line, Mary Midgley in *Animals and Why They Matter* (1998) critiques Western philosophers like Rousseau, Hume, and Hobbes to find the rejection of emotion and the exaltation of reason as integral to the denigration of animals in Western culture, moves which prize a facility with language and rationality as indicators of lives worth greater significance. Midgley argues that the "barriers which our tradition has erected against concern for animals" must be dismantled for effective concern to take hold (144). Cary Wolfe, as one of the

⁹ Singer takes up questions of race as well through the experience of pain, pointing out that "white racists do not accept that pain is as bad when it is felt by blacks as when it is felt by whites" thus suggesting (though not directly) that racism operates along a continuum with speciesism (51).

best-known theorists in the field of critical animal studies, makes ethical commitments prominent as he also examines the “discourse of animality” as a tool of oppression against both humans and nonhumans. However, he makes a point in *Zoontologies* (2003) that the harms of such discourse “fall overwhelmingly on nonhuman animals” as we take for granted the ability to instrumentalize and exploit them (Wolfe xx). In his 2010 examination of posthumanism, Wolfe goes on to suggest that humanism cannot (and will not) be dismissed or replaced, but that posthumanism can succeed in replacing dichotomies and dualisms, decentering the subject in fact, and adopting views that replace fragmentation with integration and an appreciation for complexity and dependence (254-55).

More recent work in animal studies focuses on the need to supplant dualistic thinking and to take up questions of embodiedness, subject positionality, and by extension, identity. Stacy Alaimo, for one, challenges “elevated perspectives” finding them limiting for both feminism and critical environmentalism (7). She argues that the subject cannot be separate as a knower of the world because she is always a part of that world, embedded in webs of materiality. Jane Bennett’s work centralizes this idea as she inspects the vitality of all matter—living and not—such that she “highlight[s] the common materiality of all that is” (122). Yet within these critical texts that move away from Haraway’s “god trick” of assuming disembodiment, sidestepping the complexities of racialized embodiment remains suspiciously consistent. In Matthew Calarco’s *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction* (2015) for instance, race does not come up as a construction to be interrogated. In a book about identity and difference, it is only mentioned once, and this for the purpose of analogizing how

speciesism works much like racism and sexism.¹⁰ This is to say that critical animal studies texts may articulate inquiries from positions that presume to be free of racist and sexist tendencies, yet by excluding human experiences *of* racism and sexism from consideration, they fail to recognize how such experiences shape views of identity and difference. When texts like Calarco's mention race only once, and for the purposes of defining simply how prejudice operates, they implicitly suggest that human identity is universal, while also insinuating that white, Western relationships to animals constitute the totality of human-animal relations.

Race as a Starting Point

Meanwhile those concerned that animal studies scholars have failed to account for the role race plays in conceptions of the animal, and others concerned that animal studies scholars direct their ethical concerns toward nonhumans when human inequality and suffering remain widespread often invoke postcolonial theorists like Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Achille Mbembe to situate colonialism and animalization in close proximity. The frameworks provided by these postcolonial theorists observe racialization and animalization to be entanglements exploited by conquest and capitalism. Achille Mbembe in "Necropolitics" (2013) explicates how colonialism and its reliance on racism and animal degradation are ways that power functions outside of the law, in ways that achieve capitalist end points. Racism in Mbembe's formulation denies all kinship between colonizer and colonized, and what's more transforms others through "the eyes of the conqueror" into "savage life" which is to say, "another form of animal life" that is determined less by skin color than by fears (abounding in the colonialist) that "savages

¹⁰ Calarco writes: "Just as racists and sexists fail to treat likes alike in terms of race and sexual difference, so, identity theorists argue, speciesists fail to give equal consideration to ... other species" (24).

are... ‘natural’ human beings who lack the specifically human character” (24). Such equations have enabled ideologies of death (or necropolitics) that continue to incite violence and killings of people and animals categorized outside of the colonialist’s “human” realm. Further work, like Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972) names colonization as a process of “thingification” in which both domination and submission animalize all involved (44). Césaire articulates the need to redefine—conceptually and linguistically—the human outside of and against colonial Eurocentric paradigms. Frantz Fanon two decades earlier set forward a radical task in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952): “to get man to admit he is nothing, absolutely nothing—and get him to eradicate this narcissism whereby he thinks he is different from other ‘animals’” as a way of becoming more human (6). Fanon explains his first-hand experience of racialization as one of animalization, in which his “body was returned” to him “disjointed, redone, draped in mourning” where he received the colonialist message that “the Negro is an animal the Negro is bad” (93). Fanon’s work, however, does not collude with colonialism’s disparagement of the animal, but instead challenges its conception of the human as superior, as non-animal. Though Weheliye notes that Fanon was not a feminist by contemporary standards, his efforts to reframe what it means to be human have been taken up by scholars like Sylvia Wynter and Hortense Spillers who have expanded his rejection of the colonial human to one that calls for the abandonment of Man (22).

In particular, Wynter’s critiques of “the human” as a construction, and her efforts at reconceptualizing different “genres of the human” are taken up frequently by scholars interested in situating human-animal relationships outside of Enlightenment hegemonic

paradigms.¹¹ Because Wynter centers race and gender as productive breaking-off points from Man, she challenges Western colonial epistemes that put racializing logics into material practice. Jackson writes that Wynter's work could dramatically alter the course of posthumanism were it to be widely taken up. Speculating about posthumanism's future, Jackson asks whether the binaries that posthumanism queries (e.g. human/animal, nature/culture) might finally "find their relief outside of the epistemological locus of the West" through frameworks like Wynter's that see the human divorced from Man (673). Lethabo King also engages Wynter's views that categories of exclusion emerge from systems of knowledge that construct categories as a means of deciphering the world; such systems seek to create order against chaos, thus creating the ur-binary that stirs beneath them all (177). Wynter's work represents a thirty-year engagement with the question of what it means to be human through an "unsettling" of colonizing epistemes, and her most recent volume (a project in conjunction with Katherine McKittrick) looks at the current moment of crisis as one that might only be affected through rethinking the human. A dialogue between Wynter and McKittrick entitled "Unparalleled Catastrophe for our Species? Or to Give Humanness a Different Future" explores how humans create narratives to explain the universe and our place in it, and through these processes they determine humanness as a practice. Because humans are both "*bios* and *mythoi*," Wynter concludes that to be a human is to be "no longer a noun"; instead, "being human is a praxis" (23). And through such practices, new worldbuilding can commence, which is urgently necessary in this critical moment. Wynter urges that the anthropocentric challenges that have come about through narrative practices must be confronted with narratives that redefine the very characters involved.

¹¹ Jackson, Weheliye, Lethabo King, Gossett all engage her frameworks.

New approaches apprehending representations of animals alongside or through what Claire Jean Kim terms “the optic” of race include her book *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (2015). In it, Kim examines not only how power operates within a matrix in which histories of racialization rely on animality as a vector of control, but she also considers the ways that “animal kinds” and taxonomies of racial difference specifically matter (Kim 17). Kim observes that the two concepts are inseparable since “animalization has been central not incidental to the project of racialization” (18). Importantly, she notes that violence against racialized people is (and has historically been made) permissible through comparisons to animals, since animals are already denied rights and legal protections believed inherent to humans (24). And in Western civilization, the killing of animals has long been thought to demonstrate the possession of control and a way of bringing about order through domination (Kim 32). Kim sees racism and animality as always intertwined, but depending on one’s identity, the terms of dehumanization change and function differently; for instance, Native Americans were viewed by white colonists as “barely distinguishable” from the animals who roamed the North American landscape, while black people were accorded low status on the Great Chain of Being, and most closely linked to apes (25, 43). These differences meant that violence functioned differently though no less consistently. Indians, like other animals on the American continent, were approached through a strategy of removal and eradication by European-Americans aiming to clear the terrain. Blacks experienced scientific racism that characterized them as bestial and threatening, and thus subject to confinement, enslavement and punishment (Kim 41). These histories matter as they still operate within the American cultural

imaginary and structure how race and animality continue to undergird violence and injustice. Ideologies of domination, of either/or's, binaries, and inclusions/exclusions continue to define what it means to be human, Kim finds, and finally calls not for an "extensionist" approach to humans and some primates, but rather a "reconstructive one" that reimagines all species "outside of systems of domination" (287). This important work provides direction in terms of identifying how racial tropes perform distinctively, and in spotting a way forward through a repudiation of dominion.

Embracing alterity and rejecting hierarchical perspectives, other recent scholarship also attempts to move toward disrupting ideologies of exceptionalism. Works by Paul Outka, Mel Y. Chen, Christopher Pexa, and Vera Coleman all find the reframing of human-animal relations to depend on a rejection of hierarchical thinking and praxis, which also form the bedrock of racializing constructions. These linguistic and literary analyses work through the normative dehumanizing violence that whiteness and the human do in efforts to subjugate all those outside the inner circle. Whether through Coleman's "differentiated bodies," Chen's "queer animacies," or Pexa's animal kinships, alternative means of approaching living beings relies on unmasking the assumptions inherent in Western outlooks and language (Coleman 695; Chen 70). Crucially, Chen's *Animacies* (2012) dissects how signifiers and conditions of discourse that dictate "brutal hierarchies of sentience" assign agency to some beings and make objects of others (43). In their refusal to declare that distinct boundaries cordon off human, animal, and object, they engage in making horizontal what was previously vertically hierarchical, taking into account, race, sexuality, disability, and species status (19). As Chen concludes, changing what it means to be alive and to matter are possible both through and outside of

language—by uncoding signification’s hidden determinants and finding spaces that mainstream narratives do not (or cannot) articulate. Vera Coleman, writing in *ISLE*, examines Latin literature of the Southern Cone, and finds that texts that read humans transformed into amphibians, fish, or other animals depict these hybrid creatures as “exuberant rather than monstrous” (695). Suggesting that encounters with evolution in which humans perceive continuity with other lifeforms, and appreciate the brilliance of alterity, are critical if we are to survive the Anthropocene and the challenges we present within it. A “multispecies frame” that comprehends human animality as our connection to the world can also appreciate the ways other species are radically different from ours and also entirely outside of the rankings of inferiority in which Western thinking has boxed them (695). Finally, Pexa’s article in *PMLA* reads traditional Dakota literature for its approach to animals that sets them within *tiospaye*, or a kinship circle that also includes the land. Through this, he locates resistance to the state’s coercive efforts to define citizenship and personhood. Again, a history of collective lineage that includes all beings and predates history counters governmental attempts to define the human as a capitalist individualistic subject. According to Dakota ethical codes, animals are due rights and obligations within a political system that recognizes their personhood. By respecting “the power inherent in alterity,” he suggests that Dakota traditions illustrate a decolonized model for relinquishing the instrumentalizing power that the nation state holds to be inalienable.

Finally, Paul Outka in his examination of trauma and its relationship to the sublime brings forward the tension between race in America and white environmentalism’s focus on conservation and the preservation of species over concerns

of racial injustice. In *Race and Nature: From Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (2008), Outka asserts that race (and its emergence through violence) cannot be separated from nature as both are constructs that originate in the dissolution of subjectivity. Finding nature and race to be “perhaps the two most perniciously reified constructions in American culture,” he points to the failure of ecocriticism to thoroughly unpack the connections between the two, while also noting that the field is in many ways immersed in whiteness with little concern for how environmental destruction correlates with racial injustice (Outka 3). However, he makes a point of repeating a criticism that James Cone voices: that white people are more concerned with the spotted owl or endangered whales than with the “survival of young blacks” in urban centers (Outka 1, 3). This critique repeats, rather troublingly, that such comparisons are apt, that concern for one group competitively outweighs concern for another, and that African Americans in cities are uniformly in need of white care. Outka’s drawing out of connections between racial and nature/wilderness constructions are brilliantly observed in articulating how whiteness regulates “two landscapes and two races” where one is exploitable and expendable, and the other pristine, sublime, and powerful (9). Yet his criticism, while it makes a point of disavowing the implication that blackness be read as a substitute for race since many racial constructions persist in the US, his work does not draw out such distinctions within the construction of nature. It tends to then conflate nature, wilderness, the environment, and non-domesticated animals as all synonymous with nature, which further reifies this construction.

This particular tendency is of course not limited to Outka, but exists in environmental discourse more generally. In terms of animal life, this has the effect of not

only further homogenizing nonhuman life, but further reducing its vivacity; animals become not even animals—they become subsumed by nature or the environment. The codifying forces of language already create categories of indistinction, and the hierarchical ordering that Western ideologies and systems of knowledge depend on further solidify the placement of those categories, and while ecologically all matter is connected, this linguistic interchange between nature, the environment, and animals further limits the potential for theoretical intervention and for progressive action. It makes abstract what is vital and tangible, and sanctions disconnections from sentient creatures by labelling them components of a construction. Critical approaches to race and animal studies (and racialization and its ties to animalization) can most productively and ethically work towards liberatory ends by disrupting those disarticulations and working through the conflicts they continually reinscribe.

Animal representation, ultimately, cannot be divorced from considerations of race in America. The work of postcolonial theorists, scholars who chart the entanglements of power and domination that structure race and animality, critics reading these intersections in fields of contemporary literature, and those who have begun this work in modernism demonstrate that refiguring the animal also means reforming *the human*. In modernist studies and critical approaches to early-twentieth-century literature, the animal opens up in fascinating proximity to this same human, nudging it towards an acknowledgment of its animalistic roots. Importantly, however, when reading outside of the white modernist canon, the animal emerges as not atavistic or primitive, but redemptive in its dignity and fullness. In opposition to modernist texts that render the animal (and the human animal) as monstrously other, prose and poetry that demonstrates how racialization and

animalization fundamentally distort subjects offer a means of reclaiming them from white epistemologies of subordination. When race and animality are read alongside one another, a challenge to the notion of the human appears that embraces a human animal that is not so distinctly above or different. When reading such intersections in modernism, it becomes clear that this refigured human has been asserting itself for quite some time.

CHAPTER III

OUTSIDE VOICES: NARRATIVE ALTERITY IN DEPICTIONS OF THE NONVERBAL AND THE NONHUMAN IN *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

As Michael Awkward observes in his Introduction to *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*, many (if not most) of Zora Neale Hurston's contemporaries in the 1930s African-American literary world received her second novel with a lack of fanfare, reviewing it with either indifference or outright scorn (7). Read by Richard Wright, for instance, as a novel whose "sensory sweep... carries no theme, no message, no thought" it was generally perceived to be a book that pandered to a white audience who wished to read African-American folk culture with "a piteous smile" (25). But with Awkward and a host of scholars beginning with Robert Hemenway in 1977 whose critical engagement with the novel quickly led to its canonization as both an African-American and a modernist classic, the complexities of the text's form, thematic concerns, and its political potential quickly emerged. Prominent among these themes of interest, and formerly unnoticed by Hurston's male literary cohort, was (as Awkward points out) "the theme of patriarchal power" (12). Much feminist scholarship has since attended to the complex and contradictory means by which the novel both resists and accepts gendered power dynamics and institutions, and many have lauded or questioned Janie's eventual liberation as an independent black woman.¹ Few however, have read the novel as one that radically interrogates—or allows readers to—the relationship between figurations of the

¹ In addition to Awkward's work which sees "verbal power" as correlative with Janie becoming a "fully active agent," Mary Helen Washington argues that Janie is perpetually silenced, Carla Kaplan reads voice as an ambivalent force in the text, and Cheryl Clarke reads Janie as achieving particularly feminist form of power by reaching beyond voice and into the visual (600).

gendered human and the frequent appearance of (and comparison to) animals in pivotal scenes. More specifically, *Their Eyes* prompts questions about how and what it means for the text to signify connections between gendered blackness, animality, and the (so-called) animal.

In thematizing patriarchal power, Sharon Davie claims that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* challenges a hierarchical ordering of the world in which men are on top, just as it also sometimes explicitly contests a human-centric hierarchical world order. Through the portrayal of various animals' subjectivities—a mule, vultures, a cow, a rabid dog—Hurston upends what Sharon Davie observes to be “the illusion of hierarchy and control” in which humans are the only subjects (448). And as the novel also draws parallels in its insistence that the black “woman is de mule uh de world” and crosses ontological boundaries through Tea Cake's infection with rabies, it draws attention to the close relationship between racialized narratives of animality and humanist ideology that hierarchizes human beings at the pinnacle (14). Further, it draws gendered distinctions between figurations of racialized animality, just as it also opens on to a consciousness about animals that curiously explores their *being*. The novel's thematic openness to the animal within a historical and narrative context in which dehumanization is both racialized and normalized suggests a turn away from patriarchal white humanism, and towards life outside that order. Or, as Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen posit, these interlocking themes may arise though “an awareness of dehumanization” that does not turn away from questions “of objectification or dehumanization,” but instead turns toward the nonhuman as a way of eluding subjection to the idea of “the human” (186). Hurston knits themes of power and freedom inside the story of a black woman who is

treated as a mule, and who later kills her husband when he is overtaken by a “mad dog,” and thereby calls attention to the ways that logics of domination are insidiously interwoven into the story (187). But in attending to the animal as subject, the novel chips away at the very foundations of this logic, destabilizing the supremacy of “the human,” and insisting on the importance of looking outside of that coercive form.

Part of this looking outside involves the very form of the novel itself, where dynamic and unexpected jumps between voices and perspectives resist a settled commitment to a singular narrative voice, and thus refuse fidelity to the notion of a singular, narrative authority. Through its innovative form, *Their Eyes* explores both the animal *and* racialized figures of animality with a dynamic narrative that does more than alternate between free indirect discourse and character dialogues. It also gives voice to animals (the vultures) through dialogue, depicts silences as vivid and active, speculates about nonhuman subjectivity, portrays humanized animals, and illustrates how dehumanization narratives work to wrest control from their speakers. At certain points, what may at first read as Janie’s voice assuming agency can be examined more critically to expose racialized narratives in fact taking control. In particular, the novel’s trial scene, where Janie characterizes Tea Cake as possessed by “that mad dog that was in him,” relies on a racialized narrative that bestializes black men—though Janie claims her greatest testimonial concern is remaining true to herself and fending off “lying thoughts” with a fear worse than death (187). Janie’s voice, its connection to her intentions and her sense of self, becomes—in these final scenes—not a demonstration of self-possession, but instead a questionable expression of agency suggesting rather a co-option of voice by a racist narrative of black bestiality.

Yet reading Janie Crawford as a figure who comes to self-awareness through bold possession of not only her own voice, but of the narrative in which she resides as well, has served as the foundational premise for many interpretive treatments of *Their Eyes* over the past three decades. Since Henry Louis Gates in *The Signifying Monkey* identified Janie as “the protagonist [who] approaches self-consciousness” through a text that increasingly employs “free indirect discourse to represent her development,” her autonomous growth has been read as inextricably woven into the narrative fabric of the novel (203). Gates claims that the novel’s form allows for Janie’s emergent possession of her own voice to reveal itself as the novel progresses—not only does her spoken voice become more prominent, but her presence in the third-person narrative through free indirect discourse does as well (215). And Janie finds autonomous fulfillment by the novel’s end through her assertion of voice, which also permits her conscious awareness of her own interior/exterior division. While some critics question Gates’s assertion that Janie indeed gains an autonomous voice—arguing instead that she is either silenced by the narrative as Carla Kaplan finds, or does not actually achieve verbal agency as Robert Stepto writes—scant attention focuses on the ways the narrative challenges an unequivocal belief in the supremacy of voice as a means to (or indication of) self-actualization (Washington 99, Stepto 166).² Yet the novel itself concludes with this very challenge when Janie resumes her frame narrative and tells Phoeby that “talkin’ don’t amount tuh uh hill uh beans when yuh can’t do nothin’ else” (192). These—nearly the last words she speaks before “a finished silence” takes hold of the final three paragraphs—dismisses the value of talk (192). In a novel that engages with a variety of

² Michael Awkward, Carla Kaplan, and Mary Helen Washington all question the extent of Janie’s self-realization and acquisition of unencumbered vocal freedom.

animals in different contexts, it is significant that silence concludes the narrative because language is one of the fundamental distinctions said to divide humans from the rest of the living universe. With its various digressions into silence and depictions of that which emerges when voice is not at the foreground, the novel registers an alignment with nonverbal spaces outside of the vocal narrative, including that of nonhuman being. A consciousness of alterity subtly fractures the suggestion that all can be told through vocalized discourse. In *Their Eyes*, the workings of race, gender, humanness, animalness, and narrative form all cooperate to trouble the ground of authority and control on which humanism rests, opening finally on to a silence that overshadows voice as a sign of authority.

Voice, Alternative Linguistics, and Long Silences

Critical readings that valorize Janie's vocal emancipation crucially recognize the importance of a black woman vocalizing her experience, directing the narrative, escaping her abusive marriages, and coming to peace with herself (Awkward 18, Gates 197, Clarke 599). Yet the idea that Janie exploits white discourses of black dehumanization to gain legal exoneration calls into question what many scholars have celebrated as Janie's ultimate coming to self-awareness and autonomy. Cautiously approaching claims that Janie finally speaks for herself, and recognizing instead that her legal testimony trades in ideas of white human exceptionalism, we are better able to read what goes unsaid in the novel. The novel does present its own self-critical moral paradigm in the trial scene, for instance, when the black community reacts to Tea Cake's death with objections that are forced to be silently embodied. But there are other moments as well when the novel explores the nonlinguistic and thus poses a challenge to the idea of narrative control as

triumph. By directing attention away from what goes spoken, and toward what goes unspoken—by the black community, by Janie, by Tea Cake, and by nonhuman actors—we can read agency in silence as much as it dwells in voice. In the novel’s trial scene, the black community is prohibited from speaking, but nonetheless silently protests Tea Cake’s death with movement, glares, and unsettled presence—what Rachel Blau DuPlessis calls “undepicted speech” (107). The novel portrays silent voices of resistance to the projection of animality onto black characters, as it also explores modes of awareness and power that are not made evident through voice, but rather through silence, movement, listening, and other nonverbal acts. It thus formally and thematically challenges a humanist privileging of voice, and at certain points, engages a sustained curiosity about the nonvocal and the nonhuman.

A challenge to the primacy of voice in this canonical African-American text—one that innovated the use of dialect inside a third-person narration and opened up rhetorical possibilities for black representation—means not to assert that Janie’s vocal emancipation does not occur, but seeks to locate how the novel implies voice is only a *partial* form of representation. The novel indeed works towards Janie’s security within her own voice, but it also questions this end and pays particular attention to voice’s absence. Self-awareness correlates to a degree with Janie’s assumption of voice and control of the narrative by her own perspective, but the text itself does not engage in a full celebration of its vocally triumphant protagonist; instead it champions modes of silence and nonverbal communication, and opens on to multiple explorations of subjectivity and expression. It insistently suggests that something else is heard—and can be said—when vocalized language retreats.

Even as the form and content of *Their Eyes* have opened critical discussions around the literary use of folklore, dialect, aesthetics, narrative politics, and around the novel's feminist, anti-racist (or racist), and sociopolitical emancipatory potential, little attention has yet been paid to its prescient ecocritical and posthumanist force. The keen sensitivity the text communicates for nonhuman existence and the ways in which the narrative voice breaks or alters around depictions of both animals and animality works to unfold an interpretation of experience that investigates *being* beyond language. Taking up the novel's depictions of animals and approaching its formal qualities from a modernist perspective, *Their Eyes* reads as open to alterity through language that cannot fully contain. Contemporaneous with literature that explores language as non-mimetic, as a medium that can obscure as much as it clarifies, the novel punctures language by looking around it, by interrupting speech, by attending to characters who do not speak (or do so only in snippets), and in giving voice to those who do not actually speak. These formal dislocations demonstrate that textual representations of languagelessness cannot be adequately captured, but still the text gestures toward reading beyond language. In this way, it can be read as not only modernist, but in some scenes as fantastically posthumanist as well. The novel resists an acceptance of the animal as flat, soulless or disposable, and finds exceptional ways of depicting the animal both on its own terms and through different human lenses that both illuminate and obscure how human perspectives, language, and silence shape it as a figure and determine its material being as well.

Posthuman Potential

Exploring the nonhuman and nonverbal allows a means of seeing outside the sphere of "the human" perspective. Growing concern in literary and cultural studies with

the animal, the nonhuman, and the posthuman over the last decade increasingly looks to narratives and literary practices that subvert a traditional humanist perspective that centers the human as omniscient knower. This concentration on literary representations that decentralize the human in some way points to an interest in nonhuman others at this ecological crisis point in time, but also often dares to challenge an Enlightenment ideology that places the human in a position of superiority. While theoretical explorations of “the human” from critical race, feminist, and disability perspectives have been (and continue to be) vital in articulating how this category champions some and stigmatizes others, recent work in posthumanism and animal studies adds another layer to considerations of how this designation functions. Most fundamentally, such work considers the subjugation of other forms of life under the human; it suggests that this temporal moment—the Anthropocene—in which “we” regard “the human” as superior to other forms of life requires that we release the structuring notion of the human if we wish to escape the dire fate it has assigned itself (and its animal others). The idea of the human as separate and above is one that gained scientific acceptance in the eighteenth century as the physical and biological sciences came to regard the concept of the human as a “single species subject to a natural law,” observes Elizabeth Povinelli in *Geontologies* (8). That is to say, Western eighteenth-century science conceptually naturalized the human as “the Human.” And as Silvia Wynter discusses, this naturalized category functioned to legitimate “genres of being human” that would then “invent, label, and institutionalize” black people as the “subrational Human Other” (281-282). Moving beyond the traditional and exclusive Western humanist interest in the human (where ‘the human’ also typically connotes the white, male as ideal), *Their Eyes* disavows these limited perspectives and

alters the conceptual borders around what it means to be human and complicates the possibilities for what it means to apprehend the animal. The novel also rehearses the categorical failures of the term “human” to bring about a humane form of justice for a terminally ill black man, and demonstrates how discourses of dehumanization and animality function in justifying his death.

Histories of racial- and gender-based subjugation both figure into conceptions of animals in the novel, even as the text represents the animal as a being with its own history of subjugation. While work in posthumanism attends to the ‘question of the animal,’ only some work examines how such questions are always imbedded with racialized and gendered notions. Mel Y. Chen notes that constructed linguistic links exist between animals and people of color such that they are discursively referenced as those “against which the (often rational) human with inviolate and full subjectivity is defined” (95). Chen claims that animals *as figures* mediate spaces “when many axes of human difference collide” (100). *Their Eyes* attends to these figurations of animals as mediators of difference, and the text approaches figures of animality from multiple angles, allowing such figures as the mule to serve white humanistic ends of dominance and superiority, while also fundamentally upending those logics. The novel engages discourses surrounding the animal that intersect with racialized histories of subjugation and then refutes the traditional humanist power of these intersections. Even more, the novel presents even more opportunities for reading animals as inherently complex beings.

Taken together, posthumanism and black studies supply frameworks for apprehending the figure of the animal as more than a metaphor for human struggle. Previously, however, animal figures in *Their Eyes* have been viewed through an analytic

lens that viewed them symbolically. For instance, some scholars read representations of animals in the novel as figurative critiques of white American discourse and structures of power. Davie, as mentioned, looks to the freeing of Matt Bonner's mule and its funeral as a "deliberate undermining of hierarchy" (448). And Brian Roberts explores how the novel instrumentalizes discourses around human-animal interactions to critique larger "dominant discourses" (42). He suggests that Hurston satirizes dominant white American discourse that characterized African-American men as predatory, and instead places white men in the role of "hyper-predator" (Roberts 42). However, more recent work in animal studies endeavors to read literary representations of animals as more than veiled critiques or metaphoric upendings. Bénédicte Boisseron's *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (2018), for example, studies the relationship between blackness and animality, and the connections between the dog itself and African American lives. Boisseron's book proposes that "interspecies connectedness" can be read through the history of the black Atlantic and that of the animal, so that connection beyond that of a "comparable state of subjection and humiliation" is the focus (xx). Such works propose an opportunity for viewing Hurston's animals as representations of the complexity present in the nonhuman, and as more than symbols of human-to-human struggle.

The Mule as Vital, Unspeaking Subject

Matt Bonner's mule—his figuration as animal itself, as metaphoric representation of black women's experience, and as figurative symbol for African-American enslavement—illustrates how the animal figure can be read in multiply complex and intersecting ways. Additionally, the mule provides an opportunity for examining representations of nonvocalized subjectivity as a way of exploring what the animal itself

might actually be. Since the mule does not himself speak, he emerges as a subject through his own actions and through a narrator that speculates on the mule's lived experience. Such experiences include seeking out his own home in Central Florida, plowing fields for Matt Bonner on little food, enduring abuse and baiting by men at the Eatonville General Store, securing freedom after Joe "buys" him, becoming a member of the community, and finally one day succumbing. The narration explains how—nonvocally—the mule struggled through to the end:

He died. Lum found him under the big tree on his rawbony back with all four feet up in the air. That wasn't natural and it didn't look right, but Sam said it would have been more unnatural for him to have laid down on his side and died like any other beast. He had seen Death coming and had stood his ground and fought it like a natural man. He had fought it to the last breath. Naturally he didn't have time to straighten himself out. Death had to take him like it found him. (59)

Both animal and lifeless, the mule in his dead silence occupies a physical space that the narrative attempts to capture and represent. The image of the mule's body as rigid, resistant, and defensive draws parallels between humans and animals (explicitly likening the mule to "a natural man"), and also reads meaning into embodiment. Last standing stiff and self-protective against the nonspeaking approach of "Death," the mule (as the narrative interprets) resists it in a nonverbal struggle that signals itself through a physical becoming, where life fights with taut muscles and unyielding postures, and death prevails through a final solidification of the body. And yet, though the mule, life, and death are all silent—or nonlinguistic—the physicality of this imagery suggests the vibrancy of all three, and beyond that, the ways that language can only begin to approach experience which the body apprehends differently. As Sharon Davie suggests, Hurston returns focus throughout the novel to both "bodily experiences" and to "physical action and its results," and through these foci she emphasizes "the multiple, sliding relation between language

and experience” (455). This is to say, the novel does not rest securely in the notion that language can know or capture experience, and through its focus on the physicality of bodies—especially those who do not speak—it explores consciousness and existence that evades the surety of vocal declaration.

While the scene interprets the mule’s lively interaction with death, it also interrupts assumptions about what it means to be animal. It sunders a connection between the constructs of animal and nature, rupturing a sense of continuity between the two, and thereby pulling the animal out of its ostensibly embedded place in the natural order. The mule in death does not appear “natural” and would have appeared even less so had it fallen on its side “like any other beast” (59). The mule stands out from the established codes of beastly animality, and demonstrates intention, vigor, and spirit, according to its human lingual interpreters. Lum and Sam nimbly ascribe personhood to this “natural man” of a mule who transcends the categorical limitations implied by the animal label.

Remarkably, Matt Bonner’s mule is a character who *is* anthropomorphized—with some levity—in terms of his intentions, reactions, expressions, and resentments, but remains all the while firmly and nonhumanly mule. He does not fantastically exceed his animal qualities, but through narrative attention, he emerges as a character that is not just a “poor brute beast” either (56). He assumes a subjectivity imbued with desires and revulsions. He is a mule who “did everything but let himself be bridled and visit Matt Bonner” (59). Hurston illuminates his complex subjectivity through language that attends to the mule’s physical being as an expression of his seemingly willful interiority. But this language hints at its own speculative qualities: never speaking himself, but acting in ways that appear conscious and deliberate, the mule’s actions are chronicled and interpreted

after they are completed. The narrative can only speculate on the mule's intentions, which are nonlinguistic and independent of the rational ordering and authority of speech.

Prior to his death, "the case of Matt Bonner's yellow mule" occupies substantial textual and imaginative space a third of the way through the novel, which follows his emancipation by Joe Sparks (who the townspeople then liken to Abraham Lincoln), and through to his funeral and eventual consumption by a committee of vultures (51). The mule's story illustrates how he functions as both metaphor and as agential creature. The mule even has a back story that explains how he first arrived in Eatonville through his own intention. According to Lum, the "mule had sense" that he wasn't satisfied living in West Florida, so rode Matt Bonner into the state's interior, where he goes on to waste away on the little he's fed (56). He becomes so thin, the men Sam, Lige, and Walter, who "hear and see more about that mule than the whole county put together," joke that women are using the mule's ribs as a washboard and hanging clothes to dry on his bony hips (51). The subject of much general conversation at the store, the mule supplies the men with opportunities to poke fun at Matt Bonner, and finally becomes an object who is physically poked for fun by the men. The jovial torment begins when the mule announces himself before his arrival at Joe's store with a "braying...at the edge of the woods" (56). This call signals his approach and also emphasizes his alternative speech and its unsuspecting sense of how this speech threatens his wellbeing since Lige and Lum then prepare to catch him for sport.

This scene sets off the sequence of events that leads to the mule's eventual purchase and release by Joe Sparks, who overhears Janie's critiques she mutters to herself over the men's mule-baiting; Joe takes it upon himself to free the mule from further

abuse. It begins when the men tackle the mule, surround him, and poke him to the point of whirling exhaustion. The animal's bodily reactions are described as "panting and heaving from the effort of spinning," he is made to "show his temper," and finally has "more spirit left than body" (56). These visceral descriptions are then aligned immediately with Janie's reaction to the scene when "she snatched her head away...and began muttering to herself" (56). Unable to watch the mule's torment, Janie's body reacts as a mirror for his spinning attempts to escape. She likewise turns away and heads inside to rail against the abuse privately. But Joe, tormenter himself of Janie, overhears her lamenting to herself the mule's treatment, protesting against its having "been worked tuh death" and having had "his disposition ruint wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish devilin' 'im tuh death" (56). Janie's sympathy for the mule recognizes how abuse damaged his temperament and yet persists despite the fact that he's worked to the bone. This lamentation aligns with Janie's grandmother's observation earlier in the novel that black women are the mules of the world, as Janie herself endures not dissimilar treatment from her husband whose store she tends daily with few opportunities to go outside. He strikes her as well, slapping her face when the meal she planned and prepared all day did not turn out well (72). Janie's connection with the mule's suffering, in this instance, is a call for justice and release, even though the connection does arise through what Boisseron calls a "comparable state of subjection and humiliation" (xx). DuPlessis argues that "the figure of the mule...is the symbol of all the silencing Joe imposes on Janie throughout their marriage" and from this springs Janie's empathy (107). The mule's silence, or nonlinguistic utterances, connect with Janie's having been silenced, so that she can see the mule's nonverbal suffering and history even though he cannot speak it. Years of hard

labor and malnutrition make that clear. And the mule's spirited protests against the men who goad it speak to Janie's vivacious and livid reactions to his treatment. Joe overhears her private protests and in a moment of uncharacteristic compassion negotiates determinedly with Matt Bonner to buy the mule for five dollars. Joe becomes a libratory hero and the mule becomes a figure of the community.

Interestingly, in the mule baiting scene, language (and money) with the power to free the mule appears as either inadequate or superfluous in meaningful communicative exchange. Instead, the nonverbal orchestrates much of the action. The mule here is a figure whose being both relies on linguistic signs and refuses them. He becomes a fetish of sorts, a nonspeaking being that gains agency and legitimacy through the elision of speech, and yet, is entirely dependent on the operations of it. In terms of Janie's laments and Joe's overhearing them, the verbal and nonverbal crossings, near misses, and appropriations of speech surrounding the mule's fate all emphasize how language, silence, and the liminal spaces in between cooperate to challenge the effective supremacy of voice, even in this novel that so heavily emphasizes its importance. Between Joe and Janie, speaking, not speaking, overhearing, and walking away, words emerge as fragmentary and partial expressions that only hint at the "war of defense...going on inside" (57). Celebrated by Janie as an emancipator, "something like George Washington and Lincoln," Joe doesn't speak, "he never said a word" (58). Agency—or rather consciousness—the novel suggests, does not reside in the possession of voice, which only articulates a partial self, many aspects of which cannot be simultaneously voiced. Davie argues that the novel's attention to physicality "suggests the experiential quality in human life that cannot be translated into absolutes, hierarchies, or named categories" (455). Even

more, it suggests an experiential quality to nonhuman life as well, especially when the mule exceeds his status as symbol and becomes himself part of the community.

After his release, Matt Bonner's mule becomes "a free mule in town," who then takes shape with a distinct and assertive personality. Aware that he can reliably find food supplied by the yard near Joe's porch, "the mule was usually around the store like the other citizens," and quickly "new lies sprung up about his free-mule doings" involving his being mistaken for a human family member, tagging along, or becoming bored by church services (58-59). His cantankerous personality and penchant for joining in community activities confirms Davie's contention that the novel destabilizes hierarchies, but it also imbues the mule with a human-like desire to be part of the community, and just as radically, is accepted as such. It is the mule who has agency—who does not stay in his place and has not respected his animalistic borders. An unspeaking individual who takes part and even disrupts community doings, the mule expands the meaning of community beyond the human-only realm to include the nonhuman community as well. This embeddedness within the fabric of Eatonville means that upon his death, he receives a playful funeral that actually de-sanctifies what it means to be human.

This funeral, in which the mule's body itself serves as the oratorical platform, provides a space for ridiculing rites sacred to humans through the figure of the animal, whose life remains relatively inconsequential to the community, despite the fact that the novel gestures towards its inherent value. The mule's service is performed as a "great ceremony" just outside of town where the people of Eatonville proceed to mock "everything human in death," referring to his status as a "distinguished citizen" leaving "grief" in his parting (60). And yet, his eulogy does contain images of "miles of green

corn and cool water, a pasture of pure bran with a river of molasses” (61). Strikingly, the mule’s death does not provide an opportunity for mocking the idea of an animal afterlife, but instead for envisioning a mule’s heavenly paradise; it composes an imaginary for mule bliss, subtly honoring the simplicity of such desires and offering a hope (even in jest) that animals succeed in attaining justice, even if it comes in the afterlife. In mule heaven, “the dear departed brother would look down into hell and see the devil plowing Matt Bonner all day long in a hell-hot sun and laying the raw hide to his back” (61). The human as the only being to attain a just reward after death is mocked out of this hierarchical position, and in fact is made to pay for violating animal life, while the animal succeeds to a “glittering throne” where “mule-angels would have people to ride” (61). In playfully upending human notions of redemption, the mule funeral demonstrates an alignment between the human and animal, and suggests the ease with which human-animal understanding can be achieved. Understandings that exceed species boundaries appeal to grief and justice for the mule. Further, this scene demonstrates how tightly the community’s feelings for the mule are bound up with the trauma of slavery, such that Matt Bonner’s imagined comeuppance elicits “mock-happy” shouts and celebrations (61). Luciano and Chen’s assertion that histories of dehumanization may invite a turn toward the nonhuman, and away from and beyond the human aligns with Hurston’s depiction of the mule’s treatment and the community’s celebrations of his imagined triumph (189).

Deathly Accompaniments: The Wake of Vultures

It is worth noting that early on and throughout the novel, nonhuman creatures are accompanied by the figure of death. And while this figure functions silently, its presence

alters realities for human and nonhuman alike, and also quietly instigates desperate responses among those who feel its approach. The buzzard ceremony following the mule's funeral, for instance, sets off the novel's arguably most fantastic scene in which the vultures enter the narrative as speaking agents, altering narrative expectations and suggesting both that other voices *can* speak and that the narrative is not necessarily in any one agent's control. Here, once the humans depart and return to town, the vultures descend upon the mule's corpse, so that narrative attention remains with the creature's body.

Once removed from the human plot, the text tunes in to a vocal discourse among the birds, and follows the rites of their banquet as well. Waiting for their king, who as "decorum demanded" sat "oblivious until he was notified" of the mule's death, the other birds pace hungrily waiting for the formal proceedings commence (61). Once the king arrives at the body and examines it from "end to end," he then speaks to his flock who answer in chorus. Assuming a clear voice and referring to the mule again as a human figure, the king asks three times: "What killed this man?" And the chorus responds each time: "Bare, bare fat." (62). That the vultures assume voices, that they also hold a ceremony for the mule as man, and that they agree that it wasn't death alone that came for the mule, but that indulgence, perhaps, was the cause, suggests an alternate reality within the novel—an unexpected jump into another narrative world. Davie suggests that this move upsets "any hierarchy of true over false," as it moves "beyond proper boundaries, somehow out of control" (452-53). But it also suggests that the voiceless do possess normally unheard voices and that narrative attention can register such discourses. Beyond that, the scene points to animal behavior that might be deemed mercenary,

savage, or chaotic as actually ritualized, dignified, and organized. These birds are not the vultures they're anthropocentrically made out to be; they are sophisticated in their own right even though that reality remains impenetrable to most humans. The novel radically and multiply refigures the animal in the mule's funeral scene—acknowledging humanized dignity in all its creatures.

Race and Becoming Animal in the Final Scenes

Their Eyes Were Watching God engages early on with shifts in perspective and with reading bodies when they do not speak, and while some scholarly attention focuses on the motivations and consequences of the final scenes involving Tea Cake's transformation and Janie's murder trial, the novel has not yet been examined for the ways the animal and racialized associations with animality shape these scenes and shape how voice and voicelessness function. The final scenes, which include a devastating Everglades hurricane, Tea Cake's infection with rabies following a "mad dog" bite, Janie's killing of Tea Cake, and her subsequent legal exoneration present a series of physical encounters that explore the indistinct boundaries between human and animal, while also illustrating how aggressively those boundaries may be enforced (187). While Hurston displays a strong interest in the status and presence of animals throughout the novel, the transgression of the species line in its final pages exposes a range of perspectives on the place of the animal in both the novel and in early-twentieth-century American culture. Such perspectives, necessarily informed by race and gender, take the animal to be by turns: mournable, killable, disposable, redeemable, guilty, innocent, and threatening. But more so, the status of the animal, particularly that of the dog in the novel, is inseparable from its relationship to the racialized human.

Race and animality are intermingled constructs that emerge early in the novel as subject to dominating power structures, and also as interrelated subjectivities. Troublingly, even though Hurston engages in explorations of human-animal kinship at the beginning of the novel, she also permits Janie's attainment of freedom to hinge on her denial of this association. Instead, Janie employs racialized narratives which correlate race with animality, and vice versa, to secure her acquittal. The institutions of state power in the novel go on to endorse the killing of a black man because he "becomes animal," suggesting not only that (for the state) animalized humans are killable beings, but also that humans can become animalized—that this transitional interpretation of subjectivity is valid, and that it is exploitable. Further, the novel also explores the American assumption that animals are killable beings by their very nature. As the novel vividly reminds its readers, the dehumanization of African Americans by the Euroamerican state is one with a long history of violence that interprets black people as "subhuman" and that sees animality as violable (Weheliye 3). This basis allows any recognition of human animality to be subject to violence. As Weheliye observes, "the law pugnaciously adjudicates who is deserving of personhood and who is not," and this adjudication emerges forcefully in *Their Eyes*, which engages an extensive exploration into how race and animality are co-constituted (11). The novel strips both the status of the animal and the animality of the racialized human to levels that allow for extinguishability. And it firmly articulates the subhumanizing logics of the white American judicial system, which are buttressed by a disregard for animal life. Though this disregard ultimately liberates the Janie, the novel's protagonist and eventual narrator, the narrative nonetheless subtly refuses to endorse the

white judiciary in its political devaluation of black lives, and more inconspicuously of animals' rights to existence as well.

The Animal as Killable

In viewing these final scenes through a perspective that perceives hierarchical violence as predicated on notions of racial and gendered forms of dominance that operates conditionally, questions emerge that challenge all forms of oppression, including that of humans over animals. Maneesha Deckha in her work on postcolonial feminist conceptions of animals states that “violence was enacted against colonized human beings through the differentiating logic of animalization, racialization, and dehumanization” (539). In America, racist discourse and thought historically employed tactics of dehumanization or subhumanization whereby the use of animals as proxies for people of color worked in those discourses to “justify” the mistreatment, enslavement, and disenfranchisement of African Americans for centuries. The way, then, that “the human” functions in American culture and in legal discourse, as distinct from other life—that a certain conception of the human is culturally assumed to possess a life worth sustaining—comes into particular focus near the end of *Their Eyes* when the representation of human transformation into “animal” deems Tea Cake killable by the novel’s representation of judicial order. Tea Cake’s animalization and killing are sanctioned by a justice system conditioned to permit violence against subordinated beings. Race correlates with and influences perceptions of animality (and associated ethics) when the figure of the animal—and the transfer of animality to human—becomes the hinge on which Janie’s testimony rests, especially since the animal registers as both executable and as a victim of murder. That Janie kills Tea Cake and incorporates his

animality into her defense makes use of racialization and animalization as modes of discounting life. The “mad dog” that Tea Cake becomes is ultimately, for Janie and for the white legal system, a killable being, while for the black community (whose articulated resistance the novel does not grant voice to), he remains a victim of wrongful killing.

Tea Cake’s Animal Illness

Their Eyes privileges the perspective of a white judge and jury in determining the legality and circumstantial rationality for Janie Crawford’s killing of her third husband to defend her own life, but undercuts this view as well. While the novel concludes with a seeming validation of Janie’s killing, it also takes readers through her experience of witnessing Tea Cake’s descent into a seemingly animalized state. It then urges readers to sympathize with Janie as her options rapidly narrow. But the novel also subtly suggests a counternarrative that questions Janie’s defense, her actions, and her exoneration. Insisting that Tea Cake’s death is not *just*, and that Janie’s defense exploits discourses that conflate blackness and animality, the novel also presents a challenge to readings that see Tea Cake’s death as laudatory, necessary, and emancipatory for Janie.

Tea Cake’s troubles begin near the novel’s end. Janie’s third husband is an abusive *bon vivant* who gambles, suffers suspicious jealousy, and whom Janie loves far more than her previous two husbands. After Janie and Tea Cake depart Eatonville together to work and live in the Everglades, a hurricane strikes, which leaves all semblances of infrastructural and hierarchical order in disarray. As Glenda Carpio notes, the hurricane scene highlights the human loss of and desire for “power and control” which appears most prominently once it is lost (135). Janie and Tea Cake find themselves

washed away in the storm's subsequent flood, where Janie saves herself only by grabbing the tail of a passing cow as it floats by caught in the torrents. This animal, however, is already occupied—a dog stands atop its back “shivering and growling” (165). No docile creature, “the dog stood up and growled like a lion, stiff-standing hackles, stiff muscles, teeth uncovered as he lashed up his fury for the charge” (166). Since it threatens to attack Janie should she come within reach of its jaws, Tea Cake enters the bodily fray of human and animal convergence; he stabs the threatening dog with a knife, sending it “to the bottom to stay there” (166). But before the dog sinks to its watery grave, it sinks its teeth into Tea Cake's cheekbone. Though he discounts the bite as nothing serious, weeks later Tea Cake begins to develop symptoms of serious illness, and the bite's severity becomes known. Plagued suddenly with hydrophobia, paranoia, bouts of temper, fever, and malaise, the local white doctor diagnoses Tea Cake with rabies, which by the time of its identification has progressed beyond the point of cure. Janie asks the doctor if Tea Cake is likely to die, and the doctor affirms he is, adding that “de worst thing is he's liable tuh suffer somethin' awful befo' he goes” (177). The doctor suggests sending him to the hospital, but Janie responds: “Ah can't stand de idea us tyin' Tea Cake lak he wuz a mad dawg” (177). From that point on in the novel, Tea Cake becomes increasingly ill, so much so that Janie avoids him so as not to confront the “sickness in his face” (178).

Interestingly, Janie's interactions with Tea Cake during his final days recognize his condition—marked by terror, fits, nightmares, and the inability to eat or drink—as illness. Janie tells Tea Cake he is sick, “too sick fuh me tuh handle” as she waits for medicine to arrive that might provide some relief (182). While the narration describes Tea Cake as having been seized by a “thing that set his brains afire and grabbed at his

throat with iron fingers,” Janie refuses to send him away for care, worried that “folks would...treat Tea Cake like he was some mad dog when nobody in the world had more kindness about them” (178, 183). Finally, a breaking point is reached and Tea Cake with his “suffering brain urging him to kill” confronts Janie with a gun, convinced she’s been having an affair while he’s been sick in bed (183). He shoots three blank shots at her, and when he finally fires a real bullet and misses, Janie shoots him with a rifle and he dies, biting her arm as he falls to the floor.

The scenes in which Tea Cake becomes ill and in which he dies can be read against the court room scene at the novel’s end as complicating and illuminating how narratives of animality become dangerous forms of control and brutality. While the novel plays with explorations of the nonhuman when threats of violence are less immediate, the trial scene illustrates how threatening such associations can be in a racialized context. Janie goes to court for Tea Cake’s killing, and though the narration does not transcribe her testimony, the text provides a paraphrase of her own spoken defense, and also reveals a change in her perspective regarding Tea Cake’s condition. There, on the stand:

She tried to make them see how terrible it was that things were fixed so that Tea Cake couldn’t come back to himself until he had got rid of that mad dog that was in him and he couldn’t get rid of the dog and live. He had to die to get rid of the dog. (187)

While Janie had in the days previous described Tea Cake as sick—so sick she was worried he would be treated like a mad dog—here she relies on the law’s political imagining and creation of racialized animality to defend her killing. Tea Cake’s death here is justified, or in fact necessary because he—according to Janie’s defense—becomes animal. And she implies that there is no unbecoming animal, instead “he must die to beat it” (187).

The depiction of Tea Cake's sanctioned killing ultimately draws attention to the ways that the boundaries of the human are, in fact, radically destabilized and examined in the novel—both in terms of Tea Cake's transformative illness and in the figurative work that the narrative does to draw parallel connections between its characters, human and nonhuman. As Elizabeth Povinelli's notes of "The Virus" as "the figure...which seeks to disrupt...the division of Life and Nonlife," the rabies virus in *Their Eyes* can be read as an infectious agent that draws attention to the associated vulnerabilities of both human and nonhuman, in this case a man and a dog (19). While the novel makes plain a sort of kinship of vulnerability, it also highlights the failings of the juridical order to acknowledge or account for this relationship – to account for the human as never singularly capable of species autonomy. Such an order does not – or perhaps cannot – account for such vital "entanglements" when, as Povinelli notes, our scale of "perception is confined to the skin, to a set of epidermal enclosures" (42). And this idea also pervades the novel, particularly in the courtroom scene where the legal proceedings are choked by racism. What Laura Korobkin calls "the reflexive racism of the white legal system" already demonstrates the limits of a legal order that refuses to value or equally protect nonwhite human lives, and thus cannot account for a human entangled with a virus below his epidermal surface (12). At its most visible, it is violence, its control, and its supervision that illustrate how defending the epistemology of "the human" works.

Tea Cake's dehumanization, which permits Janie to fatally shoot him without judicial consequence, suggests a legal framework that supports Janie's interiorization of her motivations. If indeed Tea Cake has a mad dog within, he becomes no longer human, and his nonhuman status renders him killable. Presenting a variety of humanist and

posthumanist problems that center upon the law's assumption of a universal humanistic conception of defensible life, that Janie shoots Teacake with impunity demonstrates ways that racialization and animalization are state-sanctioned modes of discounting human life. In her reliance on discourse that conforms to a white racist notion of animality as associated with blackness, she works to defend her killing of Tea Cake to the white legal powers in the courtroom. Janie manipulates discourses of racialized dehumanization to justify her killing as the narrative also illustrates how law's power relies on silence and the denial of voice to maintain and adjudicate outcomes that produce inhumanity.

Testimonial Approximations

Janie is put on trial for Tea Cake's death and found not guilty by a white judge and jury as she invokes Tea Cake's having become animal as the key to her defense. Contrary to Gates's claim that it is in the trial scene that Janie secures her voice, her actual testimonial speech goes undepicted and is instead summarized with a third-person narrative account of Janie's *intentions* in testifying in defense of her actions. Scholars examining this scene to explore how Janie negotiates her experience to claim self-defense and to free herself from the confines of marriage once and for all have noted that Janie "shapes her testimony to her audience—the white judicial system" (Russell 58). DuPlessis states that in that scene, Janie chooses "to speak to white women" as she believes them most likely to sympathize with her defense (109). James Phelan suggests that "Hurstun would face a difficult task in writing a speech that both white men in the courtroom and her audience would find consistent" and thus leaves Janie's voice untranscribed, and directed toward those who hold her fate in their hands (72). Laura

Korobkin examines how Janie's "accidental" killing of Tea Cake (according to the courtroom verdict) erases her agency. Taken together, these scholarly approaches to the scene acknowledge that Janie's testimony does not represent her voice, but relies on a narrative remove to record her intention to "let them know...she could never shoot Tea Cake out of malice" (187).

In the courtroom scene, voice, free indirect discourse, paraphrase, and silencing all work to cast suspicion on those denied voice, which then creates precarious positions in that space. DuPlessis observes that "the trial scene is the main place in which race and gender...show intense cross-purposes and mutual conflicts in their narrative impact" (102). As Janie is put on trial, the courtroom reflects the ways in which political disenfranchisement takes both shape and voice. The narration describes a white judge, "twelve more white men...[and] eight or ten white women [who] had come to look at her," as well as two men (the prosecution and the defense lawyers) who will argue over her sentence: the death penalty. And then, moving away from the white staging of power, narrative attention shifts to "all of the colored people standing up in the back of the courtroom" (185). The black community, "packed tight like a case of celery," is described as plant life where they also move and sway "like wind among palm trees" (185, 186). But as Janie sees it, "they were there with their tongues cocked and loaded... the only killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks" (185-186). And though many of them wish to testify—"they had come to talk, the State couldn't rest until it heard"—when Sop-de-Bottom tells the prosecutor he has something to say, he is threatened with arrest and arraignment (187). The prosecutor makes this explicit when he tells the community: "another word out of you [...] and I'll bind you over to the big

court” (187). Thus, voice is denied to Tea Cake’s steadfast representatives, so that testimony—the one form of power this group might have under the law—is not an option, and becomes in fact a risk.

The courtroom scene demonstrates how Tea Cake’s friends are denied voice (their only weapon, as Janie sees it) and denied rights through forceful silencing. This muting as a form of deprivation is ultimately dehumanizing. Megan Glick likens racialized political disenfranchisement “to the state of the animal, to a life without rights” (642). Where the law in this scene denies speech to those it deems less than human, in doing so, it produces a dehumanized subject. And thus, Tea Cake’s advocates are figured in a way that Janie can use in her defense of her husband’s death. That is to say, his friends are also animalized in a way that Janie exploits in arguing that Tea Cake had become an animal. Though the black community disagrees with the final verdict, and Janie sees her own exercise of violence as one predicated on Tea Cake becoming “like...some mad dog,” the legal acceptance of her deployment of lethal force defends conceptions of race that employ discourses of animality (187). For the state, whose foundations rest on the deployment of violence, animalized humans are killable beings.

That the novel does not transcribe Janie’s testimony suggests a competing set of narrative implications. While testimony transcriptions are already documents of erasure, in that tone, gesture, body language, silence, and verbal pace are not recorded, the narrative refuses to endorse such a practice and instead provides Janie’s intention through free indirect discourse. While the courtroom “leaned over to listen while she talked,” the reader does not encounter her speech, but instead reads her thoughts which express a need “to remember she was not at home. She was in the courthouse fighting something

and it wasn't death...It was lying thoughts" (187). The lying thoughts that Janie fights, however, are not made explicit, and in fact, the paraphrase of her testimony suggests that her intention to speak the truth does not align with the words she spoke about Tea Cake before his death. Though he was sick and ailing while alive, according to Janie, in the courtroom, he had a "mad dog that was in him" (187). That the narrative does not provide Janie's voice, but instead explains her testimonial intention to present Tea Cake as possessed and as nonhuman, rather than as an ill man aligns her intended testimony with the white racism that directs the proceedings. To read Janie's speech too closely and clearly, the novel suggests, might betray her testimonial alignment with the discourse of the state that seeks to justify Tea Cake's killing. It would also break too clearly with Janie's earlier assertions of concern for his health and condition.

Ironically, the thing Janie purports to fear most is misunderstanding, and not the death penalty which she faces if found guilty. Misunderstanding, she believes, "was worse than murder" (187). And yet this scene displays a series of misunderstandings: through silencing, through a misrepresentation of Tea Cake's being, and through a verdict that deems his death "accidental and justifiable" (188). By dehumanizing Tea Cake, and denying his peers the right to speak on his behalf, the white representatives of the law make the figure of Tea Cake into what he's always been in their eyes—what Claire Jean Kim describes as a "persistent racial trope": the black man as "violent beast" (23). Janie's release demonstrates how the law in an early-twentieth-century Florida courtroom sanctions the violent death of the dehumanized subject. At the same time, the narrative subtly challenges this outcome, through the black community, who shuffle out of the courtroom, shaking their heads—a silent refute to her defense. Silence becomes not a

form of acquiescence nor even resignation, but a contest in itself, to the failures of language, the law, and its power to articulate justice.

Through this depiction, the novel suggests an alternative moral paradigm at work within the text, one which does not accept a ‘dehumanized’ Teacake as murderable. After Janie is found not guilty for Tea Cake’s death, the text remarks on an approving white contingent in the courtroom, and a dismayed black community. While the white judge and jury find Tea Cake’s execution pardonable for his having a “mad dog” within, the novel echoes centuries of dehumanizing logics used to justify violence and murder, while also contesting (through the black community) the notion of dehumanization. This demonstrates how a rejection of dehumanization avows human-animal connection in the novel, where an unsettling series of events raise questions about how and why the animal is so conceived as inhuman by the white American state. One way is through a conception of the animal that views it as predatory and malevolent. While the rabid dog does bite Tea Cake so that they consequently experience a similar decline through the virus that attacks them both—they share that vulnerability—Tea Cake does not (as Janie argues) become a mad dog. He becomes ill just as the dog did. That Janie’s testimony connects them through the foaming chaos of illness is especially dangerous because it animalizes them both. Her defense invokes animality as raving and ferocious, which white racializing constructions deploy as a means of subjugation and devaluation. At the same time, as the narrative demonstrates, in the moment of confrontation Janie defends herself against Tea Cake as she must do, and she likely spares him unceasing suffering. But since her legal defense frames her self-defense in a way that justifies and employs anti-black racism, it complicates the trial scene profoundly. But yet again, Janie must

defend herself in the courtroom as well, within the white persecutorial space of sanctioned legal violence. By appealing to the white women present, by attempting to align herself with them, she positions herself against the bestial black man as a way of establishing her own personhood. This is her unspoken defense, and the black community seems to hear it clearly.

Janie's return home following the trial, to a space of silence after her exertion of voice, concludes with the suggestion that something can be heard in the absence of language, where a moment of silence finally brings her peace. At the novel's conclusion, Janie Crawford finally returns to Eatonville, to a house that could only be livable after she "been tuh de horizon and back" (191). As she remarks upon her return: "Dis house ain't so absent of things lak it used tuh be befo' Tea Cake come along. It's full uh thoughts" (225). Materially imbued with memory and meaning, the house Janie returns to is a quiet space filled with thoughts that, to borrow Jane Bennett's phrase, takes on a "a vitality intrinsic to materiality" (xiii). The final paragraphs describe not just the silence that surrounds Janie, who must first sweep out "the fetid feeling of absence and nothingness" that occupies the space, but goes on to describe the sounds of "a sobbing sigh out of every corner in the room; out of each and every chair and thing" (227). Though Janie's voice and her control of the narrative ensured her eventual freedom, in silence she hears the unspeaking matter that surrounds her and finally finds "peace" (227). The house, when it "commenced to sing, commenced to sob and sigh, singing and sobbing," points to the vibrancy that things can hold despite or because of their histories. Hurston presents a vision of listening to the sighs and sobs things hold. As Bennett says, of the "shared materiality of all things," there is an "incomplete commonality with the

outside [domain of] animals, plants, earth, even artifacts and commodities” (17-18). And *Their Eyes* suggests that cultivating a connection to this shared materiality ultimately grants Janie tranquility.

Conclusion

As *Their Eyes* plays with narrative perspectives and with nonverbal communications, and as the court scene demonstrates how voice, silence, thought, and intention challenge the idea that veracity can be achieved through explicit language, Janie’s words—those that are spoken, and those that determine outcomes but are not transcribed—signal a narrative that, like its protagonist, cannot settle in stasis. Language alters perception, it determines realities, and it fails to articulate any sort of truth, the existence of which the novel implicitly questions. The novel’s persistent depictions of silence, of unexplained decisions, and of bodily experiences that prevail over a language that distorts suggests a modernist novel that counters the strength of language with the power of the unspoken. It acknowledges that so much goes unheard, that what is heard must be seen for the sliver of reliable representation that it is—that to understand is to hear what is not said.

While the novel certainly demonstrates the sociopolitical power of verbal control and transmission, it also undercuts a stable allegiance to the idea that verbalization serves as the truest expression of autonomous power. Rather, *Their Eyes* suggests that discourse disempowers, and actually de-agentializes Janie at crucial moments in the text. And conversely, it suggests that silence possesses a different sort of power in the text that has gone quietly unrecognized. The novel’s form and its capricious vacillations in narrative voice may actually draw attention to the routes that certain voices trace, to the ideological

ties that discourses have to points of view. That Janie's voice does not sound her own testimony, that voices that attempt to defend Tea Cake are silenced, and that soundlessness concludes the novel all suggest a counter reading to celebrations of the novel's verbal flourishing. With its dynamic and multivocal narrative, *Their Eyes* displaces the stability of the single, authoritative voice with a set of voices, and a preoccupation with the voiceless. Through this form, the authority of a white form of humanism becomes unsettled as well. This ideological adherence to an idealized, masculine sense of the human and the human voice, is thrust aside perpetually, creating space for the emergence of different voices, and for the depiction of bodies who do not speak. As such, the novel troubles what it means to associate human agency so directly with voice, as it also creates space for representations beyond the human.

CHAPTER IV

ALTERIOR MOTIVES: MULTIDIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ANIMALS IN ZITKALA-ŠA'S *OLD INDIAN LEGENDS*

At the turn of the twentieth century, stories of talking bears, clothed badgers, and kidnapping toads may not have seemed entirely novel to American audiences. After all, Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* published in 1902 situated readers in an anthropomorphized household of rabbits, while Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* published that same year featured fanciful creatures with creational powers and advanced vocabularies. Meanwhile, Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* stories had appeared in print two decades prior, introducing readers to African-American oral storytelling through characters like Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. Yet the publication in 1901 of Zitkala-Ša's *Old Indian Legends* offered something different to readers of stories about animals who speak, think, and act with ethical consideration. Her collection—the first published English translation of Dakota oral literature—presented to readers a textual world in which animal characters figured as conceivably human, and vice versa.¹ In Zitkala-Ša's stories, animals speak, they understand one another, and they enact moral lessons, as they do in other contemporaneous volumes of animal-populated literature, but remarkably unusual in *Old Indian Legends* are the ways that a sort of dual- or multi-species identity emerges among characters in this collection. While the ability to transmutate definitively

¹ I refer to *Old Indian Legends* as Dakota tales since Zitkala-Ša explains in the Preface that “old Dakota story-tellers have told me these legends” (v). I also refer to Sioux cultural practices in this article when talking more broadly about the seven tribes native to the plains region of present-day Minnesota, Northern Iowa, Nebraska, and North and South Dakota, which formed an enduring political and cultural alliance. As Mark Rifkin notes, however, Sioux is a “misnomer” that is a French interpretation of “an Ojibwa insult” for those plains tribes (51). Dakota (which is sometimes used as a more general term for Sioux), Lakota, and Nakota are language divisions of the Santee, Teton, and Yankton tribes, respectively. Zitkala-Ša was born and raised speaking Nakota, though she later changed her name to Zitkala-Ša—a Lakota name. Further, she self-identified as Dakota (Rifkin 29; Spack 43).

from one form to another remains the sole province of the trickster Iktomi, the stories suggest this capacity prevails in less obvious ways among the many different animal characters portrayed. A combined reading of the original 1901 text and its accompanying illustrations generates an imaginary of hybrid or transformative beings when humans visually materialize in images that appear alongside the textual animal characters that they represent. An interplay between text and image destabilizes the solidity of discrete ontologies when animals function narratively as human representatives, and humans then appear comfortably as visual substitutes for animal protagonists. Through this interchange emerges a textual demonstration of how Dakota systems of knowledge understand the complex, organic continuum of human-animal relatedness. Consequently, the text presents a literal rebuke to Western/Euroamerican conceptions of species hierarchy, animal inferiority and disposability, and the notion that human-animal comparisons are profoundly threatening. In *Old Indian Legends*, animals figure prominently as kin, echoing a long history of shared ecological dwelling and cooperative existence, and in these stories, the opportunity for humans to inhabit nonhuman being is not debasing, but is instead elevating.

This essay engages critical animal studies in its approach to *Old Indian Legends* as a text that offers new ways of viewing the human-animal relationship through a literary analysis that combines word and image to read animals as people, and people as animals. Through an imaginative interchange whereby humans materialize visually to portray animal characters, notions of hierarchy between species give way to explorations of relationality and conceptions of kinship. Engaging with animal studies work by Native scholars (and Native studies scholars), this paper explores how Indian perceptions of

nonhumans as fellow agential beings come through the text both despite and because animals serve as personified humans or political entities. First published in a political and social context in which the United States actively pursued Native elimination through assimilation, these stories imagine radically different transformations that reject ideas of hegemonic ascendancy and instead welcome plurality with the rest of the living world.

Where Words and Image Merge Through Difference

Of particular interest in this essay is the way in which Zitkala-Ša's stories (as originally published) combine with their accompanying illustrations to defamiliarize the ontologies of the characters they represent. The original 1901 publication of *Old Indian Legends* (as well as a 1985 reprint) feature illustrations that were completed by Zitkala-Ša's friend, the Winnebago artist Angel De Cora, a well-known Native artist who enjoyed a career in fine art and as an illustrator for books by and about Native people (Vigil 178).² While more recent publications omit De Cora's work, reading the original 1901 version with its illustrations provides vital context for comprehending how *Old Indian Legends* negotiated the narrative terrain surrounding stories about animals. Rather than infantilize animals, the text represented them as informed by a Native view that perceives an easy changeability between human beings and animals, where one can become the other with little trouble, physically or ontologically. What's more, the illustrations give visual proof to this multifocal way of seeing animal characters who are all the while human—animal characters who are perhaps human from the start in that they speak, they interact, they obey (or disobey) codes of behavior—but are animal in their assigned textual roles.

² De Cora illustrated the frontispiece for Francis LeFlesche's *The Middle Five: Indian Boys at School* (1900) and illustrated a book by Elaine Goodale Eastman, *Yellow Star: A Story of East and West* (1911), along with numerous magazine contributions (Vigil 178).

Zitkala-Ša's writing with the complement of De Cora's illustrations signify a relationship in which humans learn from animals by inhabiting their roles and sometimes their forms, and thus refuse notions of human superiority—and more importantly, refute hierarchical conceptions of supremacy—in favor of an ethic that champions transformation as a way of being human. Linda Hogan writes that Native intellectual traditions reflect thousands of years of lived experience, which always included life among (and thus a kinship with) animal beings who all predate the appearance of humans so that what “is remembered in stories are the deepest reflections of our shared lives on Earth” (10). Through stories, she writes, “the bridge between one kind of intelligence and another, one species and another” are kept alive (Hogan 10). De Cora's work gestures toward this knowledge throughout the collection, just as it suggests that the things that the Western mind might view as setting humans apart, such as a shared language, are perhaps overestimated. The book opens, for instance, to a frontispiece that unfolds adjacent to the cover page; it depicts a Dakota man bowing with arms stretched toward the feet of a Dakota woman who stands opposite (Figure 1). The caption that accompanies the illustration explains: “This was a sign of gratitude used when words failed to interpret strong emotion” and thus gestures before the text even begins to the inadequacy of verbal language to communicate the depth of inner experience. Within this textual universe, animal characters possess and deploy language, while some humans find it inadequate—suggesting animals to be capable of complex interactions, while human beings may communicate more meaningfully without verbal consignment.



Figure 1: Frontispiece

Important as a document that records legends which present a contest to Western constructions of animals as separate and diminished, the collection of fourteen stories that comprises *Old Indian Legends* draws on traditional Dakota oral tales that (at the age of twenty-five) Zitkala-Ša gathered by visiting tribal elders, and transcribing and translating stories she feared might otherwise go unrecorded and forgotten. Hers was the first of several early-twentieth-century collections of Dakota oral literature published in an effort to preserve and circulate Indian cultural traditions while also asserting their value to a largely Euroamerican audience.³ As Zitkala-Ša describes in a 1901 letter, a sense of urgency compelled her to gather traditional stories “while the old people last...to get from them their reassured ideas of life” (Enoch 119).⁴ She achieved this goal when in 1901 Boston’s Ginn and Company published *Old Indian Legends*, her first full-length work. This compilation of traditional Sioux oral legends featured Iktomi the trickster, personified animals, and Iya the eater as reoccurring characters.

³ Ella Deloria’s *Dakota Texts* (1932); Marie McLaughlin’s *Myths and Legends of the Sioux* (1916); and Charles and Elaine Eastman’s *Wigwam Evenings* (1909).

⁴ Written in a February 1901 letter to her then fiancée Carlos Montezuma.

The legends, as she writes in the book's preface, are a composite of many voices over time and are thus imparted with particular vibrancy, which she describes as "the native spirit" (89). This very spirit is what Paula Gunn Allen writes must be encountered "experientially" and not by the "adding-machine mind" (105). Within this tradition, Gunn Allen explains that such stories rely on symbols to articulate meanings, and through symbology "re-create and renew our ancient relationship to the universe" (106). Accordingly, this collection offers readers entrée to a worldview that discerns a coherent unity between beings. This concept emerges most perceptibly through the parts animal characters play in often representing human beings. More specifically, animals come to symbolize personality attributes; they often speak and interact with one another, either upholding or disrupting conscionable codes of behavior. Their bodily descriptions, by extension, become tied to ways of being and seeing so that the predatorily enabling physical features of a bear, for instance, come to represent the ravages of colonial domination. Yet the ready symbolic exchange between human and animal suggests—even beyond social and political critique—that the stories convey what Gunn Allen describes as "insights that have not been raised to conscious articulation" (117). Such insights, *Old Indian Legends* suggests, include perceiving relationships between humans and animals as generative rather than reductive in that we see more clearly who we are through our symbolic embodiments as animals.

The illustrations work with the text to challenge what Hogan describes as the "Western mind" and its "way of living in the world" without a surviving "trust between human and animal" (11). Hogan's essay "First People" explores how many Native cultures the world over, and particularly in North America, have stories that describe

earlier times when humans and animals were “the same kind of people” and when (for some cultures) “animals changed into human form, or humans became animals” (8). Additionally, Philippe Descola in his global investigation of cultural perceptions of animals in *Beyond Nature and Culture* observes that “the continuity between humans and nonhumans” constitutes lived experience in much of the world and especially in indigenous cultures where communication with the environment is customary (27). Descola importantly argues that the Western view of animals and the environment as separate and “incommunicable” spheres is an unusual epistemology threatening in that it not only alienates humans from the rest of the world but also offers a way of rationalizing exploitation of animals and the environment as resources to be mined (30). Hogan’s essay, instrumental in explaining how Native oral literature illuminates a culture’s knowledge and approach to nonhuman life, details the ways that animals were (and continue to be) seen as fellow people—as those with whom humans share trust, and who exist as “powers” in their “states of being, gifts, or capabilities” (10). She writes that “for tribal cultures, animals are still seen as kith and kin, as other nations of people who have different intelligences from ours” (Hogan 17). It was the Western tradition that altered this collective understanding on the American continent, she contends, where going back to Roman times, animals were seen “as everything except what they were”: as symbols, myths, monsters, royalty (Hogan 17). This symbolic relegation, along with the concomitant physical enclosing of animals (zoos, parks, homes, etc.), keeps modern people from knowing animals, such that “we have become the boundary [and] we define the borders” (Hogan 17). De Cora’s illustrations dissolve the very lines of those borders and redraw them without calling attention to their potential unexpectedness. Her visual

substitutions of human *for* animal cooperate with Zitkala-Ša's verbal representations of human *by* animal to elaborate the fundamentally intertwined relationship that Dakota systems of belief observe between human and nonhuman—and the interaction between literature and illustration communicate this more fully than either medium might do separately.

The Legends as a Material Rebuke to Indian Eradication

Born Gertrude Bonnin in 1876 and raised on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, at the age of eight, Zitkala-Ša was taken from home to attend White's Manual Labor Institute, a Quaker school in Indiana, an experience she recounts fictionally in *American Indian Stories* as one in which she endured the violence of assimilationist education, and then returned to her tribal family with feelings of deep alienation that left her hanging "in the heart of chaos" (ZS 28). Zitkala-Ša continued to attend school in Indiana, but in 1897, upon leaving Earlham College, she renounced her Western name and adopted the pen name Zitkala-Ša (Red Bird) instead (Vigil 165). She went on to teach at the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania until 1899 when disagreements with the school's headmaster compelled her to relocate to Boston to play violin at the New England Conservatory (Vigil 166). From there, Zitkala-Ša returned home to South Dakota to collect the stories that would be printed as *Old Indian Legends*.

The political context of the time, in which Indian removal from traditional lands contracted tribal territories into ever smaller plots ultimately concluding in allotment policy, and in which children were taken into Euroamerican cultural custody as part of an assimilative educational effort, is addressed more prominently in Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories*, but experiences of cultural erasure and removal with which she was so

directly acquainted play into the stories of *Old Indian Legends* as well. The book appeared at a time when political and social movements continued to further disenfranchise Indian people. *Old Indian Legends* was published fourteen years after the Congressional passage of the Dawes General Allotment Act in 1887 which broke large tribal territories (which had already been greatly reduced by the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868) into 165-acre plots to be farmed and occupied by single families. The Act was a federal governmental effort to “civilize” Sioux Indians; Henry Dawes asserted that civilized citizens were those who endeavored to “cultivate the ground, live in houses...[and] own property” (Hyde 169). This colonizing effort was in part fueled by the Euroamerican cultural notion that the Sioux must be reformed from communal, seasonally nomadic people to settled, individualistic citizens with single-family commitments. Such governmental efforts asserted that Indians would be legitimate citizens once they embraced national values of ownership, individualist separation, and large-scale agricultural manipulation. So-called reforms were fueled as much by colonialist avarice as by messages that relied on the idea of Indians as savage, close to nature, and in need of civilizing.

As it was, the American racializing imagination constructed Native people as figures who were either ecologically attuned or savagely unreformed. As Claire Jean Kim points out in her examination of the interplay between race and conceptions of the animal, the savage Indian and the ecological Indian have long been “stock characters in the American cultural imaginary” (235). It was—and continues to be—this presumed association of “embeddedness in nature” that feeds an imagined “quasi-animality” of Native people (Kim 235). Within this context then, what’s remarkable about Zitkala-Ša’s

collection of tales is its willing conflation of Dakota people and animal characters such that associations and intermingling between species are embraced as part of greater truth about what it means to be human. These tales take readers out of so-called civilized spaces and into a realm of ecologic continuity where understanding and communion between humans and nonhumans produces a fuller world. Through the act of bringing traditional Sioux stories into print for an English-speaking audience, Zitkala-Ša asserts resistance to Indian erasure by working to preserve Dakota stories, while also demonstrating Sioux cultural worth to a society bent on eradicating it. The stories go further in their assertion of a cultural knowledge system that views relationships between beings as inter-ontological rather than wholly separate and opaque, and thus through the tales Zitkala-Ša denies (in many ways) an allegiance to a Western worldview.

Interestingly, Zitkala-Ša presents her work as belonging “quite as much to the blue-eyed little patriot as to the black-haired aborigine,” as she explains in the book’s preface (vi).

The book is both one of didactic intention aimed at a young white audience and an assertion of Dakota sovereignty. By functioning in both ways, it rebukes the recently arrived Euroamericans and their land grab by offering tales that critique such acquisitiveness and a present another way of knowing. With this introduction, she bestows the English-language text upon a young white audience as part of a shared heritage. But with this she also undercuts a sense of blue-eyed longevity in the US by remarking that only “in the last few centuries has [America] acquired a second tongue,” which thus necessitates such a translation (89). The preface to *Old Indian Legends*, though it does subtly undercut, as Jeanne Smith argues, “the sense of superiority” a white audience might bring to this collection, also anticipates optimistically that engaging the

interest of the young will spur an interest among adults in Dakota beliefs (Smith 48). In the prefatory address to the reader, Zitkala-Ša anticipates the *Legends*' young audience, once "grown tall like the wise grown-ups," will display an interest in "a further study of Indian folklore" (vi). The preface straightforwardly expresses an intent to interest Euroamerican children in Native traditions, and to share with them long-told stories. However, Ruth Spack argues that these tales work to "reclaim Dakota values" from the missionary education, which forced Zitkala-Ša to relinquish them (47). By translating these tales into English and intending them for a young audience, Spack writes that Zitkala-Ša "uses English to promote Dakota ways of knowing, inverting the missionaries' use of Dakota to promote a Euroamerican worldview" (48). Jeffrey Myers agrees that *Old Indian Legends* may be read as a subversion of children's literature in that it instructs readers in the "codes of Lakota-Dakota behavior," with these lessons aimed not just at children, but at "recently arrived Euroamericans [who] *are* children...clearly in need of instruction as to how to behave in relation to other people and beings in the natural world" (122). While the presence of personified animal characters and mythic figures may have appealed to an audience of children, the tales unquestionably communicate Dakota mores and principles as they model the victories and consequences of (un)conscionable behavior and the perils of transgressions.

Old Indian Legends goes on to present tales that allegorically depict the depredations of greed, conquest, and lack of respect for the natural world, while the stories also demonstrate a worldview outside of the colonial order—one that seeks justice through a trust in nature and in the compassionate capacities of humanity to reconcile. Through the representation of animals, Zitkala-Ša's writing demonstrates a sense of

relationality that functions through ideas of fluidity, non-hierarchy, and perspectives that embrace alterity. Meanwhile, Zitkala-Ša's orientation toward the Euroamerican nation, which would inform her life-long efforts to secure Indian land rights and citizenship through legal reform, is articulated in the book's opening pages as one that does not express idealist notions about a return to precontact conditions (she doesn't call for a dissolution of the US), but instead asks for space to be made within it. In its offering of accord through the sharing of stories, which "are relics of our country's once virgin soil," her preface introduces an ethic of radical forgiveness, trust, and the co-existence of cultures (v). It offers to its readers not only traditional legends, but an invitation and introduction to a Sioux culture which had, by the very audience to which it appeals, been cruelly annexed, brutalized, killed, and systematically disempowered. In her affirmation of Native "kinship with the rest of humanity" and "toward the great brotherhood of man," Zitkala-Ša asserts an open-handed position that continues to recognize kinship despite recent and contemporaneous violations of humane relationships (vi). The *Legends* work to preserve and affirm Dakota culture and propose a correction to colonial violence through this affirmation of culture that views continuity between beings.

Native Animal Studies and Critical Readings of Old Indian Legends

In the last few years, critical work has begun to look at the ways animals function in Native literature in an effort to articulate and appreciate the "interspecies ethic" modeled in texts by Native writers (Ladino 29). As Hogan explains, Native stories about animals derive from "considerable and elaborate systems of knowledge, intellectual traditions and ways of living that were tried, tested, and found true" over millennia (11). Work by Brian Hudson urges scholars to read Native literature as already informed by

ideologies that “do not define humans as categorically different from or superior to nonhuman animals” (3). And writing in *PMLA*, Christopher Pexa, in an article that examines Charles Alexander Eastman’s collection of Dakota tales, records the ways that *tiospaye* (or extended family) functions as a decolonial gesture through its inclusion of animals within the kinship circle, thereby challenging colonial and settler state notions of what it means to be a person and a citizen.⁵ This approach to *Old Indian Legends* seeks to explore how animal characters—personified humans though they be—provide readers a way of viewing the human-animal relationship from a less categorical perspective.

An apprehension of these ideologies through literature promises a way of enlarging the potential of posthumanism and limiting the suffering of animals, since contemporary modes of confinement, experimentation, killing, ecological destruction, climate change, and globalized pollution all rely on a logic that views animal life as nongrievable and expendable. By upsetting this assumption and showing another way, an epistemology that does not rely on discounting the value of “others” who are “categorically different,” Native literature evades a Western speciesist worldview which weaponizes dehumanization by placing the human at the apex of worldly life.⁶

As of yet, and despite its significance as the first Native-American–authored collection of traditional Dakota oral tales, *Old Indian Legends* has been largely neglected by literary scholars.⁷ While analyses of Zitkala-Ša’s work often give brief mention to the

⁵ Pexa mistakenly claims Eastman’s *Red Hunters and the Animal People* (1904) to be “the earliest published collection of tales from Dakota oral tradition,” but *Old Indian Legends* preceded this publication by three years.

⁶ Certainly not all of Western philosophy or work in the humanities subscribes to notions of human superiority as a grounding epistemology. A wealth of work in posthumanism and animal studies (and commonly in ecological and biological science as well) actively rejects this premise and investigates means of transforming unbalanced practices that exploit animal bodies and lives.

⁷ Perhaps *Old Indian Legends* has not been much examined because the retelling of traditional tales appears to offer fallow ground for critics in terms of questions of identity, or perhaps it appears to be less politically

collection, only a small number of scholars have engaged at length with these stories over the last quarter century. Instead, much of the scholarly attention devoted to Zitkala-Ša concentrates on her semi-autobiographical work of fiction, *American Indian Stories*, more than it does on *Old Indian Legends* or her other writings.⁸ Examinations of *American Indian Stories* focus largely on the ways Zitkala-Ša's work revealed the damage done through assimilationist boarding schools, allotment, and settler colonialism in general. Her writing is also read for the ways the subject renders her own splintered identity through a Dakota perspective unabashedly critical of Euroamerican political hegemony (Carpenter 2; Chiarello 14; Cutter 33; Davidson 31; Kunce 75; Lukens 143; Newmark 336; Rifkin 29; Schneider 67; Suhr-Sytsma 138; Vigil 172-175). A few scholars, however, have taken up *Old Indian Legends* as a text that offers much critical potential. Principally, Myers in *Converging Stories* (2005) examines at length the ways that Zitkala-Ša casts "both racial justice and the environment...as two halves of the same issue" (116). He reads ecological responsibility and anti-imperialism as central to the stories in her collection. Myers also notes how De Cora's work adds difficulty to Zitkala-Ša's stories since in her drawings "many of the 'animal' characters appear in human form," and thus upset a steady assurance in "the separateness of the human from the animal world" (124). Elizabeth Ammons also importantly acknowledges *Old Indian Legends* as a text that asserts a new form of realism in American literature. She writes that it radically "presents a single cultural reality, which is Sioux," and inside this reality

salient than her other writings, especially owing to its association with children's literature which renders it seemingly critically inconsequential.

⁸ While Kirby Brown notes that scholars in the field of modernism tend to confine their focus to only a few Native American literary figures, he observes Zitkala-Ša to be one of a small number of Native writers whose work receives critical attention. As such, Brown asserts that her writing constitutes part of "an artificially limited 'canon' of American Indian moderns ... whose lives and work get turned and returned" (306). Yet there is much to look at still in Zitkala-Ša's *Legends* and in her posthumously published *Dreams and Thunder* (2001).

exists “the realism of animals and human beings exchanging forms” (110). And further, Jeanne Smith reads *Old Indian Legends* as a text that survives because its author was able to alter its form to accord with “the culture’s contemporary needs” (49). Smith argues that Zitkala-Ša “plays the part of the trickster” by fooling her readers into accepting “an inherently valuable and living Lakota culture,” and thus confirming Native American presence as having primacy in North America (47). While presumably, *Old Indian Legends* predate, for the author and for Sioux people more generally, the incursion of Western modes of regarding the world, Smith suggests that Zitkala-Ša artfully crafts these legends to reflect contemporary concerns such that she succeeds in critiquing state violence through a form of “revisionist storytelling (49).

As such scholarship demonstrates, *Old Indian Legends* not only possesses further political potential, it has long communicated power through its material presence, as evidence of a culture that thrived for millennia through its relationship to the nonhuman world. One way the political salience of these tales surfaces is through animal characters who function as signifiers of belonging to the “country’s once virgin soil” (89). Animals are represented as native figures inherently belonging to the land, and their symbolic exchanges with Dakota people emphasize this belonging. Since these stories place animals within a kinship network of which the human is also part, a communal culture that held kinship relationships to be essential to tribal life emerges as one that sees animals as part of this network. Land, animal, and human inhabit the *Legends* to evoke and create a history of relatively harmonious cohabitation that recognizes the sovereignty of other animals and the integration of Native people, nonhumans, and the land.

Iktomi: The Embodiment of Transformation and Fluidity

Approaching the transformative promise of such integration, *Old Indian Legends* commences its first scene with an exposition of a character whose disposition is one of restless fluctuation. As a liminal figure who gives form and substance to an affective overlap between human and animal, Iktomi, the mythical trickster, occupies significant textual territory in the collection. Of the fourteen stories that comprise the *Legends*, six feature Iktomi as the title character, while he appears less centrally in four more of the tales. That Zitkala-Ša begins with “Iktomi and the Ducks,” and introduces Iktomi as a magical nonhuman who occupies a visibly corporeal human form, suggests an entrée into a multi-*Umweltian* realm where an encounter is staged through the very material of the body. Iktomi embodies the fairy, the animal, the human, and through this commingled incarnation represents a traditional Dakota belief in the potential multiplicities of being. Zitkala-Ša’s collection opens with the trickster’s description—one that glides over what he *is* to elaborate more fully on what he *does*, specifically how he adorns himself. It begins:

Iktomi is a spider fairy. He wears brown deerskin leggings with long soft fringes on either side, and tiny beaded moccasins on his feet. His long black hair is parted in the middle and wrapped with red, red bands. Each round braid hangs over a small brown ear and falls forward over his shoulders. (3)

This induction into Dakota oral history through the figure of Iktomi confronts the reader with a composite figure about whose essence little narrative attention is given; a spider fairy, not further elaborated, is presented in a straight-forward manner, suggesting his multi-essential nature to be inherently graspable. In addition to the hybridity of his body is the exocorporeal addition of clothing made from deer pelts. Iktomi as a composite creature assumes additional layers as he dresses in the skins of deer “like a real Dakota

brave” (3). In this figure, before his antics even begin, Iktomi represents not only an encounter between human, nonhuman, supernatural, and deceased, he signifies a complex relationship that is multiple, fluid, and that exceeds the realm of the human, and offers the reader a means of imagining beyond that realm as well to discover that alterity is not so incomprehensible after all.

Yet despite his clothing and his human appearance, he is still a being that is both fairy and spider—radically other-than-human in a presumably exoskeletal spiderness, and also magical as a fairy, which seems to grant him human characteristics rather than spidery ones. His spider being, in fact, receives no additional elaboration in the tales, such that the opening sentence lingers about like an unanswered riddle. At the top of the original manuscript for “Zicha, the Squirrel, and Iktomi,” a story that was only recently published sixty years posthumously, Zitkala-Ša herself hand wrote “Iktomi is the spider, personified, appearing like an Indian” as though in additional explanation to its reader (*DAT* 65). Still this leaves open the question: Where and how does the spider exist, and if it is not in form, since Iktomi presents first as human, then is there a true diminutive core to Iktomi that never need assume shape, but is always within? Jeanne Smith explains that Iktomi “takes his name from the spider” because he travels through all planes, “through air, on water, underground, on land” (46). This, she argues grants him the power to enjoy unearthly physical freedom. But Zitkala-Ša translates his being into one that cannot be entirely free. That is, “poor Iktomi cannot help being a little imp,” so that his talent for moving freely and for assuming guises does not alter his “conceit,” “his vain, vain words,” or his “naughty” ways (4). But, in many ways, Iktomi is (arguably) the most person-like character in the tales, with his wide assortment of human frailties and

susceptibilities. His antics often emphasize the greed and grasping on which colonialism thrives, as he inhabits different human and nonhuman forms in an endless effort to achieve fulfillment. That he never achieves it, despite his guises, suggests that a multiplicity of bodily appearances does not offer one gratification, but that such transformations do offer great educational potential, at least to listeners. The stories argue for a readerly acceptance of Iktomi's selfish and deceptive nature, while also demonstrating through the trickster figure that multiplicity of being does not involve a radical shape shifting to see or appreciate the world differently. Rather, the ability to see perspectives comes from a willingness to listen and imagine, this being more important than the ability to assume a transformative guise.

In *Old Indian Legends*, Iktomi playfully dispels the illusion of boundaries, pointing to the multiple and mutable relationships that always exist between humans and animals. Iktomi is a manipulative creature common to Dakota legends who is without boundaries and thus points to the nature of porous relationships and vulnerability through misbehavior. In her own collection of *Dakota Texts*, Ella Deloria writes that tales invoking Iktomi are of a group called the “real *ohy'kaka*”—tales of incredulity that “are best known, oftenest repeated, and farthest removed from the events of everyday life of the Dakota people” (IX). Iktomi is understood as a manipulative shape-shifting creature, just as he is also sometimes mythological and sometimes a human being. He exists as a figure well-known, understood, and continuous across stories while not settled in a single form. As Delphi Carstens points out, the trickster occupies “a zone of radical boundary dissolution and playful perversion where...human and animal might be brought into productive conversation” (95). He acts as an embodied recognition of entangled lives,

histories, and kinships, who through his misbehavior, also threatens his own survival along with those he ensnares. D. G. Payne points out that the trickster figure as a trope works not only to “transgress boundaries” between binary concepts, but by questioning and blurring boundaries themselves, the trickster “challenge[s] these binary constructions” (186). His very being as a creature who can exercise power and freedom through his shape-shifting capabilities possesses the capacity to manipulate human and animal trust to satisfy his own impulsive desires.

Iktomi in his ability to become other than he is (or to never quite be what he is) and the presence of animal characters playing out human dilemmas demonstrate trust in a readership to accept species substitutions, while also evidencing wariness that such a readership will acknowledge culpability for Indian removal unless it is clothed in animal skins. While metaphorically critical of Euroamerican intrusion and violence, the *Legends* lack an overtly white presence, such that the tales read as though having been unchanged since precontact times. These stories, oriented around morality, relationships, manners, and values, thus present a distinctive Sioux identity and culture ostensibly unaltered by settler colonialism, even as Iktomi and certain animal characters demonstrate qualities that appear consistent with imperialist logics. The stories, though, turn the work of dehumanization and animalization around on a Euroamerican populace that had historically exploited discourses of animality as part of the logic of disenfranchisement. While animals that metaphorically represent colonial powers appear as more blatantly *animal*, they are still not portrayed as devalued beings within the stories’ paradigmatic logic; rather, animality works to render the people it represents as unsophisticated, unaware, and brutishly enabled by their physicality—reflecting the fierceness of

colonialism. And yet within a Sioux belief system that perceives a wholeness among beings and the natural world, animals always exist as fellow kin, not as exploitable creatures. Even as the stories engage with nonhumans and use them to symbolize human people, animals are not rendered abject, but instead create a sense of the continuity between creatures and suggest that people are most certainly animal. Iktomi, in his many forms and with his spidery essence, which is relatably human in its flawed possessive orientation, is still kin and not abjectly other; he assumes the title role in stories which demonstrate the variability of being and behavior.

Animality as Humanizing in “Iktomi and the Muskrat”

The third story in the collection, “Iktomi and the Muskrat,” highlights the obligations of people to share across boundaries the sustenance that comes from the natural world, and to resist the impulse to hoard. Within the tale, the two title characters contest the importance of sharing sustenance and the obligations of hospitality. As Iktomi sits beside a lake amongst wild rice, he ravenously prepares a pot of fish soup, unaware of his surroundings and lost in hunger due to his irregular and uncertain meal schedule. The spider fairy, “not knowing when the next meal would be...meant to eat enough now to last” until the next meal (27). Thinking himself hidden, he is surprised when a “dripping muskrat” approaches from the lake with a ready expectation of being asked to join, as “was the custom of the plains people” (28). Iktomi, however, does not invite the muskrat to eat with him, but remains attentive to the soup. The muskrat is not insensitive to this slight and so begins “to feel awkward before such lack of hospitality” and wishes to be back in the lake under water (28). In Zitkala-Ša’s telling, the muskrat’s

awkwardness at being denied a shared seat at the meal and ignored like an unwanted guest prompts identification in the reader that extends sympathy to the animal.

With De Cora's illustration, which appears opposite Zitkala-Ša's text in the original volume, the muskrat assumes visual form not as a sodden, four-legged creature, but as a tall Dakota man, dressed in deer-skin pants and shirt, shifting on his feet in a show of unease at Iktomi's failure of manners (Figure 2). Iktomi appears sitting, ladle in hand, looking away from his unexpected visitor, appearing almost humorously pestered.

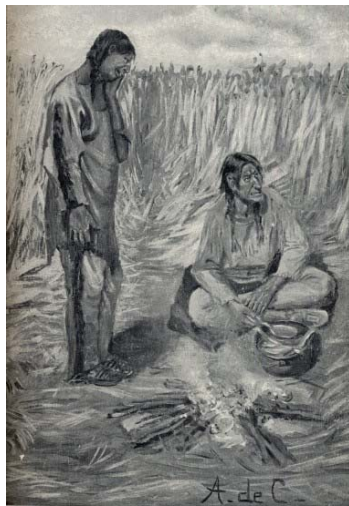


Figure 2: The Muskrat and Iktomi (28)

The effect of this visual supplement is that it becomes hard to then see the muskrat as “animal.” Rather, the text creates a metonymical substitution for the narrative animal with a visual human, forcing the reader to see through what could otherwise conceivably be read as a children's tale about a magical speaking muskrat. As elsewhere in the text, when DeCora's illustrations accompany Zitkala-Ša's stories, the text confronts its audience with imagery that shows what the text means by visually revealing animal characters to be people. While the narratives already make clear their allegorical intentions in that animals with human characteristics enact larger moral lessons—they are always already human in their language and behavior—the tales discursively retain a

dedication to animal signs and depictions. The drawings, however, disclose the work that these animals do.

While the text's preface expresses a wish for Indian acceptance by a white audience through the appreciation of folklore (so that the "little patriot" may see "the great brotherhood of man"), the stories use animals as a bridge toward that acceptance (vi). As sentimental figures that marshal a protective impulse, animals function within the text to garner acquiescence and sympathy, and to make the *Legends* instructive principles more palatable to a Euroamerican audience. The illustrations, in effect, de-metaphorize the tales and depict Indian people as the true subjects of the tales. And at the same time, this juxtaposition of text with image that both confirms and refutes the narrative, constructs itself a hybrid sense of character in which animal is human and human is animal. That the drawing depicts the muskrat as not only human, but as Indian replaces the figure of animal innocence with a bemused adult person, perplexed by Iktomi's lack of generosity. This mix between textual identification of the title creature as a muskrat with human qualities and manners, and the illustration's depiction of a Dakota man in traditional dress opens up a connection between the two characters whereby they are both one, and yet neither belongs to a stable ontologic category, thus calling those categories into question. As Jane Bennett proposes, when animal beings are presented anthropomorphically through "strategic anthropomorphism," the lines between species distinctions blur such that connectedness among beings can be visualized (99). This is particularly relevant when reading Dakota legends where a fluidity of spirit between humans, animals, and the nonhuman world is perceived to be foundational to reality. That animals are people—and people animals—is rendered both unambiguously and

indeterminately through De Cora's drawings, which portray narrative nonhumans as illustrated humans, and thus call into question the Western view of animals as radically other. Instead, their alterity is diminished and their connection to human experience in the world is emphasized.

Animal representation in this narrative works to reveal itself as anthropomorphization, but in so doing, it complicates its assertions about animal potential and openly invites the appraisal of people as animals. This is relevant especially in a Native context where, despite settler colonial efforts to degrade Native people through comparisons to animals and primitivist associations with nature, Zitkala-Ša and Angel De Cora rupture the hierarchical Western view with a vision of untroubled interconnectedness. As D.G. Payne notes: "The Native perception of animals as 'other peoples' rather than a lower order of existence" fundamentally distinguishes traditional Native and Western perceptions of animals (188). With the loss of land and Native culture resulting from settler colonial incursion, and with assimilationist schooling experienced by both Zitkala-Ša and De Cora, this belief system was threatened to be subsumed by a more Cartesian view of unassailable disconnection. Yet the conjunction of narrative and illustration perform a convergence of human and animal that reasserts a view of biospheric continuity that allows animals to stand in for people and for people to occupy the place of animal. As Ammons observes, *Old Indian Legends* "insists on the reality of interspecies transformations" and also points to the "indestructibility" of this Dakota view of reality (112). By introducing its readers to a literary vision of Dakota people as proxies for animals, and vice versa, the animal becomes more recognizable as a

sensible being, and the animality of the human serves to further humanize, rather than jeopardize, that position.

Since the muskrat occupies a place of sympathy for the reader, and not of avarice or duplicity, he stands as a nonthreatening and genial presence. Functioning as a symbol for the human in this story, in fact, enhances the muskrat's acceptability, such that the dripping, sodden, awkward creature engenders a sort of unwary compassion. The lesson in this story becomes easy to swallow because it precludes a sense of defensiveness in the reader with its portrayal of an innocuous semiaquatic mammal. With stories that were written expressly for an audience unacquainted with Native oral tradition by a writer whose life's work was to gain rights and acceptance for Native people within the settler state, the use of animal symbolism allows a critique of colonialism to be more easily absorbed.

Taken with the themes that the tales communicate—that generosity is important, that selfishness is destructive, that respect for the natural world is fundamental—*Old Indian Legends* communicates and evokes a Dakota ethos in which relationships between humans and nonhumans are not separate and hierarchical but are cooperative and dynamic. Greed and a lack of generosity are the behavioral flaws this story warns against as Iktomi, in the end, finds himself deprived of his dinner and “almost choked to death” by a bone from that same soup (33). After challenging the muskrat to a race around the lake, Iktomi offers to carry a stone on his back to slow him down so that “the race will be a fair one,” after which the winner will receive the kettle of soup as spoils (30). Iktomi's offer of competition, prize, and the presumption of fairness all go unheeded by the muskrat however, who stays behind to take the stew himself. Upon Iktomi's perspirous

return, finding his meal to be absent, he looks into the lake and sees the muskrat there with his ankles around the kettle. His hungry pleas for just one bone are answered by laughter that comes from above, however. In a disorienting move, Iktomi finds the muskrat sitting above in the trees, chastising Iktomi for his selfishness. From his perch, the muskrat drops a bone from his tree limb above directly into Iktomi's throat, laughing as the trickster chokes nearly to death until he coughs it out.

This tale's conclusion, with its many tricks and illusions—the muskrat's nonparticipation, his reflection in the lake that momentarily obscures his true whereabouts above, and the harsh delivery of a moral lesson—all work to defamiliarize a Western moral landscape. Just as the story destabilizes the boundaries between human and animal, it also calls into question a system of belief that sees ownership as the prize that results from competition. It discounts the notion that the winner takes it all, and instead claims that engaging in such logic over the practice of equal distribution is a lethal strategy. And within this moral paradigm, the story suggests that mockery and near deadly gestures of revenge are justifiable. The greater crime, this tale proposes, is that of egoism and the desire of full possession. The story of Iktomi and the muskrat emphasizes the importance of maintaining equilibrium in terms of access to food and the sustenance of nature. One's human status or ability to out-compete is disparaged in this story that champions sharing and integration with the natural world. Instead, a responsibility between species to care for one another is part of what it means to behave ethically.

As *Old Indian Legends* progresses, the stories move away from tales that focus on Iktomi and the punishments he endures consequent to his attempts to fulfill his own self-interest, and they go on to explore themes of larger cultural threat. The very codes of

behavior which the first five stories address through lessons delivered to Iktomi are followed by tales that depict monstrous threats to those codes of balance, generosity, and a belief in oneness among beings. The final seven stories contend with themes of removal from land and family orchestrated by creatures who use their brute strength to appropriate Dakota lives and homes. The tales continue to use animal figures as human stand-ins, and through this symbolic economy, they critique the brutality of colonialism. Interestingly, many of these later stories emphasize the physical, animalistic features of the villains, thus animalizing—or dehumanizing—the colonizing figures. Yet as these stories emerge from and within a moral and ideological context that views animals as people—as beings with vital agency—animalizing descriptions operate within these narratives in a way that does not devalue the animal or its life, but instead demonstrates that people are capable of unreflecting brutality. The strategic deployment of animality in these stories does not diminish the animal or suggest that animals are disposable, killable beings—animals remain kin even when they are morally offensive—instead the use of animalistic descriptions illustrates the fierceness of colonialism as violently uncivilized.

The Badger and the Bear

The first of these stories is one that analogizes the displacements of Native people by settler colonialism through animal characters in “The Badger and the Bear.” The story describes the appropriation of a badger family’s home, food stock, and arrows by a bear whom the badgers rehabilitate from starving rover to robust scoundrel. The badgers in the story are endowed with Dakota characteristics and histories, while the bear as a stand-in for Euroamerican settlers is depicted in the text as particularly mammalian and predatory. His furry coat and sharp canine teeth receive special emphasis as markers of animality

that are both strengthened by and threatening to Dakota contact. While a common tale in Dakota legend (the story appears in Ella Deloria's volume as well), this narrative circulated in non-metaphorical language in early-twentieth-century Dakota communities as well.⁹ The betrayal, brutality, and injurious ingratitude perpetrated by white settlers was well recognized by the Lakota, with this history assuming various rhetorical forms.¹⁰ Interestingly, in Zitkala-Ša's translation, animals of different species (rather than humans of different cultural origins) constitute the cast of the tale, and the features they possess work to dehumanize or humanize them in accordance with their suggested virtue. Such descriptions play with animality in complicated ways, since the legend simultaneously draws strong connections between the interrelationships of humans and animals as people endowed by the Great Spirit, and also suggests that some forms of animality align with brutality, so that animal signifiers matter. Through her narrative sketch of the bear, for instance, Zitkala-Ša's physical descriptions of its emphatically mammalian quadrupedal attributes work to accentuate the lumbering inhumaneness of the occupying group. In this story, animals are first humanized, but then, animals are also animalized.

The story begins with a portrait of the large badger family living at the "edge of a forest" where "old father badger" hunts deer and bison and keeps "mother badger very busy, and the baby badgers very chubby" (61). This domestic idyll on the forest's border connotes a boundary, as well as a vulnerable location, one not hidden and perhaps too easily exposed. With the narrative description of mother badger drying meats on "long

⁹ This same story (though less detailed) can be found in Eastman and Eastman's *Wigwam Evenings*. In Deloria's *Dakota Texts*, a vaguely similar tale is told as "Blood Clot Boy."

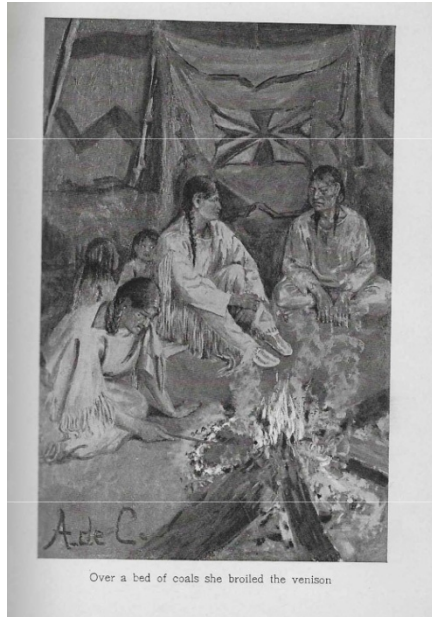
¹⁰ Lakota Chief Red Cloud, for one, in an abdication speech given on July 4, 1903, recounts a series of events following the arrival of white settlers that mirrors Zitkala-Ša's version published one year prior. In a speech transcribed by James Walker, Red Cloud said "the white man came to our hunting grounds, a stranger. We gave him meat and presents and told him to go in peace," just as Zitkala-Ša's story recounts through animal agents (138). Red Cloud went on to say: "The white man came and took our lands from us. They put us in bounds and made laws for us. We were not asked what laws would suit us." (Walker 138).

willow racks” and later storing them away in bags “painted all over with many bright colors,” a scene of contentment and gendered order begins the tale (62). Myers writes that the “clear analogy” to Euroamerican arrival is “impossible to misread” as the badgers stand in for Native Americans before the arrival of white settlers (127). Removal from their home and subsequent starvation, further analogize white settlers’ arrival as the badgers’ home is one day visited by an “unexpected comer,” a black bear who enters the dwelling with his eyes focused on the “painted bags on the rocky walls” stuffed with dried venison (62-63). Returning day after day for more food, the bear grows “fat upon the badgers’ hospitality,” and in a short time, transforms from a “shaggy bear” to one with a bright nose and a “glossy” coat (65). Once strong, he becomes covetous and expels the badgers from their home, taking everything within, including father badger’s arrows.¹¹ The bear brings in his own large family, while the badgers are forced build a small hut “a little distance from their stolen house” and begin to starve from lack of food (67). Jeanne Smith points out that the bear functions as a proxy for the “early English settlers” who bestowed not gratitude on Native Americans for their hospitality, but instead “claims of domination” (50). And Myers notes this portion of the story is “an obvious reference to removal to reservations” and goes on to argue that the story demonstrates Zitkala-Ša’s critique of “Euroamerican separateness” from the land since the bear is unable to hunt on his own despite abundant game because he is “equally disrespectful toward both land and people” (128). Myers reads the story as an ecocritical and sociopolitical critique which posits that the bear’s insensitivity toward people is bound up with his lack of respect for the environment. But Myers ties a respect for the

¹¹ *Dreams and Thunder* includes Zitkala-Ša’s story “Buzzard Skin and the Sea Monsters,” which explains the close geographic range that badgers keep towards their dens as a consequence of ranging too far and encountering trouble.

land with an ability to hunt deer and bison, a skill father badger has when supplied with arrows, but lacks once deprived of his quiver (128).

However, since these natural omnivores both possess the ability to hunt (though they eat mainly plants, grubs, and insects), the reader may wonder why either a bear or a badger needs arrows at all. That is to say that even though “The Badger and the Bear” analogizes Indian removal and white settler colonial intrusion, its title characters *are* nonetheless animal figures. The text not only names them as such, but it repeatedly draws attention to the variations in size between the two species, and emphasizes the bear’s physical features that mark him clearly as an ursine being. Yet the original text featured an accompanying illustration by De Cora that again eschewed literal adherence to the text in its depiction of the bear within the badger hut whereby all of the figures are represented visually as human beings—in fact, all Dakota people in traditional buckskin clothing (Figure 3). The text maintains an adherence to the animalistic features of the bear, though the visual accompaniment ruptures that imaginary and in the process creates a hybrid creature that is both human and bear. At the same time, the illustration buttresses an interpretation that reads the badger family as Dakota people, as the text creates an alignment between these peaceable animals and the humans they represent. As the stories take place prior to contact, there is no explicit white colonial presence, and thus De Cora’s illustration depicts a Native man as the bear, which complicates a reading that sees his behavior as exclusively Euroamerican.



Over a bed of coals she broiled the venison

Figure 3: The Badger and the Bear (64)

The text creates a discursive distinction between the two animals in the tale. Accordingly granted either more or fewer animalistic features serves to generate a meta-imaginary of complex symbol crossing. While the story appears on the surface as an allegory cautioning against greed and ingratitude, its work as a colonial critique means that its application of bodily descriptions which render some characters more animal than others clearly delineates who in this story's scenario is the more human animal. In the story's descriptions, the bear maintains its appropriate urine physiognomy: paws, claws, a black nose, and sharp teeth. Yet the bear still speaks (though seldom and rudely), which reminds the reader that, despite its physicality, the bear is never really a bear, but an allegorical personification—a human stand-in for unconscionable conduct. Meanwhile, the badgers are evoked through more humanoid descriptions; the mother badger has “fingers” and “hands,” the badger family all “stand alone upon their feet” (rather than paws), and the father badger wears clothing “covering his head and entire body in a long loose robe” (66-68). There are no references to the badgers' own furry coats, nor to their

paws, claws, noses, or any features that would suggest the figure of an actual badger. While the bear has a “big hind foot,” with which he trips the father badger when he returns to his rightful home to beg the bear for food, the badger falls “on his hands,” suggesting that while the former walks on all fours, the latter must walk on two (71). The badgers more “animalistic” features are not only de-emphasized, they are absent entirely. Thus, the story presents a tale of animal characters who are always already human representations, and yet Zitkala-Ša plays with the degrees to which they embody and exemplify their animal representatives. With the illustrations in the original publication, it becomes difficult to read the badgers as fully badger, but they retain a sort of innocence by their symbolic association with the animal. The bear, however, is cast as more materially ferocious and unruly as his animal features become stronger (his coat thickens and shines, his black nose glistens, and his size increases), which associates his animality with predation. As his verbal descriptors tend more toward the animal, the bear as usurper is embodied as both colonizer and unreasonable beast.

By flipping the script in terms of who occupies the more distinctly animal form, Zitkala-Ša creates a symbolic world in which those who perceive rigid and hierarchical distinctions between species are cast into the role of animalized villain. The Western colonizing usurper is not only interchanged with the body of a bear, but is made to be frightened by the very epistemology by which it lives. A Euroamerican worldview that holds humans to be separate and distinctively superior to nonhumans takes bodily shape within an imposing grizzly form whose physicality and penchant for roaring discursively associate cruelty with strength and anger. It is the badger in its hybrid indistinction, however, that is capable of pursuing justice through humility and a connection to the Great

Spirit. Through a lack of separateness, and within a form that assumes integration between species, the badger is able to conjure a combatant to the bear's heavy fixedness. After the father badger returns to his old home to beg food, he is sent "sprawling on the ground" by the bear, but the youngest and "ugly cub" takes pity on the badger and surreptitiously kicks a thick clot of blood his way (68-69). Taking the blood to his sacred lodge, the badger sits in "a long silence" and then prays to the Great Spirit to "bless this little buffalo blood" (71). From the blood then emerges the "first human creature," a "Dakota brave in handsome buckskins" carrying a magic arrow (72). From the badger's call to the spirit that guides the natural world, emerges a human warrior from "the red globules" of bison blood (72). This amalgam of material, spiritual, and interspecies connection brings about a resolution to the bears' hegemonic occupation that undercuts a belief in the strength of separation and domination.

The embodiment of the colonizing usurper in the form of a bear and the story's concentration on the animalistic features of this form suggests that the body's armament remains vulnerable to the larger web of natural and just forces. Upon the avenger's hearing the badger's story of his ouster, he accompanies his "father" as he goes once more to beg food (72). As the bear watches their arrival, he sees the arrow and guesses that "the avenger of whom he had heard long, long ago" has arrived (73). While the bear offers food for the first time to the badger as a "generous deed," the avenger demands with a "voice deep and powerful" that the dwelling be returned, looking on as "his black eyes burned a steady fire" (74). It is not violence or magic that compels the bear, but the firm voice of conviction alone. The avenger, transformed from animal blood, is able to challenge the corporeal strength of the bear, who faces a threat that appears beyond

bodily but involves a final reckoning. In face of the “steady fire” of justice, the bear’s “long strong teeth...rattled against each other” while his “shaggy body shook with fear” and he cries “as if he had been shot” (74). Even this strong body is vulnerable to the larger force of justice and coexistence among beings. The bear’s powerful physical features become nearly irrelevant when challenged with a reckoning with the voice that speaks for the continuity between life forms. It is the bodies who refuse to recognize that relationship that threaten themselves and the futures of other beings.

Significantly, the Blood Clot Boy, as he is known in Dakota oral tradition, calls the badger his father, and from his conjuring through the badger’s plea and the buffalo’s blood, this human emerges armed with a magic arrow which has the power to vanquish the bear. Yet the avenger never uses the arrow, but instead through voice and a look which communicates a clear unwavering judgment, he compels the bear to abdicate the badgers’ dwelling. This human avenger thus holds seemingly divine powers, and the story concludes with an intervention that deifies the Dakota brave while it also portrays him as offspring to an animal “father.” This equation between the divine and an origin story that begins in the blood of an animal and a summoning by an animal father presents a world in which animals hold creational power—where human origins trace directly to animal life. Hogan notes that “according to many of the old stories, animals are our elders, our ancestors, our sisters...they were here before humans were even imagined or dreamed of...humans came later, imperfect and not quite whole” (8). “The Badger and the Bear” illustrates this chronology and this ancestral debt as one that binds human and nonhuman, and grants no preeminence to human offspring. Relatedness is instead the thread that runs through. As Ammons writes, Zitkala-Ša’s stories convey “one complex

universe that embraces—weblike—all worlds, visible and invisible” (111). In this world of interconnectedness, the principle of human and nonhuman continuity powerfully materializes in the story to vanquish the creature who even though well-armed is still vulnerable to a more powerful, web-like world in which human and nonhuman cooperation and co-creation work to maintain justice in the face of brute aggression.

Animal Symbols as Misplaced Foes

The avenger appears again in later stories as a hero figure who, armed once more with a magic arrow, saves an Indian community from a “terrible red bird” with “man-hungry” intentions (78). In “The Tree-Bound” and “The Shooting of the Red Eagle,” animality figures once more in a mode that personifies the predations of colonialism. In these two stories, the US nation state assumes form as an eagle, not only the country’s symbol, but a symbol of Western government power since the Roman era. The red eagle in Zitkala-Ša’s telling is a voiceless man-eater who looms above and threatens to strike indiscriminately. This symbol of American governmental force is large enough and hungry enough to “threaten the safety of the people” who seek temporary safety in their wigwams (78). It also embodies a form of alterity in that it is rapacious and monstrously large. Here, animality is used to attribute predatory qualities to a symbol of the United States. This animal is so monolithic that it need not even possess a voice but can glide with “lazy indifference” above a terrified community, assured of its ability to unannouncedly take as it chooses (97). As a symbol of the US, the eagle communicates power through a quasi-naturalization; as Nicole Shukin argues in her analysis of the beaver as Canada’s national symbol, “animal signs” appear to announce their command “from the universal and disinterested place of nature” (5). Here, the red eagle is

“impartially” capable of consuming Native lives. The eagle keeps watch on the village from a hillside perch, and soars each day overhead “as if he could pounce down...and devour the whole tribe” (96). While the avenger at last appears (preceded by Iktomi who impersonates his prowess but is quickly uncovered), he succeeds in killing the eagle with a poisoned arrow. De Cora’s illustration features the avenger fringed with long feathers himself, adorned in the bodily material of the animal he pursues (Figure 4).



Figure 4: The Shooting of Red Eagle (98)

By omitting direct representation of the eagle, but mirroring its presence in the avenger’s clothing, it suggests that he is already clad in the predator’s plumage. Myers argues that this scene “imagines resistance against Euroamerican power” as one that “springs up out of the very grass” (130). Thus, through an animal symbolic, the killing of the eagle represents resistance against an imperial, biopolitical power. Yet troublingly, evidence of the eagle’s body in the illustration uses animal life as a more palatable foe (and target) than state power itself would be. That is, while animals function in stories to make certain lessons easier for white audiences to absorb, they also sometimes betray the ideological

wholeness of ecological being they espouse when they use violence against animals as an acceptable substitution for a confrontation with imperialism. Here, the eagle's demise reads and visually appears as salutary, rendering its life as extinguishable by its anthropomorphic association with human political barbarism.

Amphibious Affects

This is to say that not all the stories in the collection can be read as affirmations of the unassailable kinship between humans and nonhumans. Its textual construction as dependent on symbology makes unavoidable the ambivalent perspectives *Old Indian Legends* includes on the relationship between Dakota people and nonhuman others. In the final section of stories, "The Toad and the Boy" casts the amphibian as an envious character who desires human love and regard, and attempts to capture it through the theft of a young boy. While the toad is described as "ugly" and its behavior as criminal, the story nonetheless grants interiority, rationality, and a complex sense of yearning to the animal. Though the story draws a line between human and toad, it also suggests that familial type relationships are possible between the two. "The Toad and the Boy" begins with a scene that describes the many uses animal bodies are put to in Dakota life: wild duck roast while women make down pillows, and a mother in a buckskin dress fringes a deerskin cushion with porcupine quills. This introduction to the text points to the sacrifice of animals which constitute the fabric of comfort and sustenance for the Dakota people, and sets the stage for an intervention that complicates an easy acceptance of this sacrifice. There is a vexed quality to this story that acknowledges kinship while also lending a sorrowful malevolence to the toad that steals the mother's baby while she is out cutting firewood.

The toad may be read as a radical encounter with animal alterity that simultaneously rejects the toad and renders it sympathetically alienated. The short story shifts from the wailing mother's voice calling for her child to ten years later, when "a little wild boy" playing in the reeds overhears this same wail which brings tears to his eyes (123). He runs back to his "hut of reeds and grasses" and calls to his "mother," the "great old toad" (123-24) (Figure 5).¹² The boy, the story goes, was taken from his wigwam by the toad who longed for more than her own brood of small toads as "none of them had aroused her love, nor ever grieved her" and so she longs to keep her stolen human son with her, and tries to imitate the human voice that enthralled the boy (124). Representing a connection between toad and human that is warped, hollow, and yet insists on the animal's desire to wrest human love, the story suggests an affinity (at least from the toad's perspective) for a relationship across species boundaries as a means to fulfillment, even if it must be acquired maliciously. The boy, non-cognizant of his non-toadness, accepts his toad mother but wonders aloud why his siblings are different than he is. His sense of alterity and of kinship despite difference points not only to the boy's sense of acceptance, but to the plausibility (though clearly fictional) of a familial connection between two fantastically different beings. In his work that calls for a recognition of human animality and an avowal of the animal, Christopher Peterson writes that kinship associations are always already problematic since "kinship is based on a logic of sameness" that works to either include or exclude (12). Similarly, Zitkala-Ša challenges a "recognition of sameness" between humans and nonhumans that Brian

¹² De Cora's illustration for this story omits an interpretation of the toad and depicts only the boy as he walks through the tall grass. This omission of the toad, as other animal characters are rendered in human form suggests that this animal is less symbol than an exploration of the complex relationship between Dakota people and animals.

Hudson argues is fundamental to many Native ideologies (8). While this story suggests that relationality crosses species' lines is possible, it also firmly insists on the necessity of exclusion and boundaries.



Figure 5: The Toad and the Boy (124)

While Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories* concludes with a contemplation of the inalterable alienation she endures following her boarding school assimilation experiences, this story draws attention not only to the displacement of the boy but suggests that alienation and despair may affect the animal other as well. Though the toad is repeatedly described as ugly and mendacious, she displays a complex depth of interiority. Even as the story suggests the animal is repugnant, she also deploys agency and demands the sort of "equal consideration" that Hudson says "Indigenous ways of thinking" about animals requires (3). When the toad ventures to sing as the boy's mother does, she does so in "a gruff, course voice" and her lyrics include articles like, "doe-skin," "Ermine," and a "red blanket"; she mistakenly believes that the Dakota sing of valuable pieces rather than loved ones (125). From the animal's point of view, she surmises that the remnants of other creatures might be what people value most. In this

way, the toad reads human consumption of animal bodies as primarily important, asserting a profound value to articles derived from living material. The boy, unmoved by the toad's song, ventures out to find his mother's voice once again, and as he goes, the toad acknowledges "within her breast" that she both cannot keep the boy longer, and yet cannot relinquish "the pretty creature" either whom she taught to address her as mother (125-26). Though the boy reunites with his human family, the narrative focus on the toad's interior quandary works to attribute complex and contradictory desires to the "ugly" animal, placing it in the text's central ethical position. The human is not the central figure nor the conflicted conscience, rather "the big, ugly toad," in its reach for more hails the reader with a call to recognize its nonhuman alterity as insistently relatable (124).

Encountering *Old Indian Legends* as a collection of stories that confronts settler colonialism with a worldview that asserts connections across ontological boundaries—that sees continuity between humans and nonhuman beings, and imagines the possibility of transformation as inherent rather than radical—a contemporary reading becomes possible that views representations of animality as augmentative to the notion of personhood. Rather than threatening or demeaning (as Euroamerican uses of animality would be to the idea of human autonomy), animal figures and comparisons add depth and a sense of ecological connection between characters in these texts. The human emerges as not a static, separate, and superior entity, but as a relational person among animal people whose boundaries intersect, adapt, and take on different (and seemingly inconsistent) shapes. Not only does a call for the recognition of Dakota people and culture surface in these stories, but so does a world that places the human squarely among other beings,

sharing the same spaces and similar experiences, longings, and impulses. Animals materialize as beings with agency and perspectives that lend depth to our own, while grasping humans are figured as animals who exploit their own bodily conditions too readily.

As the muskrat functions as a creature that stands against competition and inhospitality, the badger and bear turn Western logics of animality on their heads by emphasizing how mammalian characteristics are part of the cadre of domination and theft, while cooperation and acceptance across difference are more valiant traits. That humans and animals coalesce into hybrid subjects within the imaginary of the text that features illustrations of Dakota people in stories where they are identified as animals suggests that human beings are enhanced through these refigurations. Yet the stories which feature animals as envious creatures suggest a necessary wariness of a full commitment to equal kinship between all species. Still, humans do not emerge as radically different, separate, or hierarchically greater, just as animals do not appear deficient, inferior, or wantonly killable. Instead, these stories present a complex web of relationships in which beings live together and beside one another, with frequent forays into each other's spheres. Relationships and physical domains intersect in these stories as they necessarily do on a shared planet. In such a context, distinctions between species, and the disproportionate sequestering of resources appears as not only unethical but unthinkable. Zitkala-Ša's work as the first printed English-translated collection of Dakota oral literature stands as a foil to narratives of Euroamerican conquest through possession and domination, and insists instead on the obligation that people have to take care of one

another across difference, and regard the animal within or without as essential to our own beings.

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