

**Animal Print: The Literary Production of Humane America**

by

**Alyssa Chen Walker**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(American Culture)  
in the University of Michigan  
2013**

**Doctoral Committee:**

**Professor June Howard, Chair  
Professor Philip J. Deloria  
Professor Emerita Anne C. Herrmann  
Associate Professor Susan Scott Parrish**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the following people whose wisdom, creativity, and generosity have shaped this work (and me) so much for the better. June Howard's influence on this project extends far back, long before I matriculated at The University of Michigan or knew her as anything other than a literary voice to which I was drawn. This project was inspired by June, and (for so many reasons) it could not have been completed without her. The best moments in it are the product of her wise counsel, fierce optimism, and timely rallying-cry of "Onward!" In theorizing *the humane*, I have been struck by how fully Anne Herrmann embodies all the good that this term denotes. To be taught by one who poses difficult questions not merely to challenge but to transform has been a treasured gift bequeathed by a supremely humane mentor. I am deeply grateful to Phil Deloria for taking my interest in animals seriously from the very start and for encouraging me to "be myself" (even when doing so took us both into the academically dubious realm of feline detection). By perfectly modeling and generously supporting creative risk-taking, Phil has made *joy* a full and valid part of my intellectual endeavors. Scotti Parrish has enriched this project not only with her probing questions about animals, nature, literature, and collecting, but also by sharing valuable and welcome wisdom about the juggling, planning, arranging, and rearranging it takes to sustain a writing life. I am sincerely grateful for her incisive reading, intellectual generosity, and willingness to take a chance on me when I was an unknown entity. Marlene Moore's astonishing patience

and encyclopedic knowledge of university policy and procedure have lifted me over some big and little bumps along the way. Through this project, I was fortunate to learn from many helpful and talented librarians, archivists, and SPCA staff. This group includes Jan Holmquist and Carter Luke of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Frank Mitchell of the Connecticut Audubon Society and Birdcraft Museum, and Rod Mackenzie of the Fairfield Museum and History Center. I have benefitted in innumerable ways from the steadfast and selfless support of Frederick T. Chen. And I will always be indebted to Belinda Miles Chen who kept this project alive through seven homes, three states, broken ribs, Super Storms, births, deaths, and even an uneventful day or two. But, mostly, I thank her for her careful, acute, and thoughtful reading. May I return the favor?

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## Chapter I

### **Introduction: Reading and Writing for Animals**

Readers of *Our Dumb Animals*, the official organ of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA), discovered a puzzling message inside the March 1894 issue of the popular Boston-based monthly. Amidst the typical fare about bullfighting in Spain, classroom dissection, and a tabby cat that raided the chicken salad at a Citizens' Trade Association banquet was a single sentence printed in capital letters.

**IF  
YOU WANT  
YOUR CHILDREN  
TO  
BE KIND  
TO  
DUMB ANIMALS  
YOU WANT TO GET  
B.B. AND S.S.  
FOR THEM. (113).**

As the self-styled mouthpiece of the animal kingdom, *Our Dumb Animals* executed its mission “to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves” with deep purposefulness. Its entreaties on behalf of nonhuman animals took many forms, including editorials on humane legislation, “animal heroes” features, cruelty and abuse *exposés*, pet-care advice columns, and animal poetry. Although publicly endorsed by “one hundred of the most



prominent men in the State, including His Excellency the Governor,” *Our Dumb Animals* had a reputation for irreverent and offbeat articles (Brigham 1). Even in a paper replete with eye-catching headlines, the odd communiqué of March 1894 stands out. For starters, it is printed in oversized font and demarcated from the surrounding text by a doodle-like border of lines, dots, and circles. Compounding the mystery is the sentence’s meaning, which seems intentionally obscured by the inscrutable pair of double initials (B.B. and S.S.). The playfully emphatic form, along with the explicit reference to children, raises the possibility that a young person may have played some part in the message’s creation. The colloquial-sounding modal auxiliary (“you want to get”) further hints at an inexperienced or perhaps even juvenile author.

As it turns out, a child *was* behind this mystery. Eight-year-old Bertha of Howard, South Dakota composed this sentence in the late winter of 1894. As evening descended over Howard, Bertha scrawled the words on a piece of paper and embellished them with the geometrical design. When Bertha’s father returned home from the office, she presented him with her missive along with an appeal to print it in the advertising columns of the Howard newspaper. The local press not only complied with Bertha’s request but also promptly dispatched a copy of her note to the editorial headquarters of *Our Dumb Animals*. (In addition to being an obliging parent, Bertha’s father was an editor at the Howard Press.) Tracing the blurb in *Our Dumb Animals* to little Bertha in South Dakota solves the mystery of authorship but raises a host of questions related to the message’s purpose, meaning, and reception. Why did Bertha write this note and, perhaps more significantly, seek a public audience for it? What meanings did readers infer from

it? Why did the editor of *Our Dumb Animals* devote valuable journalistic real estate to the cryptic scribbles of a child? And, of course, what is the significance of those letters?

B.B and S.S. were Bertha's shorthand for two popular novels about abused animals: Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) and Gene Stratton-Porter's *The Strike at Shane's* (1893). The novels, which attracted an enthusiastic youth following in the late-nineteenth century, explore the plight of animals subjected to cruel human usage and the deleterious effects of such mistreatment on society. It may seem that Bertha was being deliberately opaque in failing to gloss B.B. and S.S., but it also is plausible that she *expected* readers to know, or at least be able to figure out, their meaning. Given the popularity and humane ethos of both novels, a fair number of readers likely could decipher Bertha's abbreviations based on her reference to "dumb animals." The stories' censorious depictions of animal cruelty aligned with the values of the MSPCA and would have resonated with many readers of its monthly paper. Indeed, *Black Beauty* moved *Our Dumb Animals* editor, George Thorndike Angell, so profoundly that he adopted the novel as the centerpiece of his nationwide humane education campaign, of which children like Bertha were both the driving force and the chief target.

Although this introductory vignette constitutes an obscure episode in the literary history of the anticruelty novel, it brings into focus the matrix of cultural practices from which modern humane subjectivity emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. Bertha's contribution to the cultural conversation about humans' treatment of nonhuman animals encapsulates--with remarkable concision--several root assumptions of early humane rhetoric. Adult readers of *Our Dumb Animals* who, heeding Bertha's advice,

plied the young people in their lives with copies of *Black Beauty*, *The Strike at Shane's*, and similar texts, likely would have conceded the following points:

- **Humans should be kind to animals.**
- **Adults should promote kindness to animals in children.**
- **Literature can bring about kindness to animals.**

These three premises warrant some elucidation here, as they form key critical trajectories in the chapters to come. A point worth making at the outset is that these ideas, which Bertha took for granted in 1894, were new cultural productions in the 1860s. How and why did these ideas gain cultural traction? In what ways did they codify human-animal exchanges in the nineteenth century and beyond? Why did they resonate with certain populations of Americans (including middle-class children, like Bertha)? These questions drive the coming chapters' investigation into the literary production of humane culture in the United States.

The first premise--**humans should be kind to animals**--represents the official mantra of the humane advocate. But what did it mean to be humane in the context of the variegated social-reform projects, collectively known as the early animal-protection movement? Embedded orthographically and conceptually within the word *humane* (indeed, composing nearly the whole of it) is the word *human*. Lexical sources, such as *The Oxford English Dictionary* and *Webster's Unabridged*, reveal that the word *humane* entered the English language as a variant of *human*. *Inhuman*, in fact, remains an accepted antonym in the same vein as *brutal* and *cruel*. In its original sense, *humane* denoted the noble characteristics of being "civil, courteous, and obliging" toward other members of the species *Homo sapiens*. In later usage, it suggested a compassionate and

sympathetic disposition toward humans or animals in need. Humane organizations, such as the Humane Society of the United States, have reified this latter meaning as it relates to animals rather than humans. In today's parlance, humane societies are widely recognized as human charitable groups dedicated to rescuing, lobbying, and advocating on behalf of distressed animals. Yet, the first humane organization, which was formed in London in 1774, served humans exclusively under the cumbersome name "The Society for the Recovery of People Apparently Drowned." Two years later, the group managed to prune its official title down to just "Humane Society." Since the nineteenth century, the humane movement has assisted vulnerable populations of both human and nonhuman animals. Some ambitious groups, such as the American Humane Association for the Protection of Children and Animals, have undertaken both causes at once.

What we discover in the course of this brief lexical detour is that our sense of the word *humane* has been intertwined with and evocative of the human condition from the start. Even as "animal rescue" began to supplant "human rescue" as the official business of humane organizations during the nineteenth century, these groups continued to imagine social regulation as the crux of their philanthropic mission. Historian Harriet Ritvo has traced human self-concern to the core of the Victorian anticruelty movement, which conceived of animal abuse as "both an index of depravity and a predictor of further moral degradation [in human beings]" (131). True to its British antecedents, the American humane movement also conflated the protection of animals with the cultivation of an enlightened national character and a compassionate citizenry. By the end of the nineteenth century, kindness to animals had become what Marjorie Garber has called "a litmus test for 'humanness'" (15). In recent decades, this idea has gained legitimacy in

legal and medical discourses that link cruelty to animals with violence against humans. Many experts in the fields of criminology, child protection, education, and mental health perceive animal abuse as a gateway to other forms of social deviance. Even the Federal Bureau of Investigation lists animal torture among the predictors of human-on-human violence and as a criterion in profiling society's most inhuman class of criminal: the serial killer. Fears that the animal abuser will "graduate" to human victims have provided a compelling rationale for the humane education of children since the dawn of the American anticruelty movement in the 1860s.

Proponents of humane education have projected a host of sociological meanings onto the second of our three premises: **adults should promote kindness to animals in children.** In anticruelty circles, it has long been said that the best way to stymie the evil elements of society is to nip them in the bud, lest the tail pullers of today become the throat slitters of tomorrow. Particularly in the early years of anticruelty reform, humanitarians directed their regulatory efforts at young people and--as movement historian Diane L. Beers reminds us--stood firm in their conviction that "children who treated animals with respect matured into adults who treated all beings with benevolence" (86-87). Embedded in this claim, of course, was the mounting suspicion that children who failed to develop sympathy for animals would grow into callous or even sociopathic adults. Recent cultural histories of children enable us to contextualize this youth-centered approach to humane reform as a manifestation of the changing status of childhood in the nineteenth century. A constellation of institutional and private forces at this time, including child-labor laws, mandatory schooling, emerging educational philosophies of play, and a new literature of childrearing centered on what Richard H.

Brodhead has termed “disciplinary intimacy,” sought to confine children’s work to the realms of the emotional and the fantastic (17). Bertha’s humane writing, which expresses publicly a privately nurtured moral consciousness, epitomizes the emotional rather than material nature of the normative child’s contributions to middle-class American family life. Like the “good child” who created it, Bertha’s message may be thought of as both “requiring and expressing the family’s idealized capacity for love and joy” (to borrow a line from Karen Sanchez-Eppler) (xviii). Juvenile expressions of humane sentiment often framed “childhood” and “animality” as states of dependency warranting special consideration and protection. In her history of American pet-keeping, Katherine C. Grier has unearthed a cache of children’s letters, diaries, and essays that testify to the centrality of pets in “the emotional and play lives of the fortunate youngsters who had that extended childhood idealized in the nineteenth century” (71). Indeed, the invention of “the pet” as a social category in the United States is roughly coeval with the construction of “childhood” as a distinct and special stage in life. Humane treatises and parenting manuals from this period agree that pets play a crucial part in the social reproduction of “the happy home” by affording children the opportunity to rehearse the future role of nurturing parent. From this perspective, pets enhance the family unit by functioning as the children of children.

The anticruelty press mobilized the happy home as both the context for and the rationale behind the inculcation of humane social values. Yet, in every rhapsodic depiction of this nurturing, protective sphere, we hear echoes from that stunting, injurious edifice known in today’s parlance as the abusive home. Even in Bertha’s humane entreaty, which expresses her family’s “idealized capacity for love and joy,” are traces of

a domestic life beset by violence, terror, and neglect. In 1874, newspapers across the Northeast circulated the story of a ten-year-old girl named Mary Ellen Wilson, whose plight would turn violence against children into a pressing social issue and help spawn organized child protection in the United States. From the outset, public retellings of Mary Ellen's victimization at the hands of her abusive stepmother invariably linked the suffering of children with that of animals. Newspaper coverage sensationalized the case by dramatizing Mary Ellen's animality, likening her to a "homeless cur" or a "stray" ("Mrs. Connelly's Step-Child" 4; "A Child's Sufferings" 1). Journalist and reformer Jacob Riis, a spectator at the New York Supreme Court proceedings, shocked the reading public with descriptions of the mute and battered creature who appeared before the judge swaddled "in a horse blanket" (qtd. in Coleman 73). Mary Ellen's own testimony, as reported in the papers, gave the strange impression of an abused and neglected pet suddenly coming to voice: "Mama has been in the habit of whipping and beating me almost every day; she used to whip me with a twisted whip, a raw hide...I have never been taken on my mama's lap, or caressed, or petted; I never dared speak to anybody" ("A Child's Sufferings" 1). That Elbridge T. Gerry, attorney for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), represented Mary Ellen at trial only seemed to confirm Riis's specious claim that "the first chapter of the children's rights was written under warrant of that made for the dog" (qtd. in Coleman 74). Exercising full creative license, Riis fueled rumors that Gerry and the ASPCA had seized Mary Ellen under the premise that "the child is an animal" (qtd. in Coleman 74). Even if exaggerated for effect, reports of this nature evoked a visceral response from middle-class Northeastern audiences that had come to view the nurturance of dependent beings as the

essential function of home and mother. Mary Ellen's story disrupted what Jennifer Mason has construed as the myth of the American home as "the one place where beings are cared for regardless of their economic value" (13). The humane reading public confronted regular, vivid reminders from Riis and his ilk that no gentle hand had reared Mary Ellen. Rather, "mama" had wielded the whip--that culturally ingrained metonym for slavery--as a brutal expression of her utilitarian rather than emotional valuation of the child.

Mary Ellen Wilson's case provides a striking illustration of how analogic associations between children and animals have the power to absorb and the potential to mobilize reading publics (Figure I.1). It is precisely this faith in the transformative nature of the written word that undergirds the third of our premises: **Literature can bring about kindness to animals.** Returning to etymology for a moment, we discover a secondary meaning for *humane* used, according to the O.E.D., in designating "those texts or branches of study which concern humanity" or which "have been regarded as exercising a civilizing influence [on readers]." Producers of early animal-protection texts aligned themselves with this tradition of literary humanity. Self-consciously engaged in ameliorative reform, they sought to change the social order by triggering outpourings of public sympathy (*à la* the Mary Ellen Wilson newspaper coverage). Like previous generations of reformist authors, this literary cohort had what Jane Tompkins famously called "designs" upon its readers "in the sense of wanting to make people think and act in a particular way" (xi). Animal-protection literature not only performed this cultural work but also served as a metric for its success; so much so, in fact, that coming into humanity presupposed coming into literacy. Underlying both Bertha's and Mary Ellen's story is



the post-Darwinian anxiety that all children are dumb animals that evolve into civilized humans through careful socialization and the cultivation of privileged modes of self-expression. Popular representations of Mary Ellen prior to her “rescue” by the ASPCA construct her as a wild animal untouched by the civilizing caresses of a loving mother. Without such a figure to subdue and transform Mary Ellen’s animality into humanity, the child remains what Yi-Fu Tuan has described as “a piece of wild nature” (115). Indeed, the good Samaritans who rescued Mary Ellen from her abusive home cast her neglect in terms of untended wildness (“She is a little animal surely.”) (qtd. in Coleman 72). In contrast to Mary Ellen, Bertha advocates for animals because she is no longer one. She is known to us primarily through her written message, which bespeaks of a normative upbringing structured around the development of social values and the successful initiation into literacy. Whereas Mary Ellen’s apparent lack of language signifies her animality, Bertha’s literacy constructs her humanity by creating social distance from the “dumb animals” on whose behalf it is deployed. The figures of Bertha and Mary Ellen recur throughout this work, though for the most part their particular lives are generalized in abstract discourses of childhood. Indeed, Chapter II of *Animal Print* reconstructs the social mechanisms by which early humane reformers attempted to transform “piece[s] of wild nature” (like Mary Ellen) into humane children (like Bertha).

Chapter II, “‘In Quantities a Million Fold’: Humane Subjectivity and the *Black Beauty* Sequels,” takes George T. Angell’s philanthropic publishing apparatus at the MSPCA as its object of literary-historical inquiry. Laying the groundwork for the study as a whole, this discussion links the widespread consumption of imaginative literature to the production of humane subjectivity in Angell’s international promotion campaign for

Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) and its North American sequels. Targeting children as new and emergent readers, Angell structured moral reform as an initiation into what I have termed "humane literacy." Children developed humane literacy through their engagement with animal-friendly texts in the forms of reading, writing, discussion, and ritualized performance. Embarking on a full-throttle venture in literary canon formation, Angell narrowed the infinity of choices facing readers down to a manageable corpus of didactic works (upon which he *literally* stamped the MSPCA seal of approval). To foster humane literacy within its target demographic, the MSPCA funneled this literature through its fledgling network of humane children's clubs called Bands of Mercy. Young people throughout the United States participated in this movement as both ideological targets and active cultural producers, whose writings circulated widely within the humane reading public. Despite these programs' popularity, Angell and his youth educators grappled with the epistemological problem of measuring the humane movement's success in light of the entrenched and amorphous nature of animal exploitation. To cope with the impossibility of quantifying either humane feeling or animal suffering, Angell resorted to counting success in the knowable unit of page numbers. This strategy constituted a body of humane literature that was valued for and defined by its proliferation within the mass literary marketplace. Angell's strategy of cultural change through literary saturation tended to decenter animal-human exchanges as the focus of reform and to obscure differences (in style, quality, and social impact) among humane texts. If one animal-protection text is no different from any other, what, if anything, can the literary do for the humane?

Chapter III, “Bringing the Laboratory Dog Home: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and the Antivivisection Narrative,” ventures an answer to this question through a close examination of the antivivisection novel, *Trixy* (1904), and a handful of similar texts from the same period. This discussion considers the role of imaginative literature in the vivisection debates of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It argues, specifically, that the fictional narratives of author Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (a vociferous proponent of humane reform in New England) infused the antivivisection movement with a sense of urgency by exploiting the formal properties of the classic romance plot. In contrast to the graphic images of animal suffering circulated in humane periodicals, such as *The Anti-Vivisectionist* and *Our Dumb Animals*, Phelps’s work encouraged readers to reimagine the anonymous laboratory dog as a cherished family member and as private property with both sentimental and market value. In doing so, her imaginative literature revealed, in ways that other discursive forms did not, how vivisection corroded *fin de siècle* America’s most sacrosanct values. Chapters III and IV traverse the history of science in interrelated discussions of the gendering of literary form and cross-species encounter in the emerging fields of physiology and ornithology, respectively.

Taking the home and the backyard as its unlikely starting points, Chapter IV, “Backyard Ornithology: A Natural History of Domestic Life,” travels a different road than previous histories that have foregrounded the museum and the wilderness as the hub of ornithological knowledge-production in the nineteenth century. This approach reveals how early tensions between the emerging science of ornithology and the recreational practice of birdwatching generated new cultural ideas about the proper place of birds and natural-history study in American life. In tracing the roots of wildlife conservation and

modern ornithology to the popular writings of a coterie of East Coast naturalists, we discover surprising interconnections between the literary construction of “the happy home” and the invention of the field guide. Early field guides, which I refer to as “backyard-ornithology texts,” promoted a homespun form of bird study based on the up-close observation of common species in everyday spaces. Unlike the “shot-gun science” of systematics which revolved around skin classification, the new ornithology encouraged naturalists to identify with and protect their so-called Bird Neighbors. Although backyard birders eschewed skin study, they did not abandon the classificatory mindset of their museum counterparts. Rather, they created an ethical taxonomy of “good birds” that required human protection and “bad birds” that warranted extermination. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of a contemporary avian genre, the ornithological memoir, which has mobilized the happy home in different ways than the nineteenth-century field guide. In these twentieth- and twenty-first-century narratives, the woman ornithologist orchestrates in-home encounters with her avian subjects, not in lieu of institutional work, but as a means of sustaining her scientific endeavors outside of domestic space.

Broadly speaking, Chapters II, III, and IV of this study examine literature concerned with humans saving animals. Chapter V, “The Feline Turn in Mystery Fiction,” takes the different tack of exploring a popular genre about animals saving humans. In contemporary cat-mystery fiction, feline sleuths apply their animal wiles to solving or preventing crimes committed by humans against other humans. This mystery subgenre made its debut in the United States in the 1960s but did not attract a wide readership until nearly two decades later. Today, the most successful cat mysteries, such

as Lilian Jackson Braun's *The Cat Who...* series and Rita Mae Brown's *Mrs. Murphy Mysteries*, regularly land on the *New York Times Bestseller* list and boast in-print figures in the millions. Taking the cat mystery as an object of cultural analysis allows us to reexamine an earlier question--*What does the literary do for the humane?*--in the context of a mass-market genre with no explicit ties to the contemporary animal-welfare or conservation movements. Another question--*What does the humane do for the literary?*--drives this chapter's investigation into how the carefully orchestrated interplay between narrative technique and mass-marketing strategy positions the cat-loving public as both consumers and producers of the genre's most popular series. By looking closely at individual narratives, we will consider how the figure of the feline sleuth challenges the spatial logics of the crime novel and disrupts the gendering of the criminal landscape in Urban Noir and Country Cozy fiction. A final chapter, "Reading to Rover," circles back to earlier themes of literacy, childhood, and humane feeling and reconsiders their interrelation in the contemporary context of canine-assisted learning programs for children.

This project was born out of a desire to understand how humane texts mediate human-animal relationships and how those relationships, in turn, shape the expressive modes in which they are rendered. The paradox of representing in words the sufferings of the wordless adds a complicating layer to the already impossible task of getting a body to speak its pain. Many of the humans discussed in the coming pages, nevertheless, conceptualized concern for animals as a process of coming into language or of giving voice to the voiceless. The first three chapters of this work center the progressive East Coast reform culture out of which organized animal protection emerged in the nineteenth

century. These essays resuscitate a mostly forgotten corpus of humane literature through the close analysis of individual texts as well as the careful reconstruction of what Janice Radway has termed “the complex social event of reading” (8). Carrying the discussion forward in time, Chapter V illuminates a more widely dispersed literary public and a still-thriving animal genre. By approaching the humanitarian as a *literary* creature manufactured reciprocally through the mass production and consumption of animal print, this volume begins to unravel the deep and often unconscious interconnections between print media and interspecies socialization. Of the nonhuman populations of horses, dogs, birds, and cats considered in this study, all are literary and geographical transgressors. At various moments and in different contexts, they may be classified as wild, domesticated, endangered, abused, laboratory, therapeutic, companion, or crime-solving animals. They defy these categories at the same time that they embody them, and they push the limits of form and representation as they “come into voice” in the disparate texts to which I now turn.



**Figure I.1.** *George Augustus Holmes' (1852-1911) pictorial juxtaposition of the human child and the domestic pet circulated widely in the United States and Britain in the late-nineteenth century. Holmes, George Augustus. Can't You Talk? 1879. Tyrone Area Historical Society, PA. Web. 1 Aug. 2013.*

## CHAPTER II

### **“In Quantities a Million Fold”: Humane Subjectivity and the *Black Beauty* Sequels**

#### **The *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of the Horse**

A package delivered to the icy doorstep of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) in February of 1890 signaled the end of a literary quest. Inside the organization’s headquarters at 19 Milk Street in Boston, sixty-six-year-old George Thorndike Angell cleared a space for the snow-dusted parcel amidst the mountains of newspapers, pamphlets, books, and letters he had amassed during his tenure as MSPCA president.<sup>1</sup> Noting the return address of a Miss Georgiana Kendall of New York, Angell ripped through the packaging to find an unexpected boon: a secondhand copy of the British novel, *Black Beauty* (1877). Kendall had learned of Angell and his “good works” on behalf of animals through her extensive philanthropic connections along the East Coast, and she had felt certain that Boston’s most vociferous defender of animals would appreciate Anna Sewell’s uplifting tale of equine suffering and salvation. Unbeknownst to Kendall, who had mailed *Black Beauty* on a whim as a friendly gesture from one humanitarian to another, Angell had been searching for just such a novel to assist with his nationwide humane-education campaign. Over the past two decades, he had auditioned countless books for this role in hope of finding one that

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<sup>1</sup> George T. Angell’s personal library, which has been preserved in part at the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals archive, suggests that his private reading habits tended toward religious, educational, and philanthropic themes.



might do for the horse what Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) had done for the slave. Upon reading *Black Beauty* for the first time, he immediately recognized its propagandistic potential and wrote:

For more than twenty years *this thought* has been upon my mind. *Somebody* must write a book which shall be as widely read as "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*," and shall have as widespread and powerful influence in abolishing cruelty to horses as "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" had on the abolition of human slavery. Many times, by letter and word of mouth, I have called the attention of American writers to this matter and asked them to undertake it. At last the book has come to me--not from America, but from England, where already over *ninety thousand copies have been sold*' (original emphasis) (*Autobiographical Sketches* 94).

From this day forth, Angell would commit himself to the widespread dissemination of what he considered "the best book ever written teaching kindness to the horse" (*Autobiographical Sketches* 94).

Since founding the MSPCA in 1868, Angell had championed kindness to animals as the *sine qua non* of a just society. Two years earlier, Henry Bergh's newly incorporated American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York had piqued Angell's interest in organized animal protection. But the catalyst to his anticruelty involvement did not occur until 1868 when, on a gray day in Brighton, a forty-mile horse race over rugged terrain ended with the mortal collapse of its two wind-broken "contestants." News of the event in *The Boston Daily Advertiser* had fired Angell's resolve to combat such senseless cruelty to animals. By the next morning, the

lifelong animal lover had plans underway to establish in Massachusetts an organization comparable to Bergh's in New York.

Born on June 5, 1823 to a minister and a schoolteacher, Angell had come of age amidst the flourishing moral-reform culture of protestant Massachusetts. After graduating from Dartmouth College and Harvard Law School, he had formed a legal practice with prominent Boston abolitionist Samuel E. Sewall.<sup>2</sup> Through this "most pleasant and harmonious partnership," Angell would make the acquaintance of John Brown, William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and "nearly all the abolitionists and Free-Soil men in the Commonwealth" (*Autobiographical Sketches* 4; Tiffany 93). Even after their legal partnership dissolved, Angell remained close with the elder Sewall and lauded his moral courage "in endeavoring to protect the weak and defenceless [sic]" (Tiffany 93). As Angell prepared to embark on a new chapter in life devoted to animal advocacy, he drew inspiration from both Sewall's abolitionism and Harriet Beecher Stowe's literary rebuke of slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Since its release by Boston publisher John P. Jewett and Company in 1852, Stowe's work had outsold every other novel of the century and garnered a worldwide reputation as an agent of social change. Angell credited the novel with inflaming the national conscience over slavery and began searching for a book that might serve the same purpose for the animal cause. When *Black Beauty* appeared on his doorstep more than two decades later, he believed his search finally had come to an end.

By flooding American homes and schools with Sewall's novel, Angell hoped to reach his ideal audience: children. From the start, the MSPCA poured the bulk of its philanthropic efforts into youth outreach and education. In an 1869 article printed in the

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel E. Sewall was not a relative of author Anna Sewall, who spelled her surname with an "e."

MSPCA's monthly newspaper, *Our Dumb Animals*, Angell encapsulated his society's strategy for creating a more humane public: "There is only one way to do it, and that is to go down to the foundation and build up. *We must educate the children*" (original emphasis) (qtd. in *Autobiographical Sketches* Appendix). The vehicle for the organization's youth campaign was to be the printed word, and the humane novel would serve as its chief pedagogical instrument. With his serendipitous discovery of *Black Beauty* in the winter of 1890, Angell redoubled his efforts to "scatter the literature of humanity" until it reached "all the children of the State" (*Autobiographical Sketches* Appendix). By April of that same year, the MSPCA had printed the first American edition of the novel, which it touted as an ideal moral primer for young people. In appealing to parents and teachers for their support of humane education, Angell extolled *Black Beauty* as "more likely to inspire love and kind care" in children than any other book "printed in any language" (*Autobiographical Sketches* 95). With his literary prototype in hand, Angell called upon American authors to create a national canon of humane letters composed of "sequels" to Sewell's landmark text. In addition to soliciting work from the "leading literary men and women of the country," including Harriet Beecher Stowe, the MSPCA sponsored essay contests for amateur authors of all ages (*Autobiographical Sketches* 18). Angell endeavored to reach young readers and writers by funneling humane literature through preexisting channels in school, churches, and community groups as well as its sprawling network of children's clubs known as Bands of Mercy. By encouraging young people to perform their inner compassion for animals through public acts of literary engagement, the Band of Mercy movement attached a sympathetic social identity to the equivocal concept of *humaneness*.

This chapter examines the production of humane subjectivity in the nineteenth century by taking the philanthropic publishing apparatus of the MSPCA as its unit of literary-historical analysis. Targeting young people as a pliant and accessible readership, Angell promoted a youth culture of animal advocacy organized around the cultivation of what I have termed “humane literacy.” Children developed humane literacy through their engagement with didactic novels in the forms of reading, writing, discussion, and ritualized performance. A hopeful symbol in the contemporary sociopolitical discourse that represented youth as representing the future, the merciful child personified the conceptual link between social progress and humane reform. The MSPCA’s campaign to promote humane literacy conflated the merciful child with another familiar figure in the commercial and cultural iconography of Anglo-American print media: the reading child. The democratization of schooling, which Massachusetts education-reformer Horace Mann (1796-1859) spearheaded in the middle of the nineteenth century, had institutionalized academic and moral instruction for children through the state’s pioneering Common School system. Before mandatory schooling made literacy a cultural imperative of the Commonwealth, children’s reading had represented an aspirational leisure activity for the upwardly mobile. As secretary of the state’s newly formed Board of Education, Mann had advanced an integrated literary and moral pedagogy aimed at preventing delinquency among the children (particularly the sons) of immigrant and working-class families. Mann cast “universal education” as an effective means of inculcating in children the civic virtues of empathy, loyalty, and self-restraint. In the case of boys who someday would exert authority over family, chattel, and

government, the necessity of a humane conscience registered with the public on many fronts. Literacy held a privileged place in this new model of education. Reading, as a bodily posture, created exemplary classroom citizens by transforming rambunctious, inattentive bodies into docile, absorbed readers. As the focal point of formal education (or “book learning”), print texts served as what Patricia Crain has called “ligatures of relationship” by fostering a sense of connectivity and shared endeavor among students (356). In *Common Schools*, Angell (an apologist for Mann’s educational philosophy) found a ready-made site for social intervention. The MSPCA’s kindness-to-animals ethic resonated with progressive educators who embraced the inculcation of moral virtue and civic responsibility as a crucial dimension of their work.<sup>3</sup>

Even as humane education gained increasing legitimacy among East Coast educators and reformers, nineteenth-century humanitarians found it difficult to articulate their long-term goals for changing the social order. Increasingly the question of how to measure the movement’s success disconcerted Angell and his supporters. Although Northeastern humanitarians had evoked pathos for the cause by mobilizing analogic associations between human slavery and animal abuse, they came to discover the epistemological challenges inherent in this formulation. Angell had forged stirring rhetorical links between animal exploitation and chattel bondage but struggled to translate the concept of “abolition” into the nonhuman realm. The entrenched and amorphous nature of cruelty to animals at all levels of society made it difficult to envision what their emancipation might look like. To cope with the impossibility of quantifying either humane sentiment or animal suffering, Angell resorted to measuring

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<sup>3</sup> For a historical overview of humane education in the early years of the Common School movement, see Bernrad Unti and Bill DeRosa’s “Humane Education Past, Present, and Future” (2003).

progress in the knowable unit of page numbers. The ubiquity and conversionary power of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had inspired Angell, who understood the challenge of humane reform largely as one of scale. In an effort to reach as broad a readership as possible, the MSPCA endorsed a body of reformist literature that was valued for and defined by its proliferation within the mass literary marketplace. Yet, the humane canon that resulted from this early experiment in mass-mediated cultural change was significantly hampered by its own self-reflexivity. The MSPCA's *Black Beauty* "sequels," which included Gene Stratton-Porter's *The Strike at Shane's* (1893) Marshall Saunders' *Beautiful Joe* (1893), and Ellen A. Barrow's *Four Months in New Hampshire* (1894), shifted the movement's focus from human-animal exchanges to *literary* exchanges (Figure II.1).<sup>4</sup> Often plotted as meta-generic discussions, these works portrayed textual engagement as both the instrument and the sign of a humane social conscience. Framed as an initiation into literacy, the early humane movement placed the reading child--even more than the suffering animal--at the center of its ameliorative social project.

### **Equine Autobiography as Mass Literature**

The famous British story about a thoroughbred gelding named Black Beauty recounts "the autobiography of a horse" as "translated from the original equine."<sup>5</sup> The first edition by Jarrold and Sons, dated November 24, 1877, was a simple affair with a wood-engraved frontispiece as its lone illustration. Written in lucid, descriptive prose, the episodic story charts the volatile existence of a working horse in nineteenth-century

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<sup>4</sup> Other extant *Black Beauty* sequels include Mary Matthews Bray's *Our Goldmine at Hollyhurst* (1893) and Sarah Nelson Carter's *For Pity's Sake* (1897).

<sup>5</sup> The title page of the first edition of *Black Beauty*, dated November 24, 1877 and published by Jarrold of Norwich, reads: *Black Beauty: His Grooms and Companions. The Autobiography of a Horse. Translated from the Original Equine By Anna Sewell.*

England. Over the course of Sewell's narrative, the title character braves the vicissitudes of life as a beast of burden, whose fortune turns with each new master. From his pleasant beginnings at Birtwick Hall, where he enjoys "clean, sweet, and airy" accommodations, he weathers a battery of abuses at the hands of a drunken coachman, a neglectful groom, a brutal driver, and a string of incompetent guardians (Sewell 28). *Black Beauty's* trials culminate in his near-fatal collapse, after being overworked by a cabdriver with "a cruel whip" (Sewell 428). After recuperating from this ordeal, *Black Beauty* finds solace at last in a "happy place" as a ward of the benevolent Blomefield sisters (Sewell 452). The saga concludes on a tranquil, if wistful, note with *Black Beauty's* oft-quoted soliloquy: "Here my story ends. My troubles are all over, and I am at home; and often before I am quite awake, I fancy I am still in the orchard at Birtwick standing with my old friends under the apple trees (Sewell 452).<sup>6</sup>

While *Black Beauty* is now regarded as a children's classic, it was not originally intended as juvenile literature. Sewell's diaries suggest that she wrote her equine autobiography in order "to induce kindness, sympathy and an understanding treatment of horses" among cabmen and other custodians of working animals (qtd. in Ferguson 76). The story took particular aim at drivers' use of the bearing rein, a short strap that pulled a horse's head fashionably but uncomfortably erect.<sup>7</sup> Having died merely five months after Jarrolds released *Black Beauty* in 1877, Sewell never witnessed the remarkable reincarnations her horse story would undergo. Following its initial turn as a British

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<sup>6</sup> The final paragraph of *Black Beauty* remains a favorite within the animal-rescue community. Cleveland Amory (1917-1998), the well-known Boston author and founder of Black Beauty Ranch (the nation's largest animal sanctuary), famously inscribed these words on the gate of the 1,300-acre rescue facility he founded in Murchison, Texas.

<sup>7</sup> The bearing rein is a short strap extending from the driver's hands to the bit. Although very fashionable during the nineteenth century, the bearing rein posed health risks to working horses. By forcing the animal's head into an unnaturally high position, the device interfered with breathing, posture, and pulling capacity.

cabmen's manual and anti-bearing rein tract, the novel earned international acclaim as a humane manifesto, a children's story, and eventually as one of the top-selling books of all time.

Although *Black Beauty* had sold respectably in England during its first decade in print, its popularity skyrocketed in the United States as a result of Angell's deft fundraising. Backed by donations from his affluent friends, Angell quickly set about electrotyping, printing, and distributing an American edition of *Black Beauty* under the aegis of the MSPCA's educational affiliate, the American Humane Education Society (AHES).<sup>8</sup> The first American edition of *Black Beauty*, which appeared in April 1890, displayed several textual edits and additions, including Angell's subtitle: "The *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the Horse." Information about the AHES and its membership rates also appeared in the American edition along with notes on "compassionate" methods of destroying animals. To accentuate the novel's humane message, Angell insisted on setting didactic passages in boldface or italics. He also included illustrations, which had appeared in select British editions, depicting the painful posture of a horse harnessed with a bearing rein.

Angell ascribed the transformative power of *Black Beauty* to both its autobiographical form and its ubiquity as mass literature. As an equine autobiography, Sewell's narrative offered readers a new way of thinking about the horse outside of its instrumental function as horsepower. Americans and Britons in the nineteenth century encountered horses everywhere (in transportation, agriculture, war, the hunt). The

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<sup>8</sup> "The American Humane Education Society," Angell explained in the appendix to his *Autobiographical Sketches and Personal Recollections*, "was the outgrowth of a 'Mission Fund,' so called, consisting of sums of money sent to me by humane persons in various parts of our country, to be used for the promotion of humane education in such ways as I might deem best" (original emphasis).



overpresence of horsepower in human society, in fact, contributed to what Jane Tomkins has termed the “strange invisibility” of horses as *horses* (90). Equine autobiography rendered horses visible by calling attention to their inner lives. Through first-person narration and animal dialogue, readers came to see *Black Beauty* not as a unit of power but as a being endowed with a point of view. Sewell achieved this impression by giving voice to the flesh-and-blood sensations of equine suffering, relating in vivid detail the embodied experiences of being jerked by the bit, stung by the whip, overloaded with cargo, ridden over jagged ground, and driven to the point of collapse. By imbuing the horse with feelings and a perspective, these descriptions gave rise to new categories of animal ownership. Indeed, the concepts of the “humane owner” and the “inhumane owner” were constituted by the animal’s ability to feel.

As a material artifact circulating in the literary marketplace, *Black Beauty* not only created widespread visibility for animal suffering but also extended the reach of the MSPCA. As the United States did not honor English copyrights, the AHES was able to offer its edition of *Black Beauty* for a quarter of the true price. Bolstered by aggressive advertising in the pages of *Our Dumb Animals*, the pirated book sold 216,000 copies by the end of 1890 and went on to set a world publishing record by hitting the one-million mark in just two years. Beyond the official sales, the MSPCA also distributed thousands of complimentary copies of *Black Beauty* to coachmen, grooms, stable hands, and others entrusted with the care of horses. Angell resolved to keep churning out pages until he had “put a copy of [*Black Beauty*] in every home in America” (original emphasis) (*Autobiographical Sketches* 95). In an effort to attract young readers, in particular, Angell advertised *Black Beauty* as a rite of passage into humane literacy. In the pages of

*Our Dumb Animals*, he pressed children to record and discuss their impressions of the novel as a way of solidifying their burgeoning values and of rehearsing the role of animal-welfare advocate. Angell repeatedly stressed the importance of circulating the text, encouraging youngsters to pass on their copies of *Black Beauty* to other readers (just as Georgiana Kendall had done with hers). The MSPCA modeled this behavior by disseminating a portion of its literature to the public at no cost. For the commercially minded, the organization supplied cheap editions of *Black Beauty* that could be purchased in bulk and then resold for a modest profit. Any enterprising youth, the group averred, could “do good and make money” by this scheme (“How Thousands of Children” 14). By positioning moral reform halfway between religion and economics, the MSPCA created a sense that spreading the humane word had spiritual as well as pecuniary benefits. From Angell’s perspective, these activities also accomplished the practical goals of recruiting new members to the humane cause and allowing neophytes to hone their outreach skills. But in stressing literary dissemination over narrative content, the MSPCA’s publicity campaign for *Black Beauty* ultimately made the value of the text tantamount to its reproducibility in the literary market.

### **The North American Sequels to *Black Beauty***

In addition to their nationwide dispensation of *Black Beauty*, the MSPCA and AHES solicited and published scores of literary works in the same vein as Sewell’s humane paragon. By the early 1890s, the AHES had swept readers in all of “*North America north of Mexico*” into a torrent of humane print (“American Human Education Society” 152). In one year alone--from November 1<sup>st</sup> of 1890 to November 1<sup>st</sup> of 1891--

the AHES had printed 110,080,000 pages of humane literature. During that same period, the MSCPA had contributed an additional 7,000,000 pages, resulting in a combined output of 117,080,000 pages (*Autobiographical Sketches* 99). Beyond the sheer volume of available books, humane reading and writing had become increasingly valued cultural activities. By recruiting literary dignitaries, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and publisher Henry O. Houghton, to contribute writings and to serve on MSPCA advisory boards, Angell had made humane literacy a mark of prestige.

During the 1890s, the MSPCA and AHES launched a variety of programs intended to produce the next generation of humane readers and writers. To generate writing in the tradition of *Black Beauty*, the AHES sponsored hundreds of literary contests and awarded thousands of dollars in prize money each year. “[The AHES] has offered prizes,” Angell summarized, “for the best stories similar to ‘*Black Beauty*,’ illustrating kindness and cruelty in our *Northern, Southern, and Western States and Territories*. Also for the best humane dialogues and songs for use in public schools and elsewhere” (Clouston Appendix). For the best equestrian drama of *Black Beauty*, the AHES promised the tidy sum of one thousand dollars. It also awarded numerous cash prizes for inspired manuscripts “of not less than one hundred ‘*Black Beauty*’ pages” (*Autobiographical Sketches* Appendix). To encourage humane reading and writing among schoolchildren, the organization solicited compositions, awarded money, donated literature, and supplied teacher training and resources. The AHES also offered incentives to colleges and universities for the establishment of humane departments and

professorships.<sup>9</sup> “Among [the AHES’s] work,” Angell vaunted, “has been also the offering [of] a prize of one hundred dollars to *all the college students of America* for the best essay on ‘*The Effect of Humane Education on the Prevention of Crime,*’ and sending *to all their libraries* humane publications, and to the students themselves *some seventy thousand copies* of condensed humane information” (*Autobiographical Sketches* Appendix). All of these activities helped consolidate a humane public whose self-understanding originated in and through its engagement with animal print. By the same token, the humane novel was identifiable as such based on the circumstances of its production and consumption.

Each of the *Black Beauty* sequels discussed in the coming pages was recognized at the time of its initial publication as a patently “humane” novel with clear ties to the animal-protection movement. The front matter in many of these works even bears the official seal of the AHES. In style and structure, however, the novels unevenly resemble their Sewellian antecedent. Some novels purport to be “animal autobiographies,” while others abandon this narrative premise altogether (but acknowledge *Black Beauty* in prefatory remarks or in meta-literary discussions of humane literature). Sewell’s figure of the “literate horse,” nevertheless structured the thinking behind all of the sequels, which uniformly portray the cognitive abilities of animals as being either comparable or equal to those of humans. By the century’s end, the public fascination with the novel concept of equine literacy was enough to sustain the nine-year stage career of a bay stallion named Beautiful Jim Key, who performed throughout the United States under the billing “The Educated Horse” (Figure II.2). Said to have been trained by kindness alone,

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<sup>9</sup> In 1875 alone, Angell presented lectures “on the prevention of cruelty to animals” before the faculties and students at Harvard, Dartmouth, Amherst, Williams, Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, the State Normal School of Rhode Island, and the Massachusetts State Normal School at Framingham.

Beautiful Jim Key displayed the remarkable abilities to read, write, cite biblical passages, and even debate the political issues of the day. Angell lauded the horse as a real-life Black Beauty and a living example of the power of the kindness ethic. What made the literate horse such a provocative cultural text was its paradoxical embodiment of the mutually exclusive categories of animality and literacy. Even as Sewell's skillful manipulation of first-person narration facilitates the suspension of disbelief in *Black Beauty*, the novel calls attention to its own literary constructedness by reputed to speak for *dumb* animals.

The self-reflexivity inherent in the animal autobiography takes on new forms and meanings in the North American sequels to *Black Beauty*. Indeed, a defining feature of these otherwise-disparate novels is their meta-textual acknowledgement of the educational utility and social value of humane literacy. Scenes of reading, writing, and literary conversation abound in these works, representing literacy as a form of social belonging and a hallmark of every civilized community. Among the spate of nineteenth-century stories that promoted humane literacy in this way was *The Strike at Shane's*. Gene Stratton-Porter's *The Strike at Shane's* portrays reading as an uplifting and empowering activity capable of conferring authority on individuals with otherwise little social influence. The novel, which was published anonymously and subtitled "A Sequel to Black Beauty," won an AHES prize for fiction in 1893. Three years after printing *Black Beauty*, the AHES issued its first edition of *The Strike at Shane's*, which garnered glowing reviews from the American press and promised to be "as widely read as '*Black Beauty*'" ("Hundreds" 112). Although the book ultimately fell short of this tall order, it served as a humane primer for thousands of American schoolchildren at the turn of the

century. Bulk orders from public schools poured into the MSPCA headquarters in Boston within months of the novel's release, necessitating the prompt discharge of two follow-up editions.

A classic humane conversion narrative, the story describes the moral transformation of an animal abuser who finds inspiration in humane reading and literary discussion. Set on "two hundred acres of fine farm land" in Indiana, *The Strike at Shane's* chronicles the longstanding conflicts between Farmer John Shane and the nonhuman animals under his care (Stratton-Porter 6). Shane and his son, Tom, beat their working animals, terrorize the local wildlife, and adhere to the principle that "everything must bring in money or its fate [is] sealed" (Stratton-Porter 6). Exasperated by Shane's cruelty, the animals resolve to go on strike. The horses feign illness, the cow withholds her milk, and the birds refrain from eating crop-destroying insects. After a series of illuminating discussions with his daughter, Shane experiences an epiphany and adopts "the rule of kindness" in managing the animals (Stratton-Porter 78). The tale ends on a high note, as Shane vows that no animal "shall ever be mistreated on [his] farm again" (Stratton-Porter 87).

Like most *Black Beauty* sequels, the story of Farmer Shane's conversion portrays humane literacy as an expedient for moral reform. For most of the narrative, Shane exhibits scant concern for others and thinks only of increasing productivity on the farm. Viewing animals as interchangeable parts in his money-making machine, he drives them to the breaking point and then slaughters them. To his mind, "It is better to have dead horses than useless ones, just standin' round eatin'" (Stratton-Porter 52). Shane's wife, daughter, and neighbors consider his farming methods neither ethical nor profitable. "If

you would give your horses better care, and lighter work,” Mary Shane counsels her husband, “you would be the gainer in the end” (Stratton-Porter 34). But Shane, who looks at the world “only from a money point of view,” chastises his wife for interfering (Stratton-Porter 50). On one occasion, it appears as though Shane’s teenage daughter Edith, who is “invariably kind” and unafraid to speak her mind on the subject of animal abuse, has “penetrated the dusty recesses of his heart” (Stratton-Porter 7, 63). Although Edith occupies a privileged place in her father’s affections, she is unable to stymie his brutal practices due to the intrusive “thoughts of...business” that divert his attention (Stratton-Porter 67). It is only when Shane discovers the *literary* source of Edith’s beliefs that he begins to take her ideas seriously and to develop a humane conscience of his own.

As the narrative progresses, we learn that Edith is an avid reader of animal print. Humane literature provides her with a wellspring of information about animals and their “proper” treatment, and it suggests alternatives to the deplorable behavior modeled by her father. Books become a leitmotif for Edith Shane and an external signifier of her inner goodness. Convinced of the revelatory power of humane literature, she hopes her father will take up reading and learn to appreciate rather than despise the animals around him. “If papa would read the books I borrowed from Cora Tracy,” she reasons, “he would find out that birds are useful, and instead of trying to kill them and drive them away, he would be glad to have them come” (Stratton-Porter 50). Initially, Edith encounters stiff resistance. But when John Shane sustains a serious injury requiring two months of convalescence, he becomes a captive audience to his daughter’s sermonizing. This experience marks the turning point in Shane’s relationship with Edith as well as his

humane education. During their sick-bed conversations, books and reading come to signify Edith's credibility and expertise. For the first time, Shane recognizes Edith as a legitimate source of information and even defers to her in matters of human-animal relations on the farm.<sup>10</sup>

Shane's physical recovery serves as an outward manifestation of his spiritual healing. Confined to his bed with a broken body and spirit, he has plenty of time to reevaluate his conduct toward his human and animal dependents. Realizing that his cruel behavior has alienated everyone around him, he seeks a more humane approach to the management of his farm. After juxtaposing his own practices with those of his humane neighbor, Farmer Tracy, Shane finds that the latter enjoys both greater prosperity and happiness. Shaken by this sudden revelation, he turns to Edith for guidance, venturing, "Edie, you spend a good deal of time readin' books; what do you think of Tracy's ideas in regard to animals?" (Stratton-Porter 76). Overjoyed by her father's newfound interest in her opinions, Edith erupts, "They are true, papa, they are true... God gave us the birds and animals, and I think it is a sin for us to abuse them. He will certainly hold us to account for our treatment of his creatures" (Stratton-Porter 77). Shane initiates this exchange with a respectful nod to Edith's literary prowess (i.e., "you spend a good deal of time readin' books"). With this rhetorical gesture, he not only upholds reading as a privileged mode of learning but also construes books as an unimpeachable basis for authority. Following his child's example, Shane becomes a student of humane letters. He spends the remainder of his convalescence reading books "which treat of animals and

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault might describe humane literature in this context as an "enunciative modality" used to confer authority on the juvenile speakers in these narratives. Authors of humane fiction also used poetic forms for this purpose. Children and working-class characters, in particular, express their humane views in verse form.



birds and their uses” and “studiously” reexamining his farming practices (Stratton-Porter 85). By the end of the narrative, Shane has experienced a complete change of heart, the animals have called off their strike, and prosperity smiles on the farm.

John Shane’s humane conversion illustrates the transformative power of children’s literacy as an instrument of social evolution. *The Strike at Shane’s* and similar narratives provide a mass-cultural site where the interrelation of didactic literature, juvenile reading, and family identity is revealed. Such novels cast children’s reading as an expedient for the humane social uplift of the working-class family for whom economic necessity rather than empathy serves as the driving principle behind interspecies relationships. For Edith, literature acts as a moral surrogate for inculcating normative values in the absence of a humane parent. But reading also imbues Edith with the social authority to shape the values of her parents, family, and community. Because Edith engages with humane literature, she surpasses her father in moral development and propels her working-class family into the ethical landscape of bourgeois sentimentalism. By supplying reading materials, sharing information, and engaging in literary discussion, young people--like Edith Shane--constitute the hub of moral and intellectual life in humane culture. Spreading their gospel of mercy, these children provide the crucial link between animal abusers and the books that inspire humane conversions.

The pet autobiography extends the critique of the mechanistic view of animals initiated by Sewell and Stratton-Porter in their beast-of-burden tales. (Margaret) Marshall Saunders’ *Black Beauty* sequel, *Beautiful Joe: An Autobiography* (1893), circumscribes human-animal relationships within the protective sphere of middle-class family life and portrays childrearing and pet-care as mutually constitutive. Saunders’

canine autobiography recounts the adventures of its eponymous author, an abused dog who is rescued from a violent milkman and adopted by the loving Morris family of Fairport, Maine. The Morrises' parenting style exemplifies the coercive nurturance embodied in Richard Brodhead's well-known concept of *disciplinary intimacy* (17). Sharply critical of corporal punishment, Mrs. Morris regulates the moral consciences of her children through a steady diet of "good nursing, good food, and kind words" (Saunders 34). Pet-keeping integrates seamlessly into Mrs. Morris's philosophy of childrearing, which she refers to as "heart education." In a conversation with a family friend, Mrs. Morris describes how pet-keeping has transformed her "tiresomely, disgustingly selfish" sons into "the most gentlemanly lads in Fairport" (Saunders 39, 38).

I invested in a pair of rabbits for Jack, a pair of canaries for Carl, pigeons for Ned, and bantams for Willie. I brought these creatures home, put them into their hands, and told them to provide for them. They were delighted with my choice, and it was very amusing to see them scurrying about to provide food and shelter for their pets, and hear their consultations with other boys. The end of it all is, that I am perfectly satisfied with my experiment. My boys, in caring for these dumb creatures, have become unselfish and thoughtful. They had rather go to school without their own breakfast, than have the inmates of the stable go hungry. They are getting a humane education, a heart education, added to the intellectual education of their schools. (Saunders 40)

Mrs. Morris represents her sons' pet-keeping as a rehearsal for middle-class family life and the paternal obligations of "provid[ing] food and shelter" for

dependent beings. She goes on to reveal that her children have benefitted from not only caring for their pets but also observing them. The Morrises credit Beautiful Joe, in fact, with teaching their boys to be “patient, quiet, and obedient” (Saunders 41). By providing what Katherine C. Grier has called a “natural model” of domestic virtue, Beautiful Joe plays an important part in the proper socialization of the Morris children (46).

Not surprisingly, all of the reasonable adults in *Beautiful Joe* espouse a humane philosophy of child-rearing. Mrs. Morris’s kind and intelligent sister-in-law, Mrs. Wood, frequently lectures her friends and family on the social necessity of a humane education for young people. In a conversation with her niece, Mrs. Wood attributes rampant criminality to “lack of proper training” for the nation’s youth (Saunders 145). “We’re thinking too much about educating the mind,” she laments, “and forgetting about the heart and soul” (Saunders 145). To offset this bias, Mrs. Wood proposes that teachers slip some “lessons of love” in between all of the geography, history, and grammar (Saunders 145). She explains:

A little child is such a tender thing. You can bend it anyway you like. Speaking of this heart education of children, as set over against mind education, I see that many school-teachers say that there is nothing better than to give them lessons on kindness to animals. Children, who are taught to love and protect dumb creatures, will be kind to their fellow-men when they grow up. (Saunders 145)

On another occasion, while accompanying the Morrises’s daughter on a railroad trip through the countryside, Beautiful Joe overhears a “stately” and “fine-looking” lady

pontificating about the importance of humane education for “the young and tender” (Saunders 119). Expressing the era’s normative view of childhood, this unnamed woman characterizes youth as a distinct and formative phase in life that requires constant vigilance and gentle intervention from nurturing adults. Heart education, she asserts, engages children as moral beings and initiates them into an appropriate system of values.

Beautiful Joe also stresses the malleability of children and the importance of humane socialization. He characterizes his autobiography, in fact, as an attempt to foster compassion for animals in young people: “If all the boys and girls were to rise up and say that there should be no more cruelty to animals, they could put a stop to it. Perhaps it will help a little if I tell a story...I think the more stories there are written about dumb animals, the better it will be for us” (Saunders 14). In closing, he divulges the moral of his tale to all of “the boys and girls who may read it”:

If in my feeble way I have been able to impress you with the fact that dogs and many other animals love their masters and mistresses, and live only to please them, my little story will not be written in vain. My last words are, “Boys and girls, be kind to dumb animals not only because you will lose nothing by it, but because you ought to; for they were placed on the earth by the same Kind Hand that made all living creatures.” (Saunders 304)

Direct appeals, such as this one, are an essential component of the humane novel’s self-definition as a catalyst for individual conversion and cultural reorganization.

Like her title character, Saunders framed her own coming to voice within the broader enterprise of heart education.<sup>11</sup> In a personal correspondence to Angell, she attributed her writing career to the education she received from reading humane print:

I have never told you of my first knowledge of you. Christmas, 1890, 'Black Beauty' came as a present. I had never heard of it. I read it with the intensest pleasure, went over your notices, and heard for the first time of the existence of your organizations. 'This is a wonderful thing,' I said to myself. Then I ordered 'Our Dumb Animals.' From that time my humane education began. I had never been connected with any S.P.C. [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty] Society in spite of my love for animals, and knew very little about them. I may say that I have imbibed your ideas, that I am one with you in regard to social problems, etc., and that 'Our Dumb Animals' has been a powerful educator to me. Your cry for heart education rings in my ears. I hope to say something about it in a novel which I am now busy with. (original emphasis) ("What Has Come" 124)

Here, Saunders construes reading as her introduction to humane values and writing as her public performance of this new belief system. She later fictionalizes her personal conversion in the opening monologue of *Beautiful Joe*. In this playfully self-referential episode, Beautiful Joe gets the notion to write his "story of a dog's life" from perusing his mistress's copy of *Black Beauty* (Saunders 14). A literary encounter, then, apparently

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<sup>11</sup> Saunders openly supported the literary mission of the MSPCA and even dedicated *Beautiful Joe* to George Thorndike Angell.

supplies the impetus for both Saunders' and Beautiful Joe's decisions to give public expression to their humane principles.

As Saunders' conversion narrative suggests, reading was a privileged mode of consumption in the context of early humane pedagogy. The aim of humane literature was not so much to convey a particular moral as to galvanize readers to join the public dialogue on human-animal relations. By stressing the social benefits of circulating the humane word, authors spurred consumers to become producers of animal print. As a result, it was not uncommon for humane novelists to pay homage to their literary antecedents with dedications, subtitles, and textual allusions. These authorial tributes exalted reading as an initiation into deeper involvement in animal politics and helped consolidate a literary public founded on humane principles.

In book reviews, articles, and advertisements, the MSPCA mapped out an extensive literary genealogy that issued from the initial release of the American edition of *Black Beauty* in 1890. The organization frequently cast humane novels as part of a family of texts or portrayed one AHES publication as derivative of another. Angell concluded an April 1894 article in *Our Dumb Animals*, for example, with a reminder that *Beautiful Joe* "would never have been written but for a copy of 'Black Beauty' presented to its author, which at once enlisted her heart and pen to speak for those that cannot speak for themselves" ("Three Friends" 125). Author Hezekiah Butterworth, a spokesperson for the AHES literary awards committee, had underlined this point four months earlier in his prize citation for *Beautiful Joe*:

The wonderfully successful book, entitled "Black Beauty," came like a living voice out of the animal kingdom. But it spake for the horse, and

made other books necessary; it led the way. After the ready welcome that it received, and the good it has accomplished and is doing, it followed naturally that some one should be inspired to write a book to interpret the life of a dog to humane feeling of the world. Such a story we have in “Beautiful Joe.” (“Three Friends” 125)

Angell and Butterworth both valued *Beautiful Joe* for its ethical injunction above its aesthetic properties. Butterworth even praised *Beautiful Joe* as an outer manifestation of Saunders’ inner humanity, suggesting that moral imperatives compelled her project above “any speculative thought or interest” (qtd. in Saunders 9). Upon reading the novel for the first time, he felt certain “that the writer had a higher motive than to compete for a prize; that the story was a stream of sympathy that flowed from the heart; that it was genuine; that it only needed a publisher who should be able to command a wide influence, to make its merits known, to give it a strong educational mission” (qtd. in Saunders 8-9). Butterworth ascribes the novel’s “genuineness” to the circumstances of its creation, stressing that *Beautiful Joe* was Saunders’ response to an ethical appeal she perceived in *Black Beauty*.

Although the MSPCA aggrandized solitary reading (*à la* Marshall Saunders’ revelatory encounter with *Black Beauty*) as a vital mode of personal edification, it also portrayed social reading as an integral part of humane identity formation. *Black Beauty* sequels, such as Ellen A. Barrows’ *Four Months in New Hampshire* (1894), present reading as a social process in which a range of discursive practices facilitate humane consciousness-raising. The characters in this story congregate to read aloud, write, and share their impressions of humane literature. At one point, the character Sister Cady

accomplishes all three of these tasks when she shares with the community a humane poem she has written in response to *Black Beauty* (Barrows 42-44). Construing humane literacy as a form of social belonging, Barrows and her ilk hoped to inspire readers to form literary clubs in their own communities. Humane literacy initiatives, like the Band of Mercy movement, provided a forum for humanitarians to analyze animal stories, critique each other's writing, generate homework assignments, and discuss the importance of being humane.<sup>12</sup> All of these intellectual activities unfolded within the overarching structure of the MSPCA's humane-education campaign and found expression through its particular lexicon.

### **Creating Merciful Children**

When it came to attracting a youth following, the MSPCA's literacy program was a colossal success. Scores of American schoolchildren at the turn of the century pledged their loyalty to the humane cause. Angell worked tirelessly at providing incentives and outlets for children to perform humaneness in writing. In addition to sponsoring youth literary contests, he regularly showcased children's essays, poems, stories, speeches, and book reviews in *Our Dumb Animals*. Time and again, Angell impressed upon his young devotees the transformative potential of humane literature and the importance of its widespread dispersal. He frequently printed up-to-date sales numbers for *Black Beauty* in MSPCA publications and revealed his greatest wish "to live long enough to print and distribute *a million copies*" of the novel (original emphasis) (*Autobiographical Sketches* 95).

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<sup>12</sup> Another example of MSPCA-sponsored youth outreach in the early-twentieth century was the Jack London Club movement. The Jack London Clubs, which took their inspiration from London's *Michael, Brother of Jerry* (1917), pledged to speak out on behalf of mistreated performance animals.



Many young humanitarians echoed this sentiment in their own writing and attempted to assist the MSPCA in promoting its literature. Children often wrote tributes to their favorite humane novels, which they recited at social gatherings or submitted for publication. The following poem by ten-year old Samuel James Elder, Jr. is typical of the children's writing that appeared in *Our Dumb Animals*:

My book of Black Beauty is old,  
And yet otherwise it is bold,  
I hope that book may be sold,  
In quantities a million fold.

My book of Black Beauty is torn,  
And yet otherwise it is now,  
As good as when it was born,  
It's so nice that I cannot tell how. (Elder 95)

Young Samuel not only composed this tidy homage but also secured an audience for it. Through the content of his poem and his desire to publish it, he displays an awareness of print media's potency as both a vehicle for social reform and a means of consolidating a moral community. Samuel's verse underscores the sociability of reading by focusing on the relationships *others* might develop with *Black Beauty*. As a well-trained emissary of the MSPCA, he recapitulates Angell's by-the-numbers theory of cultural change. In stressing the importance of mass literary dissemination, the poem even reiterates Angell's wish to sell *Black Beauty* "in quantities a million fold." Conspicuously, Samuel relates

nothing of the story's plot, themes, characters, or moral lessons, as if the point is not to become immersed in the text but simply to pass it on.

Many children, like Samuel, came into humane consciousness in the group context of the Band of Mercy. The Band of Mercy movement, which was established by Englishwoman Catherine Smithies in 1875, migrated to the United States in the 1880s and persisted into the 1930s. George Angell and Reverend Thomas Timmins of Portsmouth, England launched the parent American Band of Mercy in Boston in July of 1882 with the public support of several distinguished citizens, including the Mayor of Boston, the Governor of Massachusetts, and the Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Angell also appealed to teachers, editors of educational newspapers, and school superintendents for assistance with the recruitment of young people. In partnership with The Honorable T.W. Bicknell, president of the National Education Association, Angell formed the American Teachers' Bands of Mercy, which carried the humane message directly into the classroom.

The American Bands of Mercy provided a wholesome social outlet for schoolchildren who had sworn to "be kind to all harmless living Creatures, and try to protect them from cruel usage." Although modeled after their British predecessor, the American bands introduced several innovations intended to foster a feeling of group belonging and accountability, such as a mandatory pledge, a membership card, and a five-pointed-star badge with the engraving "Glory to God, Peace on Earth, Good will to All, Kindness to all harmless living creatures." In the hope of attracting as many children as possible, Angell and Timmins minimized both the cost and hassle required to organize and join a band. To form a local chapter, a child needed only to collect the signatures of

thirty prospective members, select a group name, and elect a president (usually a teacher or an especially responsible child). “Nothing is required to be a member, but to sign the pledge or authorize it to be signed,” one MSPCA recruitment bulletin explained, “Any intelligent boy or girl fourteen years old can form a Band with no cost, and receive what we offer” (Barrows Appendix). By the end of the first year, 10,000 Americans had signed the Band of Mercy pledge (Rowley 51). And by August of 1884, roughly 234,000 individuals had joined 3,403 bands nationwide (*Autobiographical Sketches* 79). In just a decade, U.S. membership would soar, prompting Angell to boast, “Over eighteen thousand branches of the Parent American Band of Mercy have been formed, with probably over a million members. They are in every State and every Territory except Alaska” (Barrows Appendix). By 1912, Dr. Francis H. Rowley (Angell’s successor as president of the MSPCA and AHES) was estimating more than 3 million children dispersed among 85,098 bands (51). This number would increase by another million by the early 1920s (Jorgensen).

As an extension of the MSPCA’s sprawling literary apparatus, Bands of Mercy supported the animal-welfare movement by promoting humane reading, writing, and oration. One of the primary ways in which the MSPCA fostered humane literacy was by donating its publications to newly formed bands. Just for organizing a group, members received (without cost) a humane starter-kit, including a subscription to *Our Dumb Animals*, songs, leaflets, poems, and stories. In addition to starter-kits, Angell distributed to Bands of Mercy no less than two million complimentary copies of the AHES edition of *Black Beauty*. He also regularly featured stories, poems, and articles of particular relevance to the Bands of Mercy on the “Children’s Page” of *Our Dumb Animals*. An

article by Mary C. Yarrow on the growing international humane movement, for example, entertained American children with “Glimpses of Bands in Different Lands” (143).

By organizing children into local bands, the MSPCA created the nationwide infrastructure for the humane education of its target demographic. Local gatherings of Bands of Mercy provided an official venue for young people to commit and recommit themselves to the animal-protection cause through the repeated, public performance of humane sentiment. Recitation, story-telling, and singing were the signature events of band meetings; these public expressions of humane feeling helped solidify inner allegiance to the cause by creating an impression of group consensus and accountability. Through compulsory performances, bands established a coherent social identity through which members’ individual beliefs about animals were filtered.

The interconnection between private feeling and public articulation was not lost on Angell, who offered to furnish any interested band with information about how to engage members during group gatherings. In its articles and leaflets, the MSPCA recommended various ritualized activities for Band of Mercy children. The appointed exercises were invariably high on spectacle and performance. One such activity, which was published in *Our Dumb Animals*, involved eleven boys, each carrying a large gilt letter that, together, spelled out B-A-N-D-O-F-M-E-R-C-Y (Figure II.3).<sup>13</sup> The exercise required each boy to march in procession and to recite the stanza, from the following poem, that corresponded to his letter:

I’m first of a band of brothers,  
Whom you all will quickly see;  
Our names are in golden letters  
And mine is the letter

**B**

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<sup>13</sup> Although this exercise presumes an all-male cast, it often was performed by a mixed company of girls and boys. Such was the case for the Band of Mercy displayed in Figure II.2.

I saw that my brother was coming,  
So I left my work and my play;  
I, too, am written in gold,  
And I am the letter **A**

We'll be kind to every creature,  
And we'll grow to be good men,  
I am third in the company,  
And my name is the letter **N**

I'll try to be honest and truthful  
Whatever else I may be;  
Dare to do right, is my motto,  
For I am the letter **D**

The fifth in this grand procession,  
My name you soon will know;  
Round and shining, a golden ring,  
I'm called the letter **O**

I am a friend of the helpless,  
To their cries I never am deaf;  
I always try to aid them;  
And my letter, you see, is **F**

Cowards are mean and cruel  
I suppose you have all seen them;  
I mean to be brave and gentle  
And I am the letter **M**

Kind and tender and loving  
I will always try to be  
Helping the weak and feeble,  
And I'm called the letter **E**

Never a braver company  
Was gathered from near or far;  
There are always wrongs to be righted,  
And I am the letter **R**

I'm last in this band of brothers,  
And to do my best I'll try;  
I'll stand in line with the others,  
And here is my letter **Y**

### All

And now if you read our names with care  
A Band of Mercy you'll find,  
That means to all living creatures  
We've agreed to be good and kind.

We'll protect them from cruel usage,  
Their rights we'll try to defend,  
And whenever you chance to see us,  
You will find us the animals' friend. ("Band of Mercy" 15)

These types of performances not only engaged participants intellectually and physically but also fostered a sense of group identity and shared purpose. Along with the performance aspects of this activity, the poem's content encourages group consciousness with its consolidating imagery (e.g., "band of brothers") and thematic insistence that the sum is always greater than the parts. As the children "stand in line with the others," they at once constitute and demonstrate their common values. Activities of this nature, which were a staple among Band of Mercy troupes, also conflate literary performance and humane identity. By literally spelling out "B-A-N-D-O-F-M-E-R-C-Y" with their bodies, the children perform humanitarianism as an act of alphabetization.

As both products and expressions of Angell's humane-education philosophy, Bands of Mercy emphasized literary exchanges over face-to-face interactions with nonhuman animals. Throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the MSPCA supported humane youth groups' literary and oratorical culture by circulating materials similar to the B-A-N-D-O-F-M-E-R-C-Y exercise. One item which appeared regularly in issues of *Our Dumb Animals* and various AHES publications was a sample agenda, entitled "A Good Order of Exercises for Band of Mercy Meetings." This document encouraged groups to reserve ample time during their gatherings for singing Band of Mercy hymns, reading aloud, telling moral tales, and reciting uplifting

quotations (or “memory gems”). Although the MSPCA invited groups to adjust the “Order of Exercises” to suit their local agendas, the society was resolute when it came to the *type* of activities it endorsed. Appropriate entertainment for Band of Mercy boys and girls necessarily fostered the public performance of humane literary texts.

Following the lead of Angell and the MSPCA, many humane activists and organizations published their own educational programs for youth groups. Sarah J. Eddy authored a collection of humane excerpts entitled *Songs of a Happy Life: For Schools, Homes and Bands of Mercy* (1898), which reproduces Angell’s sample agenda along with a far more detailed “Outline of Band of Mercy Entertainment” (166). Like the AHES publications, Eddy’s manual prioritizes reading aloud, singing, and recitation above human-animal interaction. It supplies readers with a full thirty-one pages of songs suitable for Band of Mercy meetings as well as an extensive collection of quotations by animal-protection luminaries for children to memorize and recite in front of their peers. Eddy also includes an appendix with a long bibliography of humane literature and a list of “prompts” for humane compositions. Activist Flora Helm Krause, who poached sections of Eddy’s book for her own *Manual of Moral and Humane Education* (1910), follows suit by accentuating the utility of humane literacy and public performance in the moral development of young people. Although Krause intended her work as a public-school primer, she also encouraged children to assemble outside of the classroom (in “a room in the public library, Y.M.C.A. building, the school-house, church, private home, or hired hall”) for regular moral conversation. To aid children in this endeavor, she fills her manual with humane discussion prompts, literary excerpts, and pedagogical advice. Like

Eddy, Krause includes “a representative list of books, periodicals, leaflets, and articles in current magazines supplementary for humane education” (92).

While periodicals and primers proved useful as supplementary materials, the first mass effort to organize American children into humane associations revolved around didactic novels. The young protagonists in these narratives embodied the values taught in humane educational manuals and served as perfect models of altruism. The Band of Mercy members, whom Beautiful Joe encounters in Riverdale, exemplify the uncompromising integrity, empathic worldview, and seriousness of purpose of the MSPCA’s idealized juvenile humanitarianism. After attending one of their meetings, Beautiful Joe confesses to being “surprised to see how good those children were” (Saunders 147). He recalls that they had “bright and good faces” and “did not frolic nor laugh, but all seemed sober and listened attentively” (Saunders 147). The children protect the integrity of the group by holding each other accountable to its protocols and principles. Their president, a boy with “a ringing, pleasant voice,” insists that all information offered for discussion meet reasonable standards of credibility (Saunders 146). He even chastens a boy for recounting a dubious, second-hand story. “I don’t want to hurt anybody’s feelings;” the president tactfully admonishes, “but you know there is a rule in the band that only true stories are to be told here” (Saunders 150). The humane congregants in Sarah Nelson Carter’s *Black Beauty* sequel, *For Pity’s Sake* (1897), also take a hard line on this matter, discounting “anecdotes supported by hearsay evidence alone” (33).

These novels’ structuring *topos*--the truth-seeking conversation--underscores the thematic importance of humane sociality. Romanticized depictions of humane



gatherings, at which honest individuals confer about animal-related issues, serve as the genre's moral center. Like the impromptu discussion that unfurls at the railroad station in *Beautiful Joe*, a humane debate breaks out amongst a group of strangers in the opening scene of Carter's *For Pity's Sake*. This initial conversation sparks a series of humane discussions among an unlikely assemblage of fall foliage watchers, theologians, and schoolboys (Carter 8). This eclectic group, which has gathered on the veranda of an idyllic country inn, tackles a range of topics, from the theological question of whether animals have souls to the practical matter of how to avoid overtaxing oxen (Carter 9, 141). Barrows' *Four Months in New Hampshire* also derives its structural framework from a series of humane conversations. In this case, the discussions take place between members of a humane club, called the Happy Family, which assembles in the town hall every Wednesday evening to discuss the plight of animals. The Happy Family, like so many other animal-advocacy clubs in humane literature, proves to be an exemplary social organization composed of honest, altruistic people. As a fictional representation of the humane movement's core values, it provides an aspirational model for real-life Bands of Mercy.

Virtually every fictionalized Band of Mercy exhibits unquestioning confidence in the veracity of humane literature. It is common, in fact, for characters engaged in humane conversation to substantiate their truth-claims with evidence from print sources. They reference humane organizations' factsheets, pamphlets, and periodicals with utter assuredness, discounting any possibility of bias or inaccuracy. Dr. Sampson in *For Pity's Sake*, for instance, testifies to his unwavering faith in the humane press: "The literature of the Humane Societies, so widely circulated, tells the plain, unvarnished truth;--and all

may read” (Carter 177). Another character, Mr. Horton, shares this inclination toward credulity and even keeps his pocket stuffed with humane newspaper clippings, which he reads aloud when the proper moments arise. Unimpeachable among the many animal publications are the SPCA monthlies, which the protagonists in humane novels regard as indispensable to “every family in the land” (Carter 136). Characters in *Beautiful Joe*, *For Pity’s Sake*, Adella Octavia Clouston’s *Some of New York’s “400”* (1898), and myriad other humane stories uphold the MSPCA’s *Our Dumb Animals* and the ASPCA’s *Our Animal Friends* as definitive sources in all matters related to animal care and treatment.<sup>14</sup> In addition to factsheets and newspaper articles, *Bands of Mercy* regularly invoke *fictional* texts as frank and authoritative sources.

Characters in humane novels typically reference works of didactic animal fiction when launching moral or emotional appeals. Because humane stories, especially the ever-popular autobiographies, purported to capture their subjects’ point of view, they were cited as moral authorities on animal suffering. Apparently untroubled by these works’ fictional status, characters accept their dispensations of animal wisdom at face value. They invoke *Black Beauty*, the undisputed gold standard of humane fiction, with striking regularity and reverence. Laura Burton in *Some of New York’s “400,”* for instance, recounts how her memory of the chestnut mare, Ginger, who dies a miserable death on a London cab stand in *Black Beauty*, compelled her to rescue her father’s old horse from a similar fate. “The thought of the faithful creature having to end his days in such a manner, like poor ‘Ginger’ in ‘Black Beauty,’ was not to be tolerated,” she

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<sup>14</sup> *Our Animal Friends* was a monthly paper published by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York. In style and substance, *Our Animal Friends* mirrored the MSPCA’s *Our Dumb Animals*. Other kindred papers included *Animal World* of England’s Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), *Humane Journal* of Chicago, *Animals’ Friend* of San Francisco, and *Animal Kingdom* of New York.

explains, “and I bought him of the cabman by paying ten dollars more than what he gave for him” (Clouston 26). Generalizing from her own experience, Laura persuades her audience that everyone, especially the young people “who will be the men and women of the near future,” ought to read *Black Beauty* in order to gain insight into “horse life” and compassion for animals’ struggles (Clouston 28). The earnest company in *For Pity’s Sake* discusses the animal-themed writings of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Burroughs, Bradford Torrey, Olive Thorne Miller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and others. In addition to quoting extensively from humane poetry and prose, the characters in *For Pity’s Sake* pepper their conversation with biographical tidbits about famous authors’ love for animals. With these authorial anecdotes, the group establishes the sincere and venerable origins of its own humane canon.

Through its meta-literary descriptions of unimpeachable texts and devout readers, the humane genre presented itself as the voice of “plain, unvarnished truth” in the national dialogue on human-animal relations. Many humane novels read, therefore, as (not so subtle) advertisements for SPCAs, Bands of Mercy, and similar associations. As evidenced by the proliferation of humane texts and organizations at the turn of the century, the MSPCA’s heavy-handed moralizing did not deter Americans from producing, consuming, and discussing animal literature. The humane novel’s defining scene, in which honest people engage in literary conversation, shaped the public’s thinking about both which materials to read and how best to deploy them in service of the animal-protection cause. Young people, in particular, discovered in humane literature romanticized scenes of juvenile empowerment and a clear blueprint for youth mobilization. Through its sanguine portrayals of honest conversions and happy endings,

however, the humane genre conveyed the apocryphal message that the abolition of animal cruelty might result from literary engagement alone.

### **Here Our Story Ends**

This chapter has approached the early animal-welfare movement as a literary phenomenon, which built a critical mass of public support by forming activist networks around a specific body of humane texts, pedagogies, and oratorical practices. Beginning with a reframing of Anna Sewell's classic equine autobiography as a trans-Atlantic precursor to the American humane novel, we moved on to examine the proliferation of loosely based *Black Beauty* sequels produced at the end of the nineteenth century. Rather than viewing these narratives as discrete works, they were considered in relation to one another and as part of the MSPCA's powerful literary machinery for soliciting, advertising, and disseminating humane texts. Taking the Band of Mercy movement as a case in point, this discussion also considered humane youth groups as cultural sites where children developed activist identities and adults exploited the interconnections between literacy and socialization. Ultimately, this chapter presented the humane novel as a self-reflexive genre that portrayed reading and writing as both intrinsically intertwined and essential to the widespread acceptance of the anticruelty ethos.

The virtues of humane literacy were so deeply ingrained in early animal-welfare culture that reading and writing seemed, at times, commensurate with kindness to animals. Eight-year-old Bertha's pithy review of *Black Beauty* and *The Strike at Shane's* (discussed in the Introduction to this work) exemplifies the facile slippage between advocating for animals and advocating for animal *literature*. "If you want your children

to be kind to dumb animals,” she insists, “you want to get B.B. and S.S. for them.”

Implicit in this statement are assumptions about the ubiquity of humane print and its conversionary power. Becoming a humane person, Bertha would have us believe, is as simple as picking up a book. It is for this reason that the defining wish of every humanitarian turns out to be Samuel James Elder’s *literary* one: “I hope that book may be sold/In quantities a million fold.” This presumption informed the MSPCA’s approach to humane outreach and reverberates throughout its official literature. Angell’s strategy of cultural change through literary saturation and mass inclusion implied that the humane word was everywhere and always effective. This driving precept of the early humane movement had dubious consequences for nonhuman animals, as it failed to grasp how thoroughly enmeshed nineteenth-century American life was in the control and use of animal bodies. By quantifying social progress in terms of the number of humane pages in circulation and upholding literary acumen as a mark of a compassionate soul, the MSPCA reduced animal advocacy to a narrow set of discursive conventions. Amidst so much counting and so little measuring, it is difficult to guess how deeply the humane novel penetrated the moral conscience of its audience. Like the working horse that lost its horseness in a blurry mass of nineteenth-century equine bodies, so too, did the literary lose its literariness in an immeasurable infinity of interchangeable humane pages.



**Figure II.1.** *Mary Matthews Bray's Our Gold Mine at Hollyhurst (1893) was one of many Black Beauty "sequels" published by the AHES in the late-nineteenth century.* Bray, Mary Matthews. *Our Gold Mine at Hollyhurst*. Boston: American Humane Education Society, 1893. Print.



**Figure II.2.** *Beautiful Jim Key exhibits his astonishing cognitive abilities. In the background are the names of famous politicians, which the purportedly literate stallion could spell on command. Beautiful Jim Key. n.d. Ilovehorses.net. Web. 1 Aug. 2013.*



**Figure II.3.** *A Band of Mercy performs its devotion to the animal cause in a spelling exercise circa 1890. Band of Mercy. c.1890. Collection of the National Museum of Animals & Society, CA. [beindexhibit.org](http://beindexhibit.org). Web. 1 Aug. 2013.*



## Chapter III

### Bringing the Laboratory Dog Home: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and the Antivivisection Narrative

We are told that there is no need of any public sensitiveness on this subject [and that] there must be no lifting of the veil to the outside multitude.

Dr. Albert Leffingwell, *Vivisection* (1884)

They try to pacify the public by crying that there is no pain,--but details, taken from laboratory records, tell the story.

Author Sarah Nelson Carter, *For Pity's Sake* (1897)

The situation in the United States is extremely volatile. Over the last five years, *exposés* by animal rights activists... have highlighted glaring inadequacies in the current system of control.

Dr. Judith Hampson, Chief Animal Experimentation Research Officer, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1987)

The men and women who broke into the laboratories...had to make sure that people got enough of a peek behind the scenes to realize that the "science" was worthless.

PETA President Ingrid Newkirk, *Free the Animals* (2000)

### Vivisection Exposed

Historically, the purpose of antivivisection rhetoric has been to expose scientific atrocities inflicted on animals in laboratories.<sup>15</sup> The quotations introducing this chapter offer an epigraphic slice from this discursive tradition. Animal experimentation became a source of public debate in the United States following the laboratory revolution in medical science during the 1860s and 1870s. As early as 1867, the American Society for

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<sup>15</sup> *Vivisection* refers to the scientific practice of experimenting on live animals. The term is a compound of the Latin words, *vivus* (living) and *sectio* (cutting). Vivisection, thus, denotes "the cutting of the living." In the context of Western medicine, the tradition of live-animal experimentation can be traced as far back as the mid-fifth century BCE, when Alcmaeon of Croton sliced the optic nerves of living animals and documented their ensuing blindness. Vivisection became a source of public controversy in the United States during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The rise of the antivivisection movement was coeval with the institutionalization of experimental physiology in American universities. Public reprehension reached a fevered pitch at the turn of the century, when physiology became a standard course of the medical curriculum. For a historical account of the vivisection controversy in Western societies, see Nicolaas A. Rupke's *Vivisection in Historical Perspective* (1990).

the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York, under the leadership of Henry Bergh, publically decried animal experimentation and advocated legislative prohibition of the practice. Inspired by their British allies, who successfully shepherded through Parliament the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876, American humane activists sought to expose the frightful inner-workings of the vivisection laboratory to public scrutiny. In an effort to raise public awareness, the American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS) began distributing images of vivisected animals at community gatherings and state fairs. The Exhibit Committee of the AAVS even produced a traveling display of vivisection tools and practices, which it launched in Philadelphia in 1910.

Antivivisectionists on both sides of the Atlantic employed metaphors of exposure and unveiling in representations of their humane labor. This discursive practice framed anticruelty reform as the inevitable consequence of disseminating the unvarnished truth about vivisection among the people. In 1882, Bergh himself thematized the notion of cutting to the facts, so to speak, with his ironic and provocative lecture-title: “Vivisection Vivisected.”

While SPCAs and other humane organizations served as the official mouthpiece of the movement, a diversity of social groups, including teachers, clergy, scientists, and club women, contributed to the *fin de siècle* antivivisection effort. These groups exercised manifold forms of social influence and adopted such varied persuasive modes as lecturing, pamphleteering, letter-writing, and front-parlor pontificating. Though ranging in style and effectiveness, antivivisection texts were characteristically disturbing in their graphic descriptions of animal suffering. Armed with firsthand knowledge, antivivisection scientists published alarming descriptions of the “dim-lighted

underground dungeons” in some of the nation’s preeminent medical colleges (*The Vivisection Question* 47). “In the august name of Science,” testified Dr. Albert Leffingwell, “animals have been subjected to burning, baking, freezing; saturation with inflammable oil and then setting on fire; starvation to death; skinning alive; larding the feet with nails; crushing and tormenting in every imaginable way” (“Vivisection in America” 136). Clergy, teachers, and reform-minded women embedded the scientists’ graphic accounts in moral arguments about the debasing nature of violent acts upon those who perform them. Humane writers hoped to restrict or abolish vivisection by shining a light on the scientists’ secret world of animal suffering. “I have seen a great deal of vivisection,” British surgeon Francis Cann reflected, “and I think if the people were only allowed to see these operations, there would very soon be an end put to them” (*The Zoophilist* 46).

### **The Laboratory Dog in Fictional Space**

In a prefatory note to her antivivisection novel, *Trixy* (1904), American author Elizabeth Stuart Phelps propounds a democratic vision of humane fiction as a purveyor of moral light and verity to the literate public: “[A] novel, which cannot be a homily, may be an illumination. This one approaches regions whose very existence is unknown to the majority of readers, and doubted by many intelligent and kind-hearted people. I take this opportunity of saying that I am familiar with the map of these dark sections of life and know whereof I write” (vii-viii). Imaginative literature, she suggests, might add emotional heft to the antivivisection platform by exposing murky terrains of inhumanity to the light of public consciousness. Phelps suggests that the novel form, unlike the

polemic or the homily, invites particularly vivid experiences of identification with its human and canine characters. The moral and social impact of the humane novel supposedly emanates from its power to usher readers through clandestine geographies, otherwise unknown or inaccessible to them.

Curiously, while Phelps's preface braces readers for a tour through the coarse underworld of mercenary dog-trafficking and scientific torture chambers, it also makes a point of characterizing this imaginative journey as an "approach" rather than a full exposure to the dark regions of animal vivisection (*Trixy* vii). Phelps's narrative, in other words, is itself a restricted site from which grisly scenes of canine torture are conspicuously and deliberately omitted. "If *Trixy* were a polemic," Phelps elucidates, "there might be presented a variety of authentic physiological diversions as sad as they would seem to be incredible. Such being the material of the apostle rather than the artist, these pages have been closed to scenes too painful for admission to them" (*Trixy* vii). At various moments in her story, Phelps peels back the veil on the scientist's privileged institutional domain, but rarely does she grant more than a glimpse at the horrors that reside therein. While the vivisector-dog interactions in *Trixy* supply moments of high drama and suspense, most of the novel's interspecies relationships unfold *outside* of the laboratory.

Why is the laboratory relegated to peripheral space in a narrative concerned primarily with scientific experimentation and in a genre predicated on the graphic exposure of vivisection? Vivid descriptions of the animal laboratory, which serve as the focal point of other humane discursive forms, are intended to shock audiences into political action. Yet, authors who dwell on the flesh-carving in the laboratory run the risk

of turning sensitive readers away. If the details prove too grotesque or technical, then readers with weak constitutions might avert their attention from the bloody spectacle and, by extension, from the plight of the laboratory dog. In shielding readers from scenes of savagery, Phelps also interpellates them as part of a “humane” public invested in keeping the “vagaries of science” and the “shames of the human race” in check (*Trixy* 160). In a direct address to her imagined audience, she vows to steer clear of “sights which the readers of these pages could not bring their delicate sensibilities to witness, facts which you who follow this narrative would not permit its writer to relate” (*Trixy* 160). This meta-textual moment simultaneously conjures into being an ideal reading public and circumscribes its values. It also indicates that the novel will *not* rely on realist descriptions of mass slaughter in the laboratory to galvanize its audience to join the antivivisection cause. Phelps’s insistence on a sanitized narrative codifies the vivisection laboratory as a site *too real* for realist fiction. The unspeakable realities of the laboratory cannot be signified in the context of humane literature, as they belong to a realm beyond fiction.

*Trixy* retains its fictional status by re-contextualizing the laboratory dog as both a cherished family member and as private property with sentimental and market value. For this reason, the home (as the seat of familial intimacy) and the court (as a site for formalizing property claims) assume central positions in Phelps’s narrative topography. Unlike the antivivisection polemic, which functions as an *exposé* of the morally intolerable treatment of animals, Phelps’s fictional work builds pathos for laboratory dogs by envisioning them as treasured members of the American household and as defensible property in the context of the courtroom. The movement of Phelps’s canine characters

between the home, the laboratory, and the courthouse generates what I henceforth refer to as “the stolen-pet plot,” a coinage that implies the dog’s context-contingent status as cherished dependent and private property. In delineating humane and inhumane behavior in these three narrative sites, Phelps presents sharply gendered portrayals of human-canine interactions, such that appropriate treatment of dogs is necessarily appropriately “feminine” or “masculine.” The interruption of these gendered relationships by dog-bandits and vivisectors undermines heteronormative family values, as the filching of the family pet disrupts the maternal imperative of woman and violates the property rights of man.

Although Phelps relies on conventionally gendered depictions of interspecies relations in *Trixy*, she nevertheless resists the widespread *fin de siècle* habit of placing ethical concern for animals under the special purview of women. Her multi-contextual portrayals of interspecies interactions, instead, frame the antivivisection cause broadly as a “human” concern and as a litmus test for a particularly American sense of “humaneness,” which translates here as a compensity for mercy toward the weak and a respect for private property. By tracking Phelps’s canine protagonists through the narrative nerve-centers in *Trixy* and several other dog-themed works, this chapter illustrates how the stolen-pet plot construes vivisection as a threat to the most sacrosanct of American values. It argues, furthermore, that by explicitly rejecting graphic descriptions *à la* the antivivisection polemic, Phelps constitutes a humane reading public lauded for its gentle feeling and acute sensitivity to suffering.

### **Digging up Phelps’s Antivivisection Fiction**

During the three decades preceding Houghton, Mifflin and Company's release of *Trixy* in 1904, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps attracted an enthusiastic readership for her popular fiction and authored numerous influential essays in support of temperance, woman suffrage, labor reform, co-education, and other contemporary social causes. Undoubtedly, Phelps is best known for her popular "*Gates*" novels, which offered utopian visions of heaven to a nation still reeling from the devastation of the Civil War. The first volume in the *Gates* series, *The Gates Ajar* (1868), launched Phelps's literary career, achieved mass-circulation in the United States and England, and attracted the attention of famed literary "power couple," James T. Fields and Annie Adams Fields, who were instrumental in the book's publication. *Beyond the Gates*, *The Gates Between*, and *Within the Gates* (a dramatization serialized in *McClure's Magazine*) followed the first novel in 1883, 1887, and 1901, respectively. In addition to the smash-hit *Gates* books, Phelps's fiction and nonfiction prose appeared frequently in periodical flagships, such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, the *Independent*, and *Woman's Journal*. Although Phelps's literary appeal dwindled after her death in 1911, she garnered popular and critical acclaim during her lifetime and bequeathed a vast legacy to the history of letters.

Today, this literary boon remains largely untapped, except by a small cohort of scholars engaged in the important enterprise of documenting Phelps's participation in the antebellum women's movement.<sup>16</sup> On Phelps's contribution to humane reform, however, literary critics have been either reticent or apt to interpret her portrayals of animal

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Susan Coultrap-McQuinn's *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* (1990), Carol Farley Kessler's *Elizabeth Stuart Phelps* (1982), and Ronna Coffey Privett's *A Comprehensive Study of American Writer Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, 1844-1911* (2003).

exploitation as “symbolic” of women’s oppression (Kessler 111).<sup>17</sup> Carol Farley Kessler’s characterization of Phelps’s “anti-vivisection concern” as “an indirect expression of her feminist interests” is typical of this scholarly approach (111). Kessler has emphasized those aspects of Phelps’s fiction which imply that “women were treated by men as pets, vivisected as experimental subjects” (111). Ronna Coffey Privett, similarly, has summed up *Trixy* as a story about “intelligent, loving dogs whose mute cries for help often resemble women in society who are voiceless without the vote and who depend upon their ‘masters’ to save them from their inhumane situations” (246). Ann Douglas Wood has argued that many prominent nineteenth-century women, including Phelps, believed that “male doctors were performing a kind of ‘vivisection’...on their female patients” (48).<sup>18</sup> In “‘The Fashionable Diseases’: Women’s Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America,” Wood documents the rhetorical associations these women forged between the abuse of laboratory animals and the treatment of female patients for “mental illness, ‘nervous’ conditions, and sexual difficulties” (25). She credits (in a footnote) Phelps’s antivivisection novels with making the broader symbolic link between “male cruelty in vivisection [and] male cruelty in marriage” (Wood 49). Wood concludes her essay with the assertion that Phelps made “no pretense of interest in medicine as a science” but viewed the field purely “as a weapon in a social and political struggle for power between the sexes” (52). While Phelps undoubtedly drew provocative parallels between vivisection and sex discrimination, this study suggests that her animal advocacy was

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<sup>17</sup> A more recent essay by Lori Duin Kelly chronicles Phelps’s serious engagement with the antivivisection movement in Massachusetts. Kelly, however, frames Phelps’s disapprobation for vivisection as part of a larger concern with the mistreatment of *human* patients by physicians.

<sup>18</sup> Ann Douglas Wood has published most of her scholarly works under the name Ann Douglas.



more than merely metaphorical or analogic. Her commitment to the antivivisection cause, as we shall see, was ardent, enduring, and multi-faceted.

The plight of laboratory animals occupied a significant portion of Phelps's professional energy during the final decade and a half of her life. Her prominence in the antivivisection movement even inspired public denunciations from leading U.S. scientists, including one Harvard physiologist who singled her out in an 1899 issue of the *Philadelphia Medical Journal* for her "maudlin sentimentality" and refusal to "listen to the facts" (*Journal of Zoophily* 127-128). Between 1901 and 1904, Phelps delivered three addresses on the subject of live-animal experimentation to the Massachusetts State Legislature and authored several antivivisection pamphlets, including *A Plea for the Helpless* (1901), *Vivisection Denounced* (1902), and *Vivisection and Legislation in Massachusetts* (1902). She also published three antivivisection works, in addition to *Trixy*, that remain to be critically excavated after more than a century of dust-gathering. Five years prior to the publication of *Trixy*, Phelps authored an initial stolen-pet tale, *Loveliness*, which appeared in the August 1899 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* and was reprinted in gift-book form by Houghton, Mifflin and Company later the same year. *Loveliness* introduces a trademark feature (also exhibited in *Trixy*) of Phelps's antivivisection fiction: the pairing of a disabled or orphaned child with a loyal canine companion. The abduction of a silver Yorkshire belonging to an "invalid child" named Adah supplies the story's precipitating complication (*Loveliness* 22). Wracked with a "gallopin' heartbreak" over the loss of her only playmate, Adah deteriorates "to a little wraith" (*Loveliness* 27, 20). A thorough search of the city's underground dog-trafficking network by Adah's father culminates in the Yorkshire's nick-of-time recovery from the

vivisection laboratory at the “famous medical school of the University of St. George” (*Loveliness* 31-32). The joyous reunion of dog and girl sends “peals of laughter and ecstatic barks” through the “happy house” (*Loveliness* 41).

In October 1908, *Woman’s Home Companion* published Phelps’s short story, “Tammyshanty,” which also celebrates mutual affection between dogs and children. The story features orphaned newsboy Peter “Jacket” Roosevelt Tammany and his Irish Terrier, Tammyshanty. When a private experimenter notorious for vivisecting dogs in his home laboratory abducts Tammyshanty, Jacket enlists the help of a humane philanthropist, a reporter, a policeman, and two young officers of the Newsboys’ Association. Pooling the adults’ professional expertise and the newsboys’ “subterranean intelligence,” Jacket ascertains that the vivisector has imprisoned Tammyshanty in his robustly secured laboratory (“Tammyshanty” 9).<sup>19</sup> When a mob of outraged newsboys encircles the vivisector’s home demanding the dog’s release, the “fugitive physiologist” absconds by moonlight with a throng of canine captives (“Tammyshanty” 62). The street-smart mob overtakes the vivisector, however, and Jacket reclaims his beloved companion.

In the same year that *Woman’s Home Companion* published “Tammyshanty,” the magazine also serialized Phelps’s second antivivisection novel, *Though Life Us Do Part*. The work, which Houghton, Mifflin and Company promptly released in book form, echoes *Trixy* in several respects. Both novels feature dog-loving society women caught between dueling male suitors. Like protagonist Miriam Lauriat in *Trixy*, Cara Sterling in *Though Life Us Do Part* acts as guardian to a canine survivor of vivisection. Cara’s

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<sup>19</sup> It was not uncommon for *fin de siècle* antivivisection stories to feature “home laboratories.” A notable example is Mark Twain’s “A Dog’s Tale” (1904).

enterprising cousin, Reverend Sterling Hart, discovers that Clyde the Collie once suffered a stint as the experimental subject of a “rising young physiologist” at the local university (*Though Life Us Do Part 7*). As it happens, the vivisector, Dr. Thomas Frost, is also one of Cara’s eager suitors. The lack of sensitivity that serves Dr. Frost well in the vivisection laboratory translates poorly into the romantic arena, and his affection for Cara remains unreciprocated at the story’s conclusion. This thwarted marriage plot of 1908 is strikingly reminiscent of the interspecies love triangle Phelps portrayed four years earlier in *Trixy*.

### **Delicate Readers**

It is reasonably clear that what attracted many readers to *Trixy* was Phelps’s literary reputation. Having achieved widespread name-recognition by the 1880s, Phelps enjoyed a broader circulation for her humane texts than did most antivivisection writers of the era. More often than not, antivivisection literature was hampered by its self-selecting audience. Although the AAVS and other humane organizations sent pamphlets and periodicals to libraries, social clubs, schools, and cabstands, they struggled to expand subscription lists beyond a loyal core. In both the United States and Britain, the movement’s leading periodicals, such as the *Journal of Zoophily*, *The Anti-Vivisectionist*, and *The Zoophilist*, attracted audiences consisting largely of true believers.

The graphic content in these publications, which included visual materials copied from scientific manuals, served to confirm what most readers already knew or suspected about vivisection. Although Britain’s *The Anti-Vivisectionist* ran such gruesome material

that it issued warnings to those coming “fresh to the subject,” the weekly’s editorial staff nonetheless encouraged the public to confront the horrors of modern physiology:

We would again remind our readers that, though engravings illustrative of Vivisection may usually be found on our second and third pages, the sight of them, so horrifying to many, may be entirely avoided by leaving the first two leaves of the journal uncut. That they are of the utmost value in bringing a distinct idea of what Vivisection is to the minds of those people who come fresh to the subject, is beyond question. People often have no notion of the reality until they are shown these perfectly authentic illustrations, taken from the actual work of the Vivisectors themselves; but when they see them, there is no need of further argument to produce conviction. This is the purpose for which they are intended. (37)

While this warning adds a layer of anticipatory horror (and allure) to the experience of viewing the ravaged animal body, it also betrays an underlying anxiety about the reader-text relationship.<sup>20</sup> Will the average reader, who happens upon an antivivisection tract, consent to view what is said to be unviewable? As we shall see, Phelps circumnavigates the problem of recoiling readers by omitting graphic images altogether.

Since Phelps’s humane fiction circulated in the mass market, it attracted readers from all sides of the anticruelty debate. In this respect, Phelps was not remarkable among writers of imaginative literature. Contemporary authors in England, Canada, and the United States promoted compassion for animals by penning anticruelty stories for

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<sup>20</sup> For an interesting analysis of the relationship between graphic antivivisection materials and constructions of femininity, see Susan Hamilton’s “‘Still Lives’: Gender and the Literature of The Victorian Vivisection Controversy” (1991).

popular audiences. “Animal autobiographies,” such as those discussed in Chapter II, dismayed readers with their dolorous first-person accounts of suffering at the hands of humankind. Mark Twain’s “A Dog’s Tale,” which first appeared in the December 1903 issue of *Harper’s*, chronicles the life of a mixed-breed dog whose cherished pup succumbs to a physiological experiment. Like Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877) and Marshall Saunders’ *Beautiful Joe* (1893), “A Dog’s Tale” mobilizes sentiment by encouraging reader-identification with its sympathetic and psychologically complex narrator.

To a much higher degree than Twain’s antivivisection autobiography, Phelps’s work foregrounds human-canine relationships outside of the scientific laboratory. The implied reader of Phelps’s fiction is necessarily a stranger to the savage underworld of animal experimentation. Possessing a delicate nature evocative of genteel womanhood, this figure shrinks from sensational violence as a matter of course. In contrast to writers of antivivisection tracts and animal autobiographies, Phelps spares her readers from the sight of the eviscerated dog, for fear that they might “lose” their senses. Indeed, antivivisection literature deplored the desensitization of medical students to the suffering of laboratory animals. This blunting of sentiment, which hardened the budding scientist, threatened to destroy the gentle reader for whom “sensitivity” was an essential trait. For this reason, Phelps’s *Trixy* encourages readers to identify not with the shocked (and ultimately insentient) bodies in the laboratory but rather with the gentle creatures inhabiting the spaces of humanity.

### **The Stolen-Pet Plot in *Trixy***

What makes *Trixy* such a rich object of analysis in terms of Phelps's antivivisection corpus is that it combines several features of her other canine tales.<sup>21</sup> Like *Loveliness* and "Tammyshanty," *Trixy* follows the narrative trajectory of a dog abducted from a particularly vulnerable child. (The boy hero in *Trixy* is both disabled and orphaned.) The novel also resembles *Though Life Us Do Part* in various respects, such as its inclusion of man-woman-man and man-dog-woman triangles. Of further interest is the fact that *Trixy* represents Phelps's first novel-length articulation of the stolen-pet plot.

The stolen-pet plot in *Trixy* actually concerns *two* snatched dogs: Caro the Cocker Spaniel and Trixy the Poodle. The latter dog, who is the precocious companion of a poor tenement boy named Dan Badger, earns her master's keep by performing clever tricks and acrobatics for crowds of friends and neighbors. Among Trixy and Dan's most zealous supporters is Miriam Lauriat, a soft-hearted philanthropist and tenement owner. In addition to overseeing her properties and ministering to the city's downtrodden, Miriam serves as the fawning owner of a timid black spaniel called Caro. Despite the doting vigilance of their human caretakers, both Trixy and Caro fall victim to mercenary pet-traffickers, who illicitly supply local scientists with animal test subjects. In a well-secured basement laboratory at the prestigious Galen Medical School, Trixy and Caro languish in a room full of unfortunate animals, all awaiting sacrifice in one of the nation's many "slaughter-houses of science" (*Trixy* 256).<sup>22</sup> The chair of the physiology faculty and head researcher at the Galen vivisection laboratory is Miriam Lauriat's suitor, Dr.

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<sup>21</sup> In addition to the novels and short stories discussed here, Phelps penned several other fictional works that discuss vivisection and thematize human-canine love. Her novel *Walled In* (serialized in *Harper's Bazar* between Dec. 1906 and Dec. 1907) celebrates the bond between a disabled professor and his canine companion. Phelps's chapter in the collaboratively authored novel, *The Whole Family* (1908), makes explicit references to vivisection, though only in passing.

<sup>22</sup> Phelps likely named her fictional medical school for Galen of Pergamum (c. 130-210), who served as a physician to Marcus Aurelius and authored a treatise on live-dissection techniques.

Olin Steele. Once a sensitive young medical student who shuddered at the sight of animal suffering, Dr. Steele now performs live-animal dissections with the steady hand of a seasoned vivisector. Compelled by professional aspirations and institutional pressure, he makes the colossal blunder of performing a series of experiments on his paramour's beloved Caro. Luckily, Caro and Trixy manage a narrow escape from the laboratory before Dr. Steele and his colleagues can administer their lethal knife-cuts. Caro, understandably, emerges from the harrowing experience far worse for wear.

The dognapping incident at Galen results in a public scandal, a courtroom battle, and the permanent estrangement of Olin Steele and Miriam Lauriat. In an ultimate blow to his ego, Dr. Steele's case is prosecuted by his chief rival for Miriam's affection: the modest and upstanding lawyer, Philip Surbridge. A stark contrast to Dr. Steele, Philip Surbridge is a man of "perennial sympathy" and uncalculated self-sacrifice (*Trixy* 200). The prosecution presents a cogent case against the Galen Medical School, and by the trial's end Dr. Olin Steele is personally and professionally shattered. In a final irony, the vivisector finds his death-bed vigil attended only by his loyal Saint Bernard, Barry. At home with his canine companion, Dr. Steele is haunted by the ghosts of his former vivisection subjects and wretchedly cries out, "Poor things! Poor things!" (*Trixy* 279). Like Thomas Frost in *Though Life Us Do Part*, Olin Steele proves the cad of Phelps's love plot when his ruthless professional aspirations render him unredeemable as a romantic hero. Miriam's disbelief that "any true woman [could] take a vivisector's hand" suggests the extent to which the narrative's romantic and humane storylines are intertwined (*Trixy* 274). In choosing the humane man over the inhumane self-promoter, Miriam also exhibits her sound judgment, moral fortitude, and readiness to face the

challenges and responsibilities of marriage. Phelps concludes her story on a bright note with the tail-wagging reunion of the dogs with their owners and a pledge of romantic devotion between Miriam and Philip.

### **Bringing the Plight of the Laboratory Dog Home**

Dr. Steele's bedroom hallucinations of his animal victims bring the specter of the vivisectioned dog into the domestic sphere. Here, dogs that he formerly conceptualized as scientific material get re-imagined as pets. Envisioning laboratory animals against a domestic backdrop forces Dr. Steele to draw a connection between the scores of dogs he sacrificed in the name of scientific progress and his beloved boyhood companion, Barry. The domestic space re-contextualizes (for Dr. Steele and Phelps's readers) anonymous scientific subjects as precious members of human families. Stirred by "momentary contact with life and love" in the canine form of Barry, Dr. Steele recognizes in each of his former victims a value apart from their instrumental function in the laboratory (*Trixy* 265). Gripped by this awful recognition, his "fevered brain" conjures up a phantasmagoric procession of "mute and sentient" creatures (*Trixy* 266, 265). No longer perceiving these creatures as anonymous test subjects, Dr. Steele re-encounters them as the "domestic animals that comfort our homes" and the "little spirits, born to be playthings for children" (*Trixy* 265-266). This solemn procession triggers the terrible epiphany that Dr. Steele's victims belonged to the same docile society as Barry. It also transforms the interchangeable animals of the laboratory into precious individuals. Once Dr. Steele comprehends the animals' familial status as former or potential domestic pets, he recognizes their individuality. As the ghosts pass by his bed, Dr. Steele searches the



eyes of “*each* martyred creature” and confronts its uniqueness (my emphasis) (*Trixy* 265). He even pays special homage to certain individuals: a greyhound he vivisected in Vienna, a kitten from his medical school days, and, lastly, Miriam’s precious spaniel.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout *Trixy*, Phelps juxtaposes the instrumental attitude of the vivisector toward his anonymous *mass* of dogs with the pet-lover’s valuation of the *individual* animal. A heated exchange between Miriam Lauriat and Olin Steele, which takes place prior to the latter’s sickbed revelation, encapsulates these two contrasting sensibilities. Hoping to vindicate himself for vivisecting Miriam’s dog, Dr. Steele explains that he was unable to distinguish Caro from the multitude of nameless test subjects in the laboratory:

“There wasn’t one chance in a million that--I didn’t know it was  
your dog!

You know I didn’t!”

“You knew,” said Miriam coldly, “that it was somebody’s dog--a  
cherished one. He was gentle. He was high-bred.--And there was this.”

She drew the tarnished silver collar from her pocket, and with shaking  
fingers put it into his hand.

Steele’s white face turned a ghastly gray.

“I give you my word I never saw this before!”

“Are you not the head of your department? Where does  
responsibility lie if not on you? This collar came out of your laboratory

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<sup>23</sup> This sentimental scene in *Trixy* recalls other death-bed revelations in nineteenth-century American literature, such as Eva’s vision of heaven in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Notably, Phelps and Stowe were neighbors in Andover, Massachusetts from 1851 to 1864. Like George T. Angell and other prominent humanitarians, Phelps revered Stowe and admired the ethical content of her fiction.

yesterday morning. How many other lost dogs have the faculty of Galen College unlawfully taken besides mine?"[...]

"What is one dog--what are ten thousand dogs compared with the life of one baby?" he demanded fiercely.

Miriam now turned her averted head, and, for the first time that morning, looked him straight in the eyes. The misery in them held her rising denunciation back.

"You have tormented many dogs. How many, I do not want to know. Have you ever saved the life of one baby?" (*Trixy* 217-219)

Dr. Steele's attempt at personal absolution hinges upon the interchangeability of all animals that are no longer or not yet pets. In the context of the physiology laboratory, each dog is an equally expendable unit of living matter. The validity of Dr. Steele's research depends on the homogenizing reduction of "half a hundred dogs" to "half a hundred living brains" (*Trixy* 55). Miriam's hostility toward Olin Steele stems largely from the fact that Caro bore the distinguishing markers of a pet. His silver collar, gentle disposition, and high breeding imply that he was not simply owned but domesticated into a privileged social class. From these signs, Dr. Steele ought to have recognized Caro's special status as a "cherished" pet. The scientist might have vivisected countless other animals without a twinge in his cold conscience, but should not he have realized that *this dog* was imbued with sentimental meaning and even social status? In the homogenizing and objectifying context of the laboratory, however, Dr. Steele views Caro as just another experimental subject.

Domestic space in *Trixy*, therefore, is crucial for producing the dog's status as a pet and for codifying certain interspecies relationships as familial. For this reason, the home is an indispensable narrative space and the main site for generating pathos in relation to canine characters. The home is also a site of *cathexis* where humans invest particular canine bodies with incredible importance and treasure individual dogs as outlets for emotional energy and expression.<sup>24</sup> Once a dog is chosen for a pet, its personal value to its owner may be limitless. From the perspective of its caretaker, a single pet can matter more than ten thousand laboratory dogs or even one human baby. The novel's domestic scenes essentially *familiarize* anonymous laboratory animals, endowing them with names, personalities, families, and deep personal meanings.

The primary way that Phelps familiarizes the laboratory dog is by invoking maternal caretaking imagery. She often feminizes interspecies relationships in the home, construing the dog as a child substitute. As the above passage reveals, Dr. Olin Steele considers vivisection justifiable if it saves "the life of one baby."<sup>25</sup> Miriam Lauriat, on the other hand, views vivisection as intolerable because she relates to her dog as if he *were* a baby. The frontispiece of the novel visually reinforces the narrative's infantilization of the canine. The color plate depicts a domestic scene in which Miriam Lauriat comforts her surrogate human child, Dan Badger, while the infantile Caro reposes in a bassinette at her feet (Figure III.1). An upright and square-shouldered male figure,

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<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud's concept of *cathexis* refers to the concentration of mental or emotional energy on an object, person, or idea. This concept is implicit in much of Freud's work and is discussed explicitly in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895), and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905).

<sup>25</sup> It is likely that Phelps modeled Dr. Steele's "one-baby" speech after a comment made by Harvard University president, Charles William Eliot. Eliot, who served as Harvard president from 1869 to 1909, popularized the pro-vivisection argument that the lives of thousands of animals are worth less than the life of one human child. Eliot's remark came on the heels of the 1894 development of an antitoxin for diphtheria.

who turns out to be Philip Surbridge, gazes out the window, thus completing the heteronormative family scene. Notably absent from Phelps's stolen-pet stories are visual representations of vivisection laboratories. *Loveliness* gestures toward the horrors of vivisection through artist Sarah S. Stilwell's visual rendering of a dognapping, but none of Stilwell's illustrations depicts the laboratory itself.

Like their accompanying visual representations, Phelps's textual descriptions stress the familial nature of human-dog interactions in the home. *Trixy* contains countless scenes in which dogs appear as children and their human guardians as parents. This analogy works well as an affective device because it aligns the dog with a culturally valued life-form: the human baby. It also possesses symbolic purchase due to the literal and psychological propinquity of pets and babies in the Western bourgeois family. In his psychological investigation into the social construction of "pets" as a cultural category, Yi-fu Tuan describes the human child as a pet *par excellence*. He explains, "Whatever views a mother may have toward her infant, in the actual practice of mothering she has to treat it as an incontinent young animal and even as a thing...The small child is a piece of wild nature that must be subdued and then played with--transformed into cute, cuddly beings or miniature adults as the mother or the surrogate mother sees fit" (Tuan 115). Tuan classifies mother-to-child and owner-to-pet relationships as *intimate*. What exactly does this intimacy entail? He elaborates, "Gestures of physical intimacy may express equality and brotherhood: picture two friends with their arms around each other's shoulder. On the other hand, more often and (I believe) more deeply, they presuppose inequality: picture a mother hugging her child, a horsewoman patting the flank of her steed, or think of such historical bonds as that between a knight and his squire, a man and

his valet” (Tuan 163). While these forms of intimacy may have a positive impact on both the empowered and the dependent party, they are characterized as much by affection as by dominance.

The reunion between Miriam and Caro, which follows the latter’s death-defying escape from Galen laboratory, evokes stock images of intimacy between mother and baby. Miriam--an unmarried, self-supporting property owner--invests her maternal energy in Caro rather than a human baby. Instead of marrying into a domestic situation, Miriam keeps her *own* home by renting domestic space to others (in the tenement she owns). Her financial independence buys her time to choose between suitors and allows her to support the alternative family she has formed with her elderly aunt and dog. Caro compensates for the fact that Miriam is a professional woman with an already established domestic situation. She enthusiastically directs her maternal feelings at Caro who, in turn, looks to her for comfort and protection. Seeing Miriam for the first time since his abduction, the “deeply loved” and “exquisitely cherished” spaniel struggles “to crawl,” like a baby, toward his mistress (*Trixy* 188-189). Miriam “stoop[s] to lift” Caro and holds “the little creature in her arms--its face against her own, its paws around her neck” (*Trixy* 189). She then becomes “absorbed in a series of efforts to induce the dog to swallow some milk” (*Trixy* 191). “It was not,” we are told, “until she had succeeded in these attempts [to feed Caro], and Caro had fallen asleep, that she recovered in some degree her own composure” (*Trixy* 191). In this moment of domestic intimacy between human and dog, Phelps idealizes Miriam’s single-minded (or what Tuan might call “overbearing”) ministrations to Caro’s needs and celebrates her “maternal” lack of self-concern.

Phelps further underscores the familial status of the novel's pets by repeatedly rendering them as child-like. Just as Caro crawls and coos like a baby, Trixy the Poodle resembles a child and relates to her human caretakers accordingly. On several occasions, Trixy's guardian, Dan Badger, characterizes her as a child in a dog's body. Addressing the audience of a theatrical performance, at which Trixy dons a "little white tulle-covered dress," Dan proclaims, "You see her now, ladies and gentlemen, a little dog in child's clothes; but you wouldn't understand mebbe as well as I do--that *really*, Trixy is a child in dog's clothes" (*Trixy* 73, 75). As part of the evening's repertoire, Trixy parades on two legs, curtsies, leap-frogs, rides a teeter-totter, somersaults, sings, dances, and plays with various toys. For the finale, she prances into Miriam Lauriat's lap, wrapping "both paws around the young lady's neck" (*Trixy* 76). In this pose, the pair radiates the exalted bearing of an interspecies *Pietà*. "The face of the dog could not be seen," Phelps continues, "and its child's dress and infantile attitude gave a strange impression, as if some new Madonna, gently owning her kinship to the subject races, had arisen to protect them" (*Trixy* 76-77). This scene of familial intimacy foreshadows the later integration of Dan and Trixy into Miriam's household. Following the traumatic episode at Galen laboratory, Philip Surbridge tells Miriam's aunt that her niece "has adopted the lad--and Trixy--into the family" (*Trixy* 230). Aunt Cornelia, aghast, exclaims, "She might give Trixy a high chair" (*Trixy* 231). Indeed, she might.

The domestic spaces in *Trixy* produce intimate bonds between humans and dogs akin to those of family members. As Sterling Hart remarks of his cousin's dog in *Though Life Us Do Part*, "I'm rather fond of Clyde myself. He's been in the family a good while" (54). While Phelps's canine protagonists retain their child-like qualities outside of

the home, their status as family pets is violable, unstable, and always under threat. The precariousness of the dogs' domestic position stems in large measure from an incongruity between narrative constructions of intimacy and private ownership. The tension between these two concepts inheres in the paradoxical notion of "pet ownership" in which dogs are at once family members and owned objects (that may be bought, sold, or stolen). Although the dogs in Phelps's antivivisection stories may *feel* as though they belong in a particular place or with a particular person, their lawful homes are not necessarily "where their hearts are." A passage describing the turmoil Trixy experiences while imprisoned at Galen suggests the complexities and contradictions associated with her position as a stolen pet. Phelps writes:

For two weeks the French poodle had been bewildered by the agony of homesickness. Torn from its master, from its home, from its occupation, it had fallen into lethargy that had dispossessed it of its natural reason. Now, after the last desperate and futile attempt to break or gnaw the rope, the baffled creature had cast itself upon the floor. In that moment of exhaustion, memory flooded its brain. With a bound the dog leaped to its feet. It uttered a short, piercing bark of triumph. Suddenly Trixy had found herself. (*Trixy* 162).

Trixy's "homesickness" indicates that she feels dispossessed of her proper place and of her occupation as a theatrical show-stopper. She is a lost dog in two senses: Dan has lost possession of her and she has lost a sense of herself and her place in the world. In the Galen laboratory, Trixy's feelings, faculties, and unique traits are irrelevant. She matters only as an object of scientific inquiry. Yet, sadly, she retains the old loyalties, desires,

and affections of a pet. She feels dispossessed because her owner has been dispossessed of her. Phelps's inconsistent use of pronouns (i.e., it, she) in the above passage and elsewhere in the novel reflect Trixy's paradoxical position as both a child-like individual and an object of property.

### **Dogs in Court: The Question of Ownership**

Dogs--as mobile, sentient, and self-directed property--have a tenuous relationship to their homes and human intimates. They can stray, run away, or get lost. Dognappers can coax them with treats, snatch them from yards, or intercept them during unaccompanied walks. Both Trixy and Caro temporarily lose their familial status when black-market dog bandits steal them from their homes. Ironically, Dan and Miriam's best recourse for restoring Trixy and Caro's family position is to invoke their legal status as property. For both humans, this strategy ultimately proves effective in regaining custody of their canine companions.

Much of the drama in *Trixy* derives from challenges to owners' legal claims to their dogs. A dispute over Caro, in fact, drives a bitter wedge between Olin Steele and Miriam Lauriat. When Dr. Steele finds Miriam cradling "his" missing dog (who turns out to be her lost pet, Caro) in her arms, he blurts out, "Why, that's my dog! Where did you get it? I've been all morning hunting for it" (*Trixy* 193). Dr. Steele recognizes the animal as his professional possession, the live instrument of "his own work" (*Trixy* 193). Miriam challenges his professional claim to Caro with the sentimental rejoinder: "The dog is mine. This is Caro. I lost him two years ago. I thought he was dead. I never cared for any other dog" (*Trixy* 198). Miriam's expressions of love for Caro prove less



effective, however, than her invocation of legal rights to him. Only after she produces Caro's collar and licensing tag does Dr. Steele finally capitulate.

Unlike the relatively quick resolution to the dispute over Caro, the battle for Trixy plays out in a very formal and public arena. In fact, the dispute culminates in a courtroom trial that pits little Dan Badger against the heavyweights of the Galen medical establishment. Again, Dan's recovery of his beloved companion hinges on the construction of the dog as private property. As attorney Philip Surbridge reminds the court in his closing statement, the case boils down to "respect [for] the sacredness of property" (*Trixy* 256). In order to bolster Dan's ownership claim, Philip Surbridge submits into evidence a torn blanket on which the boy had indelibly scrawled: "This belongs to Trixy Badger. She is a little white dog. She belongs to Daniel E. Badger, 123 Blind Alley. If lost, please return her" (*Trixy* 252). The blanket, recovered from an ash barrel outside of Galen's vivisection laboratory, sways the judge in Dan's favor. Following the revelation of the blanket, there is no longer any question in the judge's mind that "the dog was stolen" by Galen's canine banditti (*Trixy* 257). The blanket (an object evocative of both childhood and domestic space) not only implies Trixy's familial situation but also serves as evidence of Dan's prior possession of her. Like Caro's silver collar, Trixy's blanket indicates a specifically classed ownership. The modest blanket with its handwritten message suggests a working-class affiliation, and it raises the possibility of a non-sentimental attachment to the dog. Dan loves Trixy but also relies on her as a source of income. The judge's ruling, thus, protects an investment that is both sentimental *and* economic.

The disjuncture between intimacy and ownership is a driving force behind all of Phelps's stolen-pet plots. Loving and caring for a dog is not, as we have seen, enough to establish legal ownership. Human caretakers (as well as vivisectors) bear the burden of establishing a legal right to their dogs under the laws of private property. Although the court intervenes favorably on behalf of Dan and Trixy, Phelps critiques humane law enforcement as incommodious and insipid in certain circumstances. Difficulties arise for the human protagonists in both "Tammyshanty" (1908) and Phelps's canine-themed story, "Jonathan and David" (1904), when legal conceptions of ownership fail to coincide with interspecies bonds based on mutual intimacy and cohabitation. In "Tammyshanty," the dog license stands as a synecdoche for humane law and poses a significant obstacle for poor Jacket Tammany, who cannot afford the city's pet-licensing fee of two dollars. Through the generosity of a senior officer of an unnamed humane organization, Jacket eventually acquires a dog-owner's license at the city hall for his "mongrel" terrier, Tammyshanty. When a dognapper abducts Tammyshanty, Jacket naively assumes that the license will expedite his companion's recovery. Jacket scours the city with unflagging persistence, greeting countless strangers with his robotic query: "Say, mister, hev you seen a lost dog anywheres? A *licensed* dog?" ("Tammyshanty" 8). The law, Jacket eventually realizes, can bestow ownership but not necessarily protect it. Bolstered by "a mob" of humane citizens, Jacket finally recovers his dog from the vivisection laboratory. His humble interspecies "family" remains intact only through the generosity of a concerned public.

Phelps's short story, "Jonathan and David," also suggests a disjuncture between bonds of intimacy and legal ownership. Like Jacket Tammany in "Tammyshanty,"

Jonathan Perch is initially unable to purchase a license for his beloved dog due to a lack of financial resources. Although Jonathan cannot assert legal ownership of David the Collie without the two-dollar license, he nevertheless proves a scrupulous caretaker to his canine charge. Throughout the narrative, Phelps feminizes Jonathan's nurturing relationship to the dog with whom he dutifully shares "his fire, his food, his bed, his mind, his heart, his past, [and] his future" ("Jonathan and David" 365). In establishing the pair's familial bond, Phelps recounts how Jonathan "guarded [David] anxiously from every snow-storm, covered the shivering little body with his own ragged comforter a dozen times a night, brooded over him like a mother through distemper and teething, and patiently educated the growing dog with the passion and the opportunity of love and leisure" ("Jonathan and David" 365). At times, Jonathan even addresses David with the affectionately diminutizing salutation: "Why, you're nothing but a baby--you!" ("Jonathan and David" 365). Despite Jonathan's parental devotion, he knows that he is not David's "lawful owner" ("Jonathan and David" 370). "You're a tax-dodger...", he regretfully informs the dog, "It's my fault, David. I can't pay. I can't get together two dollars--not any way. I've only got seventy-six cents. Your taxes are most two months overdue. I've been so worried I can't sleep" ("Jonathan and David" 366). Jonathan fears that if he does not purchase the license soon, then the city dogcatcher will destroy David. Hoping to save David from this fate, Jonathan sells him to a conman for the price of a dog license. With no foreseeable way of recovering his dog, Jonathan lapses into a depression. As in "Tammyshanty," it is not the court that intervenes on Jonathan's behalf but the humane public that effects the eventual return of David to his loving home.

Without the economic advantages of the middle-class pet owner, Jacket Tammany and Jonathan Perch must rely on a sympathetic public to restore their interspecies families. Their predicament underscores the importance of humane citizens, whose random acts of charity hold the long arm of physiology at bay and compensate for the limited protections offered by the legal system. While “Tammyshanty” and “Jonathan and David” end with happy reunions between guardian and dog, both stories present interspecies relationships based solely on love and cohabitation as tenuous. The home in Phelps’s antivivisection fiction fails to sustain the family bond it produces between its human and canine inhabitants and, ultimately, proves an ineffective barrier against unwanted penetration from both authorized and illicit intruders.

### **Creating Exigency: “Yours May Be Such a Household”**

To underscore this point in her humane narratives, Phelps calls attention to the liminal sites between the home and the streets. In *Trixy*, for example, a dog-bandit abducts Trixy from the open area just outside of Dan’s tenement building. In “Tammyshanty,” the dognapper takes the even bolder step of breaching Jacket’s living quarters (presumably nabbing Tammyshanty through a broken window). Describing Jacket’s frantic search of his tenement, Phelps emphasizes the porosity of domestic space. Snow drifting through shattered windows suggests the utter violability of the home structure. Tammyshanty’s vulnerability to abduction is compounded by the fact that he spends the majority of his time sitting at broken windows, reposing on the tenement stoop, and patrolling the alleys surrounding his home. Windows, doorways, and stoops are conspicuous features of the urban architecture in all of Phelps’s antivivisection works.

Her canine characters and their human caretakers spend an inordinate amount of time gazing through, sitting at, and lingering near these liminal sites. The color illustrations in *Loveliness* suggest the importance of these spaces in Phelps's narrative landscape. With the exception of the story's frontispiece (a portrait of Loveliness), its illustrations all depict characters in liminal positions: Adah keeping vigil at her windowseat, a dognapper stealing Loveliness from his family's doorstep, and Adah and Loveliness skipping down a path in their yard (Figures III.2, III.3, III.4).

As we have seen, Phelps's canine abduction narratives complicate popular conceptions of the home as a safe, private, and impenetrable space for interspecies families. That dogs spend much of their time in the liminal territory between the home and the street (e.g., yards, stoops, doorsteps, gardens) makes them all the more vulnerable to abduction. The dog, whose familial status is produced by and sustained in the home, faces innumerable risks when removed from its domestic situation. Like slippery tentacles stretching out from the laboratory, mercenary dog-suppliers extend the reach of the scientific establishment into the city streets, the public parks, the yards, and even the homes of America's animal lovers. The ease with which dognappers violate domestic space feeds our horrifying sense that public and private spaces can never exist in total isolation from each other. By the 1908 publication of "Tammyshanty," Phelps's vivisection laboratory and private home have become one and the same. Although the home laboratory in "Tammyshanty" remains unsignified as a narrative space, it literalizes the anxiety that modern science knows no limits. In populating her stories with dog bandits and private vivisectioners, Phelps generates exigency for the antivivisection cause by suggesting that anyone's dog may be stolen from anywhere at any time. She decreases

the emotional distance between the reader and the anonymous laboratory animal with her subtle insistence that *this could be your dog*. Rather than exposing her readers to mass suffering in the laboratory, Phelps individualizes the laboratory dog and frames humane activism as a defense of family bonds and private property.

Although the laboratory remains an unsignified space in Phelps's narrative, it is nonetheless an ever-present and indispensable nerve-center of her antivivisection fiction. The specter of the laboratory always looms at the narrative outskirts, and its vast network of dognappers poses a constant threat to the sanctity of the interspecies home and to pet owners' property rights. The laboratory constitutes what Michel Foucault might have called a heterotopic site, or an "other" space that exists simultaneously inside and outside of society. Foucault described such sites as "outside of all places," even if locatable in physical reality (24). We might conceptualize Phelps's laboratory, then, as a kind of *disaffective heterotopia* in which scientists violate legal and social standards of behavior toward animals. As a negative mirror of the interspecies home, the laboratory threatens to destroy the values and meanings that owners invest in their pets. In Phelps's antivivisection fiction, the laboratory is an unseen space yet also "the greatest reserve of the imagination" (to borrow Foucault's language again) (27).

The terrifying ubiquity of the laboratory implies that every pet owner ought to support the antivivisection platform so that Miriam and Dan's story does not become *their* story. In a stirring recapitulation of Dan's ordeal, Philip Surbridge admonishes the dog-loving public: "[Dan's] tragic experience is one of hundreds that never reach the knowledge of the public, or the protection of the courts. The merciful dénouement of this dark tale does not often await the bereaved household that has mysteriously lost its dumb

and cherished friend. Yours may be such a household. Mine might be such bereavement. We, too, may be elected to share this fate into which the physiology of our day drags the animal and the human too” (*Trixy* 255). Philip Surbridge confronts his audience with the harrowing suggestion that all domestic pets are vulnerable to abduction, even those ensconced in warm, nurturing homes. Yet, the true rhetorical force of his monologue emanates from its portrayal of both the animal and the human as victims of modern physiology.

Framed in this way, vivisection’s most sinister corollary is what Surbridge calls the “bereaved household.” The private bourgeois home, which contemporary print media rhapsodized as the nucleus of emotional fulfillment and a refuge from the burdens of the outside world, is the unexpected casualty of physiological science run amok. In its idealized form, the American home fostered affective bonds, proper sociability, and kindly care for dependent beings.<sup>26</sup> As the locus of childrearing, it also supplied the principal context for instilling in future generations the domestic virtues of empathy, self-restraint, and fair play. In antivivisection fiction of the period, threats to the home are embodied differently by the mercenary dognapper and the vivisector. The dognapper, who ostensibly participates in the black-market animal trade out of economic necessity, breaches his victim’s home clandestinely and with utter anonymity. The vivisector, by contrast, enters domestic space through the legitimate avenues of middle-class sociality and with a range of possible motives. In *Trixy*, Dr. Olin Steele gains access to Miriam Lauriat’s home through culturally sanctioned protocols of courtship and with the intention of securing a suitable wife. While an attractive prospect by measure of his

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<sup>26</sup> As Katherine C. Grier explains in her history of pets in America, the “domestic ethic of kindness” was expected to encompass both the human and nonhuman dependents of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century household.

wealth and social position, Dr. Steele lacks the requisite personal qualities for intimate companionship and, consequently, poses a liability to any domestic dependents that might come under his purview. As Miriam Lauriat realizes, marriage to such a man likely would produce a home bereft of “tenderness,” “kindness,” “sympathy,” and “the daily shelter of a safe character” (*Trixy* 298).

Indeed, Dr. Steele’s scientific ethos contravenes the culture of compassionate self-restraint in which the turn-of-the-century family ideal was rooted. His professional mandate compels him to devalue or deny any phenomenon that defies explanation by the scientific method, and his quotidian practice of brutality blunts his emotional acuity. Dr. Steele even contends, for example, that maternal affection does not exist because he is unable to observe it in the brain cells of vivisected dogs (*Trixy* 54). This finding inspires him to undertake a follow-up investigation into the existence of love. For two months, Dr. Steele probes the brains of laboratory animals in an effort to collect material evidence of love. But love, we are told, was too evasive: “It was not to be cut out by a scalpel or grasped by pincers; and Dr. Steele therefore [wrote] a paper, learnedly contending that love was only a Greek hypothesis, a psychic disease, the dream of the past, the illusion of the present, and did not exist” (*Trixy* 55). Dr. Steele’s thesis on love’s nonexistence, for which he is awarded the highest degree in physiological science, renders him inadmissible to the affective realm of domestic life. He, thus, constitutes an antagonist on multiple narrative registers, serving as the embodiment of the novel’s most reviled values, the foil to its dog-loving characters, and the chief impediment to its romance plot between Miriam Lauriat and Philip Surbridge.



It is through this interplay of the romantic drama and the stolen-pet plot that Phelps's narrative achieves its most unsettling tensions and satisfying resolutions. The antivivisection novel insists--by means extrinsic to journalism, polemic, and other generic forms--that readers envisage the modern physiologist in a variety of social contexts and relationships. The figure of the vivisector-as-suitor compels readers to project into the sanctified realm of nurturance, intimacy, and tender care the habitual violence of the physiology laboratory. Imagine, the narrative exhorts us, admitting this fellow into your boudoir! In conveying her antivivisection message as romance fiction, Phelps suggests the broad horizons of moral decay engendered by the physiologist in American society. Ultimately, it is in the *familiar* roles of lover, husband, father, and friend that the vivisector threatens to extend his deleterious social influence. For Miriam Lauriat, whose independent income, discerning judgment, and secure living arrangements permit her to defer marriage or forsake it altogether, the vivisector proves only a temporary vexation. But even the redoubtable heroine of *Trixy* succumbs briefly to the vivisector's wiles, leading us to wonder what might become of a woman with meager resources and clouded judgment. As Miriam herself predicts, such a person would sacrifice an essential part of her gendered identity, as no "true woman" could ever "take a vivisector's hand" (*Trixy* 274). Although *Trixy* concludes with a scene of domestic tranquility, the novel augurs only darkness and disquietude for the bereaved family of the vivisector.

*Trixy* is as much about the cruelty that humans inflict on dogs as it is about the suffering that human beings impose on themselves. The novel's interlocking plots beg the question: What type of *humans* should we--Phelps's "intelligent and kind-hearted"

readers--strive to be? The story's haunting displacement of the vivisector and his canine victims into the domestic arena encourages readers to define and defend the structuring values of their most intimate spaces and relationships. In the context of Phelps's literature, dogs make compelling figures because they mediate the range of emotional and physical geographies that underpin American social life. Reduced to a grotesque spectacle, the dog of the antivivisection polemic bears scant resemblance to its former self and inspires revulsion as much as sympathy. To Phelps's mind, society was best-served when canine bodies remained intact both in the laboratory and in literature.

In *Dog Love*, a cultural study of human-canine relationships in the United States, literary scholar Marjorie Garber notes that humane organizations exist in order to moderate our species' staggering propensity for inflicting pain on the weak. Yet, she reflects, "'Humane societies' ... evoke in their very titles the good qualities of *human beings*: kindness, mercy, compassion" (Garber 15). To be *human* is to exist in a natural state that encompasses a full range of flaws and brutalities. To be *humane*, however, is to adhere to a socially prescribed standard of compassion. In defining the cultural parameters of humaneness, Phelps's narratives stayed well within the bounds of popular fiction and, therefore, appealed to a broader segment of the reading public than did other humane discursive forms. Writing against the conventions of the antivivisection *exposé*, Phelps upheld reader-sensitivity as a hallmark of humaneness rather than an obstacle to it. It would seem that the antivivisection novel, as she conceived it, is intended not so much to accommodate gentle readers as to create them.



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**Figure III.1.** *Miriam Lauriat comforts Dan Badger, while Caro reposes in a bassinette at her feet and Philip Surbridge gazes out the window, frontispiece.* Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. *Trixy*. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904. Print.



**Figure III.2.** *Adah keeps vigil at her windowseat, illustration.* Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. *Loveliness*. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899. Print.



**Figure III.3.** *A dognapper abducts Loveliness from his family's doorstep, while two relatively disenfranchised members of the community (a female servant and a child of color) exchange words in the background, illustration. Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. Loveliness. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899. Print.*



**Figure III.4.** *Adah and Loveliness skip down a path in their yard, illustration.* Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. *Loveliness*. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899. Print.

## Chapter IV

### Backyard Ornithology: A Natural History of Domestic Life

This is how parrots are: not only are they deeply attached to their flocks, they're homebodies.  
Joanna Burger, *The Parrot Who Owns Me* (2001)

#### Putting the Birds Back in the Trees

Throughout the summer of 1897, the members of the children's bird club of Fairfield, Connecticut congregated on the sprawling estate of author Mabel Osgood Wright. The 38-year-old New Yorker had summered for as long as she could remember at Waldstein, her family's country home in the prosperous coastal community on Long Island Sound.<sup>27</sup> As a girl exploring the gardens, meadows, and groves surrounding Waldstein, Wright had developed the lifelong fascination that would inspire her adult moniker: The Bird Lady. Eager to impart her love of birds to the next generation of Fairfielders, Wright had converted her hereditary property into a makeshift nature classroom where children could encounter local wildlife. To familiarize the Fairfield birders with Connecticut's avifauna, she taught them to identify various species on her estate. Unleashed on the grounds, the children scanned trees, parted leaves, and peered into underbrush in pursuit of birdlife. Despite the obvious pleasures of romping through the woods in the summer sunshine, there was a morbid aspect to these ornithological treasure hunts. When the children spotted a bird perched on a branch, they encountered it

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<sup>27</sup> Mabel Osgood Wright's father, Reverend Samuel Osgood, built the family estate in Fairfield in 1850 and initially dubbed it *Waldstein*. Anti-German sentiment caused the family to rename the property *Mosswood* during World War I. The storied history of Waldstein is well-preserved at the Birdcraft Museum of the Connecticut Audubon Society in Fairfield, though the estate itself is now Mosswood Condominiums.

not as a blinking, breathing animal but rather as a stiff, impassive mount. These birds were *dead*.<sup>28</sup>

On loan from Wright's mentor, Dr. Frank Chapman of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the flock at Waldstein had been shot, skinned, stuffed, and mounted for display. It surely struck some members of the party as inauthentic to find a warbler lodged in the crotch of a tree, forever frozen in midflight. But, unlike live birds, the mounts never frustrated youthful attention spans by flying away or failing to appear. Gingerly arranged in lifelike poses, they evoked the living article while yielding unflinchingly to curious hands. Although Wright's brand of nature education required neither expensive optics nor undue patience, it combined key components of both nineteenth-century recreational birdwatching and the emerging science of ornithology.

As the children of the Fairfield bird club studied and compared the mounted specimens, they engaged in a form of dramatic play that mimicked the practices of museum-based, or "systematic," ornithologists. To the systematic ornithologist, bird identification was largely a matter of naming, comparing, and classifying specimens by species and subspecies. Counting among their ranks many of the nation's first university-trained bird experts, this group of burgeoning professionals fueled a vast network of hunters, taxidermists, dealers, and traders, who supplied skins and mounts for museum study and exhibition. As part of her own wildlife education, Wright had undertaken a course in systematic ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History.<sup>29</sup> This museum stint clearly informed the Fairfield club's curriculum, particularly its emphasis

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<sup>28</sup> For more information on the exploits of the Fairfield bird club and Wright's nature-education efforts, see the Mabel Osgood Wright and Regina Glover Collections of the Connecticut Audubon Society/Birdcraft Museum in Fairfield, CT.

<sup>29</sup> It was here that she befriended Dr. Chapman, owner of the mounts installed in the trees at Waldstein.



on the close inspection and classification of dead specimens. Despite Wright's systematic training, however, preservationist sentiment guided her work as both a club mentor and a nature writer. This preoccupation with *birdlife*, which placed Wright beyond the pale of the museum orthodoxy, would captivate not only the Fairfield children but also throngs of aspiring naturalists across the continent. Though contrived and (some might argue) grotesque, the "birdwatching" excursions around Waldstein provided an easy segue into discussions about live birds and their protection. The club's unconventional form of field study enabled Wright to recontextualize inert specimens in nature and to impart the basics of live-animal observation to birding neophytes. By putting Chapman's dead flock back in the trees, so to speak, Wright also conveyed an implicit argument about the appropriate place of birds and bird study to an impressionable group of wildlife enthusiasts.

To encourage the children's interest in animate nature, Wright read aloud from popular ornithological books, including her own *Citizen Bird: Scenes from Bird-Life in Plain English for Beginners* (1897), which she co-wrote with famed systematist Elliott Coues.<sup>30</sup> As part of a growing literary cohort, which included authors Florence A. Merriam, Neltje Blanchan, and Olive Thorne Miller, Wright brought ornithological science to life in broadly accessible narratives about Bird People and their customs. Frequently aimed at children and their caregivers, these works espoused an ethic of restraint by discouraging the juvenile pastimes of egg-collecting and target-shooting. To underscore her bird friendly message to the Fairfield club, Wright excerpted from books

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<sup>30</sup> Given Elliott Coues' reputation as a skin-collector, it is somewhat surprising that Wright agreed to the literary collaboration. Her private letters, however, suggest that she felt ambivalent about killing birds in the name of science and held her co-author in high regard for his extensive ornithological knowledge (*Autograph Book* Mabel Osgood Wright Collection, Fairfield).

that encouraged their readers to respect the avian members of society. No doubt the flock of bird corpses in the trees overhead supplied an ironic backdrop for these humane teachings. Still, Wright encouraged her charges to sympathize and even empathize with birds as fellow beings. The narratives, for their part, fostered feelings of identification in readers by portraying birds as vibrant creatures with coherent interior lives and humanlike sociality. The antitheses of defunct museum specimens, these literary birds were husbands, wives, children, and neighbors whose social imperatives reinforced genteel, Anglo-American ideals. Although the majority of museum scientists derided this brand of nature education as the facile dilettantism of society ladies, Wright maintained that meaningful ornithological study was as much a matter of identifying dead birds as it was identifying *with* live ones.

Mabel Osgood Wright's summer bird club provides a convenient launch pad for this chapter because it speaks to the increasing democratization of ornithological study in turn-of-the-century North America. Decades before Wright authored her popular bird guide "in plain English for Beginners," ornithology revolved around the acquisition and classification of skins by museum specialists and wealthy private collectors. The objective of this "shotgun ornithology," as historian Scott Weidensaul has dubbed it, was to document the diversity of avian forms through the creation of a comprehensive archive of North American birds. In the race for specimens, a prolific collector might reasonably compile several thousand skins over the course of a career. Competing for ever larger and more diverse repositories, ornithologists and their field agents stalked rare and exotic species into the wildest reaches of the continent. Upon returning to their museums,

universities, and personal treasuries, these intrepid birders preserved, compared, and catalogued each unit of ornithological data in a precise taxonomic system. Not surprisingly, most recreational birders struggled to keep pace with the migratory lifestyle and encyclopedic knowledge of the collector crowd. The impracticability of systematic collecting, in fact, did much to individuate “serious” ornithologists from untrained enthusiasts.

Even as bird study assumed an air of expert exclusivity in the nineteenth century, middle-class Americans readily consumed ornithological knowledge from diverse sources and in multiple contexts. Rising literacy rates, technological advancements in publishing, and decreased unit costs for printed matter set the groundwork for an explosion of popular nature literature in the 1800s. The nation’s expanding urban population, which had increased fivefold between 1860 and 1900, integrated avian information from these new print sources with knowledge gleaned from museum visits and public lectures. Well-healed urbanites also made pastoral sojourns to seasonal destinations, like Fairfield, for wild bird encounters. Literary engagement with avian characters, museum study of stuffed specimens, and field observation of local species all shaped public perceptions of birdlife in nineteenth-century America.

This chapter serves as an investigation into Americans’ shifting beliefs about the proper place of birds and bird study in modern life. It concerns, particularly, the influence of early field guides on both the domestication of ornithological labor and the rise of the bird-protection movement. Although this discussion departs from the previous chapters in its focus on “wildlife” rather than “working animals” or “domestic pets,” it does so partly to highlight the fluidity of such categories as context-contingent human

constructs. By respatializing wildlife study, in fact, the “backyard-ornithology” genre consolidated a reading public that viewed birds as both scientific taxa and feathered citizens worthy of legal protection. Whereas the ornithological establishment endorsed the mass slaughter of birds in the name of scientific advancement, the nation’s growing population of backyard birdwatchers preferred its objects of study to remain in the trees or on wing. Although Wright and her peers defended museum collections for their taxonomic and pedagogic utility, they turned their attention to “the *living bird* in his love-songs, his house-building, his haunts, and his migrations” (original emphasis) (*Birdcraft* xvii). They exhorted aspiring naturalists to do the same and to express their affinity for birds by joining the effort to protect them from needless destruction.

Many authors cast American women in the mollifying social role of tempering male aggression. Who better to persuade men to retire their shotguns and boys to hang up their slingshots, preservationists reasoned, than trusted wives and mothers? Preservationist writers appealed to women not merely as matriarchs but also as consumers. In the late 1800s, the fashion capitals of Paris, London, and New York City pronounced feathered hats the *dernier cri* for style mavens in the United States and Europe. The resulting plume boom in ladies’ millinery prompted catastrophic declines in indigenous bird populations, especially among the tragically beautiful heron family.<sup>31</sup> In an effort to stymie the feather trade and to promote “humane” fashion, bird-book authors attempted to redefine a spray of aigrettes on a lady’s hat as a mark of unwomanly cruelty rather than of good taste. Women, they argued, had more to gain from studying birds than from wearing them (Figure IV.1). Since ornithological societies and wildlife

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<sup>31</sup> Robin W. Doughty’s *Feather Fashion and Bird Preservation* (1975), Jennifer Price’s *Flight Maps* (1999), and Sarah Abrevaya Stein’s *Plumes* (2008) provide compelling histories of the late-century plume boom.

surveys rarely countenanced female participation, authors urged women to pursue birding adventures in local settings. Popular field guides even painted backyard birdwatching as a wholesome and biologically appropriate activity for woman, who could study the mating, nesting, and childrearing behaviors of local birds without unraveling her own domestic life in the process. Unlike the systematic tomes devoted to scrupulous delineations of species and subspecies, literary ornithology encouraged readers with varying degrees of formal training to identify with common birds in quotidian spaces. This new birding genre adapted systematic principles to spaces and methodologies that were widely accessible to women naturalists, who, in turn, pushed live birds and their protection to the forefront of the ornithological enterprise.

### **Identifying Birds**

Before Anglo-American readers encountered the sympathetic Bird People of *fin de siècle* preservationist literature, they marveled at the diversity of species documented in the natural histories and identification manuals of scientific ornithologists. As ornithology emerged as a specialized branch of natural history in the middle of the nineteenth century, its practitioners set out to document through technical description and illustration variations in bird forms across geographical regions. Two early touchstones in the field of systematics were Elliott Coues' *Key to North American Birds* (1872) and Spencer Fullerton Baird, Thomas Mayo Brewer, and Robert Ridgway's *A History of North American Birds* (1874). Taken together, these manuals provided a comprehensive description of the anatomy, distribution, and classification of the continent's birds as well as advice for collectors on how to prepare and store specimens. Although amateur

English naturalists, such as John White, John Lawson, and Mark Catesby, had issued previous descriptions of birdlife in the so-called New World, American scientists of the mid-nineteenth century claimed the continent's avifauna as their professional province and dismissed the contributions of untrained dabblers. To solidify its expert status, the new birding establishment procured institutional sponsorships, built collegial networks, and developed a specialized nomenclature. Along the way, professional ornithologists defined "serious" bird study as a taxonomic pursuit intended to bring order to the chaos of the natural world.

At the center of the professional ornithologist's classifying enterprise was skin-collecting. The practice of killing and collecting birds for close, methodical analysis was hardly new by the mid-nineteenth century. Decades earlier, a small, but dogged, group of artists and amateur naturalists had laid the groundwork for the consolidation of specimen study into an organized, academic endeavor. Among this coterie of talented illustrators was future birding luminary Alexander Wilson (1766-1813), who freely shot wild birds in the making of his seminal work, *American Ornithology*. Understandably, Wilson found defunct subjects far easier to illustrate than skittish live ones. The legendary John James Audubon (1785-1851), whose name had become synonymous with bird protection by the early-twentieth century, also showed no qualms about killing the subjects of his meticulous, lifelike paintings. Yet, the ornithological carnage attributable to the museum set undoubtedly eclipsed that of Wilson, Audubon, and the hunter-illustrator crowd. Lacking the powerful optics and portable reference guides of today's birdwatchers, early ornithologists struggled to sort through the impossible diversity of species and subspecies encountered in the wild. By amassing skin collections, however, nineteenth-century

scientists were able to examine, compare, and describe specimens in far greater detail than the average birdwatcher crouched in the bush.

Since systematic ornithologists predicated their authority on an encyclopedic knowledge of skins, they assumed *carte blanche* to kill birds “everywhere, at all times” (*Key* 10). Wright’s *Citizen Bird* coauthor, Elliott Coues, who deplored the killing of birds for non-scientific purposes, had no qualms about coaching aspiring birders to adopt the double-barreled shotgun as their “main reliance” in species identification and to regard “fifty birds shot” as a “good day’s work” (1, 15). He even considered unwanted or duplicate species fair game, as they could be traded on the skin market for more desirable specimens. Because skins served as ornithological currency with value in use and exchange, scientists had good reason to acquire as many birds as possible.<sup>32</sup> Many systematic ornithologists also saw fit to distance themselves from “sentimental” birdwatchers, who quailed at the thought of bird death. Charles B. Cory, an intrepid collector and founding member of the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU), made his feelings plain when he declined an invitation to lecture before a bird-preservation society. “I do not protect birds,” he retorted to the dumbfounded group, “I kill them” (qtd. in Moss 78). Indeed, Cory’s personal collection topped out at 19,000 specimens. While an inherited fortune supported Cory’s ornithological globetrotting, heavy research loads forced most salaried scientists to enlist proxies in the field to procure rare or distant specimens. Spencer Fullerton Baird (1823-1887), the first curator of the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., built one

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<sup>32</sup> In his landmark *Key to North American Birds* (1872), Coues remarked: “Birdskins are capital; capital unemployed may be useless, but can never be worthless. Birdskins are a medium of exchange among ornithologists the world over; they represent value,—money value and scientific value. If you have more of one kind than you can use, exchange with someone for species you lack; both parties to the transaction are equally benefitted” (12-13).

of the most prodigious skin collections in the world by tapping his contacts in the Army Medical Corps. With formal training in biology and natural history, many Corps members proved to be eager and effective collaborators in the advancement of ornithological knowledge. Through their participation in military expeditions and federal surveys, they also regularly ventured into regions considered too perilous and remote for civilian birders. As collections at the Smithsonian and other research centers bulged, curators accumulated storehouses of ornithological data and painstakingly catalogued each skin in a library-like system of drawers. Through their efforts, the musty museum supplanted the airy field as the center of ornithological knowledge-production in the United States.

While museums housed a growing archive of ornithological material, professional societies provided an invigorating space for experts to define and debate the pressing bird-related questions of the day. In 1873, the Nuttall Ornithological Club of Cambridge, Massachusetts became the first organization in North America devoted to the scientific study of birds. Named for Harvard naturalist Thomas Nuttall, the Club launched numerous careers, including that of founder William Brewster, into the scientific stratosphere. Between 1876 and 1883, the organization published the continent's first ornithology journal, the *Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club*. At the outset, the Club appealed to a mixed company of scientists, taxidermists, natural-history dealers, and students from the nearby Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard College. It did not, however, include any women. Club policy barred women's participation until well into the 1970s. Despite the initial excitement generated by the Nuttall group, the highly localized, all-male society struggled to build a stable base. By the late 1870s, attendance



at weekly gatherings had dropped. The once-buzzing meetings, which had attracted some of the region's most promising young birders, now limped along with barely enough men for a quorum. As the Club's charter members graduated from the local university and moved on to pursue professional opportunities across the country, Brewster and fellow Nuttall dignitaries, J.A. Allen and Elliott Coues, began to wonder if a national organization might better serve the needs of the ornithological community.

Brewster, Allen, and Coues' call for a national society resulted in the formation of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) in September of 1883. The three-day inaugural meeting of the AOU, which took place at the Natural History Museum in New York, attracted an eminent crowd of American and Canadian ornithologists. In establishing a constitution and bylaws, attendees of the invitation-only event used the quarter-century-old British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) as a model. To foster an aura of prestige, the AOU founders instituted strict selection criteria and a hierarchical membership structure. A key order of business in these early days was the creation of a scholarly publication for the dissemination of benchmark ornithological research. Brewster facilitated this task by transferring proprietorship of the Nuttall Club's *Bulletin* to the AOU. Renamed *The Auk* (in deference to the BOU's *The Ibis*), the journal began circulating in 1884 under the direction of former *Bulletin* editor, J.A. Allen. With a professional society and scholarly publication in place, American ornithologists had solidified their professional identity and institutionalized the scientific standards that underpinned their expert status.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For detailed histories of the Nuttall Ornithological Club and the American Ornithologists' Union, see Mark V. Barrow's *A Passion for Birds* (1998) and Scott Weidensaul's *Of a Feather* (2007).

## **Florence Merriam's Field Guide to Common Birds**

The primary purpose of the AOU in these early years was to advance ornithology as both a scientific enterprise and a formal profession. It is difficult to imagine, then, that these dyed-in-the-wool systematists would countenance a *literary* birder within their midst. But in 1885 the organization bestowed an associate membership on a backyard ornithologist of the first order. This new member raised eyebrows for a number of reasons. For starters, Florence A. Merriam (1863-1948) was the first woman elected to the exclusive society.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the Nuttall Club, which would prohibit female membership for nearly a century, the AOU admitted Merriam two years after its inception.<sup>35</sup> Although Merriam possessed the technical skills of a systematist, she downplayed the importance of skin study and disavowed the intellectual territorialism of her profession. Even as her commitment to an inclusive authorial voice and to live-bird observation inflamed conservative birders, Merriam made her mark as the author of a landmark ornithological corpus, the founder of the Smith College and District of Columbia Audubon Societies, and the recipient of the AOU's Brewster Medal for the best book on birds of the Western Hemisphere. Through her novel approach to wildlife study, Merriam would help spark widespread interest in live-bird observation and inspire a new mode of ornithological writing aimed at "homebound" naturalists. A pivotal figure in the rise of backyard ornithology and the bird-protection movement, Merriam forged an

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<sup>34</sup> After her marriage to Vernon Bailey on December 16, 1899, Florence Augusta Merriam became known as Florence Merriam Bailey.

<sup>35</sup> C. Hart Merriam, who was a charter member of the AOU and the first head of the U.S. Biological Survey, nominated his sister for membership in the AOU. Bailey's membership was approved at the "associate" level in 1885. In 1929, Bailey became the first woman elected to the AOU's highest rank of "fellow."

alternative path through the scientific field that circumvented the conservative (and, at times, hostile) realm of systematics.

At once an insider and an outsider to the birding establishment, Merriam crafted a professional identity that melded the techniques of the skin collector and the birdwatcher. Even as a young girl, she had honed her identification skills while straddling the worlds of museum science and backyard observation. Born into a prominent New York family, she (like birding contemporary Mabel Osgood Wright) developed a fascination with wildlife during rural ambles around her fair-weather home in the country. From an early age, Merriam scrambled to keep pace with her older brother, Clinton “Hart” Merriam. Hart, who would go on to become a respected ornithologist and charter member of the AOU, devoted his leisure time to shooting local birds, which he painstakingly preserved with arsenic powder. The Merriams spared no expense in the cultivation of their son’s talents. When Hart’s skin collection exceeded the capacity of the family domicile, Clinton Levi Merriam erected a three-story museum to display his son’s handiwork. Like Hart, young Florence learned to locate birds in the woods and to classify skins based on anatomical differences. With no museum of her own, however, Florence claimed the communal space of the woods as her principal workspace. Here, she taught herself to identify birds with an opera-glass rather than a shotgun in hand. Leaving Hart to pore over bone, feather, and skin in his private museum, Florence sought to understand living birds in their natural habitat.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout her career, Florence Merriam would continue to practice and promote the outdoor observation of local birds. While Hart spent his early adulthood hunting new

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<sup>36</sup> Florence Merriam’s biographer, Harriet Kofalk, provides a rich account of Florence and Hart’s childhood birding exploits in *No Woman Tenderfoot* (1989).

species throughout the American West, Florence devoted herself to observing common birds in the open air and to keeping meticulous field notes. As a student at the recently opened Smith College from 1882 to 1886, she organized birding excursions in and around Northampton for throngs of her classmates. So popular were the “bird walks” at Smith (which offered no course in ornithological science at the time) that Merriam led several groups of students into the field every week and resolved to form a birding society on campus. In these extracurricular endeavors, she drew inspiration from *Forest and Stream* editor George Bird Grinnell (1849-1938). A vociferous conservationist, Grinnell had formed the Audubon Society in February of 1886 in response to the overhunting of plume-bearing species by American milliners. In letters from this period, Merriam expresses disdain for the cruelly festooned hats she encountered daily in the corridors at Smith. Hoping to curtail this appalling trend, she constituted a charter branch of Grinnell’s organization on campus and rallied her classmates to become members: “Come on, girls! Come out under the sun-filled heavens and open your soul to the song of the Lark” (“How to Conduct Field Classes” 83). Within three months, roughly half of the student body had taken part in a bird walk and a third had joined the Smith College Audubon Society. Through Merriam’s efforts, Northampton had become a bona fide birdwatching hub.

Overwhelmed by her (unofficial) job as resident ornithologist, Merriam searched for a practical field guide to which she could refer her bird-enthralled classmates. She soon discovered, however, that no such book existed. Hoping to fill this lacuna in the ornithological literature, she began revising her extensive field notes with an eye to publication. Over the next three years, Merriam would publish several articles on

common birds in ornithological magazines and local newspapers. Her writings from this period include a series of essays entitled “Hints for Audubon Workers: Fifty Birds and How to Know Them,” which ran in Grinnell’s *Audubon Magazine*.<sup>37</sup> Buoyed by the success of the Audubon articles, she set out to write a book that would “enable not only young observers but also laymen to know the common birds they see about them” (*Opera-Glass* vi). In 1889 she completed what was, for all intents and purposes, the first ornithological field guide, *Birds through an Opera-Glass*. Part instructional manual and part identification guide, the pocket-sized book contained helpful hints for observers, narrative descriptions of seventy common birds, and a handful of black-and-white illustrations. The publication of this groundbreaking text not only sparked widespread interest in ornithological literature but also helped raise awareness about the plight of plume birds in the age of feathered fashion.

Among the innovative features of *Birds through an Opera-Glass* was its emphasis on convenience. At a time when most Americans associated ornithology with prolonged travel, firearm proficiency, and taxonomic expertise, Merriam insisted that an old sunhat and a pocket notebook qualified just about anybody to study birds (*Opera-Glass* ix). She deemphasized skin collecting and encouraged readers to pursue ornithological adventures in the parks, yards, and gardens of their own communities. Even a public bench could suffice as a “backyard” observatory for urban ornithologists. “By going among the birds,” Merriam explained, “watching them closely, comparing them carefully, and writing down, while in the field, all the characteristics of every new bird seen,—its locality, size, color, details of marking, song, food, flight, eggs, nest, and habits,—you

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<sup>37</sup> *Audubon Magazine*, which was an organ of Grinnell’s Audubon Society, was a precursor to the long-running publication *Bird-Lore*.

will come easily and naturally to know the birds that are living about you” (*Opera-Glass* 3). With a conscious bent toward local species, Merriam’s birding-made-easy approach provided a feasible alternative to serial collecting. It also proved that meaningful ornithological knowledge could emerge from live-bird studies conducted outside of a museum setting. This revelation held major implications for women birders, who rarely gained *entrée* into the established ornithological institutions of the day. The success of *Birds through an Opera-Glass* inspired a bevy of guides by other authors, such as Mabel Osgood Wright, Neltje Blanchan, and Olive Thorne Miller, who echoed Merriam’s call to get to know the local birds.

### **Ornithology as Woman’s Work**

While plenty of men produced and consumed popular bird books in the nineteenth century, backyard-ornithology narratives were widely characterized as women’s literature.<sup>38</sup> Contemporary critics of the genre invoked gender as a means of discrediting or casting aspersion on what seemed to them a softer-than-fluff science. Publishers, who profited from middle-class women’s growing consumption of nature books, were all too eager to advertise literary ornithology as ladies’ fare. In truth, both proponents and detractors of the genre overstated the extent to which the reading practices of nineteenth-century Americans split along sex lines. What can be said of the backyard field guide is that it defined its own gender inclusiveness and accessibility against the perceived exclusiveness and opacity of systematic literature. “I would explain to the ladies at the outset,” Merriam wrote in the preface to *Birds through an Opera-Glass*, “that this little

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<sup>38</sup> James Newton Baskett, A. Radclyffe Dugmore, Ernest Harold Baynes, and Thornton W. Burgess are among the many men who authored successful backyard-ornithology books in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

book is no real lion, and that they have nothing to fear. It is not an ornithological treatise. It has not even the lion's roar of technical terms and description to warn them of raging dullness [*sic*], but is 'a very gentle beast, and of a good conscience'" (v). Author Neltje Blanchan followed Merriam's lead in the preface to her bestselling guide, *Bird Neighbors* (1897):

The plan of this book is not a scientific one, if the term scientific is understood to mean technical and anatomical. The purpose of the writer is to give, in a popular and accessible form, knowledge which is accurate and reliable about the life of our common birds. This knowledge has not been collected from the stuffed carcasses of birds in museums, but gleaned afield. (vii)

There is little doubt that the systematic realm, which presupposed formal taxonomic training, financial independence, and unrestricted mobility, offered limited opportunities to certain populations of birders. In addition to the overt bias of many ornithological institutions, the wider culture of collecting served to marginalize women. Few rank-and-file birders of either sex could travel to uncharted regions on a whim or pay exorbitant fees to field agents for the procurement of new skins. Many women, furthermore, had to reconcile bird study with the innumerable domestic tasks they performed each day. Even Merriam, an ornithological celebrity of independent means, deplored "plain sewing" as the nagging vexation in her otherwise engrossing hours of birdwatching (Kofalk 55).

Attuned to the logistical challenges faced by women in the field, authors of backyard ornithology reframed bird study within a local context and insisted that a bird need not be rare to be of ornithological interest. Their favorable disposition toward

common birds ran counter to the prevailing collector mindset, which privileged exotic species and exalted the act of discovery. By shifting attention to common species, backyard birders carried ornithology out of the hinterlands and into the well-trodden spaces of the everyday. In *Bird Neighbors*, for example, author Neltje Blanchan finds inspiration in the familiar creatures that “nest in our gardens or under the very eaves of our houses; that haunt our wood-piles; keep our fruit-trees free from slugs; waken us with their songs, and enliven our walks along roadside and through the woods” (vii). Mabel Osgood Wright counsels readers of her popular field guide, *Birdcraft* (1895), to “begin near at home,” venturing only so far as comfort and practicality dictate (15). “Do not go further than where you may walk without ceremony or fuss,” she advises, “Never make a laborious tour of the bird-quest, or think that you must live in a tent remote from people, in order to name the majority of our every-day birds” (*Birdcraft* 15). The ornithological field guide, as Wright and her ilk envisaged it, constituted “a record of happy field days about home” (*Birdcraft* Dedication). While collectors pitched tents in remote wilds, this new class of birder lured specimens to the yard with dinner crumbs, identified birdsongs through open windows, and studied courtship displays over the hedgerow. To their minds, there was no shortage of ornithological work to be done close to home among everyday birds (Figure IV. 2).

To overcome problems of geographical specificity, backyard ornithologists featured abundant, widely dispersed birds, such as the American Robin, the House Wren, and the Red-winged Blackbird, in their writings. As ornithologists of the nineteenth century and today readily acknowledge, any neat distinction between native and exotic species becomes fuzzy in light of seasonal migrations, uneven distributions, and the



birder's unique vantage point. In his study of common species of the East Coast, A. Radclyffe Dugmore reminds readers that *all* birds are exotic until they are known. "Even birds as conspicuous as the Baltimore oriole, the cardinal, or the scarlet tanager," he suggests, "are as remote as birds of paradise to many people" (Dugmore 7). Although early field-guide authors hailed disproportionately from the northeastern United States, they freely extrapolated their experiences onto other regions of the continent. Blanchan, who studied the diverse birdlife in New York City's Central Park, maintains that a comparable boon "could be discovered in the same sized territory anywhere" (*Bird Neighbors* vii). Olive Thorne Miller defends the broad applicability of her regional study, *With the Birds in Maine*, as follows: "Although the studies chronicled in this book, with one or two exceptions, were made in Maine during ten summers, part or all of which I have spent there, it should be understood that the birds described are not confined to the Pine Tree State nor even to New England. They are for the most part common to the Eastern and Middle States" (Preface). In the interest of selling copies, authors and publishers frequently overstated their texts' portability and usefulness in field identification. In reality, these works provided only modest aid to beginning birdwatchers. Unlike the quick-reference books of today, early guides featured lengthy narrative descriptions that proved impracticable in the field. By respatializing bird study and highlighting everyday species, however, they created the conditions of possibility for the widespread inclusion of birders working outside of institutional settings.

Just as backyard birdwatchers recast ornithological fieldwork as neighborhood exploration, they also portrayed laboratory study as domestic improvisation. For systematic ornithologists, close visual and tactile encounters with birds generally took

place in universities or natural history museums. In these institutional settings, scientists meticulously dissected and juxtaposed avian bodies for the sake of classification. Birds would arrive on site dead and disappear into storage drawers in various states of disarticulation. Backyard ornithologists also orchestrated up-close encounters with birds. In most cases, they brought birds into their homes for the purpose of observing and interacting with them at close range. The live specimens remained in captivity for a finite period (usually a season) before being released into nature.

A close friend and birdwatching companion of Florence Merriam named Olive Thorne Miller (1831-1918) published a detailed account of her domestic laboratory in 1885.<sup>39</sup> Derived largely from field notes and relayed in an engaging anecdotal style, Miller's *Bird-Ways* offers narrative descriptions (but no visual images) of several common birds of the Northeast. Targeting adult readers with varying degrees of ornithological knowledge, the book focuses on the behavior, songs, and physical traits of wild birds encountered near the Miller residence in Brooklyn, New York. Publisher Houghton, Mifflin and Company advertised *Bird-Ways* as an "Out-Door" nature book (a literary niche the firm was eager to occupy).<sup>40</sup> Yet, it was the sections of the narrative that dealt with Miller's *indoor* studies in her famous "bird-room" that captured readers' attention. The bird-room was a private ornithological laboratory that Miller created in the home she shared with her husband and four children. A fond reminiscence of this in-home aviary appears in Miller's obituary, which Florence Merriam published in the April 1919 issue of *The Auk*: "Of the bird-room described so interestingly in 'Bird Ways' it is

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<sup>39</sup> Olive Thorne Miller was the *nom de plume* of Harriet Mann Miller.

<sup>40</sup> In "Before Nature Writing: Houghton, Mifflin and Company and the Invention of the Outdoor Book, 1800-1900" (2001), Eric Lupfer discusses *Bird-Ways* and other bird-themed works within the framework of nineteenth-century publishing history, arguing that outdoor nature narratives played a crucial part in Houghton, Mifflin and Company's self-definition as a publisher of "classic American literature."

only necessary to say that first and last Mrs. Miller had about thirty-five species of birds which she brought from the birds stores in winter and allowed to fly about in her bird room, where she could study them unobtrusively at her desk by means of skillfully arranged mirrors” (“Mrs. Olive Thorne Miller” 166). While other ornithologists migrated with the birds during the winter months, Miller simply brought them home, where--as she put it--“summer prevails the year around” (*Bird-Ways* 43).

Descriptions of the in-home laboratory in *Bird-Ways* construe ornithology as a domestic affair, not just in location but also in practice. Instead of specialized scientific equipment, Miller employs common household items to conduct behavioral experiments in her winter observatory. Her ornithological toolkit consists of whatever is on hand: a waste-basket, a doll, a ball of yarn, an apron, a shawl, a mirror, a pillow, and a rug (Figure IV. 3). On several occasions, she manipulates the environment by rearranging furniture or altering home decor in order to gauge and record her subjects’ reactions. Miller’s unconventional methods--keeping specimens at home, repurposing everyday objects, and improvising experiments--serve the practical purpose of extending her ornithological workday. Whereas Merriam’s backyard birdwatching ends when her plain-sewing begins, Miller’s ornithological study and domestic labor overlap in time and space. Strategically positioned inside the bird-room, she can sew a hem and steal glances at the cardinal on the credenza. Even if the notion of an in-home flock was more than the average bird enthusiast could accommodate (or tolerate), Miller’s domestic studies provided a model for amateur naturalists and challenged the museum’s unquestioned jurisdiction over ornithological knowledge-making. In addition to being convenient, Miller’s approach also served the ideological function of quelling social anxiety over the

extra-domestic pursuits of women. By containing ornithological research within a designated household nook, this type of work reinforced a system of valuation that registered women's intellectual labor primarily as a compliment or an impediment to domesticity. Indeed, many authors, besides Miller, made convenience the organizing concept of their ornithological practice. By emphasizing home-centered birdwatching over institutional collecting, they posited ornithology as an acceptable outlet for women's scientific impulses. But the domestication of ornithology brought living birds under the purview of American women not as scientists but as homemakers.

### **Identifying With Birds**

In conceptualizing backyard ornithology as an appropriately feminine pursuit, authors routinely cite the *nature of birds* as a topic of inevitable interest to women of good conscience. The point was not simply that live-bird study could fit within the physical confines of domestic space or fall in line with the daily rhythms of homemaking. More important than logistics was the belief in a human-bird kinship rooted in shared values and a common social existence. According to backyard ornithologists, the ethical congruity between humans and birds was never more evident than during nesting time. "Now is the time to study all the best attributes of bird life," Wright attests in *Birdcraft*, "the period when we may judge the birds by our own standard, finding that their code of manners and morality nearly meets our own" (12). In the ethical landscape of early field guides, authors typically reserve their prime narrative real-estate for the Bird Neighbors who protect their homes, nurture their young, and contribute to their communities.

Admired for their fidelity, nurturance, and self-sacrifice, these pillars of avian society naturalized the maternal imperative of the genre's ideal readers.

On the highest rung of the backyard-ornithology genre's avian hierarchy are the species that display an unswerving commitment to the normative social triad of marriage, childrearing, and homemaking. Coauthors Elliott Coues and Mabel Osgood Wright encapsulate the "good-bird" ethos in the title chapter of *Citizen Bird*: "[The] parent birds love each other and their little ones, and often lose their lives in trying to protect them. They build their homes with as much care and skill as House People use in making theirs. Then they work hard, very hard indeed, to collect food to feed their children, for bird children are, oh, so hungry!" (52). Among the many species in this esteemed avian order, authors most often cast the American Robin ("this nearest of our bird neighbors") as the paragon of domestic virtue (*Bird Neighbors* 225). Miller places the Robin, a species known to defend its home "with vigor," first among all the avian subjects of *Bird-Ways* (7). "The most delightful study of one summer, not long ago," she recalls, "was the daily life, the joys and sorrows, of a family of robins, whose pretty castle in the air rested on a stout fork of a maple-tree branch near my window" (*Bird-Ways* 4). Miller goes on to describe the nest as a miniature version of the American home, complete with doting female nurturer, assiduous male provider, and cherished offspring. Of the bird's parental disposition, she adds approvingly that "so proud and happy yet so anxious a parent is rarely seen" (*Bird-Ways* 10). Miller concludes her chapter on the species with a detailed description of its nest, which she exalts as a metonym for the happy home. "This snug cottage of clay," she effuses, "has been the scene of some of the sweetest experiences of all lives, great as well as small. For the happiness it has held I will preserve it." (*Bird-*

Ways 12). In keeping the nest as a domestic commemorative, Miller not only integrates an object of scientific interest into her family home but also reinforces the values that sustain it.

Texts, like *Bird-Ways*, legitimize the woman birder by subsuming her ornithological interests under a generalized concern for all things domestic. Rather than challenging woman's normative social role, these works naturalize it. Indeed, the avian housewife takes center stage in most backyard-ornithology narratives. Between Mr. and Mrs. House Wren, it is the latter that rears the young and oversees domestic affairs. Coues and Wright praise "Mrs. Jenny Wren" in *Citizen Bird* for her "nice and clean" home and for "making a fresh nest for every new brood" (144, 148). Blanchan's Jenny Wren is equally fastidious, keeping her nest "scrupulously clean" and whistling the "cheeriest of songs" as she carries out her domestic duties. Field-guide author Thornton W. Burgess even insists that "there isn't any cleaner housekeeper" in the animal kingdom than Mrs. Wren, who countenances only "clean straws" and "clean trash" in the weaving of her nest (35). The female kingbird, upon which Olive Thorne Miller bestows the sobriquet "Madame Tyrannis," also evokes admiration and understanding from backyard ornithologists. In the August 1890 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Miller ponders the domestic challenges facing the kingbird "wife."<sup>41</sup> "Family life is a test of character," she muses, "no less in the nest than in the house" ("The Kingbird's Nest" 258). In her "homestead in the oak," Madame Tyrannis has "as much trouble getting matters adjusted to her mind as if she [has] a household of furniture to place, with carpets to lay, curtains to hang, and the thousand and one 'things' with which we bigger housekeepers cumber

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<sup>41</sup> This description of the female kingbird from *The Atlantic Monthly* later appears in Miller's book, *Little Brothers of the Air* (1893).

ourselves and make life a burden” (“The Kingbird’s Nest” 260-262). This analogue between woman and bird encapsulates the genre’s class- and gender-specific form of interspecies identification. “Good birds” fall under the purview of socially and economically advantaged women who readily identify with the avian housewife’s defining occupation of endlessly arranging and rearranging her family’s material possessions. Of course, not every common bird ingratiated itself with the backyard-ornithology set. Species perceived to be selfish, unattractive, or aggressive were either ignored or reviled. The English Sparrow, which “meddles with the nests of useful birds,” provokes considerable ire from Coues and Wright for disrupting the sanctity of the happy home (*Citizen Bird* 57). Even more detestable is the cowbird, who commits the unforgivable sin of nest parasitism. “The Cowbird is the pariah of bird-dom,” Wright scoffs in *Birdcraft*, “the exception that proves the rule of marital fidelity and good housekeeping” (167). By depositing her eggs in other birds’ nests, this derelict parent not only abandons her chicks but also puts the brood of the overworked and underappreciated foster mother in jeopardy.

Another way backyard ornithology portrayed birds as relevant to women was by representing certain species as objects of aesthetic value. Good birds not only maintained happy homes for their avian families but also embellished the outdoor spaces frequented by their human neighbors. Unlike their systematic counterparts, backyard ornithologists freely contemplated the beauty of certain birds and birdsongs in their writings. In keeping with the refined tastes of the East Coast elite, “attractive” birds were as apt to wear understated, practical attire as bright, showy plumage. Miller admires the “graceful and elegant” movement, “refined” manners, and “‘most musical’ throat” of the

unassuming Wood Thrush (*Bird-Ways* 25). Though the Hermit Thrush is “neither gay-colored nor noisy,” she concedes, it improves its surroundings with the “sweetest and most tender twittering” (*Bird-Ways* 27, 29). The aesthetic gifts of certain avian visitors, especially songbirds, were thought to enhance the overall appeal of human homes. Some species even seemed to be the very embodiment of home, as if the charms of domestic life inhered in their bodies and songs. The Purple Martin struck Neltje Blanchan in this way: “A colony of martins circling about a house give it a delightful home-like air. Their very soft, sweet conversation with one another as they fly, sounds like rippling, musical laughter” (*Every Child* 98). Women who enticed birds to their yards with feeders, baths, or boxes enhanced the overall appeal of their homes. For this reason, bird preservation seemed to be an extension of good housekeeping.

Despite backyard ornithologists’ unconcealed preference for attractive and melodious birds, they made special concessions for species thought to defend the human home. Coues and Wright hail the “Weed Warriors” and “Insect Eaters” as valiant species for the services they provide to House People. Whether aesthetically pleasing or not, these creatures guarded humans against threats to their happy homes. Blanchan’s description of the Purple Martin highlights the bird’s utility as a deterrent to pests. “Intelligent people,” she observes, “who are only just beginning to realise what birds do for us and how very much more they might be induced to do, are putting up boxes for the martins, not only near their own houses, that the birds may rid the air of mosquitoes, but in their gardens and orchards that incalculable numbers of injurious pests in the winged stage may be destroyed” (*Every Child* 97). If humans truly loved their homes, they would not just tolerate an avian presence but do everything they could to *encourage* it.



## **Bird-Hat Matriarchy**

Backyard ornithologists contended that good birds (who adorned and defended American homes) warranted legal protection from greedy milliners and heartless consumers. In *Wild Bird Guests and How to Entertain Them*, Ernest Harold Baynes implores readers to save these “powerful friends” and “valuable allies” of humankind (81). He offers a host of economic justifications for the conservation of pest-eating birds, estimating “a loss of about a dollar a month for every man, woman, and child in the United States” from the insect and rodent scourge (Baynes 81). Yet, Baynes champions bird protection not only as an economic enterprise but also as a form of character building:

Work for the birds tends to thoughtfulness and consideration; inasmuch as it is inspired by the work the birds do for us, it encourages appreciation and gratitude, and a sense of justice and fair play; as it brings to the worker a sense of the helplessness of his feathered friends at certain times, it begets feelings of humanity, kindness, sympathy, and compassion and stimulated warmth of heart; and if some personal sacrifice is required in order to do this work, the worker gets practice in unselfishness. (125-126)

Baynes considers these activities especially germane to the moral education of children. “If children once learn these things,” he maintains, “they will have made a very fair start toward good citizenship” (Baynes 126). As part of this larger enterprise of social reproduction, bird preservation garnered the overwhelming support of Northeastern Women’s Clubs.

The women of the nineteenth-century club movement mobilized their cultural identity as civic homemakers in service of numerous causes, including poverty, temperance, and child labor. A significant number of backyard-ornithology readers and writers participated in this movement, which drew women together “for mutual aid and stimulus” as well as “for the progress of civilization” (*Woman’s Club* 10, 16). Olive Thorne Miller, who was a regular speaker on the clubs’ tea-and-lecture circuit, even published a manual on the subject entitled *The Woman’s Club* (1891). In her chapter on the evolution of the “Club Idea,” Miller recalls how the movement originated from “home roots” in a “purely womanly manner” (*Woman’s Club* 17, 14). She insists that, even as regional clubs began undertaking an array of philanthropic causes, the movement’s overriding mission remained the same: to support woman in her role as “home-maker of the race” (*Woman’s Club* 14). Since any issue related to the moral, physical, or spiritual well-being of the national body was of concern to the Club Woman, bird preservation naturally found its most vociferous supporters from within the club ranks.

Backyard-ornithology texts affirmed the ameliorative social purpose of the Club Woman by dramatizing the extinction crisis as a conflict between feminine nurturance and masculine destructiveness. Bird-protectionist Sarah Nelson Carter, whose *Black Beauty* sequel we discussed in Chapter II, invoked the “battle of the sexes” idea with a series of momentum-building questions.) Though she concedes that God gave “man” dominion over fowl, she asks:

Does that mean that every little gamin may raid upon and destroy bird’s nests and eggs wherever he finds them? Does it mean that every proper little school boy

shall be encouraged to take just one egg of a kind from the nests to make a “collection”? Does it mean that our young men shall further aid this process of extermination with fire arms, and bang away at every harmless feathered creature which crosses their path in the forest? (Carter 90-91)

While the antagonist is gendered male in each of these bird-abuse scenarios, Carter depicts the human female as an ally of the weak and a defender of the family. “Women alone,” she declares, “can put a stop to this wholesale horror that threatens the very extinction of whole families of these beautiful creatures” (Carter 92).

Backyard ornithologists considered women biologically hardwired to identify with birds through the common experience of maternity. Even childless women, they suggested, felt a natural kinship with avian mothers through their shared possession of “maternal instincts.” The mass destruction of the white heron (also referred to as the Snowy Egret), whose lacey feathers were among the most coveted embellishments on women’s hats in the 1880s, triggered an outpouring of maternal grief from bird preservationists. Slaughtering of the species generally took place during springtime rookery raids when plume hunters invaded herons’ nests in order to shoot parents as they tended their newly hatched young. The mother heron’s celebrated refusal to abandon her offspring in the face of danger incited a thunderous outcry against what was perceived to be an assault on motherhood, family, and the “domestic” space of the nest. Another humanitarian and bird-preservationist, Sarah J. Eddy, authored the following doleful account of the mother heron’s plight:

One of the greatest sufferers among the bird mothers is the egret, or snowy heron. The pretty, airy plumes which we see on many hats grow on the egret’s back, and

fall over the sides and tail of the bird. They are most beautiful at the time when the mother bird is raising her brood of little ones. This is the time for the hunter to shoot her, and he finds it easy, because the egret will not readily fly away from her babies. The little birds starve to death, and in many places there are no egrets left. (81)

The shocking image of brutalized avian mothers and babies pervades backyard-ornithology literature of the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Naturally, the genre's female readers were expected to identify with the mother heron's selfless devotion to her young. "The suffering of the mother-bird," Carter muses, "must touch the mother-pity in woman" (92). To be unmoved by the carnage of the rookery raids was to be unwomanly, more akin to the lowly cowbird than to the feminine ideal of unrelenting maternity.

Backyard ornithology portrayed woman's maternal influence as a bulwark to long-term conservation efforts. By teaching children to *identify* and *identify with* "good birds," women helped inculcate domestic virtue and productive citizenship in the next generation. To assist women with the moral education of young people, many backyard-ornithology authors followed their initial publications with child-friendly versions of the bird guide. In some cases, publishers simply reformatted or retitled an author's previous work in a way that appealed to juvenile readers. Olive Thorne Miller's *The First Book of Birds* (1899) and *The Second Book of Birds: Bird Families* (1901), for example, later appeared as a single work entitled *The Children's Book of Birds* (1915). Coues and Wright's *Citizen Bird* (1897), Neltje Blanchan's *Birds Every Child Should Know* (1907), and Thornton W. Burgess's *The Burgess Bird Book for Children* (1919) were among the

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<sup>42</sup> Ironically, the marsh-dwelling egret was unlikely to appear in the everyday lives of backyard ornithologists. Though not a "backyard bird" *per se*, the tragic mother egret helped authors to frame bird protection in terms of "the Conservation of Womanhood" (to echo Jennifer Price) (73).

more successful children's bird books to emerge following the first wave of field guides aimed at adults. Some guides explicitly identified young people as their target audience, while others invited adults and children to study birds in concert. Authors implied that women ornithologists performed a crucial social service by sharing their knowledge and skill with impressionable children.

### **Ecological Homemaking in the Twenty-First Century**

It is within this context that the strange practices of Mabel Osgood Wright's summer bird club, with which we opened this chapter, begin to make sense. Like Merriam's ornithological walks at Smith, Wright's excursions around Waldstein taught indiscriminating naturalists how to identify the birds with which they *ought* to identify. Although Wright relied on museum mounts as pedagogical instruments, she broke rank with her institutional colleagues by applying the principles of systematics to the "domestic lives" of common birds. By observing stuffed specimens in the trees, the Fairfield children learned to use field marks in species identification and to conceptualize familiar outdoor settings as legitimate sites for ornithological inquiry. Since dead-birdwatching provided scant information about live-avian subjects and their value to people, Wright introduced literary sources that disciplined readers to think of birdlife in relation to benchmark middle-class values. The Fairfield children's textually mediated encounters with birds, which conflated good avian neighbors and upright human citizens, framed the cause of species preservation as a moral crusade to save America's happy homes. Instead of classifying for classifying's sake, Wright's taxonomic enterprise made

wildlife legible within a preservationist system of values that championed the protection of avian homemakers and the eradication of home wreckers.

In assuming the backyard as its geographical and symbolic starting point, the nineteenth-century field guide expanded the scope of ornithology to include disenfranchised women scientists and overlooked avian subjects. As backyard naturalists focused their opera-glasses on the family lives of their avian neighbors, field observation and species protection came to be viewed as women's work. Field guides reinforced this perception with direct appeals to middle-class housewives and elite club ladies to exert their moral influence on behalf of innocent avian families. Although women met resistance in natural history museums, ornithology societies, and government wildlife agencies, they forged alternative pathways through the bird-rich environs in and around their homes. In yards, gardens, parks, and private homes, women improvised research methods and repurposed quotidian objects. The moral overtones of this homespun ornithology resonated with the high-minded Club Women of the North East, who upheld juvenile field guides and youth birding groups as vital mechanisms of social reproduction. By boycotting cruel millinery and teaching the American public to identify with "good" avian citizens, backyard birdwatchers not only affirmed their role as civic homemakers but also revolutionized ornithological practice in the nineteenth century and beyond.

Today, the ornithological writings generated in North American research centers reflect a general shift in scientific orientation from skin comparison to field observation. While "serious" natural history in the nineteenth century connoted bird death and taxonomic labor, ornithology in recent times has encompassed such diverse

specializations as avian systematics, field ecology, behavioral studies, population dynamics, bioacoustics, conservation science, animal psychology, and evolutionary biology. Since the emergence of U.S. graduate training in ornithology in 1915, aspirants to the profession have benefited from a far more variegated course of study than the autodidacts of previous decades. The backyard birdwatcher's preoccupation with "avian domestic life" has splintered into an array of ornithological sub-fields related to sexual selection, nesting, and reproduction. The bird-protection movement (which so captivated Club Women in the nineteenth century) now permeates the ornithological establishment under the guises of human impact studies, conservation biology, and Citizen Science initiatives. Ridiculed as unscientific a century ago, observation and conservation have gained traction in even the most conservative of birding circles.

How ironic that the ornithological establishment has institutionalized these core principles and practices of backyard birdwatching, while its companion genre--the field guide--has phased them out. Field-guide authors in the modern era rarely indulge in overt moralizing about avian domestic life or species preservation. Initially, this generic shift may have reflected the diminished sense of urgency about environmental issues, which the passage of the Migratory Bird Act of 1918 occasioned. But it more likely stems from the publication of Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds* in 1934. This slim, inexpensive, highly visual text revolutionized birding around the world by rendering field identification easier and more systematic. The text's unique artistic style, which prioritized identificatory function over aesthetic appeal, quickly caught on with the birding public and continues to set the worldwide standard in nature guides. Since Peterson's arrival on the birding scene, field guides have tended to focus on birds as

visual targets rather than as cultural symbols. Indeed, they promote what Spencer Schaffner has called “binocular vision” by depicting species in relative isolation from the cultural and environmental contexts in which early backyard birdwatchers imagined them (3). Today’s top-selling texts forgo verbose narrative descriptions in favor of color photographs, brief scientific descriptions, range maps, and habitat information. The authoritatively detached voice of “objective science” has replaced the first-person point of view, which humanized (and feminized) early field-guide narrators. Even the way readers interact with field guides has changed from slow cover-to-cover reading to quick thumbing-and-scanning. Electronic field guides, audio guides, iPods, Smart Phones, and other pocket-sized gadgets also assist today’s technologically savvy birders in making visual and auditory identifications in the field. Through their facilitation of species identification and their steadfast indifference to human-bird identification, the new generation of field guides has helped spawn a twenty-first-century version of the systematic collector culture. Quick-reference guides are indispensable tools to an amateur class of competitive birders known as “tickers.” Also referred to as “listers” or “twitchers,” tickers devote vast quantities of time and money to compiling personal collections of bird *sightings*. Unlike their skin-collecting predecessors, however, tickers hunt rare birds for the satisfaction of ticking species off a list. Classifying tickers as birdwatchers misrepresents the nature of their avian encounters (which often last a mere matter of seconds). What a bird is doing and how it is fairing are secondary concerns to tickers, whose objective is not so much birdwatching as bird*glimpsing*. Tickers may use field guides in service of a particularly detached mode of observation, but few



birdwatchers in the field would swap their utilitarian reference guides for a cumbersome moral narrative about the social politics of ornithology.<sup>43</sup>

While today's field guides avoid the social commentary of their nineteenth-century counterparts, popular ornithology literature as a whole continues to invoke the institutions of home and family as organizing categories. Contemporary ornithologists (female and male, amateur and professional, working far afield and close to home) have constructed domestic narratives as a way of understanding their relationships to birds and bird study. Over the past two decades, such narratives often have taken the form of ornithological memoir. Unlike today's field guides, this popular genre (which boasts several *New York Times* bestsellers) accommodates first-person narration, affective description, and moral reflection. These literary techniques are conspicuous features in Arnette Heidcamp's *A Hummingbird in My House* (1990), Mark Bittner's *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill* (2004), Irene Pepperberg's *Alex & Me* (2009), Stacey O'Brien's *Wesley the Owl* (2009), and Jeff Guidry's *An Eagle Named Freedom* (2011).

Among the most commercially successful ornithological memoirs of recent times is Joanna Burger's *The Parrot Who Owns Me* (2001). Although Burger resuscitates several themes from early field guides in her memoir, including the convenience of domestic birding and the importance of methodological improvisation, she occupies a very different position relative to the ornithological establishment than her nineteenth-century progenitors. Burger, who shares her home in suburban New Jersey with a Red-lored Amazon parrot named Tiko, is a world-renowned biology professor at Rutgers University and an AOU fellow. Like Olive Thorne Miller, she sets up an ornithological

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<sup>43</sup> Stephen Moss's social history of birdwatching, *A Bird in the Bush* (2004), includes a fascinating chapter on ticking.

“home office” in which she observes, cares for, and writes about avian life on a daily basis. Unlike Miller, however, Burger presents her in-home ornithological study as an impetus for reimagining her relationship to both the wild and the domestic.

Bird study in *The Parrot Who Owns Me* is neither confined within domestic space nor restricted to slivers of time reserved for pleasant diversion. Burger’s ornithological work is supported by institutional funding and does not reinforce a normative domestic structure in order to justify its own existence. Yet, Burger forges strong conceptual links between the ornithological and the domestic throughout her narrative. In an epiphanic moment toward the end of *The Parrot Who Owns Me*, Burger reveals that domestic bird study has transformed her from an individualistic ecologist into an ecological homemaker.

Tiko has taught me, a sometimes headstrong and often ferociously independent woman, the importance of interdependence, the importance of taking care, and the importance of being cared for. It’s a necessary part of being human and being connected to the world around us that we realize and acknowledge our vulnerability and the vulnerability of all creatures, and that we act in accord with that knowledge. It is critical that we allow the empathetic and altruistic part of ourselves to be the guiding force behind the way that we conduct our lives, whether we give to those less fortunate than ourselves, take care of the magnificent creatures that share our world, work tirelessly to preserve native habitat, or separate each strand of an unruly mass of hair so gently that we do not wake our loved one as she sleeps. (Burger 205-206)

This last sentence refers to an earlier episode in which Tiko tenderly preens Burger's hair during a period of convalescence. Burger, we learn, contracted Lyme disease while conducting fieldwork on Herring Gulls for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. Tiko's "constant preening and undivided attention" during this trying time awakens in Burger feelings of cross-species mutuality, which inspire her to think of ecological interdependence in terms of familial obligation (197). Tiko's caretaking of the caretaker exemplifies the book's "great lesson" that all creatures belong to an "enormous family" whose ties produce certain "obligations" (Burger 205). Just as early field guides construed backyard birdwatching as civic homemaking, Burger's memoir portrays environmental stewardship as ecological homemaking. In both cases up-close encounters with birds inspire a sense of social responsibility, but in early field guides the weight of this obligation falls overwhelmingly on women. What Tiko's story suggests, however, is that homes may be spaces of mutual concern, where the role of ministering angel can be filled by anyone at any given time. This message, no doubt, is an important one. For in this quiet domestic moment, when the woman ornithologist becomes the recipient rather than the embodiment of nurturance, we--as readers--find ourselves in hopeful anticipation of her swift return to the field.



*The Right Kind of Feathers for a Hat*

**Figure IV.1.** Backyard-ornithology authors encouraged women to study birds rather than wear them. Ernest Harold Baynes' *Wild Bird Guests* (1915) showcases this image of a woman with a live bird perched on her hat. Baynes, Ernest Harold. *Wild Bird Nests*. New York, E.P. Dutton, 1915. Print.



*Chickadee Feeding Under a  
Berlepsch "Food Bell"*

**Figure IV.2.** *Early field guides encouraged backyard birders to attract common birds with feeders.* Baynes, Ernest Harold. *Wild Bird Nests.* New York, E.P. Dutton, 1915. Print.



**Figure IV.3.** *Domestic ornithologists made use of household items and improvisational methods in their bird studies.* Baynes, Ernest Harold. *Wild Bird Nests.* New York, E.P. Dutton, 1915. Print.

## Chapter V

### The Feline Turn in Mystery Fiction

Chat mystérieux, chat séraphique, chat étrange...  
Charles Baudelaire, "Le Chat" (1857)

I am the Cat who walks by himself,  
and all places are alike to me.  
Rudyard Kipling, *Just So Stories* (1902)

#### Cat Killings and Other Crimes

Stephen King's original screenplay for the 1992 Columbia Pictures film, *Sleepwalkers*, is characteristically disturbing. Gory messes are a hallmark of King's imaginative universe, but the carnage displayed in the opening scene of *Sleepwalkers* is shockingly (and literally) inhuman. The victims in this bloodbath are all *cats*. Feline corpses are everywhere: dangling from a porch, strung up in trees, and smashed against a wall. As one movie reviewer wryly concluded, "*Sleepwalkers* is not a film that cat lovers will enjoy" (rev. of *Sleepwalkers*). Anti-feline brutality so pervades *Sleepwalkers* that viewers reasonably might wonder whether King, who is among the world's best-selling living authors as well as the 1996 recipient of the prestigious O. Henry Award, intended to rattle the cat-fancying public.<sup>44</sup> But what grudge could the Master of Macabre possibly hold against ailurophiles or the furry objects of their affection?

Since the mid-1980s, staunch proponents of hard-boiled mystery and horror in the United States have expressed mounting frustration over the resurgence of feel-good

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<sup>44</sup> King also has won the 2003 National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters and numerous Bram Stoker Awards (most recently in 2011 for "Herman Wouk is Still Alive").

murder stories.<sup>45</sup> Harshest criticisms have centered on the “Cozy” mystery novel, which purportedly privileges florid over muscular prose, idealized over realistic characters, quaint over gritty settings, and snuggling over strangling. To hard-boiled purists, feline-themed mysteries typify the insufferable saccharine of the soft-boiled. For the past two decades, Stephen King (an avowed dog lover who identifies his muse as a Welsh Corgi named Frodo) has crusaded to purge mystery and horror of cuddly cats or--as in the case of *Sleepwalkers*--to pulverize the cats that appear in such narratives. In bemoaning the current state of popular fiction, King has offered the following appraisal of the feline trend in murder fiction: “A lot of writers have resorted to caricature rather than character. Put another way, they have resorted to cats of various shapes and colors...but all of them, alas, seem gray in the dark” (qtd. in B. Murphy xiii). King is certainly not the lone trumpeter of anti-feline sentiments. Mystery critic Bruce F. Murphy has dubbed the cat mystery “a feeble concept,” Cozy fiction “at its worst” (88, 114).<sup>46</sup> “By making the novel’s ‘cattiness’ its center,” Murphy has asserted, “the cat phenomenon substitutes the principles of marketing for those of fiction. Sentimentality replaces emotion, and striving to be cute replaces striving to be meaningful” (88). Even Natalee Rosenstein, vice president of Berkley Publishing Group/Penguin Putnam Inc. and longtime editor of Lilian Jackson Braun’s *The Cat Who...* mystery series, concedes that the “cozy, lighthearted genre...isn't taken so seriously by people in the mystery business or the publishing business in general” (Kaufman).

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<sup>45</sup> Feel-good murder novels rocketed to popularity during the so-called Golden Age of mystery writing (the period between WWI and WWII) when the Country Cozy and Country House sub-genres dominated the British and American markets.

<sup>46</sup> Despite Murphy’s condescension toward the cat mystery, he nonetheless felt compelled to include a **CATS** entry in his 1999 reference book, *The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery*. His commentary on the genre, however, serves mostly to reinforce a hierarchy of tastes in which cat-mystery fans dangle from the lowest rung of literary sophistication.



Despite the haranguing cat mysteries have received over the past three decades, they are unlikely to suffer the premature death of King's unfortunate cinematic felines. The genre, on the contrary, occupies a rapidly expanding niche in the contemporary mass-mystery market. But does *Felis domesticus* really belong in the world of murder and mayhem? Are the cats in cat mysteries anything more than a marketing ploy or a cheap fix for ailurophiles? To the genre's detractors, the answer is clear. "The cat is a shortcut," King has pronounced, "a kind of emotional shorthand employed by writers who can't really write and readers who can't really read" (qtd. in B. Murphy 88). Many critics of the genre direct their disdain not only at mystery felines but also at the "cat people" who produce and consume the genre. King's critical outburst reiterates the defining frustration of the literary man mired in a mass-cultural cesspit of "scribbling women" and "their trash." The disconcertingly gendered subtext to cat-mystery criticism devolves into rapacious misogyny in Robert Kaplow's *The Cat Who Killed Lillian Jackson Braun* (2004), which features the woman writer's decapitated body stuffed into the toilet of a men's bathroom.<sup>47</sup> Kaplow's genre criticism operates at the level of a puerile rape fantasy with a dildo as a murder weapon, a Siamese cat named Poon-Tang, and a gratuitous "breasts-stuck-in-the-cement" episode (21). This strikingly virulent critique elides the cat mystery and the cat woman in a familiar diatribe against degraded taste and facile emotionalism.

There is no disputing that the novels' feline characters fulfill specific needs associated with the feminized emotion of cat loving. Unlike the *fin de siècle* animal narratives discussed in the previous chapters of this work, the contemporary cat mystery

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Kaplow is a critically acclaimed novelist, best known for the *New York Times* bestseller, *Me and Orson Welles* (2003), which chronicles the personal and creative evolution of an aspiring male artist.

presupposes an audience defined by a post-welfarist ethic of care toward domestic pets. In the cat mystery, bonds of affection not only circumscribe a particular reading public but also structure the genre's crime plot as an affirmation of human-cat mutuality. The emotional gratification, which has inflamed so many mystery critics, derives from the careful rendering of "animal rescue" as a *reciprocal* affair in which cats save humans that save cats. The cat mystery operates as an *emotional contract* between writers and readers, which specifies "mutual rescue" as the genre's structuring principle and desired outcome.<sup>48</sup> To heighten this sense of interspecies reciprocity, authors employ a range of literary techniques (e.g., indirect discourse, humanizing description, and animal dialogue) to render cats emotionally legible to the narratives' readers and human characters. But cat-mystery writers also take care to preserve the species-specific animality of cats, which author Clea Simon has termed "the feline mystique." Indeed, the pleasure of these texts derives not only from their categorical insistence on feline affection but also from their thematization of feline inscrutability. To preserve the all-important "species difference" of the genre's anthropomorphized cats, authors mobilize folkloric and mythological representations of feline shapeshifting, perversion, and extrasensory perception. The cat mystery progresses as a series of biological, spatial, and generic transgressions in which emotionally transparent yet intrinsically unknowable felines defy and disrupt Cozy decorum. At once wild and tame, foreign and familiar, cats travel freely and inconspicuously in areas that, traditionally, have been cordoned off by the gendered spatial conventions of mystery fiction. As literary devices used to bridge diverse narrative and generic domains, feline characters enable cat-mystery writers to

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<sup>48</sup> The concept of an *emotional contract* draws upon Ien Ang's discussion of the *emotional realism* of the mass-cultural text as well as Frederic Jameson's and June Howard's theorizations of genre as a *social contract*.

appropriate liberally from other mystery subgenres and to feature heroes who are as intrepid as they are devoted.

### **Cat People and Mass-Cultural Intimacy**

Readers in the United States first encountered the cat-sleuthing concept in the 1960s with the back-to-back publications of Lilian Jackson Braun's *The Cat Who Could Read Backwards* (1966), *The Cat Who Ate Danish Modern* (1967), and *The Cat Who Turned On and Off* (1968).<sup>49</sup> Although Braun took an eighteen-year hiatus from mystery writing before reviving her series with *The Cat Who Saw Red* (1986), her output was steadily and impressively fecund for over two decades. Within two years of Braun's comeback, Berkley Publishing Group issued four new original-paperback installments of her series and reprinted her three novels from the 1960s. In response to steady consumer demand, Braun added to her Edgar Award and Anthony Award nominated series at the rate of one book (and sometimes two) per year between 1986 and 2007. Since the 1980s, her smash-hit mysteries have inspired an avalanche of similar series and even an international cat-writers guild. Cat mysteries are big business, and budding writers and publishers are eager to cash in on the feline craze.

The megastars of the cat-mystery industry--Lilian Jackson Braun, Rita Mae Brown, and Lydia Adamson (*nom de plume* of Franklin B. King)--boast remarkable career longevity and in-print figures in the millions. Before her death at the age of ninety-seven, Braun published the twenty-ninth installment of *The Cat Who...* series, *The Cat Who Had 60 Whiskers* (2007), landing her on the *USA Today* bestseller list for the

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<sup>49</sup> Nearly a quarter of a century before Lilian Jackson Braun released *The Cat Who Could Read Backwards*, D.B. Olsen (pseudonym of Dolores Hitchens) published a thirteen-volume series featuring a feline gumshoe. Her *Samantha* series, however, failed to reach a wide audience and is no longer in print.

fifteenth time. To date, her novels have sold roughly thirty million copies worldwide and been translated into sixteen languages. Braun's iconic series has even been the subject of a question on the television trivia program, *Jeopardy*. In 2013, Rita Mae Brown and her feline "coauthor" Sneaky Pie marked the twentieth anniversary of their *New York Times* bestselling series with the release of *The Big Cat Nap* (Figures V.1, Figure V.2).

Brown's twenty-three volume *Mrs. Murphy* series, which inspired a 1998 television movie starring Ricki Lake and Blythe Danner, has been translated into French, German, Japanese, Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, and Portuguese. Similarly, the *Alice Nestleton* mysteries of Lydia Adamson had an impressive twelve-year run prior to the series' retirement in 2002. As of 1997, in-print figures for Adamson's books had exceeded 1.5 million. Although more up-to-date figures for the *Alice Nestleton* novels are unavailable to the public, there is no reason to think that in-print numbers dipped or plateaued between 1997 and 2002 with the release of the last seven installments of the twenty-one-volume series.<sup>50</sup>

Clever production and marketing strategies account for a large measure of the genre's commercial profitability and longevity. As formula fiction aimed at a preconstituted ailurophilic public, the cat mystery is a product of what Janice Radway has called the vast "institutional matrix" of the "modern mass-market paperback industry" (19). At once works of art, commodities, and self-advertisements, the books contain much besides their feline-themed stories. With brightly colored dust jackets, flashy cover art, and inviting photographs of authors with their feline companions, cat mysteries make highly effective bookstore eye-catchers (Figure V.3). By framing each narrative with

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<sup>50</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Adamson series, see Willetta L. Heising's *Detecting Men: A Reader's Guide and Checklist for Mystery Series* (1998).

positive reviews and testimonials, plot summaries and purchase information for upcoming issues, and authors' postal and web addresses, publishers encourage an enduring relationship between consumer and product. In recent years, Braun's and Brown's publishers have diversified their cat-mystery franchises by releasing companion cookbooks, clothing, and pet paraphernalia. In doing so, they have orchestrated long-term, multi-contextual encounters between their products and the cat-mystery public. Like their publishers, cat-mystery authors have found ways to sustain the genre's boom. They keep readers in a state of anticipation by employing the same techniques that soap-opera writers use to encourage regular viewing of their television melodramas. Unresolved storylines, cliffhanger endings, sympathetic characters, and heavy-handed foreshadowing all help cat-mystery authors generate a future-oriented readership whose satiation depends on the purchase of additional products.

Cat-mystery writers also encourage brand loyalty by forging personal connections with the public. Authors expend an inordinate amount of energy addressing, praising, and soliciting opinions from fans, and they frequently dedicate books to their readers or remember them in acknowledgments. Carole Nelson Douglas closes her cat mysteries with Dear-Reader letters from both herself and her feline creation, Midnight Louie. She also auctions off narrative "guest spots," which permit a few lucky fans to leave their personal imprint on a story. (The highest bidders get to have a character in Douglas's Midnight Louie series named for themselves or their pet.) In her more recent novels, Rita Mae Brown has made a habit of including epistolary prefaces or appendices that function as a kind of reverse fan mail. Coauthor Sneaky Pie Brown introduces *Murder, She Meowed* (1996), for instance, with the warm greeting: "Dear Reader: Thank you for your

letters...I sure hope you're having as good a time as I am!" (Preface). The genre's perky invocations--for which Sneaky Pie exhibits dizzying faculties--interpellate readers as both "cat people" and series fans. Ingratiating devices, of the Dear-Reader variety, conjure into being a cat-mystery public which feels personally implicated in the creation and success of a given series.

To acknowledge the ways cat-mystery writers and publishers encourage emotional attachments to their products is not to diminish or dismiss the personal meanings readers find within the narratives. The feelings of intimacy forged by long-term engagement with a series can prove deeply meaningful and transformative for cat-mystery fans. Many of the genre's readers cherish their bonds to a particular series and express their affection in strikingly familial language. In a reader review for Brown's *Pay Dirt* (1995) (set in Crozet, Virginia), one longtime fan of the series enthused, "I feel at home in Crozet! I absolutely love Rita Mae Brown's characters! They're family!" (rev. of *Pay Dirt*). During a rare 2006 interview for *The Wall Street Journal*, Lilian Jackson Braun regaled interviewer Joanne Kaufman with tales of readers' devotion to her famous series. At one point, Braun even suggested that her novels have "saved" readers during trying times in their lives. Kaufman recounts, "A recovering alcoholic once wrote a fan letter to Ms. Braun claiming that the books helped him conquer his drinking problem. [Another reader] insisted that she wasn't going to meet her maker until she made her way through the entire series, according to an attending nurse. She reached her goal on a Monday night and died Tuesday morning" (Kaufman). Although fans of other genres undoubtedly covet their own reading experiences, cat-mystery buffs appear to

derive from their favorite novels and companion products a unique type of satisfaction closely tied to their self-identification as “cat people.”

Any foray into cat-mystery culture is likely to lead to the realization that the genre’s readers are, by and large, men and women who share their lives with cats. Fans enthusiastically identify as “cat people” in blogs, reader testimonials, and tribute websites. Plugged in to this reality, the cat-mystery industry takes great pains to center feline motifs in their advertising and promotional campaigns. Writers and publishers also encourage the *performative* aspects of being a cat person, as this identity is logically implied by cat-mystery consumption.<sup>51</sup> Standing before a packed house at a December 2006 appearance in Cleveland, Ohio, Rita Mae Brown asked (in lieu of words of welcome or introduction), “How many people [here] have cats?” As a sea of hands shot up, Brown nodded approvingly. Even at book signings, Brown’s customary greeting reinforces the tie between cat-mystery culture and cat loving: “And what is *your* cat’s name?”<sup>52</sup>

But what exactly do ailurophiles “get” from their engagement with these texts and their fictional felines? In answering this question, it is helpful to consider how cat mysteries portray both cats and interspecies relationships. Although cat-mystery authors display varying degrees of willingness to anthropomorphize, they all provide readers with a “window” into the hearts and minds of their feline characters.<sup>53</sup> Common to virtually

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Warner’s *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) has advanced my understanding of the performative quality of literary publics.

<sup>52</sup> Rita Mae Brown, author appearance, written notes, Cleveland, Ohio, 15 December 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance* has enhanced my understanding of the internal variations that exist in genre fiction. In the spectrum of anthropomorphic felines in cat mysteries, Clea Simon’s feline characters are arguably the most cat-like, while Shirley Rousseau Murphy’s cats--who can talk, make phone calls, and read--arguably are the

every successful cat-mystery series are unambiguous expressions of feline adulation for and loyalty to human caretakers. Depending on the particular volume or series, cats express these sentiments variously through speech, action, or implication. But regardless of the internal differences within the genre, feline characters invariably demonstrate clear affection for “their” humans. Even Brown’s famously bilious feline sleuth, Pewter, deigns to utter “*I love you*” to his human caregiver (*Sour Puss* 165).

Other cat-themed genres, such as the pet memoir and the veterinary story, depict expressions of feline love, but the cat mystery exhibits an important additional dimension linked to structural properties of the crime plot. Because the human objects of their affection inevitably come into contact with swindlers, bullies, and murderers, mystery felines have ample opportunity to demonstrate the canine-associated trait of protectiveness. By attacking or diverting potential evildoers, cats exhibit a level of devotion to their owners exceeding that of pets in other feline-centered genres. Mystery cats are even willing to *die* in order to rescue their human friends. In the climactic scene of Brown’s *Sour Puss* (2006), the villainous Arch Saunders attempts to kill the series’ human protagonist, Mary Minor “Harry” Haristeen. With little regard for their own safety, Harry’s devoted cats, Mrs. Murphy and Pewter, lead an all-animal charge and rescue their physically out-matched caretaker. After the harrowing ordeal, Harry begins to weep. She is not crying “from fear,” we are told, but rather “from gratitude” (*Sour Puss* 237). Brown continues, “[Harry] owed her life to these little friends...She stood up, shook her head, then knelt back down. She kissed Mrs. Murphy and Pewter” (*Sour Puss*

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most human-like. Some authors, such as Marian Babson, display varying degrees of anthropomorphizing from one volume to the next.



237). That the cats were primed to make the ultimate sacrifice in the name of love is lost on neither Harry nor Brown's readers.

This effusive exchange between Harry and her pets illustrates an inviolable rule of the genre: cats' love for their owners is unequivocal. Feline apathy, on the other hand, is incompatible with the cat mystery's values. It amounts to the unthinkable. By dispersing fears of unreciprocated affection, this underlying narrative logic provides comfort and reassurance to devoted cat people. In her 2002 study of the human-feline bond, journalist and cat-mystery writer Clea Simon discusses the insecurities many ailurophiles harbor concerning their cats' inscrutable motives. According to Simon, many cat caretakers worry that they are projecting unfair desires or impossible expectations onto their pets. In one interview Simon conducted, a woman named Trisha describes the strong attachment she formed with her feline companion while receiving treatment for clinical depression. "[The cat] would allow me to hold her, and pet her for longer durations than usual, and also be more physical with her when I was very low," Trisha recalls, "To this day she literally licks my tears away" (qtd. in Simon 17-18). Later in the interview, however, Trisha betrays doubts, fearing that her cat's tender tear-licking revealed nothing more than a penchant for "the salty taste" (qtd. in Simon 18).

Owners with high emotional investments in their pets' affection find, in cat mysteries, a world purged of such insecurities. Drawing on intimate knowledge of their audience, authors produce stories in which cat-related wishes come true and doubts fade away. Perhaps Shirley Rousseau Murphy had some version of Trisha in mind when she dedicated her first *Joe Grey* mystery to "those who wonder about their cats" (S. Murphy Dedication). In an April 2004 interview with Bethanne Kelly Patrick of

*Bookreporter.com*, Rita Mae Brown sent a message to her fans regarding cats' capacity for affection: "What I wish that people understood about animals that many don't is that all the higher vertebrates are quite sophisticated structurally, mentally and emotionally...I believe that many animals have a greater and deeper capacity to love than we do" (qtd. in Patrick). In the imaginative universe of Brown's fiction, where cats are willing to lay down their lives for love of their humans, these assertions certainly hold true.

This unwavering feline devotion expresses the animal-rescue culture truism that cats recognize and appreciate human kindness. Rescue volunteers Diane Leigh and Marilee Geyer convey this message in *One at a Time* (2003), a photo-journalistic account of "a typical U.S. animal shelter":

Those generous people who adopt from a shelter grant the ultimate wish, literally giving the gift of life to an animal who needs a second chance.

And some believe that the animals are quite aware of this. Many adopters will tell you that the animals seem to know they have been saved and are grateful, doing everything they can to fit into their new family and becoming extremely devoted to their new guardians. (97)

Nearly all cat-mystery cats are "rescues"--shelter animals, strays, or throwaways--whose human companions pluck them out of tenuous circumstances and provide food, shelter, warmth, and veterinary care. Although cat-mystery authors avoid the overt politicization of animal-rights rhetoric, they narrate interspecies love within the context of a pet overpopulation crisis that results in the euthanization of 3-4 million healthy animals in U.S. shelters every year. Rita Mae Brown's outspoken feline coauthor, Sneaky Pie, tosses in the occasional reminder to support the rescue effort, but usually as a blithe

afterthought (Figure V.4). Still, the animal-rescue ethos that produces “cat people” informs the cat mystery’s human-rescue premise that produces “people cats.”

There is no question that the demonstrative felines in cat mysteries afford readers a type of pleasure that has little to do with literature and everything to do with cat loving. It is also fair to say that the cat-mystery industry is attuned to the consumption patterns of a pet-pampering public, whose companion-animal expenditures for 2012 topped \$52 billion and whose patronage of kitty psychiatrists, feline masseuses, and astrologists-to-the-cats appears to be on the rise. The cat mystery’s success, however, is attributable to more than its commodification of interspecies love. Although critics have accused the cat mystery of lacking any “serious” literary content, I contend that the genre’s transgressive felines allow writers to circumvent the geographic constraints of Cozy fiction and to poach literary conventions from a variety of mystery subgenres. Owing to its feline content, the cat-mystery novel constitutes a hybrid form that not only satisfies readers’ emotional expectations but also challenges the gendered spatial parameters of crime literature.

### **Generic Territorialism in the Crime Novel**

Though cat mysteries center intrepid heroes, the mystery form in general tends to privilege bounded space. Mystery, to borrow Kenneth S. Calhoun’s adjective, is an *agoraphobic* genre (327). It simultaneously dramatizes and contains humankind’s diffuse fear of the random criminality “out there.” The preponderance of pathological foreigners and murdered transgressors in the genre illustrates the high cost of disturbing the spatial order. As mystery buffs well know, “the body” often belongs to someone who

made a fatal attempt to elevate their social position, professional rank, or economic standing. Social climbers and others who do not “know their place,” so to speak, routinely suffer an unhappy fate in mystery narratives. Spatial conservatism, thus, translates into social conservatism, as boundary crossing often signals mental or physical disorder in a character. Normative spatial practice in the mystery genre dictates that plots unfurl inside sharply delimited zones. For this reason, we strongly associate particular geographic spaces and social milieux with particular mystery subgenres. Geographic spaces get mapped onto generic spaces: Country Cozy, Urban Noir, International Spy, and Murders on the High Seas. Characters and plots that make perfect sense to us in one context would feel woefully out of place in others. One can hardly imagine the hard-boiled Californians, Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, at high tea with the vicar’s wife in St. Mary Mead.

As place-bound narratives, mystery subgenres are governed by their own local taboos, spatial logics, and gendered epistemologies.<sup>54</sup> Even mystery’s transgressive shapeshifter, the “master of disguise,” relies on an urban landscape. The best-known disguise artist of them all, Sherlock Holmes, requires bustling city streets in order to lose himself in anonymous crowds. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did not, of course, set all of his Holmes stories in London. But when Holmes makes excursions into the British countryside, Conan Doyle must alter the detective’s investigative persona so as to accommodate the geographic change. He also deploys the figure of the dog (the classic sidekick of the professional male detective) to purge the country landscape of its Cozy associations. To establish an appropriately ominous *mise-en-scène* for his Gothic novel,

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<sup>54</sup> For an extended discussion of the place-bound nature of literary forms, including the detective novel, see Franco Moretti’s *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (1998).

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), Conan Doyle shifts the action from 221b Baker Street in London to the somber moors of Devon, where a demonic hound terrorizes the Baskerville clan. The folk and Gothic elements of the story necessitate a rural setting where both a local legend and a spectral canine can circulate freely. In Devonshire, Holmes cannot hide in plain sight as he can in London. He, therefore, conceals himself by camping out in a Spartan hut on the town's periphery, away from the main action of the narrative. For a large portion of the story, Conan Doyle banishes Holmes to this marginal narrative space and employs Watson as a proxy. When Holmes again materializes in the story, he does so as a country tracker rather than as a gentleman sleuth. At one point, he even sniffs a dead animal carcass for clues with the dogged determination of a bloodhound.

When Holmes journeys from city to country, he changes from a master of disguise into a tracking bloodhound in an "ear-flapped" hat.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, when characters residing in the country decide to assume alternate identities, they typically head for the city. In "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1899), Neville St. Clair routinely travels from his country home in Lee to London. En route, he transforms himself from a country businessman into a bedraggled mendicant. Possessing a particular "facility of repartee" as well as a talent for disguise, St. Clair discovers that he can earn more money from begging on the city streets than from his regular occupation as a newspaperman ("Twisted Lip" 243). He, therefore, resolves to compromise "his pride" for "the money" by making pan-handling his full-time occupation ("Twisted Lip" 243). Later marrying and securing a country residence in Lee in the County of Kent, St. Clair attempts to

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<sup>55</sup> In "Silver Blaze" (1892), Dr. Watson describes Holmes's hat simply as "an ear-flapped travelling-cap." Following the precedent set by illustrator Sidney Piaget, the cap is most often rendered as a "deerstalker" hat and has become a trademark accessory of the famous sleuth.

conceal his double-life from family and friends by renting a small apartment in London where he can assume his disguise. St. Clair's "changing room" serves as a transitional space between his country home and the city streets. He enters the room dressed as "St. Clair the county gentleman" and emerges as "Boone the beggar." Conan Doyle represents London as a space of anonymity, casual relationships, and misapprehension. Through the manipulation of bodily signs, St. Clair can invent a social identity for himself that exploits the good will of the strangers he encounters on the London streets. While this clever subterfuge enables St. Clair to uphold his elite social position as a country gentleman, it can only be carried out in an *urban* context where nobody will recognize him and where begging is commonplace.

Urban Noir, as much as any crime subgenre, evokes a particular geography. The Noir city is a highly stylized landscape in which heavy accumulations of local-color descriptions, exaggerated uses of idiom, and stock characterizations cultivate a strong sense of place. In many Urban Noir works, plot and character matter most as appurtenances or extensions of atmosphere and setting. Raymond Chandler, whom the *The Library of America* publishers and numerous others have unblinkingly promoted as "America's greatest mystery writer," created characters that function as extensions of their physical environments. Chandler's "red-headed woman" from the short story, "Bay City Blues" (1938), for example, blends seamlessly with the sleazy, dismal architecture of the region's backstreets: "She had large, dark, hungry eyes, awkward features and no make-up except a mouth that glared like a neon sign" (827-828). Through copious uses of simile and metaphor, Chandler invents characters and settings that bleed together in

service of the Noir atmosphere. Here, a city building and a city woman (with a mouth “like a neon sign”) cast equally foreboding glares over the narrative.

The blurring of character and setting is a widespread practice in the Urban Noir subgenre. In addition to objectifying characters as “props” in a pervasive urban topography, writers make extensive use of the pathetic fallacy and personification. In an oft-cited passage from the beginning of *The Big Sleep* (1939), for example, Chandler evokes stock Urban Noir characters in his description of an airtight greenhouse belonging to Detective Philip Marlowe’s cryptic client, General Sternwood. We are told that the orchids in Sternwood’s botanical vault resemble various urban dregs populating Southern California’s public spaces. The plants’ blooms exude the “rotten sweetness of a prostitute” (“The Big Sleep” 593). Their stalks, which look like “the newly washed fingers of dead men,” foreshadow the “lax dead hand” of a corpse that is later found “washing about in the surf off Lido fish pier” (“The Big Sleep” 592, 623, 620). And their “boiling-alcohol” odor recalls the hard-drinking, hard-boiled cohort to which Detective Marlowe himself belongs (“The Big Sleep” 592). While the plants in this private space are evocative of public figures (e.g., the prostitute, the dumped corpse, the barfly) and their associated urban haunts, General Sternwood seems barely human. The old man’s “bloodless lips” and fireless eyes reveal that he is “obviously dying” (“The Big Sleep” 592). Part-machine, part-beast, and part-plant, he slumps in his wheelchair with “a leaden mask” of a face, “thin clawlike hands,” and a few locks of hair that resemble “wild flowers fighting for life on a bare rock” (“The Big Sleep” 592). Despite his wealth and elite social standing, the general is a pitiable manifestation of the bestiality and desperate values of the urban wasteland.

Far more than Conan Doyle's narrative topography, which contains transitional zones between different geographies (e.g., Neville St. Clair's "changing room"), Chandler's Southern California constitutes a widely encompassing and undifferentiated landscape. Whether we are sealed inside General Sternwood's greenhouse in *The Big Sleep*, slumming in a sanatorium in *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), or winding through the cool, chirruping mountains of *The Lady in the Lake* (1943), we are always conscious that *this* is Chandler's city. Even his *mélange* of misfits, dullards, and *femmes fatales* are fully marinated in the steamy stew of Urban Noir. They are examples of what literary critic John Bayley has termed the "atmosphere of characterization," a generic stylistic mechanism by which Urban Noir practitioners achieve "an extraordinarily vivid sense of place" (Introduction). Taking a cue from Bayley, it might be fair to say that character and plot in the Urban Noir mystery are instruments or accoutrements of setting and atmosphere. The blurring of character and setting, furthermore, is indicative of a more general muddying of the line between interiors and exteriors.

Like the antivivisection narrative discussed in Chapter III, the detective plot is itself premised on the terrifying violability of internal spaces--architectural, bodily, psychological, or otherwise. The nightmare of Urban Noir is that there is no safe or pristine inner sanctum. Rather, it is a crude subgenre with none of the bourgeois pretention that entraps the amateur lady detective of the Country Cozy in her genteel *intérieur* and divides her from the wretched bodies in the street. The hardened male detectives of the Noir universe, furthermore, must draw on their own "appalling knowledge" of the city--to borrow Marcus Klein's apt phrasing--in order to navigate and survive it (194). As readers of urban crime fiction, we *need* street-hardened detectives,



such as Holmes, Spade, and Marlowe, to use both their muscle and their “locally furnished intelligence” to guide us through their home turfs (Williams 227). We rely on them, as Raymond Williams put it in *The Country and the City* (1973), to “penetrate the intricacies of the city” and to “find [a] way through the fog” that so mystifies us (227). In the same way that mystery as a “form” imposes order on diffuse terror and chaos, the city sleuth contains urban criminality by reducing it to “single causes” (Williams 227). Urban male detectives usher us toward the sanctifying streetlamp. They both locate and constitute small orbs of light in the terrifying chiaroscuro of the urban criminal landscape. We depend on the solitary male detective--whom Megan E. Abbott has named the hardboiled novel’s “tough guy”--to shepherd us through the illegible noir city (3).

Like urban crime tales, Country Cozies depend on a particular geography for their underlying structure. The most popular Cozy writer of all time, Agatha Christie, charted her *Miss Marple* puzzlers onto the bucolic English village, most often represented in the series by the protagonist’s hometown of St. Mary Mead.<sup>56</sup> Old-fashioned, gossipy, and slightly priggish, Christie’s Miss Marple personifies the self-contained social world of the village. Miss Marple’s apparent knack for solving mysteries derives, as she readily admits, from an education in rural sociality. Having witnessed a lifetime of minor dramas in this setting, Miss Marple possesses a mental index of human motivations, which she routinely consults during her cases. Even when the sleuthing spinster investigates people and places outside of St. Mary Mead, she invokes the feminized social world of tea parties, church fundraisers, and knitting circles as her crime-solving touchstone. In contrast to Sherlock Holmes’s preferred method of detection (i.e.,

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<sup>56</sup> Some mystery scholars have argued that the term “Cozy” is an allusion to the quilted teapot insulator, which Jane Marple used as a pretty and practical *accoutrement* to her very British afternoon habit.

observation, deduction, and occasional fisticuffs), Miss Marple relies on “woman’s intuition.” Drawing conclusions based on feeling, archetype, and analogy, Miss Marple strikes the stories’ professional male investigators, especially the forthright Inspector Slack, as exasperatingly desultory and provincial.

But Miss Marple’s reasoning *is* provincial. She classifies suspects according to a folk taxonomy of representative “types,” all of which are based on her neighbors back in St. Mary Mead. An intimate knowledge of the English village--which Christie portrays as an enclosed, orderly, and transparent space--assists Miss Marple in bringing order and light to the chaos and opacity of a crime scene. Geography, in other words, structures the mystery plot by informing Miss Marple’s investigative method. Despite her countrified habits and appearance, the elderly sleuth’s perceptive powers are far reaching and broadly applicable. Christie even implies that her protagonist’s insights are truer *because* they have not been complicated by formal training, corrupted by professional ambition, or disciplined to fit police procedure. In “The Four Suspects” (1932), for example, Miss Marple lends her “petty perspective” to an ex-Commissioner of Scotland Yard, advising him on a case of international proportions (179). Needless to say, she not only solves the case that has stumped the professionals but does so without leaving the comfortable confines of her parlor.

In addition to structuring the detective plot, geography also regulates the *moral* and *cultural* atmosphere of the Cozy narrative. A country gentlewoman, such as Miss Marple, is bound by certain rules of decorum specific to her position as an upper-class spinster. Miss Marple’s status as a “dear lady” can be an asset in her crime solving, as it affords her access to spaces of social privilege and encourages some suspects to let down

their guard in her presence (“Nemesis” 21). It, however, also renders her unfit for “coarse” places, activities, and forms of social intercourse. Gender, age, and frailty certainly play a significant part in preventing Miss Marple from tromping across the moor or strong-arming thugs, but custom also substantially truncates her investigative repertoire. Social decorum translates into literary decorum in Cozy mysteries, such as Christie’s *Miss Marple* series. In order to shield the gentlewoman sleuth from the seamier side of life, the Cozy author must craft an appropriately sanitized narrative environment. For this reason, crimes that occur outside the borders of St. Mary Mead (or comparable social spaces) require Miss Marple to enlist the aid of consorts of a different class, sex, or age than herself. Even more than Holmes, Miss Marple must appoint proxies to do her dirty work.

The farther Miss Marple travels from the *locus amoenus* of St. Mary Mead, the more physically restricted and aggravated she becomes. *A Caribbean Mystery* (1964), which is the only Miss Marple story set outside of England, presents significant challenges with regard to its protagonist’s mobility. While convalescing in a posh hotel at St. Honoré in the West Indies, Miss Marple realizes that without her reliable coterie of investigative assistants she may not be able to thwart an impending murder. In a rare description of Miss Marple wavering in her trademark restraint, Christie writes, “She realized, bitterly, that here on this paradise of an island, she had none of her usual allies...Miss Marple, feeling rather like a humble deputy of the Almighty, almost cried aloud her need in Biblical phrasing. *Who will go for me? Whom shall I send?*” (“A Caribbean Mystery” 99-100). Ultimately, Miss Marple convinces a British businessman to exert his influence over the situation, explaining to him, “People will take notice of

what you say or suggest. They wouldn't listen to me for a moment. They would say that I was an old lady imagining things" ("A Caribbean Mystery" 109). In this land of strangers, Miss Marple, for all her gumption and perspicacity, gets reduced to her "scatty," "fluffy" appearance ("A Caribbean Mystery" 110, 113).

Whether they are bound by physical demarcations, rules of decorum, or reader expectations, mystery protagonists typically adhere to the normative spatial practice of their given subgenres. Spatial restraints influence their sleuthing personae by determining not only what, whom, and how they investigate but also from whence they draw their special insights and make their incisive observations. In the closed social world of the Cozy mystery, Miss Marple ensconces herself in the elite interiors of resort hotels, family estates, and old-world cottages so that she can interpret the meticulous arrangement of bodies, gestures, and words among her bourgeois suspects. In the dizzying complexity of the city, Holmes, Spade, and Marlowe add to their "appalling knowledge" of modern corruption by immersing themselves in the low-life milieu of gamblers, gangsters, pornographers, blackmailers, and drug-dealers. Even when Miss Marple, Holmes, Spade, and Marlowe crack conundrums of international scope and consequence, they do so from very particular social and geographic locations, and their perspectives are decidedly provincial. The borders delimiting these locations are determined by subgeneric spatial conventions, which, incidentally, all four of these prototypic literary sleuths helped to prescribe. Although the specific sites where mystery plots unfold have, traditionally, shaped protagonists' thoughts and actions, cat mysteries tend to resemble spatial pastiches or hybrids and to exhibit far less narrative determinism.

Even in the agoraphobic context of mystery literature, we do not strongly associate cat detectives with any single location or social milieu. The feline mystique, which cat people value as a species-specific embodiment of animality, derives from the impossibility of pinning the cat down. In referring to the cat-mystery cat's stomping ground, we cannot invoke the proper possessive with any of the assurance that we can with Holmes's London, Marlowe's Los Angeles, Spade's San Francisco, or Jane Marple's St. Mary Mead. For what exactly *is* the right and proper place of the cat detective? One hardly knows. The cat is a cultural stray, skulking and scuttling through various social and geographic domains with perfect ease. Since the feline belongs to no single locus or milieu, any number of spatial associations ring true: house cat, alley cat, barn cat, dumpster cat, bookstore cat, dockyard cat, lap cat, and so forth. We even link cats to the ship, that floating site which is, as Michel Foucault pointed out, at once within and detached from its culture (i.e., "a place without a place").<sup>57</sup> Every good ship has a good mouser, hence "ship cat." As we will see, cat mysteries mobilize the feline's captivating ubiquity and folkloric association with transgression to push the spatial limits of the crime plot.

### ***Felis ubiquitous* as Narrative Perversion**

Many literary and folkloric traditions conceptualize *Felis domesticus*, or the common housecat, as a creature immune to full domestication. According to the written and oral narratives of countless peoples around the globe, every cat retains at least some feral characteristics. The title of Carl Van Vechten's cultural history of the domestic

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<sup>57</sup> In a March 1967 lecture entitled, "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault referred to the ship as "a floating piece of space" and "the heterotopia par excellence."

feline, *The Tiger in the House* (1922), alludes to the creature's irrepressible wildness. "The cat," he elaborates, "walks by herself, retains her pride, her dignity, her reserve, keeps the secret of the ciborium, and gives no sign of the cupellations she has witnessed in alchemical garrets. She is perverse, refuses to be 'put' anywhere, often takes delight in manifesting her affection for someone who has an inherent dislike for her, while she frequently ignores an admirer" (Van Vechten 83). Genetic studies on the origin of the domestic feline indicate that Pussycat's wild ancestors more or less *chose* to live among humans (and our rodent-rich grain stores) around 12,000 years ago. In contrast to other acts of domestication, it appears that cats inserted themselves into the agricultural settlements of human beings, who likely rewarded the ingratiating little exterminators with a bowl of milk and a chin rub. Oxford University researcher Carlos A. Driscoll has encapsulated the scientific community's take on feline domestication this way: "We think what happened is that cats sort of domesticated themselves" (D. Brown).

Various writers of mystery, horror, and Gothic literature have tapped into this widespread presumption of feline perversity. Most famously, Edgar Allan Poe, who is often credited as the American progenitor of mystery fiction, exploited the popular conceit as a way of heightening the uncanny aspects of his short story, "The Black Cat" (1843). In this Gothic tale about a man who murders his wife, Poe cultivates an atmosphere of strangeness and unpredictability by thematizing the paradoxical feline's *domestic wildness*. Even the story's opening sentence implies the essential paradox of the housecat: "For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen I neither expect nor solicit belief" (Poe 839). At once "wild" and "homely," the figure of the cat signifies the perversity of the tale's murderous husband. Like the purring pet who

suddenly and inexplicably swipes a caressing hand, the homicidal human exhibits paroxysms of brutality triggered by no rational provocation. Indeed, the tale's deranged narrator attributes his own criminal deeds to "the spirit of PERVERSENESS" awakened in his breast by a black cat (Poe 839).

Cats, as Poe well understood, excite occult fascinations that enhance the mystical or grotesque elements of a narrative. A certain *je ne sais quoi*, which author Clea Simon has termed "the feline mystique," derives no doubt from the cat's mythic association with witches and warlocks. In addition to their pagan assignation as quotidian manifestations of devils, tricksters, vampires, and witches, cats have been construed in the Judeo-Christian tradition as Satan's familiars. Court records from the Salem witch trials of 1692, for example, indicate that several accused "witches" were compelled to finger their pet cats as satanic familiars or instruments in occult rituals. In a famous literary example of the feline presence in devil-lore, Huckleberry Finn teaches Tom Sawyer a witch's remedy for warts that entails throwing a dead cat into a graveyard while chanting: "Devil follow corpse, cat follow devil, warts follow cat, I'm done with ye!" (Twain 46).

Professions of cats' shapeshifting powers also abound in fables, superstitions, and various folk survivals found throughout North America. In an ethnographic account published in a 1914 issue of *The Journal of American Folklore*, Josiah Henry Combs recorded a cat-related superstition of the Kentucky Mountains: "Witches often metamorphose themselves into black cats and toads when they go about their mischief-making. For this reason it is bad luck to injure a black cat or a toad" (328). A similar tale told throughout the United States and Britain involves a woman who transforms herself into a cat in order to sneak into a neighbor's home. Suspecting her chicanery, the

neighbor apprehends the trespassing woman-turned-cat and chops off her front paw. Upon returning to her human form, the woman discovers that her corresponding hand is missing. The absent appendage exposes the subterfuge to the community, and the woman is either punished or rehabilitated (depending on region-to-region variations in the story's ending).

As they do in myth and folklore, human-feline metamorphoses abound in popular culture. Fantasy fiction, in particular, has seen its fair share of shapeshifting characters. In 1950, American author Paul Gallico published his feline fantasy novel, *Jennie*, which featured a boy-turned-cat. More recently, the best-selling British author, Terry Pratchett, has written a tomcat-turned-man into his "Discworld" fantasy series. Shapeshifting characters also have made numerous appearances in movies, television, and comics. Notably, the human-feline characters who most readily come to mind (*Catwoman*, *Miss Fury*, *Black Cat*, and *Josie and the Pussycats*) all either solve or commit crimes. Perhaps critics ought not be surprised, given this history, that cat-mystery writers and fans consider housecats naturally suited to the crime plot.

To go a step further, it is precisely the cat's irrepressible "cat-ness" that recommends it for the mystery genre. Its domestic wildness and shapeshifting ability render the cat figure a fungible literary character, adaptable to a wide range of geographic, cultural, and generic spaces. As the talking feline in Rudyard Kipling's *Just So* story, "The Cat That Walked By Himself" (1902), informs the human who wants to domesticate him: "I will catch mice when I am in the Cave for always and always and always; but *still* I am the Cat who walks by himself, and all places are alike to me" (106). Literary cats are indeed intrepid and adaptable. Like the witches we associate them with,



cats are marginal figures who sit on the boundary between human society and the wilderness. Not surprisingly, feline liminality and shapeshifting are pervasive themes in cat mysteries. Many of the genre's characters demonstrate metamorphic abilities by transforming from human to cat or from cat to human. In Marian Babson's *Nine Lives to Murder* (2002), for instance, a man and a cat switch bodies as the result of a violent collision. Similarly, Shirley Rousseau Murphy includes transspecies characters in her *Joe Grey* series. Other cat-mystery authors thematize feline liminality less explicitly by positioning their cat characters on fences, walls, doorsteps, or windowsills.

As liminal figures, cats play an important role in the spatial logics of the mystery narrative. Just as felines in mythology cheat death by traveling back and forth between this world and the next (hence, their "nine lives"), felines in cat mysteries venture into spaces of criminality and come out unscathed. The cat mystery's soft-pawed, supple-spined heroes squeeze into tight spots that larger and less agile crimebusters, such as humans or police dogs, cannot access. Feline dexterity allows Carole Nelson Douglas's *Midnight Louie* to walk a tightrope, Shirley Rousseau Murphy's *Joe Grey* to wriggle up a ceiling vent, and Lilian Jackson Braun's *Koko* to propel himself onto a narrow rafter twenty feet above the floor.<sup>58</sup> These popular feline heroes showcase the physical gifts--exceptional balance, flexibility, and quickness--which allow cat detectives to stalk their felonious prey through tricky terrains and to accomplish narrow getaways. In the respective works of Lydia Adamson, Marian Babson, Lilian Jackson Braun, Rita Mae Brown, Susan Conant, and Shirley Rousseau Murphy, feline sleuths investigate crimes in such varied places as: an Atlantic City casino, a cozy countryhouse in England, an

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<sup>58</sup> These three displays of feline dexterity occur in Douglas's *Cat in a Quicksilver Caper* (2006), Murphy's *Cat on the Edge* (1996), and Braun's *The Cat Who Saw Stars* (2000).

antique shop in a Michigan “junktown,” a dense Virginia forest, an exclusive neighborhood in suburban Boston, and a dingy alley in a coastal California town.<sup>59</sup>

Cat-mystery felines, as the above examples suggest, can infiltrate and adjust to new environments with relative ease. Lithe and sure-footed, they accomplish feats of remarkable agility, while incurring fewer personal risks than their comparatively clumsy human counterparts. Many of the genre’s cats also exhibit the feline talent (which zoologists attribute to the cat’s acute sensitivity to the Earth’s magnetic field) for finding their way home from virtually anywhere. Using their internal navigation systems, cat detectives routinely track suspects into *terra incognita* and return home safely. Adroit, inconspicuous, and endowed with built-in homing devices, cat-mystery cats can investigate a wide array of places without becoming disoriented or arousing suspicion. With their scant regard for social and geographic boundaries, they not only add to the excitement of the detective plot but also push the normative spatial parameters of the traditional mystery narrative. Indeed, the feline characters in cat mysteries compose an adventurous pride whose territory spans virtually every patch of the mystery landscape.

While the cat detective counts on its aforementioned physical dexterity in apprehending villains, it also benefits from its highly adaptable feline perspective. While human sleuths rely on a profound knowledge of one particular environment, cat characters draw on a more panoramic intelligence which allows them to investigate a wide range of social and geographic landscapes. By climbing up high, crouching down low, wiggling through slats, or balancing on partitions, feline sleuths avail themselves of

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<sup>59</sup> These examples are drawn from the following cat mysteries, respectively: Adamson’s *A Cat on a Winning Streak* (1995), Babson’s *Please Do Feed the Cat* (2006), Braun’s *The Cat Who Turned On and Off* (1986), Brown’s *Sour Puss* (2006), Conant’s *Scratch the Surface* (2006), and Murphy’s *Cat on the Edge* (1996).

a variety of vantage points and ways of seeing. They can survey a vast landscape from above, or they can comb a crime scene on the ground with such fine-toothed exactness as to rival Sherlock Holmes's "extraordinary genius for minutiae" ("The Sign of Four" 91). Mystery cats, furthermore, often traipse along fences or edges so as to keep an eye on more than one region at once.

In her aptly titled novel, *Cat on the Edge* (1996), Shirley Rousseau Murphy fully exploits the perspectival versatility of her feline characters. The cover art on the April 2000 *Avon Books* reprint of the 1996 original suggestively depicts the cartoonesque image of a bug-eyed tomcat trotting along the uppermost spine of an A-frame house. The illustration corresponds to an early scene in the story in which talking feline sleuth, Joe Grey, evades a murderous human pursuer by climbing "up a rose trellis" and scampering along the roofline of a "small, peaceful village" at Molena Point, California (S. Murphy 15). Such aerial escapes are a trademark maneuver of Joe Grey and the other feline characters in Murphy's twelve-volume series. The cats of Molena Point frequently position themselves high above human society or on dividing lines between different neighborhoods in the sprawling coastal community.

From their favorite posts above or between spaces, the cats can survey the goings-on in the entire region or oversee the activities in adjoining areas at closer range. At one point, Joe Grey discovers a lookout spot that affords him *both* a bird's eye overview and a dual-perspective on two disparate geographies. Aloft in a giant oak tree on the crest of a hill, he marvels at the sweeping view, which encompasses the city streets, the village cottages, the tall courthouse, the local businesses, the beach, the sea, the rocky cliffs, the mountains, and all manner of human and animal life. Joe observes that, in this particular

perch, he is “poised between two worlds” (S. Murphy 15). To the left of the median, he can see “the cottage rooftops snuggled close together” (S. Murphy 15). Even at a great distance, the village strikes him as being quaint and familiar. Opposite this “homey” area, however, he beholds the savage California wilderness (S. Murphy 15). This “cruel and bloody” region, he recalls, is ruled by “coyotes and pumas,” who most likely would view him as nothing more than “an hors d’oeuvre” (S. Murphy 15). Joe belongs to both of these worlds; he is a cherished domestic pet yet also very much “his own cat” (S. Murphy 15). He relishes napping on a “warm, safe bed” beside his “human housemate” but cannot resist scavenging in alley dumpsters, devouring wild rabbits, and wrangling with the local ferals (S. Murphy 45).

Shirley Rousseau Murphy’s Joe Grey is truly a “cat on the edge” (Figure V.5). Like many other cat-mystery felines, he both bridges and embodies distinct social, geographic, and generic worlds. Since Murphy invented a main character that can move comfortably in and between cities, suburbs, villages, mountain wilds, seedy backstreets, and cozy cottages, she is not bound by the spatial conventions of any one of the particular subgenres onto which these physical spaces are traditionally mapped. Her narratives, on the contrary, liberally imitate and combine elements from both the Urban Noir and Country Cozy mystery traditions. As the debut volume, *Cat on the Edge* establishes the *Joe Grey* series as a spatial pastiche. In the novel’s first chapter, Joe Grey witnesses a murder while foraging through garbage cans in a dark alley. Upon glimpsing Joe crouched in the shadows, the human perpetrator of the crime panics and decides that he must dispose of the witness to his illicit deed, never mind that the witness is a *cat*. This decision precipitates a blazing chase through Molena Point during which Joe

demonstrates his impressive feline stamina and agility. In the course of the pursuit, he scrambles up a trellis, darts under a car, balances on a tree limb, dives beneath a porch, wiggles into a crawl space, and zigzags through a dozen backyards. The excitement dies down when Joe finally reaches “his neighborhood territory,” and chapter two begins with a description of the exhausted cat “curled up on his master’s bed” (S. Murphy 13). In this frenetic opening sequence, Murphy whisks us through a variety of generic sites, starting in a quintessentially Urban Noir locus of criminality (the dark alley) and ending in a favorite Country Cozy place of repose (the village bedroom). In between, she also provides a sampling of feline vistas. We peer *up* from beneath a parked car; we look *down* from the treetops; we stare *through* the darkness of a crawl space.

Murphy further mottles the novel’s *mise en scène* by playfully mixing generic tropes and topoi, which we typically would think of as being incompatible in a single mystery narrative. In *Cat on the Edge*, the seedy alley of Urban Noir leads into a cozy teashop, a softly glowing bistro, a local art gallery, and an upscale golf store. In this narrative universe, the sour stench of “garbage” and “dog pee” mingles easily with “the perfume of the jasmine vines” adorning antique storefronts (S. Murphy 7, 4). Here, the “thud of breaking bone” in the street punctuates the “soft, nostalgic melody” of a “forties love song” floating out of a cozy village restaurant (S. Murphy 1, 4, 2). In the space of just one sentence, Murphy can inconspicuously re-envisage a dark, forbidding “alley” as a “peaceful lane” (S. Murphy 2). While this jumbled setting would disarm us in other narrative contexts, it feels appropriate when focalized through the “most wild, yet most homely” feline character, Joe Grey. It makes as much sense to us that Joe would be slinking through a dingy alley as it does that he would be balled up on a comfortable bed.

That the shadowy alley and the peaceful lane turn out to be one and the same in this story seems somehow more plausible because its hero is at once darkly brooding *and* as cute as a button.

Although Joe Grey seems as docile as any housecat when he is nestled in a pile of blankets, he generally exudes the toughness and hard-nosed independence of his Urban Noir progenitors. He is terse, cynical, and unsentimental, and he prides himself on being “the epitome of tough tomcats” (S. Murphy 18). Nicknamed the “Rakish Ruckster,” Joe Grey (like many a Noir bachelor) has earned quite a reputation for tomcatting around. In spite of himself, he admits to feeling a loose attachment to his “sometime lady love,” a diminutive brindle cat named Dulcie (S. Murphy 8). As a counterpoint and complement to the hard-boiled Joe, Dulcie embodies--as her name suggests--the sweet insouciance and rustic naiveté of a Country Cozy lass. Both Joe and Dulcie mirror the personalities of their human companions (or perhaps it is the humans that reflect the cats). Joe’s master, Clyde Damen, is a thirty-eight-year-old, poker-playing, weight-lifting auto mechanic with a sparse bachelor pad and an enthusiastic retinue of girlfriends. In contrast, Dulcie’s mistress, Wilma Getz, is a retired “spinster of middle years” who lives in a “modest, tree-sheltered” stone cottage with a “lush English garden” (S. Murphy 34, 33, 61). While Clyde expresses his fondness for Joe through crude banter, Wilma manifests her “softer instincts” by endlessly indulging Dulcie’s whims and by being “lenient” to a fault (S. Murphy 35). We expect to find a wisecracking bachelor, such as Clyde Damen, in a hard-boiled detective novel and a graying spinster, such as Wilma Getz, in a Cozy mystery, but we would not necessarily anticipate seeing both of these characters in the *same* narrative. Joe and Dulcie bring these two unlikely human friends

together in the common bond of cat ownership. The novel ends, in fact, on the occasion of a community-wide picnic in which Joe, Dulcie, Clyde, and Wilma all join together in happy communion. Once again, we are back in the alley where the murder in chapter one occurred, but now a celebration, not a crime, is in progress. The site of conflict has become a space of reconciliation in which stock Urban Noir and stock Country Cozy characters sit “side by side” (S. Murphy 271). In Murphy’s *Molena Point*, it is hardly a stretch to imagine Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe sharing tea with the vicar’s wife.

While Shirley Rousseau Murphy’s *Joe Grey* series provides an illustrative case of generic mixing between Country Cozy and Urban Noir, Rita Mae Brown’s mysteries depict feline incursions into wild and Gothic spaces. Critics tend to label Brown a Country Cozy writer, in part, because the principal characters in her *New York Times* bestselling series hail from picturesque Crozet, Virginia. While many of her individual narratives are indeed set in this small Southern town, the series as a whole displays a significant amount of geographic variation. In a genre overrun with curious cats, the redoubtable Mrs. Murphy and her spunky sidekick, Pewter, have distinguished themselves as uncompromising snoops, willing to thrust themselves into all manner of unfamiliar places and harrowing circumstances in the service of justice. They have stalked criminals and sniffed out clues in such varied destinations as a bear’s cave, a mountain monastery, an archeological-dig site, a vineyard, a steeplechase, and a freshly dug grave.<sup>60</sup> By perusing crime scenes, hunting down leads, warning human friends of danger, and eavesdropping on suspects’ conversations, the cats, invariably, help drive the physical progress of Brown’s narratives.

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<sup>60</sup> These examples are taken from the following *Mrs. Murphy* novels, respectively: *Sour Puss* (2006), *Cat’s Eyewitness* (2006), *Murder, She Meowed* (1996), *Murder at Monticello* (1994), *Sour Puss* (2006), and *The Tail of the Tip-Off* (2003).

Mrs. Murphy and Pewter, like most cat mystery felines, boast a perfect comprehension of the English language and an innate grasp of human psychology. Brown represents her cats' words and thoughts in amusing dialogue, which she helpfully differentiates from human speech through italicization. In contrast to Shirley Rousseau Murphy's loquacious Joe Grey, Brown's felines can only address human characters with indirect discourse: an exclamatory meow, a suggestive nudge, a well-timed switch of the tail. Although Mrs. Murphy and Pewter are unable to ring up their owner on the telephone the way Joe Grey can (and does) in *Cat on the Edge*, their non-verbal exchanges with humans are nonetheless crucial to the detective plot. Using body language and sound cues, they spur their human guardian, Mary Minor "Harry" Haristeen, to follow promising leads and to note critical details of the crime scene. As a lifelong animal lover who is highly attuned to her pets' feelings, personalities, and habits, Harry proves a deft interpreter of feline pantomime. This skill provides a safeguard for all of the genre's human protagonists, whose lives hinge on their ability to read their cats' histrionics and to sense their moods. Indeed, the human-feline bond serves as the main channel through which clues to the crime plot are revealed. The cat mystery's happy resolution--as every fan knows--depends on the mutual understanding between the stories' "cat people" and "people cats."

Like the villagers of St. Mary Mead, the good citizens of Crozet inhabit a social world in which news travels fast and everyone knows everyone else's business. In addition to spending an inordinate amount of time gossiping in community nerve centers, such as the Greater Crozet Post Office, Carmen Gamble's *Shear Heaven* salon, and Tracy



Raz's café, Harry and her human peers boast full social calendars. "This being Virginia," we are told, "there were parties for every single human endeavor and lack of the same" (*Whiskers of Evil* 101). Harry's "close-knit" peer group consists of old-money socialites and members of the glitterati: millionaire horse breeders, vineyard owners, retired Hollywood stars, and world-class fashion models (*Sour Puss* 34).

Mrs. Murphy and Pewter gladly hobnob with Harry's jet-set crowd, but they also consort with a broader society, consisting of the wild animals in the region's forests, creeks, skies, dens, and caves. This motley crew of critters is as gossipy as any in Crozet yet is not tied to the fussy interiors, tidy farms, and manicured lawns of the Virginia elite. When Mrs. Murphy and Pewter make *their* social rounds, they venture into the foggy mountains, murky woods, and damp caves surrounding Crozet's human habitations. The cats often call on their undomesticated friends when they want a tip on an investigation or the latest scuttlebutt from the wilderness.

As part of her investigation into the long-ago disappearance of a Virginia socialite named Mary Patricia Reines in *Whisker of Evil* (2004), Mrs. Murphy pays a nighttime visit to a fox in her den. "*Foxes have long memories,*" Mrs. Murphy addresses the vixen, "*Ask some of the old ones if their grandmothers or great-grandfathers ever spoke of Mary Patricia Reines*" (*Whisker of Evil* 138). She goes on to interrogate the fox about a mysterious outbreak of rabies among the local human population: "*I was wondering if you'd heard any reports of rabies among the foxes...Two humans have had it. Both dead, although one was killed outright. They discovered the rabies later, after the autopsy...What about the raccoons or the beaver? You all talk*" (*Whisker of Evil* 138). Later, Mrs. Murphy appeals to her owl friend, Flatface, for help gathering information

from her flying fellows--the bats. Drawing on her intimate knowledge of the region's topography, Mrs. Murphy muses: "*There are all those caves in the Shenandoah Valley. I mean not just the Luray Caverns but caves all over. Just right up over these mountains. I know they're full of bats. If you have any friends over there, maybe they could ask the bats if they know about rabies among them*" (*Whisker of Evil* 140). In a similar episode from *Sour Puss*, Brown's cats alight on a bear's den and interview its four-hundred-pound denizen about a recent murder. Mrs. Murphy, in the same novel, also drops in on the recurring possum character, Simon, for a "good gossip" (*Sour Puss* 10).

These interspecies palavers in the wilderness are so integral to Brown's mystery plots that Jim Cox and Ann Lewis Hamilton deemed it appropriate to feature one in their 1998 screenplay for the television-movie adaptation of the "Mrs. Murphy" series, *Murder She Purred*. In the course of a criminal investigation, Mrs. Murphy, voiced by Blythe Danner, abandons her cozy cottage and heads for the Virginia woods. Fed up with the incompetence of humans, she decides, "It's about time we paid a little visit to a friend of mine." The resolute tabby travels deep into the forest and, upon locating a fox hole, bellows, "Izakiah!" A red fox with a whiskey voice, belonging to actor David Allen Kramer, emerges from a dark den and is promptly interviewed about the marauding of a local cemetery. With his head cocked at a thoughtful angle, the fox remembers, "Oh! There *was* something I heard last night...a car on the old logging road." Furnished with the information she needs, Mrs. Murphy turns and sprints back to her cottage.

Mrs. Murphy and Pewter's social intercourse with undomesticated animals shuttles them through wild regions that human characters in Country Cozy novels rarely penetrate. Although the cats' reliance on gossip as a major investigative resource situates

them squarely within a classic Cozy social space, they frequently must travel to the edges of human settlement and beyond in order to generate the local information mill.

Christie's Miss Marple can confidently dispatch an undercover housekeeper to the Crackenthorpe mansion based on assurances from the village pipeline that, as of late, "everyone is crying out for efficient domestic help" (4:50 *From Paddington* 37). The nonhuman characters of Crozet, by the same token, can testify that Harry's dog recently exhumed a human femur from an illicit grave due to the fact that "all the wild animals and birds are talking about it" (*Whisker of Evil* 238). Age, infirmity, and social position, however, preclude Miss Marple from personally infiltrating the Crackenthorpe household. The old lady must content herself with "snipping off a few things in the garden," while Lucy Eyelesbarrow roots out the novel's killer (4:50 *From Paddington* 27). By contrast, Brown's cats can abandon their cozy home at will and cross into the Gothic realm of beastly wilds, ghoulish gravesites, and bats' caves.

The cats' ability to navigate these treacherous spaces stems not only from their agile bodies and acute senses of sight, smell, and hearing but also from their uncanny aptitude for sensing danger. In Brown's series, the cats' "sixth sense" makes them indispensable to the novels' human investigators. Even Harry, who possesses keener faculties than most people, depends on the extrasensory feline endowments of Mrs. Murphy and Pewter. The cats' heightened perceptions alert Harry to danger and provide her with infallible impressions of strangers. (If a cat-mystery feline hisses at a human, there is a good chance that the person in question is embroiled in some unsavory enterprise.) Juxtaposing Mrs. Murphy's feline prescience to Harry's duller perceptions, Brown narrates:

Being a feline, her senses were much sharper than Harry's, although Mrs. Murphy knew Harry possessed remarkable hearing for a human and was able to hear into some of the cat range. She also possessed a decent nose. But what Harry could never possess was that extrasensory perception that even the lowliest feline had. And that sixth sense was warning Mrs. Murphy that danger was coming closer, closer.... (*Whisker of Evil* 139)

Even more so than in the mysteries of Rita Mae Brown, the cat's sixth sense plays a prominent role in the novels of Lilian Jackson Braun. In Braun's *The Cat Who...* series, feline extrasensory perception largely compensates for the fact that Siamese sleuths, Koko and Yum Yum, are indoor-only pets. Because they are "never allowed to roam outdoors," the pair must rely more heavily on their uncanny feline gift for "sensing" events from afar (*The Cat Who Played Brahms* 27). Despite substantial impediments to their mobility, Koko and Yum Yum routinely assist in criminal investigations by offering impressions of suspects, alerting their master to danger, and making occasional prognostications. Even in his domestic confines, Koko will emit a bone-chilling yowl at the very moment a murder occurs *anywhere* inside the borders of Moose County. In Braun's 2003 companion publication, *The Private Life of the Cat Who...* (2001), Koko and Yum Yum's owner, Qwill, cogitates on feline extrasensory perception in a journal entry:

Most cats, I'm told, are nervous before a violent storm, and they're being used to predict earthquakes. We have no earthquakes in this area, but Koko has a tantrum before a storm. What's more, he is visibly disturbed when an intruder is approaching. He lets me know, several seconds in advance, when the phone is

about to ring--and whether to expect friend or foe. How does he know? One more puzzlement: He senses right from wrong!...[T]hat little four-legged psychic knows good from evil...Koko's sixty whiskers may be the catly equivalent of the optic fibers that carry information in today's digital world. (23-25)

Whiskers, in *The Cat Who...* and other series, function as a synecdoche for the sixth sense that enables cats to interpret signs that even the keenest humans are incapable of perceiving. As one wise character in *The Cat Who Could Read Backwards* (1966) opines, "I would gladly trade one ear and one eye for a full set of cat's whiskers in good working condition" (76).

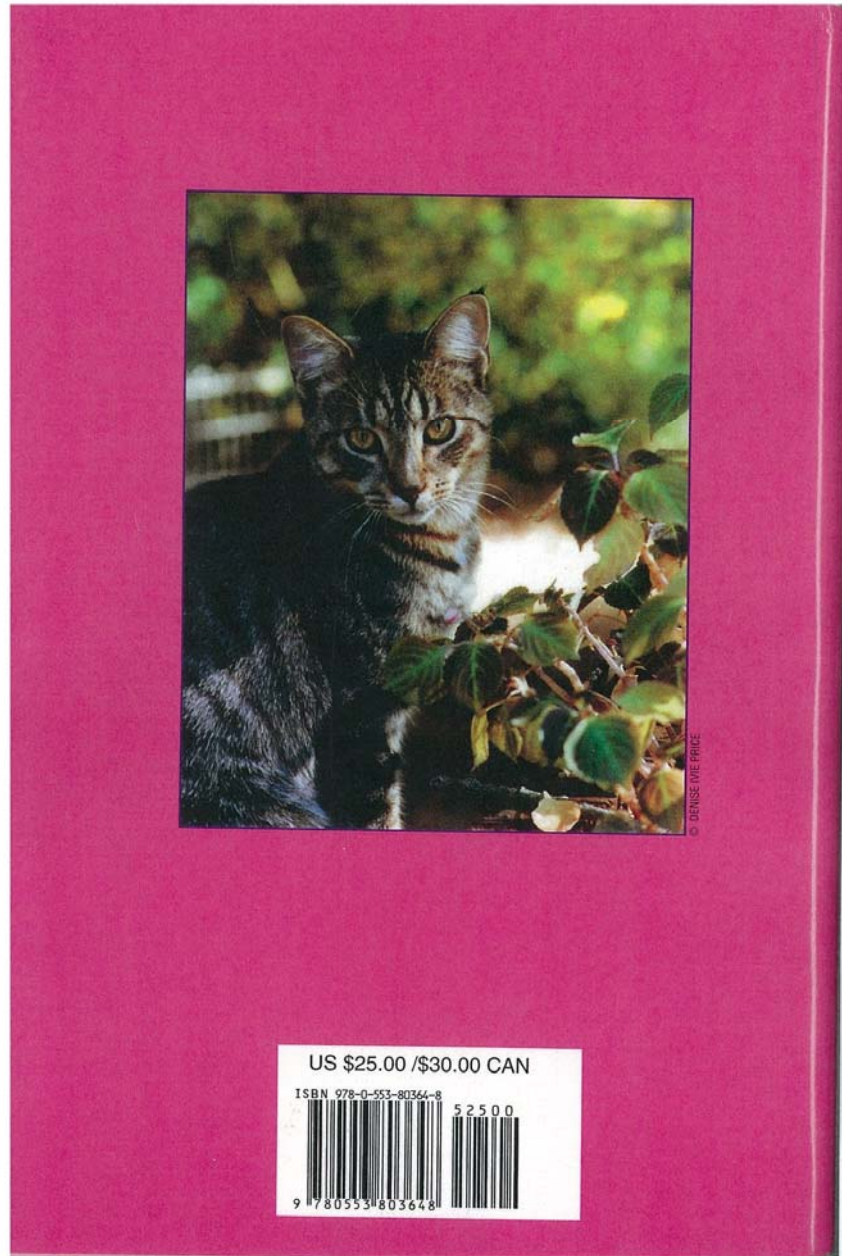
In addition to compensating for their restricted mobility, Koko and Yum Yum's "whisker intelligence" allows Braun to incorporate Gothic motifs and settings into her Cozy series. The plot of *The Cat Who Talked to Ghosts* (1990), for example, unfolds in a "hellishly dark" ghost town where an old woman named Iris Cobb was recently "frightened to death" (6, 94). Suspecting that his pets' sixth sense can help him exorcise a "ghostly visitor" from a farmhouse with "the reputation of being haunted," Qwill temporarily relocates to this "spooky" spot (*The Cat Who Talked to Ghosts* 84, 93, 94). In this supernatural and horrifying environment, he encounters a "grotesque" Hanging Tree, a house mortared with "hog's blood," architecture that inspires the "same sense of awe" as "Gothic cathedrals," and a basement strewn with "broken furniture, rusty tools, moldy books, cracked crockery, and cobwebs" (*The Cat Who Talked to Ghosts* 80, 82, 175, 195). Upon arrival, Koko promptly alerts Qwill to a strange and sinister presence at the site. "Something is going on that I don't understand," Qwill muses, "Koko spends hours gazing out the very window where Iris saw the frightening vision [that killed her]"

(*The Cat Who Talked to Ghosts* 94). When the number of strange incidents in the area increases, Qwill assures a frightened neighbor, “If [a] ghost is prowling around here, Koko is going to find him!” (*The Cat Who Talked to Ghosts* 195).

In a later volume in the series, entitled *The Cat Who Saw Stars* (1999), Braun’s cats even apply their psychic powers to an extraterrestrial mystery that has the quirky town of Mooseville entertaining aspirations of becoming “the Roswell of the North” (13). Instead of searching the hellish darkness for apparitions as they do in *The Cat Who Talked to Ghosts*, this time Qwill and his clairvoyant cats repair to a lakeside cabin near an alien-abduction site and scan the skies for UFOs. In this case, Braun supplements the crime plot with a second mystery: can those funny little whiskers actually pick up signals from extraterrestrials? And, if so, does that not mean that the cats are partly *alien* themselves? In concluding her extraterrestrial mystery, Braun writes, “What were the cat’s origins? No one knew. One day he simply...appeared. Previously, Qwilleran had attributed Koko’s superior intelligence to his sixty whiskers. Perhaps the secret was something more unthinkable--the intelligence of an alien race who were not little green men but little green cats!” (*The Cat Who Saw Stars* 287). Even the most housebound of cat-mystery felines, such as Koko and Yum Yum, embody a discomfiting in-betweenness. They are of our world, yet they are partly wild and alien to us. They fit snugly within the domestic sphere, yet they retain a certain strangeness and essential “unhomeliness.” As cultural signifiers of spatial and social transgression, cat characters perform a great deal of narrative work by opening imaginative worlds sealed off by human gestures of territorialism. Perhaps, it is this uncompromising mobility that

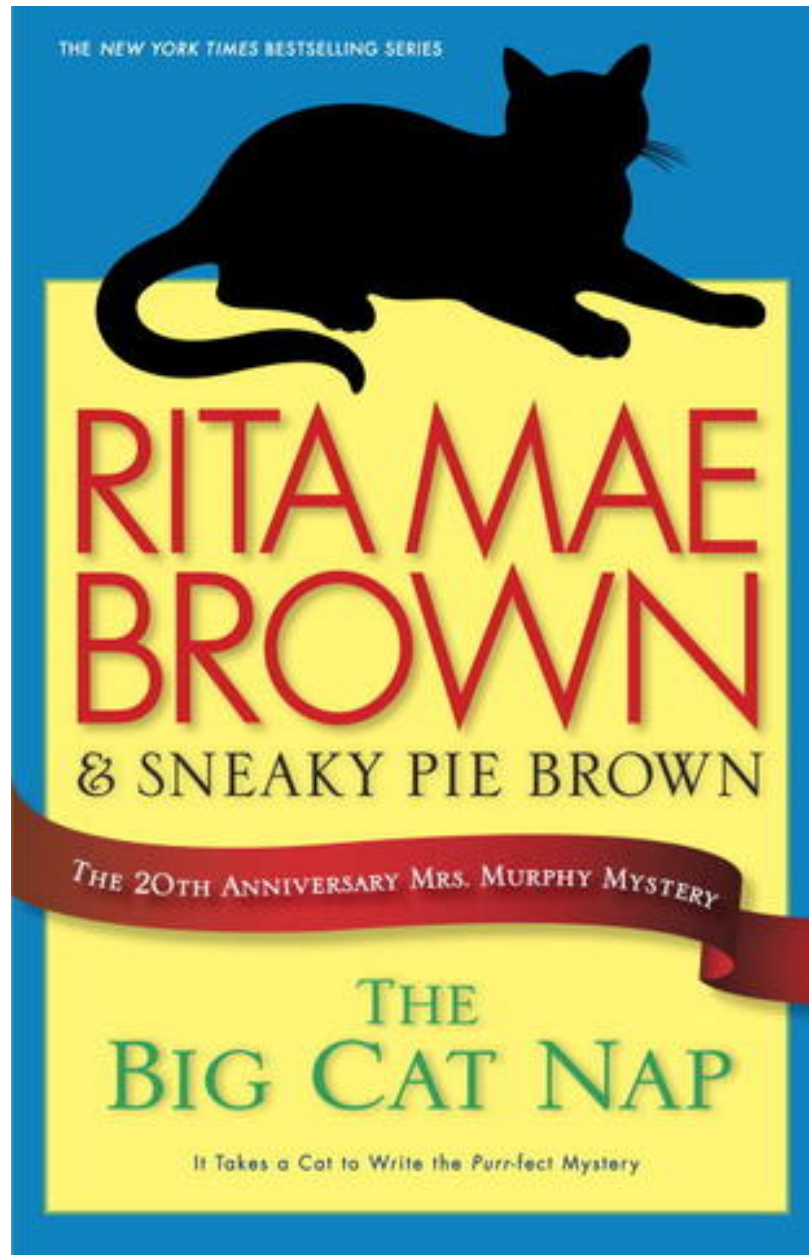
provokes so much rage toward “cat people” and “people cats” who refuse to be put in their place.

We live in close proximity to cats: we share our beds with them, we feed them, we play with them, we stroke them, and we *love* them. But as the poet Jean Burden has observed, they are “only a whisker away from the wilds.” Even the clearest manifestation of the cat’s reciprocal affection--its purr--is also a reminder that there are animal-to-animal communications to which we are wholly alien. That ingratiating little vibration, which we read as a sure sign of interspecies love, is a vestige of kittenhood that once stimulated the mother cat’s milk. For all their cuteness and sociability, cats evoke unsettling feelings of alienated familiarity, what Poe called “the spirit of PERVERSENESS” and Freudians might refer to as *unheimlich* (i.e., “not homely”). That which is *unheimlich*, as Freud understood it, is “in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (363). Like all of the nonhuman animals discussed in this work, cats recall the repressed wildness in humankind and stalk the shifting boundary between sociality and criminality, kindness and cruelty, humanity and inhumanity. If we follow these creature far enough, we become people on the edge who can read every story of humane feeling for traces of its opposite. What we learn, when we read in this way, is that the pages of *Animal Print* are filled with too much violence.



**Figure V.1.** Feline “coauthor” Sneaky Pie Brown on the dust jacket of *Puss ‘n Cahoots* (2007). Brown, Rita Mae, and Sneaky Pie Brown. *Puss ‘n Cahoots*. New York: Bantam Books, 2007. Print.





**Figure V.2.** In 2013, Rita Mae Brown and her feline coauthor celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Mrs. Murphy series with the release of *The Big Cat Nap*. Brown, Rita Mae, and Sneaky Pie Brown. *The Big Cat Nap*. New York: Bantam Book, 2013. Print.



Clea Simon is a Massachusetts-based writer, journalist and a regular contributor to the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Ms.*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Salon.com*. She's the author of three nonfiction books, *Mad House: Growing Up in the Shadow of Mentally Ill Siblings*, *Fatherless Women: How We Change After We Lose Our Dads*, and *The Feline Mystique: On the Mysterious Connection Between Women and Cats*. She lives with her husband, the writer Jon S. Garelick, and their cat, Musetta. *Mew is for Murder* is Simon's first mystery novel.

**Figure V.3.** *Cat-mystery author Clea Simon and her feline companion pictured together on the back panel of Mew is for Murder (2005). Simon, Clea. Mew is for Murder. Scottsdale: Poisoned Pen Press, 2005. Print.*

Dear Reader,

Don't you just love Miss Nasty? Karin Slaughter likes monkeys, so I created Miss Nasty for her.

I hate monkeys, myself, but I do love horses. Mostly I play with Thoroughbreds, but there is a young Saddlebred on the farm, Blue Sky, and he's such a sweetheart. For one thing he recognizes that I am far more intelligent than the human around here.

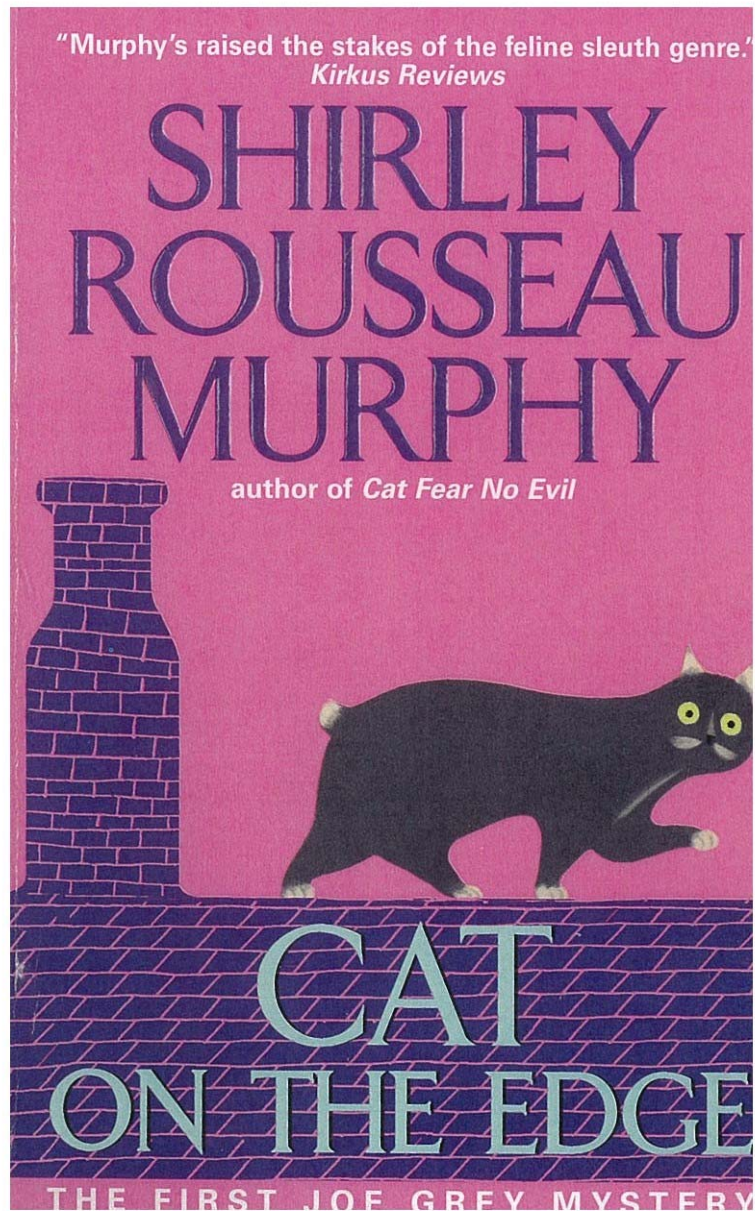
Hope all is well in your world. Don't forget to give to your local animal shelter.

Yours in Catitude,



Sneaky Pie

**Figure V.4.** *Sneaky Pie's "Dear Reader" letter in Puss 'n Cahoots (2007) concludes with a gentle reminder to support animal-rescue efforts.* Brown, Rita Mae, and Sneaky Pie Brown. *Puss 'n Cahoots*. New York: Bantam Books, 2007. Print.



**Figure V.5.** *Shirley Rousseau Murphy's intrepid feline hero is truly a cat on the edge.* Murphy, Shirley Rousseau. *Cat on the Edge*. New York: HarperPrism, 1996. Print.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusion: Reading to Rover

“You better believe your dog loves to read.”

Kathy McNulty, “Becoming a R.E.A.D. Team” (2003)

Ten-year-old Bryce is a nervous reader. The linchpin skills of language arts have not come easily for the quietly determined fourth grader, who struggles through oral-reading exercises in a halting whisper. Like 69% of fourth graders in his home state of Utah, Bryce has failed to obtain proficiency in the benchmark faculties of decoding, fluency, and reading comprehension (Ng).<sup>61</sup> Lance Girton, the Reading Specialist at Bennion Elementary School in Salt Lake City, has flagged Bryce as a candidate for remedial support due to his “below grade level” performance in this make-or-break area of learning. Once a week, Bryce and seven of his classmates participate in an after-school reading program organized by Girton and his volunteer support team. Girton has high hopes that the program will boost Bryce’s confidence and skill by providing him with regular opportunities to read aloud and discuss literature in “a very safe, comforting environment” (“Becoming a R.E.A.D. Team”).

On this particular afternoon, Bryce and his reading partner, Kiyoshi, are tackling a new book: J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999). As Girton

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<sup>61</sup> In 2010, the Annie E. Casey Foundation reported that 69% of Utah fourth graders read below the appropriate age level. This study, which based its conclusions on data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, placed Utah slightly below the national average of 70%. The foundation’s researchers highlighted fourth grade as a critical moment in education, as it marks the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.”

and several children play word games around a small table, Bryce and Kiyoshi sit on a blanket in the corner of the school library with volunteer literacy aid Kathy McNulty. As Bryce begins to read, Kiyoshi listens intently with his eyes fixed on the dauntingly thick book. McNulty occasionally prompts or encourages Bryce but, for the most part, remains unobtrusive. The reading progresses smoothly and, after a few pages, Bryce seems to be hitting his stride. Then, with no apparent warning, Kiyoshi shakes his entire body, flops over, and proceeds to fall asleep. Bryce seems unsettled. But McNulty jumps up, repositions Kiyoshi, and offers the following explanation: “If it is a really interesting part in the book, [Kiyoshi] can focus more on you if he closes his eyes and is not looking all around. This means he is *really* interested” (“Becoming a R.E.A.D. Team”). Bryce seems to take McNulty at her word and resumes reading, only this time with Kiyoshi’s furry head resting in his lap.

Experienced dog handlers know that even a highly trained therapy animal, like Kiyoshi, can succumb to the soporific effect of a soft blanket and a good story (Figure VI. 1). But canine lethargy rarely fazes McNulty, who feels that her red brindle Akita performs a vital service to the community, even if he sometimes falls asleep on the job. Kiyoshi is a registered reading-assistance dog with Intermountain Therapy Animals (ITA), a Salt Lake City based non-profit organization dedicated to “enhancing quality of life through the human-animal bond” (*Intermountain Therapy Animals*). Launched in November of 1999, ITA’s Reading Education Assistance Dogs program (R.E.A.D.), dispatches trained therapy animals and their handlers to schools, libraries, bookstores, and other settings to serve as reading facilitators for children.<sup>62</sup> To date, there are

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<sup>62</sup> The program’s name, “Reading Education Assistance Dogs,” is somewhat misleading in its emphasis on canine therapy. While dogs outnumber all other species of “R.E.A.D.ers,” education-assistance cats,

approximately 3,500 volunteer teams “serving in 49 of the 50 states, 4 provinces in Canada, and 59 teams in Europe and elsewhere around the world, with registrations increasing daily” (Shaw 365). While the broad sociological impact of R.E.A.D. on the nation’s illiteracy crisis remains unclear, small-scale studies at the University of California, Davis indicate that weekly canine-assisted therapy can improve children’s fluency up to thirty percent and promote positive feelings about reading.<sup>63</sup>

In the United States, the practice of bringing animals into elementary schools is nothing new. Since the 1880s, American teachers have kept classroom pets as a way of enhancing nature study and encouraging the traits of kindness and responsibility (Grier 178). Animal-assisted reading education, however, emerged at the end of the twentieth century as an offshoot of the canine-visitation movement in hospitals. In fact, R.E.A.D. is the brainchild of a former nurse and Intensive Care Unit manager named Sandi Martin, who witnessed firsthand the therapeutic benefits of utilizing pets in medical facilities. Like many health-care professionals, Martin quickly discovered how the presence of an assistance animal could affect the physiological indexes of stress in a range of therapeutic contexts.<sup>64</sup> During her nursing career, she often marveled at the power of a friendly dog or a purring cat to steady the breathing, relax the muscles, and lower the heart rate of a

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guinea pigs, parrots, horses, and donkeys also have lent their services to the cause. In fact, many handlers report greater success with cats and small pets, especially in instances where a child is fearful of dogs. Many schools and libraries advertise their local R.E.A.D. programs with less species-specific titles (e.g., “Paws with a Cause,” “Tales of Joy,” “Tail Waggin’ Tutors,” “Reading With Rover”).

<sup>63</sup> In collaboration with Tony LaRussa’s Animal Rescue Foundation, researchers at the University of California, Davis, found that both homeschoolers and public-school third graders who read to therapy dogs once a week over a ten-week period outperformed a control group on the Oral Text Reading for Comprehension Test. A 2007 study of animal-assisted literacy education conducted by J. Heyer at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota produced similar results.

<sup>64</sup> For rich discussions of the physiological impact of pets on humans, see Alan Beck and Aaron Katcher’s *Between Pets and People: The Importance of Animal Companionship* (1996) and Aubrey H. Fine’s *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (2010). Janelle Nimer and Brad Lundahl’s “Animal-Assisted Therapy: A Meta-Analysis” (2007) also provides compelling evidence of the positive impact of pets on humans’ physical and emotional health.

distressed patient. “Wouldn’t the same benefits accrue,” she wondered, “with children who were struggling to learn to read?” (“R.E.A.D. FAQ”). For the thousands of teachers, librarians, principals, and parents who endorse R.E.A.D., the answer to this question is unequivocally “yes.”

But does reading to rover really work? And, if so, how exactly do dogs turn children into readers? ITA Assistant Director Karen Burns admits to facing her fair share of skepticism when pitching the R.E.A.D. concept to school and library administrators. One ornery principal, she recalls, even waved her out of his office with the ungracious retort: “I don’t buy this. Dogs don’t offer much” (“Successful R.E.A.D. Programs at School”). In training sessions, Burns makes a point to coach prospective team members on how to “answer the tough questions” from those who would dismiss R.E.A.D. as “a stupid idea” (“Successful R.E.A.D. Programs at School”). She also encourages naysayers to peruse ITA’s growing storehouse of data, which includes assessment-test scores, parent and student testimonials, and teacher reports. For the most part, the data suggests that R.E.A.D. students are making gains in the areas of reading, oral communication, and academic motivation.

Proponents of R.E.A.D. intervention in schools attribute the program’s success to both the canine facilitators and the students’ beliefs about them. Drawing on the human-pet relationship studies of psychiatrist Aaron Katcher, ITA links improved literacy performance to the dogs’ calming influence on nervous readers. By simply sitting or lying close by, the dogs facilitate the reading process by drawing attention outward, turning off anxiety, creating feelings of intimacy and safety, and increasing positive expectations (“R.E.A.D. FAQ”). Principal Eula Baumgarner of Desert Mesa Elementary



in Yuma, Arizona explains it this way: “If you are a hesitant reader [and] you’re just learning to read, the dog doesn’t care that you mispronounce the word or that you read slowly. They’re just there for your support... The dog is not going to judge you, and it will still love you. And students need that. They need some connection” (“R.E.A.D. Dogs Help Kids to Read!”). Performance anxiety dissipates, Baumgarner insists, when the children come to think of the dogs to which they are reading as nonjudgmental listeners. Burns agrees and suggests that nervous readers relax in the presence of her 140-pound Great Dane for one simple reason: “Maggie never laughs at mistakes” (“R.E.A.D. at School”). For R.E.A.D. participants, who often languish at the bottom of the school pecking order due to their academic, social, and behavioral challenges, the prospect of a nonjudgmental listener can offer a welcome reprieve from peer derision and adult disappointment.

While R.E.A.D. children undoubtedly appreciate this nonjudgmental presence, they also appear to value the dogs as *engaged* listeners. Students often characterize their therapy animals as interested, invested, and careful listeners, who “feel good” when someone takes the time to read to them. Younger readers, in particular, imagine themselves to be helping an illiterate friend that is both curious about books and eager to listen to them. As one student in the Rio Rancho, New Mexico program put it, “Dog kept looking at the picture so I had to read it. It helped me read more. I liked reading with Dog.” (“Tales of Joy R.E.A.D. Program”) (Figure VI.2). When Bryce talks about R.E.A.D., he, too, frames the program in terms of the reciprocal benefits to readers and listeners. “Kiyoshi [is] a good listener,” he reflects, “and I really liked it when Kiyoshi was kind of, like, wondering about the things in my book. He feels kind of good when

children read to him and that makes the children feel good, too” (“R.E.A.D. at School”). Many older children, especially among the middle-school set, recognize that dogs do not “read” in the traditional sense.<sup>65</sup> Yet, even these students overwhelmingly believe that the animals enjoy listening to books and appreciate their human partners’ earnest efforts.<sup>66</sup>

The R.E.A.D. program provides a fitting bookend to *Animal Print*, which opened with a very different vignette about literacy, childhood, and animals. This study began with a nineteenth-century child’s critical endorsement of two novels about human-animal relationships: Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877) and Gene Stratton-Porter’s *The Strike at Shane’s* (1893). Eight-year-old Bertha of Howard, South Dakota, we recall, demonstrated her humanity in the spring of 1894 by submitting that friendly bit of advice to the local newspaper:

**IF  
YOU WANT  
YOUR CHILDREN  
TO  
BE KIND  
TO  
DUMB ANIMALS  
YOU WANT TO GET  
B.B. AND S.S.  
FOR THEM. (113)**

What initially appeared to be the singular expression of a quizzical young mind, we now know to be a characteristic fragment of a larger cultural conversation about human

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<sup>65</sup> In *Why the Wild Things Are* (2001), L. Gail Melson describes older children’s partial suspension of disbelief as follows: “Despite most children’s acknowledgment that pets cannot literally comprehend what they are saying, children have the feeling of being heard and understood” (51).

<sup>66</sup> Older students often find creative ways of engaging their animals with the text. Some children, for example, select canine-themed picture books because they believe the animals find them appealing. The R.E.A.D. dogs have been known to reinforce this impression by staring or sniffing at the pictures of dogs.

beings' treatment of nonhuman animals. By now, however, Bertha has faded in our memories. Somewhere in this history of people and animal literature, she slipped into the vigorous multitude of American youth that served as both a force and an object of humane socialization in the late-nineteenth century. Yet, Bertha's words keep calling us back with their alluring insistence that, through some alchemical combination of animals and books, we might create a golden child.

Flash forward more than a century, and we end almost where we began, with thousands of American youth "coming to voice" for animals. Like the Band of Mercy movement, canine-assisted literacy education mobilizes positive feelings about animals as an impetus for reading. Bryce's story, however, is not about "coming to voice" for animals in general but rather for one dog in particular: Kiyoshi. Because R.E.A.D. programs rely on the embodied interactions between a human reader and a canine listener, they challenge us to reframe and rethink some of the interconnections between literacy, childhood, and animals inferred in the previous chapters. This volume's *fin de siècle* episodes--concerning the MSPCA's publishing apparatus, Phelps's antivivisection writings, and early ornithological guides--considered how early humane print culture mediated human-animal relationships and how those relationships, in turn, changed the expressive modes in which they were rendered. The chapter on cat mysteries carried this discussion forward in time and considered how the humane feelings of "animal rescuers" have shaped a contemporary mass-market genre with no explicit ties to the humane movement. These final pages invite readers to reconsider these earlier questions amidst mounting concerns about juvenile illiteracy and the increasing acceptance of animal-assisted interventions. But this discussion also raises new, if somewhat related,

questions, such as: What type of readers do dogs, like Kiyoshi and Maggie, create? And what do these readers imagine their relationship to “dumb animals” to be?

As we have seen, the readers targeted most often for canine-assisted therapy are *nervous* ones. Indeed, the mission of the R.E.A.D. program is to reduce “reading anxiety” by providing children with a calm and nonjudgmental audience. In the underfunded, overcrowded public schools to which R.E.A.D. teams lend their services, focused attention from a *human* literacy specialist is all too often a goal rather than a reality. By necessity, oral reading typically occurs in group settings in elementary and middle school. For self-conscious students, reading groups can feel like institutionally sanctioned spaces for regular public shaming. R.E.A.D. programs, however, encourage students to conceptualize reading as a service as opposed to an exercise. Well-trained therapy dogs encourage this mindset by giving the impression of listening for their own enjoyment rather than for the child’s mistakes. In so doing, they transform an anxiety-producing exercise into a confidence-building opportunity.

The most successful R.E.A.D. participants come to take pride not only in holding the attention of the dogs but also in performing a service for them. Many children express their burgeoning identity as a reader in terms of “feeling special.” While the term *special* can function as a marginalizing ascription in schoolyard parlance due to its association with “special education,” it connotes in this case a status more akin to being valued, privileged, or useful. In the R.E.A.D. context, these feelings of specialness derive from the child’s belief that someone is *really* listening. The following testimonials from R.E.A.D. students across North America suggest how meaningful the dogs’ engaged listening can be:

*“I like working with [the dogs] and...I feel proud when they listen to me. I like that they don’t get up and start walking around in the library. They sit down quietly.”*

*“It seems like [the dogs] listen more. Mostly when you read to people, they’re looking around, not listening to you.”*

*“I didn’t know how to read. It didn’t make me feel good about myself. After I started to read to Chelsea I felt good. I like to read to her because she helps me with words and she’s a good listener. Now I can read a lot of different books. That makes me very happy.”*

*“Thank you for sitting by my side and listening to me read. You are very nice and you fill up my heart.”*

*“I miss you so, so, so, so, so much. You listened when I read to you.”*  
(“Tales of Joy R.E.A.D. Program”; “Reactions Children”)

The above remarks challenge us to rethink Bertha’s notion of being “kind to dumb animals” in terms of flesh-and-blood interactions between speaking humans and listening dogs. They also raise questions about which party actually constitutes the dumb animal in need of kindness. Is it the nervous child grasping for words? Is it the dog who communicates mostly by listening? Is it both? Or neither? The historical actors in the previous chapters of this work structured humane reform around “speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves.” Early humane activists employed analogies, indirect speech, and an endless array of rhetorical tricks to capture the feelings of their tragically “dumb” subjects. In the process, they defined humane feeling overwhelmingly in terms of their own speech acts. The kindness-to-animals ethic upon which the R.E.A.D. program is premised encourages “speaking to” rather than “speaking for” nonhuman animals. Angell’s abused workhorse, Phelps’s vivisected dog, Wright’s mother bird, and

Brown's feline coauthor define and produce humane feeling through human ventriloquists. Kiyoshi, on the other hand, teaches by listening.

R.E.A.D. programs recast the nineteenth-century concept of the *dumb* animal as the *nonjudgmental* dog. Reading to rover, furthermore, construes animals' inability to speak as a catalyst for creating a certain type of child reader. The aim of R.E.A.D, however, is not to produce a humane reader (like Bertha) but rather a proficient one. While R.E.A.D. organizers employ quantitative metrics to evaluate students against rigid state and federal literacy standards, the children gauge their success as readers through their canine companions' nonverbal responses. When Kiyoshi nods off, therefore, Bryce feels unsettled because he has learned to think of reading as an other-oriented activity that is structured around the social imperatives of sharing and relating.

In this sense, reading to animals is surely a humane endeavor. One might even say that R.E.A.D. children imagine themselves as "human-assisted listening facilitators" for dogs. This self-understanding motivates young people by attaching new social meanings to the act of reading. The children want to believe that they are bringing joy to a being that they have come to value as an engaged, if not quite a proficient, fellow "R.E.A.D.er." The feeling of specialness that can arise from embodied interactions between humans and animals can serve as a powerful impetus to read, to write, to listen, or to speak. As children, like Bryce, struggle to come to voice for their own reasons and in their own ways, they call our attention to the empty space between the disparate modes of animal communication. That gulf is quiet now, but someday echoes may emerge. Though they surely will sound strange and inspire unfathomable ways of listening, they just may tell a story that--once heard--will require me to write *this* one anew.



**Figure VI.1.** *A comfortable lap facilitates listening for some dogs and induces sleep in others. Intermountain Therapy Animals. n.d.  
[http://www.therapyanimals.org/Read\\_Photos.html](http://www.therapyanimals.org/Read_Photos.html). Web. 15 September 2013.*



**Figure VI.2.** *R.E.A.D. animals serve as engaged, nonjudgmental listeners for young readers. Read to a Dog Program. n.d.  
<http://www.scls.lib.wi.us/monona/youth/readtodog.htm>. Web. 15 September 2013.*



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