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Kinesthetically Speaking: Human and Animal Communication in British Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century

Dana Jolene Laitinen
University of South Florida

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Kinesthetically Speaking: Human and Animal Communication in British Literature of the Long
Eighteenth Century

by

Dana Jolene Laitinen

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Laura Runge, Ph.D.
Nicole Guenther Discenza, Ph.D.
Emily Jones, Ph.D.
Christine Probes, Ph.D.

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Dedication

We have no communication with being.

— Michel de Montaigne

But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell

thee

— Job 12:7

I would like to thank Dr. Laura Runge, professor of eighteenth-century British literature at the University of South Florida, Tampa, for her guidance in seeing this project to fruition. Her two words to me —“intersubjective communication”— during an office meeting when I brought a human and canine encounter in a Frances Burney novel to her attention articulated something that has, in no small way, shaped the trajectory of my intellectual journey. I would also like to thank Dr. Christine Probes, professor of French language and literature at USF, whose for her suggestions to me about the animal controversy in seventeenth-century France. I would like to thank the other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Nicole Guenther Discenza and Dr. Emily Jones, for their time and feedback on early drafts of individual chapters. I’d like to thank Dr. Jessica Cook for her advice on the dissertation process over the years. I thank my Uncle Ronald Welles for his endless patience through years of hand wringing and doubt. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the many pets who shared spaces with me going back to my earliest childhood, especially my beloved cat, Howling Wolf, who endured hours of heavy metal music and several cross-country moves, and the abandoned Mr. Kitty, whose cries I answered, and who often sat outside my window, listening to church bells ring hymns across the street while I wrote.

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Abstract

While scholars have studied talking animals in British children's literature of the long eighteenth century, little attention has been given to cross-species conversations. Thus, my research starts with the following questions: what does it mean when humans talk to animals in literary texts? What do representations of interspecific communication in eighteenth-century British literature accomplish? Interspecific communication in the literary works of this study may be understood in the context of the philosophy of sensibility's debt to French Renaissance humanist Michel de Montaigne, particularly his arguments about animal semiosis in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*. I argue that interspecific conversations challenge Enlightenment arguments for the radical ontological separation of humans and animals.

I deploy a historicist methodology and the lens of post-linguistic semiotics, situating, and interpreting the literature next to concomitant philosophical discourses. Post-linguistic semiotics brings together zoosemiotics and cultural and literary criticism. My investigation expands our knowledge of how eighteenth-century British authors responded to the watershed philosophy of René Descartes, particularly the denial of language and reason to animals. Contrary to the longstanding view that the eighteenth-century had purely instrumental views towards animals, the authors of this study embrace a relational ontology in their attitudes towards animals, presenting a model for constructing the human and animal relationship based on an ethics of friendship, or, as in the case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a repudiation of the animal and a denial of humanity's relationship to its own animality.

Introduction

The surge of interest in animals in the humanities and social sciences in the past twenty years is known as the “animal turn,” and this relatively new field has reinvigorated the disciplines producing new knowledge about animals, and human and animal relationships (Ritvo 119). Scholars have begun to re-evaluate the Enlightenment’s representation of nature and animals, correcting the long-held view that the period had a strictly instrumental attitude towards nature, epitomized by the philosophy of René Descartes, the Scientific Revolution, and the biblical teaching of human dominion.¹ The eighteenth century had its own “animal turn” in which cultural representations of animals shifted significantly (Keenleyside 7). For example, pet portraiture, part of a wider attempt to represent the natural world accurately, became a genre unto itself revealing an interest in the idea of animal subjectivity and interspecies sympathy (Tague 184-185). British authors understood that empiricism could never fully define what an animal is and that our understanding of them is mediated by language (Keenleyside 7). They perceived the need for “literary forms of knowledge” in addition to the scientific because eighteenth-century readers understood that “rhetorical conventions make real world claims” (Keenleyside 7).

Many fine monographs on animals in eighteenth-century British literature have been produced, such as Laura Brown’s *Homeless Dogs & Melancholy Apes: Humans and Other Animals in the Modern Literary Imagination*; Heather Keenleyside’s *Animals and Other People: Literary Forms and Living Beings in the Long Eighteenth Century*; and Tobias Menely’s *The Animal Claim Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice*. If Nathaniel Wolloch’s 2019 *The*

Enlightenment's Changing Conceptions of Animals in the Long Eighteenth Century is any indication, the scholarly trend shows no signs of abating.

Talking literary animals, which had their modern origin in this period, have since become a generic convention of children's literature and have also begun to receive critical attention. For instance, Tess Cosslett, in her 2006 monograph *Talking Animals in British Children's Fiction, 1786-1914*, explores the cultural significance of animal narrators in the period's proliferation of children's literature, arguing that they function as didactic mouthpieces. In this study, I am also interested in representations of communicating animals. However, I begin with a related but inverted question. Instead of asking what function talking literary animals serve, I ask, what does it mean when a human speaks to an animal in a literary work from this period? What do scenes of interspecific communication in literary works of the long eighteenth century accomplish?

My attempt to offer an answer to the question above has led me to the intersection of Enlightenment philosophy and literature. In order to understand the nature of human beings, philosophers have turned to consider our closest biological relatives—the animals. Speculation on animals, however, has engendered more questions than answers, and the animal question has perpetually vexed philosophers in their attempt to articulate postulations in metaphysics, particularly the branch of ontology, which seeks to know what is real and the nature of being. The long-standing philosophical debate about animals is known as the animal question. That is, are animals capable of reason and language, and if so, are they therefore ontologically equivalent to humans? The debate goes back to ancient Greece. Christian theologians such as St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) articulated ideas about animals, and the debate resurfaced with renewed vigor in the early modern period and served philosophical, scientific, and cultural ends. Sixteenth-century humanist, theriophilist, and philosophical skeptic

Michel de Montaigne argued that animals possess languages of their own, and thus, a measure of reason. Italian anatomist Hieronymus Fabricius recorded similar ideas about animal language in his 1603 *De Loquela Brutorum*. However, seventeenth-century mathematician and philosopher René Descartes postulated that animals were machines, mindless languageless automatons. Cartesian metaphysics theorized a radical ontological separation between the human and all other animal species, based on a “new definition of speech” as exclusively human language that carried over into the Enlightenment (Senior 62).

In addition to framing my discussion with the early modern animal debate between Montaigne and Descartes, I deploy the insights of French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who has observed that “animal” is an umbrella term that “men have given themselves the right and the authority to give the living other” (23). With this observation, Derrida reveals another facet of how language functions in the animal debate. Humans deploy monolithic terms that have the effect of erasure—of glossing over the wonderful heterogeneity of species. My inclusion of Derrida adds further theoretical grounding for the importance of the animal debate, its pervasiveness in French thinking, and its British reception. I bring in additional insights of French thinkers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Emmanuel Levinas, and contemporary French ethologist Dominique Lestel. Thus, my investigation has revealed a fertile cross-cultural exchange between French and British thinking about animals that continues to reverberate in the West. In addition, I discuss important British philosophers of sensibility such as David Hume.

I am positioning this study in relation to Tobias Menely’s compellingly written *The Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* (2015). As I do, Menely investigates the interest in animal semiotics in eighteenth-century British literature of sensibility, a counter Enlightenment discourse. The sensibility movement stressed the epistemological validity of the

body and emotion in contrast to rationalism's privileging of reason. For writers of sensibility, the human is defined by "receptivity, a susceptibility to the signs of others" rather than verbal speech acts and political contracts (Menely 15). "The sociolinguistic domain," writes Menely, "which offers a foundational register for humanist historiography, is only a special case in a world in which the vicissitudes of the sign provide a common condition of all living beings" (13). Writers of sensibility took note of the extralinguistic semiosis shared by humans and animals, recognizing that the "somatically legible body" of the animal could signify (Menely 6). Menely argues that writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau understood the vocalizations of animals as constituting appeals of address to human beings (in this case writers) who respond as political advocates giving the animals voices via literary representation (1).

The discourse of sensibility's "semiology of creaturely affect and address" might be considered a proto discourse of zoosemiotics (Menely 20). Coined by Thomas A. Sebeok in 1963, "zoosemiotics" refers to a line of inquiry that brings together "methods and subject matters of semiotics and ethology" (the study of animal behavior) and is defined as the "study of signification, communication, and representation within and across animal species" (Maran 1). This dissertation approaches literary representation of animals through the lens of what Timo Maran has identified as "post-linguistic semiotics," defined as a "synthesis between zoosemiotics and cultural and literary criticism" (Maran 1). Maran explains that this synthesis incorporates several possible "approaches such as common ancestry of humans and other animals, human-animal communicative relations, corporal and endosemiotic aspects of humans related to linguistic activities, and analogies between semiotic processes in humans and other animals" (6).

I focus further by approaching eighteenth-century representations of literary animals through the lens of anthropo-zoosemiotics, or human and animal communication. My analysis

adds to our knowledge of how the literature of sensibility in eighteenth-century Britain engaged the animal question. Many writers of sensibility such as Antony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury and Henry More believed that animal signification communicated feeling and not ideas (Menely 2). I argue, however, that following Montaigne in the skeptical tradition of theriophily, the writers I discuss entertain the idea of animal reason, in varying degrees, in addition to animal emotion. The writing of anti-Cartesian French theriophilists including Montaigne had become available in English in the late seventeenth century (Lewis 6). Jayne Lewis writes, “arguing that animals can reason and develop language, the theriophilists implicitly located the foundations of all human habits of representation in the sensible particulars that make up even animal cognition” (6). This interest in the “sensible particulars” of the theriophilists overlaps with the interests of the eighteenth-century British writers of sensibility (Lewis 6). In the eighteenth century, extralinguistic communication challenged Enlightenment claims to language-based human exceptionalism, and thus, pushed back against the new metaphysical and epistemological paradigm of the Scientific era.

Interest in the animal question in this period was not confined solely to writers and philosophers. The Cartesian beast-machine hypothesis was widely known in eighteenth-century Britain and written about in popular discourse. For example, in May of 1739, excerpts from French Jesuit priest Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant’s bestselling *Amusement philosophique sur le langage des bêtes* were published in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, a widely read monthly compendium of news, essays, and poetry printed in London. Cartesianism made great fodder for the genre of satire, and Bougeant heavily lampoons the beast-machine theory. For example, he writes about human and canine relationships: “you have a bitch which you love, and which you think yourself reciprocally loved by. Now I defy all the Cartesians in the world to persuade you

that your bitch is a mere machine” (7). Bougeant’s challenge suggests that people in this era had strong personal convictions regarding the Cartesian theory.

Bougeant’s arguments against the Cartesian hypothesis are comprised of claims about animal language. He says, for example, “[w]e everyday speak to beasts, and they understand us very well...animals, in turn speak to us, and we understand them” (40). Bougeant likens the capacity for animals to communicate with humans to knowledge of a “foreign language” (41). He infers therefore that animals must also be naturally endowed with “the faculty of understanding and speaking” (41). According to Bougeant, the lack of variety in animal language is compensated for by “miens, gestures, and motions which are a kind of language very intelligible, and a supplement of the vocal expression” (54). Based on their responses, Bougeant claimed that animals can perceive human emotion. Animals, then, for Bougeant, possess a range of semiotic options for communication that do not rely on conventional language.²

Many of Bougeant’s ideas sound as if lifted straight from the pages of Montaigne. As I will demonstrate, the authors in this study all read or were familiar with Montaigne. In *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, an important Counter-Reformation text combining classical Pyrrhonism and Christian natural theology, Montaigne deploys theriophily as an argumentative strategy to counter modern reiterations of ancient Stoic pride. Raymond Sebond was a Spanish scholar of religion, philosophy, and medicine at Toulouse who claims in his 1430 *Natural Theology* (published posthumously in 1484) that his method teaches “every truth necessary to Man concerning Man and God” (qtd. in Screech xiv). Natural theology derives from biblical passages such as Job 12, which positions animals as speakers who can teach humankind about divine attributes. The apostle Paul alluded to the earlier tradition in the New Testament book of Romans and states that humans can gain insight into the creator by studying the creation and that

therefore, humans will be held accountable for this access to divine knowledge, implying that natural theology has an immense doctrinal gravitas for new testament hermeneutics.

Sebond believed fallen reason prevented a correct interpretation of the *lex naturae*, and he positioned himself as a sort of theological reading instructor (Screech xiv-xv). The religious establishment charged Sebond with heresy since he appeared to dispense with the divine revelation of scripture (Screech xiii). In defense, Montaigne qualified Sebond's method by claiming it teaches "truth insofar as it is possible for natural reason, concerning knowledge of God" (Screech xiv). In other words, Montaigne taught that human reason and divine revelation work in tandem. Montaigne biographer and scholar M.A. Screech says that according to Montaigne, "no purely human reasons [sic] can show conclusively that man—for all his 'reason'—is in any way higher than the other animals. They, too, like us have reasoning powers" (xxi). For Montaigne, human reason cannot secure absolute knowledge of anything, including the minds of animals.

In order to lower humans by raising animals, Montaigne provided a detailed exposition of animal anecdotes that demonstrate emotion and intelligence. He raised the ontological status of animals through empirical observation of their faculties.³ Drawing on ancient sources, mostly Plutarch, Montaigne argues that the corporeal movements and gestures of animals function as semiotic evidence of reason (18). He speaks of animals talking to each other and to humans. He observes that they demonstrate sympathetic response to one another's distress calls, all through extralinguistic modes. In sum, Montaigne argues that animals speak languages of their own. The availability of this point of view on animal language helps to explain why the Enlightenment's definition of speech as exclusively human language represented a monumental shift.

This shift is evident in the writing of Descartes. It is clear from his abundant comments on animals, reason, and language in his 1637 *A Discourse on the Method* that Descartes was positioning himself within the animal debate going back to ancient Greece.⁴ Aristotle claimed in the *Politics* that “man is the only animal with the gift of speech” (1.1253a). However, the Stoics pushed the argument further to claim that internal speech, exclusive to the human, was the foundation of human superiority. The impetus for this qualification was what is generally known as the “parrot problem.” Since several species of birds can speak human words, it presented a problem for defining a strictly human ontology according to the presence of verbal language. Thus, it followed that verbal language must be proved in context dependent situations.

With the use of reason (here deduction), Descartes sought “a first principle of philosophy,” an all-encompassing methodology that would establish epistemological certainty and erase “the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics,” i.e., Montaigne (28). The result was the syllogistic *cogito*, which I here paraphrase as: The only thing I know without a doubt is that I exist because I am thinking. The *cogito* stabilizes the “flux of signs” since no sense impression or sign is reliable for Descartes (Melehy 268). Several commentators including Friedrich Nietzsche pointed out that the *cogito* is not the unmediated, a priori, or self-evident certainty Descartes thought it was, but rather an effect of language itself. The major premise of Descartes’ well-known syllogism is derived from the logic of a grammar in which all action requires an actor (Melehy 267). In other words, the conclusion necessitates the premise. Descartes took the position of the Stoics, who argued that human and animal difference was based on internal speech. The *cogito* is a metaphysical postulation based on the presence of internal speech.

In order to articulate the *cogito*, Descartes had to confront the problem of animal intelligence and communication. As a solution, he offered what is perhaps his second most famous, or infamous, proposition known as the beast-machine theory in which he asserted that animals are automatons. Unlike humans, animals do not possess a transcendent immortal soul or *res cogitans* manifested in the faculty of reason. Descartes' theory benefitted the scientific community, whose rapid discoveries were dependent on the instrumental use of animals conducted in dissection and vivisection. Many, however, rejected what Percy Bysshe Shelley called the "monstrous sophism" of the beast machine (qtd. in Rowe 137).

The debate between Montaigne and Descartes is a microcosm of one of the foundational attributes of modernity: competing philosophical positions. Historian Stephen Toulmin's revisionist history of the origin of modernity, *Cosmopolis*, is helpful for contextualizing the Cartesian epistemological watershed articulated in the *cogito*. In opposition to the dominant historical narrative of the early-to-mid-twentieth century stating that modernity was inaugurated with Descartes and the Enlightenment's scientific revolution, Toulmin locates the origins of modernity in the tension between the late-Renaissance humanism of Montaigne and the rationalism of Descartes. The Cartesian quest for certainty, according to Toulmin, can best be understood in the context of the aftermath of the tremendous upheaval of the Thirty Years War. Toulmin writes, for the survivors of this war "the dream of logically necessary arguments whose 'certainty' could go beyond the 'certitude' of any theological position kept its charm in both modes of reasoning and language" (89). Before Descartes, the rediscovery of ancient history and literature "intensified" appreciation "for the kaleidoscope diversity and contextual dependence of human affairs" (26-27). Montaigne had argued, in Toulmin's words, that "it was best to suspend judgment about matters of general theory, and to concentrate on accumulating a rich perspective,

both on the natural world and on human affairs, as we encounter them in our actual experience” (27). Montaigne “saw attempts to reach theoretical consensus about nature as the result of human presumption or self-deception” (Toulmin 29). The *cogito* would represent just such human arrogance to Montaigne.

In their quest for “theoretical consensus,” seventeenth-century philosophers “disclaimed any serious interest in four different kinds of practical knowledge: the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely” (Toulmin 30). Human reception had no bearing on rational facts because modern philosophy does not concern itself with the concrete situatedness of argumentation among specific groups of people for specific purposes (Toulmin 31). Instead, the new method relies on “written” “proofs” that transcend the particular as opposed to “the rhetorical force of oral reasoning” (34). This new emphasis on written argumentation not only underplays alternate human modes and contexts of communication but effaces the complex nonverbal communicative exchanges between humans and animals situated in domestic and natural environments.

Montaigne was a humanist who had a genuine appreciation of animals and sought to put a check on the human disavowal of animals that he characterized as an “insane arrogance,” but post-humanist scholars such as Carey Wolfe assert that humanism is essentially an anthropocentric discourse as its name suggests (51). Wolfe argues that the scholarly treatment of the animal question upholds the same anthropocentric binaries that privilege the human over the animal whether from a historical approach or from one based on representational theories such as Giorgio Agamben’s argument in *The Open* (99). Wolfe argues that the concept of subjectivity reinforces speciesism and should be demolished (99). For Wolfe, to be a “humanist” is “by definition, anthropocentric” (99). However, many literary authors, including those in this study, push back against the anthropocentrism of the Cartesian paradigm.

In addition to the charge of anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism is often cited in critiques of animal studies. However, scholars and scientists have begun a reevaluation of the concept. Tess Cosslett argues for the positive outcomes associated with anthropomorphic literary strategies. One of the main functions of talking animals as a narrative strategy is to invert hierarchical relationships between the human and animal (132). Cosslett claims that the “anecdotal” methods of Darwin and his disciple George Romanes are “deliberately anthropomorphic, in order to stress the continuity between animals and man” (142). She explains that her purpose is to show that anthropomorphism is not “unscientific,” but is often part of a scientific approach: “once you have a theory that admits no significant gap between man and animal the term loses much of its negative meaning” (Cosslett 146).

A second anthropomorphic literary strategy is the naming of animals in stories. Cosslett comments that the “naming of the animals is a human device, again to give them individuality [and are not] a sign of human possession in a crude sense. They serve instead as recognition devices, a sign that these animals are ‘known’ by humans” (143). Ultimately, in children’s stories “anthropomorphic animals meet theriomorphic children, often with the effect of blurring or questioning the difference between human and animal, stopping in its tracks the ‘anthropological machine’... —a thought machine that always reinstates the difference between *man* and animal” (her emphasis 2). In his series of lectures published under the title *L’Animal Que Donc Je suis* (*The Animal That Therefore I Am*) Jacques Derrida describes this same tendency to stress difference as an “immense disavowal” of the animal in Western philosophy (14).

In *Talking Animals in Children's Fiction: A Critical Study*, Catherine Elick points out the potentially transformative power of anthropomorphism to alter the human and animal relationship. Elick says, "the anthropomorphic approach ... has not denatured animals, as some detractors who find anthropomorphism to be 'sentimental' claim, but *re-natured* them so that they represent more than just a standard by which humans judge their own morality and maturity" (8). In a related point, Erica Fudge observes the inherent relationship between communication and ethics demonstrated in representations of literary animals: they "offer a way of thinking about animals more generally, and potentially, more positively ... if we don't believe that in some way we can communicate with and understand animals, what is to make us stop and think as we experiment on them, eat them and put them in cages?" (76-77). I would add that in my estimation, Montaigne's arguments are highly effective precisely because they are not simply rhetorical or anthropomorphic exercises but hold a measure of empirical weight in terms of observable animal behaviors. It is because animals are so close to us in many ways that they function so well in arguments that challenge metaphysical assumptions.

I chose the literary works in this study for their extended explorations of interspecific communication. There are many other canonical eighteenth-century works that feature animals such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Thomas Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat Drowned in a Tub of Goldfishes," and Thomas Cowper's "The Garden," which features his musings on his beloved pet hares. There are eighteenth-century works featuring talking animals that are not for a children's audience, such as the canine narrator of Francis Coventry's 1740 *The History of Pompey the Little or The Life and Adventures of a Lapdog*; the caged starling in Laurence Sterne's 1768 *Sentimental Journey*; and the mouse rhetorician in Anna Laetitia Barbauld's 1773 poem "The Mouse's Petition." These works, however, are not primarily

concerned with communication, human or animal. What is unique to the scenes I examine in the works in this study is their exploration of the implications of extralinguistic communication in the tradition of Montaigne.

The century long range of publication dates of the works I discuss, starting in 1726 and ending in 1831 with the revised *Frankenstein*, is indicative of the tremendous upheaval of the Scientific Revolution as it rippled out and intersected with the nascent Industrial Revolution in the early nineteenth century. Therefore, I have arranged the chapters chronologically. I commence with Jonathan Swift's 1726 *Gulliver's Travels*, a proto novel of sensibility, innovating on Montaignian ideas. Next, I examine Christopher Smart's highly personal critique of the Scientific Revolution in his mid-century poem 1759 *Jubilate Agno*. I move to the high novel of sensibility examining extended scenes of interspecific communication in Frances Burney's 1782 *Cecilia*, 1814 *The Wanderer*, and her diary, finishing with the culminating representation of the human and animal relationship in British literature, Mary Shelley's 1831 *Frankenstein*.

In chapter one, entitled "Avowing the Animal in *Gulliver's Travels*: Reason, Language and the Kinesthetic Imagination," I argue that Gulliver's controversial late-novel equiphilia is an intervention in the animal debate, positioned in the theriophilic tradition of Montaigne. Swift's debt to Montaigne, largely overlooked, offers an alternative avenue of inquiry to the long-standing critical aporia in *Gulliver's Travels* studies, identified by James Clifford as the "soft" and "hard" schools of criticism. The "soft" critics view Gulliver as the target of Swift's satire while "hard" critics view the novel as a manifestation of Swift's misanthropy (33).

In the Houyhnhnm episode, Swift explores the implications of human and animal nonverbal semiosis, informed by Montaigne's arguments on animal communication in *An*

Apology for Raymond Sebond. As a result of his several adventures as a creature of ontological ambiguity, Gulliver learns to avow his human animality, an innovation on Montaignian theriophily. My reading of *Gulliver's Travels* suggests Swift was cognizant of the intersection of gender and species oppression in eighteenth-century speciesist culture and adds to our understanding of the literature of sensibility as a discourse exploring extralinguistic forms of communication as part of a larger critique of the Enlightenment. I draw on contemporary zoosemiotic theories of human and horse communication to suggest that Gulliver's kinesthetic imagination has been awakened to greater empathy for all species.

In chapter two, entitled "'He Worships in His Way': Feline Kinesis and the Topos of the Writer's Cat in Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*," I argue that the portion of *Jubilate Agno* featuring Smart's extended meditation on his cat, Jeffry, functions on both a cultural and personal level. Attempting to recapture a mythopoetic view of nature, Smart encodes his response to the Scientific Revolution in representations of his cat's embodied movement. I argue that Smart deploys what I call the topos of the writer's cat, in the tradition of Montaigne's famous feline in the *Apology*, to imagine Newtonian laws of physics in terms of animal semiosis. I contend that Smart's project is to read Jeffry's movements and articulate their spiritual meaning. That is, Smart translates his cat's maneuvers into spiritual acts, in which Jeffry, the cat, functions as a symbol of unfettered religious freedom—a proxy for Smart's thwarted religious expressions. On the personal level, Smart, imprisoned in a mental asylum for improper public prayer, stands in solidarity with Jeffry, representing himself as a vulnerable animal unwillingly confined.

While Montaigne's rhetorical use of his pet cat has received much critical attention, I discuss an overlooked human and feline encounter recounted by Montaigne, which helps to

illuminate the political implications of interspecific communication in *Jubilate Agno*. I emphasize the connection between the “somatically legible body,” to use Menely’s highly apt phrase, and the concept of reading animals in the Montaignian tradition of natural theology (6). The animal, as a chapter in the *lex naturae*, is a theological advocate, and by demonstrating its divine purpose advocates, in a sense, for itself. The poet’s task is to illuminate this for the reader by writing criticism, if you will, of the book of creation.

In chapter three, entitled “Talking the Dog: Communicating with Canine Characters in the Writing of Frances Burney,” I examine representations of human and canine interaction in two novels and an extended diary passage. Recent scholarship on the representation of dogs in eighteenth-century British literature has focused primarily on the “misogynist trope” of the lapdog (Ellis 97), an expression of eighteenth-century anxieties in which “the woman and her lapdog were common tropes for the evils of eighteenth-century acquisitiveness” (Wyett 283-84). In this chapter, I argue that Burney, empowering her female characters, challenges the misogynist lapdog trope by appropriating the eighteenth-century sentimental view of the dog, the “unswerving servant” dog, normatively associated with men and aligning it with women (Wyett 276). Burney not only aligns feminine virtue with the capacity for sympathy for animals, a cultural standard of the time, but the reverse, making the very Montaignian suggestion that animals are endowed with the capacity for sympathy towards human beings. Thus, she counters ideas reaching back to Aristotle who recognized that both humans and animals can communicate vocally but denied that animals can express their emotions *to humans* (Menely 2, my emphasis).

Burney explores the animal recognition of human signs as well as the human recognition of animal signs, underscores the agency of dogs, and creates canine characters who are semiotically empowered with a profound ability to impinge on human outcomes. Her

representation of canines as interlocutors of human speech and speakers of embodied language renders them active participants in the discourse of sensibility. As they did in Swift and Smart, shared forms of embodied expressivity in Burney's work resist the radical discontinuity between the human and animal of Cartesian dualism. Her depictions of situational similarity between heroine and canine resonate with Smart's sense of vulnerability and self-identification with his cat.

In chapter four, entitled “‘What Was I?': The Creature, the Cat, and the Monster of Ontology in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*,” I argue that Shelley entertains the skeptical philosophical ethos of Montaigne in her treatment of the animal question. In the figure of the creature, Shelley ingeniously incorporates the central philosophical dilemma of the Enlightenment: the animal question. I draw on provocative contemporary scholarship to suggest that her contemplation is Montaignian even in the evocation of his now famous feline, deployed in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* as a rhetorical figure through which he explores the limits of human reason. In distinction to Montaigne, Shelley explores not the limits of human reason, but the tragic potential of human reason. Through the relationship between the creature and Victor, Shelley investigates philosophical and ethical questions such as those surrounding the practice of vivisection, making Montaignian moves by depicting instances of interspecific communication and creaturely kinesis to put pressure on Enlightenment notions of a strictly language-based criterion for human exceptionalism. *Frankenstein* represents the culminating literary engagement of the animal question in literature in English.

In the discussion that follows, I use the term “animal” rather than “nonhuman animal.” I concur with Fudge, who writes, “‘animal’ follows early modern usage more closely ... ‘nonhuman animal’ can distance the reader from discussion in ways that are not always helpful”

(1). She comments that “‘animal’ has an emotive quality that ‘nonhuman animal’ does not” (1). This, I would argue, is most likely due to the close relationships modern humans have with their pet “animals,” and their ubiquitous presence in representations.

At stake in the representations I examine is a definition of human ontology, making them, therefore, very high stakes. The Eighteenth-century literary representations of animals, and human and animal relationships, in this study provide a compelling exploration of the ethical implications of early modern metaphysical and epistemological theories on animal lives, and by extension human lives, that are still being worked out as a historical process. In our era of STEM and the seemingly limitless possibilities of scientific advancements, including bio-engineering experiments, such as cultivating meat from animal cells—a further erasure of the animal in modern systems of food production that could be argued as more troubling ethically than eating animals because it’s an additional obfuscation—the need for competing epistemologies and theorizations of humans and animals is more urgent than ever. Notions of radical separation between humans and animals re-instantiated in the early modern era by the Cartesian paradigm enables the exploitation of animals undergirding the exploitation of human beings in Western political and economic systems. The systematic exploitation of animals enabled by Cartesianism has, at least in part, precipitated the global climate crisis and extinction of species now facing humanity. The production of animal protein is highly wasteful, yielding about a four percent return on one hundred percent of plant protein fed to livestock. In addition, excrement from industrial meat farms produces high amounts of methane, a greenhouse gas with more severe consequences than carbon dioxide (Koneswaran and Nierenberg). Today, more animals are slaughtered in the U.S. in one day than were slaughtered in a year when Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle* (1905) (Patterson 64). Perhaps we could listen to the animals again as they mew,

bark, chirp, low, squawk, and sing; seeing what they say as they fly, swim, crawl, creep, and trot, and thereby, reclaim part of our humanity that was lost, cleaved off by the Cartesian divide.

Chapter One

Avowing the Animal in *Gulliver's Travels*: Reason, Language, and the Kinesthetic Imagination

If this is the best human philosophy can offer ... I would rather go and live among horses.

—J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*

“My friends often tell me in a blunt way that I *trot like a horse*,” says Gulliver towards the end of the Houyhnhnm episode (Swift’s emphasis 235).⁵ He also says, “My horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four hours a day” (244). These statements have caused much consternation in the critical reception of *Gulliver's Travels*—so much so that in the 1970s, James Clifford identified two critical camps he dubbed the “soft” and “hard” schools in the ongoing debate (33). In sum, the “hard” school reads Gulliver’s aversion to his family and concurrent equiphilia as a statement of Swift’s misanthropy while the “soft” school insists Gulliver is the satiric target because of his faith in Houyhnhnm rationality (Clifford 33). “Soft” school critics have labeled Gulliver’s actions “plain foolishness,” “obviously ridiculous,” “asinine,” “hippanthropic folly,” “delusional,” “mad,” and of “questionable sanity.”⁶ Readers and critics even doubted Swift’s mental health.⁷ The assumption seems to be that talking to and moving like animals is a self-evident sign of mental illness.⁸

In this chapter, I wish to make neither a “soft” nor “hard” school intervention; instead, I suggest that Gulliver’s statements themselves are an intervention in early modern debates at the nexus of animals, language, and reason positioned in the tradition of Michel de Montaigne’s theriophilic text *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*. Theriophilic texts rely on the inversion of

human and animal characteristics, for moral instruction, often depicting a view of animals as superior to humans. The works of French theriophilists including Montaigne had become available in English in the late seventeenth century. Jane Lewis writes, “arguing that animals can reason and develop language, the theriophilists implicitly located the foundations of all human habits of representation in the sensible particulars that make up even animal cognition” (6). While Swift depicts theriophilic inversions in *Gulliver’s Travels*—the human who moves like a horse, for example, can be understood as an inversion of the horse who talks like the human—he also picks up on a second pivotal strain in Montaigne’s thinking on animals which relies on human and animal contiguities, particularly the mutual capacity for embodied modes of communication. These semiotic similarities put pressure on the Enlightenment’s division of human and animal languages into “science and fiction” in a “new definition” of speech as exclusively human verbal language (Senior 62). For philosophers such as René Descartes, the absence of verbal language in animals indicated an absence of reason. However, Montaigne held the view that animals speak languages of their own and therefore possessed a measure of reason.

Long ago, T.O. Wedel identified Montaigne as Swift’s philosophical ancestor writing, the “best commentary on *Gulliver’s Travels* is [Montaigne’s] great *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*,” which “like *Gulliver’s Travels*, is a scathing attack upon Stoic pride” (33). Recently, Claude Rawson has described Montaigne as “a formative figure in Swift’s outlook and thought” (69).⁹ James Ramsey Wallen, in his comparison of Montaigne and Nietzsche’s negative humanism (a belief that human nature is inherently flawed), cites Swift’s masterpiece, with its “superlatively reasonable talking horse” as the literary exemplar of “a certain subterranean counter-conception of the human/animal distinction that occasionally surfaces in the Western literary philosophical tradition” but says no more of Swift (466, 449).

On the other hand, Rob Boddice adduces *Gulliver's Travels* as the epitome of eighteenth-century popular print's power to disseminate philosophical ideas, yet summarily dismisses Montaigne from having an influence on English thought about animals (27). I would stress Montaigne for bringing classical theriophily forward, his ethical thinking on animal semiosis, and his literary influence, and I submit that Gulliver's "trot[ting] like a horse" and adopting their "gait and gesture," (235) is Swift's rather oblique yet coltish allusion to Montaigne, whose middle name Eyquem "points to the outward movement of the horse" as Georges Van Den Abbeele observes in his analysis of the horse motif in Montaigne's travel writing (33). An intertextual reading of Swift and Montaigne offers an alternative to the critical aporia regarding Gulliver's late-novel equiphilia. Swift's debt to Montaigne has not been fully explored.

In *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, the longest of the *Essays* and an important Counter-Reformation text, Montaigne interweaves classical Pyrrhonism and Christian natural theology, derived from the apostle Paul's teaching that a reprobate humanity is "without excuse" since divine attributes can be inferred from reading the book of nature as well as the book of scripture (Romans 1:20). Sebond, a Spaniard who taught medicine, philosophy, and religion at Toulouse, claims in the highly censored *Prologue* to his ca. 1430 *Natural Theology* (published posthumously in 1484) that his method teaches "every truth necessary to Man concerning Man and God" (qtd. in Screech xiv). Sebond believed that humanity's postlapsarian faculty of reason prevented a correct interpretation of the *lex naturae*, and he positioned himself as a sort of theological reading instructor (Screech xiv-xv). His audience was women and laymen who, he thought, needed no formal education to gain moral wisdom from reading the book of nature. The religious establishment misinterpreted Sebond as advocating a method independent of the bible, i.e., "heretical," and the remainder of his *Natural Theology* was misunderstood (Screech xiii).

Enter Montaigne. Sebond's method, he qualifies, is one that teaches "truth insofar as it is possible for natural reason, concerning knowledge of God" (Screech xiv). His aim is to quash human vanity, particularly updated iterations of ancient Stoic pride in reason, and Protestant heresy. Reading the animal as a sign, as well as a user of signs, is central to Montaigne's argument, and the *Apology*, which he had previously translated, is a virtual primer on the right use of reason in the interpretation of animal signs. Montaigne argues that reason cannot secure absolute knowledge of anything, including the minds of animals. He doubts that language, and therefore reason, is exclusively human, arguing that the embodied expressivity of animals is evidence of ratiocination, asserting that "their very movements serve as arguments and ideas" (18).¹⁰

As an interpretive framework, I draw on Hassan Melehy's reading of *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* as an allegory for the "limits of human reason" (273). The function of allegory, says Melehy, is to demonstrate that the "objects of discourse" can't be fully represented due to the allegorical nature of language itself (274). Montaigne's animal signs are borrowed from ancients such as Plutarch, and as such, "jostled" in their present context since their prior signifying context is unavailable, demonstrating the distance between signs and thus the instability of meaning (Melehy 274). Melehy situates his analysis in the quarrel between Descartes and Montaigne, identified by Stephen Toulmin as the origin of modernity.¹¹ Taking umbrage with Montaigne, Descartes wrote to the Marquess of Newcastle in 1646 that Montaigne's crediting of "understanding" and "thought to animals" was in error (qtd. in Melehy 264). Melehy argues that Descartes mistakenly read Montaigne literally, failing to perceive that his observations of animal signs point to something, such as "speech and intelligence," which may be beyond human understanding (272).¹²

In Montaigne's allegory there are no one to one correspondences, and he issues a challenge to see "whether it is in man to arrive at any certainty by argument and reflection" (12). Descartes answered that challenge, indicating in his 1637 *A Discourse on the Method* that his "method" allowed him to arrive at an epistemology that was "certain" (28). Alluding to Montaigne's animal argument, he writes, "[o]ne must not confuse words with natural signs that express the passions and can be imitated by machines and animals nor think, like some of the ancients, that the beasts speak, even though we don't understand their language" (47-48). In his view, language is "continuous, as a system of signs, with reason" (Melehy 270).

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift weighs in on the Montaignian-Cartesian quarrel. His representations of animal semiosis, borrowed from Montaigne, do not signify directly according to their prior context but take on an altered meaning in their post-Cartesian context. Nonverbal embodied modes of communication in both humans and animals issue a challenge to the Cartesian argument that animals are automata devoid of cognition while simultaneously pointing to how humans create semiotic meaning, often constructing it with animals in interspecific contexts.¹³ The deliberate ambiguity of talking human-like horses, horse-like humans, and humanoid Yahoo animals pushes back against Cartesian certainty, ontological distinctions, and language-based claims to human exceptionality. The discontinuity between Swift's representations of speaking horses and the equine body provide the reader with a prototype for imagining a horse's mind a century and a half before Anna Sewall's socio-politically influential 1877 *Black Beauty*. With their ability to speak their own language, the Houyhnhnms flout the Enlightenment's "new definition" of speech, adding a clever post-Cartesian nuance to Swift's riff on the narrative device of the talking fabular animal (Senior 62).

After a series of embodied communicative encounters and episodes of animalization, Gulliver experiences a sort of anagnoristic shock, later figured allegorically in his equinesque movements and human-horse conversations, which are given not as empirical evidence of insanity but instead emblemize an avowal of the animal.¹⁴ After his increase in self-knowledge, Gulliver no longer accedes to arbitrary hierarchies that position humans higher than animals. Swift's depictions suggest an awakening of Gulliver's kinesthetic imagination wherein he sympathetically identifies with his horses in embodied knowledge. Gulliver's subsequent avoidance of his family is not an absolute repudiation, but a measure of realizing the primary incongruity of the human: the human is an animal endowed with reason, but which seems to take pride in using reason primarily for immoral purposes, which other animals do not do. If Montaigne's *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* is an allegory for the "limits of human reason," Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is an allegory for the failure of philosophy to account for the animality of the human, here defined as material and sentient (Melehy 273).¹⁵ *Gulliver's Travels*, then, is an imaginative rendering of Montaigne—a lesson in the book of human nature that asks the reader to question her own assumptions about what it means to be human in terms of human and animal relationships. It's also a reinvestment in the pedagogical validity of allegory in a culture increasingly saturated with the truth claims of scientific discourse—a discourse that relegates animals to automatism—and "realistic" literary forms such as *Robinson Crusoe*.¹⁶ In other words, *Gulliver's Travels* is a satire of the animal debate.

In what follows, I briefly elaborate on the Montaignian ideas that Descartes objected to before discussing Swift's critique of Descartes. Next, I read Swift and Montaigne intertextually, analyzing their views on reason and language, which are essential for understanding their view of the human and animal relationship. Next, I focus on the commencement of the Houyhnhnm

episode as the locus of Swift's most pointed parallel with Montaigne's primary skeptical argument: humans and animals share embodied communicative modes. I also review crucial instances in previous episodes that anticipate the culminating example. Finally, I offer an alternate interpretation of Gulliver's controversial statements with which this essay began and suggest a parallel between Swift's investigation of interspecific communication and contemporary ideas in the field of zoosemiotics, particularly the symbolic interactionist theory of human-horse communication, which speaks to the continued relevance of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Aristotle claimed in the *Politics* that "man is the only animal with the gift of speech" (1.1253a). In what seems a direct rejoinder, Montaigne queries: if the "complaining, rejoicing, calling on each other for help or inviting each other to love [of animals] ... is not talking, what is it?" (23). His insistence that animal vocalizations qualify as speech distinguishes him from both Aristotle and Descartes. "How could they fail to talk among themselves," writes Montaigne, "since they talk to us and we to them?" (23). His syntax implies that human and animal communication precedes animal to animal, an intriguing logic. To prevent misreading, he states the inference: "Consequently, we should admit that animals employ the same method and the same reasoning as ourselves when we do anything" (25). His choice of "admit" is telling, boldly insinuating that humans ignore, even willfully deny, the implications of animal signs.

Montaigne argues analogically that sign language, an embodied form of gestural communication, is the fundamental human language and comparable to animal signs. He catalogues examples of human communication, mainly but not exclusively, in hand gestures to underscore his point. For example, he lists "request, promise, summon, dismiss, menace, pray, supplicate, refuse, question, show astonishment," providing nearly fifty examples, finishing with the phrase "and what not else" to suggest that there are many more (18). He affirms that humans

use the hands “with a variety and multiplicity rivalling the tongue,” and his conclusion is striking: “this suggests that it is, rather, sign-language that should be judged the ‘property’ of man” (18-19). He challenges the abiding view that verbal language is the bedrock of human communication, proposing nonverbal language instead.

In perhaps the most meaningful statement in the *Apology*, he accounts the human as one among many animal species, charging that “[w]e do not place ourselves above other animals and reject their condition and companionship by right reason but out of stubbornness and insane arrogance” (51). According to Montaigne, the human “reject[ion]” of the animal “condition” is an abject ontological repudiation that is in a very real sense an abnegation of ourselves, and the human disavowal of the animal is tantamount to insanity. He contends humans misuse reason (a salient theme in *Gulliver’s Travels*) to construct dubious ontological distinctions for the purpose of elevating and thereby separating themselves from animals. His approach towards animals could be described as a relational ontology, suggesting humans should live in “companionship” with them (51).

Montaigne claims that ascribing animal behaviors to instinct is irrational: “there is, I say, no rational likelihood that beasts are forced to do by natural inclination the selfsame things which we do by choice and ingenuity” (25). He makes a radical argument here for the agency of animals. Positing a chain of being that is horizontal rather than vertical, he says, “I have gone into all of this to emphasize similarities with things human, so bringing man into conformity with the majority of creatures. We are neither above them nor below them” (24). In sum, Montaigne’s *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* could be considered a pioneering work in the field of zoosemiotics, which “includ[es] semiotic arguments in animal ethics” (Maran 1). Swift will explore similar ideas in *Gulliver’s Travels*.

Swift disdained the project of Descartes, making him a literal target in *The Battel of the Books* (1704). Descartes rejected Scholastic Aristotelianism, which was still the dominant intellectual paradigm. In Swift's piece, Aristotle, aiming an arrow at Bacon, misses and shoots Descartes in the eye (*Basic Writings* 132). An empiricist, Bacon did not seek systematizing theorems or first principles as Descartes did. Much has been written about Swift's criticism of empiricism in *Gulliver's Travels*, but he criticizes rationalism equally, and in *Battel*, it seems he would have it over rationalism; he reroutes the arrow. That Descartes is shot in the eye, rather than, say, the heel, is not without metaphorical import since empiricism's primary methodology is visual observation. Descartes, says Swift, is blind.

In the Laputa episode of *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver brings up Descartes—from the dead that is. Laputa is a flying island of mathematicians who literally have their heads in the clouds. They are so lost in their own internal thoughts, like Descartes, that they need “flappers” to strike various parts of their bodies to awaken them to immediate reality. Gulliver, temporarily empowered to summon the dead in pairs, requests Descartes and Gassendi among others. He directs the pair to explain to Aristotle their “systems” (168). While Gassendi would agree with Descartes that the animal soul is corporeal, he believed animals had minds since they had the same biological equipment such as brains and nerves (Boas 132). He disagreed with Descartes on animal intelligence, acknowledging a measure of reason and asserting that animals speak their own words (Boas 91, 132). Gassendi, an empiricist, critiqued Descartes. After admitting his own errors, Aristotle dismantles both philosophers and their theories are “exploded” like lab experiments gone awry (168). Swift is aiming at the unstable, even fashionable, aspect of scientific discovery, which like a coat, seems to change with the season. He also satirizes

philosophical technical arguments that split hairs over notions of animal souls and language since our own limited reason can never ascertain with certainty the answers to these questions. Instead, Swift believes that the pretext of these disquisitions is to prove human superiority. In other words, what better method to prove the superiority of human reason than through tortuous arguments?

An even more humorous critique of Descartes appears in the chapter “A Digression on Madness” from *A Tale of the Tub* (1704). Swift’s narrator investigates the cause underlying the “madness” in the human compulsion for building empires and propounding new “schemes” of philosophy (*Tale* 91). Swift writes: “Cartesius reckoned to see, before he died, the sentiments of all philosophers, like so many stars in his romantic system, wrapped and drawn within his vortex” (*Tale* 89). That is, Descartes was a systematizer who sought to best all previous thought. Swift thought that moderns like Descartes were “mad in the clinical sense” for the sin of “reduction, the stripping away of whatever in the outside world does not square with one’s private fantasies, or of whatever is tedious and beyond one’s capacity to master,” and for “arrogant self-sufficiency” (Spiller 15-16). He uproariously attributes Descartes’ metaphysical compulsion to flatulence that has wandered from the bowels to the brain (*Tale* 91). For religious conservatives such as Swift, Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” must have reverberated blasphemously with the divine “I am.” In sum, Swift’s assessment of Descartes might be articulated as follows: “I fart; therefore, I am.”

Swift was not alone in his negative assessment. Blaise Pascal, who attended a lecture given by Descartes agreed with him about animals, but he found the rationalist method untenable. Meric Casaubon, a scholar and clergyman appointed by James I, referred to Descartes as “a crack-brained man” filled with “excessive pride and self-conceit” (qtd. in Spiller 21-23).

According to Spiller, besides Casaubon, Swift was the only critic who perceptively amalgamated Descartes' many weaknesses, including intellectual laziness, excessive introversion, and resemblance to religious fanaticism (22-23). Spiller does not give an example of Cartesian faineance, but the following from the "Second Meditation," which sounds remarkably, at the sentence level, like an answer to Porphyry in *Isagoge*, the classic text on Aristotelian logic, lends insight into Swift's critique:

But what is a man? Shall I say a rational animal? Assuredly not; for it would be necessary forthwith to inquire into what is meant by animal, and what by rational, and thus, from a single question, I should insensibly glide into others, and these more difficult than the first; nor do I now possess enough of leisure to warrant me in wasting my time amid subtleties of this sort. I prefer here to attend to the thoughts that sprung up of themselves in my mind and were inspired by my own nature alone... (para. 5).

The *animal rationale* is an ancient Greek definition of the human, possibly Aristotle's. Descartes completely avoids the implications of "animal," dodging difficult questions because answering them requires rigorous investigation and involves raising other questions. Like a Greek god, he counts as knowledge whatever springs fully formed from his skull. It strikes the ear oddly when a thinker says he doesn't have time to think—like a Laputan "flap" in reverse. In his well-known letter to Pope, Swift writes, "I have got materials towards a treatise proving the falsity of the definition *animal rationale*; and to show it should only be *rationis capax*" (capable of reason) (262). If Descartes wasn't willing to do the work, Swift was.

Western arguments about human and animal difference, that is, the animal question, have always hinged on language and reason, and Swift's fluency in the Enlightenment debate is patent

in *Gulliver's Travels*. Next to the Houyhnhnm episode, the Brobdingnag chapter contains the most pointed evidence. In Brobdingnag, the land of giants where Gulliver is diminutive, the shift in perspective caused by physical dimensions controls categorization, trumping other more barefaced similarities. The Brobdingnagian farmer who first finds Gulliver classifies him as a human “shaped” animal about the size of an indigenous beast known as a “splacknuck” (80). The Brobdingnagians observe Gulliver as a creature who imitates humans, but that “seemed to speak in a little language of its own” (80) —one of several allusions throughout *Gulliver's Travels* to Montaigne's suggestion that animals speak languages of their own, and a direct reply to Descartes' admonition that to think so is to err like the “ancients” (47).

Gulliver's Travels was highly popular in 1730s France (Percival 63). At least one French writer, lampooning early modern ontology, seemed to take a cue from Swift. Jesuit priest Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant writes in his 1739 *Amusement philosophique sur le langage des bêtes*, “Imagine to yourself a man who should love his watch as we love a dog, and caress it because he should think himself dearly beloved by it, so as to think that when it points to twelve or one o'clock, it does it knowingly and out of tenderness to him” (7).¹⁷ This passage is ingenious in the complexity of its critique. First, in order to criticize the proposition that animals are non-sentient automata, he ironically attacks the proposition that animals are sentient, by equating loving a clock with loving a dog. Second, he makes the comparison between animals and machines ridiculous in a reversal suggesting that machines are sentient. Third, the comparison is hilariously effective because according to this logic, if one believes that animals are automata, then developing affective relationships with other automata such as clocks is perfectly reasonable. Descartes is the source of the clock analogy. He reasons that since some animals “show more skill” than humans in some things, they should be more intelligent and

“surpass us in everything” (*Discourse* 48). But since those same animals are also inferior to humans in other ways, what they can do better does not demonstrate “mental powers” but rather the fact “that they have no mental powers whatsoever” and is an effect of instinct analogous to “a clock consisting only of ropes and springs” (*Discourse* 48). This is an obscure logic. Would it follow that because one person exceeds another in mathematics, the second has no reason at all?

Back in Brobdingnag, the king modulates from thinking that Gulliver is a “splacknuck,” a ridiculous sounding name that speaks to the arbitrariness of terminology, to thinking him a “piece of clock-work,” that is, an automaton, to suspecting him merely a parrot trained to speak by Glumdaclitch, Gulliver’s child-nurse, and her father (85-86). The parrot problem in the language and reason argument is well-known. John Locke spends time on the parrot in his discussion of language and identity in his 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, but forty years earlier, Descartes utilized the bird argument in the *Discourse* saying, “magpies and parrots can utter words as we do, and yet cannot speak like us, that is, by showing that they are thinking what they are saying” (47). The argument is that animals have no internal “thoughts” and therefore no reason because they cannot truly engage in context dependent discussion (*Discourse* 46-47).

Descartes’s ideas are, for all intents and purposes, a reiteration of the Stoic position (Percival 58). The Stoics staked their philosophy on claims about animals, holding that the difference between the human and animal was the assumption of “internal speech” in humans as opposed to verbalization, for even some birds can imitate human speech, and with this distinction, they “pushed the argument further” than other philosophic schools (Percival 57). Above, I cited T. O. Wedel’s observation that *Gulliver’s Travels* follows Montaigne in attacking Stoic pride (33). It was the Stoics, in the Western tradition, with their theory of justice based on

“fellow feeling,” who first excluded animals from the moral purview because of their apparent lack of reason (Sorabji 7-8). The connection between Swift’s attack on human pride and the function of animals in Stoic thinking is striking.

In the case of the bird, Gulliver’s speaking would be nothing but mechanistic mimicry devoid of understanding. He does, however, finally demonstrate a semblance of human status by answering specific questions with “rational answers” in a human “voice” (86). The king of Brobdingnag is something of a Cartesian, requiring appropriate response. The human voice, not the human body, proven in verbalized context dependent ratiocination, would be the categorical arbiter in this instance. Perhaps, implies Swift, the animal body does not authentically demarcate ontological status either. However, because of the difference in size, and despite his use of verbal language, Gulliver is finally pronounced a “*lusus naturae*,” freak of nature, by Brobdingnagian scientists, suggesting ontological instability (87). A difference in degree (physical dimension) is taken as a difference in kind—a reversal of the theriophilic argument that human and animal difference is one of degree rather than kind. In this episode, Gulliver’s vulnerability as a sign, even though he can signify in language parallels many instances of corporeal vulnerability; he is prey to rats, flies, monkeys, eagles, and mischievous schoolboys. He is imprisoned like an animal by Glumdaclitch in a protective yet cage-like “box,” symbolizing the restrictive aspect of his temporary animal identity and suggesting the same for philosophical demarcations (103).¹⁸

Swift treats the question of animal language extensively in the Houyhnhnm episode. Upon his first encounter with the Houyhnhnms, for example, Gulliver evinces a Cartesian point of view observing that the horses’ “language expressed the passions very well” (192). That animals could express their instinctual drives and primal emotions but nothing else was a Cartesian belief and an early modern commonplace. Gulliver states “my principal endeavour was

to learn the language ... for they looked upon it as a prodigy that a brute animal should discover such marks of a rational creature” (198). In this single sentence, Swift tallies the essence of the debate: only rational animals, i.e., humans speak language; therefore, only humans are rational. The horse master reveals the belief that language use trumps the body in ontological distinctions when Gulliver reports that the horse “was more astonished at my capacity for speech and reason, than at the figure of my body” (201). Gulliver looks suspiciously like a Yahoo, and so his acquisition of the Houyhnhnm language transgresses the normative order, for the Yahoos do not speak. The horse master, a Cartesian, assumes that animals are devoid of language and reason.

Swift, then, was clearly cognizant of the debate at the intersection of animals, language, and reason, but what exactly was his view of human reason? I am interested in this question because one of the main objectives of the theriophilists was to challenge the notion that human ontological superiority is predicated on reason. The distinguishing factor when it comes to reason, Swift says, is that “...reason itself is true and just; but the reason of every particular man is weak and wavering, perpetually swayed and turned by his interests, his passions and vices” (*Sermon 10*). Swift displays a nuanced appreciation of the difference between abstract concepts and the individuality of human experience. Gulliver echoes Swift’s description of reason, telling the reader that Houyhnhnm reason “strikes you with immediate conviction; as it must needs do where it is not mingled, obscured or discolored by passion and interest” (225). In this instance, Houyhnhnm reason is represented as the antithesis of human reason; they are a collective and the individual’s desires are subsumed within the group.

Swift, however, utilizes the talking horses as a sounding board for multiple viewpoints on reason. As opposed to espousing a strictly Cartesian view, the Houyhnhnms are a mélange of perspectives including the Montaignian. For example, the horse master asks additional questions

that demonstrate a level of complexity in his understanding. He asks, says Gulliver, “how I acquired those appearances of reason, which I discovered in all my actions” (198). He observes Gulliver’s “actions” and makes an inference of intelligence, reiterating Montaigne’s empirical contention that animals demonstrate enough observable behaviors to warrant an inference of reason. Swift presents here the Montaignian view that when it comes to animals that “from similar effects we should conclude that there are similar faculties” (25).

In the same discussion with the horse master, Gulliver tries to explain the meaning of the word “opinion” and the origin of disputes, of which, the horses have no experience. Swift alludes to the Cartesian *cogito*—the infamous rationalist proposition of certainty, “I think therefore I am.” Gulliver says that “reason taught us to affirm or deny only where we are certain; and beyond our knowledge we cannot do either” (225). Gulliver makes a positive assertion here that human reason can lead to certainty, but the implication in the Montaignian sense is that human knowledge is limited because reason is not sufficient for absolute affirmation or denial of anything. For Montaigne, the only certainty is uncertainty, and Swift hints that the skeptical position is the reasonable position. Gulliver goes on to discuss “several systems of natural philosophy,” and the horse master’s reaction is to “laugh that a creature pretending to reason, should value itself upon the knowledge of other peoples [sic] conjectures, and in things, where that knowledge, if it were certain, could be of no use” (226). In this instance, the horse master presents Swift’s skeptical perspective on science and epistemology in general, and Cartesian metaphysics in particular. For Swift, philosophical systems are risible, hot air, flatulence.

It is a critical commonplace to interpret *Gulliver’s Travels* as satire on reason, but it’s more accurate to say that *Gulliver’s Travels* is a satire on the *misuse* of reason. In addition to the dialogue with the Houyhnhnm horse master cited above, Swift’s primary strategy for elaborating

his judgment of human reason throughout *Gulliver's Travels* is through definition *ex negativo*. He depicts example upon example of the human abuse of reason. People slaughter each other over the proper end for cracking an egg. Scientists vivisect dogs and attempt to reduce feces back into food. Mathematicians are so caught up in their calculations they don't notice when their wives look for love elsewhere. In the Houyhnhnm episode, Swift criticizes, among other things, mendacity, vice, war and weapons of mass destruction, and animal cruelty. He alludes to Aristotle's claim that only "man" has the "gift of speech," but astutely observes that the human utilizes the reason that accompanies that gift solely to increase degeneracy (234).

The Houyhnhnms also misuse reason; they forbid familial bonding, make servants of their own, enslave the Yahoos and contemplate exterminating them. In their moral ambiguity, the Houyhnhnms are not unlike the mixed characters of late-century British novels. These modulating statements on reason and its use indicate, I think, Swift's pragmatic approach to the subject. If so-called ideal reason can be allied with practices of slavery and philosophical exercises that contemplate extermination of animate species, then having an inflated sense of pride in that faculty is highly questionable even unreasonable. Swift implies instead that a reason that is swayed by the passions and plagued by uncertainty, that is human reason, is preferable to a reason that is systematically hidebound, like Gulliver clothed in Yahoo skins. The overarching implicit question of *Gulliver's Travels* is, then, what is the reasonable use of reason? I am arguing that Swift's deployment of the animal question is one strategy for working out an answer to that question.

Montaigne's negative assessment of human reason in the *Apology* has a caustic bite that Swift must have admired. Directly prior to his observations on animal semiosis, he launches into an extended diatribe against humanity's most esteemed faculty, defining reason as an

“appearance of rationality which each of us constructs for himself,” and comparing it to a “tool of malleable lead or wax” (144). As Swift does, he suggests that reason is not absolute but an “appearance,” contingent, individualized, and highly impressionable, subject to the vagaries of “passion” and therefore a shaky foundation for claims to absolute knowledge (147). To illustrate the mutability of human reason, Montaigne writes, “My horses’ gait seems sometimes rough, sometimes gentle” (145). Swift agrees, using the words “passion and interest,” when Gulliver informs the reader that the Houyhnhnms have no such flaws in their reason (225). “[H]uman reasonings and concepts” are like “matter, heavy and barren,” says Montaigne, characterizing it as a plague-infected invalid embraced by humanity: “I make men feel the emptiness, the nothingness of Man, wrenching from their grasp the sickly arms of human reason” (11-12). In his attack on reason, he issues a second challenge: “Let man make me understand, by the force of discursive reason, what are the grounds on which he has founded and erected all those advantages which he thinks he has over other creatures...” (13). To lower human pride in reason, Montaigne canvasses many examples of animal ingenuity in addition to animal semiosis. He discusses the fox who “ratiocinates” when the Thracians entrust him to test the thickness of river ice and the pure “dialectic” of the dog deciding which of three crossroads to take in pursuit of his master or prey (26, 28).

For Swift, who was “troubled by the flaws of verbal communication,” language is as imperfect as reason (Kelly 33). Schemes for repairing a faulty post-Babel human language were topical in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For example, John Wilkins in *An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (1668); John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690); projectors in the Royal Society; and others such as Descartes, Newton, and Leibniz made proposals on the topic. Leibniz, for example, wrote several

treatises on language. In *On the Universal Science*, he postulated that symbols could be given to primitive concepts that could be combined to form more complex concepts and in sum, the whole would be a “universal characteristic” (Kulstad). It was believed that communication failures due to imperfect language resulted in wars and civil strife. The English civil war, for example, served as a recent reminder, so the thinking went, a universal language would prevent future conflict.

Swift satirized such notions in the Laputa episode where a preposterous proposal is put forth to concretize language, excising all parts of speech but nouns. Instead of speaking, people would simply carry with them material examples of whatever they wish to denote (157). The absurdity of this idea hardly calls for comment, but it’s tempting to imagine Gulliver carrying a horse, who is usually a bearer of the human body, in his arms instead of just saying the word “horse.” The image is hilarious because it demonstrates the impossibility of this scheme in another parody of Cartesian reductivism that insists, not on the metaphysical, but on a strictly material orientation to life.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the Houyhnhnms have an impossibly ideal language in which concepts such as lying are nearly inexpressible in the positive sense and can only be defined in the negative as “the thing which was not” (202). This has been interpreted as Swift’s comment on “modern-day” sophists such as “lawyers and politicians” (Rivero n. 6, 202), but I think it’s tied to the example from Laputa to question the desirability of a strictly concrete use of language solely for exchanging “information of facts,” as Gulliver describes the Houyhnhnm approach (202). The Houyhnhnms have no poetry. In other words, Swift is wary of the usurpation of scientific discourse as the one and only true description of reality. The idea is that the Houyhnhnms are so pure that they cannot conceive of a “lie,” but even a negation of a

positive is still a positive.

In sum, Swift perceived human language as flawed, but he would have taken this observation to a different conclusion than the language projectors: the lesson to be drawn is that to privilege the human species over all others based on this fallen endowment is tenuous at best. He was not an idealist and recognized the improbability of these universal language proposals, understanding that even if external signs could be universally agreed on, their signification would be problematic due to the inherently symbolic nature of language itself.

Montaigne also commented on the inadequacy of language. He describes as “irreverent” religious cant such as “God cannot die” and “God cannot change his mind” (99). The problem with these statements, he says, is that they attempt to circumscribe divinity with “the rules of human language” (99). He claims that “our speech, like everything else, has its defects and weaknesses. Most of the world’s squabbles are occasioned by grammar!” (99). In reference to divine attributes, he writes, “we utter words, but our intelligence cannot grasp the sense. Despite that, we, in our arrogance, want to force God through human filters” (101). Here, he alludes to the concept of ineffability, arguing that human language cannot, even should not, attempt to describe something as incomprehensible as the divine, connecting efforts to do so to the human sin of “arrogance” (101). There is a connection here between the challenge presented in reading creatures and the divine since human language acts as “filter” or limit on both (101). The human “intellect” can go no further than making “analogies,” and it must be understood that the relationship between signifier and signified is not absolute but an approximation (105). Since language is flawed, the implication goes, humans should no more pride themselves on it than reason. In conclusion to these arguments, Montaigne writes:

As for the power of speech ... if it is not natural, then it cannot be necessary. And yet I believe ... that if a child before learning to talk, were brought up in total solitude, then he would have some sort of speech to express his concepts; it is simply not believable that Nature has refused to us men a faculty granted to most other animals (23).

His summation is noteworthy for it subtly reverses the assumption that it is humans who are endowed with reasoned speech and that animals can only vocalize passions by suggesting that animals naturally possess speech and that humans are privileged to share in the capacity.

Swift proposes, nonetheless, that humans strive for meaningful dialogue. In *Hints Towards an Essay on Conversation*, he discusses the value of exchange and observes that all people are capable of being “agreeable.” He applies again the strategy of definition *ex negativo*, comically cataloguing many misuses of conversation. For example, humans converse solely for displays of self-importance such as their talent for wit or for “making a vanity of telling ... faults.” Conversation for Swift is an art the purpose of which falls under the Horatian dictum to delight and instruct. In the concluding paragraphs, he writes, “thus we see how human nature is most debased, by the abuse of that faculty which is held the great distinction between men and brutes.” Ostensibly, this is an allusion once again to Aristotle, but in this context, Swift seems to say that dialogue rather than speech is the “great distinction.” Moreover, he hints that this view is a prosaic opinion “held” by others and not necessarily himself. He goes on to acknowledge gender implications, attributing the “degeneracy” of conversation to the “custom ... of excluding women from any share in our society, further than in parties at play, or in dancing, or in the pursuit of an amour,” suggesting that he perceives the shared oppressions of women and animals in terms of voice; both are precluded: one due to gender and one to species.

This theme of conversation arises in Houyhnhnm-land where Gulliver is a “humble auditor” (233). Even though he has learned the language of the land, Gulliver’s role as an interlocutor rather than speaker womanizes/animalizes him. Positioned as the animal, Gulliver is, in effect, silenced. Houyhnhnm conversation, like their reason, is ideal and includes “no interruption, tediousness, heat or difference of sentiments” (234). The horses believe that “a short silence doth much improve conversation” (234). Swift’s ironic view of the vapidness of human conversation is to say that silence is better. Yet, the placidity of Houyhnhnm conversation, while desirable in one sense, nevertheless implies that a dialogue with pure abstract reason would be extremely lifeless.

The Houyhnhnms cast Gulliver out, he says, because the horse master is “known frequently to converse with me, as if he would receive some advantage or pleasure in my company: that such a practice was not agreeable to reason or nature, nor a thing ever heard of before among them” (235). This prohibitive intermingling at the level of discourse includes species, implicitly comparing taboos on intra-human communication, such as those involving race, class, and gender, to interspecific communication—all of which transgress social and political boundaries.

Conversation is an enduring theme once Gulliver returns to England. Gulliver’s subsequent avoidance of his family after his time with the horses, is only a partial rejection, and a measure of realizing the primary incongruity of the human—an animal “capable of reason,” which pridefully takes advantage of reason to increase vice (262). Upon his return, he initially speaks neither to his wife, representing the prideful blind human, who has had no such epiphany, superseding gender here, nor to his children, to whom human pride is imputed via fiat. However, Gulliver’s aversion is temporary, and his connection to his own species is not irreparably severed

in favor of horses. It is imperative to read Gulliver's statements about his wife and children in context since his partial estrangement from his family is as foundational to the insanity interpretation as his amicable relationship with his horses. He says, "I began last week to permit my wife to sit at dinner with me, at the furthest end of a long table, and to answer (but with the utmost brevity) the few questions I ask her" (249). These statements are shortly thereafter tied to Gulliver's conclusive view of the human as a prideful animal filled with vice. By the end of the novel, Gulliver is taking steps, albeit small, towards reopening dialogue with other humans. In this case, verbal language, however imperfect, does have the potential to mediate, and he speaks of his "reconcilement to the Yahoo-kind in general" (250). He distinguishes between humanity's everyday vices, which "nature hath intitled them to," and arrogance, which they are not "intitled to" (250). What he finds intolerable is that these same people remain blind to their status as an "animal" and are "smitten with pride" (250). Gulliver demonstrates difficulty adjusting to his new self-knowledge. Neither Swift nor Montaigne propounded idealistic perspectives on reason or language, and they questioned the long-standing imbrication of animals in human philosophical/theological debates that chew on them, so to speak, to serve metaphysical theories that sometimes have devastating real-life consequences, such as the denial of feeling pain to animals.

If Montaigne's lesson in natural theology maintains that similarities with animals should give the human a humbler view of himself, the question remains, what are those similarities? Montaigne makes a case for embodied semiosis. In *Gulliver's Travels* this translates to both intra and interspecific communication where gestural and vocal, as opposed to verbal, communication is a salient motif. In a pioneering study of gestures in *Gulliver's Travels*, John Sena claims that Swift presents gestures as "superior to written and spoken language" (146). Of Gulliver's first

encounter with the horses, he writes, “[t]he initial effect of the gestures in this scene is to bridge the gap between humans and nonhumans, to establish a context in which we are able—even invited—to make the practices of horses applicable to humans,” but argues that ultimately, the horses are “humanized” through gesture (Sena 161). Another way of looking at this, however, is that just as gestures work to “humanize,” they animalize Gulliver, for they are a form of embodied expression which humans and animals share (Sena 161).

Several scenes involving gestural communication occur in initial encounters between Gulliver and the “creatures,” “monsters,” “people,” “animals,” “Yahoos,” and “Houyhnhnms” he meets. For example, as Gulliver lies tied down on the Lilliputian beach, one citizen “lift[s] up his hands and eyes by way of admiration” (18). Shortly thereafter, Gulliver turns to observe the “person and gesture” of a Lilliputian speaker, alluding to the importance of nonverbal communication even as it accompanies language (19). “I replied,” says Gulliver, in “a most submissive manner, lifting up my left hand and both my eyes to the sun, as calling him for a witness” (19). Gulliver also successfully communicates hunger through gesture putting his “finger frequently” to his “mouth to signify . . . food (19).” (19). In Brobdingnag, when an “enormous Barbarian” picks him up, Gulliver says, “[a]ll I ventured was to raise my eyes towards the sun, and place my hands together in a supplicating posture, and to speak some words in a humble melancholy tone” (72-73). In Laputa, Gulliver waves his hat as a signal, and the Laputans point to acknowledge him (132-133). When the flying island is lowered close to him, Gulliver says, “I then put myself into the most supplicating postures and spoke in the humblest accent . . . [t]hey made signs for me to come down from the rock...” (133). In these examples, Gulliver and the strangers demonstrate successful gestural communication, and Gulliver makes use of paralanguage, “humblest accent,” a nonverbal communication technique which includes

volume, pitch, and tone (133).

Even after Gulliver learns their language, the Houyhnhnms speak in embodied “signs” and vocalized “words,” emphasizing the multiple communicative strategies that humans often exercise in combination. (196). When Gulliver first encounters a Houyhnhnm, gestural communication is once again the initial mode of contact, and he describes an extended nonverbal exchange which I partially reproduce here:

We stood gazing at each other for some time; at last I took the boldness, to reach my hand towards his neck, with a design to stroak it, using the common style and whistle of jockies when they are going to handle a strange horse. But this animal seeming to receive my civilities with disdain shook his head, and bent his brows, softly raising up his right fore-foot to remove my hand. Then he neighed three or four times, but in so different a cadence, that I almost began to think he was speaking to himself in some language of his own. (190)

This segment is replete with interspecific gestural communication; despite this, the horse, in the human position, chooses, as Montaigne argues, to ignore the implications and has a condescending attitude of “disdain” (190). This first exchange with the horse reinforces a second Montaignian argument: the issue is not a lack of language in animals, but a “defect” in the human preventing full comprehension of animal language even though humans and animals can communicate to a degree (17). Interestingly, the horses do not speak a human language such as the animal narrators of fable. Gulliver makes the very Montaignian observation that the horse has “some language of his own” (190). This language of their own is represented through onomatopoeia, that is, equine vocalizations such as “Hhuun, Hhuun” (193). Gulliver attempts to communicate nonverbally by whistling, and he translates the Houyhnhnm language for the

reader—a precursor to the narrator who understands, unlike other humans, animal language in late-century didactic stories for children.¹⁹ Montaigne observes that humans change “idiom” according to the species spoken to, indicating the very real phenomenon of interspecies communication (23). Swift’s deployment of onomatopoeia in the Houyhnhnm episode suggests that Gulliver’s English horses are speaking, but not in the English language.

Gulliver’s inaugural encounter in book four, however, is not with a horse, as one might expect, but a Yahoo. In this scene, Swift explores the significance of the embodied communicative technique of vocalization. Gulliver reveals an anthropocentric attitude in his description of the Yahoo as a “disagreeable animal,” a “monster” for which he feels “antipathy ... contempt and aversion” —an inverse parallel of a Brobdingnagian who views him as a “hateful little animal” (190, 73). When a Yahoo approaches him and lifts his “fore-paw,” Gulliver strikes him with his sword (190). He reports, “When the beast felt the smart, he drew back, and roared so loud, that a herd of at least forty came flocking about me from the next field” (190). This exact language appears in a previous incident in which Gulliver is positioned as a strange animal. When the Lilliputians shoot him with arrows, he says he “roared so loud” they shrank from him (18). In this “roar” of trauma described as “the smart,” Swift challenges Descartes’ claim that an animal’s pain is merely mechanical and not really felt via his identical wording, “roared so loud.” Normally “roar” is associated with the vocalizations of large animals such as the lion, but here it works to suggest that the experience is the same for each species, and it emphasizes pre-verbal modes of expression. Like animals, humans use vocalizations to communicate, and moreover, appropriate their own terms for animal vocalization, “roar,” for themselves. At the same time, Cartesians would deny that animals who “roar” can signify anything but mechanistic reflex.

The Yahoo's response demonstrates the vocal aspect of animal semiosis that forms the basis of Montaigne's empathy in "Of Cruelty," which Philip P. Hallie calls the "living nerve of Western ethics" (156). Montaigne finds, he admits, a "violent pleasure" in the chase during the hunt but is greatly disturbed by the "cry of a hare" in his "dog's teeth." Evidently, Montaigne touched a nerve in Descartes, who had his own definition of feeling in his use of "*sentire*" which requires conscious thinking, which animals, according to him, do not do, as opposed to passions, such as fear and hunger which are involuntary (Harrison, "Descartes" 224). As Erica Fudge observes, this implies that animals do not feel or experience corporeal suffering as humans do, so it does not qualify as such (154). The Cartesian theory allows humans license to inflict suffering on animals without compunction (154).²⁰

Both the Yahoo and Gulliver roar, and Gulliver is effectively animalized in this sort of primal scream which precedes verbal language. Yet, he is deaf to the Yahoo's semiotic display. Even a horse can distinguish between the menacing bark of a dog and some other "meaningful cry" that a dog makes, says Montaigne (18). Gulliver's lack of sympathy dehumanizes him briefly making him lower than a horse, for even animals demonstrate humanity for each other forming "alliances" for "mutual succor" (Montaigne 44). "Oxen, pigs and other animals can be seen rushing in to help when one of their number is being attacked and rallying round in its defence," observes Montaigne (44). Gulliver himself comments that a "common hound ... has judgment enough to distinguish and follow the cry of the ablest dog in the pack" (222). At this point in the narrative, Gulliver is an ontological blank, and the incident with the Yahoo forms what might be called the climactic nadir of *Gulliver's Travels*. Because he does not yet see his own animality, Gulliver does not sympathetically identify with the Yahoo, and in that sense, Gulliver is lower than both human and animal. The Yahoos who respond to the distress of their

fellow are more fully human than Gulliver.²¹ When he finally sees his reflection like Narcissus or like Eve in *Paradise Lost*, he will not become enraptured with himself, but shrink in horror like Frankenstein's creature when the epiphany hits. Shortly thereafter, in a reversal of the Yahoo scene, the horses examine Gulliver with fascination. When one unintentionally injures his hand he admits, "he was forced to roar" (191). The horses understand his roar and alter their manner of touch.

Swift's exploration of embodied communication positions *Gulliver's Travels* as a harbinger of the novel of sensibility that would reach full foment in the late eighteenth century. Writers of sensibility viewed the "pre-linguistic semiosis" that humans and animals share as an "unequivocal expression of ... a condition of ontological equivalence" (Menely 10). For example, Rousseau explored ideas of sympathetic identification with the animal based on embodied semiotic exchange. "Man's first language," he writes, "is the cry of nature" (58). This "cry" represents the non-discursive ability of the majority of species to communicate through vocalization. The human, according to Rousseau, is at least partially defined in response to this cry through a feeling of "pity" (63). He writes:

In fact, commiseration will be all the more energetic as the witnessing animal identifies itself more intimately with the suffering animal. Now it is evident that this identification must have been infinitely closer in the state of nature than in the state of reasoning. Reason is what engenders egocentrism.... (63)

One creature in distress causes another to identify with him, and this is a natural response independent of rational thought (in many ways, Rousseau echoes Montaigne). This "cry" is the foundation of creaturely identification, and Rousseau sounds like a theriophilist in his conflation of reason and egocentric pride. Even though Gulliver is dehumanized due to the absence of

sympathy, Swift challenges the reader to recognize the semiotic import of the Yahoo “roar.” He asks the reader to consider just what animal cries signify.

Even though they don’t speak verbal language, the Yahoos are semiotic beings; they “roar” in bodily distress; they surround Gulliver “howling” and “making odious faces” (190). While the incident with the Yahoo contains pathos, Swift enhances the meaning through his favorite comic mode, adding an additional facet to his deployment of the scatological to *Gulliver’s Travels* where he associates it with the embodied communication of the Yahoos. That is, for Swift, even defecation can be a form of gestural communication. The Yahoos communicate collective disapproval of Gulliver’s violence by climbing a tree and “discharg[ing] their excrements” on Gulliver’s head (190). Inverting the chain of being, they sit, so to speak, on the seat of reason and defecate—a disgustingly uproarious comment on the so-called superiority of human rationality.

This theme has been foreshadowed by the “most ancient student” in the academy of Lagado, the city below Laputa, who has been trying for years to reduce excrement to its original form of food—a hilarious parody of Cartesian reductivism (152). Swift bleeds the communicative import of these corporeal animal functions, employing satirically these forms of animal communication, which he also foreshadows in Lilliput where Gulliver, like a gargantuan canine, puts out a fire in the royal palace by urinating on it. His waggish agency in this scene had a heroic effect, and no doubt functions as political commentary, but the intended message of the Yahoo feces is lost on Gulliver, for he makes no comment except to say that he was nearly “stifled with the filth” (190).

Montaigne also forayed into the scatological, proclaiming the human’s proper place in the cosmos the “mire and shit of the world” (16). Swift no doubt had to negotiate his fair share

walking the streets of London as his speaker does in a “Description of a City Shower.” He describes a “confluence” near the market of “dung, guts and blood, / Drowned puppies, stinking sprats all drenched in mud, / Dead cats, and turnip tops...” (60-62). He represents the “world,” like Montaigne, as one of “mire and shit,” which he terms “mud” and “dung,” a revolting street stew including “puppies” and “cats.” The addition of animals, semiotically referred to as “pets,” to animals considered “food” raises an interesting question about the different categories within the term “animal.” Gulliver himself refuses the “asses flesh” offered to him by the Houyhnhnms, perhaps hinting at an unease with the body’s capability to transform animal flesh to human flesh (195). This depiction of life’s interconnectedness is beautifully Swiftian in its repulsiveness. For Swift, carnivorism, blood, urine, and feces serve as reminders to the human, who would often rather ignore the messy implications of corporeality, that is, the reality of the corpus, of his mutual embodiment with animals. Swift’s exploration of gestural language, I am arguing, adds another facet to his emphasis on the body.

Gulliver will soon acknowledge the efficacy of Yahoo communication. The “roar” will return and is of great import in finally identifying him as a Yahoo, but Swift has been building up the narrative tension with hints at this throughout the Houyhnhnm episode. For example, the horses are eager to classify Gulliver and perform a side by side visual comparison with a Yahoo: “The beast and I were brought close together; and our countenances diligently compared, both by my master and servant, who thereupon repeated several times the word *Yahoo*” (emphasis in original 194-195). The horses here recognize the human face as a species identifier. Gulliver says of the Yahoo that he feels “horror and astonishment” at seeing in “this abominable animal, a perfect human figure” (195). Ironically, Gulliver recognizes the Yahoo animal as human, but does not yet recognize himself as a Yahoo animal.

Not until the often-discussed scene in which the young female Yahoo makes amorous overtures to Gulliver “embrac[ing him] in a most fulsome manner” will he avow his own animal status (225). In response to this embrace, he exclaims, “I roared as loud as I could” (225). Gulliver’s animal identity is finally established via embodied communication, not the face, not verbal language: the female deploys the embrace and Gulliver the roar. In this instance, Gulliver’s roar is like a double-edged sword at once an abject pre-verbal denial of animal status, and a confirmation of it. The experience has the effect of killing Gulliver’s previous conception of his human “self.” He describes it as a “mortification to myself,” continuing, “[f]or I could no longer deny, that I was a real Yahoo, in every limb and feature” (225). Swift treats Gulliver’s anagnoristic recognition comically in a sort of reversal of a bungled seduction scene, but there is a weighty subtext here because he has recognized his animality. In his later remembrances, Gulliver literally faces or humanizes his own animality: “When I happened to behold the reflection of my own form in a lake or a fountain, I turned away my face in horror and detestation of myself and could better endure the sight of a common Yahoo, than of my own person” (234-235). Swift turns the reflector on Gulliver and it is not a human artifact made of glass, but nature itself in the form of a “lake” or a “fountain.” Ingeniously, Swift connects the pedagogical technique of natural theology, which teaches through the observation of nature, to his satiric mirror. This dramatic realization is a watershed, demanding an alteration in the character. Gulliver finally admits that he is a Yahoo; the human animal has a face, but only after he faces the animal.

When he is rescued after his exile from Houyhnhnm-land and brought aboard the Portuguese ship, Gulliver describes his reaction to hearing the sailors speak: “it appeared to me as monstrous as if a dog or a cow should speak in England, or a Yahoo in Houyhnhnm-land”

(241). Gulliver is perhaps not too swift, but he clearly understands that in the world turned right side up, animals do not use verbal language. How then should we read the controversial statements of Gulliver with which this essay began? There are two ways that do not necessarily negate each other but illustrate once more the complexities of Swift's text which, I have been arguing, deliberately challenge finality. We can read Gulliver's statements allegorically as symbols for his sympathetic identification with his horses based on his new self-knowledge of himself as a human animal, and we can read more closely by investigating historical meanings.

To revisit, in the novel's concluding paragraphs, Gulliver says, "my horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least for hours every day" (244). One eighteenth-century meaning of "converse" is the "interchange of thoughts other than by speech" (*OED*). In addition to writing, this could, of course, mean gestural communication. "Converse" could also mean a "manner of life" while "conversation" could mean "the action of consorting or dealing with others; living together; commerce, intercourse, society, intimacy" (*OED*). Gulliver's conversations might refer to nonverbal communication with his horses such as the "whistle" that he has already mentioned (190). It also suggests that he is speaking about living in close contact with his horses, spending time with them. But does four hours a day necessarily indicate unreasoned mania? Have we been reading Gulliver too restrictively with an anthropocentric predisposition to think of conversation solely in terms of verbal exchange? Perhaps the critical conundrum is based on an erroneous assumption that Gulliver claims his horses speak English instead of a language of their own as they did in Houyhnhnm-land.

Gulliver intrudes on his own narration alluding to the present stating: "By conversing with the Houyhnhnms, and looking upon them with delight, I fell to imitate their gate [sic] and gesture, which is now grown into a habit, and my friends tell me in a blunt way, that I *trot like a*

horse (235). Sena notes that this is the final “significant gesture” of the novel, indicating that Gulliver has “confused form with substance and wishes to be literally like a horse” (165). Sena’s is a soft school reading; Gulliver is the butt of Swift’s joke, for he fails to realize that Houyhnhnm rationality is far from ideal. “Gate” can mean “a way, manner, or method of doing or behaving, a peculiar habit” and not necessarily a walking style (*OED*). The word “trot” can be “applied to a similar gait in a man [to a horse] (or other biped), between a walk and a run” because all feet are briefly and simultaneously off the ground (*OED*). Since at least 1416, “trot” was used to refer to humans who moved quickly as in this example from 1704: “If you’d have me trot it to the East Indies, ... ‘tis no sooner said than done” (*OED*). I sense that Gulliver’s friends, like Swift, are milking the metaphor, horsing around.

Swift’s exploration of interspecific communication presents the reader with a representation of the use of the kinesthetic imagination in our relationship with animals that may have a basis in lived experience. Gulliver’s animal movement is suggestive of contemporary zoosemiotic theories of human and horse communication, namely the “symbolic interactionist” theory, which “create[s] a model of the self that allows animals’ subjective presence to become visible through interaction” (Brandt 302). According to this theory, a horse trainer or rider communicates through subtle changes in his or her body movement and can read the horse through positioning of the horse’s body such as the ears (Brandt 306). In other words, “the body can be a site for symbolic interaction,” which creates “kinesthetic empathy” (Brandt 304). This theory of human-horse communication rings distinctly with the eighteenth-century definition of “converse” as the “interchange of thoughts other than by speech” (*OED*). After he finally admits his Yahoo identity, Gulliver indicates that he has learned to read the animal in himself, which opens his imagination into such “kinesthetic empathy” with his horses when he returns to

England (Brandt 304). Gulliver's empathy is allegorized as movement—as if he has imagined, like a shaman or animal trainer, his way into the animal's mind by imitating the semiosis of a horse's motions.

Gulliver might still uphold the “accomplished Houyhnhnms” as exemplars of reason, but like any student, he can't learn everything at once, and Swift did not have a negative view of reason itself (247). Despite their faults, the Houyhnhnms are nevertheless capable of virtues such as “friendship and benevolence,” which gestures toward an answer to what I believe is the implicit question of *Gulliver's Travels* mentioned above: What is the reasonable use of reason? (226). Swift's answer, I am arguing, lies in Gulliver's relationship with animals once he returns home. In praxis, this translates to humane treatment: they are “strangers to bridle and saddle” and live in “amity” with him (244). This is in direct contrast to his description of the human abuse of horses in England to the Houyhnhnm master. After being treated with “kindness and care,” English horses are eventually sold into “drudgery” until death and obscenely “left as carrion for birds and dogs,” a displacement of so-called ontological inferiority onto the animal body (203). Our current ecological predicament, to which the factory farming of Western capitalism, for example, contributes greatly to climate change in terms of greenhouse gasses, suggests that long-standing assumptions about the human and animal relationship still obtain and to a degree that I can only describe as irrationally suicidal. Bovine excrement produces extraordinary amounts of methane, a greenhouse gas with graver consequences even than CO₂. What Swift would have made of this, I can only imagine. Thus, the questions that *Gulliver's Travels* raises are perhaps more relevant than ever as we approach the 300th anniversary of its publication.

Gulliver says he plans to “apply” what he has learned of Houyhnhnm “virtue” to teach his family and “to behold my figure often in a glass, and thus if possible habituate myself by

time to tolerate the sight of a human creature: to lament the brutality of Houyhnhnms in my country, but always treat their persons with respect..." (249). Gulliver takes on the responsibility of holding the mirror to himself as a constant reminder. He views the horses as "persons" (249). When we call an animal a "person," writes Barbara Smuts, we do not "attribute human characteristics to them. It has to do, instead, with recognizing that they are social subjects ... personhood connotes a way of being in relation to others" (118). In other words, Gulliver's approach to animals is one of relational ontology.

On a personal level, too, Swift had intimations of the implications of animal semiosis; he cared for his horses deeply, writing about them to two very close women friends named Esther whom he gave the nicknames Stella (Esther Johnson) and Vanessa (Esther Vanhomrigh) and evidently spent many hours in "conversation" with them (Kelly 333-344). He seems to say since we can't know the workings of animal minds beyond a reasonable doubt, we should extend them the benefit *of* the doubt. Isn't this what we mean by "healthy skepticism" in the colloquial and philosophical sense? Against the Stoics, he implies that ethics should extend to animals. This is a reasonable use of reason and a reasonable imbrication of animals in human concerns, facilitating the "companionship" spoken of by Montaigne (51). As for Gulliver, could we extend him also the benefit of the doubt? Whatever his remaining faults, he no longer abides in the "insane arrogance" with which humans repudiate animals; thus, his love of horses is the very embodiment of sanity (Montaigne 51).

Chapter Two

“He Worships in His Way”: Feline Kinesis and the Topos of the Writer’s Cat in Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*

As surely as there is an animal body, so there is also a spiritual body.

— I Cor. 15: 44

In Frances Burney’s 1796 novel *Camilla*, a young beauty attempts to wrap a cat around her neck all the while oblivious to the lacerations she is receiving from its claws. Dropping the cat, she folds her face in cloth, mummy-like, shrieking and striking her head violently. This scene unfolds during the Tyrold family’s propaedeutic excursion to the estate where the young woman resides. Mr. Tyrold instructs his daughter Eugenia, crippled and severely disfigured by smallpox, that “beauty, without mind, is more dreadful than any deformity” (310-311). It’s unsettling, associating madness with cats. It’s also mildly evocative of Christopher Smart’s piteous predicament as he immortalized his pet cat, Jeoffry, in *Jubilate Agno* while confined to an insane asylum on the charge of improper public prayer. Unlike Burney’s beauty, however, Smart had a beneficial relationship with his cat, and *Jubilate Agno* may contain the first poetic description of pet therapy in English. “Jeoffry,” a variation of “Godfrey,” means “God’s peace” and could not have been lost on a poet of such semantic sensitivity as Smart whose own cognomen was “Kit.”

Burney was personally acquainted with Smart, writing about him with humor and compassion in her diary ca. 1768-1769, about ten years before his death in debtor’s prison: “Mr.

Smart the poet was here yesterday ... He is extremely grave, and has still great wildness in his manner, looks, and voice... I felt the utmost pity and concern for him” (ED 29). A year later, she writes, “Mr. Smart presented me this morning with a rose. ‘It was given me,’ said he, ‘by a fair lady—though not as fair as *you!*’ I always admired *poetical* license!” (ED 60). Did she have him in mind while writing *Camilla*? Although it is very unlikely that she would have read *Jubilate Agno*—it was not published until 1939—she could have known of Jeoffry’s existence. The evidence strongly suggests that her father and mutual friends such as Samuel Johnson, who was very fond of his own cat Hodge, visited Smart while he was confined, and Smart remembers him in the poem, praying, “God be gracious to Samuel Johnson” (C 74).²²

A direct connection between Smart and *Camilla* is all highly speculative, of course, but there is a link between the Burney and Smart in terms of their representations of animals. In their writing, both Smart and Burney self-represent as vulnerable animals, compelled by situational similarity to both identify with and establish communication with their pets. I open with the subject of Smart’s madness because it is as inseparable from his critical history as Swift’s. The two shared more than a charge of insanity, however. Both were Anglican, had a gift for writing in the satiric mode, and displayed similar sensibilities towards animals. Smart admired Swift, implying in *Jubilate Agno* that the great satirist’s writing is authentic and bears the stamp of divine approval, saying, “bless the Lord Jesus for the memory of ... Swift / For all good words are from God and all else is cant” (B 84).

In chapter one, I positioned *Gulliver’s Travels* in relation to the Montaignian-Cartesian controversy. I claimed that Swift’s exploration of the human animal as a creature of semiosis engaged in embodied communication with other animals, derived from Montaigne’s *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, challenges Enlightenment assumptions of language-based human

superiority, arguing that Gulliver's equiphilia can be understood allegorically as an avowal of and subsequent sympathetic identification with the animal. In broad strokes, this chapter draws a parallel between Smart and Swift in terms of their self-positioning within eighteenth-century debates concerning animals, reason, and language, and their strategic reinvestment in older literary forms and sources to recoup a mythopoeic interpretation of the natural world in an age of scientific discourse. While Swift deploys allegory and fable, Smart, in his effort to demonstrate that "nothing is so real as that which is spiritual," emulates the antiphonal structure of Hebrew poetry (B 258).²³ He also borrows from commonplace books, ancient authors such as Pliny, and the shared tradition of the medieval bestiaries. For instance, the entry for cat in the *Second Family Bestiary* reads as follows:

People call this animal cat (*catus*), from prey (*captura*): some say because it seeks (*captat*), that is, it observes. For it sees so keenly, that it overcomes the darkness of night with the brightness of day. Wherefore, "cat" comes from the Greek, that is talented. (Clark 161)

Compare the above with these lines from the Jeffry passage:

For he keeps the Lord's watch in the night against the adversary. / For he counteracts the powers of darkness by his electrical skin and glaring eyes. / For he counteracts the Devil, who is death, by brisking about the life (B 718-720, 88).

Both authors seem intent on shoring up the cat's positive valence. The author of the bestiary cites one possible etymology of cat related to prey, and therefore, death, but follows it with an emphasis on the cat's ability to overcome darkness. Jeffry not only fights darkness, but "counteracts" the devil conflated by Smart with death. Compare the passage above with these in which Smart puns on the Greek preposition *κατ* and cat:

For the power of some animal is predominant in every language. / For the power and spirit of CAT is in the Greek. / For the sound of a cat is in the most useful preposition κατ' ευχην. / For the pleasantry of a cat at pranks is in the language ten thousand times over. (B 625-628)

The authors connect “cat” to the Greek language etymologically. Smart says elsewhere in the poem, “I have glorified God in Greek,” which he calls a “consecrated” language because it was the language of the New Testament (B 6). The phrase κατ' ευχην means “as planned.” But “κατ” can also mean “downwards.” (83). Karina Williamson notes that Smart is punning on metrical feet when he writes, “For the Greek is thrown from heaven and falls upon its feet” (83, B 632). However, Smart was probably also referring to “downwards.” His wording evokes the thunder bolt thrown down by Zeus, which he cleverly associates with the lightning speed with which a falling cat will right itself and land on its feet. This is supported by several lines in proximity that conflate Greek with cats, including the passage quoted above. For instance, the line “For the sleekness of a Cat is in his αλατηρι,” which Williamson notes means “splendour” or “beauty” directly precedes it (B 631, *PW* 1, 83).

Like Swift, Smart is working within the tradition of natural theology, particularly Montaigne’s brand of Christianized classical skepticism. Both authors portray animals through kinesthetic imagery. Animal kinesis, according to Montaigne, is evidence of reason and tantamount to a type of language (18). If animals have their own language, the argument goes, then humankind is not exceptional in terms of intelligence and reason. Smart’s 1754 *An Index to Mankind*, published six years before he commenced *Jubilate Agno*, features a conclusion entitled, “An abstract of curious and excellent Thoughts in Seigneur de Montaigne’s *Essays*.” Although none of the included quotations mentions animals, Smart includes this from *An*

Apology for Raymond Sebond: “Human reason and discourses are like confused and barren matter, until the grace of God puts them in form, which alone gives them shape and value” (174). Smart’s choice suggests that he, too, was cautious regarding the possibilities of human reason, preferring to frame it within a biblical perspective as a corrupted faculty. His skeptical bent is evident in *Jubilate Agno*: “I rejoice that I attribute to God, what others vainly ascribe to feeble man” (B 97). As a disciple of Montaigne, one of his aims is to circumscribe human pride, especially as it manifests in relationships with animals. This is evident in his early poem, “On an Eagle Confined in a College-Court,” in which the speaker mourns the bird’s “cruel fate,” designating it a “wrong” (11, 33). The eagle possesses a “type of wit and sense,” says the speaker, but it is “confin’d” and “cramp’d by the oppressors of the mind” (35-36). The bird’s imprisonment is motivated by “scholastic Pride” (25). Smart characterizes the academic tradition, emblematic of human reason, as arrogantly suppressing nonhuman intelligence, imprisoning the eagle literally and figuratively. Years later, in *Jubilate Agno*, Smart would mourn his own unjust incarceration.

Broadly speaking, *Jubilate Agno*, like *Gulliver’s Travels*, belongs to the literature of the sensibility movement, itself part of a wider eighteenth-century cultural response to the Enlightenment’s de-animation of nature, epitomized by the Cartesian beast machine and the Latinate nomenclature of scientific taxonomy. The magnitude of the Enlightenment’s paradigmatic shift has been articulated by Eric Miller as the “evacuation of the figurative” and by Matthew Senior as the “extradition” of animals “from human consciousness and speech” (99, 62). Smart engages heavily with Enlightenment ideas in *Jubilate Agno*. For example, he appropriates the language of taxonomy, “quadruped,” for his own purposes writing about Jeffery, “he is the cleanest in the use of his fore-paws of any quadruped” (B 731). Punning on

“fore” and “four,” Smart winsomely refers to the way a cat will clean its face with its front paws, perhaps referring also to the superb dexterity, “cleanest,” of the feline species.

Smart’s engagement with the Scientific Revolution is much more expansive than the appropriation of Latinate taxonomy, however. Scholars have written extensively about his explicit refusal of Newton’s materialism, but in this chapter, I wish to qualify this hermeneutic by observing that behind Newton lies the specter of Descartes.²⁴ In the previous chapter, I described a specific quarrel between Descartes and Montaigne regarding animals as outlined by Hassan Melehy. In this chapter, I introduce the “Cartesian-Newtonian conflict” identified by Bryce Christensen (154). In doing so, I stress an over-arching argument of this dissertation—that a viable interpretation of the literary animals of the long eighteenth-century cannot be divorced from the historical debate involving Descartes and Montaigne. Christensen explains that in a misappropriation leading to widespread misapprehension, writers such as Voltaire and John Toland “stole Newton’s apple from his spiritual universe and made it a cog in their world machine” for their own purposes (152). What is little known, and certainly wasn’t known to his contemporaries, is that Newton attacked Descartes in his unpublished writing for his “world-machine philosophy” and intentional “infidelity” but himself “rose to raptures of poetic transport” based on a view of nature presided over by providence (Christensen 148-149). In response to Descartes, Newton appended the *Principia* with the “General Scholium,” which contained a brief discussion of religion. He hoped his own ideas about space, time, and motion would support “the veracity of biblical claims” about the workings of nature (Janiak 93). He built on Descartes’ ideas regarding space and motion while rejecting his separation of theology from natural philosophy (Janiak 89).

According to Moira Dearnley, Smart's "garbled expression" of Newton's laws in *Jubilate Agno* offers internal evidence of his insanity (151). This is just one of several examples she marshals to support a view of Smart as mentally ill. But Smart was not interested in writing accurate scientific discourse—even the unicorn makes an appearance in *Jubilate Agno* (A 26). Was he truly insane? His medical diagnosis is uncertain and fraught with conspiracy. Chris Mounsey observes "something distinctly dubious about the lack of information surrounding the confinement" when compared to other cases, and he identifies two possible "villains" in the drama: an MP whom Smart had satirized in print and his own father-in-law, publisher John Newbery, the same Newbery of the prestigious award for children's literature (195, 200).²⁵ Newbery, probably over money matters, launched a thinly-veiled public smear campaign shortly before Smart was confined, and religious mania, the given justification, was a "catchall reason for disposing of annoying relatives" at the time (Mounsey 181, 200). According to his own description of himself as having "a greater compass both of mirth and melancholy than another," Smart was posthumously diagnosed with cyclothymia or what is now called bipolar disorder by one Russell Brain [sic], twentieth-century psychiatrist (B 132, Mounsey 209).

William Force Stead, discoverer and first editor of *Jubilate Agno*, reinforced the insanity myth, publishing Smart's manuscript as *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song from Bedlam*. Stead writes that the poem, consisting of four fragmented folios labeled A-D for editorial purposes, contains "plenty of rubbish," "frequent intrusions of the meaningless and grotesque," "questionable theological statements," and perhaps nothing but "moonshine and madness" (*Bedlam* 13, "Cat" 685, 681). Of this line in the Jeoffry section, "For in his morning orisons he loves the sun and the sun loves him," he says, "It is reasonable to say that the cat loves the sun, but what rational man would say that the sun loves the cat?" (B 721, "Cat" 684).²⁶ Quoting the same line, Dearnley

dismisses Smart's descriptions of Geoffry as "reckless statements" (155). Such comments are perplexing. On the one hand, Stead accedes that felines feel. On the other hand, he implies that Smart's deployment of prosopopoeia is irrational. He seems not to appreciate the pun on sun/son, echoed further in "orisons," reminiscent of John Donne in "A Hymn to God the Father." This suggests to me that his analysis was haunted by the notion of the *poète maudit*, a classification later given Smart by Northrup Frye (Greene 329). Stead, however, when he confronted the poem, found a manuscript in the form of a literary puzzle, and he did not have the benefit of decades of careful scholarship to build on.

Despite critical misgivings, Stead recognized the affective power of the Geoffry passage, the final seventy-three lines of Fragment B's 768, writing, "Every animal-lover will be moved by the long tribute" (*Rejoice* 47). Stead was accurate; since his public debut, Geoffry has "moved" readers, critics, and other poets, inspiring many tender tributes such as Hunt Hawkins' 1978 "My Cat Jack." For Stead, the value of Smart's "sympathetic feeling for dumb creatures" was its potential to rehabilitate his reputation from that of a man drunk with wine and religion to man of "fellow-feeling" ("Cat" 681, *Rejoice* 47). But if earlier critics were on the lookout for internal evidence of insanity, one wonders why none chose this gem: "For to worship naked in the rain is the bravest thing for refreshing and purifying the body" (B 384). As this chapter will show, this seeming throwaway holds an interpretive key when paired with this line about Geoffry: "he worships in his way," to which I will return below (B 697).

In addition to discussions of insanity and Smart's engagement with the Scientific Revolution, the subject of communication has been a significant avenue of scholarly inquiry in the critical history of *Jubilate Agno*. Rosalind Powell argues that in emulation of biblical models such as the burning bush, Smart explores communicative "modes" besides language that "might

reflect divinity,” creating “his own system of signs,” to “overcome the paradox of communication in religious poetry” (“Towards” 117). Powell overlooks Jeoffry’s semiosis (the cat is not even mentioned) as a potential “system of signs” (“Towards” 117). Harriet Guest contends that Smart’s linguistic playfulness “reanimates the figurative elements of speech,” arguing that Smart presents a “significant distinction between the self-expression of men and animals... it is only man that is made in God’s image, and whose language and breath are therefore the image of that living soul which is the breath of God” (175, 194). Clement Hawes observes the theme of “interspecies communication” in *Jubilate Agno* but cautions that Smart only “celebrates the possibility” of it, interpreting his representations “as a remarkable attempt to reimagine bourgeois domesticity” (200). None of these critical assessments, as astute as they are, fully account for the connection between Smart’s catalogue of Jeoffry’s behaviors and the cat’s meaning, if they mention him at all. Except to say that Jeoffry is “surpassing in beauty,” Smart does not describe the cat’s appearance (B 68). There is no indication of the color or length of his coat etc. Smart focuses on Jeoffry’s maneuvers. Why write seventy-three lines listing the actions of a cat?

Recently, Tobias Menely’s ardent work has begun to fill the gap. He argues that the “somatically legible body” of the animal includes the idea of a “prior voice,” which is an “address” to which the human (poet) responds as an animal advocate (6).²⁷ Smart’s project, says Menely, is to advocate for Jeoffry by transforming his “living being into written verse, to ‘raise’ animate expressivity into the realm of social meaning by translating it into conventional language” (Menely 144). Menely’s argument is based on Smart’s prayer for God “to translate” his “MAGNIFICAT into verse and represent it,” which puns on both his cat and the Christian extraliturgical prayer the Magnificat or Song of Mary (B 43).

I would augment Menely by drawing a few fine distinctions. I contend that Smart's project is to read Jeffry's movements and articulate their spiritual meaning. Smart is an interpreter, not just in the sense of translating one language or form into another, but in glossing meaning. In *Jubilate Agno*, he refers to reading and interpreting animals writing, "Let Joseph, who from the abundance of his blessing may spare to him, that lacketh, praise with the Crocodile, which is pleasant and pure, when he is interpreted, tho' his look is of terror and offence" (A 46). Against humankind's misinterpretation of the crocodile as malevolent, Smart re-interprets the crocodile as "pleasant and pure," revising a traditional view of nature as hostile (A 46). I would emphasize the connection between the "somatically legible body," to use Menely's highly apt phrase, and the concept of reading animals in the Montaignian tradition of natural theology (6). The animal, as a chapter in the *lex naturae*, is a theological advocate, and by demonstrating its divine purpose advocates, in a sense, for itself. The poet's task is to illuminate this for the reader by writing criticism, if you will, of the book of creation.

Smart interprets meaning by writing a lexicon of feline kinesics. He constructs many of the lines in the Jeffry passage in the simplicity of the copular formation of x equals y, describing the cat as this or that. For example, "he is the quickest to his mark" (B 723). He adds a gloss to other lines by constructing them with an adjective clause beginning with "which" such as "he can fetch and carry, which is patience in employment" (B 746). Within these rather pedestrian declarative sentence structures, the reader finds embedded the rhetorical devices of poetry such as alliteration, allusion, association, assonance, paronomasia, prosopoeia, and syntactical variety, making *Jubilate Agno*, especially the Jeffry section, a truly unique contribution to British literature. What I find most striking, however, is that Smart presents the cat predominantly in terms of his actions, which are glossed in sum as forms of worship, and

which I reproduce here for emphasis: Jeoffry “worships,” “leaps,” “rolls,” “performs,” “looks,” “kicks,” “works,” “sharpen,” “washes,” “fleas,” “rubs,” “goes,” “meets,” “takes,” “plays,” “keeps,” “camels,” “counteracts,” “loves,” “purrs,” “knows” and “suppresses.” In addition, Jeoffry can “quest,” “brisk,” “set up” “fetch,” “carry,” “spraggle,” “clamber,” “tread,” “swim,” “consider,” “jump,” “stretch,” “catch,” “toss,” “spit,” “hiss,” “learn,” “kiss,” “kill,” and “creep.” Finally, he is figured as “serving” and “dallying” (B 697-768). This is an impressive repertoire of forty-four verbs distributed in well over half of the passage’s seventy-three lines. It attests to the acuity of Smart’s observational skill and poetic imagination, as well as the wonder of feline locomotion. Of over one hundred animals mentioned in *Jubilate Agno*, only Jeoffry, the cat, receives such an extended treatment.

In this chapter, I shall argue that Smart deploys what might be called the topos of the philosopher’s, scholar’s, or poet’s cat, but which I will call the writer’s cat for broadest application, to work out his cultural and personal purposes. Taking a cue from Montaigne who writes that the “very movements” of animals “serve as arguments and ideas,” Smart represents Jeoffry’s “ritual calisthenics,” which have received no critical emphasis in themselves, as an extended argument for the spiritual significance of animal semiosis (18).²⁸ Montaigne implies that animals can participate in spiritual activities (13). Smart follows presenting Jeoffry’s movements as the “way” in which the cat “worships” (B 697). At the macro-level, Jeoffry’s spiritualized motions form a resistant reading of Newtonian mechanism and Cartesian beast machines. Smart appropriates Newton’s concepts of motion and refigures them as a form of feline devotion. While Guest argues that Smart’s project “reanimates the figurative elements of speech,” I contend that Smart reanimates the Cartesian beast machine, restoring the motionless and language-less animal of the dissecting table back to poetry where his behaviors speak a

spiritual language (175).

At the micro-level, Smart, I posit, identifies with his pet cat in terms of situational similarity; both are captives in the asylum and both suffer corporeal injury. Smart will self-represent as a vulnerable animal in solidarity with his cat. His representation seeks to compensate for his own spiritual suppression by visualizing Jeffry as a symbol of unfettered religious expression. Smart's inclusive vision imagines the animal body within the religious body. Jeffry's spiritual movements, then, are an indemnification of Smart's literal and figurative immobility. It is Jeffry, the writer's cat, who advocates for Smart, atoning for his exclusion from the human community (6).

In the section that follows, I elaborate on the topos of the writer's cat, providing several examples including Montaigne's. Then, with additional ideas from Montaigne and from Smart's era, I briefly examine the topic of religious devotion as it relates to the capacity of animals to engage in the practice. I do so in order to foreground my discussion of Smart's response to Newtonian and Cartesian concepts as they are registered in his interpretation of Jeffry's movements as a form of worship. After, I investigate Smart's more personal intimations of his predicament as a prisoner in solidarity with Jeffry, which I frame with a second, and to my knowledge, overlooked utilization of the writer's cat topos in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*.

Many authors have utilized the animal encounter as a narrative strategy, but there is something about the lithe mysteriousness of the cat that seems to elicit speculative thought. Smart interrupts the Jeffry passage with a self-reflexive comment on this, saying about his cat, "he is good to think on if a man would express himself neatly" (B 755). The writer's cat has many precedents. For example, the fourth-century historian and biblical translator St. Jerome is often depicted in Renaissance art accompanied by a lion. The ninth-century Irish poem, "Pangur

Ban,” a sort of mock heroic written by a monk about a cat named Pangur Ban (white pangur meaning white textile worker), depicts a “scholar” who analogically compares his work: thought, to his cat’s: mice.²⁹ And a portrait of Sir Walter Scott depicts him at his writing desk with his beloved tabby, Hinx, nearby. In a more recent instance, American author Annie Dillard opens her 1974 Pulitzer Prize-winning eco-philosophical novel, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, with a meditation on her cat, a “tom,” fresh from the hunt, who paints her nightgown in bloodied paw prints, “roses,” that soak to her skin (1). She wonders in the rhythm of poetry: “The sign on my body could have been an emblem or stain, the keys to the kingdom or the mark of Cain. I never knew” (2). Aye, there’s the rub. She never knew. Dillard employs the cat encounter to know what she doesn’t know, a Montaignian move. She represents her cat as a semiotic being, writing on her body, leaving a “sign,” a trace of itself—a use of language that is beyond human understanding (2). This cat encounter sets the stage for and instantiates Dillard’s spiritually-inflected ruminations on nature.

Perhaps the most discussed example of the writer’s cat, however, belongs to Montaigne. In *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, he employs the topos to ask what might be the most effective rhetorical question in Western literature—at least in terms of the human and animal relationship. “When I play with my cat,” he conjectures, “how do I know that she is not passing the time with me?” (17). In this cat encounter, Montaigne experiences an epistemological rupture that destabilizes his identity as human subject and the cat’s as object, between perceiver and perceived, precipitating a moment of uncertainty to which he responds later in the text in his well-known summation of skepticism: “*Que sçay-je?*” (What do I know?) (100). This brief aporia allows Montaigne to consider whether a cat possesses subjectivity. Yet the serious implications of Montaigne’s question are in tension with the situation: he is at play with his cat

and implicitly asking if he is not then the mouse. This rhetorical situation is paralleled between Montaigne and the reader, and he speaks not with a roar, but a ... meow. In this context, Descartes' quarrel with Montaigne becomes more accessible—the gadfly has stung while his cat looked on. Aware of the latitude of signs, Smart compares language to “a cat at pranks,” seeming to share the rather Derridean (and Montaignian) insight that, like a cat, language is a playful animal, inherently symbolic, resisting certainty (B 628). Jeoffry, I submit, belongs to this long-standing tradition of writer's felines. In fact, the figure of the cat as a writerly strategy is found elsewhere in *Jubilate Agno*. More than any other single mammal, the feline makes an appearance in the poem as “leopard” (A 9), “lion” (A 13), “pard” (A 30), “panther” (A 31), “Cat” (A 57), “civet” (A 77), “tiger” (B 403) and arguably the “little Owl, which is the wingged [sic] Cat” (B 68).

Whereas Newton and Descartes theorized about the movements of the heavenly bodies in terms of physics, Smart presents the movements of the feline body in terms of worship. Montaigne broaches the topic of worship in the *Apology* in order to criticize human pretensions to exceptionalism, writing, “Man claims the privilege of being unique in that, within this created frame, he alone is able to recognize its structure and beauty; he alone is able to render thanks to its Architect” (13). Montaigne's use of “privilege” and “unique” encapsulate the stance of Renaissance humanism. However, figuring God as an architect, he implies that animals, like humans, can acknowledge their creator in gratitude, making the rather unorthodox suggestion that animals can appreciate the aesthetic and engineering complexities of their own bodies or “created frames” (13).

Belief that animals cannot engage in religious activity was commonplace, even topical, in Smart's era. Thomas Seaton (1684–1741), clergyman and religious writer, for example, asserts

that reason as evidenced by the faculty of speech was a prerequisite for praise, writing in the epigraph of his hymn forty-two that “no visible creatures have reason and speech to praise God but we” and he asks, “why is all nature dumb but we? / A base, ungrateful train” (qtd. in Mounsey 211). Admirably, Seaton proposes to praise in their stead, but his emphasis on “reason and speech” demonstrates the prevailing view that excludes animals from communication with the divine (qtd. in Mounsey 211). His reasoning itself is odd, implying that animals are willfully ungrateful even though they are created without verbal speech.³⁰ In direct opposition, Smart will present Jeoffry as a cat who “purrs in thankfulness” (B 726). This is important to Smart since “the sin against the HOLY GHOST is INGRATITUDE” (B 306).

Jubilate Agno commences with an invocation for humans and animals to praise God together: “Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give glory to the Lord, and the Lamb. / Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of life” (A 1-2). Fragment A presents over one hundred human and animal pairings worshipping God in a spirit of gratitude. For example, “Let Mahol praise the Maker of Earth and Sea with the Otter, whom God has given to dive and to burrow for his preservation,” Smart exhorts (A 48, 40). As in the case of the otter whose defense mechanisms include diving to escape predators, Smart will refer to Jeoffry’s many cat characteristics as God-given blessings worthy of praise. In one of his most poignant lines, for example, he writes, “the dexterity of his defence is an instance of the love of God to him exceedingly” (B 733). Smart’s interpretation emphasizes the function of the cat’s claws as a defense, rather than offense, mechanism expressly given through divine compassion. The line is highly affecting because it presents divine love as a gift that extends to all of creation, echoing Psalm 145:10-11: “The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord.” The placement of the adverb “exceedingly” at the end of the

line reinforces the idea of God's love as transcendent, going beyond the boundaries of the earthly (B 733).

In Smart's view, human language is not requisite for expressing gratitude to the creator, only life itself. His perspective may be based on biblical Hebrew. He emulated the structure of Hebrew poetry, so it's plausible that he was attentive to the semantics as well. In Genesis, both humans and animals are called *nephesh*, translated as "living being" or "living soul" and always coupled with the physical sense of *basar* meaning "flesh" (Anderson 83). Both are given the divine in-breathing or *ruach*, often translated as "spirit" (Anderson 83). According to Genesis 1:20-21 and 24, humans and animals became *nephesh*, or "living souls," when God breathed his spirit into them. Thus, the same breath of life animates both humans and animals. Smart alludes to this in the invocation writing, "in which is the breath of life" (A 2). As Chris Mounsey has observed, the sentiment is profound: according to Smart, only life itself is required for partaking in worship; therefore, animals are included in spiritual activity because they too possess the divine *ruach* or spirit (212).

I disagree, then, with Guest's contention that Smart distinguishes "between the self-expression of men and animals" because he believes that only human "language and breath" bear "the image of that living soul which is the breath of God" (194). If that were so, why would he invoke all "in which is the breath of life" to praise the creator (A 2)? Smart makes a comparison in terms of function between the verbalization of the human and the vocalization of the animal. "A man speaks HIMSELF from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet," and a "LION roars HIMSELF compleat from head to tail," he proclaims (B 228-229). Both require air or the "breath of life" passing over the vocal organs. The result is a self-conferral of subjectivity.

Smart's exploration of the religious communication of animals presents God and animals as both speakers and interlocutors, suggesting the two-way sense of community inherent in the word "communication." For example, he presents God listening to a wolf, writing, "Let Lemuel bless with the Wolf, which is a dog without a master, but the Lord hears his cries and feeds him in the desert" (A 76). He interprets the wolf as a misunderstood dog, outside the human community. It was generally acknowledged at the time, theologically speaking, that God hears the vocalizations of animals, but not that animals could know or praise divinity. For example, theologian and founder of Methodism, John Wesley writes, based on the Apostle Paul's teaching in the book of Romans, "their groans are not dispersed in idle aire, but enter into the ears of him who made them," but then hedges it with, "we have no ground to believe that they are, in any degree, capable of knowing, loving, or obeying God" (qtd. in Menely 135). In contrast, Smart presents Jeoffry as a being aware of his creator, writing, "he knows that God is his Saviour" (B 737).

Smart also makes the unorthodox claim that the creator speaks to animals as a human would a pet. He writes that Jeoffry responds by purring "when God tells him he's a good Cat" (B 726). Thus, both the creator and his creation engage in similar activities, listening, speaking, and offering reciprocal praise. The sounds of Jeoffry's purring are a type of language that has supplicative efficacy, suggesting that animals have a communication-based relationship with their creator that qualifies as worship.

"Worship" is the first action verb of about forty-five that describe Jeoffry's daily devotional. At dawn, Jeoffry "worships in his way" (B 697). The remainder of the passage describes what his "way" entails. Several of these actions rewrite Newton's discoveries in physics, reassociating his laws of motion with divine laws. Smart perceived Newton as

espousing a doctrine of crude materialism and individually responsible for the paradigmatic cleaving of theology from epistemology fundamental to the Scientific Revolution. This is evident in lines such as, “Newton is ignorant for if a man consult not the WORD how should he understand the work?” (B 220). For Smart, the book of creation and the book of scripture are interdependent, and he characterizes Newton as no less than “ignorant” for omitting scripture from his understanding of nature (B 220). He compares his own allegiance to revealed truth to Newton’s falsity by claiming, “Newton nevertheless is more of error than of the truth, but I am of the WORD of GOD,” emphasizing his own belief in scripture as an epistemological basis about the nature of the cosmos (B 195).

Newton made great contributions to theories of motion, which is of great concern to Smart. Newton expanded on Galileo’s work to establish his three laws of motion: inertia, force, and equal and opposite reactions. He inferred that the principles governing the movement of the heavenly bodies would be universally applicable to earthly bodies since the same creator was responsible for both. Smart presents Jeoffry’s movements as evidence of perpetual motion, which was an Enlightenment debate, going back at least to the Middle Ages, and which Newton thought hypothetically possible. Perpetual motion is the idea that unless an outside force acts on something in motion, such as a machine, the machine would never deviate or cease from its present motion. Many have tried and failed to construct perpetual motion machines. “[A]t the word of command,” says Smart, Jeoffry can “spraggle upon waggle” (B 748). Williamson notes that “spraggle” is a “dialect word meaning to ‘sprawl’ or ‘clamber,’” but provides no gloss on “waggle” (89). To “waggle” is to “shake or wobble while in motion” and was defined in the 1706 edition of *Phillips’s New World of Words* as “to be always in motion” (*OED*). Smart supports the idea of perpetual motion writing, “For the PERPETUAL MOTION is in all the

works of Almighty GOD” (B 186). Smart’s belief stems from John Hutchinson, whose own refutation of Newton entitled *Moses Principia* (1724) supported the idea of perpetual motion as a divine law (Williamson *PW* Vol. 1, 43). According to Smart, Jeoffry’s movements are perpetual. This idea is given an additional emphasis in Smart’s rendering of Jeoffry in the hyperbolic: the cat responds to Smart’s command, not with motion alone, but motion (spraggle) within motion (waggle)! Strangely, this line seems to anticipate Seth Chandler’s nineteenth-century discovery that the earth “wobbles” several degrees on its axis over a period of six years, all of which occurs within another wobble taking place over a year for a total seven year “wobble” cycle. The mystic in Smart would not attribute this to mere coincidence. The greater point here, however, is that the preponderance of Smart’s representations gives the reader the summative impression of a frisky feline whose mode of being is expressed in constant locomotion. Jeoffry’s only “rest,” itself a type of stative action, fittingly appears at the midpoint of the passage (B 738).

Newton also supported Kepler’s theory of the heliocentric universe. Smart appropriates this notion for his own purposes, presenting Jeoffry as a sort of heliocentric kitty (perhaps even attempting to redefine pagan practices of sun worship, for he tells us that Jeoffry “made a great figure in Egypt,” alluding to the cat’s long-standing religious associations B 756) whose day begins by acknowledging the sun, an emblem of the creator. Jeoffry’s first movement or act of worship is enacted by “wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness” (B 697-698). Thus, at dawn, Jeoffry “worships in his way” by “wreathing” or symbolically orbiting the sun (B 697). The cat’s “wreathing” or circular motion evokes planetary orbit, especially when coupled with the fact that he performs this action at sunrise, mimicking the daily revolution of the earth. He makes seven revolutions symbolizing the days of the week. The number seven has long been associated with divinity and is an image of completion or perfection. For instance, in

Genesis, God rested on the seventh day after creating the universe. Smart's use of "elegant" as an adjective is rich with allusion. It could describe a well-written literary turn of phrase but was also used to describe scientific theorems that have an "ingenious simplicity" (*OED*). Geoffrey's simple movements are like a scientific theorem manifesting the creator's, not Newton's, genius.

Geoffrey's heliocentricity is also evident in the line that Stead and Dearnley stumbled over: "in his morning orisons he loves the sun and the sun loves him" (B 721). Here, Smart is punning on "sun," presenting a cat who communicates with the divine, loving and being loved by the "son" of God (B 721). This pun is doubled in "orisons," meaning prayer. Geoffrey's recognition of the "the first glance of the glory of God in the East," referring to the first light of dawn, metaphorized as a look from the eyes of God and perceived as an indication of divine "glory," is in distinction to humans. Smart claims, "For the Glory of God is always in the East, but cannot be seen for the cloud of the crucifixion ... For due East is the way to Paradise, which man knoweth not by reason of his fall" (B 697, 167-168). In Smart's view, postlapsarian human reason, on which he puns with "reason," meaning a cause, obscures religious insight like a cloud covering the sun. Smart implies that in his way, Geoffrey is a better "servant of the Living God duly and daily serving him" than humankind (B 696).

Smart's figuration of Geoffrey alludes to Newton's theories of gravity and inertia. "Gravity" appears twice in the Geoffrey passage alone. In characteristic punning, Smart playfully explains that Geoffrey is a "mixture of gravity and waggery," which he says of himself in an exact replica of wording earlier in the poem (B 736). Newton's theory of gravity explained the cause of elliptical orbits and why, for example, the moon does not move away from the earth but stays in its present trajectory. Newton also inferred that gravity is a force that operates between all earthly bodies as well as the heavenly. Thus, Geoffrey's "gravity" keeps him on his present

trajectory of motion, while “waggery” or playfulness comes from “wag” in the sense of movement as in the wagging of an animal’s tail. In Smart’s vision, affect between himself and Jeffry operates in a sort of friendly gravitational, that is, emotional tug of war, like the earth and the moon. Jeffry “can set up with gravity which is patience upon approbation” (B 745). Punning on “gravity” meaning serious and a physical force, Smart presents Jeffry defying earth-bound characteristics, “for he can jump over a stick which is patience upon proof positive” (B 747). Proof positive simply means the absolute assurance of something that exists. Jeffry waits patiently for Smart to produce the stick which is a proof of his master’s love. When he defies gravity by jumping, he receives Smart’s “approbation” (B 745). In this instance, his emotional connection to Smart compels him to the gravity, or seriousness, associated with patience, a Christian virtue, while his jumping antics connote the pranks of a cat at play (B 736).

Newton’s law of inertia states that bodies in motion will stay in motion, or more specifically, at their present velocity, or stay at rest unless acted on by an outside force. Smart’s loving production of the stick, which, Jeffry “can fetch and carry” functions causally, as an outside compulsion, compelling Jeffry to movement. Similarly, Smart’s “command” also spurs Jeffry to motion where he “can spraggle upon waggle,” as discussed above (B 748). Alluding to the states of bodies either in stasis or in motion, Smart writes of his cat, “there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest” and “there is nothing brisker than his life when in motion” (B 738-739). Coupled with “nothing” Smart’s comparatives “sweeter” and “brisker,” become superlatives, superseding cosmic examples.

Descartes had his own theories of planetary movement; however, he also commented on the significance, or perhaps non-significance would be more accurate, of animal movement in his reply to Montaigne. In the *Discourse*, he writes that “speech must not be confused with the

natural movements that are signs of passion and can be imitated by machines as well as by animals” (47). Descartes is arguing that body language is not a form of speech and cautioning against the belief that animals “speak although we do not understand their language,” referring to Montaigne and some of the “ancients” (47-48). Descartes defends the view that any use of language by animals, such as parrots, is mere mimicry devoid of understanding.

In his “Second Meditation,” Descartes articulates his theory of radical dualism by distinguishing between the *res extensa*, sometimes translated as *res corporeas* or corporeal substance and the *res cogitans* or mental substance, translated as “thinking thing,” and often synonymized with consciousness or the soul (par. 8). Animals, according to Descartes, do not possess the *res cogitans*, and are instead solely composed of the *res corporeas* (par 9). In short, animals, according to Descartes, do not have immortal souls. Smart answers the idea of the *res cogitans* by describing Jeoffry as possessing a “spiritual substance” (B 762). In his mythopoeic vision, Smart describes the phenomenon of static electricity that he experiences when petting the cat as “God’s light” an “Electrical fire” that “is a spiritual substance which God sends from heaven to sustain the bodies both of man and beast” (B 760- 762). Jeoffry’s electricity reinforces what Smart says earlier about humans: “For the breath of our nostrils is an electrical spirit” (B 265). Smart here appropriates his era’s fascination with galvanism, evident in the frequent use of the Leyden jar at eighteenth-century salon gatherings, for example. One person touching the jar could send a wave of electrical charge through a circle of people holding hands. These types of exhibitions thrilled the public with a taste of the era’s many scientific discoveries. In Smart’s view, both humans and animals share the mystery of electricity, which is explained as the divine spark or the animating principle, equalizing humans and animals by demonstrating that what makes humans animals, or those who are animated, is divine causation.

Smart's use of "brisk" in association with Jeffry not only reimagines Newton's theories of motion, as discussed above, but reanimates the Cartesian beast machine, reimbuing the animal with the *res cogitans*. "To brisk" means "to freshen, enliven, *animate*, exhilarate and quicken," (my emphasis OED). Descartes performed his own dissections, even vivisections. His conclusion that animals are beast machines followed viewing dead and mechanical ones, making a horror out of logical deduction (Senior 62). Smart says of Jeffry "there is nothing brisker than his life when in motion," and he "counteracts the Devil, who is death, by brisking about the life" (B 739, 720). As an adjective "brisk" means "sharp or smart in regard to movement (in a praiseworthy sense) quick and active, lively" (OED). In Smart's post-Cartesian moment, his use of the word "brisk" carries significant weight, reinvigorating the beast machine with God-given animation, the same in both human and animal as depicted in Genesis. In the first example, Jeffry's animate motion is qualified once again in the superlative: "nothing brisker," meaning that Jeffry's creaturely vitality is most apparent, most lively when he is in motion, echoing "spraggle upon waggle" (B 739, 748). In the second example, Jeffry himself is ontologically endowed with the power to "animate" or to "quicken." There is the suggestion here that Smart is referring to the way Jeffry's presence, accompanied by his feline hijinks, functions therapeutically as a balm for his own spirit. Jeffry's movements are nothing short of an antidote for death since he "counteracts the Devil, who is death" (B 720). In opposition to the Cartesian view that animals are language-less automatons consisting of physical matter only, Smart's feline ethology represents Jeffry, who is imbued with the divine spark, speaking a spiritual language through kinesis. He attributes Jeffry's marvelous variety of movements to the "divine spirit" which "comes about his body to sustain it in compleat cat" (B 742). Here again, in "compleat," is an image of perfection like the number seven. Smart's view of animals renders

them perfect as created and not lacking in so-called superior human attributes.

Smart spiritualizes feline kinesis throughout the entire passage. In a delightful example, Geoffrey “leaps up to catch the musk, which is the blessing of God upon his prayer” (B 699). Instead of a leap of Newtonian induction, this cat performs a leap of feline faith. In the most obvious sense, “musk” may refer to the tendency of some cats to spray their scent for territorial marking. However, musk has spiritual associations. It is known for its use in perfume and can be used as a transitive verb meaning “to perfume.” In the bible, perfuming is analogous to anointing; Mary, the sister of Lazarus, perfumed Christ’s feet and then wiped them with her hair. In this sense, God would “musk” or anoint Geoffrey with perfume, which is a “blessing” (B 699). To represent the creator anointing a cat is an extraordinary use of the imagination, demonstrating Smart’s inclusive vision of animals within the divine portion.

Having completed his morning devotional forming his spiritual “work,” Geoffrey “begins to consider himself” in behaviors that represent cat consciousness. (B 698, 701). This line is foreshadowed in the opening of the passage in which Smart’s own devotional consists of his meditation on Geoffrey: “For I will consider my Cat Geoffrey” (B 695). Thus, the cat’s worship, which is rendered in orbital images, is itself encircled by the human’s devotional. Smart presents the activities of his cat in terms of spiritual performance. In a type of circular Decalogue evoking his “wreathing” motion, the cat “performs” his consideration of himself “in ten degrees” (B 702). A degree is one three hundred and sixty-sixth of the measured angles of a circle, and like the number seven, a circle represents completion or perfection. Smart transforms these “ten degrees” of motion into ten laws of cat ablution, analogous to the moral cleanliness associated with the ten commandments (B 702). For instance, Geoffrey “looks upon his fore-paws to see if they are clean” and “secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there” (B 704). In delightful syntax, Smart refers

to the space behind the cat with the pronoun “there,” which is positioned at the end or rear of the poetic line and makes playful reference to the species’ remarkable preference for self-disposal of feces (B 704). Moreover, “behind” can refer specifically to the rear of anything moving, which certainly applies to Jeoffry (*OED*).

In addition to clever syntax, Smart employs anthimeria in a wedding of whimsy and sublimity, one of the most compelling aspects of this poem because it manages to move away from the flatness of empirical observation towards transcendent meaning. Smart writes, “he camels his back to bear the first notion of business” (B 754). Here, Jeoffry is represented in terms of another animal whose name, the noun “camel,” is transformed into a verb in order to stress action and which so cleverly describes the way a cat will arch its back to stretch after a period of rest. Smart puns on the word “business” which also carries a meaning of movement. For example, the “business” of a dog’s tail refers to its wagging, which I discuss in greater detail below (*OED*).

In the seventh commandment of the feline Decalogue, Jeoffry “fleas himself, that he may not be interrupted upon the beat” (B 709). According to William H. Bond, Smart’s use of “beat” implies that Jeoffry “will not have to interrupt his activities” with “scratching,” a very plausible explanation (116). I would like to add to another gloss. By 1721, “beat” could refer to the activities of a night watchman or constable (*OED*). Jeoffry is figured as a spiritual watchman who “keeps the Lord’s watch in the night against the adversary” (B 718). Here, Smart is referring to “beat” in the sense of policing. Smart invests the human instrumental use of the cat for protecting the home from rodents with a new meaning: he guards against the devil and prepares himself by getting rid of his fleas so they will not distract him on his night watch. Moreover, his night watch is when “his business more properly begins” (B 717). Earlier definitions of

“business” included “briskness,” “motion,” “work done by an animal” (*OED*). Thus, Jeffry’s motions are a form of “business” or the spiritual work he performs overnight. The lexical connections of a number of these words with movement demonstrate how Smart marshals his extensive knowledge of the English language to associate the animal’s vitality with spirituality.

In the final lines of fragment B, Smart qualifies Jeffry’s motions once again in the superlative: “God has blessed him in the variety of his movements” and “his motions upon the face of the earth are more than any other quadruped” (B 763, 765). In the language of taxonomy, he presents the species of cat as the most dexterously communicative of God’s creatures. Perhaps it’s an overstatement to say that in Jeffry, Smart collapses the cosmic wonder of Newton’s planetary motion into the quotidian form of a cat, but Smart’s purpose is to demonstrate just how far from ordinary the cat really is. He aims to show the spiritual, not mechanistic, workings of all of nature.

I have been arguing that at the macro-level, Smart’s spiritual interpretation of Jeffry’s maneuvers as a form of worship can be understood as pushing back against the Scientific Revolution, mainly in terms of Newtonian theories of motion, and Cartesian views of animals. Far from an automaton devoid of language and therefore reason, Jeffry speaks a language of spiritual kinesis, making the rather iconoclastic argument that animals can participate in religious activity. I turn now to the micro-level of Smart’s more personal deployment of the writer’s cat as a response to his religious suppression and imprisonment. I frame my analysis with Montaigne’s redeployment of an earlier example of the writer’s cat topos, Apion’s story of Androchus and the lion.

While Montaigne’s encounter with his cat, discussed above, is well-known to scholars of literary animals, a second cat encounter in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* is also useful for

illuminating Smart's employment of the trope. In the *Apology*, Montaigne retells the story of Androdus and the lion. This narrative by Apion, the first-century historian, describes a human and lion encounter he claims to have witnessed during a day of Roman blood sport. Apion reports that a slave named Androdus was pitted against an "unusually big" lion with a "terrifying roar" (42). Upon recognition of his former benefactor, the lion stopped short as if "struck with wonder" and began "to wag its tail as dogs do when fondly greeting their masters" (42). Androdus in turn recognizes him as the injured lion he had tended while concealing himself in a cave, attempting to escape slavery. As a result of this mutual recognition, mortal violence is avoided. A sentimental crowd pleaser, this remarkable event is the impetus behind Androdus' release, and he is granted permission to keep the lion as a pet. He later explains that when he was hiding in the cave, the lion "came gently up to me and showed me its wounded paw, as though asking for help" (43). The lion's gesture of offering his paw, like a handshake, has communicative efficacy and is interpreted as a form of speaking. In addition, the lion's tail wagging is interpreted as a self-evident sign of affect. The tale of Androdus and the lion was revived in the Middle Ages and attributed to Aesop. Later, it was grafted onto the history of St. Jerome, mentioned above, who was said to have removed thorns from a lion's paw forever befriending him. Near the end of his life, long after *Jubilate Agno* was written, eighteenth-century English poet William Cowper translated Vincent Bourne's Latin version of Apion's story as "Reciprocal Kindness: The Primary Law of Nature."³¹ These examples of the extralinguistic communicative abilities of animals explain the story's attraction for Montaigne.

The political implications of Androdus and the lion, however, go far beyond the standard fabulistic interpretation of mutual kindness, presenting a human and an animal recognizing each other in solidarity as captive victims of Roman hegemony and utilizing interspecies

communication as a site of resistance. The narrative implications resonate with Smart's predicament. It is evident that Smart viewed himself as a victim both of malicious relatives and the eighteenth-century medical establishment, and he forged his own bond with a feline while imprisoned. To set up this important theme, he commences fragment B with, "For I am not without authority in my jeopardy," meaning "captivity" (B 1, Williamson *PW* Vol. 1, 12). According to the Bestiary quoted above, the word "cat" or "*catus*" derives from the word "prey" or "*captura*" (Clark 161). Thus, the word "cat" has the sense of captive tied to it etymologically. Throughout fragment B, Smart will represent himself as an animal subjected to both corporeal and semiotic vulnerability and in solidarity due to situational similarity, he will identify with Jeffry.³² As a person of sensitive intelligence, Smart would have recognized the inherent incongruity of the status of pets: cherished, but kept, in a sense, as domestic captives.

I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that Smart was committed to the asylum for committing an error of worship. He was known to enlist others to pray with him, vociferously and spontaneously. In the poem, he explicitly refers to this ostensible reason for his incarceration: "For I blessed God in St James's Park till I routed all the company" (B 89). Smart figures his predicament as a case of misreading. He registers the semiotic error of others writing, "I am under the same accusation as my savior—for they said, he is besides himself" (B 151). Accused of being possessed by demons and therefore of mental disturbance, Christ was misread, that is, misunderstood, he implies. Many of Smart's lines suggest that he felt religiously persecuted. For instance, a more oblique allusion to Christ says, "they lay wagers touching my life," evoking the casting of lots for Jesus' clothing by the Roman soldiers at the crucifixion (B 92). As a composite Androdeus-Christ figure, Smart connects his own prosecutors to Roman political power.

Many other lines refer to familial persecution, hinting at what was most likely the real motivation behind his incarceration. He draws a comparison between strife in the family of European nations and his own writing, “I meditate the peace of Europe amongst family bickerings and domestic jars” (B 7). He hints that he is a victim of jealousy saying, “I preach the very GOSPEL of CHRIST without comment and with this weapon shall I slay envy” (B 9). He says that “malice” has “been multitudinous” and that “there are still serpents that can speak” (B 17-18). Here, family members are figured as snakes in the Garden of Eden. He comments, “they have separated me and my bosom, whereas the right comes by setting us together” perhaps alluding to Newbery, his father in law, by mentioning separation from his wife, Newbery’s daughter (B 59). In what is perhaps another reference to his family, he says, “my brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook” (B 74). One of the most compelling examples hints at the possible damage to his reputation caused by incarceration: “my existimation is good even amongst the slanderers...” (B 3, Williamson *PW* Vol.1, 12). As mentioned above, Newbery damaged Smart’s public reputation and could likely be one of the “slanderers” (Mounsey 181). These lines and others offer strong evidence that Smart was aware that his imprisonment was not truly for his idiosyncratic religious habits but due to far more nefarious family-instigated reasons.

Smart’s semiotic vulnerability, being misread as insane, or guilty of religious enthusiasm, often translated to corporeal vulnerability in the asylum, and he represents himself as an abused animal. Corporal punishment, or therapy, as it was sometimes considered, was standard practice in eighteenth-century mental institutions. He laments, “they work on me with their harping-irons, which is a barbarous instrument, because I am more unguarded than others” (B 124). Like a hunted whale, Smart is susceptible not only to the slings and arrows of scheming relatives, but to the disciplinary instruments of the medical establishment. He describes himself as “unguarded,”

meaning expressive of his inner life, his faith, his thoughts, and emotions. He puns, even in this painful example, on the word “barbarous,” meaning barbed and uncivilized. He represents himself as a “frog in the brambles,” unable to escape and susceptible to the intrusive puncturing of the thorns like the barbs, evoking Christ’s crown of thorns (B 95). He speaks of being beaten, “the officers of the peace are at variance with me and the watchman smites me with his staff” (B 90). He writes, “they pass by me in their tour, and the good Samaritan is not yet come,” perhaps alluding to the added cruelty of being on display, like a circus animal, for aristocrats who would visit asylums for amusement (B 63). Smart compares himself to a worm writing, “I rejoice like a worm in the rain in him that cherishes and from him that tramples” (B 37). The lowliest of animals, the worm is the most vulnerable to those who tread on the downtrodden. The negative emotional associations of “rain” are counterbalanced by “rejoice,” since worms seem to appreciate this weather phenomenon more than humans, however, and in a spirit of Christian resignation, Smart seems willing to accept both cherishing and trampling. In a final example, Smart prays “to be accepted as a dog without offence, which is best of all” (B 155). Like the wolf mentioned above, Smart figures himself as a misunderstood dog. Like cats, dogs have had a variable symbolic currency, revered as companions, reviled as symbols of immorality, and often abused like scapegoats. This prayer for “acceptance” suggests that Smart felt he was misunderstood and therefore rejected.

Smart’s melancholia is hinted at earlier in the poem in relation to cats. Smart describes the purring of a cat as his “murmur” and his cry as one of “woe” (B 634-35). The description underscores the apostle Paul’s observation that due to human error in the fall “all creation groaneth” in “its bondage to corruption” (Romans 8:21-22). The implication is enormous: animals are vulnerable to death because of human error. Jeoffry is not immune to injury, and

commiserating, Smart writes, “For he is of the Lord’s poor and so indeed is he called by benevolence perpetually—Poor Jeoffry! poor Jeoffry! the rat has bit thy throat” (B 740). Smart’s self-representations as a whale, frog, worm, and dog, demonstrate how he identifies with the susceptibility of Jeoffry the cat. The presence of rats suggests a perilously unhealthy living situation in which humans and animals engage in mortal struggle. While rats would have been endemic to such places as the asylum, their agency presents a real danger to Jeoffry. Deploying interspecific communication in a move of solidarity not unlike Androdes and the lion, Smart verbally sympathizes with Jeoffry, speaking to him with compassion. And when the cat’s health improves, Smart gives God the credit saying, “I bless the name of the Lord Jesus that Jeoffry is better” (B 741). A resuscitative antidote to the power of death and an emblem of religious expression that substitutes for Smart’s religious oppression and physical restriction, Jeoffry’s feline kinetics are freighted with a rich symbolic currency. Smart’s portrait of his cat interprets feline movement as a type of language that can communicate with both his master and the divine. Like Smart, the “worm in the rain,” who says, “to worship naked in the rain is the bravest thing for refreshing and purifying the body,” Jeoffry, too, “worships in his way” (B 384, 697). Hence, Smart draws a comparison between his unorthodox mode of religious expression and the actions of the cat. Both are imbued with spiritual significance.

Cats are apposite as writer’s muses for many reasons such as their playful mysteriousness. According to Bruce Boehrer, however, more than any other animal, cats have been subject to “literal and symbolic violence during the course of their history with human beings” (271). In some places in Britain during Smart’s lifetime, cats were still being burned alive in religious rituals or added as sound effects in burning effigies. Perhaps this is another incentive behind Smart’s intent to shore up the symbolic valence of the cat in positive spiritual

terms rather than, say, as a witch's familiar or demon.

The topos of the writer's cat is still deployed and rhetorically powerful. It functions through paradox, aiding the writer to know what he doesn't know. Evoking Smart's statement, "he is good to think on if a man would express himself neatly" (B 755), Jacques Derrida observes, "thinking about the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry" meaning, I think, that only the language of poetry can say what can't be said about an animal's life (7). In the process, this paradoxical function of poetry can articulate aspects about human life, about the human spirit, that neither philosophy nor science can. Derrida describes an uncanny encounter with his own cat in his lectures first published in 2006 as *L'animal que donc je suis*, or *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the title of which is an allusion to Descartes' rationalist proposition "*Je pense donc Je suis*" (I think therefore I am). Naked in his bathroom, Derrida experiences a moment of "absolute alterity" as he suddenly realizes that his body is under his cat's gaze (11). His experience of the "seeing animal," which according to him, Western philosophy has never accounted for, functions as a springboard for speculation, leading to his insight that "animal" is an umbrella signifier, "an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other," and under which humans categorize "an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals" (14, 23, 41). The last two centuries of unprecedented industrialized exploitation of animals in the West is, according to Derrida, a symptom of this semantic disease (26). With this insight, the animal, Derrida suggests, like the human, is a creature subject not only to corporeal but to semiotic vulnerability.

Derrida describes Montaigne's *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* as "one of the greatest pre- or anti-Cartesian texts on the animal that exists" (6). He insists, though, that his cat is no trope, not Montaigne's, and not to be read allegorically as a mere rhetorical device. His cat "does

not appear here to represent, like an ambassador, the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race” (9). By insisting on his “real cat,” Derrida acknowledges what he calls its “unsubstitutable singularity” (9). His cat, he affirms, is “irreplaceable” (9). “Nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized,” he says (9).

Paradoxically, though, Derrida arrives at “certainty,” the very problem of the Cartesian *cogito* (9). But Derrida, I think, is fighting fire with fire, and it’s not a matter of playful signifiers or punning around, but of life and death. He writes, “[n]o one can deny the suffering, fear, or panic, the terror or fright that can seize animals and that we humans can witness” (28). Yet, Derrida understands that as he speaks about his cat, he is translating it into language, representing it, and that he can’t fully escape figuration as a function of language just as Christopher Smart knew when he asked God to “translate his MAGNIFICAT” in one of his most unorthodox puns straddling the line between sacred and profane (B 43). Nevertheless, Derrida is asking the West an implicit rhetorical question: If you had to, which “certainty” would you choose: “irreplaceable living being” or “beast-machine”; “What do I know?” or “I think therefore I am”?

Derrida’s phrase “unsubstitutable singularity” is highly felicitous for describing Smart’s portrait of Jeoffry. The preponderance of evidence indicates that Jeoffry was a “real cat,” as real as Derrida’s. As a “real cat,” sharing Christopher Smart’s space in Potter’s asylum, Bethnal Green, East End, London, England, AD 1759, Jeoffry embodies such an “unsubstitutable singularity,” historically, corporeally, ontologically (Derrida 9). And this Derridean insight speaks to the incredible pathos of the Jeoffry passage. Behind the levity of Jeoffry, lies the gravity of the human condition, which is, ultimately, the animal condition. The reader soon

recognizes the similar situation of the poet and his cat, caged animals suffering injury.

However, Geoffrey's liberty of movement, even within his restricted environment, functions as an emblem of spiritual freedom, and Smart's ability to find solace in the cat despite the bleakness of his situation is compelling. Notwithstanding his imprisonment, Smart did have the privilege of the pen, and his figuration of Geoffrey's dynamism educes the motion in emotion. The reader is "moved," as Stead so long ago predicted, by Geoffrey's moves (*Rejoice* 47). Geoffrey is poetry—*in motion* (B 740).

There are those who argue that figuration of animals does them a disservice because it's not real.³³ But all language is inherently symbolic, and to say that meaning is deferred is not to say that meaning is impossible. What Smart has done in *Jubilate Agno* is sacralize a cat's life. And to sacralize animal life is to do so for human life. The poem is an affirmation, insisting on meaning. The miracle is not just that the poem survived, but that it registers Smart's sense of faith despite his ostracization. Geoffrey kept Smart sane. Only through poetry could Smart approach the ineffable mystery of feline kinesis; animals are such stuff as poems are made on. The question, then, is not which one is real, but which one is ultimately more meaningful: "For in his morning orisons he loves the sun and the sun loves him" or *felis catus*?

Chapter Three

Talking the Dog: Communicating with Canine Characters in the Writing of Frances

Burney

How many ways we have of speaking to our dogs and they of replying to us!

— Michel de Montaigne

Dogs were of topical interest in eighteenth-century popular and private discourse. For instance, Thomas Bewick, in his 1790 *General History of Quadrupeds*, notices the “surprising” agentic capacity of dogs and claims that canine history is human history, attesting to the long-standing partnership of the two species. (Wyett 276). British MP and author Horace Walpole, who is credited with inaugurating the gothic novel with *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), once expressed anxiety over the protracted illness of his pet dog Rosette in a letter to Lady Ossory dated August 13, 1773. After receiving her response, Walpole replied, “You don’t flatter me, Madam, by being more concerned for me than for Rosette. She is still alive, but I despair of her recovery; however, you have so little dogmanity, that I will say no more about her” (139). Walpole’s sentimental neologism, “dogmanity,” aptly expresses an available eighteenth-century attitude towards the canine species, splicing “dog” and “humanity” in a linguistic hybrid that suggests humans and animals can have intersubjective affective relationships based on a sense of benevolence, a prized virtue. The eighteenth-century “sentimental idea of the dog” was often expressed with the less original yet poetically inflected phrase “unswerving servant” (Wyett 276). These types of dogs, such as those used for hunting and guarding, were especially valued

for their service. Scenes of affect between humans and canines have been represented in the literature of sensibility since its inception. The prime example, written just two years before Walpole wrote of Rosette, is the lachrymose scene over the death of the dog named “Trusty” in Henry Mackenzie’s 1771 seminal novel of sensibility *The Man of Feeling* (180-181).

Dogs were not always sentimentally represented in eighteenth-century discourse, however. Views of the lapdog were rather polarized; either they were fawned over as pets or vilified as symbols of luxury. Recent scholarship on the representation of dogs in eighteenth-century British literature has focused primarily on the “misogynist trope” (Ellis 97), an expression of eighteenth-century anxieties in which “the woman and her lapdog were common tropes for the evils of eighteenth-century acquisitiveness” (Wyett 283-84).³⁴ Perceived as a “sexual rival,” the lapdog threatened entrenched patriarchal hierarchies and “embodied the increasing tensions between categories such as nationality, race, class, gender—indeed even species (Wyett 286, 290). In sum, the lapdog carried “subversive symbolic potential” against patriarchy and could be a “disturbing transgressor” of entrenched hierarchy (Wyett 281).³⁵ Jodi Wyett argues that Burney’s lapdogs symbolize “folly,” “vanity,” and “the immoral consequences of valuing a relationship with a dog over human connections” (291). For example, in *The Wanderer* (1814), the snobbish aristocrat Mrs. Ireton transforms her lapdog Bijou into a vicious little toady who terrorizes her nephew, her black male child slave, and her hired female companion, the novel’s heroine, Juliet. In this case, the lapdog is raised in social status above other humans to the “level of its mistress” (Wyett 293).

Burney’s representations of dogs, however, are far from monovalent even within the same novel, and Wyett, focusing on the lapdog, overlooks Burney’s representations of the loyal service dog. Other scholars have commented on Frances Burney’s animal representations. For

example, Barbara Seeber argues that they function as a feminist critique of patriarchy, observing that her “novels . . . repeatedly make parallels between the fate of women and animals,” specifically in terms of “entrapment” (101,100). Yet, Seeber glosses over Burney’s canine representations in her 1782 novel *Cecilia*, simply noting that the dog is a source of comfort for the heroine, and about Burney’s male characters, she claims, “sensibility does not bring with it kindness to animals” (Seeber 106, 109). Patricia Meyer Spacks views Burney’s representation of dogs as mere comic plot devices necessary for the external revelation of interior thoughts (99-100). Finally, Julia Epstein, in her analysis of Burney’s diary description of a near drowning incident in which she was accompanied by her husband’s dog, Diane, observes dramatic tension between Burney’s self-representation as a heroine who overcomes peril through her own presence of mind and the trope of the damsel in distress (37-38). Epstein subtly implies that the diary account may be an overdramatization since it closely mirrors Burney’s previous fictional representations, and she overlooks the dog’s crucial role in the heroine’s survival (34-35).

This chapter will suggest that instances of interspecific communication in Burney, like those of Swift and Smart, may be understood in the context of the sensibility movement’s debt to Michel de Montaigne, which in Burney’s historical moment—the last quarter of the eighteenth century—was at its height. Writers of sensibility reacted to Descartes’ assertion against Montaigne that humans are categorically superior to animals and ontologically separate based on the human endowment of reason as evidenced in the use of verbal language (Menely 9). Developing a “novel conceptualization of the significance of vocal and bodily expressivity, the prelinguistic semiosis humans share with other animals,” they were concerned with “communication” in what Tobias Menely calls a “semiology of creaturely affect and address” (Menely 21, 3, 20). In their view, humans were defined as fellow creatures who respond to the

voice of the animal based on an “ontological equivalence” predicated on “a shared susceptibility to injury” (Menely 10, 15). To summarize, the philosophy of sensibility might be understood as an attempt to suture the mind/body split of Cartesian dualism.

Sarah Ahmed’s nuanced discussion of affect, an essential concept of the sensibility movement as discussed by Menely above, is useful here for illuminating the episodes of embodied communication discussed below. Rather than a cognitive state that can be separately located somewhere in the mind, she describes affect as an extralinguistic phenomenon which carries “the messiness of the experiential” and operates by “the unfolding of bodies into worlds” through “the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what comes near” (33). Burney’s heroines and heroes are affected by the canines who share their lives in extraordinary ways.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Christopher Smart’s representations both of self and cat demonstrate his awareness of their mutual corporeal and semiotic vulnerability as captives in an asylum. Smart’s presentation seeks to compensate for his own religious suppression by visualizing his cat as a semiotic being whose movements have spiritual significance. This animal representation also functions as part of a broader cultural critique of the Scientific Revolution. Jeoffry’s spiritual kinesis challenges mechanistic views of animals and serves as a reading lesson in the book of nature, emphasizing the divine inspiration common to both humans and animals. Both authors discussed in the first two chapters of this dissertation, Swift and Smart, build on Montaigne’s empirical observation that when it comes to animals, “from similar effects we should conclude that there are similar faculties” (25).

In this chapter, I argue that Burney, empowering her female characters, challenges the misogynist lapdog trope by appropriating the “unswerving servant” dog normatively associated with men and aligning it with women (Wyett 276). Her heroines’ intersubjective relationships

with canines comment on the intersection of shared oppressions based on gender and species while interrogating long-standing cultural assumptions about animals, language, and reason. Burney not only aligns feminine virtue with the capacity for sympathy for animals, a cultural standard of the time, but the reverse, making the very Montaignian suggestion that animals are endowed with the capacity for sympathy towards human beings. She explores the animal recognition of human signs as well as the human recognition of animal signs. Thus, she underscores the agency of dogs, creating canine characters who are semiotically empowered with a profound ability to impinge on human outcomes. Her representation of canines as interlocutors of human speech and speakers of embodied language renders them active participants in the discourse of sensibility. Her unique positioning of both human readers and canine characters as the intended recipients of the heroine's discourse imaginatively deploys narrative to equalize human and animal, one within and one without the fictional world, offering intimations of the way fiction, or representation, can construct bridges over perceived ontological and social gaps. Her work thereby resists views of animals as language-less automatons, and her representations of interspecific interactions expand the already broad scope of human character in her novels, offering a model of positively charged human and animal relationships based on communication. As they did in *Swift and Smart*, shared forms of embodied expressivity in Burney's work resist the radical discontinuity between the human and animal of Cartesian dualism. Her depictions of situational similarity between heroine and canine resonate with *Smart's* sense of vulnerability and self-identification with his cat as a mutual prisoner.

In the section that follows, I offer preliminary evidence of Burney's posture towards animals discovered in a diary account, and then I substantiate her familiarity with Montaigne. To reiterate the philosophical underpinnings of my reading of human and canine encounters in

Burney, I summarize just a few of his several exempla portraying the singularity of the human and canine relationship in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*. A second purpose is to reemphasize my contention, raised in the Introduction to this dissertation, that eighteenth-century attitudes towards animals represent less “changing attitudes,” as it is so prevalently argued in the extant historiography, than reclaiming attitudes that have been available in the West, at least since ancient times, in Greco-Roman writing.

Burney’s positive fictional representations of human and canine interaction adapt the Montaignian tradition to rewrite the misogynistic narrative of eighteenth-century representations of women and their pet dogs. The evidence indicates that Burney was familiar with the sensitive skeptic. Writing to “Daddy” Samuel Crisp, a close family friend, in a letter dated April 5, 1776, Burney conveys that she has previously sent him a selection of books and is anxious to learn of their fate. “I would have sent Montaigne,” she writes, “but was afraid the parcel would have been too heavy to be safe only packed in paper so they must wait till the next opportunity” (*ED* vol. 2, 137). Of course, Burney here refers to the logistics of shipping the physically voluminous writing of Montaigne with other ponderous books secured only in paper. But this innocuous statement provides unintentional commentary on the sometimes-weighty subject matter of Montaigne found in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, for example, in which he interrogates human presumptions of superiority over animals. Burney’s diary reference is yet another indication of the pervasive influence of Montaigne on the early modern imagination. His *Essays* were widely read and part of the standard curriculum for the educated.³⁶

Montaigne’s writing about dogs in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* is an illuminating digest of anecdotes from the Western classical era, derived mostly from Plutarch, that demonstrate, he claims, canine loyalty, intelligence, ethics, reason, “loving affection” and

“greatness of spirit” (36, 45). For example, he recounts a story of the third century B.C.E. Stoic Chrysippus, “as scornful a judge of the properties of animals as any philosopher there ever was,” in which he was “forced to admit” that the dog he observed “reasoned” when it came to the intersection of three crossroads and chose one over the other two. Montaigne imagines the dog’s inner dialectic: “I have tracked my master as far as these crossroads; he must have gone down one of these three paths; not this one; not that one; so, inevitably, he must have gone down this other one” (28). As a second example, he speaks of the actions of guide dogs for the blind. He is “moved to wonder,” he says, because they will “choose” an uneven path over a smooth one to keep their masters from the gutter (29). He asks, “How does it know that a path might be wide enough for itself but not wide enough for a blind man? Could all that be grasped without thought and reasoning?” (29). If canines have no reasoning powers whatsoever, these questions are difficult to answer.

Thespian canines are an absolute marvel. One such dog belonged to a juggler who served in the Marcellus theatre during the reign of Roman emperor Vespasian the elder. The dog “had to pretend, among other things, to swallow some poison and to lie dead for a while” (29). The dog began to “shake and tremble” before it “lay down and stiffened as though it were dead,” and after being dragged all over the stage, the dog somehow knew “when the time was right” and “it began to stir very gently, as though awakening from a deep sleep and raised its head, looking from side to side in a way which made the audience thunderstruck” (29). Montaigne’s description indicates that the dog’s understanding goes beyond that engendered simply by training, suggesting instead a metacognitive grasp of the difference between appearance and reality, no small feat even where humans are concerned. “What is that” Montaigne queries, “if not the actions of a very subtle intelligence?” (31).

He talks about dogs who appear to dream such as watchdogs who “can be found growling in their sleep ... as though they saw some stranger coming” (47). Dreams, of course, have a host of associations that connect the human to the transcendent. The ability of a dog to dream threatens notions of human superiority as summarized, for example, in Hamlet’s famous monologue in which he claims, “What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god, the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals” (2.2.327-331). This speech articulates the early modern commonplace that humans have superior endowments, likened to angels and gods, that place them above other animals in the hierarchy of being with the “man” at the earthly apex.

Montaigne attributes a sense of ethics to dogs, particularly justice. In a story that anticipates the work of contemporary law enforcement K9 units, Montaigne says, “Our history books tell of certain dogs which vigorously reacted to the murders of their masters” like witnesses at a police lineup (41). He writes, “If justice consists in rendering everyone his due, then animals who serve, love and protect those that treat them well and who attack strangers and those that do them harm show some resemblance to aspects of our own justice” (36). The emphasis, as always throughout the extended animal argument in the *Apology*, is on “resemblance” between the human and animal (36).

In the tradition of theriophilic inversion, Montaigne represents canine loyalty as superior to the human’s: “As for faithfulness, there is no animal in the world whose treachery can compete with Man’s” (41). Dogs are also superior in emotional endowment. The “loving affection of dogs,” says Montaigne, “is incomparably more lively and consistent than men’s” (36). He then relates, as proof, the heart-wrenching story of a dog named Hircanus who belonged

to King Lisimachus, the successor of Alexander the Great. When Lisimachus died, Hircanus went on a hunger strike and would not budge from the dead king's bedside until the day of cremation when he threw himself on the pyre (36).

In addition to sagacity, loyalty, justice, and affection, Montaigne argues that dogs are capable of sympathy and speaking. These last two attributes most clearly illustrate the connection between the preoccupations of the sensibility movement and Montaigne's ideas. "There are also inclinations where our affection arises not from reasoned counsel," he argues, "but by that random chance sometimes called *sympathy*. Animals are capable of it too" (emphasis in original 36). In this statement, he emphasizes the nonrational side of human emotion—that aspect of the human spirit which cannot be explained by logical deduction or expressed in conventional language.

Although Aristotle recognized that both humans and animals can communicate vocally, he denied that animals can express their emotions *to humans* (Menely 2, my emphasis). Montaigne counters Aristotle and illustrates animal sympathy in terms of grief: "We often shed tears at the loss of animals which we love; they do the same when they lose us" (43). In terms of speaking, "Horses, dogs, cattle, sheep, birds and most other animals living among men recognize our voices and are prepared to obey them," writes Montaigne, arguing for the presence of interspecific communication (32). Emphatically, he comments on the ability of humans and dogs to communicate with each other writing, "How many ways we have of speaking to our dogs and they of replying to us!" (23). Montaigne's dog stories offer a brief compendium of positive canine attributes. In her fiction, Burney capitalizes on these historical observations, updating the highly gendered associations of these stories with men and aligning them with women to associate the loyalty of the "unswerving servant" dog with female character.

Burney's personal writing indicates that she had a sympathetic mindset towards animals. Her diary entry for August 19th, 1773, written a mere six days after Walpole's letter concerning his ailing dog, when she would have been about twenty-one, describes her reaction to two animal races she witnessed while visiting Teignmouth. She finds that the donkey race, in which "sixteen of the long-eared tribe ran extremely well," is "diverting," but her brief reflection on the pig race lends additional insight into her attitude toward animals (*ED* vol. 1, 234). She opines: "the poor animal had his tail cut to within the length of an inch, and then that inch was soaped" (*ED* vol. 1, 234). The object of the game was to force the pig to run and to challenge a man to catch it by the tail and thereby receive it as a prize. She finds the entire spectacle, including unnecessary human modification of the animal body for sport, "ridiculous" and "cruel" (*ED* vol. 1, 234). This is especially true when this change guarantees that the object of the sport can never be accomplished; the pig suffers in vain. She also says such games put humans into "ridiculous" positions, perhaps as a result of economic need, which adds a second layer of gravity to the spectacle and imbricates both lower-class humans and animals as instrumental objects of disdain.

This diary scene parallels, and is perhaps the source for, an unforgettable scene of deliberate cruelty in her first novel *Evelina* (1778). For upper-class amusement, two lower-class elderly women are tethered together and forced to run a race. Due to their advanced age and frailty, they suffer physical injury. The narrator, Evelina, uses the same word as Burney in her description of the pig race, "ridiculous," i.e., objects of ridicule, to characterize the situation (311). The gendered association of lower-class women and animals in these parallel scenes addresses the shared oppressions of both, and ageism adds to an already troubling instance of social inequity.

Burney's entire oeuvre aligns with her sympathetic disposition regarding animals in her description of the pig race, especially her representations of dogs. In the next section of this chapter, I offer close readings of scenes of intersubjective human and canine communication in *Cecilia*, *The Wanderer*, and Burney's lived experience of it as recounted in her diary. For further illumination, I engage additional philosophical ideas both close to and far flung from Burney's time, such as the thinking of Scottish philosopher of sensibility David Hume, French philosopher of sensibility Jean Jacques Rousseau, twentieth-century French philosopher and critic of Western ontology Emmanuel Levinas, and contemporary French philosophical ethologist Dominique Lestel.

Burney's first alignment of the loyal servant dog with a female character occurs in *Cecilia* (1782). As the novel opens, the reader meets Cecilia Beverley, an orphaned heiress, who must learn to negotiate the complicated social mores of London; the attentions of several suitors, some of whom are purely mercenary; the trials and tribulations of falling in love; and her personal longing for purpose. A clause in her uncle's will stipulates that Cecilia's husband must take her surname if she is to keep her inheritance. This proves doubly difficult when she falls for Mortimer Delvile, whose father is obsessed with the patriarchal traditions of nobility emblemized in the family name.

At the novel's midpoint, Cecilia stays at Delvile's ancestral castle, unaware of his conundrum. His eventual revelation that he cannot marry her due to his family's pride precipitates a crisis for which there is no foreseeable resolution, and he decides that the only possible remedy is separation, hastily departing. Heartbroken, Cecilia seeks the comfort of the castle's environs where she can indulge her emotions without the fear of social censure but finds she is not alone. Delvile's pet dog, Fidel, "now always accompanied her" and "ran by her side"

(520). Fidel embodies the trope of the loyal service dog. The loyalty of the dog signifies both his positive attributes and the depth of the heroine's virtue, and he might be viewed as an eighteenth-century version of a therapy dog. Cecilia talks to the dog, "lamenting that *he* had lost his master" and touches him, "caressing her faithful favourite," all which "soothed her own tenderness" (Burney's emphasis, *Cecilia*, 520). This deceptively simple scene is packed with significance in terms of its representation of an intersubjective human and animal communicative encounter and its narrative strategy. It demonstrates the signification of animal movement as language and agency and operates within the affective register, representing shared emotional states between human and animal based on situational similarity and communication.

One premise of the philosophy of sensibility is that the human responds to the animal following its prior address (Menely 6). Often, this is characterized as the animal "cry," which is a vocalization. Prominent examples occur in both fiction and nonfiction such as Jean Jacques Rousseau's novel *Émile* (1762) and John Oswald's *The Cry of Nature or an Appeal to Mercy and Justice on Behalf of the Persecuted Animals* (1791). In Burney's scene, Fidel has not barked, whined, or vocalized, but I submit that in the Montaignian tradition, animal kinesis functions here as a form of address. Montaigne, the reader will remember, asserts that the "movements" of animals "serve as arguments and ideas," implying that they are a form of kinesthetic communication (18). This idea is predicated on the connection between outward action and internal intention. Montaigne reminds his reader that we can never know for sure what the "inner motivations" of animals are which leaves the possibility open, of course, that they don't have them, in a human sense, but equally so that they do (16). He makes this point to interrogate human presumptions about animals, and to emphasize possibility, not certainty, as the bedrock of his skeptical philosophy.

The heroine and the dog are in similar situations, and Burney structures their affective relationship as a shared experience of grief in their loss of Delvile. Cecilia talks to the dog, “lamenting that *he* had lost his master” (Burney’s emphasis 520). And commiseration with the dog, helps to alleviate her own suffering (520). According to the doctrine of sensibility, Cecilia’s attribution of grief to Fidel would not be understood as anthropomorphic projection. Writing about the emotional sophistication of animals in his 1739 *Treatise on Human Nature*, eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume says, “Grief likewise is received by sympathy, and produces almost all the same consequences, and excites that same emotion as in our species. The howlings and lamentations of a dog produce a sensible concern in his fellows” (345). Hume, here, follows Montaigne who observes that “Oxen, pigs and other animals can be seen rushing in to help when one of their number is being attacked and rallying round in its defense” (44). According to both authors, the faculty of sympathy operates identically in both humans and animals. The vocalized expression of grief elicits sympathy in the hearer, who responds as the intended recipient.

The second encounter between the heroine and the dog even more clearly illustrates Burney’s contribution to the discourse of sensibility vis `a vis animals by developing the theme of interspecies sympathy begun in the above example. In the tradition of Montaigne, Burney suggests that animals are “capable,” to use his wording, of sympathy (36). Other writers of sensibility were also concerned with the idea of sympathy. For Hume, sympathy, as opposed to reason, is the measure of the human. He writes that the “most remarkable” “quality of human nature” is “that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive communication by their inclination and sentiments” (276). He defines “sympathy” as the “communication of passions” and asserts, as did Montaigne, that it “takes place among animals, no less than men”

(345). He continues: “Love in animals, has not for its only object animals of the same species, but extends itself further, and comprehends almost every sensible and thinking being,” claiming that animals are capable of cross-species affect (345). Moreover, this statement from Hume approaches theriophilic inversion, subtly implying that animals are superior to humans in their capacity for love. If sympathy is the *sine qua non* of the human, and animals are capable of it, the moral implications are enormous, which Hume recognized; sensibility is the foundation of his moral philosophy, predicated on “‘sympathetic’ knowing mediated by the affect sign” and based on the corporeality which humans and animals share (Menely 58-59). The diametrical opposition between Hume’s and Descartes’ view regarding the defining characteristic of the human cannot be overstated: Descartes worshipped reason while Hume privileged sympathy.

Rousseau argued, based on their semiotic displays, that animals were capable of “pity” (62). In the *Discourse*, Rousseau wrote that it was pity that “carries us without reflection to the assistance of those we see suffer” and it is a “virtue so natural that even the beasts sometimes show evident signs of it” (64, 62). He writes, “the mournful lowing of cattle entering a slaughterhouse voices the impression they receive of the horrible spectacle that strikes them,” implying that the cattle are lowing not in fear for their own lives but in sympathy at the sight of their fellows suffering (62). Rousseau was interested in a political philosophy revolving around right and responsibility and was one of the first to extend the idea of natural rights to animals. He drew on the ideas of Étienne de Condillac, a French philosopher, who, like Montaigne, observed a relationship between the affect sign and conventional language (Menely 71). Here, outward affect “signs” indicate the faculty of sympathy (Rousseau 64, 62).

The second scene of interspecific communication in *Cecilia* takes place in the garden summerhouse at Mrs. Charlton’s. As a practical joke, an acquaintance, the frivolous and ill-

mannered foil of Cecilia, Lady Honoria, kidnaps Fidel and sends him to Cecilia there. Cecilia learns that Delvile is literally lovesick, and worried, she consequently becomes even more attached to Fidel. The narrator says, “while sometimes she indulged herself in fancifully telling him her fears, she imagined she *read* in his countenance the faithfullest sympathy” (my emphasis 541). Burney’s scene has overtones of natural theology, a biblical doctrine in both the old and new testaments in which the book of nature is read to gain insights into the divine and which Montaigne defended in the *Apology*. In the Introduction to this dissertation, I characterized Raymond Sebond as positioning himself as a sort of “theological reading instructor” (9). While I do not mean to imply that this passage has any overt religious content, it does present a human “reading” an animal and drawing an inference about his emotional state. Burney closely aligns reading and imagination, which can be defined as “to form an idea or notion with regard to something not known with certainty” (*OED*). Thus, in this instance, imagination precludes “certainty” and would therefore accord with skepticism. Hume argued that all formation of ideas in the human imagination ultimately derive from empirical observation and sensory impressions (Morris). Thus, for Hume there is no such thing as pure imagination as a faculty that has no basis in the external world. Thus, while imagining emotional states in animals might seem anthropomorphic or fanciful, in the philosophical sense of the discourse of sensibility, it represents a valid inference based on external data.

The interspecific exchange is communicated through facial expression. Like language, the human face is sometimes thought of as the defining characteristic of the species. However, twentieth-century French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, critic of Western ontology, has questioned this belief. In his compelling essay entitled “The Name of the Dog,” Levinas describes his experiences in a Nazi P.O.W. camp in which he and his fellow prisoners are

reduced to a “gang of apes” who were “beings without language” (48). One day, a stray dog appears in the camp and starts an embodied conversation with the men through vocalization. For a few weeks, he meets the prisoners in the morning and awaits their return in the evening “barking in delight” (49). The men in the camp call the dog “Bobby,” conferring subjectivity with a name (49). For the men, Bobby quickly becomes “a cherished dog” because, Levinas says, “For him, there was no doubt that we were men” (48-49). The daily appearance and barking of the dog restore human identity to the prisoners and giving the dog a name is to accept him within the human community, celebrating this profoundly meaningful interspecific relationship. In contrast to a human having “dogmanity,” Bobby, the dog, demonstrates humanity (Walpole 139).

In an interview published with “The Name of the Dog,” Levinas speaks about the significance of the face in delineating ontological identity, expressing doubt over the notion that human difference can be distinguished solely by the face saying, “One cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal. It is via the face that one understands, for example, a dog” (49). For Levinas, the face is the marker of individual subjectivity and the conduit through which the human “understands” the animal. That is to say, the face, even a dog’s face, can communicate in ways inaccessible to conventional language, and which a human being can comprehend. The ethical, he says, “extends to all living beings” because humans know what suffering is (50). For Levinas, ethics start by a human putting another ahead of its own life, which he says is “unreasonable,” and he concludes the interview saying that his whole philosophy might be summarized as follows, “Man is an unreasonable animal” (50). In other words, biological survival at all costs would seem to be “reasonable,” but the human has this “unreasonable” sense of ethics (50).

Burney portrays Fidel as a semiotic being, capable of expressing emotion via movement of the facial muscles, which is also the method by which the human face expresses feeling. By reading the communication of emotion in the dog's face, Cecilia positions Fidel as a participant in the discourse of sensibility. Even though the dog may not understand the semantics of her verbal lament, although dogs can learn to attach actions to specific verbal commands, he clearly understands its emotional import. The scene demonstrates how the human and animal co-create subjectivity via semiotic exchange. In other words, in Burney's novel of sensibility, the human and animal relationship is structured as one of intersubjective communication and is not, therefore, qualitatively different than interhuman relationships.

Burney's third and final scene of human and animal communication in *Cecilia* expands her representation of the human and canine relationship beyond the gendered alignment of distressed women and animal allies, portraying a man in an affective relationship with a dog. It includes a dense layering of meaning involving the relationship between the communication of signs and sympathetic response. Cecilia mourns her loss of Delvile to Fidel in the summerhouse:

her sorrow found here a romantic consolation, in complaining to him of the absence of his master ... calling on him to participate in her sorrow, and lamenting that even this little relief would soon be denied her; and that in losing Fidel no vestige of Mortimer, but in her own breast would remain; 'Go then, dear Fidel,' she cried, 'carry back to your master all that nourishes his remembrance! Bid him not love you the less for having some time belonged to Cecilia; but never may his proud heart be fed with the vain glory, of knowing how fondly for his sake she has cherished you!' (546)

Pat Rogers has characterized this scene as having “the air of a Schubert song” (qtd. in Doody *FB* 404). In recognizing the musicality of the scene, scholars may have been attuned, no pun intended, to the etymology of semiotics. It was English philosopher John Locke who adapted *séméiotkè*, meaning musical notation, to *semiotics* or the doctrine of signs (Sebeok 78). Indeed, one can view this exchange between Cecilia and Fidel as a melancholy duet of signs given emphasis in the words “complaining,” “participate,” “sorrow,” and “cried” (506). Perhaps no scene more clearly illustrates Burney’s inclusion of animals as semiotic participants in human lives. Cecilia issues an invitation to the dog to “participate” in her personal sadness (506). In short, Cecilia asks the dog for his sympathy, now that she has read the signs of that faculty in the expressivity of his face: “she imagined she read in his countenance the faithfulest sympathy” (541).

Cecilia finds “romantic consolation” in the expression of the dog’s face (546). “Romantic” can mean impractically imaginative, which would normally have pejorative connotations. But “romantic” functions here in the person of sensibility as a way into the language of the other. The *OED* gives “sentimental” as a synonym for “romantic,” which is related etymologically to “sensibility,” citing Burney’s *Evelina* as an example. As shown above, in the philosophical sense, the use of the imagination does not represent silliness, but a response of the mind to the perception of external evidence. In other words, imagination mediates between the senses and the mind, phenomena and noumena, and the evidence here is canine facial expressivity. In broad strokes, this portrayal repudiates the Cartesian denial of language to animals by imagining a broader definition of language or communication itself as the sending and receiving of signs.

This exchange in which the human addresses the dog evokes Montaigne's exclamatory statement, "How many ways we have of speaking to our dogs and they of replying to us!" (23). This will be even more apparent in *The Wanderer*, where gesture as an extralinguistic mode of communication is primary, but here Cecilia is speaking to Fidel, "'Go then, dear Fidel,' she cried," in direct address using the vocative case (546). In terms of grammar, "the vocative posits a relationship between two subjects ... to constitute encounters with the world as relations between subjects" (Culler 156). Culler is speaking about the function of apostrophe in poetry, which often addresses an inanimate object, but the vocative is also used between persons. When humans speak to animals in the vocative, they are creating subjects linguistically. By this definition, the vocative is related to "linguistic instrumental action," by which the "agent expresses her intention linguistically, and where doing so is also a means of achieving her goal" (Gustafsson 232). Through her verbal address, Cecilia puts Fidel in the subject position rather than his subject status being an apriori given. The implication is that there is not a radical difference between a human speaking to a human and a human speaking to an animal; in both cases, it establishes a relationship between two subjects, meaning persons. This would suggest, according to the discourse of sensibility in which the animal voice addresses the human, that the communicative modes of animals create human subjectivity itself. In other words, the preverbal vocalizations that humans and animals share precede human verbal language. Rousseau presents this idea in *Émile* wherein the character is awakened to his own humanity when he witnesses the cries of a suffering animal (183-184). In the *Apology*, Montaigne claims that humans have a proclivity for rejecting animal "companionship" due to "insane arrogance" (51). But Cecilia's address to Fidel signifies her acceptance, rather than repudiation, of the dog into the human discourse community. In short, it signifies her "dogmanity" (Walpole 139).

Burney expands her representation of the human and canine relationship in this scene beyond the gendered alignment of distressed women and animal allies by portraying a male character in an affective relationship with a dog. Like Levinas' Bobby, Fidel signifies Delvile's presence with a "loud barking" (546). Having overheard the entire previous exchange between Cecilia and the dog, he is temporarily "speechless," which puts him in the both the normative female and animal place as voiceless, and the scene positions the woman and dog as speaking subjects first: the human via language and the dog via vocalization (547). The man's subject status follows both the woman and animal in Burney's rewrite, implying that it is not inherently gendered or self-conferred, but given through communicative interaction with other beings. Cecilia, in turn, is so surprised, she, too, is then rendered "mute" (547). As the situation has evolved, it is finally only Fidel who is capable of vocalization, and the humans have no language but that of the body, which responds by going silent.

Delvile and Fidel proceed to engage in an emotionally charged kinesthetic exchange, interlinking affect for animals with a masculinely gendered sensibility. Fidel in "rapturous joy" displays his emotional state communicating with Delvile, by "jump[ing] up to him" and "lick[ing] his hands," and the hero "return[s] his caresses" (547). Delvile deploys both verbal and nonverbal communication saying, "Yes, *dear Fidel*, you have a claim indeed to my attention, and with the fondest gratitude will I cherish you ever!" (Burney's italics 547). Out of the mouth of Delvile, Burney has articulated a foundational premise of the philosophy of sensibility as articulated by Tobias Menely in the title of his study *The Animal Claim: Sensibility and Creaturely Address* (my emphasis).³⁷ Menely draws on Humphrey Primatt's 1776 *Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals* in which Primatt writes, animals

have a “right to happiness” based on their vocalizations (qtd. in Menely 10). Primatt compares animal signification to a foreign language, in which an animal’s “cries and groans, in case of violent impressions upon his body, though he cannot utter his complaints by speech or human voice, are as strong indications to us of his sensibility of pain, as the cries and groans of a *human* being, whose language we do not understand” (emphasis in original, qtd. in Menely 10).

Primatt’s discussion is significant when juxtaposed against Descartes’ notion that animals feel pain but at the same time can’t perceive or experience it consciously as humans do. In other words, animals don’t know that they are experiencing pain, they only feel it. This assertion is nothing short of a Gordian knot. How can a sentient creature feel pain but not experience pain? It baffles the human mind to try to distinguish the difference, to understand how this is possible or what purpose it serves if the animal does not have some level of consciousness.

Burney and Levinas use the word “cherish.” For both authors, this word could mean to “cling to feeling,” but it also has a historical meaning. In Burney’s time, according to the *OED*, “cherish” also referred to the expression of feeling through physical gestures such as caress. Touching the dog and speaking to him, Delvile deploys both nonverbal and verbal communication in his interaction with Fidel. To be human, then, in both the examples from Burney and Levinas, is inextricably bound up in human and animal interaction. As opposed to an ontological demarcation between human and animal predicated on the presence or absence of verbal language, nonverbal language works to establish ontological continuity.

In Burney’s fiction, animal semiosis not only communicates affect and co-creates subjectivity, but it functions as a form of agency that can impinge on human outcomes. Up until now, Delvile has misinterpreted Cecilia’s behavior, speaking to the potentially damaging effects of eighteenth-century standards of female propriety, which nearly forbade communication of

authentic thought or feeling. Delvile exclaims, “I see what I took for indifference, was dignity; I perceive what I imagined the most rigid insensibility, was nobleness, was propriety, was true greatness of mind” (549). Cecilia’s sympathetic communication with the dog demonstrates another facet of her virtue and is just as meaningful in revealing her worth to Delvile as her expression of feelings for Delvile himself. In this case, Delvile has mis-imagined Cecilia’s signs, but this is not due to his defect but because Cecilia has not had the freedom to communicate authentically.

Positioning the animal as a human advocate, rather than the reverse, is another of Burney’s unique contributions to the discourse of sensibility. Many eighteenth-century literary representations of animals are structured in such a way that the human is understood as speaking for the animal by imagining the animal’s perspective. For example, Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s poem “The Mouse’s Petition” presents the reader with a monologue spoken by a mouse who is to be the object of a scientific experiment. The function of the poem is to speak for the vulnerable creature who has no verbal language with which to self-advocate. However, Burney imaginatively reverses this situation and thereby not only expands, but in a sense, redefines this aspect of the discourse of sensibility by positioning the animal as a human advocate. In the scene quoted above, she enlists Fidel as an envoy who will speak to Delvile for her. Burney repeats this redefinition: After being highly embarrassed by her “unguarded folly” in the revelation of her feelings for Delvile, Cecilia tries to break away (548). It is Delvile who now entreats Fidel, using the vocative, to act as an advocate and to speak for him: ““Come, *dear Fidel!*” cried he... “come and plead for your master! Come and ask in his name who *now* has a proud heart, whose pride *now* is invincible!” (Burney’s emphasis 548). These scenes are extraordinary since the human outcome, in which the hero and heroine are reconciled, is predicated on the communicative

agency of the dog, which has been rendered in his extralinguistic capacity to signify. Here, Fidel is a conduit through which the characters speak to each other. More than a mere plot device, Burney gives Fidel is representation as a character, who engages in dialogue through vocalization, movement, shared situation, and emotion with other characters, impugning language-based claims of human exceptionalism.

Burney's depictions of the canine character Fidel in *Cecilia* hold a trove of meanings that nuance the discourse of sensibility. Her work demonstrates how animals in the eighteenth-century imagination can be participants in the discourse of sensibility as speakers of embodied language in intersubjective encounters. Such instances of animal semiosis are an additional extralinguistic "mode of communication," such as crying, blushing, or gesturing, represented by the writers of sensibility in their effort to emphasize the "faculty of feeling" as an antidote to rationalism (Todd 5, Tague 182). In *The Wanderer*, Burney will rework these relatively short scenes, giving human and canine communication an extended treatment that relies heavily on gesture, evoking *Gulliver's Travels*.

Gender, class, and species oppression intersect in *The Wanderer*, published in 1814, and set in the 1790s, directly preceding the French Revolution. In the Dedication, Burney states that she cannot ignore the political ramifications of this momentous event (6). Even though she makes no patent mention of contemporary politics, the content of the novel is politically charged. Margaret Doody observes that Burney's portrait of the English aristocracy's treatment of the poor is paralleled with the concept of tyranny (xix). In Burney's fictional world, the upper-class women are interpolated within the system desiring to oppress lower-class women whom "they can patronize" or treat as proteges in order to "show off superiority" (Doody xvii). Burney's depictions of human and animal encounters in *The Wanderer*, though, work to interrogate such

notions of hierarchy.

Juliet, the novel's heroine, is an English aristocrat returned from France who must hide her identity, for reasons eventually revealed to the reader, until her personal circumstances prove less perilous (she has been blackmailed into an unconsummated marriage of convenience with a revolutionary, who is later executed as a traitor, to save her guardian, a bishop). Devoid of money and identity, she must rely on the kindness of strangers, who at times use her to assert their own superiority as described above. Eventually, she tries to negotiate making a living for herself doing a series of odd jobs such as milliner and hired companion but with little success. Her failures are the result of the system of oppression in which affluent members of society often create pretexts to justify withholding wage compensation.

Late in the narrative, Juliet takes drastic measures when she thinks her identity is about to be exposed, and she literally wanders through the "New Forest" to conceal herself. In this portion of the novel, Juliet anticipates Jane Eyre, who flees Rochester's deception to wander. She is a complete outcast without even a society of strangers. This female wanderer is noteworthy, for she complicates the Romantic trope at its very inception by demonstrating how a vulnerable female exposes the gendered assumptions built into the conceit itself. Juliet is a premonition of Frankenstein's creature, friendless, like an animal in the woods (102). However, another animal will use communicative agency to shore up, like Bobby in the prison camp, Juliet's humanity, and ultimately, their meeting will have lasting consequences for the heroine's outcome.

As she walks, Juliet's thoughts turn to the natural variety of animals:

The remark and attention of a few days, sufficed to shew her, not only as much difference in the interior nature of the four-footed and of the plumaged race, as there is in their hides or their feather; but nearly, or perhaps, quite as much

diversity, in their dispositions, as in those of their haughty human masters....she found that though the same happy instinct guided them all alike to self-preservation, the degrees of skill...were infinite; yet not more striking than the variety of their humours; kind, complying, generous; or fierce, selfish, and gloomy. (695)

This passage reads like a page straight out of Montaigne, and describes the diversity of animals, which Juliet likens to the multiplicity of human attributes such as “kind” or “gloomy” (695). Juliet’s attribution of an “interior nature” to animals directly opposes the Cartesian view of animals as mindless machines.³⁸ It evokes Montaigne’s overarching war on human pride, especially in terms of how it manifests in relationships with animals (695). Her view of human masters as “haughty” employs the exact wording as the speaker of Smart’s “On an Eagle Confined in a College Court.” She observes that animals have “degrees of skill,” putting attributes such as intelligence and the possession of culture on a horizontal rather than vertical continuum.

Juliet’s naturalistic reflections follow a carefully choreographed communicative exchange with a vicious dog named Dash, whom she has previously encountered. Dash is usually accompanied by two woodsmen, who have intimated, but not carried out, violence against her. In this scene, Juliet and the dog briefly face situational similarity and are wandering alone. When the dog lunges to attack, Juliet turns to “face him; holding out her hand in a caressing attitude” as a “manifestation of kindness” because she understands that “flight, to the intelligent, though dumb friend of man, was well seen to be cowardice, and instinctively judged to be guilt” (686). Although the dog is considered “dumb,” a commonplace indicating that he does not speak verbal language, Juliet, nevertheless, demonstrates that she believes that humans and animals can

communicate in nonverbal modes; she deploys gesture or nonverbal address, “facing him,” and using hand signals (686). She considers the dog’s intelligence, which is tied to his ability to discern human character. In this case, the dog would read “cowardice” as “guilt,” like one of Montaigne’s police dogs (686). Juliet views “instinct” as a form of intelligence which also aligns with the discourse of sensibility. Hume, as opposed to Descartes, did not distinguish between the faculties of reason and instinct, used to make arguments about human and animal difference. He thought that “reason” was merely another word for “instinct,” an artificial distinction for propping up notions of human superiority (160).

Juliet’s sign of holding out the hand as a “manifestation of kindness” illustrates the significance of the hand in nonverbal communication, which is foundational to Montaigne’s claim that sign language, and not verbal language, is the fundamental basis of human communication (686). In the *Apology*, he remarks that humans speak with the hands in ways that “rival the tongue” (18). Extralinguistic communication, of course, is Montaigne’s primary observation of human and animal similarity. Following, Burney’s depiction implies that the dog can read human sign language.

In response to Juliet, Dash “abruptly stopped, to look at and consider his imagined enemy; and from a barking, of which the stormy loudness resounded through the forest, his tone changed to a low though surly growl in which he seemed to be debating with himself” (687). Montaigne asserted that dogs can engage in such examples of dialectic (28). The additional qualitative aspects of Dash’s vocalization display a variety of expressivity that uses paralinguage, or tone and volume, which Gulliver also deployed as a communicative strategy in his initial encounter with the Brobdingnagians (133). This is a rather sophisticated and multi-layered portrait of a dog painted in strokes of intelligence, imagination, internal conflict,

consideration, interpretation, decision, and response to human gesture. In other words, Burney's description is that of canine reason. The dog signals his alarm and intent to attack both through his vicious barking and his physical motion. Juliet responds to the animal by turning and showing him her face. The dog in turn reads her as "caressing" and kind and his response is to stop his motion and to change the "tone" of his bark altering the meaning.

Juliet's turning to face the dog brings Levinas' ideas to mind once again. In contrast to Cecilia reading Fidel's face, here Dash reads Juliet's face. Both examples illustrate a mode of extralinguistic communication emphasized by the discourse of sensibility. Levinas acknowledges that animals have faces but hedges when it comes to the serpentine species. The interviewer asks if the subject must possess speech to have a "face" in the ethical sense (49). Levinas is reluctant to make definitive pronouncements but believes that the ethical extends to all life whether it has a human face or not. When Juliet turns to face Dash, showing her face to him, she literally faces her fear—putting a face on the animal much as Gulliver did to the animal in himself. She positions herself to see and be seen by the animal, and to read the attendant body language bringing them into relation with one another.

In inverse relation to the definition of sensibility as human response to the prior address of the animal, Burney characterizes Juliet's behavior toward the dog as a form of "address" which takes both verbal and gestural forms (687). Juliet speaks to the dog, "bending forward" "calling to him with endearing expressions" (687). Burney subverts the idea of human exceptionality based on language by showing that animals respond to the prelinguistic semiosis legible in tone of voice and gesture. The woman and dog engage in a complex semiotic exchange that strains credulity if simply reduced to a strictly Cartesian explanation of mechanism. Dash understands Juliet and "caught by her confidence, made a grumbling but short resistance; and,

having first fiercely, and next attentively, surveyed her, wagged his tail in *sign* of accommodation, and, gently advancing, stretched himself at her feet” (my emphasis 687).

Burney’s use of the word “sign” here is monumental in terms of the overarching argument of this dissertation as an explicit example of the Montaignian assertion that animals engage in embodied forms of semiosis. A “sign” presupposes a sender, an intended message, and a receiver. The dog signifies his readiness to befriend Juliet with gestural signs, such as wagging the tail and prostration.

Juliet now “repaid his trust with the most playful caresses” (687) using body language to signify. She then, speaks to Dash exclaiming, “Good and excellent animal ...what a lesson of mild philanthropy do you offer to your masters! The kindness of an instant gains you to a stranger, though no unkindness, nor even the hardest usage, can alienate you from an old friend!” (687). Juliet delineates her own version of the “unswerving servant” dog who can respond both to the “kindness” of a “stranger,” as she herself has had to do, and who remains loyal even if mistreated (687). The canine heart is represented as having an immense capacity for affective response and is therefore also a model for human instruction. This scene renders interspecific communication as a “lesson” of “philanthropy,” which recalls the hard school belief that Gulliver’s human-horse communication was meant to be a demonstration of Swift’s misanthropy. Could the human and animal relationship based on friendship referred to in Swift also be a “lesson” of “philanthropy” instead (687)?

The next human and animal encounter in *The Wanderer* is more even complex. After Juliet befriends Dash he runs off “but, in a few minutes, greatly to her satisfaction, her new friend re-appeared; wagging his tail, rubbing himself against her gown, and meeting and returning her caresses” (688). However, Dash is not alone, and Juliet soon realizes that “her

intended protector belonged to the young men whom she had been endeavouring to avoid” (688). When they see her, one says, “Why t’be a girl!” and the other answers, “Be it? Why then I’ll have a kiss” (688). The men’s comments are fraught with potential brutality. Aware of the danger, Juliet attempts to escape, but realizes the futility and instead relies on her own clever resourcefulness, employing the same technique that she used with Dash by turning to face the men. Meanwhile, Dash “jumped and capered from his masters to his new associate, from his new associate to his masters, with an intelligent delight, that seemed manifesting his enjoyment of a junction which he had himself brought about” (690). Dash’s behavior signifies the emotion of “delight” qualified as “intelligent,” attributing a cognitive capacity to the dog for recognizing cause and effect. His jumping and capering between them signal his self-positioning as an intermediary bringing about a “junction” (690). Burney reverses the human and animal categories in this scene with a depiction of human dogs and animal men, but the potential violence of the situation, which would also animalize Juliet is avoided through the agency of the “unswerving servant” dog and transformed into one in which human beings enter benevolent relation with each other.

Juliet’s reaction to the kindness of the dog, inspires the men to emulate him. Suddenly full of pride in their dog, the woodsmen command Dash to “fetch, carry, stand on his hinder legs, leap over their hats, caper, bark, point, and display his various accomplishments” (690). Juliet “encouraged this diversion ... till the youths, charmed by her good fellowship, were insensibly turned aside from their evil intentions; and soon, and in perfect harmony, they all arrived at a considerable farm, upon the borders of the New Forest” (690). Dash’s capacity for communicative semiosis is displayed as an impressive repertoire of movements and behaviors reminiscent of Smart’s representations of Jeoffry. They give him the agency to prevent a sexual

assault, transforming a dehumanizing situation into one of intersubjective encounter. Juliet speaks the language of the woodcutters by “stimulating a repetition of every feat,” bringing them all into “good fellowship,” meaning not only are they on friendly terms, but fellows or equals, which has the power to overcome “evil intentions” (690). The men are in turn given a measure of dignity by displaying their communicative skills as animal trainers. The democracy of voices in this scene is extraordinary, precipitating an egalitarian moment that suspends gender, class, and species distinctions.

The intersubjective exchange between Dash and Juliet, and his agency in helping her to escape danger, is the foundation of their affective bond and pivotal to the novel’s denouement. Dash, at least indirectly, has an agential part in the final revelation of Juliet’s social identity. He is bought “at a high price” from the woodsmen and is brought to live with Juliet and the hero Harleigh after their wedding (872). By bringing Dash into their domestic sphere as a pet, Harleigh and Juliet acknowledge the efficacy of his singular agency. The dog and humans are now part of what philosophical ethologist Dominique Lestel calls a “hybrid community,” which is a phrase that attempts to encapsulate “the wealth and diversity of human/animal relations, relations that are built on a sharing of meaning and interests” (62). Juliet and Dash have shared semiotic meaning that is shown to influence human and animal outcomes.

The scenes with Dash complicate the association between women and animals as one of “entrapment” noticed by Seeber (100). Rather than a dashing young man, it is Dash the dog, working in tandem with the damsel in distress, who orchestrates her release from danger. Thus, the seriousness of the incident with the woodsmen is given another layer of complexity because it also incorporates a mild satire of chivalry, suggesting that women and animals are capable of heroism. Ironically, the dog helps to liberate Juliet from the lumberjacks only to be involved in

her domestication through marriage, but by including Harleigh in the purchase of Dash, Burney aligns men as well as women with animals in affective relationships as she did with Fidel, Delvile, and Cecilia. Margaret Doody suggests that Henry Mackenzie's hero Harley of the seminal sentimental novel *The Man of Feeling* may be the inspiration for *The Wanderer's* Harleigh (Introduction xxv). Harley cries over the death of a beloved dog. Their relationships with canines demonstrate, contrary to Seeber's claim, that the sensibility of Delvile and Harleigh includes "kindness to animals" (106).

I have been arguing that in *Cecilia* and *The Wanderer*, Burney creates scenes of human and canine communication that challenge or rewrite the misogynist lapdog trope by aligning the "unswerving servant" dog with women, creating a narrative of woman's best friend as Juliet calls Dash her "new friend" (688). In her diary, which I will examine next, Burney paints a sublime tableau involving the forces of nature that literally places human and animal on the same level. In this instance, she will represent the dog as her own best friend whose communicative agency and affect impinge on her own experience.

In July of 1817, three years after the publication of *The Wanderer*, Frances Burney had a harrowing experience in which she nearly drowned while collecting rocks for her husband, an amateur gemologist, at Ilfracombe on the Southwest coast of England. Accompanied by her husband's "favorite little dog, Diane," Burney became trapped in an ocean-flooded cave and clung to a rock for ten hours before a search party found her (*DL* vol. 2, 484). Her account must be one of the most extraordinary, yet little known, portrayals of human and animal communication on record. It pales, in terms of Burney's oeuvre, only to her terrifying account of undergoing a mastectomy for breast cancer before the advent of anesthesia. If he had followed instead of preceded Burney, Montaigne would have included the Ilfracombe incident in his

catalogue of uncanny canine tales as an example of a dog's loyalty. The Ilfracombe incident does the same work as her fictional examples, further challenging the lapdog trope in two primary ways: the dog, described as "little," is likely a lapdog, but belongs to Burney's husband, and is his "favourite," indicating that doting on lapdogs was not a strictly gendered activity in the eighteenth century; and the lapdog in this instance is reconfigured as the "unswerving servant" dog who is loyal to a woman. It serves as an eerie real-world instance of the alignment of women and animals in terms of what Seeber (following Epstein) has observed as Burney's primary theme: "entrapment" (100).

Epstein writes that "what is striking about this narrative ... is its rhetorical insistence on the physicality of the experience," and she claims that Burney "asserts through this account that women experience oppression, fear, and danger with their bodies" (37-38). What I find most striking is the parallel that Burney draws between her experience and the dog's, showing that corporeal vulnerability literally positions the human and animal on the same physical level. The Ilfracombe incident, which I summarize in detail, highlights human and animal situational similarity and provides a rich evidentiary basis for the claim of human and animal continuity based on "pre-linguistic semiosis" and shared "susceptibility to injury" that are the hallmarks of the discourse of sensibility (Menely 15). Rousseau's assertion that "commiseration will be all the more energetic as the witnessing animal identifies itself more intimately with the suffering animal" is borne out in Burney's representation of herself, not as a damsel, but as an animal in distress, who witnesses the suffering of another animal (63).

Burney foreshadows the danger of the cave with a preliminary incident. She says that she and Diane are walking on a "promontory" high above the water when "a sudden gust of wind dashed so violently against us, that in danger of being blown into the sea, I dropped on the turf at

full length, and saw Diane do the same, with her four paws spread as widely as possible, to flatten her body more completely to the ground” (*DL* vol. 2, 484). The identical response of human and animal to “flatten” the “body” to avoid being swept by the wind over the side of a cliff is both poignant and strangely sublime. Human and dog are in an equal position, prostrate, in the face of nature. Is Burney acting out of “animal instinct”? Is Diane acting out of “rational deduction”? This description is intriguing because their equal and instantaneous actions belie any easy distinction. Writers of sensibility emphasized the liminality between reason and instinct in contradistinction to Descartes, and Burney portrays nature itself as the great equalizer here.

Burney and Diane descend and enter a cave-like recess fittingly named “Wildersmouth” (*DL* vol. 2, 485). At the top of the cavern, Burney sees something gleaming and hopes for a good rock find, only to discover the “jawbone and teeth of some animal” (*DL* vol. 2, 486). This relic does not bode well. Diane disappears while Burney continues her search for rocks. She reports that Diane reappeared “with an air so piteous, and a whine so unusual, that, concluding she pined to return to a little puppy of a week old that she was then rearing, I determined to hasten” (*DL* vol. 2, 486). The dog’s importuning grows more emphatic, and she pulls on Burney’s dress. Finally relenting, Burney descends to discover that the bottom of the cave is flooding (*DL* vol. 2, 486). This has been, it turns out, an instance of human and animal miscommunication; Burney has misinterpreted Diane’s “unusual” vocalization which was meant to be a warning (*DL* vol. 2, 486). Burney attempts to find a way out, and she observes the dog as she does so: “Diane looked scared; she whined, she prowled about; her dismay was evident, and filled me with compassion—but I could not interrupt my affrighted search to console her” (*DL* vol. 2, 487). For Burney, this is not a case of anthropomorphism. She states the dog has successfully communicated evidence of “dismay” (*DL* vol. 2, 487). The dog’s distress must have been acute,

for even in her own fright, Burney feels sympathy for her. Not unlike Burney's heroines, she and the dog are in a position of mutual vulnerability due to situational similarity. Not unlike her response to the pig race described above, a distressed animal elicits "compassion" (*DL* vol. 2, 487). In a reversal of the scene between Fidel and Cecilia, it is the human who would comfort the animal, emphasizing emotional interdependence. According to writers of sensibility, we become human and experience our better angels, so to speak, such as our faculty for compassion, when we respond to an animal and recognize our similarity to them.

Diane climbs to the top of the cave and finding an exit barks, Burney says, "triumphing in her success and calling upon me to share its fruits" (*DL* vol. 2, 487). Burney represents the dog's barking as signifying emotion and invitation. But the exit proves too small for a human, so Burney continues her search while the dog disappears a second time. Burney continues to climb as the waves rise, cutting her hands and feet while bruising her knees in the process "for I could only scramble up," she writes, "by clinging to the rock on *all fours*" (Burney's emphasis *DL* vol. 2, 489). Burney's emphasis on "*all fours*" underscores her self-representation as a vulnerable human animal susceptible to the harshness of the environment. This is the second time that nature has animalized her, as she must repeat the position she had to take on the promontory in the high wind. She finds that her only option is to cling to the rock wall as the waters rise. Without the dog, she feels "wholly alone—wholly isolated" (*DL* vol. 2, 490).

When Diane reappears in the "aperture in the rock," Burney reports that the sight fills her with "joy" (*DL* vol. 2, 490). Burney does not state why the dog returns, but there is the implication here that Diane embodies the sentimental idea of the "unswerving servant" dog. With difficulty, Diane makes her way to the flat slab that Burney is holding onto. Burney uses her parasol to hook the dog's collar and bring her near, risking her own hold on the rock. She

declares that the comfort the dog has brought her no other can “conceive” (*DL* vol. 2, 491). The dog responds in her own language characterized as “cries of joy” (*DL* vol. 2, 491). Burney clearly indicates that the animal’s presence helps to alleviate her tremendous sense of fear, but even her writerly imagination is put to the test, for she can only articulate the experience through a hyperbolic negative: no one can “conceive” (*DL* vol. 2, 491).

Burney’s recollection begins to take on a more retrospective literary flavor as she endeavors to shape meaning. In distinct political overtones that evoke Christopher Smart’s situation, she writes, “Oh well can I conceive the interest excited in a French prisoner, by a spider, even a spider! ... To see my little companion was an occupation that for awhile kept me from seeing after myself” (*DL* vol. 2, 491). Burney compares herself to a political prisoner able to control her own fears by focusing on the suffering of an animal who is her “companion” (*DL* vol. 2, 491). She says that she would have been “subdued” by the “awful” situation if she had “not been still called into active service in sustaining my poor Diane” (*DL* vol. 2, 492). In other words, the presence of the dog helps Burney keep her presence of mind. Her construction of the scene mirrors the premises of sensibility in terms of responding to the prior address of the animal which she articulates as being “called” and is communicated through Diane’s embodied signs (*DL* vol. 2, 492):

No sooner were we thus encompassed than she was seized with a dismay that filled me with pity. She trembled violently and rising and looking down at the dreadful sight of sea, sea, sea, all around ... she turned up her face to me, as if appealing for protection; and when I spoke to her with kindness, she crept forward to my feet, and was instantly taken with a shivering fit. (*DL* vol. 2, 492)

The animal’s fear is communicated in bodily signs such as “trembled violently” and “shivering

fit" (*DL* vol. 2, 492). She "appeal[s]" to Burney, intersubjectively through her facial expression, indicating that she too comprehends the perilousness of the rising sea. In the language of Rousseau, Burney describes her response as "pity." In turn, she speaks to the dog and the dog responds by moving closer, demonstrating how humans and animals have what we might call hybrid conversations that include verbalization, vocalization, and gesture.

Burney tries to comfort her: "I dropt down as children do when they play at hunt the slipper, for so only could I lose my hold of the slab without falling, and then I stroked and caressed her in as fondling a way as if she had been a child ... she then looked up at me somewhat composed, though still forlorn, and licked my hands with gratitude" (*DL* vol. 2, 493). For the third time, Burney is leveled with the animal dropping on all fours. She represents the relationship in terms of mother and child, humanizing Diane, tenderly making a "cushion" for her from the items in her bag. She efficaciously communicates her compassion to the dog through the language of touch, and the dog responds, calming down, and expressing thanks through the gesture of touching her tongue to Burney's hand. Burney and Diane wait together for ten grueling hours, when famished and exhausted, they are finally located by a search party. Like Cecilia, Burney consoles herself by consoling the dog.

Burney's representation of human and canine communication at Ilfracombe is textbook in terms of the claims of writers of sensibility: The animal applies to the human who responds in sympathy due to her awareness of shared vulnerability. This incident refigures the lapdog as the "unswerving servant" dog who remains with Burney when she could have escaped. Burney's compassion for the suffering of the dog, despite her own mortal danger, is an exemplary portrait of a woman of sensibility. Moreover, it presents an interesting tension not just between the heroic self and the damsel in distress, as Epstein has observed, but between Burney as a heroine

who consoles the dog and the dog as a heroine who paradoxically rescues the human through her animal vulnerability (34-35). In this case, situational equivalence constructs ontological equivalence.

While the scene as a literary representation might be artificially heightened due to Burney's artistic skill, there is no reason to dismiss her belief that she was in mortal danger. At one point she graphically writes that falling on the rocks below would have "inevitably dashed out my brains," and she was trapped for *ten* hours (*JL* vol. 10, 695). Her facility with words lends insight into aspects of experience that are not easily accessed through language—to the realm of affect which humans share with animals—to "the messiness of the experiential" which operates by "the unfolding of bodies into worlds" through "the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what comes near" (Ahmed 33). The Ilfracombe incident illustrates just how much Burney was "touched," or affected, by Diane's "com[ing] near" to her (Ahmed 33). That Diane was a female dog adds a poignant element of gender solidarity to this scene, illustrating that a female dog can be a woman's best friend. The diary incident, with its intimate portrayal of human and canine communication in perilous circumstances, retrospectively invests Burney's fictional dogs with a greater degree of verisimilitude beyond plot convenience, demonstrating that the line between the actual and the virtual, between life and art, is fine indeed.

I have argued that Frances Burney's depictions of intersubjective human and canine conversation can be understood within the historical context of the eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility, which was part of a larger cultural response to the divide between Montaigne and Descartes. In the broadest sense, these scenes are exemplary in their illustration of how human and animal communication puts pressure on notions of language-based human exceptionality. In the narrower sense, Burney's representations provide an alternative to the

eighteenth-century misogynist lapdog trope by aligning women with the “unswerving servant” dog in order to challenge negatively gendered associations between women and canines. She shows that human and animal conversations are a hybrid discourse not unlike human communications which often rely far more on paralanguage than speech.

Burney’s depictions suggest that when a human being speaks to an animal, it functions to create mutual subjectivity, and thus animals, like humans, should receive ethical consideration. Humans are compelled to talk to animals. It’s part of who we are as a species. Talking to them is just one of a range of semiotic options we have for communicating with them. We also talk to them in embodied modes such as gesture. Although Burney’s depictions speak to her own historical moment, in some ways, they speak to our own. For example, her interest in anthropo-zoosemiotics, or the study of semiosis between humans and animals, resonates with work in the field of contemporary ethology. Dominique Lestel argues that the idea of animal culture requires attention to that of animal communication which is “‘the Pandora’s box’ of the animal subject,” in which “questions of animal communication and culture inhere—and explode” (qtd. in Chrulew 26). The existence of animal subjectivity is what Lestel calls “the fourth scientific injury to human narcissism” (the previous are the Copernican, Darwinian, and Freudian) which “raises the animal to a state jealously guarded by our species” (qtd. in Chrulew 27). Lestel, who has studied the history of subjectivity in terms of phylogenetics and cultural evolution says, “the science now confirms what folk knowledge has long understood: animals are intelligent subjects” (qtd. in Chrulew 28). Citing long-term longitudinal studies in the form of “genuine biographies” that follow individual animals, Lestel says, “It is no longer a figure of speech to talk about subjects, it has become the expression of a strong hypothesis substantiated by reliable data collected over months and even years in a systematic and rigorous manner” (qtd. in Chrulew

391). Might we add literary representations of animals or literary knowledge as another epistemology along with Lestel's "folk knowledge"?

Despite her evident concern for animals, I would not necessarily conclude that Burney was a champion of animal rights. I offer the following comment from an 1817 letter to her father as a caution. Burney remarks that contemporary "manners ... uphold not alone the Rights of man, and the Rights of Woman, but the Rights of Children—and will, ere long, ... include the Rights of Cats, Dogs, and Mice" (*Journals*, IX, 305). It's hard to determine if Burney is being facetious here because examination of the context reveals little. Is she ridiculing or championing defenders of women's rights such as Mary Wollstonecraft? Is she scoffing at the idea of animal rights? It's possible that Burney is derisively alluding to Thomas Taylor's 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*.³⁹ The scenes of human and animal communication that I have examined in this chapter suggest that Burney truly felt compassion for animals and understood the intersection between misogyny and speciesism but exactly how far this translates to her political vision is unclear due to her sometimes-contradictory statements.

On the other hand, she was a consummate satirist, and her comment could be a mockery of those who use *reductio ad absurdum* arguments against the idea of women's rights. In the case of the diary comment, I think it's important to remember who Burney's audience was: Dr. Charles Burney, her father. Burney often had to defer, personally and in her professional aspirations as a woman writer, to the wishes of her father, who, for example, actively suppressed her play *The Witlings*, a satire on bluestocking circles. Therefore, we might infer that in her comment on animal rights, Burney was simply toeing the party line. It's difficult to ascertain with certainty.

Even though writers of sensibility depict animals participating in the human discourse community, it's hard to argue definitively that all these writers would support a doctrine of animal rights. Nevertheless, by no means did they ascribe to purely instrumental views of animals either. Mary Shelley will confront these ideas in *Frankenstein*, endeavoring to keep Enlightenment debates alive as animals were increasingly deployed as narrators in children's fiction. Away from writers engaging with philosophy, the culture turned the animal question over to political progressives who in 1824, for example, formed the first animal protection agency in England, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, just six years after the publication of *Frankenstein*. In its time, *Frankenstein* was a continuation of the argument that literary representation has value for the lives of real animals.

Chapter Four

“What Was I?”: The Creature, The Cat, and The Monster of Ontology in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Read Montaigne—Correct Frankenstein

— Mary Shelley

Frankenstein commences at the narrative’s chronological end. The reader enters a scene in which Victor Frankenstein chases his creature to the North Pole, vowing to destroy him in a desire for revenge. The creature has killed Frankenstein’s youngest brother, wife, and best friend because he has been spurned by his creator. Walton, an arctic explorer, and the novel’s first narrator, rescues Victor, bringing him aboard his ship. He listens to Victor’s story and subsequently preserves it in epistles to his sister. He reports first seeing Victor in a “sledge” writing, “only one dog remained alive; but there was a human being within it” (14). The syntactic construction of this sentence is curious. The antecedent of “it” is, ostensibly, the “sledge,” but the referent’s distance from the antecedent and the intervening noun “dog,” creates an alternate meaning: Victor, the sentence implies, is within the living dog. There is the suggestion here that Victor and the dog are one being, a human and animal composite. Thus, from their first appearance in the exposition, Victor Frankenstein and his creature are associated with animals. They do not appear as the solitary wanderers of the Romantic trope, but as beings imbricated with the lives of other beings, co-dependents for survival in the harsh arctic

conditions of the initial setting. The arctic scene with the sled dogs functions as a prolegomenon adumbrating Shelley's exploration of the human and animal relationship in *Frankenstein*.

Shelley not only introduces the subject of the human and animal relationship in terms of the entanglement of species in this scene but the subject of the human's relationship to his own animality.⁴⁰

The imbrication of Victor and the dog suggested by Shelley's unconventional syntax is given full and explicit treatment in the figure of the creature. Describing his first sighting of the creature Walton writes, "a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature, sat in the sledge, and guided the dogs" (13). From the outset, the creature is fraught with ambiguity, "a being" that appears human but is of indiscriminate species, perhaps even fantastical, a giant (13). Critics have viewed the creature emblematically as a stand in for other humans, alternately suggesting the marginalized other, the colonized subject, and the oppressed woman.⁴¹ I propose, however, to offer an interpretation based on what the text says the creature is—a human and animal hybrid, composed of body parts and scraps obtained from "the dissecting room and the slaughter-house" (34).⁴² In the figure of the creature, Shelley ingeniously incorporates what is, arguably, the central philosophical dilemma of the Enlightenment: the animal question. That is, do animals possess reason and language? And if they do, are they ontologically equivalent to humans? This debate is best framed by the disagreement between two highly influential French thinkers, Renaissance humanist and skeptical philosopher Michel de Montaigne and seventeenth-century philosopher scientist René Descartes.

In his 1580 *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, Montaigne engaged the animal question, debated since the classical epoch by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Diogenes of

Sinope and the Stoics. Montaigne's primary purpose is to crush modern reiterations of Stoic pride in reason that he perceived in the Reformation's challenge to the Catholic church.

Adopting a position of skepticism, he was wary of such radical change. His main argumentative strategy is theriophilic, meaning that he inverts human and animal characteristics, lowering humans by raising animals. He argues that language is neither exclusive to humans nor defined solely as verbal speech, insisting that animals speak languages of their own and communicate through embodied movement, which he gives as evidence of ratiocination, insisting "their very movements serve as arguments and ideas" (18). According to Montaigne, animal movement serves as an ever-present reminder of the potential reasoning capacity of animals, manifesting itself in myriad forms, in innumerable temporal and topographical contexts, and outside the human spheres of knowledge and agency. He argues that nothing, including the minds of animals, can be known with certainty. In sum, Montaigne views nonverbal language as a marker of liminality between species rather than viewing verbal language as evidence of absolute disjuncture.

Descartes took umbrage with Montaigne's argument writing in his 1637 *Discourse on the Method*, a watershed in Western philosophy, that "[s]peech must not be confused with the natural movements that are the signs of passion and can be imitated by machines as well as by animals" (47). In the *Discourse*, Descartes claims to have reached an epistemological certainty, articulated in his most famous proposition, "I think; therefore, I am," also known as the *cogito*, the foundation of modern rationalism (28). Descartes posits human consciousness as an undoubtable foundation upon which all human gnoseological edifices may be built. He rejects "the book of the world" as a source of wisdom, proclaiming, "I took the decision one day to look into myself and to use all my mental powers to choose the paths I should follow" (11). He

decides “never to accept anything as true” except “that which presented itself to my mind so *clearly* and *distinctly*, that I would have no occasion to doubt it” (his emphasis 17). The thinking self, then, is the measure of all truth claims for Descartes.

Victor has a similar method of deductive reasoning, believing in his own thinking as an epistemological foundation. During the trial of Justine Moritz, the servant falsely accused of the murder of young William Frankenstein, the first of the creature’s victims, Victor concludes that the creature is the responsible party. He claims that thought precedes fact: “*He* was the murderer! The mere presence of the idea was an irresistible proof of the fact” (Shelley’s emphasis 50). In this case, Victor’s deduction is valid, but Shelley calls attention to the potential danger of this methodology: it requires no proof.

The ambiguity of the creature constantly obscures the concept of Cartesian certainty. For example, at the center of the novel, the creature tells Victor what is, essentially, a literacy narrative, describing his acquisition of verbal language. In the early modern view, his possession of language would demonstrate his humanity; however, in the world of Shelley’s novel, his partial animal corporeality continually challenges this categorization. Victor, repulsed by the creature’s appearance, refuses the implications of the interlocutory relationship within the creature’s narrative. After experiencing momentary compassion for his alienated creature, he pronounces with finality, “When I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred” (103). The creature, as a moving and talking being, is neither fully animal nor fully human and remains in a state of ontological limbo throughout the entire novel.

Victor’s horrified rejection of the creature represents what Jacques Derrida describes as an “immense disavowal” of the animal, one “whose logic traverses the whole history of

humanity” (14). Human history, according to Derrida, may be read as one of self-imposed separation of itself from other species. In his series of lectures published under the title *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, an allusion to the *cogito*, Derrida pauses on Descartes, who, he says, “waits for us with his animal machines” like a monster lurking in the shadows of Western thought (22). For Derrida, the Cartesian beast-machine hypothesis claiming that animals are unconscious machines without language and without reason, perceiving neither being nor feeling is the most strident example of the West’s “immense disavowal” (14). Montaigne anticipated the Derridean thesis articulating the collective human attitude towards animals as an “insane arrogance” (51).

Ultimately, Descartes was responsible for the concept of a purely mechanistic universe, erroneously attributed to Sir Isaac Newton.⁴³ The Cartesian universe included mechanistic animals. Shelley’s father, William Godwin, belonged to the “radically idealist, rationalist tradition,” stemming in the early modern era from Descartes (J. Williams 6). Godwin was among the many writers including Paine, Diderot, and Buffon, who, following Voltaire, “misappropriated” Newton into the Cartesian system (Christensen 147-48). John Williams, applying a feminist lens to his interpretation of Shelley, writes that “*Frankenstein* recorded a profound uneasiness with the intellectual tradition,” part of which stemmed from rationalism, behind eighteenth-century politics because women were largely excluded from discussions of individual rights (30). I would add that *Frankenstein* demonstrates Shelley’s apprehension of the exclusion of animals from that same rhetoric of freedom, and that the two exclusions are part of the same mechanism of political power.

The Cartesian beast-machine hypothesis was still being debated in early nineteenth-century British discourse when Shelley wrote and published her 1818 masterpiece. For example,

in *The General Character of the Dog: Illustrated by a Variety of Original and Interesting Anecdotes of That Beautiful and Useful Animal in Prose and Verse* (1804), Joseph Taylor anthologizes anecdotes about canines, mostly from the early modern period, in which one author ponders, "I wonder ... how any man alive can have the effrontery to maintain that brutes are unintelligent machines" (132). Taylor's author perceives anthropocentric hubris in the human stance towards animals. A second example comes from the writing of Percy Shelley. In his *Vindication of the Natural Diet* (1813), a defense of vegetarianism, Percy Shelley alludes to the Cartesian hypothesis, writing, "the monstrous sophism that beasts are pure unfeeling machines, and do not reason, scarcely requires a confutation" (qtd. in Rowe 137).⁴⁴ He insinuates that the theory is unnatural, a deception. Yet, despite her husband's claim, Shelley was compelled to provide a "confutation" in *Frankenstein*, the most comprehensive representation of the human and animal relationship in literature in English.

In this essay, I shall argue that in *Frankenstein*, Shelley entertains the skeptical philosophical ethos of Montaigne in her treatment of the animal question. Her contemplation is Montaignian even in the evocation of his now famous feline, deployed in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, as a rhetorical figure through which he explores the limits of human reason.⁴⁵ Through the relationship between the creature and Victor, Shelley explores philosophical and ethical questions vis-à-vis the animal debate, making Montaignian moves by depicting instances of interspecific communication and creaturely kinesis to put pressure on Enlightenment notions of a strictly language-based criterion for human exceptionalism. In distinction to Montaigne, Shelley explores not the limits of human reason, but the tragic potential of human reason, which can create monsters, and treat animals monstrously, unleashing causal chains of negative outcomes. She reinvents the topos of the writer's cat as a rhetorical strategy in order to level a

critique of the science in her era, particularly the ethics of vivisection.⁴⁶ The creature, a partially resurrected cat, returns to torture Victor in an emotional vivisection.⁴⁷

There are instances when Shelley explicitly deploys Montaignian theriophily. For example, after the creature reads Plutarch's *Lives*, a comparative analysis of paired Greek and Roman statesmen, he begins to ruminate on the problem of human evil saying, "to be base and vicious, as many on record have been, appeared the lowest degradation, a condition more abject than that of the blind mole or harmless worm" (83). That is, an unethical human is lower than the lowliest animal. After his murderous rampage to avenge Victor's repudiation, the creature confesses to Walton that "vice has degraded me beneath the meanest animal," meaning that as a result of his partial humanity, he has sunk beneath animality (160). These examples demonstrate the inversion of human and animal characteristics deployed by theriophilists to criticize human pride.

What I would like to emphasize, however, is that the creature himself is essentially a Montaignian figure. Rather than assuming animals have no experience of consciousness, Montaigne stresses that the human mind cannot know the animal mind with certitude. Animals, especially felines, are for Montaigne inherently ambiguous beings—just human enough to engender doubt. The creature, like Montaigne's cat, is the antithesis of Cartesian certainty, precipitating more questions than answers. His depiction as a hybrid who speaks like a human but has a partial nonhuman animal body suggests that the concept of the human, for Shelley, is a linguistic construct draped over an uncertain ontology.⁴⁸ The Cartesian paradigm is the ideological foundation of Western concepts of the autonomous self, ontologically separate from animals, that undergirds the capitalist system. Shelley's novel brings to light the occlusion of animal exploitation behind human exploitation at the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution.⁴⁹

Frankenstein, then, explores the real-world impact of philosophical claims on human and animal lives.

While Shelley was drafting *Frankenstein* at Bath, Percy Shelley, who heavily edited the first edition, read Montaigne, starting in September of 1816. In her journal, Shelley records that on Saturday the 9th of November 1816, Percy “reads *Gulliver’s Travels* aloud and Montaigne in the morning” (*Journals* 1:145). The ambiguity of this sentence suggests that he may have read Montaigne “aloud” also (*Journals* 1:145). In late November, she writes, “Shelley reads and finishes Montaigne to his great sorrow,” indicating that the skeptic’s essays had a profound impact on the young poet (*Journals* 1:145).

Shelley’s personal admiration of Montaigne is evident in her 1838-39 *Lives of Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France*. She calls him a “tranquil philosopher” who “dissected human nature” and “one of the most delightful authors in the world” (25, 15). She observes that his essays have been “attacked in modern times” and launches a defense writing, “[i]t requires that the reader should possess some similarity to the author’s own mind to enter fully into their merits” (36). According to her journal, Shelley herself read Montaigne while she revised the first edition of *Frankenstein*, as indicated by the epigraph to this chapter: “Read Montaigne—correct *Frankenstein*” (1: 245). Editors Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert explain that “[t]he corrections,” handwritten by Shelley in a copy of *Frankenstein* given to one Mrs. Thomas, “were possibly for a new edition” (1: 245, n.3). While the 1818 version has been favored since the textual recovery of the 1990s, some critics prefer the 1831 version, arguing that it deepens the moral dilemma introduced in the first edition.⁵⁰ In the 1831 revision, there is an increased emphasis on Victor’s attempts to assign blame to the workings of fate instead of accepting his own culpability. Anne K. Mellor calls this shift Shelley’s “rhetoric of fatalism” (*Mary* 171).

Mellor views this as a compromised vision of the original edition. However, Victor's view does not necessarily represent Shelley's. I read Victor's attempt to blame fate as his refusal of ethical responsibility. The 1831 *Frankenstein*, the only version familiar to readers for over a century and a half, reflects an even greater debt to Montaigne than the first, positioning Shelley nearer the skeptical end of the philosophical spectrum and revealing, in her words, her "similarity" to Montaigne's "own mind" (*Lives* 36).

In the argument that follows, I explain further the philosophical significance of felines as rhetorical devices in Montaigne's *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, relating it to intriguing recent scholarship concerning the creature's corpus. This discussion foregrounds my analysis of two pivotal sections in the novel. First, I examine Shelley's exploration of the implications of extralinguistic semiosis in the reanimation scene as it relates to the practice of vivisection. My analysis enhances our understanding of Shelley's critique of science as it intersects with her interest in Montaignian ideas. Then, I focus on the creature's literacy narrative, which represents Shelley's highly unique contribution to the animal debate. In this story forming the heart of the novel, Shelley explores the relationship between humans, animals, language, and ontology, positioning herself within the skeptical tradition. For further illumination, in a few places, I discuss compelling details from Shelley's biography.

Twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once famously remarked that "if a lion could talk, we could not understand him," meaning that the life of an animal is of such radical alterity to human life that not even language could bridge the ontological divide (qtd. in Levvis 170).⁵¹ Wittgenstein's apothegm evidences an anthropocentric predisposition, however unintentional, succinctly articulating an available viewpoint on the animal question stretching back to ancient Greece. For example, Aristotle asserts in the *Politics* that "man is the only animal

with the gift of speech” (1.1253a). At the foundation of Western civilization, humans privileged themselves over the other animals based on a definition of language as verbal speech.

Philosophers such as Montaigne have argued that animals have languages of their own and provocatively deployed the feline as a figure through which they articulate alternative intellectual positions. In *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, he deploys the cat twice, presenting a domestic pet and a lion. The first instance provides a way for him to entertain the concept of animal subjectivity. He does so by considering human and animal interaction saying, “When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?” (17). In Montaigne’s view, the body is a liminal interface between internal consciousness and the external world, and this is may be true for animals. He argues that the movements of animals have meaning, suggesting the signification of a reasonable actor (18). Like a playful cat toying with his reader mouse, Montaigne figures both himself and his pet comically in simian terms. He suggests that his cat has her own form of intelligible language writing, “We entertain ourselves with mutual monkey-tricks. If I have times when I want to begin or to say no, so does she” (17). Montaigne represents his enjoyment of his relationship with his pet as predicated on communication, revealing an animal-centric attitude.

The second feline in the *Apology*, a lion, anticipates the content of Wittgenstein’s remark, but is its ideological opposite; in the story of Androdus and the Lion, originating in antiquity, a human understands a lion’s language. Thrown together in the Roman circus to fight to the death, Androdus and the lion deploy interspecific recognition (Androdus previously tended the wounded lion) and communication to circumvent Roman authority. The lion wags his tail in greeting like a canine, and the scene is such a crowd pleaser that both are set free. In this story, Montaigne suggests the political implications of interspecific communication (42-43).

As a rhetorical figure, Shelley's creature is an early nineteenth-century version of Montaigne's cat. Shelley repurposes the writer's cat in order to critique the Scientific Revolution, especially the instrumental use of animals in scientific experimentation. Recent scholarship has suggested that the connection between Shelley's creature and the feline species may be concrete. Describing the creature's reanimation to Walton, Victor says, "I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open" (35). Jackson Petsche and Stephanie Rowe have each made the provocative observation that the yellow pigmentation suggests that at least one of the creature's eyes is that of a cat (101, 138). Rowe explains that the bodies of dead "cats" would have been available to Victor as part of early nineteenth-century dissecting room "remnants" (137).

The text gives a second indication of the creature's cat corporeality, which neither Petsche nor Rowe has commented on. Victor reports that he is equally horrified by the creature's "straight black lips" (35). The lips of some common breeds of cat, such as the brown tabby, having black lips, fit Shelley's depiction (See Appendix A). The "black lips," and the "yellow eye," I submit, make a compelling argument for the creature's partial felinity (35-36). Thus, the haunting trace of melancholic expression on the face of the cat named "Mr. Kitty" may be, at last, an intimation of the true face of "Frankenstein."⁵²

The creature's hybridity is connected to Shelley's exploration of the ethics of animal experimentation as it intersects with the significance of extralinguistic semiosis, of such interest to writers of sensibility as they pushed back against philosophies of language-based human superiority. In addition to the cost of vivisection in terms of animal life, Shelley considers the human emotional price of the controversial practice. Vivisection was hotly debated in the 1820s and tied to the animal protection movement. According to Anna Guerrini, protecting domestic animals functioned rhetorically as a positive contrast between the nostalgic pastoral of yesteryear

and both the perceived excesses of modern science and “depraved notions of the industrializing present” (71-72). In the early nineteenth century, the public perceived a “slippery slope” between dissecting live animals and dead humans. People feared human beings would be vivisected soon (Guerrini 72). By 1831, when Shelley had revised and republished *Frankenstein*, these issues were even more pressing (Guerrini 73). Because the creature is part human, he brings the disturbing implications of possible human vivisection to the fore.

In terms of experimentation with animals, the implications of the Cartesian beast-machine theory cannot be overstated. Adherence to the Cartesian hypothesis was essential to some scientists practicing vivisection. According to Descartes, animals do not consciously experience pain like humans; semiotic displays of agony are purely mechanistic. As Erica Fudge explains, the Cartesian position is that “an animal can experience torture but cannot somehow properly *feel* it” (her emphasis 157). In consideration of the medical benefits to humankind, it is not difficult to understand how the Cartesian theory compensated for the current absence of anesthesia as a matter of “convenience” (Singer 293). The Cartesian theory provided the disavowal of animal suffering necessary to carry out the scientific research. While most scientists acknowledged animals could feel pain despite the Cartesian hypothesis, there were instances when Descartes’ denial of the conscious experience of it by animals was used by vivisectors as a pretext for ignoring the obvious semiotic indications of trauma experienced by the animals. At times, this denial seemed to manifest in a sadistic theater of cruelty. For example, this harrowing description of a late seventeenth-century vivisection at a Jansenist seminary in Port Royal is telling:

They administered beatings to dogs with perfect indifference and made fun of those who pitied the creatures as if they felt pain. They said the

animals were clocks; that the cries they emitted when struck were only the noise of a little spring that had been touched, but that the whole body was without feeling. They nailed the poor animals up on boards by their four paws to vivisect them and see the circulation of blood which was a great subject of conversation. (qtd. in Singer 293-294)

The assertion that the animals are “clocks” is a troubling usage of language for the purpose of ontological prestidigitation (qtd. in Singer 293). It is also one of the most explicit examples of the application of Descartes’ beast-machine theory on record. The crux of this early modern description of vivisection is the nonverbal signification. As a demonstration of the prelinguistic semiosis that humans and animals share, the vocalizations of the dogs must have presented a tortuous real-time refutation of the beast-machine theory to the vivisectors, who choose not to hear by asserting that an expression of pain given by a canine is mechanical noise. It’s a strange sort of denial. In the reanimation scene, Victor refuses to hear the creature, which is repeated when the creature tells his literacy narrative later at the novel’s center, presenting the refusal to listen as a form of disavowal.

The creature’s reanimation is depicted as traumatic—a sort of vivisection in reverse, showing the close relationship between vivisection and Victor’s reanimation enterprise. Shortly after the process of resurrection, the creature signifies in three extralinguistic modes available to both humans and animals. After he opens his eyes the creature vocalizes, gestures, and uses facial expression. Victor recalls, “his jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks ... one hand was stretched out seemingly to detain me” (36). In the image of the “jaws,” Shelley accentuates one part of the anatomical structure required to produce human speech (36). However, the word’s visceral connotation, coupled with the

creature's hybrid composition, presents an animalistic image also evoking attack or eating. The suggestions of biting, mastication, and digestion subsumed within "jaws" emphasize that speech is not the exclusive purpose of exercising the maxilla and mandible, underscoring its situatedness in the body (36).

The image of the "jaws" has a second and more troubling implication because of its relationship to the word "grin," bringing to the fore the messy ethics of Victor's work. According to the *OED* a "grin" can be performed by humans or animals and involves drawing back the lips to show the teeth, usually to display pain or anger, and can be said of the "jaws" as well.⁵³ This sense of the word is available in the well-known expression "grin and bear it."⁵⁴ Moreover, well into the nineteenth century, the word "grin" in the noun form denoted a snare for a bird or rabbit that featured a "running noose" (*OED*). Both the noun and verb carry macabre denotations and when considered with other textual evidence such as the creature's exposed teeth, which Victor describes as having a "pearly whiteness," the precision of Shelley's word choice is clear (35). The creature's face signifies suffering.

Victor finds the creature's appearance repulsive, but his frenetic kinesis proves as disturbing. After the creature opens his "yellow eye," Victor next observes, "it breathed hard, and convulsive motion agitated its limbs" (35). He elaborates telling Walton, "I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as Dante could not have conceived" (36). Victor perceives the creature's movements as "ugly," and the phrase "rendered capable of motion," suggests he recognizes he has bestowed not just biological life, but a measure of agency on the creature (36). The creature's agony is manifested in "convulsive" movement of the body (35). In this scene, Victor compares animal kinesis to the writhing of the dead in Dante Alighieri's vision

of hell in the *Divine Comedy*. In Dante's version, the movements of the condemned signify the conscious experience of guilt and the physical sensation of various forms of tortuous punishment such as burning, being buffeted by the wind, or even frozen. Shelley renders animal movement in horrific images to depict the suffering of animals in scientific procedure. In other words, for animals, vivisection is hellish, analogous to the human experience of damnation. Shelley's evocation of hell for an audience of mainly Christian readers is an effective rhetorical move for convincing them of the ethical fuzziness of vivisection, rendering animal suffering in images of human suffering associated with the religious implications of the consciousness of human culpability.

Later, the creature comes to Victor's room and tries to establish communication by vocalizing and making gestures. Victor reports that the creature made "inarticulate sounds," yet claims that the creature "might have spoken, but I did not hear" (36). These statements are contradictory. How can Victor say that the creature made "sounds" and simultaneously not hear them? The creature, due to his partial humanity, may be speaking verbal language, or he may be vocalizing as part of his animality. As Shelley presents it, Victor chooses not to "hear" (36). In other words, to hear in this case is to listen. Victor's refusal to hear is a form of disavowal reminiscent of the Cartesian vivisectioners, who claim the animal "cries" are the "noise" coming from a "little spring" (qtd. in Singer 293).

Victor's disavowal is further enacted when he flees the creature's presence. He reports falling into a fitful sleep full of nightmares, recalling, "my teeth chattered, every limb became convulsed" (36). This detail echoes the reanimation scene. The creature is described a few lines earlier with the same terminology; his "limbs" display a "convulsive motion" (35). In these descriptions, Shelley demonstrates the similarity between humans and animals in the capacity of

the body to signify. She blurs the line between human emotional states such as “horror” and the response of the animal body to the experience of trauma. In other words, psychic disturbance and physical disturbance are both realized in the body, demonstrating human and animal continuity.

Victor denies that he has heard the creature. Yet he is telling this disturbing story to Walton who must hear him for the story to be fully communicated. Victor speaks from his memory of the events, and Walton is positioned as the interlocutor. The whole of *Frankenstein* is a story of recollection, revealing something about the function of memory; it recasts and reinterprets the initial impressions. As the narrative progresses, Victor, it might be said, begins to “hear,” which is connected to his remorse as a function of memory (36). Memory serves to reframe the significance of the events for Victor, evoking the re-membering of the vivisected creature’s corpus, re-collected from many different bodies. In retrospect, Victor experiences regret as a feeling of horror. He speaks of the “horrors of my secret toil” and says to Walton that he “tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay” (33). His present state of regret manifests in the body. He says, “[m]y limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance” (33). On the verge of tears, meaning the fluid drops released by the eyes in response to trauma, Victor’s body shakes as he remembers harming animals. The word evokes “to tear” in the verb form, that is, Victor’s dismembering of human and animal bodies, the regret of which expresses itself in the body and in a semantic homonym, further enhancing the causal relationship between vivisection and Victor’s re-membered experience. To remember with regret indicates an evaluative interpretation of the past event. Here, the memory metaphorically re-members the humans and animal bodies that have been torn dismembered. The re-membering of the exploited bodies as a function of memory elicits regret, which Shelley suggests is the appropriate response to Victor’s ethical awakening. In a sense, Victor’s body is telling this story,

acting with him as a corporeal narrator, working in tandem with verbal language (33).

In the tradition of Montaigne, writers of sensibility were interested in the semiotics of the body. This included the semiotics of animal bodies and interspecific exchange. In order to de-emphasize the philosophical preoccupation with verbal language as the criterion of an absolute human ontology, Montaigne stresses that, like animals, humans communicate via the body through gestures and facial expressions. He also observes involuntary forms of embodied communication. He writes, “[t]he chameleon changes passively ... We change hue as well, from fear, anger, shame and other emotions which affect the colour of our faces ... Jaundice, not our will, has the power to turn us yellow” (34). Unconscious nonverbal forms of human communication, such as Victor’s crying, precede language and function in *Frankenstein* to push humans closer to animals in Montaigne’s vision of a human and animal continuum rather than a human and animal aporia.

Victor’s retrospective casting of vivisection as a form of torture illustrates Shelley’s attention to the emotional cost of the practice for humans. The association between vivisection and torture reverberates throughout the novel.⁵⁵ For example, after the creature murders William, he frames the family servant, Justine. During her show trial, Victor says, “I suffered living torture,” identifying himself as the “true murderer” (54, 59). Shelley represents the creature returning like a resurrected cat to torture Victor with acts of revenge. This is presented as an emotional vivisection, a compelling nuance of the novel’s revenge theme. As Victor contemplates making a female companion to assuage the creature’s loneliness, he imagines being tortured by the animals that he will use in the process: “I saw continually about me a multitude of filthy animals inflicting on me incessant torture that often extorted screams and bitter groans” (105). The consequences of the creature’s violent revenge put Victor in an ambiguous

ontological position. He can only express his unbearable emotional turmoil in extreme forms of extralinguistic vocalizations—screaming and groaning. His extralinguistic display pulls back the curtain of his exclusively human identity, revealing the animal behind the veil of language.

One specific scenario in Shelley's life experience may help illuminate the source of these disturbing images of animal suffering and therefore their significance to her. Biographer Miranda Seymour documents that when Shelley was approximately ten years of age, her family moved to Skinner street in London where she was close enough to hear "the nightly screaming of animals being slaughtered in candlelit abattoirs under Smithfield" (57). Seymour speculates that an "impressionable" Shelley was probably "horrified" when she connected "the sounds of the night to the bloody carcasses," hanging nearby for sale by butchers like executed criminals (58). Perhaps, I would add, Shelley also perceived a relationship between the name of her street "Skinner" and the activity of slaughter (Seymour 57). This biographical incident haunts the pages of *Frankenstein*. As a victim of emotional vivisection, Victor is so traumatized by his own use of experimentation on animals that he cannot express his mental state in language, only in extralinguistic signs of distress—distant echoes of the screams of slaughtered animals buried in Shelley's memory.

Shelley's sympathetic portrayal of Victor's grief for his previous exploitation of the animals is anticipated by his grief over the death of his very young brother William. After the creature murders William, Victor looks to the consolation of philosophy averring, "[t]hose maxims of the Stoics, that death was no evil, and that the mind of man ought to be superior to despair on the eternal absence of a beloved object, ought not to be urged. Even Cato wept over the dead body of his brother" (48). Rejecting the Stoic argument, Victor acknowledges the value of human emotion, particularly the experience of mourning as an appropriate response to the

death of loved ones. Shelley, however, excised this entire passage from the 1831 version, positioning Victor closer to the Stoics. Thus, while Victor's character has elements of sympathetic structuring in both editions, in this part of the 1831 version, his emotions are slightly muted. This move, of positioning Victor closer to the skeptics by excising the passage in which he disagrees with them, is related to Shelley's skeptical position on the animal debate.

An increased alignment of Victor and the Stoics enhances the ethical dilemma presented in the first edition. The Stoics influenced the thinking of Descartes and surpassed Aristotle's language argument by claiming that speech in the form of thought was the deciding demarcation between humans and animals (Percival 57). For example, Sextus Empiricus, one of the most well-known Stoics, alleges that "[m]an differs from the irrational animals by reason of internal speech, not uttered speech, for crows, parrots, and jays articulate sounds" (qtd. in Percival 57). Descartes, rehashes this argument in the *Discourse* writing, "we can see that magpies and parrots can utter words as we do, and yet cannot speak like us, that is, by showing what they are thinking" (47). Thus, according to this line of reasoning, verbal language is a criterion of the human if it is deployed contextually and in chains of reasoning. Descartes' well-known proposition, "I think therefore I am," illustrates the criterion of a preexisting inner monologue as argued by Empiricus. Writing, like speech, is also evidence of this criterion, encoding the thought that preceded it.

However, writers of sensibility such as Rousseau, heavily influenced by Montaigne himself and whom Shelley revered, suggest that the human comes into being through interaction with other beings, including animals. As Tobias Menely points out, in Rousseau's novel *Émile*, the protagonist comes into being or compassion when he hears an animal signifying suffering (15). Shelley will demonstrate how the process of learning language is a desire to respond to the

speakers who address the listener. In contrast, the Stoics, who did not acknowledge vocalization or movement as a form of language denied that animals speak and believed that humans had no obligation to extend ethical consideration to animals since they have no reason and hence no capacity for ethics themselves.

Shelley's portrayal of the physical and emotional trauma occasioned by the scientific practice of vivisection suggests that she remained skeptical despite its contribution to advancements in medicine. In a sense, Shelley's portrait of vivisection is an intersectional case study of philosophy and ethics, that is, the ethical consequences of the application of philosophical ideas to the material world. At the novel's center, she moves to a closer examination of the branch of philosophy known as metaphysics and its further offshoot, ontology, which investigates the nature of being. In short, ontology seeks to know what is real, often articulated in terms of categories, such as human or animal. The creature's hybridity presents a constant challenge to categorical conceptions that would seek to definitively answer the question: what is real? Yet, as a figure of ambiguity, it is his close approximation of existing categories of human, and animal, or more specifically, feline, that pushes back against all strict philosophies of the antireal. In the creature's literacy narrative, Shelley intensifies the metaphysical implications of his multi-corporeality, engaging the animal question further by depicting his acquisition of verbal language. Shelley asks, does his acquisition of language mean that the creature has metamorphosed into a human being or was he one prior to this? Or is there a third term? The creature's plasticity as a rhetorical figure like Montaigne's cat allows Shelley to comment on the animal debate by challenging the concept of an exclusively human ontology and notions of how that ontology comes into being. It would be tempting to argue that the creature's acquisition of language indicates a transition from preverbal animal to verbal human, but one

point of contention for writers of sensibility is that humans not only share the preverbal state with animals in infancy but retain it and continue to utilize it despite the acquisition of language, contradicting a foundational proposition of Western metaphysics. Neither fully animal nor fully human, the creature bridges the Western dichotomy.

Many critics have observed Shelley's interest in language and discussed the creature's acquisition of language at length.⁵⁶ For example, Peter Brooks argues that in *Frankenstein*, the "problem of the monstrous is played out in the question of language" (591). "The Monster understands," says Brooks, that "the relationship of language" "favors him" as opposed to visual relationships (592). The creature's narrative moves Victor to compassion, he observes, demonstrating "the power of language itself to link speaker and listener," but it is only temporary, and he is eventually excluded from the "intersubjective relations" of the "narrative contract" (593). The conclusion derived from a view of language as purely verbal is that the "narrative contract," in Brooks words, is only possible between human beings (593).

I would like to suggest, however, that in *Frankenstein*, the question of the animal is, to borrow Brooks' terminology, "played out" in the "problem" of language (591). Following Montaigne, Shelley does not define language as solely verbal. As a writer of sensibility, she emphasizes the extralinguistic use of signs that humans and animals share and suggests that the "narrative contract," in Brooks' words, should extend to animals (593). The creature's literacy narrative suggests that the agreement is binding when animals communicate with humans. The creature's literacy narrative engages the close relationship between Western ontology and theories of language and communication. Shelley's layering of meaning in the creature's narrative is masterful. The creature speaks in verbal language, telling a story about learning verbal language, for which he must recreate his preverbal state with words. His story acts as a

check on language-based human pride by demonstrating that so-called animal language, or extralinguistic semiosis, precedes human language. His narrative preemptively contradicts Wittgenstein's remark that a human couldn't understand a talking lion.

After Victor disavows the creature, refusing to "hear" him during the reanimation and then abandoning him, the creature begins his pattern of murderous revenge by killing William. He returns to Victor after he learns to speak human language and asks for sympathy saying, "[I]isten to my tale ... hear me ... Listen to me, Frankenstein" (69). The creature commences his narrative by explaining that before he learned to speak, he observed the extralinguistic signification of other animals. Listening to the song of birds, he discovers that he is an auditor. Much critical attention has been given to the significance of the works of literature that the creature reports reading particularly Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Less attention has been given to the creature's interaction with the songbirds. He recalls for Victor, "I first discovered that a pleasant sound, which saluted my ears, proceeded from the throats of the little winged animals" (71). Rather than seeing the birds, the creature first hears them, which emphasizes aural communication. His sentimental rendition of his preverbal experience of hearing the birds is compelling as he attempts to recreate for Victor his preverbal thought. When this incident took place, he did not know the word "bird." In his recollection, he substitutes "little winged animals" even though these words were not then available to him either.

Adapting John Locke's *tabula rasa* theory, holding that humans have no innate knowledge and learn everything through sensory impression, Shelley echoes Montaigne's argument that animals communicate with each other. The creature's representation of his own attempt to make sense of the external world through sensory impressions reveals the creature's perception of the vocalization of other animals. The vocalizations of the birds are described as a

“pleasant sound” and the creature recognizes their relationship to the body, identifying the “throats” as the source (71). In his preverbal state, the creature is represented as highly attuned to the embodied semiosis of the other creatures. And this language of animals precedes the human language he will eventually acquire.

The creature not only hears the vocalizations of the birds, but he interprets them as signification. His interaction with the birds demonstrates Shelley’s view of the formation of subjectivity. First, it is a function of communication, of speaking and being spoken to, of hearing and being heard, rather than apriori metaphysics. Second, as opposed to a Euro-masculinist conception of identity formation as the self that makes all others the same, subjectivity here is presented as dependent on intersubjective relations rather than appropriation or colonization.

An intransitive verb, “to salute” means to address someone with respect, good wishes, or courtesy. The creature interprets the bird song as signification addressed to him as the intended interlocutor. The *OED* cites Percy Shelley’s *Hellas* 46 (1822) as an example of the poetic sense of salute in reference to birds greeting the sun or dawn with song. However, Shelley reinvents the long-standing tradition later invoked by Percy, representing the creature as perceiving himself as the recipient of the birds’ salutations. Thus, the scene illustrates one possible outcome of interspecific communication: the creature’s status as subject. In the imagination of sensibility, subjectivity or human identity is a function of language, constructing it through communicative interaction. This applies to animal-animal relationships. The natural antagonism between cat, literalized in the body of the creature, and the birds is exchanged for the intersubjective relationships engendered by cross-species communication. The creature realizes that he shares the prelinguistic modality of the other animals but says that he can only produce “uncouth” and “inarticulate sounds” (71).

Shelley introduced the phrase “inarticulate sounds” in the reanimation scene (36). Here she reemphasizes her interest in extralinguistic signification and human language. The animalistic tone of the creature’s preverbal sounds, he says, “frightened me into silence again,” he says (71). The potential of human vocalization to produce guttural nonverbal sounds and high-pitched screams, a feature of the horror genre later maximized in the medium of film, is frightening because it edges closer to human animality, to the precipitous edge of losing ontological footing.

However, it is here in the exchange with the birds that the creature comes into being, rather than the moment of reanimation. After his entrance into the world of intersubjective relations via the experience of hearing the music of the birds, the creature craves additional relationships and stows himself away on the property of the De Lacey family where he sees and hears a symphony of extralinguistic signification, including music. The power of music to elicit human emotion and embodied response in this portion of the narrative complements Shelley’s exploration of its connection to the signification of human and animal languages. The creature reports that the “sweet mournful air” played by the elder De Lacey “drew tears” from his companion’s eyes until she eventually “sobbed audibly” (74-75). “He then pronounced a few sounds ... and smiled with such kindness and affection,” says the creature, “that I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature” (75). The feelings he experiences are more potent than “hunger or cold” and he says, “I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions” (75). The exchange of nonverbal signs witnessed by the creature elicits feeling to the point of overwhelming him, demonstrating the power of embodied forms of communication unavailable to conventional language. Shelley shows an interest in what is now called zoomusicology and makes an analogy between the signs of the body and music. Rousseau believed that language

came from the emotions and music and not reason.

The creature observes that young Felix De Lacey, in addition to music, makes sounds that are “monotonous” (75). He is describing the sound of Felix as he reads a book. The creature’s description presents human language as a diminution of music, especially reading as the oral translation of written language, one step removed from authentic verbal expression of thought. It is monotone in contrast to music, which is often comprised of polyphony, or, as in the case of a single musician or instrument, the linear sequence of notes that compose melody. This detail is meaningful because it presents a counterpoint to the Enlightenment view that verbal language is a superior endowment indicating a superior ontology.

The creature learns to speak by watching the interactions of the De Lacey family. Initially, he is frustrated by the arbitrariness of language saying, “the words they uttered” had no “apparent connexion [sic] with visible objects,” but he learns by degrees (77). He notices that the De Laceys speak in both verbal and nonverbal modes. For instance, the love interest of Felix De Lacey, Safie, who does not yet speak their language which is French, speaks through “gestures” and can communicate “her lively gratitude” without words (85). In distinct echoes of the Montaignian viewpoint on language, the creature says that Safie “uttered articulate sounds, and appeared to have a language of her own” (81). Yet verbal communication is impossible since Safie and the De Laceys speak different human languages. “They made many signs which I did not comprehend,” says the creature (81).

Montaigne implied that animals speak languages of their own, reinfusing Renaissance discourse with this idea from both biblical natural theology and thinkers of ancient Greece. Shelley establishes that even within the human species, multilingualism prevents understanding. Nevertheless, that does not prevent all communication. Safie and the De Laceys compensate via

nonverbal “signs” (81). If verbal language is not necessary for all human communication, it suggests the possibility that humans and animals can engage in a measure of nonverbal interspecific communication.

Rather than experiencing the human affection that his partial humanity craves, the creature will experience a second disavowal, this time by a member of the De Lacey family. Shelley deploys feline imagery a second time to bring out the meaning of the scene. The creature befriends the elder De Lacey, a blind man unaware of his hybrid appearance. One day, Felix De Lacey, the son, whose name shares the etymology of “feline,” happens upon the creature visiting his father and tries to intervene. Felix, poor because of his father’s misfortune, and unhappy, exiled from his homeland and in love with Safie, a Christian Turk, who is forbidden by her father to marry him due to religious reasons, is anything but lucky or happy as his name would suggest. His unhappiness clashes with the creature’s only happiness, which is the acceptance of the blind De Lacey. The antagonism between the two is represented in the leonine imagery. He is described as having “sublime force” as he tries to separate the creature and his father (94). The creature describes himself saying, “I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope” (94). In this zoological image, one of nature’s large felines tears apart its prey, echoing the violence of the creature’s murders and foreshadowing Victor’s destruction of the female creature, accomplished by the same method. The ferocious quality of the lion resonates with the creature’s animal or base nature, but as Shelley demonstrates in the evocation of theriophily mentioned above, the creature’s partial humanity causes his lust for revenge, which has degraded him beneath the animal.

The creature’s experiences, namely, his traumatic coming into being as a resurrected composite of humans and animals; the preverbal semiotic exchanges; his acquisition of language;

his observation of the love between the De Laceys; his piecemeal construction out of a handful of written texts; his repeated repudiation by humans based on his “hideously deformed and loathsome” physical appearance; and his acute loneliness, prompt him to ask the ontological question at the center of the novel: “What was I?” (70). He observes, “I was not even of the same nature as man” (83). The ambiguous creature does not have an a priori “nature” (83). Rather than the Stoics, the creature’s point of view aligns much more with Montaigne and the skeptics. His question resonates profoundly with Montaigne’s well-known summation of the skeptical position: “What do I know? (“*Que sçay-je?*”) (100). Montaigne stresses epistemological and metaphysical uncertainty, an uncertainty that vexed Descartes.

In describing his new metaphysical “method” with which he endeavors to “rid” himself of all his previous “opinions,” Descartes alludes to Montaigne: “In doing this, I was not copying those sceptics who doubt for doubting’s sake, and pretend to be always unable to reach a decision, for, on the contrary, the aim of my whole plan was to reach certainty” (25). Answering Montaigne with one undeniable affirmative is his stated *modus operandi*. In the broadest terms, the entire project of Descartes can be understood as a quest to answer Montaigne’s summative question (Van Den Abbeele 41).

In order to reach this “certainty,” Descartes must first address the uncertainty presented by the animal mind, necessitating his theory of the beast machine (25). Descartes attempted to solve his conundrum by separating mind and matter, implying that we can’t know with certainty that other human minds exist, we can only infer that they do. Only his mind is a certainty. But this raises another problem: can’t we then infer that animal minds exist? To put it another way, how can we know for certain that animal minds do not exist, if we only know other human minds through induction? The presence of verbal language in the human was Descartes’ attempt at an

answer. In other words, Descartes' answer to Montaigne's question, "What do I know?" is "I think therefore I am." Shelley returns the volley by framing the question in ontological terms: "What was I?" The rhetoric of the creature's question challenges Descartes' concept of absolute ontological distinction among species, and by extension, all claims to epistemological or metaphysical certainty (70). His use of "what" rather than "who" points up the material-corporeal dimension of being to suggest that neither the body, nor reason, nor language are all-encompassing foundations of certainty.

Victor's, however, is a quest to attain Cartesian certainty, instantiated in the power of "bestowing animation on lifeless matter" (32). He himself deploys the word "certainty," so heavily loaded in the post-Cartesian philosophical lexicon, as he searches for the key to life: "Sometimes, on the very brink of certainty," he says, "I failed" (33). The philosophical irony is that even once he attains the "certainty" of performing resurrection, the product of that resurrection, the creature, creates an even greater unknown. The creature then asks, "[w]as I then a monster?" (83). In the original mythic definition of the word, a "monster" is a human and animal hybrid. By that definition, the creature is a monster. However, the "then" in the creature's question has a distinct temporal connotation. It is not until after his moral transgression of killing William that he becomes a human monster.

The creature's narration has a momentary effect on Victor, opening him up to compassion, but the creature's ontological question and the implications it suggests causes more existential conflict. If he were to accept the creature, it would be tantamount to accepting his own animality, which he will not do. Emblematizing the position embraced by most of Western philosophy, he insists on absolute ontological distinction, enacted through repeated disavowal. At the beginning of the creature's tale, he refuses to listen and exclaims, "I will not hear you!

There can be no community between you and me” (68). Shelley’s use of “community” draws etymological attention to the function of communication in intersubjective relationships (68). As he did in the reanimation scene, Victor disavows the creature a second time. At the end of the creature’s narration, his moving and talking, his speaking in both modes, rekindles Victor’s disdain and he says, “my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred” (103). The creature’s animal movement and his human speech cause Victor’s third attempt at disavowal. In other words, his performance of his literacy narrative has the effect of highlighting human animality rather than human transcendence. He is literally a talking animal, which is always brought to the fore by his corporeality, or the reality of his corpus, literally constructed by human and animal scraps. The creature’s human speech does not erase his animality.

Shelley viewed the concept of the human as a linguistic construct, an idea enabled as a function of language rather than a transcendent essence, suggesting that human subject identity is performative and predicated on communication with others, whether human or animal. A second biographical detail from Shelley’s life helps to elucidate my point. On the day Shelley was born, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin said to William Godwin, “I have no doubt of seeing the animal today” (qtd. in Seymour 27). As Seymour observes, this rings strangely in our contemporary ears but “animal was a word frequently applied to babies” in Shelley’s time (27). The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a 1795 letter from Wollstonecraft to Gilbert Imlay, the father of her illegitimate first daughter, Fanny, under the definition of “animal.” Wollstonecraft wrote, “my animal is well.” This historical use of the word “animal” speaks to the theory that subjectivity is something acquired as young humans learn to speak language and enter what Lacan calls the “symbolic order” of the human community. Rousseau had a similar idea viewing the human as naturally innocent until corrupted by language and culture. The use of the term “animal” to refer to young

humans in Shelley's time indicates a very different perspective from our contemporary mindset. We impute subjectivity to our infants. This does not seem to be a given in Shelley's time, and it points to an understanding of the social construction of the human as a status acquired through linguistic, social, religious, and political means, rather than apriori ontology.

Victor will disavow the creature once more before the narrative ends. He agrees to make a female companion to assuage his loneliness, but at the point of completion, he tears her apart like an animal tearing apart prey or a butcher cutting up an animal. He vows to do the same to the creature and from then on, the two engage in a sort of cat and mouse game. The creature toys with Victor, killing his childhood friend Henry Clerval in yet another revenge. As they begin the arctic chase that commences the novel, the creature tells Victor, "you will find near this place, if you follow not too tardily, a dead hare; eat and be refreshed" (147). By providing the dead prey, the creature ensures the cat and mouse game will continue. Victor chases the creature who can never be caught, just as the creature's ontology can never be finally determined and his ontological question, therefore, never finally answered. His hybrid body ensures that the only certainty is uncertainty, demonstrating Shelley's skeptical philosophical self-positioning.

"Horror," explains Stanley Cavell, "is the title I am giving to the perception of the precariousness of human identity, to the perception ... that we may be, or may become, something other than we are, or take ourselves for" (418). Cavell's concept of horror is essentially a philosophical definition. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* anticipates this concept of horror. To experience "horror," as Victor describes it, is to recognize the instability of conceptions of human ipseity represented by the creature's multi-corporeality and his capacity to signify (103). Cavell's insight prompts the question: What, then, *do* we "take ourselves for" (418)? Historically, the answer has been framed in the negative. Whatever we are, we are not

animals. Shelley suggests, however, that human identity might be mistaken.

Cavell's conception of horror is not unrelated to Derrida's conception of human identity. According to Derrida, the human "I am," is always "*near* what they call the animal. It is too late to deny it, it will have been there before me who is (following) after it. *After* and *near* what they call the animal and *with* it—whether we want it or not" (11). In other words, human identity is predicated on the animal. The disavowal of the animal can never be final because the animal being precedes the human being. Walton articulates a similar statement near the end of Victor's story saying, "[w]ho can follow an animal which can traverse the sea of ice, and inhabit caves and dens, where no man would venture to intrude?" (144). Walton asks, who comes after the animal? Victor's human identity follows the dogs, who follow the creature, who follows still more dogs, forever into the unknown symbolized by the desolate arctic landscape. Victor's identity begins with the animal and dissolves in death.

Frankenstein is Shelley's exploration of the human and animal relationship and the human's relationship to her own animality. Her view of human nature is rather cynical; she tests human ethics through representation of the creature's reanimation an event that indicates the fine line of vulnerability between animal life and death in the scientific practice of vivisection. In Shelley's era, the advancements of the Scientific Revolution were rapidly expanding, powered by the nascent Industrial Revolution. Those advances were in no small part made possible at the expense of animal life in experimentation, creating an even greater sense of urgency in terms of critical response, necessitating Shelley's creature. The concept of an exclusive human ontology gives rise to questionable ethics that exact a high price in terms of human and animal suffering. Thus, what Shelley is getting at in *Frankenstein* is a discussion of the material exploitation of animals, made possible through the interpolation of human beings into adherence to

philosophical notions that form the core of Western identity, which is an underlying mechanism of capitalism.

Intervening in the debate framed by Montaigne and Descartes, Shelley, like the other writers of sensibility that I have discussed in this study, challenges the Enlightenment definition of speech as an exclusive human property. In the first three chapters of this dissertation, I examined scenes of human and animal interspecific communication in works by Jonathan Swift, Christopher Smart, and Frances Burney, arguing that these scenes register Enlightenment anxieties over human and animal difference as framed by the debate between Montaigne and Descartes. As works belonging to the literature of sensibility, they present a sympathetic view of animal semiosis. As a concomitant competing discourse, the sensibility movement countered the androcentric humanist discourse of the Age of Reason as it progressed historically. *Frankenstein* belongs to this cultural heritage.

While Swift, Smart, and Burney depict the human and animal relationship as one of benevolence based on intersubjective communication, Shelley exposes what Victor calls the “dark side of human nature,” one that, despite a verbal petition for sympathy from the creature, ends in disavowal (41). Victor refuses to hear the creature, and thus, refuses intersubjective communication. Victor’s solipsistic disavowal of his creature emblemizes the human repudiation of the animal that Montaigne described as an “insane arrogance” (51). *Frankenstein* intimates a troubled trajectory for the West’s relationship with animals, borne out in the ever-increasing manipulation of species in areas such as industrial farming and bioengineering, anticipating earlier twentieth-century works such as Upton Sinclair’s critique of human and animal exploitation in *The Jungle* and more recent speculative fiction such as Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.

Shelley read Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* in December of 1816. Like Burney's outcast heroine, Juliet, the creature wanders alone. In its insistence on the confrontation with human animality, however, *Frankenstein* owes more thematically to *Gulliver's Travels*. Percy read it aloud to Shelley during the drafting phase of her masterpiece. It is Victor who struggles with the insanity, so often levelled at Gulliver, of a singular-minded pursuit, whether in the initial act of creation or subsequent quest for destruction of the creature. *Frankenstein* exposes the madness of the human repudiation of the animal because, as the hybrid body of the speaking creature constantly reminds the reader, it is tantamount to rejecting the human. Unlike Gulliver who eventually avows the animal in himself, narrowing the human and animal divide, Victor will spurn the creature, and in doing so, disavow his own animality (103). However, Victor is not unsympathetic. Victor's ambitions and the consequences they unleash illustrate the tragic potential of human reason. His character is buffeted by experience like the creature, and his emotions careen back and forth between irrational hatred and profound remorse. He says to Walton, in a statement worthy of Montaigne, "'Man,' I cried, 'how ignorant art thou in thy pride of wisdom!'" (144). For writers such as Montaigne, Swift, and Shelley, human pride, which is in part based on our self-defined superiority over animals, is the source of much trouble and suffering.

Animals, such as the sled dogs and the hare, have a meaningful presence in Shelley's masterpiece, but the creature is an extraordinary literary invention, encompassing Enlightenment debates about the animal question, showcasing Shelley's singular genius, and making *Frankenstein* the most compelling representation of the human and animal relationship in English literature. Part feline, the creature is not unlike Montaigne's cat, in form and function, toying with the reader, as he toys with Victor in a kind of cat and mouse artic chase, engendering

doubt about what it means to be human and interrogating preconceived notions concerning animal minds. Shelley's philosophical novel confronts the reader with the monster of ontology, articulated in the question, "What was I?" (70). The creature's question forever imprints Shelley's skeptical ethos, goading the reader to attempt an answer to a question far from rhetorical. The question of *Frankenstein* is not whether Victor or the creature are human or monster, but rather are they human or animal? The answer is both, and so, of course, are we.

Conclusion

The cultural anxiety generated by the animal question did not cease with Shelley's definitive skeptical argument for human ontological ambiguity articulated in *Frankenstein*. The idea of animal language continued to vex nineteenth-century Britain and it manifested in the growing market for children's literature. In the decades after (and even leading up to) the publication of *Frankenstein*, a spate of didactic novels and poems for children featuring animal narrators was published (including Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*). Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories* (1786) inaugurated the talking animal tradition as we know it today (Cosslett 4). Previously, Trimmer had clearly demarcated the line between human and animal in her *An Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature, and Reading the Holy Scriptures, Adapted to the Capacities of Children* (1770) (Cosslett 17-18). Cosslett writes, "her emphasis on speech as one of the essential differences between man and animals explains her worries about the talking robins in her later book *Fabulous Histories*" (18). The mother who tells the story encourages sympathy with animals but says: "You never see them conversing together and telling their thought and opinions as mankind do" (qtd. in Cosslett 18). This sounds very familiar. It is a reiteration of the Stoic position that internal speech differentiates human from animal.

Like Montaigne, Trimmer believed that she was using natural theology in order to lead readers into a correct reading of scripture; however, she denied animals language. Some of her ideas are not very different from the androcentric point of view espoused by Descartes and his adherents. Many of the era's children's authors seem to fear "that their child readers will be

misled into thinking animals really can talk,” indicating a “self-consciousness about animal language as a literary device” (Cosslett 4-5). Trimmer’s literalism is a potentially troubling development in the use of natural theology, for even the bible speaks of speaking animals. About animals, her narrator tells children, “[w]e must kill them, to preserve our own lives, but should never be cruel to them while they do live” (qtd. in Cosslett 18). For a vegetarian like Shelley, the first half of this statement would be less than truthful. It would also point up the inherent paradox in the notion that humans should be kind to animals up until the moment they destroy them. Parents, of course, do not want their children to confuse fact and fiction, but if considered more carefully, this authorial fear betrays an ever-present anthropocentric cultural bias concerning animal language (Cosslett 4).

These late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century children’s stories were the seeds of the full-fledged media industry featuring animal-centered narratives booming in the West today. They include everything from Anna Sewell’s highly influential 1877 *Black Beauty*, a descendant of *Gulliver’s Travels* in terms of its exposure of cruelty to equines; to early twentieth-century radio shows such as *Rin Tin Tin*; television shows such as *Lassie*; animated cartoons; myriad films in multiple genres such as drama, horror, and comedy from *Old Yeller* to *Jaws* to 2018’s *Zoo*, based on a true story about two youths in Ireland who save a baby elephant during the 1941 blitz; as well as the continuation of print with its volumes upon volumes of children’s books. On the one hand, the ubiquitous presence of animals in these cultural forms is an indication of the human fascination with and love of animals, especially pets. The anthropomorphism of the talking lion of *The Lion King* and the human voice over of a dog’s inner monologue in *A Dog’s Purpose* can have positive effects such as teaching children, and adults for that matter, to imagine animals as subjects. On the other hand, many representations of talking animals

ironically silence real animals by transforming them into a commodity to be consumed as entertainment. In some ways, these representations function as a distraction from the debate about animal language, human ontology, and the ethical implications involved. Thus, cultural representations of animals have multiple and often conflicting meanings and effects.

In recent years, the topic of animal communication has exploded in popular discourse. Countless stories have been featured in popular magazines and newspapers. For example, a recent article in the *HuffPost* entitled “Goats May Have Better Communications Skills Than We Give Them Credit For” summarizes research on the communicative gaze of this member of the *caprinae* family. A May 2017 *New York Times* article features the title “Can Prairie Dogs Talk?” The subtitle reads, “An Arizona biologist believes their sounds should be considered language—and that someday we’ll understand what they have to say” (Jabr). In August of 2019 *National Geographic* devoted an entire issue to the subject of animal communication entitled “Secrets of Animal Communication.” It would be impossible to say exactly what has led to this cultural *zeitgeist*, but if anything, it demonstrates that the animal debate continues. Perhaps the trend is related to the animal turn in the humanities and social sciences. It also demonstrates a significant shift in scientific thinking on animal communication, which has received much serious inquiry in recent years. As my study shows, people have long been fascinated by the concept of communicating with animals, and the credibility of the scholarly trend may signal to people that the topic is not relegated to children and so-called “crazy cat ladies.”

But why this “rise of the animal in the modern imagination” in the first place? (Brown 20). Laura Brown attributes it to two material causes: the practice of pet keeping and the discovery of the great ape (20). She argues that these “innovations in human-animal contact generated a vital imaginative power” that transformed representations of animals (20). She says,

for writers of the time, “imaginary animals ... provide a new lens through which to examine the significance of the nonhuman being for human identity, human experience, and human history” (x). Brown’s thesis articulates an anthropocentric bias of early modern culture, placing the human at the center of all literary representations of animals.

I have been arguing, however, that the literary representations in this study were generated as response not to material encounters but to ideological forces, and that they challenge the anthropocentrism of the Enlightenment paradigm. The cultural upheaval caused by the substitution of the mythopoeic interpretation of nature for a scientific view in the early modern era is traceable in representations of animals in British literature of the long eighteenth century. The older tradition had been available since the days of ancient Egypt and Greece, linking humans and animals in the very origin of language. I have been arguing that the literary animals of this period offer a counter narrative to the dominant discourse of Cartesianism, which articulated a radical ontological split between humans and all other species. This split was made possible by the Enlightenment’s denial of animal language—a silencing of the animals, described by Eric Miller as the Enlightenment’s “evacuation of the figurative” (99) and by Matthew Senior as the “extradition” of animals “from human consciousness and speech” (62). I am arguing that in the representative literary works of this study, it is particularly the semiotic capacity of animals, as outlined by Montaigne, and the implications of interspecies communication, that forms the evidentiary basis for critiquing Descartes’ solipsistic rationalism and zombified beast machines. With *Frankenstein*, it’s as if Shelley was attempting to reanimate the animal question, to keep literary animals alive in the world of philosophical discourse in response to the growth of children’s literature and as the debate moved into the political arena (the first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was formed in England in 1824 and

in 1835 Britain passed the Cruelty to Animals Act, one of the first laws in the industrialized world to protect animals).

The literary works of this study are part of a cultural movement known as the discourse of sensibility. In a broad sense, this movement was a reaction to the Scientific Revolution and to rationalism. The literature of sensibility paid attention to the “somatic utterance” of the body such as blushing, crying, and gesturing (Goring 6). I have claimed that the “somatic utterance” of animals in the works in this study is another example of the discourse of sensibility’s focus on extralinguistic forms of communication (Goring 6). Tobias Menely explains that the “period’s valorization of first order signs, such as sympathetic communication to which eighteenth-century moral philosophers ascribed an unprecedented ethical valence” is in part a reaction to the “impersonality and disembodiment, reproducibility and indefinite address” associated with print culture (6).

And while this may seem like an unrelated tangent, it’s not. Stephen Toulmin has accounted for the era’s need for written propositions that could stand outside of contextual meaning and application (34). This cultural shift privileging written “proofs,” stemmed from the tremendous carnage of European religious wars (34). While the proliferation of print culture in this era may be ascribed to various factors such as the increase in literacy and leisure time—a luxury reaped from Colonial expansion—print culture is also bound up, like vellum enclosed in leather covers, in the broader cultural shifts that are tied to the animal debate.

Writers and philosophers of the eighteenth century understood that the signification of the animal voice precedes both verbal and written propositions (Menely 31). The “communicativity that begins” in the senses, they understood, is “always in excess of conventional meaning” (Menely 9). Thus, human language is in some ways inadequate for describing animal language.

Anticipating the Derridean idea that the signifier can never contain all the signified, Montaigne argued that animal communication falls within this domain of uncertainty; it may be inaccessible in the full sense to humans even though humans and animals can engage in interspecific communication to a degree. The situation of communication is, according to Derrida, the fundamental ethical situation for which one model is friendship (Menely 39). What we are getting at here, then, in terms of a vision of the human and animal relationship in the literary works in this study is an alternative to the Cartesian view of a superior human ontology. In other words, these works espouse a relational ontology whether in benevolent friendships or antagonistic disavowal.

This ethic of a relational ontology is present in *Gulliver's Travels*. In chapter one, I claimed Swift's exploration of embodied semiosis is derived from Montaigne's *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*. Both Swift and Montaigne deploy the semiotic capacity of animals, an indication of a measure of reason, to question human pride in that faculty as a proprietary endowment. Gulliver's horseness is a satire on the human belief that our species is transcendent over other animal species—that we are not animals at all. It emblemizes his embrace of his human animality. Yet, *Gulliver's Travels* is more than satire. It's a hybrid work of several genres including philosophical treatise and travel narrative; it's also a proto novel of sensibility in which Swift anticipates Derrida's model of friendship. Gulliver befriends the sorrel nag and is saddened to leave him when he is evicted from the land of the Houyhnhnms. Once Gulliver returns to England, he encourages the model of ethical friendship. Gulliver's horses live in "friendship" with one another and are "strangers to bridle and saddle," living in "amity" with him (244). Other English horses are treated like friends by humans with "kindness and care" and then they are eventually sold into "drudgery," worked to death, and profanely "left as carrion for birds and

dogs” (203). Gulliver and his horse-like movements are in some ways a mirror image of Shelley’s creature. Swift morphs Gulliver into a sort of human-horse hybrid, emblemizing his avowal of his human animality.⁵⁷

Christopher Smart’s zoopoetics in *Jubilate Agno* presents an alternative to a mechanistic view of animals and the growing hegemony of scientific discourse. Of the works I have discussed, Smart’s poetry is the most heavily invested in the tradition of natural theology. He presents his cat, Jeffry, as a source of spiritual comfort that helps alleviate his physical and mental anguish. Jeffry manifests, for Smart, divine meaning in the semiotics of his many motions. In the tradition of Montaigne’s famous encounter with his feline, Smart deploys the topos of the writer’s cat to illustrate the spiritual significance of feline kinesis, figuring Jeffry as a symbol of religious freedom. Jeffry’s capacity for worship contradicts contemporary religious doctrines that exclude animals from participation in spiritual activities. Smart presents Jeffry as his only friend in the asylum. Like Androdes and the lion, Smart and Jeffry have a friendship based on the solidarity engendered by situational similarity, and their relationship demonstrates the political implications of interspecific friendship.

In chapter three, I argued that canines are represented as “woman’s best friend” in Frances Burney’s novels and her diary. Burney’s cross-species friendships represent an ethical model of human and animal relationships, predicated on interspecific communication. Her depictions of human and canine communication are multivalent and complicate the “misogynist trope” of the lapdog in eighteenth-century discourse (Ellis 97). Burney aligns the sentimental “unswerving servant” dog usually associated with men with her heroines (Wyett 276). She depicts canines as highly agential, significantly impinging on human outcomes.

In *Cecilia*, Burney explores the signification of emotion on the face of an animal and the

language of a dog's barking. For a time, Fidel, the dog, is Cecilia's only friend, and his communicative agency has a direct impact on the reunion of the hero and heroine. The extended scenes of gestural communication between Juliet and the dog Dash in *The Wanderer* are extraordinary in their portrayal of the semiotic complexity possible in interspecific exchanges. The dog's ability to send and receive signs, to be befriended by Juliet, has a causal relationship with her eventual befriending of the two menacing woodsmen. Interspecific friendship in this case prevents violent outcomes. Dash is further befriended by Harleigh, the hero, and taken to live with him and Juliet after their marriage. Burney also wrote about the importance of canines in her own life. In her description of the harrowing incident at Ilfracombe, Burney describes her dog Diane's range of semiotic behaviors, and it is the dog's presence that helps Burney psychologically. Burney's depictions of cross-species conversations, fictional and nonfictional, depict an ethic of friendship between humans and canines.

In contrast, Shelley's portrayal of Victor's refusal to engage in a friendship with the creature registers the antagonistic violence of some human and animal relationships, stemming from a disavowal of human animality in early modern metaphysical postulations, particularly the Cartesian. Shelley's speaking creature challenges definitions of the human as distinctly different from or superior to the animal. Shelley levels this provocation in her invention of the creature's patchwork corporeality, an oblique nod to the topos of the writer's cat, which presents a constant counter-argument to his eventual acquisition of language and, therefore, according to the Cartesian paradigm, humanity. Shelley entertains the skeptical position of Montaigne, exploring ethical aspects of the human and animal relationship that obtain in the intersection of animal semiotics and vivisection. Shelley's portrayal of the dark trajectory of human and animal relations at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution anticipates contemporary speculative

fiction about animals and bioengineering.

The animal representations in the works of Swift, Smart, Burney, and Shelley are heavily indebted to Montaigne. If animals represented a part of speech for Montaigne, he would call them verbs, speaking their own languages of movement. Montaigne reminds his readers that animals are excellent communicators with members of their own species as well as other animals (17). In addition to movement, animals communicate in vocalization. He writes, a “horse knows there to be anger in a given bark of a dog; but that horse does not take fright when the same dog makes some other meaningful cry” (18). He asserts that animal vocalizations signify meaning. What is most striking about Montaigne’s argument is that he maintains that animals engage in interspecific communication with humans, as I have discussed in previous chapters and repeat for emphasis: “How could they fail to talk among themselves, since they talk to us and we to them?” (23). Regarding canines, Montaigne observes that humans have many “ways ... of speaking to our dogs and they of replying to us!” (23). He writes, “we use different languages again, and make different cries, to call birds, pigs, bulls and horses; we change idiom according to species” (23). The variety of animal languages, he says, parallels that of human languages (23-24).

He does not deny difference completely but reconfigures the human conception of hierarchy as a continuum: “We are neither above nor below them ... some difference there is: there are orders and degrees: but always beneath the countenance of Nature” (24). Montaigne stresses human and animal similarities over differences writing, “we ought to note the parity there is between us. We have some modest understanding of what they mean: they have about the same of us” (17). Animal semiosis narrows the ontological gap, and all species are beneath a personified Nature. Humans, in their inferential capacity, can understand many instances of

animal communication, but it's important to acknowledge, according to Montaigne, that animals can interpret human semiosis to a degree as well.

The ethical implications of interspecific communication are staggering: if humans and animals can communicate, it implies that animals possess language in some measure and use it with intentionality. They should be within the human moral purview as sensitive and intelligent beings. What I have been getting at, what the literary works of this study get at, are the ramifications of the application of human philosophy to the lives of animals. This is significant because “humanist culture goes to great lengths to insist that nonhuman animals look but do not see, make sound but do not speak” (Feder 70). Before we can understand the “traces of dirt and blood from material relationships between species” as represented in the literary texts of the period, I argue that we need to understand the philosophical ideas that make the “material relationships” possible (Armstrong 7). This understanding, I have been arguing, is available in the debate about animal language between Montaigne and Descartes. Their debate is part of the ideological underpinning that makes possible the animalization and exploitation of human beings in Western capitalism.

If instead of denying animals language, we take friendships with animals as an ethical model, what might this look like in terms of new ideas and philosophies? As an alternative to the Cartesian paradigm, contemporary French ethical ethologist Dominique Lestel proposes a “bi-constructivist” approach to human and animal relations, in which humans recognize that they co-construct meaning with animals. Bi-constructivism is an approach which “considers that animals are not machines but are interpreters of meaning, subjects, interpreters of the world, interpreters of others and interpreters of themselves” (188). Descartes claimed that “animals can't use words or *signs*” (my emphasis 46). In contrast, Lestel says, “humans must understand that animals are

not just pretty scenery, a food resource or a source of affection, but a *semiotic space* that participates fully in their very humanity” (my emphasis 196). This idea is not radically different from Montaigne’s emphasis on natural theology, which teaches that animals are themselves signs. To be human, then, is not to be defined against the animal, as has been the case historically, but to be a species engaged in semiosis with other species. Humans and animals create meaning together.

Lestel calls on scholars in the humanities and social sciences to create new forms of inquiry and knowledge about animals eschewing the “available data” which has its own “cultural history” to create what he calls “phenomenological ethology or biosemiotic ethology, in other words, a non-Cartesian ethology” (189). “We need to develop,” says Lestel, “a relational perspective and move on once and for all from the ontological perspectives that the West has favored since Aristotle” (190). “Artists and writers have to be involved with animal studies not just critics,” he says, and interspecific friendship needs to be thought about (194-195). Eighteenth-century writers approached a relational ontology and thinking about friendships between species nearly three hundred years ago. Swift’s complex depiction of Gulliver as equinesque, using both the conventions of satire and sensibility, emphasize human animality. Smart’s feline friend, Jeoffry, performs a liturgy of motion, depicting animals as spiritual beings with inherent value. The canines in Burney’s writing are friends who interact in the affective domain and whose agency create cause and effect patterns in human lives. Shelley’s creature, the supreme figure of the human and animal relationship in Western literature, articulates the question at the foundation of ontology itself: “What was I?” (70). Remaining skeptical, Shelley refuses a simple answer, implying, therefore, that the question is continually posed in the present as “What am I?” How we choose to answer that question has profound implications for human

and animal lives. Animals are, despite their ambiguity, for Swift, Smart, Burney, and Shelley, neither invisible nor mute. Their representations of animals and humans communicating and creating meaning together demonstrate that literary forms, as Sir Phillip Sydney argued in his *Defense of Poesy*, can quicken us to matters of ethics much more profoundly than philosophy or history.

Endnotes

1. See, for example, Christopher Hitt's "Ecocriticism and the Long Eighteenth Century."

2. Bougeant's treatise then is a response to the watershed of Cartesianism. Bougeant aimed to reconcile animal intelligence with Cartesian philosophy. He rejected Descartes' notion that animals are unconscious machines while preserving his belief in the transcendent human soul. Ironically, Bougeant was exiled for a time to La Flèche where Descartes was educated, not for his theological theory accounting for animal intelligence by attributing it to demonic possession, but most likely because his real intent was a satirization of Jesuit "sophistry" (Harrison, "God" 75). His own solution to the conundrum created by the Cartesian view of animals conclusion was an equally controversial theory. He claimed that far from being machines, animals possessed the souls of fallen angels. Even though his treatise was meant primarily as a satire, Bougeant's observations on animal semiotics leveled criticism on the proposition that animals operate on purely mechanical instinct. In any case, his work was so controversial, he was banished from Paris (Percival 55).

3. Some of Montaigne's animal anecdotes are fantastical and stretch the limits of credulity; however, many of them are credible observations of animal behavior.

4. Many of these same debates were taken up in the early eleventh century by preeminent Islamic philosopher Avicenna, who "denies animals awareness of their self-awareness" (Alwishah 73).

5. Unless otherwise noted, all Swift citations refer to *Gulliver's Travels*.

6. The first two descriptors appear in Kathleen Williams, "Animal Rationis Capax," 75. For "asinine" and "hippanthropic folly" see Michael Franklin, "Lemuel Self-Translated" 7, 10. For "delusional" see Heather Keenleyside, *Animals and Other People*, 125. For "mad" and "of questionable sanity" see Julia Goldberg, "Houyhnhnm Subtext," 269.

7. For example, Sir Walter Scott referred to Swift's "incipient mental disease" meaning madness—the proof of which was his extreme misanthropy (Williams, *Critical Heritage* 290, 312-13). Orrery, Warton, Young and Jeffrey also thought Swift's "philosophy ... the result of a diseased mind" (Wedel 24). He was retrospectively diagnosed with Ménière's disease, a malady of the inner ear.

8. A notable (perhaps only) exception is Anne Cline Kelly who has also questioned this assumption in her perceptive analysis of Gulliver's positioning as both pet and pet keeper. See "Gulliver as Pet and Pet Keeper: Talking Animals in Book 4." pp. 323-349.

9. Claude Rawson provides an extended discussion of Swift and Montaigne's similarities regarding the topos that "man is worse than a beast" in terms of ethnographic studies of indigenous cannibalism and how it compares to atrocities of Western Colonialism. He notes even domestic instances such as the cannibalistic victimization of French Huguenots by Catholics in Montaigne's time. See chapter one, "Indians and Irish from Montaigne to Swift," pp. 17-91.

10. All quotes from Montaigne are from the *Apology* although I make a reference to his essay "Of Cruelty."

11. See Toulmin's magisterial monograph *Cosmopolis* for an extended analysis of the Montaignian-Cartesian controversy.

12. I would stress, as does Melehy, that an allegorical interpretation does not deny the literal aspect of “animal *qua* animal” in Montaigne’s writing. Melehy writes, “the function of the allegory is to describe the limiting of real animals,” but he also considers the rhetorical aspects of literary play in Montaigne’s writing (273).

13. For a discussion of a “bi-constructivist” approach to human and animal relationships in contemporary ethology, see Dominique Lestel, p. 187

14. Anne Cline Kelly likens Gulliver’s state of mind when he returns to “post-traumatic stress syndrome.” See “Gulliver as Pet,” p. 339.

15. This insight is inspired by Jacques Derrida’s encapsulation of the Western philosophical tradition’s (non)engagement with the “seeing animal” as an “immense disavowal,” but it was there in Swift long before (*Animal* 14).

16. See J. Paul Hunter for a concise treatment of *Gulliver’s Travels* and the realistic novel.

17. Bougeant was exiled for a time to La Flèche where Descartes was educated, not for his theological theory accounting for animal intelligence by attributing it to demonic possession, but most likely because his real intent was a satire of Jesuit “sophistry” (Harrison, “God” 75).

18. Swift’s references to vivisection and the mistreatment of horses are additional examples of animal corporeal vulnerability in *Gulliver’s Travels*. In using the phrase “semiotic vulnerability,” I am alluding to Jacques Derrida’s highly compelling discussion of the umbrella signifier “animal,” which others all non-human beings. He writes, “The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the

authority to give to the living other” (23).

19. For an in-depth examination of humans privy to animal language see Tess Cosslett’s *Talking Animals in British Children’s Fiction, 1786-1914*.

20. I do not intend to imply reductively that all scientists, anatomists, or ethologists, etc., are unfeeling or unethical regarding animals. Sometimes in his private correspondence, Descartes seemed vague on these matters, and he even doted on a pet dog named “Mr. Grat” (Mr. Scratch). See Peter Harrison, “Descartes on Animals” (220). Yet once the theory was let loose in the *Discourse* like Frankenstein’s monster, it was sometimes used to deny animals pain, which I will discuss in chapter four.

21. Donald Keesey’s “The Distorted Image: Swift’s Yahoos and the Critics” provides an illuminating argument that Swift positions the human lower than the Yahoo.

22. Williamson notes following information from Boswell’s *Life* that Johnson “may have visited Smart in the asylum at this date” (*PW* vol. 1 114). This portion of the poem where the line about Johnson appears was written between June 12, 1762 and January 30, 1763 (Williamson *PW* vol. 1 108).

23. It was William H. Bond, in his 1954 edition of *Jubilate Agno*, the second ever published, who first proposed the generally accepted arrangement of Smart’s surviving folio fragments into corresponding “Let” and “For” lines which the first editor William Force Stead had published in separate sections. Bond argued that Smart had modeled his poem on the antiphonal structure of the Hebrew psalter, based on Smart’s personal acquaintance with Robert Lowth whose 1753 *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* was a “pioneering study” of the bible as literature (20). Harriet Guest has persuasively argued for a revised view based on other OT

structures, namely the book of Job, in which the “Let” verses are “dependent solely upon one another, forming a sublime mode of poetry through the inter-connections created by their external exhibition of structural parallelism, ... and the reflection of this in their internal, antiphonal parallelism” (142).

24. See, for example, D.J. Greene’s pioneering 1953 “Smart, Berkeley, The Scientists and the Poets—A Note on Eighteenth-Century Anti-Newtonianism.” John Block Friedman calls Newton “[o]ne of Smart’s favorite scapegoats,” writing that “Smart connects Newton and the Newtonians with the Deist emphasis on natural religion as well as with the Mechanists’ rejection of spirit” (253). Rosalind Powell claims that Smart’s work “characterizes Newtonian science as a misreading of the world and its mistranslation into vain human language” (“Systema” 365). Karina Williamson observes that Smart’s “outright rejection of Newtonian science in *Jubilate Agno* was a new feature of his poetry” and probably influenced by John Hutchinson’s *Moses Principia*, which was a refutation of Newton based on the biblical book of Genesis (*PW* vol. 1 131). She claims that Smart is rebutting the “metaphysical foundations of science itself” (“Principia” 414).

25. Christopher Devlin also discusses the questionable circumstances surrounding Smart’s confinement. See chapters seven and eight, pp 88-127.

26. This and all subsequent Smart citations are from the Williamson edition.

27. Menely’s interest in the intersection of zoosemiotics and literary studies is like mine. His compelling *The Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* focuses on the sensibility movement and the later animal rights movement, in general, while I focus on natural theology and the Montaignian-Cartesian divide.

28. This well-wrought phrase is Geoffrey Hartman's. He compares Jeoffry's spiritual moves to Ignatius of Loyola's "spiritual exercises" (440). The sense is primarily metaphorical, and he does not follow it with an examination focused on Jeoffry's actual movements (440).

29. Douglas Gray suggests that Pangur Ban is perhaps the "remote ancestor" of Jeoffry (191).

30. Ironically, it was Seaton's contribution to the University of Cambridge which founded the annual poetry contest on sacred subjects which Smart won on five occasions, establishing his poetic reputation.

31. Coincidentally, friends of Cowper, who also suffered from madness, saved the manuscript version of *Jubilate Agno*. William Haley and the Reverend Thomas Carwardine studied Smart's manuscript for insight into "poetic mania" (Blaydes 97). The poem remained unknown for nearly two hundred years until William Force Stead found the manuscript in the library of Carwardine's great-grandson, Colonel. W. G. Carwardine Probert.

32. My use of the phrase "semiotic vulnerability" is inspired by Jacques Derrida and more fully elaborated below.

33. For example, Laurie Shannon argues that figuration keeps animals in the "yoke of symbolic service" (5).

34. Kathryn Ready argues in "The Lapdog of Luxury and Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*" that the novel, whose canine representative, Chowder, "draws attention to the ambiguous role of animals in the eighteenth-century literature of sensibility," is "Smollett's intervention in the luxury debate" (153). Smollett associates Chowder not only with Tabitha, the sister of Matthew, the novel's hero, but with the hero himself "to make the point that the male critic of luxury is not exempt from the criticism he directs at commercial society" (164).

In “The Lady and the Lapdog: Mixed Ethnicity in Constantinople, Fashionable Pets in Britain,” Teresa Braunschneider examines the satirical use of the lapdog in a letter written by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu “to show how Montagu’s reference to her own pet functions as a critical response to satirical representations of fashionable women as thoughtless consumers of luxury goods” and how Montagu’s deployment of the trope draws “parallels between pets and slaves in British culture” (32). Laura Brown claims that representations of the lady and her dog demonstrate how the eighteenth-century “imagination” “processed” the “encounter with alterity” [in the age of Imperial expansion] and “the idea of difference” (31).

35. For an interesting discussion of the “theoretical and practical” importance of dogs and the animal controversy in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century French discourse, see Christine McCall Probes’ “Controversy and Consolation: The Animal in the Royal Court, Madame and her Spaniels” (23). Probes discusses some of the many references to pet canines, Descartes, and the animal question in the voluminous correspondence of Madame Palatine, duchess of Orleans. Palatine corresponded with Leibniz and both believed in animal immortality (Probes 7). Probes notes that Palatine’s library contained Montaigne and that she was a serious student who would have read him, thus speculating she would agree with his argument that there is sometimes more difference between people than people and animals (23).

36. Burney was also familiar with the writing of Jonathan Swift and calls him “admirable” (ED 140). She also describes a plan to write a book dedicated to “Miss Notable,” the main character of Swift’s “Polite Conversation” (ED 314). Undoubtedly, she had read his human and horse conversations in *Gulliver’s Travels*.

37. Menely does not discuss Burney.

38. Seeber makes a similar observation (101).

39. Joyce Hemlow writes in her footnote to this passage: “FBA was perhaps unaware that *The Rights of Man* of Thomas Paine (1737-1809) had evoked not only *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) but also *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (1792) by Thomas Taylor (1758-1835) the Platonist” (305). I think it just as likely that Burney was indeed aware of this. D.D. Devlin interprets this quote as a direct reference to both Wollstonecraft and Paine (65-66).

40. Helena Feder makes a similar claim about the confrontation with animality (70) as does Jackson Petsche (104). I arrived at it independently through the intellectual investigation I have conducted in this dissertation, particularly my analysis of *Gulliver’s Travels* as a representation of a human who learns to avow his animality.

41. For example, Ellen Moers argues that *Frankenstein* is a “birth myth” that registers the horror of the exploitation of women, based on sexual reproduction (319). In terms of the colonized subject, Karen Piper argues, “the ‘birth’ of the creature in Europe could be said to represent cultural fears of the invasion of the ‘primitive’ in ‘civilized’ society, or the arrival of the colonized, in search of revenge, on the shores of the colonizer (63). For discussions of the marginalized Other, see Anne K. Mellor’s “Making a Monster” and Peter Brooks.

42. Scholars such as Jackson Petsche and Stephanie Rowe have also noticed this important detail.

43. This is the thesis of Bryce Christensen’s “The Apple in the Vortex: Newton, Blake, and Descartes.”

44. My effort to procure the 1813 version of this text where this quote appears for further

examination was unsuccessful.

45. This insightful interpretation of Montaigne's *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* as an allegory of the "limits of human reason" is Hassan Melehy's (273).

46. Anne K. Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Work, Her Monsters* is the groundbreaking study on this topic, particularly her chapter entitled, "A Feminist Critique of Science" (89-126). Karen Williams discusses vivisection and vegetarianism in *Frankenstein* framing it predominantly within arguments for animal rights.

47. I am indebted to Jackson Petsche for the inspiration for this idea. Petsche argues that Shelley critiques discourses of carnivorism and asserts that the creature, partially made from slaughterhouse refuse, is literally "meat resurrected" (102).

48. Critics have made similar claims. For example, John H. Lamb has argued that the monster's fall is not like that of Milton's Satan, but that his "fall" is "into culture and language ..." (303). The novel is about the "monstrous myth of identity that leads to violence" and demonstrates that "being is a verbal construct" (305). Shelley presents language not as a "transcendental" means to escape prescribed identities, but as monstrous in itself (312). However, I argue Shelley reveals how notions of human identity arising out of theories of language as philosophical/epistemological premises precipitates the violence done to animals, which is the foundation of cultural transference to violence against humans. Therefore, language is not monstrous; the monstrosity is the ontological theory deduced from the phenomenon of verbal language.

49. I am aware that my emphasis on the Cartesian paradigm leaves out the influence of the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition teaching human dominion over the earth and its animals as

discussed, for example, by Lynn White. However, Descartes is a product of that system, and my emphasis is the alternate biblical tradition of natural theology so influential on thinkers like Montaigne.

50. The relative merits of the 1818 and the 1831 editions of *Frankenstein* have been debated by scholars. There is what might be called a purist school who have argued that Shelley's revisions for the 1831 edition indicate her bowing to conservative religious and social pressures. For instance, Anne K. Mellor, who prefers the 1818 edition, set the tone in her landmark monograph about Shelley. However, scholars such as Nora Crook and James O'Rourke belong to what could be called the "revisionist" school and have persuasively argued that the 1831 edition deepens the moral implications of the original, and that therefore the work deserves its own merited status.

51. This interpretation of Wittgenstein comes from Gary W. Levvis (170).

52. The appearance of "Frankenstein" as a shambling green zombie in popular culture is so pervasive that I hardly need draw attention to the significance of what may be, in some respects, a more accurate visualization of the creature's actual appearance. It is interesting to note, however, that the green pallor has stuck to Shelley's character nearly since his creation. Angela Wright observes that it was the hugely popular 1823 dramatic adaptation of *Frankenstein* by Richard Brinsley Peake entitled *Presumption, or the Fate of Frankenstein* in which Victor first "shrieked 'It lives!'" which propelled what had otherwise been a lackluster reception of the novel, commenting that the "greenish face" had its inception here (3-4).

53. This discussion of "grin" and the following is based on the entry for the word in *Oxford English Dictionary*.

54. The second entry in the OED gives the definition of a “forced” or “clownish” smile associated with “grin” now.

55. The word “torture” appears in eleven instances in the 1818 and twelve in the 1831 editions.

56. For example, Stephen C. Behrendt has observed, “the importance of language and its inadequacy in communication are stressed repeatedly by all the major characters” in *Frankenstein* (80).

57. Anne Cline Kelly has made a similar suggestion writing, “Gulliver acquires an oxymoronic label—‘wonderful Yahoo’—to denote his hybrid character” (327). The context of Kelly’s observations is the cultural interest in the weird, including people who were viewed as hybrids such as the “primitive” people who “supposedly mate with animals, such as the Irish with wolves” (328). What I am arguing, however, is that Gulliver’s horse-like semiosis is Swift’s demonstration of human ontological ambiguity vis à vis the animals and language debate.

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Appendix



Mr. Kitty. Dana Laitinen. February 25, 2019,
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