

“Created for Our Convenience”:

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Human Use of Animals in the Novels of Anne Brontë

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## **Statement of Originality**

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Research at Macquarie University. I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work, and that all reference to the work of others has been fully documented.

This thesis has not previously in any form been submitted for assessment in any formal course of study.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Elizabeth King', written in a cursive style.

Elizabeth King

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## Abstract

Depictions of human use of animals form an important aspect of Anne Brontë's broader critique of structures of control and domination in her society. From working horses to lap dogs to hunted prey, her representations of animals dominated by human characters reveal an underlying critique of a society governed by an instrumental attitude to animals. Harriet Ritvo has noted the general Victorian understanding that animals "had been created for human use" ("Learning" 37). This thesis explores how Brontë critically engages with the idea that animals exist in order to be used by people and her examination of how the otherness of animal experience is used to justify practices of domination. Beginning with Brontë's scenes of overt violence against animals, I draw out how these scenes expose the position of animals within human society. In the second chapter I consider Brontë's interrogation of contrasting structures of control that inform relationships between humans and domestic animals. Finally, I examine her exploration of alternative ways of relating to animals, and her positive engagement with both relations of use and understandings of difference between human and animal experience. In all three chapters, I examine her representations of physical use of animals, as well as how she interrogates the conceptual use of animals within figurative language. This discussion focuses on both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

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## Introduction

“I’m not a bird, and I can’t feel what I do to them.” These are the words of seven-year-old Tom Bloomfield justifying his torture of a nest of baby birds in Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (20). This understanding of otherness as a justification for cruelty towards animals is something Brontë continually grapples with in her depictions of relations between humans and animals. When Tom’s general enjoyment of trapping animals culminates in plans to torture the nest of birds, Agnes herself destroys the nestlings to prevent their torture. She is later taken to task by Tom’s mother for not allowing him to keep the birds. “You seem to have forgotten” Mrs Bloomfield tells Agnes, “that the creatures were all created for our convenience” (47).

It is the combination of these understandings of “convenience” and otherness that drives the research direction of this thesis. I explore how Brontë critically engages with the idea that animals exist in order to be used by people and her examination of how the otherness of animal experience becomes a justification for their instrumentalisation. From working horses to lap dogs to hunted prey, her depictions of animals dominated by human characters reveal an underlying critique of how difference is used to justify practices of domination and exploitation.

Harriet Ritvo has noted the general Victorian understanding that animals “had been created for human use” (“Learning” 37). This thesis explores how Anne Brontë challenges this

dominant attitude towards animals in both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Her representations of human use of animals form part of her broad analysis of oppressive social structures, and she maintains an awareness of the link between animal suffering and both gender and class inequalities within her society. Cruelty towards animals does not merely stand as a prefiguration of violence towards humans, but forms one aspect of a society based on structures of control and domination.

This analysis will extend to Brontë's representations of both physical and conceptual use of animals. As well as examining the physical use of animals depicted in her novels, I also explore her depiction of how different characters use animals figuratively to express human concepts. In the first two chapters I explore how characters in her novels use animal figures negatively, describing other characters as if they are animals in order to justify cruel treatment or control of them. In the third chapter I explore Brontë's depiction of characters' figurative use of animals as a way to sensitively reflect on their own experiences, and the interplay between similarity and difference in her comparisons of human and animal experience.

## **Critical Context**

Anne has traditionally been the neglected sister of the Brontë family, with much more critical attention paid to her older sisters, Charlotte and Emily. It is only relatively recently that Anne has begun to receive considerable attention from critics and scholars. Much of this attention was sparked during the 1980s and early 90s, when a number of critics began to highlight her important feminist contribution. Seeking to claim Brontë as a major feminist writer of the nineteenth century, many of these critics particularly noted the subversive power of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall's* straightforward representation of domestic violence and a

woman who chooses to leave her abusive husband. Examples of this critical tradition include Elizabeth Langland's discussion of female desire in the novel and Juliet McMaster's examination of how Brontë's framing devices reveal gender inequalities within her society. An increasingly nuanced scholarship has also developed around Brontë's use of complex narrative structures, with a particular focus on the embedded narrative technique of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. For example, Maria Frawley examines how Brontë uses focalisation to subtly explore questions of subjectivity and identity, while Betty Jay interrogates the complex spatial politics of Brontë's novels.

Yet there remains very little critical work on Brontë's representations of animals. This is curious, considering how prominently animals feature in her work. The small amount of criticism on Brontë's representations of animals largely focuses on symbolic interpretations of the animals in her writing, failing to recognise her examination of the place of animals within society. In her 1986 study, *The Brontës and Nature*, Enid L. Duthie refers multiple times to Anne's "allegorical use of nature" (247), as well as her use of animals as "archetypal" symbols of "her own feelings" (108). Similar positions have more recently been taken up by critics such as Elizabeth Hollis Berry and Hilary Newman in their writings on Brontë's representations of animals.

The important tradition of feminist scholarship on Brontë's writing has influenced a small amount of recent work on how Brontë's representations of animals fit into a larger critique of oppressive structures within her society. These have usually concentrated on what Maggie Berg has described as the "specifically feminist politics of the structural links between women and animals in her writing" ("Hapless" 177). Scholars such as Berg, Lisa Surridge and Judith E Pike have noted how the animals that feature in Brontë's writing form part of her analysis of the position of women within patriarchal societies. This work has been invaluable in its



recognition of the complexities of Brontë's feminist politics, as well as its awareness of how Brontë's representations of animals tie into broader concerns about dominant social structures.

However, there is a tendency in such work to maintain the symbolic interpretations developed by earlier scholars, casting the animals in her work as mere allegorical figures that stand in as prefigurations of the treatment of women. This reduces Brontë's depictions of animals to symbolic representations of human experience and risks minimising the importance of her articulation of how animals are used within human society. The feminist focus of such scholarship also neglects to place as much importance on the much broader social critique Brontë is making of systems of control in society generally. Simply drawing links between women and animals in Brontë's writing obscures her critique of how practices of othering lead to a more widespread culture of domination. An in-depth analysis of how her representations of human treatment of animals fit into her broader critique of societal structures of control is lacking in analyses of her depictions of animals that have been made so far. The focus on similarities between women and animals in Brontë's writing also neglects to pay attention to her critique of how understandings of difference function to justify exploitative practices.

Another area that is generally lacking in scholarship on Anne Brontë is sustained, in-depth comparison of her two novels. All of the full-length monographs on Brontë's work are structured into separate discussions on each of her novels and her poetry. Similarly, articles in journals and essay collections tend to concentrate on either a single novel or her poetry. Direct comparisons of her two novels are rare. This may well be owing to the fact that there is so little scholarship about her. Exploring her writings separately is an effective way of drawing out the specific nuances and characteristics in each work. However, close comparative study of her two novels enables a deep engagement with the complex similarities and differences between her texts. This is particularly beneficial in examining her representations of animals, which

occur frequently throughout both novels. In order to most effectively investigate the implications of Brontë's use of animal imagery, each of the chapters in this thesis will incorporate close comparisons of both Brontë's novels.

## **Animal Studies**

This thesis takes the position of animals in human society seriously. My argument is based on an understanding that Anne Brontë also took the experience of animals seriously in her writing. The animals in her work do not simply feature as tropes or symbols of human experience, but are recognised as fellow creatures with experiences of their own. For this reason, my research is situated largely within scholarship that considers animal experience in depth, and is attentive to how animals are positioned within human societies.

A large body of recent historical work has focussed on contextualising understandings of animals in Victorian England. Ritvo's work has been highly influential in this field, especially since the publication of her seminal study on Victorian understandings of animals, *The Animal Estate*. Since then, similar approaches have been taken up by many authors. Particularly applicable to my research area is Ivan Kreilkamp's examination of the development of anti-cruelty laws, Donna Landry's work on changing attitudes to horsemanship and Keridiana W. Chez's critical analysis of masculinity and affect in Victorian relationships with companion animals.

In the introduction to a recent collection of essays on Victorian conceptions of animals, *Victorian Animal Dreams*, Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay acknowledge that their “greatest debt” is to “Ritvo's legacy” (3). They highlight her drawing together of

different examples of a general attitude of domination of animals that predominated in nineteenth-century England. They then go on to note that their collection “also complicates that legacy, questioning the sufficiency of 'domination' as a master rubric by which to think through relations between humans and other animals in the nineteenth century” (3). I also extend my research to examine Brontë’s exploration of alternative ways of engaging with animals. While I draw attention to Brontë’s critique of the instrumentalised position of animals within her society, I also emphasise her engagement with other complex conceptualisations of animals.

A limited amount of scholarship on Brontë has already drawn on the work that has been done on conceptions of animals in Victorian England. In an essay on Emily Brontë’s representations of animals, Surridge refers to Ritvo’s work and suggests that the writings of both Anne and Charlotte “clearly embody this human-centred view of animal-human relationships” and “reproduce the quintessentially Victorian gesture of confounding humane treatment of animals” with the “suppression of dangerous or violent elements of human society” (“Animals” 161). This dismissive comparison neglects to recognise Anne Brontë’s sophisticated critique of the position of animals in her society. Indeed, describing Brontë’s depictions of animals as “quintessentially Victorian” is both dismissive of the complexities inherent in Brontë’s writing, and reductive of the multiplicity of Victorian understandings of animals into a “quintessential” quality. Ritvo herself has noted recently that it is “difficult to identify any particular view as distinctively characteristic of the Enlightenment or the nineteenth century” (“Animal Consciousness” 70).

In fact, given the many social changes taking place in the nineteenth century, human understandings of animals were rapidly shifting, and multiple contradictory points of view were apparent in people’s perspectives. This has been explored in depth by scholars such as Diana Donald and Teresa Mangum, who specifically note the complex ambiguities inherent in

Victorian understandings of animals. At the beginning of her study on representations of animals in British artwork of the period, Donald notes that “what is striking is not a trajectory of comprehensive change in attitudes to animals, but the simultaneity of widely differing and indeed contradictory emotions and opinions” (*Picturing* 10). Danahay similarly notes, “The history of the relations between humans and animals in the Victorian period is a diverse, contradictory and complex field” (116). Such complexities are apparent in Brontë's representations of characters' struggles to conceptualise and engage with animal experience.

In order to further explore the contradictions, uncertainties and paradoxes inherent in Brontë's writing of animals, I incorporate recent work being done to reconceptualise understandings of animals. As Donald notes “The strangely divided consciousness of human beings in their attitudes to animals is not peculiar to the Georgian or Victorian age... Like our ancestors we are capable of viewing animals both as fellow-beings... *and* as objects to be used” (*Picturing* 305). A similar ambiguity can be seen to dominate both Victorian and contemporary understandings of animals. Indeed, variants of many of the same issues continue to be grappled with by current theorists and many of these frameworks are highly pertinent to my analysis of Brontë's challenging representations of the use of animals within human society. I therefore draw on the recently developed discipline of Animal Studies and new theories that re-conceptualise animals and their relationships with humans.

As Animal Studies is a relatively new field of inquiry, there remains no agreed-upon definition of the area. Matthew Calarco remarks on this lack of definition before suggesting that “the main stakes of the field lie in the effort to place questions concerning animals at the center of critical inquiry” (2). This is a direct reference to Jacques Derrida's work on “the question of the animal” (8), and is illustrative of how Derrida's unpacking of the traditional role of animals within Western philosophy is generally considered highly influential in this

field. In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida points out that the time is ripe for such conceptual work because “no one can today deny... the unprecedented proportions of the subjection of the animal” (25).

More recent theorists have been influenced by Derrida and draw on his work in order to develop their own lines of inquiry. Both Calarco and Cary Wolfe have noted the importance of Derrida's work for its careful examination of practices of othering in human societies. Also applicable to my research area is the work of Anat Pick and Donna Haraway, who both build on the work of Derrida. Pick interrogates the convention of concentrating on differences between animals and humans, instead proposing a focus on similarities. She suggests that “notions of embodiment” and a focus on the shared experience of bodily vulnerability can “provide a powerful antidote to anthropocentrism” (6). This attention to shared bodily fragility provides a pertinent lens through which to view Brontë's representations of how different characters respond to violence against animals. Meanwhile, Haraway's concept of ‘significant otherness’ challenges dominant understandings of interactions between humans and animals by developing a more equal reading of how animals and humans each take part in an interaction. This is applicable to some of Brontë's alternative representations of relationships between animals and humans.

Morse and Danahay also highlight the influence of Derrida and other Animal Studies scholars on their own critical examinations of representations of animals in the nineteenth century. They suggest that “while Derrida's approach is radical, the boundary between the animal and the human has long been unstable, especially since the Victorian period” (4). They highlight the connection between the re-thinking of animals in earlier periods and the extension of this thinking into philosophical fields of inquiry today. Calarco has noted the interdisciplinary quality of animal studies and suggests this multidisciplinary approach is

necessary because “we need to think unheard-of thoughts about animals” (6). Berg refers to this comment in reference to Brontë's writing on animals. She suggests in response, “Perhaps, however, we simply need to turn to unheard thoughts in existing artworks” (“Let” 20). This aim will also inform my practice of examining the representation of animals in Brontë's work. Much of the current theoretical work that deconstructs traditional understandings of animals can be applied to historical representations of animals to facilitate new readings of these representations. There are undercurrents in Brontë's writing that suggest a critique of what are currently understood to be dominant ideas at the time she was writing. Just as work is being done to reconceptualise our understandings of animals, such work can also be applied to writing of the past, in order to interrogate our assumptions about the ways of viewing animals that were historically available to people.

This is not to suggest that Brontë's work grapples with identical issues to those interrogated by current Animal Studies theorists. Rather, some of the recent theoretical work on reconceptualising both animal experience and human relations with animals may be a useful framework to apply to Brontë's own reflections. Applying new forms of philosophical thinking to historical writing on animals can reveal unconventional thought patterns and provide a productive lens through which writing of the past may be examined.

## **Chapter breakdowns**

My examination of Brontë's depictions of human use of animals is divided into three chapters. I initially examine how individual acts of brutality against animals are shown to be generally indicative of a societal attitude of instrumentalisation and domination. I then turn to more apparently innocuous encounters with animals, in order to demonstrate how Brontë

represents these interactions as also characteristic of dominant attitudes that focus on how animals can be used. Finally, I explore how Brontë gestures towards alternative ways of relating to animals.

Scenes of violence against animals in Brontë's writing are often deeply revealing of broader social structures of instrumentalisation and control. In my first chapter, I take as a starting point a number of key violent scenes from Brontë's writing that depict the brutal treatment of animals. I analyse these moments in depth, demonstrating how such depictions expose broader social attitudes to animals. These scenes reveal the relationship between the instrumentalisation of animals and the understanding of animals as other. By examining these passages in depth, I draw out Brontë's analysis of how violent treatment of animals is influenced by understandings of difference.

Having established Brontë's demonstration of how individual acts of violence against animals are situated within structures of domination (justified by otherness), I then explore more insidious forms of exploitation of animals in her writing. My second chapter specifically considers her critique of how structures of domination inform relationships between humans and domestic animals. In particular, I focus on the commodified position of domestic animals in the societies Brontë depicts, and how different forms of social control can be seen reflected in human treatment of animals.

While Brontë is sharply critical of the position of animals within her society, throughout both novels she also explores different ways of understanding and engaging with animals. In the third chapter I re-think Brontë's representations of relations of use between humans and other animals, and consider positive ways of conceptualising instrumental relations. I explore Brontë's challenging examination of ideas of difference between human and animal experience

and her depictions of empathetic relationships between animals and people that take difference into account, rather than using otherness to justify cruel treatment. Just as I re-think Brontë's representations of relations of use between humans and animals, I also examine how both novels can be seen to trace a development in the figurative use of animal imagery. In her exploration of different ways of using animals conceptually, she articulates ways of understanding animals that rely on challenging understandings of difference and similarity.



## Chapter One

### “Sport for Me in that Nest”

#### Paying Attention to Brontë's Scenes of Violence Against Animals

“Mr Huntingdon, all spattered and splashed as he was, and stained with the blood of his prey... came out of his way to meet us, with cheerful smiles and words for all but me.”

*(The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, 177)*

Anne Brontë's depictions of violence against animals do not simply detail the behaviour of brutal individuals, but in fact reveal the position of animals in a society determined by structures of control and domination. In this chapter, I investigate key moments that escalate into violence against animals in both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. I argue that Brontë demonstrates how cruel treatment is informed by a dominant understanding that animals exist in order to be used by people. This instrumentalisation is ultimately justified by an understanding of animals as other and the difference between human and animal experience. Paying attention to Brontë's scenes of violence against animals reveals her serious examination of the position of animals within human society, as well as how she situates this violence within other oppressive structures.

Lisa Surridge suggests that the significance of Brontë's scenes of violence against animals lies in how they “symbolically” prefigure violence against women (“Animals” 162).

She refers to Harriet Ritvo's argument that the animal rights movement in the nineteenth century developed largely out of a desire to enforce civilised society. Ritvo suggests that cruelty towards animals was viewed as “a predictor of future moral degeneration” and the motivation for the suppression of such cruelty was “as much to protect potential human victims... as to mitigate the suffering of beasts” (*Animal Estate* 131). For Surridge, this “human-centred” concern with animal suffering is apparent in Anne Brontë's depictions of violence against animals (161). However, this analysis does not recognise the serious attention that Brontë pays to the position of animals, and how she situates their oppression alongside both gender and class inequalities. Brontë's attention to violence against animals demands a corresponding critical attention, and in this chapter I seek to examine how these scenes of violence draw attention to the position of animals within human society.

When *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was first published in 1848, the novel's violence was heavily criticised. An anonymous review in *Rambler* describes the “offensive minuteness” of the novel's “disgusting scenes of debauchery, blasphemy and profaneness” (“Mr Bell's” 268). A similar sentiment is clear in another anonymous review in *Sharpe's London Magazine*, which emphasises the “disgustingly truthful minuteness” of the novel's scenes of drunken brutality (“*Sharpe's*” 264). In both these reviews, the novel's “minuteness” appears as “offensive” as its brutality. Diana Donald has noted the common “disparagement of detailed realism in art” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*Picturing* 41). She describes how “grand generalisation was the key to greatness,” while “optical 'minuteness'” was considered “myopic” (40). The criticisms of Brontë's novel reflect aesthetic as well as political disapproval, in that it is the detail with which her violent scenes are described as much as the violence itself that was found objectionable.

This correlation between politics and aesthetics is also apparent in Brontë's writing, as

her commitment to realism stems from a desire to represent unpalatable truths. Following the critical reviews of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Brontë published a preface to the second edition of the novel that responded directly to these critiques. In this preface, Brontë draws a connection between the novel's violent scenes and her own commitment to truthful realism. "I wished to tell the truth," she states, going on to emphasise her continuing commitment to representing people "as they really are," rather than "as they wish to appear" (29-30). She also refers directly to *Agnes Grey*, describing how her first novel "was accused of extravagant overcolouring in those very parts that were carefully copied from the life" (29), thereby extending this commitment to realism to both novels.

It is significant that some of the most violent scenes of both Brontë's novels depict cruel treatment of animals. Given Brontë's commitment to representing things "as they really are," it is important to pay attention to her realistic portrayals of violence against animals, and not simply read them as symbolic representations of human experience. As Marianne Thormählen has recently noted, many critics have pointed out how unexpectedly affecting Anne Brontë's representations of violence are and how they "really 'get to' the reader in a way that the worse brutalities of *Wuthering Heights* do not" ("Standing Alone" 337). This is generally attributed to Brontë's unexaggerated prose and inclusion of realistic detail.<sup>1</sup> This level of detail is not limited to depictions of violence experienced by human characters, and close readings of her scenes of violence against animals reveal a committed attention to detail.

When Arthur Huntingdon attacks his own spaniel in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, it is the inclusion of realistic detail that makes the scene so powerfully believable. This incident is narrated by Arthur's wife, Helen, and Brontë's controlled, straightforward prose draws effective

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<sup>1</sup> While Robert Liddell notes simply that "Anne is more realistic, more visual, particularly in ugly scenes" (11), Edward Chitham directly compares violent scenes from *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to highlight Anne's commitment to unpalatable realism (102).

attention to how the violence escalates. Arthur is lying on the couch, when Dash jumps up on him and begins to lick his face. Arthur throws him off “with a smart blow” and “the poor dog squeaked, and ran cowering back to me” (225). When Arthur wakes up and calls Dash over to him, Helen describes how “Dash only looked sheepish and wagged the tip of his tail.” The subtle detail of Dash's “sheepish” wagging of “the tip of his tail” realistically conveys the dog's distress. This also lends a gentle pathos to the scene, ensuring that Arthur's response is all the more shocking - “Enraged at this, his master snatched up a heavy book and hurled it at his head. The poor dog set up a piteous outcry and ran to the door” (225). The detail of the book's heaviness and the fact it is aimed at Dash's head emphasise Arthur's cruelty, while verbs such as “snatch” and “hurl” convey the violent force of his actions. Dash's “piteous outcry” contrasts with his earlier “squeak,” drawing attention to how the violence has escalated. The realistic detail of this scene reveals the extension of Brontë's commitment to realism to her depictions of cruelty towards animals.

The shared vulnerability of Helen and Dash in this scene situates the brutal treatment of animals within a society based on structures of control and domination. Once Helen lets Dash outside, she herself is scolded by Arthur, who then notices her hand has also been struck by the book and is “rather severely grazed” (225). Surridge notes that “this scene positions Helen and Dash as joint recipients of Huntingdon's abuse” (*Bleak Houses* 77) as they are both injured. She goes on to suggest, “Violence is transferred from one to the other: while the man throws objects at the *dog*, the *woman* is injured” (77). Yet the violence of this scene is not so much *transferred* as *shared*. Helen and Dash are both struck by the book and a textual connection is made between them through this shared physical experience of the same act. Surridge suggests that Brontë uses “the trope of the abused animal” to imply a violent relationship between Arthur and Helen that is “suggested rather than explicit” (76). Yet the suggestion of marital violence is not solely what makes this scene powerful and Dash does not function solely to

represent Helen's own experience of violence. Rather, their mirrored experiences of this attack draw attention to a culture of domination in which all who are disempowered are similarly at risk.

Brontë's representation of the shared vulnerability of Dash and Helen's bodies can be interpreted as a challenge to power structures that subject the bodies of both women and animals to violence. Anat Pick has described “a powerful antidote to anthropocentrism” (6) in writing that explores the shared vulnerability of all bodies, as all life is “susceptible to interventions of power” (15). *Attentiveness* to the reality of vulnerability is an important component of Pick's theory. She stresses the importance of vulnerability as both “an object of attention” and “a universal mode of exposure” (5). Paying attention to the details of Brontë's scenes of violence against animals allows for readings of these scenes that draw out the shared embodied experiences of both human and animal characters. In these scenes, the disempowered position of animals is situated alongside other oppressive structures that subject certain groups of people to the control of others.

Deborah Denenholz Morse has emphasised the role of witnessing in *Tenant* and how different characters “testify to the truth of what they have perceived” (103). While Morse does not refer specifically to Brontë's scenes of violence against animals, the concept of bearing witness is particularly applicable to these scenes, as animals do not share human language and are unable to testify themselves to the treatment they have received. Morse stresses how characters report “the truth of what they actually see,” revealing a commitment to “openness and vision” (103). Helen's detailed recording of this attack in her diary enables her to bear witness to the violence both she and Dash have experienced.

Throughout this attack, Arthur's position of sanctioned authority over both Helen and

Dash is emphasised in the shift in how he is referred to as the violence escalates. Arthur is initially referred to simply as “he” but as he becomes more violent, Helen consistently refers to him as Dash's “master.” This serves to directly link his brutal treatment of both Helen and Dash with his position of authority. The association of Arthur's position of power with his brutality is re-iterated in a scene that occurs only the day after this incident. Helen and Arthur are arguing, and Arthur makes plans to travel to London. The servant, John, brings a message from the coachman asking if he could put off the journey as one of the horses is sick, and the following exchange takes place:

“Please, sir, Richard says one of the horses has got a very bad cold, and he thinks, sir, if you could make it convenient to go the day after to-morrow, instead of to-morrow, he could physic it today so as —”

“Confound his impudence!” interjected the master.

“Please, sir, he says it would be a deal better if you could,” persisted John, “for he hopes there'll be a change in the weather shortly, and he says it's not likely, when a horse is so bad with a cold, and physicked and all — ”

“Devil take the horse!” cried the gentleman” (227).

John introduces this request as respectfully as he can, as is evidenced by his repeated use of the phrase “please, sir” and long-winded expressions such as “could make it convenient.” In contrast, Arthur cuts him off every time he speaks. Arthur's dominance is further emphasised by Brontë's shift to the phrase “the master” to describe him. This use of the direct article emphatically highlights the position of power he has over John that enables him to interrupt his requests with his own demands. The positioning of this incident so shortly after Arthur's attack on Dash and the pointed reference to Arthur as “master” in both scenes contextualises his earlier violent outburst in a society based on structures of domination, in which women,

servants and animals are all similarly positioned. At the same time, John's concern for the welfare of the horse provides a marked contrast to Arthur's brutal disregard. Brontë's use of the verb "persisted" stresses John's courageous resolve in the face of Arthur's rage, indicating how seriously he takes the horse's illness. Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith note that the word "likely" here indicates a dialect word meaning fitting or reasonable (579). This demonstrates a brave attempt to stand up to Arthur by suggesting that using the horse at his command would be unreasonable. This realistic use of dialect to convey how John would speak is an example of Brontë's bearing witness to the kinds of interactions that took place between masters and servants.

This scene exposes the disregard for the experience of animals within the upper-class society Brontë portrays. It also reveals an argument against the concept of working-class brutality. The Victorian association of the working class with cruelty to animals has been well documented. Martin A. Danahay notes that "it was axiomatic for many Victorian social commentators that the working classes were prone to violence" (115), while Ritvo emphasises the "identification of cruelty as a lower-class propensity" (*Animal Estate* 135). Ivan Kreilkamp notes the link between this assumption and the development of anti-cruelty laws that focussed on working-class sports and working animals, suggesting that such laws "seemed to set a net designed to capture exclusively working-class perpetrators" (3). In this scene Brontë depicts a class structure that dramatically challenges dominant understandings of how people from different classes interacted with animals. John's concern for the horse contrasts with Arthur's careless instrumentalisation, marking a clear difference in the expectations and demands placed on animals by those who worked most directly with them and those who benefited from their labour and oppression. The episode is indicative of a culture in which upper-class "masters" were able to demand the obedience of servants and animals alike.

A similar critique of mastery is clear in *Agnes Grey*. During Agnes's first situation as a governess, she becomes aware of her own lowly position within a hierarchical society. At first Agnes is surprised that she is expected to refer to her seven-year-old pupil as “master” but soon realises that young Tom has been encouraged to assert his dominance from a young age. Tom tells Agnes that he is “obliged” to hit his sister “to keep her in order” (19), and Agnes soon discovers that “Master Tom” is determined to “keep not only his sisters, but his governess, in order” (26). Tom's masterful attitude towards both women and animals is clear from the moment he is first introduced to Agnes, when he shows her his rocking horse and insists she “stand for ten minutes, watching how manfully he used his whip and spurs” (19). Agnes says she hopes he will not use his whip so much when he rides “a real pony.” Tom replies, “Oh yes, I will!... I'll cut into him like smoke! Eeh! My word! But he shall sweat for it” (19). Tom's phrasing here is suggestive of forms of speech he has heard adults using. His emphasis on how the horse will “sweat for it” particularly reveals a social attitude towards domestic animals, situating cruel treatment of them within a culture of use.

Tom's inheritance of an equally instrumental attitude to wild animals becomes clear in the similar language he uses when he acquires a nest of fledglings that he plans to torture. “My word but I will wallop 'e,” he cries enthusiastically, “there's a rare sport for me in that nest” (46). Tom's reference to the birds as “sport for me” is particularly revealing. The word “sport” reveals his developing understanding of the function of wild animals as prey for hunters. He considers the birds as sport *for* him – they exist for his pleasure. This language exposes how Tom's behaviour is indicative of an inherited appreciation of the hunt. It is Tom's uncle who finds the nest of birds for him, thus explicitly encouraging him in his domination of animals. An earlier conversation between Agnes and Tom reveals the active role both his father and uncle play in the development of his propensity to torture animals. Tom relates how his father gave him a nest of sparrows the summer before and watched Tom torture them, telling him “it's



just what *he* used to do when *he* was a boy.” His uncle was also there and “he said I was a fine boy” (20). An enthusiastic hunter himself, Tom's uncle treats his own dogs “so brutally” that Agnes wishes one of them would bite him (45). A clear example of Tom's future existence as lord and master, his dominating attitude towards both wild and domestic animals is clear in his brutal treatment of both.

The emphasis on boyhood in both his father's and uncle's comments highlights the gendered implications of Tom's education into a future life of mastery. There is also a gendered quality to the anticipatory pleasure Tom takes from his planned torture of the nestlings, as he stands over the nest with “his legs wide apart” and “his body bent forward” (46). When Agnes destroys the nestlings to prevent their torture, Tom immediately appeals to his uncle to punish Agnes for ruining his fun. His uncle is “coming up the walk with his gun, and was, just then, pausing to kick his dog.” Tom runs over to him, “vowing he would make him kick me instead of Juno” (46-47). This direct linking of the embodied experiences of Agnes, the nestlings and Uncle Robson's dog draws attention to powerful social forces of domination that extended to the treatment of both animals and women.

By positioning Uncle Robson's kicking of his dog alongside Tom's planned torture of the nestlings, Brontë highlights the instrumentalisation of both wild and domestic animals. The detail that Tom's uncle approaches “with his gun” links his own hunting practice with both Tom's torture of the birds and his brutal treatment of his dog. A similar strategy of juxtaposition occurs in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Like Tom and his uncle, the aptly named Arthur Huntingdon is a keen participant in blood sports, and his dominating attitude to wild animals is directly linked to his brutal treatment of his own companion animals. This is apparent in Helen's anticipation of the hunting season during a period of Arthur's volatile ennui. “Happily, it will soon be the shooting season,” she notes, relieved that Arthur “will find occupation

enough in the pursuit and destruction of the partridges and pheasants... instead of lying under the acacia tree pulling poor Dash's ears" (238-239). Dash is Arthur's "favourite cocker," a companion animal (225). Arthur's brutal use of both wild and domestic animals is apparent in his easy transferral between the hunting of wild animals to the cruel treatment of his own dog.

Just as Tom's violence against the birds is coded with gendered implications, Arthur's aggressive enjoyment of the hunt is frequently associated with his treatment of women and there are a number of scenes throughout the novel that position hunting alongside courtship. Shortly after Helen and Arthur's engagement, Helen's uncle goads Arthur to join him in the hunt by demanding whether he is "too busy making love to my niece to make war with the pheasants?" Arthur replies, "I'll murder your birds by wholesale, just for keeping me away from better company than either you or them" (198-199). The association of hunting with romance in this scene situates both pursuits within a bloodthirsty culture of brutal domination. Arthur's cheerful use of the dramatic word "murder" to describe his killing of the birds humanises their deaths and highlights his similar attitude towards both prey and people over whom he has power. The incongruous phrase, "murder by wholesale," draws attention to the generally unacknowledged brutality of the destruction of birds in large numbers. In an earlier scene, Huntingdon declares "Humph! I'll go and shoot now" when Helen fails to respond to his flirtations, and later pointedly flirts with someone else while still "stained with the blood of his prey" (177). In these scenes Brontë hints at a society governed by a culture of violent oppression that (literally) bleeds into all levels of social life.

By drawing attention to the similar treatment of both animals and women, Brontë highlights how both women and animals are disempowered within a culture based on structures of domination, use and control. The gendered implications of how Tom and Arthur treat animals would not have been lost on a Victorian audience. Donald points out a perceived

ontological link between female experience and the experience of animals. The concept of feminine sympathy with animal suffering “rested not only on the gendering of sensibility, but on the perceived likeness between their fate and that of animals, as the frequent victims of superior male power” (*Picturing* 22-23). A certain amount of critical work has already been done in situating both Tom’s and Arthur’s cruelty within a general culture of mastery and domination. Maggie Berg notes that “Tom’s apprenticeship in ‘gentlemanliness’ involves learning cruelty” (“Hapless” 187), and reads Arthur’s hunting practice as a “ritualized enactment of men’s right to sacrifice” that “serves to maintain male dominance” (“Let” 24). Judith E. Pike stresses that violence against animals in both novels serves to represent a culture in which boys are “acculturated early on to assert control over property and dominance over women” (114). Both Pike and Berg draw particular attention to the gendered implications of Tom’s treatment of animals and how his attitude can be used to infer his future position of mastery. However, there has been very little critical investigation into what Tom’s cruelty towards animals demonstrates about his inheritance of understandings of the role and function of animals.

The factor that unites dominant understandings of animals with their brutal treatment becomes clear shortly after Agnes destroys the nestlings, when Mrs Bloomfield takes her to task for preventing Tom’s torture of them:

“You seem to have forgotten,” said she, calmly, “that the creatures were all created for our convenience.” I thought that doctrine admitted some doubt, but merely replied

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“If they were, we have no right to torment them for our own amusement.”

“I think,” said she, “a child’s amusement is scarcely to be weighed against the welfare of a soulless brute” (47).

This conversation between Agnes and Mrs Bloomfield situates Tom's violence within a culture based generally on the use and domination of animals. It becomes clear that Tom's planned torture of the nestlings does not simply indicate an individual propensity to mindless violence, but demonstrates the influence of a dominant understanding that animals exist for human use. While privately contesting the notion that animals exist in order to be used by people, Agnes voices only the less controversial distinction between use and gratuitous torture. Mrs Bloomfield's response that "a child's amusement" outweighs the "welfare of a soulless brute" reveals the extent of her own understanding of animals as convenience. A child's pleasure is considered more important than the experience of an animal being tortured.

This conversation highlights the use of religious discourse to justify human use of animals. Ritvo has highlighted the religious understanding that dictated that animals had been divinely "created for human use" ("Learning" 37). Mrs Bloomfield's own suggestion that animals were "created for our convenience" demonstrates this dominant attitude. Agnes's personal reflection that this "doctrine admitted some doubt" draws further attention to the religious implications of Mrs Bloomfield's statement, while Mrs Bloomfield's reference to animals as "soulless" emphasises her use of Christian discourse to justify the domination of animals. The understanding that animals have no souls is used to validate the hierarchical positioning of human convenience over animal experience. In Agnes's responses to Mrs Bloomfield's argument, Brontë presents an alternative religious point of view. Appealing to the very soul Mrs Bloomfield has claimed as setting herself apart from animals, Agnes quotes from the Bible (Matthew 5:7) - "Blessed are the Merciful." Mrs Bloomfield's response to this is telling. "Oh, of course! but that refers to our conduct towards each other" (48).<sup>2</sup>

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2 For an analysis of influences on Brontë's religious attitudes to animals see Marianne Thormählen (*The Brontës and Religion* 168-170). For reference to Brontë's belief in Universal Salvation see Thormählen (84-89), Miriam Elizabeth Burstein (443-444) and Alexander and Smith (516).

Mrs Bloomfield's emphasis on mercy as something owed only to "each other" reveals how much the otherness of animals is used as a justification for their exploitation. What becomes clear throughout both Brontë's novels is the insidiousness of how the lines around "each other" are drawn, the ominousness of how these lines shift, and who counts as worthy of mercy. The differentiation between "conduct towards each other" and conduct towards *the* other reveals how those in positions of power can justify the use and cruel treatment of anyone they like. The implications of the understanding of animals as other is a concern that continues to preoccupy much of the recent theoretical work being done on conceptions of animals. As Cary Wolfe notes, "Our stance toward the animal is an index for how we stand in a field of otherness and difference generally" (5). The designation of difference becomes a justification for cruel treatment of *anyone* deemed other.

This understanding of difference as a justification for use is also clear in a conversation between Agnes and Tom about the traps he sets to catch animals. After being shown his traps, Agnes asks, "don't you know it is extremely wicked to do such things? Remember, the birds can feel as well as you; and think, how would you like it yourself?" (20). To this, Tom replies "Oh, that's nothing! I'm not a bird, and I can't feel what I do to them" (20). In this response, the difference between how Tom and Agnes each understand the capacity of birds to experience pain is strikingly clear. While Agnes believes that birds can feel "as well as you," Tom devalues their experience because he can't feel it himself. The key justification here is difference. Because Tom is "not a bird" and cannot himself experience their pain, that pain becomes unimportant, and the ease with which he maintains his brutality becomes clear. Tom also does not precisely follow the logic of Agnes's question. While Agnes is suggesting that Tom should not inflict pain that he would not like to experience himself, he responds literally to her question by stating that he cannot feel the pain he causes, and therefore it does not trouble him. For Tom, the difference between the experience of animals and his own

experience becomes a justification for his use of them.

Brontë's depictions of social attitudes towards animals reveal how understandings of difference influence treatment of others. Frequently, this is demonstrated through characters' use of figurative language to designate others as animalistic. In both novels, there are echoes of Mrs Bloomfield's description of animals as "soulless brutes" in how characters refer to their servants and justify their treatment of them. Arthur refers to his butler as an "insensate brute" as an excuse for frightening him during an outburst of rage (266). Throughout the Huntingdons' brutal marriage, Arthur also frequently refers to Helen as if she is an animal, justifying his cruelty towards her. During an argument that occurs shortly before Helen leaves him, Arthur exclaims "She's the very devil for spite. Did ever any mortal see such eyes – they shine in the dark like a cat's (372). This comment associates Helen with both cats and the devil, in contrast to "mortal" humanity.

The reference to others as animals to justify cruel treatment is also frequently apparent in the language of the Bloomfield family in *Agnes Grey*. When Mr Bloomfield finds the children grinding eggshells into the carpet, he immediately loses his temper, exclaiming "How dare you make such a mess, you little d – 's." He then turns his attention to Agnes, with the cry "No wonder your room is not fit for a pigsty – no wonder your pupils are worse than a litter of pigs!" (41). The violent implications of this kind of language are made particularly clear when Mr Bloomfield flies into a rage one day when his children refuse to come inside. "Come in with you, you filthy brats, or I'll horsewhip you every one!" he yells (37). The telling detail of the horsewhip links the children's behaviour to the behaviour of disobedient animals, and hints aggressively at the corporal punishment this could justify. Mr Bloomfield immediately turns his dissatisfaction on Agnes, demanding of her, "What in the d – 's name, can you be thinking about?... it's very strange... you've no better control over 'em than that!" (37). Aggressive devil

imagery is combined with animal imagery, and Agnes is once again implicated in his association of the children with this imagery. Mr Bloomfield's aggressive language is reflected in his violent treatment of the children, which Agnes begins to see as the only way to control them. She notes, "Their father's peevish temper, and the dread of the punishments he was wont to inflict when irritated, kept them generally within bounds in his immediate presence" (26).

It becomes clear that Mr Bloomfield's use of aggressive animalised language and the pressure he puts on Agnes to discipline his children affects her own engagement with the children. She describes how he "would unexpectedly pop his head into the school-room... and find them... quarrelling over their victuals like a set of tiger's cubs" (40). The influence of Mr Bloomfield's aggressive mastery on Agnes is expressed in her mirroring of his use of negative, animalising language to refer to aspects of the children's behaviour. Describing the impossibility of her position in the family, Agnes notes "The name of the governess... was a mere mockery as applied to me; my pupils had no more notion of obedience than a wild, unbroken colt" (26). This sentiment is indicative of both Agnes's sense of the impossible role she is forced to play as a governess, as well as her recourse to simplistic animal imagery during this period. Attention is drawn to how the difficulty of her position directly impacts how she engages with the children.

Agnes's figurative use of animals to refer to the Bloomfield children is mirrored in her increasingly violent treatment of the children. As Marilyn Sheridan Gardner pertinently notes, Agnes "gradually" acquiesces "to the predatory atmosphere of Wellwood" (58). At first, Agnes attempts to practice a non-violent, persuasive form of pedagogy, noting how "in vain I argued, coaxed, entreated, threatened" (29). However, she eventually succumbs to the aggressive atmosphere that permeates the Bloomfield household, taking this out on Tom's sister when "exasperated to the utmost pitch, I would shake her violently by the shoulders, or pull her long

hair” (30). While a number of critics have noticed how Agnes's behaviour changes during her role as governess at Wellwood House, there has been little note made of how her treatment of the children is reflected in her reference to them as animals.<sup>3</sup> Gardner notes that Agnes transfers “her images of children from vegetable to animal” (58) but does not explore the aggressive implications of this use of animal imagery. Agnes's reference to the Bloomfield children as animals ultimately enables her to justify her use of the violent forms of social control favoured in a household dominated by Mr Bloomfield's “peevish temper” and brutal punishments.

These examples demonstrate Brontë's articulation of how difference and otherness are used as a justification for human use of animals, and how animalising language can thereby be used as justification of brutal treatment of other people. Akira Mizuta Lippit has directly linked the use of animal figures as metaphors to justifications of violence. He notes, “If one's victim can be seen as inhuman... one is then justified in performing acts of violence... since those acts now fall beyond the jurisdiction of anthropocentric law” (168). Wolfe and Jonathan Elmer also highlight how the “fundamental sacrifice of nonhuman animals” is necessary for the “ideological work of marking human Others as animals for the purposes of their objectification” (146). Wolfe and Elmer here draw attention to how dominant ideologies rely on a distinction between human and non-human life that deems any violence perpetrated on animals as justifiable because of animals' status as ‘other.’ The violence of this animal/human binary can be extended to treatment of people, once they have also been deemed ‘animal.’

Anne Brontë's scenes of violence against animals draw attention to the underlying violence that determines animals' position in human society and their status as other. It is significant that the most explicitly described scene of violence against animals in *Agnes Grey* is

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3 For example, James R Simmons, Jr notes Agnes's “degenerative spiral in both her theories and practice toward raising the Bloomfield children,” (37) and Betty Jay suggests that “the very means with which Agnes strives to regulate Mary Ann's femininity identifies her with the masculine violence she seeks also to curtail in Tom” (17).



Agnes's merciful destruction of the nestlings, rather than Tom's planned torture. Agnes's stark description of her killing of the birds contrasts to Tom's enthusiastic outlining of his brutal plans. While Tom is describing his "list of torments" with "fiendish glee," Agnes notes simply how she finds a "large flat stone" and "crushed them flat beneath it" (46). Rather than having Agnes find a way to restore the birds to safety, Brontë depicts the destruction of the birds as the only viable option to prevent their torture, testament to the brutal reality of the situation. This scene exposes the violence that underpins the position of animals within the hierarchical society Brontë portrays. Drawing on the work of Wolfe and Elmer, Danahay stresses the significance of how the "human/animal divide is based on a fundamental symbolic violence that is repressed and marginalized but underscores all representations of animals" (102). By examining artworks that depict domestic animals behaving violently, Danahay draws out how such works bring to the surface this repressed violence, thereby destabilising "the Victorian division between the world of private, domestic relationships and the public world of competition and conflict" (116). Although Agnes's destruction of the birds is another example of violence perpetrated on animals, it is similarly destabilising in its representation of a genteel woman's reluctant recourse to violence, rather than a young boy's jubilant torture.

Just as Agnes is drawn into a culture of aggressive cruelty in her treatment of the Bloomfield children, her merciful killing of the nestlings demonstrates the impossibility of remaining non-violent in the society she has entered. Gardner notes the complexities of this moment, pointing out how Agnes's "humane destruction of the birds" nevertheless means that she is "forced to spill innocent blood" (60). Yet unlike Agnes's aggressive treatment of the Bloomfield children, this scene is characterised by its emphasis on shared vulnerability, rather than difference. Agnes's brief note that she completes this act "at the risk of both making myself sick, and incurring the wrath of my employers" directly links her own embodied experience of fragility with that of the birds, and further illuminates her momentary rebellion

(46). This shared fragility is emphasised in Tom's immediate demand that his uncle strike her instead of his dog. This scene marks a turning point in Agnes's attitude, as she does not refer to other people as animals as a justification for cruel treatment again in the novel.

The shared vulnerability of Agnes and the birds is similar to the shared vulnerability of Helen and Dash I examined at the beginning of this chapter. Brontë's realistic depiction of both these scenes demonstrates an attentiveness to the “minute” details of the violence that takes place. The connections drawn between human and animal characters demonstrate Brontë's awareness of the similar forms of violence that animals and disempowered people were subject to. Yet these scenes do not solely use animals' experiences to “symbolically” prefigure violence against women. Rather, she demonstrates how both experiences are characteristic of a society based on a system of domination and exploitation, ultimately justified by perceptions of difference between human and animal experience.

## Chapter Two

### “The Sense to Know its own Mistress”

#### Brontë's Critique of the Commodification and Control of Domestic Animals

“I should like to be less of a pet and more of a friend if I might choose – but I won’t complain of that.”

*(The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, 215)*

In the first chapter I explored instances of violence against animals in each of Brontë's novels, and demonstrated how these individual moments could be drawn out to reveal the workings of a society based on structures of domination and the instrumentalisation of animals. In this chapter I examine how Brontë reveals structures of domination present beneath the most affectionate seeming relationships between humans and domestic animals. I focus on both companion animals and working animals – animals as pets and as labour. In particular, I draw attention to Brontë’s interrogation of how domestic animals are valued as commodities and objects of exchange. In the first half of this chapter I examine Brontë's interrogation of particular terms associated with companion animals. I then compare contrasting forms of social control apparent in Brontë’s depictions of the use of domestic animals.

Both Harriet Ritvo and Yi-Fu Tuan have noted the growth of the pet industry and the popularity of companion animals throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ritvo

emphasises that “the Victorian cult of pets was firmly established” by the mid-nineteenth century (*Animal Estate* 86). Both she and Tuan highlight how companion animals were used as means to ends, with pets functioning as status symbols and aesthetic objects. As Tuan notes, the rise of domestic animals is directly related to a history of animals being brought under human control, as breeding practices were specifically developed so animals could be used by humans. “Domestication means domination: the two words have the same root sense of mastery over another being – of bringing it into one's house” (143). More recently, a number of scholars have pointed out the rapidly changing status of companion animals in the nineteenth century, and the ambiguous position of animals generally as a result. As reliance on animal labour intensified and the presence of tame animals in everyday life became commonplace, animals were positioned as objects that could be controlled by humans and used for human means.

In the first chapter, I demonstrated how young Tom Bloomfield's torture of animals is ultimately justified by an understanding that animals exist in order to be used by people. When Agnes asks Tom what his mother thinks of his torture of animals, Tom replies, “She says it's a pity to kill the pretty singing birds, but the naughty sparrows... I may do what I like with” (21). The suggestion that it is “a pity” to kill “pretty singing birds” reveals an aesthetic value placed on specific animals, enough to discourage their unwarranted destruction. Later in *Agnes Grey*, following Agnes's second situation as governess, Brontë highlights the use of ornamental animals to display class and gentility. When Agnes visits her former pupil, now Lady Rosalie Ashby, she is taken on a tour of the estate. In the drawing room, Rosalie “shewed me her fat French poodle that lay curled up on a silk cushion, and the two fine Italian paintings” (172). This positioning of the poodle directly alongside the paintings reveals the place of animals within particular aristocratic homes. Rosalie's poodle is an example of what Ritvo identifies as “the incorporation of dogs into the rhetoric of social aspiration” and how the aesthetic value of

animals could be used as a marker of status (87). The detail of the poodle's silk cushion emphasises the aesthetic value placed on it. The poodle's frenchness is significantly noted alongside the “fine Italian paintings,” signalling the specific prestige associated with European ornaments. The poodle’s value lies solely in its position as an object.

Breed is an important signifier in Brontë's representations of aestheticised animals. Tuan notes that the poodle was already becoming “a fashionable pet” by the end of the eighteenth century (146) and how “human affection” for pets was “more likely to be directed to a type or breed than to particular individuals” (150). Dash, Arthur Huntingdon's long-suffering spaniel in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, is tellingly described by Helen as Arthur’s “favourite cocker” (225). A nineteenth-century reader would have been familiar with the association of cocker spaniels with obedience and subservience. By giving Arthur’s dog the same name as Queen Victoria’s famous spaniel, Brontë draws attention to the association of particular breeds with prestige and the growing popularity of companion animals with the aristocracy.<sup>1</sup>

Rosalie's poodle is an example of a companion animal thoroughly commodified and objectified in how Rosalie relates to it, as is clear when she first invites Agnes to visit, noting at the end of her letter “you shall see my poodle too, a splendid little charmer imported from Paris, and two fine Italian paintings of great value... and many elegant curiosities besides” (168-169). Earlier in the novel, Agnes's description of the Murray family's terrier, Snap, reveals an examination of the process of commodification. Agnes first refers to Snap one afternoon when she is painting a watercolour for one of her pupils with the dog beside her. She notes, “At my feet lay a little rough terrier. It was the property of Miss Matilda; but she hated the animal, and intended to sell it, alleging that it was quite spoiled” (110). The transition from the depiction of Snap lying at Agnes’s feet to the statement that he belongs to Matilda shifts the

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<sup>1</sup> For a description of Queen Victoria’s relationship with Dash, see Helen Rappaport (34-36).

register from a moment of shared solitude to a focus on material property. Agnes describes Snap as “an excellent dog of its kind” but notes that Matilda “affirmed it was fit for nothing, and had not even the sense to know its own mistress” (110). All references to Matilda in this description focus on her instrumental attitude to Snap. He is her “property,” “spoiled” and “fit for nothing.”

The emphasis on Snap’s unfitness draws attention to how he is valued for his ability to behave in a certain way. Matilda’s frustration that Snap doesn’t “know its own mistress” emphasises the importance placed on domination of animals. In order to be useful, an animal must first know who to serve. Agnes goes on to note that Matilda “purchased” Snap when he was a puppy, initially insisting that “no one should touch it but herself” but soon found looking after him too difficult. The emphasis on “purchase” again highlights Snap’s status as a product for Matilda – a product she is not prepared to spend time caring for.

From the moment Snap is introduced, his position as an objectified companion animal is immediately linked to Agnes’s own position of commodified companionship. It is just as Agnes is musing on how Snap is considered “fit for nothing,” that Mrs Murray appears. “How can you sit at your drawing on such a day?” she cries, “I wonder you don’t put on your bonnet and go out with the young ladies” (111). Mrs Murray pointedly makes it clear that she would prefer Agnes was outside with her pupils. She goes on to lament, “Oh! if you—if any governess had but half a mother’s watchfulness... I should be saved this trouble; and you would see at once the necessity of keeping your eye upon her” (111-112). Her long-winded diatribe, punctuated with dashes, semi-colons and qualifying phrases, highlights the tenuousness and ambiguity of Agnes’s position as a governess. By emphasising that Agnes is not a mother, Mrs Murray draws attention to how it is not possible for Agnes to develop the same level as authority as herself, while words like “trouble” and “necessity” emphasise the fact that nevertheless it is her job to

maintain this impossible position. This passage exemplifies what James R Simmons, Jr. has articulated as Brontë's representation of "the tribulations of attempting to serve as a surrogate mother while in fact having little of the authority or power of the natural mother" (26).

Like Snap, Agnes faces the constant threat of being replaced. The implication in Mrs Murray's speech is that Agnes will lose her position if she doesn't perform her duties satisfactorily. The subtle link implied by the positioning of Agnes's reflections alongside Mrs Murray's pointed remarks demonstrates how Agnes and Snap are both considered disposable by the family. Agnes's earlier note that she fears Snap will be "transferred to some rough, stony-hearted master" highlights the fragility of her own position (110). This sentiment is emphasised in Mrs Murray's later overt hint that "judicious" governesses must "devote themselves body and soul to their calling" (149). The subtlety of this particular hint is undermined by Mrs Murray's immediate interpretation of her own remarks. "You will excuse my dropping these little hints... Many ladies would speak to you much more strongly; and many would... quietly look out for a substitute" (149). Diana Donald has identified in the writings of Victorian animal rights advocates an increasing awareness of and discomfort with "cutthroat commercialism that commodified men as well as animals" ("Beastly" 528). The Murray family's attitude towards both Agnes and Snap is indicative of animals' commodified position within a hierarchical society, as well as the similar commodification of people in positions of servitude. The relationship that Agnes forms with the dog and the similarity of their positions enables her to develop a sophisticated sympathy with Snap's experience.

Agnes's developing empathy for Snap's position is most clear in how her reference to companion animals shifts throughout the novel from conceiving of them as "pets" to referring to them as "friends." In the beginning of the novel Agnes occasionally refers to her pets as friends, and appears to use the two words interchangeably in reference to companion animals.

When she first leaves home to become a governess, she describes her farewells to both her “pet pigeons” and her “dear little friend, the kitten” (12-13). Although Agnes refers to the kitten as her “friend,” her use of the term here is fairly condescending, considering the qualifying adjectives, “dear” and “little.” Her reference to the pigeons as “the pretty creatures we had tamed” reveals an aesthetic valuing of animals later associated with Mrs Bloomfield and Rosalie.

Early in the novel, Agnes also refers to herself as “the pet of the family” (4). It is clear that Agnes is dissatisfied and uncomfortable with this position, as she describes her family’s “ceaseless kindness” making her “too helpless and dependent” (4). Maggie Berg has noted how Agnes’s reference to her position in her family is similar to her descriptions of her companion animals. She points out that such comparisons are “eloquent of Agnes’ lack of agency” (“Hapless” 179). Throughout the novel, Agnes also becomes increasingly aware of the implications of how animals themselves lack agency. By positioning Agnes’s dissatisfaction with her status as the family pet alongside her belittling reference to her own pets, Brontë draws attention to Agnes’s initially shallow engagement with companion animals.

Agnes’s reference to the animals in her life shifts during her own experiences of commodified companionship. It is in her relationship with Snap that Agnes most overtly shifts her use of terminology for companion animals, referring to him exclusively as her friend. Brontë draws explicit attention to Agnes’s use of this language when Agnes meets Mr Weston and Snap again at the end of the novel. When she reports this back to her mother, she first announces “I met an old friend on the sands today,” then corrects herself - “Two old friends indeed” (188). This reference to Snap and Mr Weston using the same term links them together in a similar position in Agnes’ esteem. This indicates a more equal way of relating to the dog, contrasting with her earlier condescending reference to her kitten and pigeons.



A similar dialectic between reference to companion animals as “pets” or “friends” is present in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In the early days of their marriage, Helen worries that Arthur does not take her seriously but treats her as an aesthetic object. She notes in her diary, “I could do with less caressing and more rationality: I should like to be less of a pet and more of a friend” (215). Lisa Surridge argues that these early scenes between Arthur and Helen question “whether even the most loving affection reduced a Victorian wife to the status of a pet or possession” (*Bleak Houses* 91). She suggests that by “developing the analogy between wives and pets” with Helen’s “petlike status,” Brontë highlights “the political problem of men’s ‘ownership’ or control of women” (91-101). Yet while it is clear that Helen does not appreciate being accorded a “petlike status” herself, as the novel progresses she also grows critical of the positioning of animals themselves as pets.

This becomes particularly clear shortly before Arthur’s attack on Dash. During a period of ennui that soon develops into brutal violence, Helen describes Arthur alternately “petting, and teasing, and abusing his dogs” (224). This reveals the power structures that dictated affectionate relationships between humans and subservient creatures, and the abusive treatment that companion animals remained vulnerable to. Dash’s status as Arthur’s “favourite” draws attention to a tension between affection and cruelty in their relationship. This paradoxical state of being subject to both affection and violence is characteristic of the increasingly ambiguous position of domestic animals. Teresa Mangum describes the tension between “the devaluing of most animal life” and “the heightened attachment to *pets*” as an “inherent contradiction in nineteenth-century human-animal relations” (18). By positioning Arthur’s “petting” alongside his abuse of his animals, Brontë draws attention to the expression of this contradiction even *within* relationships between humans and pets.

This oscillation between exaggerated affection and brutal violence is not apparent in

Gilbert Markham's interactions with companion animals. His expression of domination is much more insidious. Unlike Arthur, Gilbert is never associated with the term pet, although he is accompanied everywhere by his dog, Sancho. Yet he does not refer to animals as friends either. The subtlety of control that Gilbert exerts over his animals can be used as a way to analyse the ambiguities of his character.<sup>2</sup> Both Arthur and Gilbert demonstrate an instrumental attitude to animals, but each uses animals in different ways. Reflected in these attitudes are different manifestations of domination and control.

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a fitting novel with which to explore contrasting modes of domination because of how it functions as what Juliet McMaster terms a “period commentary” (352). The novel is structured as an extended letter from Gilbert to his brother-in-law, J. Halford. In the middle of the letter, Gilbert includes a long section of Helen’s diary, which outlines her previous disastrous marriage to Arthur. Both sections of the novel are clearly dated. Gilbert dates his first meeting with Helen to “the autumn of 1827” (35) and the first entry of Helen’s diary is dated 1821 (148). As the action of the story takes place in two distinct time periods, it is possible to observe contrasting social orders and attitudes that dominate in each. Noting that it was common for Victorians to look back and comment on the Regency period as a time of excess and immorality, McMaster argues that Helen’s marriage to Arthur fails because Arthur is a typical Regency gentleman, while Gilbert and Helen both favour Victorian moral standards. This enables both “a period commentary and an exploration of society’s unequal expectations of men and women” (352).

However, change in time period alone doesn’t account for all the differences between

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2 A telling example of the critical debate that exists about Gilbert's character occurs in the collection of essays, *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë*. Within this collection, Marianne Thormählen and Andrea Westcott argue for opposite readings of Gilbert. While Thormählen suggests that Gilbert “changes decisively as a result of his love for Helen” (167), Westcott argues that Brontë provides “too many illustrations of [Gilbert’s] strong prejudices and manipulative actions for us to think [him] capable of the necessary metamorphosis” (223).

how Gilbert and Arthur relate to animals. Gilbert's status as a "gentleman farmer" (35) contrasts with Arthur's aristocratic position and demands an alternative form of domination in his work with both animals and labourers. Judith E. Pike has recently responded to McMaster's claims by suggesting that both Brontë's novels represent different forms of masculinity existing alongside each other, rather than associating Gilbert's and Arthur's behaviour with the values of specific periods. She suggests that Brontë constructs an image of ideal masculinity that contrasts with a "corrupted masculine ethos," and reads Gilbert as one example of a superior, controlled masculinity (118). Like Pike, I argue that Brontë depicts different forms of masculinity and control in Gilbert and Arthur. However, the image of masculinity that Gilbert represents is not necessarily any less concerning than the form exhibited by Arthur. While Brontë certainly critiques the displays of Regency excess and brutality evidenced in Arthur, she also demonstrates insidious forms of domination expressed by Gilbert.

Part of the difficulty of assessing Gilbert's character is his own unreliable narration and his control of the reader's interaction with the text. As Andrea Westcott notes, Gilbert is "at liberty to shape the past so that it will conform to his own perspective" (220). There are a number of gestures in Gilbert's representations of himself that suggest a deliberate alignment with particular forms of control. Many of these are reflected in his attitudes to animals. A telling example occurs at the very beginning of the novel, when Gilbert arrives home from the fields. His mother asks about his day and Gilbert responds with a long account. "I've been breaking in the new colt – no easy business that – directing the ploughing... for the ploughboy has not the sense to direct himself – and carrying out a plan for the extensive and efficient draining of the low meadow-lands" (36-37). This long list establishes Gilbert's embodiment of an understanding of animals as tools to be used in the production and maintenance of daily life. Gilbert's emphasis on his "efficient" management of his farm sets him up early in the novel as a foil to Arthur's spoilt outbursts of rage against animals and servants alike.

Yet while Gilbert's relationship with animals is less overtly violent than Arthur's, there is already an ominous quality to how he represents his control of working animals. His unclear description of breaking in the colt as “no easy business” implies a systematised violence, justified as part of the effective management of an agricultural property. His reference to the ploughboy “not having the sense to direct himself” implies a similarly dominating attitude to his labourers. This comment is reminiscent of Matilda's complaint that Snap has “not even the sense” to know his mistress and highlights Gilbert's controlling position of domination over his underlings.

Gilbert's emphasis on controlled use of animals is made explicit by how his response contrasts to his brother's answer to the same question. When Mrs Markham asks Fergus how he spent his day, he replies simply “Badger-baiting.” Gilbert then interrupts to insist “It's time you should be doing something else” (37). The bill against badger baiting was passed in 1835. This part of the novel is set in 1827, but the baiting of animals was already a controversial sport, associated with the working class.<sup>3</sup> Gilbert's response indicates an attuned awareness to civilised attitudes towards the practice, as well as a reference to the later passing of the law for the novel's readers. Fergus's abrupt answer contrasts with Gilbert's confident, detailed outlining of his management of his farm. Gilbert's depiction of himself in relation to his brother functions to represent himself as a superior, civilised Victorian gentleman.

Gilbert's long list of his day's pursuits is reminiscent of Agnes's first reference to Mr Murray, as “a devoted fox-hunter, a skillful horse-jockey and farrier, an active, practical farmer, and a hearty bon-vivant” (61). This description evokes the lifestyle of an energetic country gentleman and the enthusiastic incorporation of animals into all aspects of life. Unlike badger baiting, fox-hunting was an “upper-class” blood sport that was “left unregulated,” as Martin A.

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<sup>3</sup> See Martin A. Danahay (115).

Danahay notes (115). The contrasting attitudes of Gilbert and Arthur are reflected in the comparison between Agnes's two employers in Brontë's earlier novel. While Arthur and Mr Bloomfield are liable to fly into fits of rage, Gilbert and Mr Murray demonstrate much more controlled forms of domination. While this description emphasises Mr Murray's skill and proficiency with animals, his competence is subtly undermined a few lines later when Agnes notes that she frequently hears him "swearing and blaspheming against the footmen, groom, coachman, or some other hapless dependent" (61). This echoes Agnes's earlier reference to feeling "helpless and dependent," highlighting the theme of dependency that runs throughout the novel. Mr Murray's "skillful" management of animals is juxtaposed with his abusive treatment of his underlings, indicating the threat of cruelty they faced if they displeased him.

Brontë indicates an influence on Gilbert's refined, controlling attitude to animals by subtle reference to natural history terminology. Early in Gilbert's letter to Halford, he launches into a long account of his early love interest, Eliza Millward. After detailing her complexion and figure he goes on to describe her eyes as "narrow in shape, the irids black, or very dark brown" (42). "Irids" is a term commonly used by Thomas Bewick, a popular natural historian in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> While a number of critics have noted the influence of Bewick and other natural historians on the Brontës, little note has been made of the significance of Gilbert's reference to this term.<sup>5</sup> By using natural history terminology, Gilbert aligns himself with increasingly popular methods of classifying and ordering animals. Ritvo has noted the growing popularity of natural history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, suggesting that Bewick

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4 This term is used throughout both Bewick's volumes of *History of British Birds*. It is also included in his list of technical terms at the front of the book, in which he notes that Iris (plural Irides) refers to "the part which surrounds the pupil of the eye" (xxx).

5 The influence of Bewick on the Brontës has long been critically recognised. Jane W. Stedman has specifically drawn attention to how Gilbert's use of the term "irids" reflects the influence of Bewick, but only mentions this briefly in an article about Bewick's influence on Charlotte Brontë, so does not go into any detail about the implication of this usage (39). For more on Bewick's influence on the Brontës, see Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, (31-33). See Alexander and Smith (338-340) and Barbara T. Gates (251-259) for more on the Brontës and natural history generally.

“presented the animal kingdom as rationally ordered and easily comprehensible” (*Animal Estate* 14). Gilbert's use of this term draws attention to his status as a gentleman well-acquainted with new classification guides and ways of understanding animals. It is also an assertion of his position of recognised authority. As Ritvo notes, “this literature... simultaneously confirmed human ascendancy and supported the established social order” (42).

Gilbert's use of terminology associated with animals to describe a woman's features subtly positions women alongside animals within the social order, and demonstrates Gilbert's belief in his own superior position. Throughout the novel, Gilbert frequently associates Eliza with cats, at one point describing her tread as “soft as that of a cat” before noting that her manners “resembled those of a pretty, playful kitten” (42). Such descriptions mirror Arthur Huntingdon's language in the novel's internal story presented in Helen's diary. As discussed in Chapter One, Arthur often refers to Helen as a cat to highlight the difference between them and ultimately justify his cruel treatment of her. Gilbert's reference to Eliza's “irids” echoes Arthur's frequent descriptions of Helen's “flashing eyes” watching him “like a very tigress” (222) and shining “in the dark like a cat's” (372). Gilbert's use of animalising language to describe Eliza is similarly othering, yet his tone is less overtly brutal. His use of orderly scientific terminology to describe women suggests a much more controlled form of domination. His presentation of a particular understanding of social order demonstrates his commitment to a scientific and philosophical tradition that Jacques Derrida has described as a “discourse that never resists placing the woman and the child on the side of the animal” (57).

Keridiana W. Chez has linked shifting forms of masculinity and control with human use of companion animals in the nineteenth century. She suggests that “animal companions” were commonly used as “emotional prostheses” to affectively demonstrate the capacity to care for other beings (2). Chez emphasises that “gender discourses mediated” how these “interspecies

prostheses” operated, as “middle-class masculinity became redefined as the power to affectively connect with animals... thereby developing the ability to govern via affective intimacy rather than violence” (3). Chez's emphasis on governance “via affective intimacy” is a fitting lens through which to view Gilbert's attitudes to both animals and people. His relationship with his trusty companion Sancho forms an important aspect of his self-presentation as a reasonable gentleman. Naming his dog after Don Quixote's squire, Gilbert comically casts himself as a bumbling but gentle follower of codes of chivalry by reference to a novel highly popular with Victorian readers.<sup>6</sup> His relationships with animals form a crucial aspect of his self-presentation as a gentleman-knight.

Gilbert's relationship with Sancho also functions as what Chez has described as a way to “renew connections between humans *via* the dog” (3). By displaying his caring tenderness with a creaturely substitute, Gilbert attempts to forge deeper connections with Helen and her son. When Gilbert first meets little Arthur, he immediately notes how the child's eyes sparkle “with glee” when he sees Sancho (47). Gilbert is quick to use this connection to his advantage, calling the dog over to pacify Arthur when he falls off a wall. Gilbert later uses Sancho even more deliberately to win Arthur over. While visiting Helen one day, Gilbert notices Arthur “wistfully gazing” at Sancho (52). Gilbert apprehends Arthur's “timid disinclination” to approach, but gives him “a little encouragement” until Arthur is “induced” to come closer. Gilbert then notes, “In a minute he was kneeling on the carpet, with his arms around Sancho's neck, and in a minute or two more, the little fellow was seated on my knee” (52). Gilbert quickly transfers Arthur from his position beside Sancho to his own lap. His use of the passive phrase “was seated” makes it unclear whether Arthur climbs onto Gilbert's lap, or whether Gilbert himself places him there. Gilbert's indefinite descriptions of particular moments render

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6 For an analysis of the popularity of *Don Quixote* with Victorian audiences, see J.A.G Ardila (18-21).

precisely what has happened unclear and lend an ominous tone to his narration of events.

Gilbert's use of his dog to further his relations with Helen and her son becomes especially loaded when he gives one of Sancho's puppies to Arthur. Gilbert revealingly notes, "My first pretext for invading the sanctum was to bring Arthur a little waddling puppy" (93). It is obvious that Gilbert's gift is completely motivated by his ulterior motive of winning his way into Helen and Arthur's life, as the puppy is merely a "pretext for invading the sanctum". The language Gilbert uses is telling, unwittingly revealing the aggressive implications of his own 'invasion' of Helen's private space. This is highlighted when Gilbert goes on to confidently assert that this gift "delighted the child beyond expression, and, consequently could not fail to please his mamma" (93). The clear statement that the puppy "delighted" Arthur contrasts with Gilbert's hypothesis that it "could not fail to please" Helen. This suggests that Helen has given no direct indication that the puppy pleases her at all. The fact that Gilbert invades "the sanctum" to bring the puppy indicates that he did not discuss the gift earlier with Helen. The powerplay involved in giving a child an animal without prior discussion with his mother extends Gilbert's self-serving attitude to the puppy to the people he is trying to impress. For Gilbert, the puppy functions purely as a means to an end to further his relationship with Helen.

There is a telling similarity between how Gilbert uses animals to further his connections with people and how he uses Helen's diary in the development of his relationship with his brother-in-law. Gilbert's letter to Halford is an act of homosociality and the embedding of Helen's private diary within it is ominously revealing of his attitude towards his wife.<sup>7</sup> It becomes clear throughout the narrative that this use of Helen's diary as an object of homosocial

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<sup>7</sup> Both Betty Jay and Tess O'Toole have noted how Helen's diary functions as an object of exchange in the development of a homosocial bond between Gilbert and Halford. O'Toole describes how the "transaction between Gilbert and Halford" accords with Sedgwick's theory that "women are used as instruments with which those economic and affective bonds between men that structure society are forged" (718-719). Jay emphasises that "this passing of a woman's story between men in order to repair their intimacy represents an act of appropriation" (39).



exchange is not the first instance of Gilbert's exploitation of a living being in order to develop another relationship. Neil Hayward Cocks has pointed out how little Arthur functions as an "object of exchange" in a similar way to develop Gilbert's relationship with Helen (1135). Cocks draws attention to Gilbert's comment that "in love affairs, there is no mediator like a merry, simple-hearted child" (109). Considering Gilbert's opportunistic recognition of Arthur as a "mediator" in his romance with Helen, it is understandable that Sancho's puppy becomes a convenient "pretext" for winning over both child and mother. Just as Gilbert uses Arthur to become closer to Helen, so does Sancho's puppy become an object of exchange to win young Arthur over in the first place.

The understanding of companion animals as "emotional prostheses" can also be extended to analysis of Gilbert's relationships with other domestic animals. Already utilised for their labour, Gilbert's working animals also become objects in his campaign to further his connection to Helen by displaying his idealised masculinity. One afternoon Gilbert sees Helen and young Arthur, and heads to meet them with Sancho, who pounces on Arthur with "impetuous mirth" (74). This incident begins typically, with Sancho's enthusiasm enabling Gilbert to approach Arthur. Gilbert is then given the opportunity to use another of his animals as a means of furthering this relationship, when Arthur points to Gilbert's "strong black mare" and requests a ride. Despite Helen's initial objections, Gilbert takes Arthur for "a turn or two." His description of Arthur "enthroned upon his monstrous steed," "solemnly proceeding up and down" evokes a gentle tone of mock chivalry (75). This solemn gallantry provides a clear contrast to Brontë's depiction of Tom Bloomfield's vicious beating of his rocking horse discussed in Chapter One. Yet notably, when Gilbert "dismounted the gallant horseman, and restored him to his mother, she seemed rather displeased at my keeping him for so long" (75).

By describing the "gallant horseman" upon his "monstrous steed," Gilbert uses the

classical language of chivalry to evoke a gentlemanly masculinity. Yet this scene also reveals Gilbert's opportunistic use of his horse to demonstrate his own gentleness. Donna Landry has noted the changing attitudes towards horsemanship that occurred in England throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She identifies that during the eighteenth century, good horsemanship was equated with lighter control of the horse, rather than the excessive force that had previously been used. By the nineteenth century, ideal horsemanship meant achieving a “degree of subtlety of communication and control” (“Bloody Shouldered” 45). She suggests that “this language of the English seat exudes a theory of governance as well as an equestrian ideal” (46). In Gilbert's representations of his own relations with horses, he evokes this idealised form of subtle control.

However, a darker side to Gilbert's presentation of calm, orderly masculinity surfaces in an incident that occurs shortly before Helen gives him her diary. While Gilbert's jealous attack on Frederick Lawrence with a horsewhip has been recognised as the most violent act of the novel, little attention has been paid to an earlier scene of confrontation. Gilbert sees Frederick on his way to Helen's house and stops him, “seizing his horse by the bridle” and demanding to know why he is visiting her. Frederick's response is significant. “Will you take your hand off the bridle?... you're hurting my pony's mouth” (111). Frederick's concern indicates the painful force of Gilbert's grip. This exchange continues, with Frederick repeatedly stating his concern for his horse and Gilbert refusing to release him until the vicar approaches on the road and Gilbert immediately lets go. This sudden release emphasises the control he is able to maintain in this situation, as well as the importance he places on keeping up appearances in the face of social conventions. Landry describes ideal horsemen as “taking only the lightest possible contact with their horses' mouths” (*Noble Brutes* 69). It is clear from Gilbert's hold on the horse's bridle that he is capable of practising a form of control much more brutal than the way he presents himself to others. He is prepared to use this aggressive form of control, even while

maintaining an external presentation of idealised, reasonable manhood.

Within Gilbert's narration, it is unclear how tightly he is holding the bridle and how much pain he is causing the horse. Yet Frederick's continual reference to his pony suggests implicitly that this pain is substantial. This lends a subtle ominousness to the scene, with the horse's pain only hinted at and Gilbert's narration not allowing the reader access to the horse's experience. His language is notably equivocal. At one stage he describes Frederick's horse as "scarce less astonished than its master at such uncivil usage" (112). This description lends a comical tone to the scene that contrasts with Frederick's concern and minimises the distress of the horse. Describing his act as "uncivil" diminishes its cruelty, as well as highlighting Gilbert's preoccupation with the appearance of civility. The ominousness of his position as an unreliable narrator is emphasised. Unlike Arthur's attack on Dash which is later narrated in Helen's diary, the reader is given much less access to the experience of the horse than in Helen's sympathetic narration of Dash's experience.

Gilbert's aggression is clearly much more controlled and decisive than Arthur's outburst of rage. It is significant that Arthur eventually dies due to injuries sustained during "a fall from his horse in hunting" (427). Arthur's loss of control of his horse contrasts with Gilbert's maintenance of control in his relationships with both animals and other people. His gripping of the bridle displays a much calmer aggression than any of Arthur's outbursts and there is a striking similarity between this controlled violence and his treatment of human characters. His firm grip on the pony is reminiscent of an incident that occurs the first time Helen visits him. Gilbert is nettled as he feels she hasn't listened to him properly during an argument. As she is leaving, Helen holds out her hand to him. In response, Gilbert gives her hand "a spiteful squeeze; for I was annoyed at the continual injustice she had done me" (58). Selfishly regarding their disagreement as a form of "injustice," Gilbert uses an underhand form of

aggression to assert his domination over Helen.

Critical assessment of Gilbert is divided as to whether he can be understood to have improved over the course of the novel.<sup>8</sup> Gilbert's reading of Helen's diary is frequently interpreted as a crucial moment in his transformation, in which he begins to learn humility and respect. In these readings, his assault on Frederick and his earlier controlled violence towards Frederick's pony are situated before Gilbert's positive transformation. However, there are notable instances after Gilbert's apparent transformation that suggest that one thing that remains unchanged is his controlling attitude. Towards the end of the novel, when Arthur has died and Gilbert is waiting to hear news of Helen, Eliza tells him she has heard Helen is engaged. She begins to laugh, prompting Gilbert's response - "I seized her arm and gave it, I think, a pretty fair squeeze, for she shrank into herself with a faint cry of pain or terror" (464). In this case, Gilbert's awareness of the pain he causes is explicit. The detail of Eliza's cry suggests his disturbing lack of concern. The similarity between this squeeze, his earlier squeezing of Helen's hand and his grip on Frederick's horse suggest that Gilbert's maintenance of controlled aggression has not changed.

Throughout both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Brontë explores contrasting forms of control and domination of both companion and working animals. In particular, she draws attention to the increasing commodification and objectification of domestic animals, and their treatment as means to ends. In the next chapter I turn to Brontë's exploration of alternative forms of engagement with animals and her efforts to draw attention away from mere considerations of how animals can be dominated by people.

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8 For different interpretations of Gilbert's apparent transformation, see Melody J. Kemp, who suggests that Helen's diary and letters "provide interpreted experience that proves corrective to Gilbert" (207), and Tess O'Toole, who reflects that the older Gilbert's smug reflections caution the reader "not to assume too much about Gilbert's improvement under Helen's tutelage" (720).

## Chapter Three

### “All Kinds of Birds and Beasts”

#### Interspecies Relationships and ‘Significant Otherness’ in Brontë's Writing

“In sympathy for the busy citizens of the rookery, I regretted to see their habitation, so lately bathed in glorious light, reduced to the sombre, worky-day hue of the lower world, or of my own world within.”

(*Agnes Grey*, 176)

The previous chapters have explored Brontë's critique of the position of animals within human society. I now turn to her exploration of alternative ways of engaging with animals. This chapter contains a re-thinking of relations of use between humans and animals, and a focus on Brontë's examination of understandings of difference between human and animal experience. A tension between kinship and otherness can be seen to inform Brontë's depictions of relationships between human and non-human animals. I draw on Donna Haraway's concept of ‘significant otherness’ as an apt way of exploring these interspecies relationships. The second half of this chapter maintains a focus on Brontë's exploration of difference, but concentrates on her representations of figurative use of animals. In her depictions of characters’ use of complex animal metaphors to reflect on their own experiences, Brontë draws attention to both the commonality and difference between human and animal life.

In the second chapter I explored how Agnes's relationship with the dog Snap draws attention to the similarities of how they are each used by the Murray family. I now concentrate on Agnes's attempts to move beyond an instrumental attitude in her own relationship with Snap. From the moment Snap is introduced, Agnes contrasts how she relates to him with the Murrays' objectification of the dog. Her descriptions of her relationship with him are characterised by an emphasis on care. As Matilda soon tires of "so helpless and troublesome a nursling," she allows Agnes to rear Snap and Agnes describes herself carefully "nursing the little creature from infancy to adolescence," thus obtaining "its affections" (110). Terms associated with human babies, such as "nursing" and "infancy," lend a tenderness to this passage that is lacking in Agnes's descriptions of the children in her care. The reciprocal affection Agnes and Snap share enables the development of an interspecies relationship that Agnes values more than her flawed relationships with people during her time as a governess. Throughout the novel, Agnes continues to contrast her relationship with Snap to how other characters treat him. When Agnes and Snap come across Rosalind Murray and Mr Hatfield walking together one afternoon, Snap playfully grabs hold of Rosalind's dress. Mr Hatfield hits the dog with his cane and Snap runs back to Agnes "with a clamorous outcry that afforded the reverend gentleman great amusement" (112). Overtly contrasting her own behaviour with the cruelty of Mr Hatfield, Agnes notes how she "stooped to caress the dog, with ostentatious pity to show my disapproval of his severity" (112).

Yet while Agnes is firmly critical of other characters' cruelty, her own relationship with Snap is fraught from the beginning. This is largely due to their affection for each other, as this is a source of irritation for Matilda. Agnes describes Snap's affection as "a reward I should have greatly valued... had not poor Snap's grateful feelings exposed him to... many a spiteful kick and pinch from his owner" (110). Agnes's emphasis on how she values the "reward" of Snap's affection demonstrates the positive impact the dog has on her life. However, the fact that

this affection exposes Snap to violence emphasises the complexity of their relationship. Agnes goes on to question, “how could I help it? I could not make the dog hate me by cruel treatment” (110). This question indicates Agnes's own discomfort with her relationship with Snap. She knows that his affection for her will lead to his being punished, but at the same time enjoys his company. This taints the pleasure of their relationship.

The fact that Agnes does not own Snap allows their relationship to develop organically, yet this also ultimately means that she has very little control over what happens to him and he is eventually given away. Agnes describes Snap's removal from the Murray household as one of two “causes of affliction” that occur around the same time. The other is her father's worsening health. The clear importance of her father's illness and the noting of these incidents together indicates the strength of Agnes's affection for Snap. Agnes draws attention to the apparent discrepancy between the seriousness of the two events by noting that Snap's departure “may seem a trifle, but it cost me many a tear” (143). By highlighting the comparative triviality of the loss of Snap, Agnes thereby emphasises the large impact it nevertheless has on her life. She outlines further, “my little... bright-eyed, warm-hearted companion, the only thing I had to love me, was taken away” and goes on to describe Snap's new owner as “notorious for his brutal treatment of his canine slaves” (143-144). This explanation reveals a number of different reasons for Agnes's distress at Snap's removal. The description of Snap as “the only thing I had to love me” highlights the value Agnes places on Snap's affection for her, yet also emphasises her own form of instrumentalism. Snap's affection is something Agnes needs to feel loved. At the same time, her noting of his new owner's cruelty demonstrates her real concern for the welfare of the dog.

Describing the increasing popularity of pets and the Victorian “longing to believe in animal love,” Teresa Mangum suggests that “inevitably, animal attachment to humans is best

understood by humans when expressed as animal service *to* and *for* humans” (21). Agnes's expression of Snap's affection for her as a “reward” draws attention to her instrumental understanding of their relationship, as does her description of him as a “thing” to “love me.” Yet it is also clear that Agnes is aware of the asymmetry and inequality that exists in their affectionate relationship, and that this is a source of discomfort to her. The overt linking of Snap and Agnes's shared affection with the physical mistreatment Snap receives from his owner draws attention to Agnes's fraught, complex experience of this love.

This complexity is akin to the model of thoughtful engagement with inevitably asymmetrical relations between animals and humans outlined by Donna Haraway. Haraway points out that symmetrical relationships across species are generally not possible or even desirable. Rather, she maintains the importance of developing the most responsible and compassionate ways of engaging within unequal relationships that exist between species. Within this model, the love and affection shared between humans and animals can be understood as forms of use. Haraway suggests that “to be in a relation of use to each other is not the definition of unfreedom and violation” (74). Rather than denying the relations of use that exist between people and animals, she stresses the necessity of recognising these relations and developing the most responsible means of articulating them. Agnes's relationship with Snap exemplifies a similar instrumentalised but empathetic regard, as is evidenced by her description of his affection as a “reward.” Her question, “How could I help it?” reveals her uncomfortable awareness of the asymmetry of their relationship, and the element of responsibility she takes for Snap's wellbeing. As Haraway stresses, “the capacity to respond, and so to be responsible, should not be expected to take on symmetrical shapes and textures for all the parties” (71).

Haraway emphasises the *response* component of responsibility. In this respect she is



referencing and expanding on the work of Jacques Derrida. In *The Animal that therefore I am*, Derrida refutes the notion that language is what separates animals from humans by examining the concept of response. Derrida questions why philosophers have always denied animals “the power to *respond*” and insists that we “cannot treat the supposed animality of the animal without treating the question of the response, and of what responding means” (33). Haraway takes up this question of response and further considers how to recognise an animal’s response and then “*look back*” (20). This idea considers interspecies interactions as exchanges in which both participants are informed by the other and changed by the experience. She describes this process as “becoming with,” which she defines as “making each other available to events” (27). In Agnes’s interactions with Snap, it is clear that she is aware of Snap’s responses to events, and that her own behaviour changes as a result. Her recognition of Snap’s playful greeting and the inappropriately cruel response of Mr Hatfield indicates her direct engagement with Snap’s behaviour. Her comforting of the dog “with ostentatious pity” in response to his “clamorous outcry” demonstrates her ability to respond to his distress.

When Agnes and Snap reunite at the end of the novel, their reciprocal responses to each other are emphasised, despite their different ways of expressing themselves. Agnes is on her morning walk and about to turn back when she hears a “snuffling” behind her. A dog suddenly appears, “frisking and wriggling to my feet.” It is then she recognises him - “It was my own Snap... When I spoke his name, he leapt up in my face, and yelled for joy” (184). Agnes’s description of Snap oscillates between anthropomorphism and a marked awareness of difference. Descriptions of his “snuffling,” “frisking” and “wriggling” emphasise his unique creaturely movements, as well as highlighting Agnes’s recognition of Snap’s specific way of expressing delight. In the paragraph before, Agnes described herself as she “walked, skipped, and stumbled” along the sand. The use of three highly different verbs in a similar phrase emphasises the striking difference between how dogs and humans move and express emotion.

In contrast, the phrase “yelled for joy” is a peculiarly humanised way of expressing Snap's happiness. Combined with the earlier creaturely verbs, it emphasises Agnes's recognition and interpretation of Snap's response to seeing her. She then describes her response back to him. “Almost as much delighted as himself, I caught the little creature in my arms, and kissed him repeatedly” (184). Agnes emphasises the similarity of the regard she and Snap have for each other, despite the difference in how they each express this affection. When Mr Weston appears shortly after, his first words to Agnes are telling - “Your dog remembers you well, Miss Grey” (184).

Haraway refers to her understanding of asymmetrical relations based on empathetic awareness of difference as ‘significant otherness.’ She describes ideal interpecies relationships as relations between “significant others with whom we are in consequential relationships in an irreducible world of embodied and lived partial differences” (72). When Agnes reports back to her mother that she met “two old friends” on her walk, her relationship of ‘significant otherness’ with Snap is clear. Despite the fact that Snap and Mr Weston occupy very different positions in Agnes's esteem, she emphasises that they both qualify for the same relationship title. She goes on to remind her mother of Snap, “whose history I had recounted before,” and then relates “the incident of his sudden appearance and remarkable recognition” (188). By noting her previous recounting of Snap's “history,” Agnes draws attention to the importance of her friendship with the dog. Their relationship is clearly strong in her memory as she has made a point of describing him to her mother. The emphasis on Snap's “remarkable” recognition highlights Agnes's consciousness of the dog's own capacity to recognise and respond to others. This conversation makes clear that it is not only Snap who “remembers well.” The mutual regard they have for each other is stressed.

A similar emphasis on response is clear in Helen and Dash's interactions during Arthur's

assault on them both in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In the first chapter I argued that Dash does not function solely to represent Helen's own experience of violence but rather demonstrates a shared vulnerability. By examining what is shared and what is different in how Helen and Dash each experience this attack and the communication between them, it becomes clear how their separate experiences enable them to develop an interspecies relationship that becomes an act of solidarity in the face of Arthur's abuse. There are a number of moments when Dash appeals directly to Helen in this scene. From his initial "cowering," he eventually resorts to a position of complete appeal – clinging close to Helen and licking her hand, "as if imploring protection" (225). The phrase "as if" conveys the uncertainty of communication between Helen and Dash and the fact that Helen chooses to interpret him as directly imploring her. When Dash runs to the door with a "piteous outcry," Helen responds by letting him outside. This "piteous outcry" echoes Snap's "clamorous outcry." In both cases, Brontë draws attention to how Helen and Agnes both recognise and respond to an animal's distress.

The communication between Helen and Dash becomes directly linked to their similar embodied experiences of the attack, in that it is only once Helen lets Dash outside that she realises her hand has also been struck by the book (225). In Anat Pick's discussion of shared bodily vulnerability as a link between human and animal experience, she stresses the importance of recognising "the communicative pressures of vulnerability" (11). The shared vulnerability of Helen and Dash is what allows them both to communicate so effectively in this scene. Helen understands Dash's vulnerability because of her own position and this is what enables her to respond to his appeals. After Helen lets Dash outside, she asks Arthur if the book he threw was also "intended" to hit her, indicating her awareness of the similarly disempowered position she and Dash occupy (225). Although each occupy positions of dependency, they are also able to find ways to survive and eventually escape. This agency is made possible, in part, through crossspecies communication.

The difference in how Helen and Dash each experience this attack is also clear. Dash must communicate with Helen because he is unable to escape Arthur without her help. Unlike Dash, Helen cannot simply run outside in this instance. Yet Dash's escape from Arthur can also be read as prefiguring Helen's own eventual escape from the marriage. Dash does not function solely to symbolise Helen's experience – rather Helen learns from Dash's responses how to develop her own. It is the communication between Helen and Dash that draws out the complexities of their separate experiences of the attack, as well as enabling them to support each other.

A similarly complex engagement with both similarity and difference between human and animal experience occurs towards the end of *Agnes Grey*, during Agnes's visit to Ashby Park. Waiting for Rosalie in her sitting room one afternoon, Agnes gazes through the window at the "lengthening shadows" on a group of trees inhabited by "an innumerable company of noisy rooks" (176). As the sky darkens further, Agnes notes how "in sympathy for the busy citizens of the rookery, I regretted to see their habitation... reduced to the sombre, worky-day hue of the lower world, or of my own world within" (176). This apparently simple comment on how the darkening sky reflects Agnes's emotional state can be seen to reveal a thoughtful engagement with the lived experience of the rooks. The use of words such as "company" and "citizenry" suggests a kinship between rooks and humans, yet also highlights their separateness from Agnes. Her reference to their "busy citizenry" draws attention to the fact that she does not simply regret the dying light aesthetically, but because it means the rooks' work is cut short. The emphasis on light and darkness reveals an engagement with elements that affect the experience of rooks. Her added note that "for a moment, such birds as soared above the rest might still receive the lustre on their wings" suggests this light is something the birds themselves seek (176).

Agnes's use of the image of the rooks to express her own emotion combines both internal and external awareness, demonstrating real sympathy for the rooks even as she symbolically uses their experience to voice her own feelings. This reveals a complex figurative use of animals, as well as an awareness of the physical experience of real animals, emphasising both the similarity and difference between Agnes's and the birds' experience. This complex expression of both empathy and awareness of difference is apparent in the increasing sophistication with which both Agnes and Helen use animal figures conceptually throughout each novel.

A critique of simplistic use of figurative language occurs early in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, during one of Helen and Gilbert's first conversations. This discussion is not about animal imagery specifically, but natural imagery in general. Gilbert uses the metaphor of an oak sapling to argue that boys should be exposed to the rougher aspects of life, rather than over-protected. He suggests that a sapling reared in a hothouse, shielded "from every breath of wind," will not grow as hardy as a tree "exposed to all the action of the elements" (56). Throughout the rest of the chapter, Helen proceeds to pull this metaphor apart. She points out that he would probably recommend rearing a girl using the "hothouse" method he earlier criticised (56), thereby drawing attention to how Gilbert's crude use of this image flattens out complex questions about appropriate forms of education for male and female children. During her refutation, Helen elaborates on Gilbert's metaphor to summarise his argument, noting "Such experience... (to use a trite simile) will be like the storm to the oak" (57). Brontë's use of brackets indicates Helen's wry, pointed aside, implying the common use of arboreal metaphors to describe childhood. The implication is that careless use of common natural metaphors risks an imprecision that does not properly capture the topics under discussion or the natural processes being used to symbolise them.

In his recent study on metaphor, David Punter notes that while “metaphor undoubtedly deals in likeness,” it also “deals in unlikeness and dissimilarity” (9). He suggests that metaphor often “makes us look at the world afresh” by “challenging our notions of the similarity that exists between things; how alike they are; and in what ways, in fact, they are irreconcilably unlike” (9). Metaphor as an articulation of both similarity and difference implicitly draws attention to what is different by highlighting what is similar. Akira Mizuta Lippit has specifically associated the emphasis on difference in figurative language with animal imagery. He uses the term “animetaphor” to describe the “negative space” that the “animal figure has come to occupy” (162), suggesting that there is a “fantastic transversality at work between the animal and the metaphor... Together they transport to language, breathe into language, the vitality of another life, another expression” (165). Both Helen and Agnes use figurative animal imagery as a way to reflect on their own experiences, and their use of such imagery can be seen to reflect a nuanced engagement with both difference and commonality between human and non-human existence.

Derrida has specifically linked the use of poetic language with the development of human interest in animal experience. “Thinking concerning the animal,” he suggests, “derives from poetry” (7). In an analysis of his own autobiographical writing, Derrida notes, “my animal figures multiply, gain in insistence and visibility... as my texts become more explicitly autobiographical” (35). Animal figures become a way to think through parts of ourselves at the same time as thinking through difference. In Helen’s and Agnes’s use of animal figures to reflect on *their own* experiences, there is a clear empathy and engagement with subtle comparisons between human and non-human experience.

In the first chapter, I discussed Agnes’s reference to the children in her care as animals as a way to distance their behaviour and experience from her own. As the novel progresses,

Agnes's use of animal imagery shifts considerably and her later use of animal metaphors to reflect on her own experience demonstrates a movement away from simplistic use of animal figures to designate difference. Towards the end of her stay in the Murray household, Agnes uses a series of animal metaphors to describe the intricacies of emotion she feels about her appearance. Reflecting on Rosalind Murray's beauty in comparison to herself, Agnes uses the analogy of animal kinship to expand on her understanding of the relationship between aesthetics and affection. She begins by noting, "A little girl loves her bird... Why?... Because it lives and feels, because it is helpless and harmless" (134). Brontë's use of ellipses and direct questions highlights Agnes's struggle to work through her understanding of the development of affection. At the same time, she also engages in complex questions about how to define relationships between people and animals. She goes on to note, "A toad, likewise, lives and feels, and is equally helpless and harmless; but... she cannot love it like the bird, with its graceful form, soft feathers and bright, speaking eyes" (134). By drawing out the lived experience of the toad, in comparison to the physical description of the bird, Agnes evokes a compassion for animal experience that extends beyond aesthetic appreciation. Although she uses the toad to represent her own loneliness, there is also a real sense that Agnes cares about the fact toads aren't appreciated by people in the same way as birds.

From this comparison, Agnes moves immediately to another animal image to reflect on how she feels "debarred" from love because of remaining unnoticed. She notes, "as well might the humble glow-worm despise that power of giving light, without which, the roving fly might pass her and repass her a thousand times" (135). This use of the glow-worm image displays a keen interest in the minute, intricate workings of the natural world, as well as a capacity to extend such a foreign experience to stand in for a personal one. This is particularly clear when Agnes goes on to expand the metaphor - "she might hear her winged darling buzzing... he vainly seeking her, she longing to be found, but with... no voice to call him, no wings to follow

his flight” (135). The description of the male glow-worm as a “winged darling” who is “vainly seeking” his mate, and the worm a female “longing to be found” offers a highly humanised, emotive account of glow-worm experience. In contrast, the subsequent details of the worm's lack of voice and wings demonstrate an awareness of the anatomical details of the glow-worm's specific difference. This evokes a sympathetic engagement with the lives of creatures vastly different to herself, demonstrating a movement between concern for herself and awareness of the experience of others.

Brontë's knowledge of glow-worms was probably developed from the family's natural history collection. In *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*, Gilbert White notes, “The light of the female glow-worm... is a signal to the male” (124).<sup>1</sup> Brontë's use of such accounts to engage imaginatively with the image of a female glow-worm waiting for a mate reflects a sensitive interaction with natural history as a way of both reflecting on human experience and seriously considering the lived experience of non-human creatures. She notes finally, “the fly must seek nother mate, the worm must live and die alone” (135). This simple, ungendered description suggests a mental shift from using the image of the glow-worm to evoke her own experience, to a distanced consideration of the actual experience of other creatures.

Agnes's use of the toad and worm figures to describe her own experience demonstrates an oscillation between use of them symbolically and active interest in the actual experience of these creatures. Describing the popularity of animal fables in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Diana Donald notes the shift throughout this time from clear representations of singular moral tales to more complex engagements with understandings of animal

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<sup>1</sup> This was a popular natural history text that was reprinted several times, and the Brontës were well familiar with it. Charlotte Brontë recommends White in a letter to Ellen Nussey (47) and Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith suggest it was possibly owned by the family (338). See Alexander and Smith (338-340) and Barbara T. Gates (251-259) for more on the Brontës and natural history.



consciousness and experience. She describes how “the animals' symbolising function... could never be entirely insulated from the other levels of signification and affect which arose from the reader's perception of them as real animals” (*Picturing* 119). Agnes's figurative use of animal imagery demonstrates a similarly complex exploration of what is shared and what is radically different between human and non-human experience and an empathetic engagement with the actual experience of animals in the act of using them conceptually.

Agnes's movement from the comparison of the bird and toad to the description of the glow-worm demonstrates an awareness of the incapacity of the earlier metaphor to exactly articulate her experience. Immediately after this extended page of musing, Agnes goes on to note “Such were some of my reflections about this period. I might go on prosing more and more, I might dive much deeper, and disclose other thoughts... but I forbear” (135). This highlights the struggle to express difficult concepts using figurative language, as well as the addictive pleasure of the search for the right metaphor. Agnes's growing capacity to engage deeply with complex metaphors is emphasised by her suggestion that she could “dive much deeper,” the very phrase demonstrating the enticing pull of metaphorical language. Her choice to “forbear” illustrates the effort to pull herself back from such explorations. By describing these as her reflections “about this period,” Agnes emphatically dates this kind of thinking to a specific time, implying that she had not necessarily engaged in this mode of thought before. Given that all of the conceptual figures she has used in this section have been animals, this suggests a growing capacity to engage imaginatively and empathetically with animal experience - a far cry from her description of the Bloomfield children as “tiger's cubs” (40).

A similar movement between metaphors occurs in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, in Helen's attempt to express her lack of understanding of the glories of heaven. She begins by suggesting that “to regret the exchange of earthly pleasures for the joys of heaven, is as if the grovelling

caterpillar should lament that it must one day quit the nibbled leaf to soar aloft and flutter through the air” (410). Beginning with this fairly common trope of a caterpillar pre-metamorphosis, Helen goes on to elaborate, “If these little creatures knew how great a change awaited them, no doubt they would regret it; but would not all such sorrow be misplaced?” (410). Helen suggests she does not believe caterpillars are aware of their impending metamorphosis, but imagines that if they were they might dread it. This analysis illustrates a complex engagement with the concept of animal minds, both materially and figuratively. Helen both speculates about caterpillars' actual experience of ignorance and imaginatively engages with how they might experience knowledge if they possessed it, projecting their potential anxiety about the prospect of metamorphosis.

The choice of the caterpillar metaphor sensitively echoes an image Helen has used multiple times throughout the novel. Early in her marriage to Arthur, Helen regrets his treatment of her “as if I had been some frail butterfly” (216) and insistence that she dress up “like a painted butterfly” (230). In these earlier examples, Helen uses the butterfly figure bluntly, as a way to evoke feminine vanity and weakness. In her return to imagery of caterpillars and butterflies, she demonstrates a new-found engagement with the actual lived experience of these insects. After describing the caterpillar pre-metamorphosis, Helen goes on to describe the experience of butterflies, “roving at will from flower to flower, sipping sweet honey from their cups or basking in their sunny petals” (410). This extended description suggests a much more thoughtful engagement with how such animals actually live, contrasting to her earlier dismissive references.

The attention to detail in the insect metaphors used by both Agnes and Helen is noteworthy, as it reveals the development of sympathy with creatures particularly different from themselves. Harriet Ritvo has recently noted how “the likeliest targets of unconscious

identification and projection were the animals who were most like people (“Animal Dreams” 273). She specifically notes that while insects fascinated the Victorians, it was unusual for people to identify with them (273). Helen and Agnes's unusual identification with insect metaphors suggests a challenging conceptual use of animals, interrogating typical understandings of difference between humans and animals. Apparent in these metaphors is a real empathy for the experience of other creatures, as well as a conceptual use of them to explore their own experiences.

Yet it is Helen's ultimate rejection of the caterpillar figure that most clearly reveals her sophisticated engagement with figurative language as a way to explore her own experience. Immediately after her use of this metaphor to attempt to articulate her incomprehension of heavenly life, Helen continues “if that illustration will not move you, here is another: - We are children now... We cannot conceive... nobler occupations beyond our present comprehension” (410). This shift to the metaphor of the child reveals Helen's dissatisfaction with the caterpillar metaphor's capacity to explain her feelings of uncertainty about life after death. Despite her rigorous engagement with the actual experience of caterpillars and butterflies in her struggle to conceptualise her own experience, she still determines this particular choice of metaphor as inappropriate. Her transition between the two figures with the phrase “if that illustration will not move you” draws attention to the process of searching for the right metaphor to capture the concept she is trying to express. This is reminiscent of Agnes's avowal of her potential to go on “prosing more and more” in her efforts to articulate herself.

It is significant that Helen chooses to shift to the figure of the child to express her uncertainty about life beyond death. This suggests a link between optimistic hope in the prospect of children growing up with thoughts on the afterlife. A similar optimism is clear at the end of the novel. Young Arthur's marriage to Helen Hattersley provides a satisfyingly

circular conclusion to the novel, with the happiness of their union symbolically redeeming the disastrous marriage between the older Arthur and Helen Huntingdon. A similar sense of hope can be seen in Brontë's depiction of little Arthur's attitudes towards animals, as a short scene at the end of the novel demonstrates. Immediately after Gilbert and Helen romantically unite, little Arthur runs in to see Gilbert. "Look Mr Markham," he cries, "a natural history with all kinds of birds and beasts in it, and the reading as nice as the pictures!" (487). Winifred Gerin has suggested that this book is probably Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds* (55), and this brief comment of Arthur's hints at how his engagement with the book differs from Gilbert's use of natural history terminology, as discussed in Chapter Two. This is the first time in the novel that the word "beast" has been used positively. All other usage of the word has been in insults with which different characters cast each other as inferior. Little Arthur's positive use of the word implies the potential of a more equal engagement with animals, rather than a use of natural history as a way to assert human dominance through classification systems.

It is at this moment that the novel returns to the present, and Gilbert's letter to Halford. "That pretty child is now a fine young man," Gilbert notes, describing how little Arthur married Helen Hattersley and "realised his mother's brightest expectations" (487). By shifting from the image of Arthur and Gilbert reading natural history together to the note that Arthur has completed the satisfying union of the second generation, Brontë links little Arthur's attitude to animals to his realisation of Helen's "brightest expectations." This implies a hopeful looking forward to interspecies relationships that are not dictated by structures of domination.

In the first chapter I discussed Brontë's commitment to realism in the preface to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and the applicability of this to her representations of animals. Brontë's engagement with figurative language also forms part of her serious reflection on the experience of animals. She uses animals figuratively as a way of actively considering animal experience,

as well as reflecting on human experience. Within the preface itself, there are a number of complex metaphors that form part of her argument for truthful realism.<sup>2</sup> After stating her aim to “tell the truth,” Brontë goes on to question “Is it better to reveal the snares and pitfalls of life... or to cover them with branches and flowers?” (30). This question combines multiple metaphors. The “branches and flowers” represent stylistic elegancies that may be used to distract from brutal reality. Yet the branches Brontë refers to are not simply decorative. She is specifically describing the process of covering up traps and snares used to catch animals. This extended hunting metaphor likens the use of artistic flourishes to distract from reality to hiding animal traps under branches. Brontë's use of the phrase “snares and pitfalls” is especially complex, as both words can be used to refer to mistakes or mishaps that people are fated to encounter throughout life. However, within Brontë's hunting metaphor, both snares and pits are deliberately set up to capture unsuspecting prey. This emphasises Brontë's commitment to the unvarnished representation of structures of control and domination. The use of the hunting metaphor links the use of animals within human society to broader social structures. Brontë's recourse to figurative language within her argument for the truthful representation of reality demonstrates how the powerful combination of both figurative imagery and realism may be used to reveal the oppressive structures of society.

Throughout *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Brontë explores complex differences between human and animal experience. Her engagement with the tension between difference and kinship in comparisons of animal and human life is clear in her use of figurative language, as characters struggle to find adequate imagery to express the sentiments they are trying to articulate. By drawing out the connections and dissimilarities between human and animal experience, such metaphors draw attention to their shared existence, despite the

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<sup>2</sup> For a thoughtful analysis of the series of metaphors used by Brontë in the Preface, see Antonia Losano (90-93).

differences in how they experience the world. This empathetic engagement with difference forms a crucial part of Brontë's critique of the domination of animals within human society.

## Conclusion

In a *Brontë Studies* review of Chase Pielak's recent study on animals in Romantic poetry, Aileen Mullis notes the small amount of scholarship on animals in the Brontës' writing and suggests that Pielak's study could offer “an intriguing impetus for carrying such explorations further” (367). Mullis quotes Pielak's suggestion that “We must rethink Romanticism alongside its animals” (2) and urges a similar rethinking of the Brontës “alongside [their] animals” (367). This is essentially what I have aimed to do with Anne Brontë's writing on animals. In each of the chapters of this thesis I have sought to explore a component of Anne Brontë's sophisticated articulation of how animals are used within human society.

Rethinking representations of animals in historical writing is a project that has been taken up by numerous scholars in recent years. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have provided an array of sources exploring human-animal interactions, and changing understandings of animal experience are particularly clear in the development of natural history and the growing animal rights movement. Scholars such as Harriet Ritvo, Martin A. Danahay, Diana Donald, Ivan Kreilkamp and Deborah Denenholz Morse have provided detailed analysis of texts exploring animal experience from this period, unpacking and deconstructing this rich body of work. A number of key texts from the early stages of the animal rights and anti-cruelty movements have also recently been republished, such as the Reverend Thomas Young's *An Essay on Humanity to Animals*, the Reverend Humphry Primatt's *Duty of Mercy*, and Lewis Gompertz's *Moral Inquiries on the Situation of Man and of Brutes*.

Yet many of the key texts documenting these changing attitudes towards animals are associated with a particular section of society, and only those who occupied positions of power

were able to engage overtly in these critical debates. Anne Brontë would have had no access to the spaces in which many of these arguments were taking place, as women were not able to access the courts and parliament where decisions about the anti-cruelty laws were made. Writings on animal rights were also generally produced by prominent male figures of the community, such as clergymen. While much has been written on the many theoretical tracts that were written concerning animal rights, there has been little focus on female writers' engagement with these issues. In the first chapter of this thesis I referred briefly to the anti-cruelty movement in England in the mid-nineteenth century and recent theoretical debate on how this movement was situated within class structures and relied on associations of the working class with brutality towards animals. I noted the work done by Ritvo and Kreilkamp that draws attention to the class consciousness these laws revealed. Similar discussions were taking place at the time anti-cruelty debates were being introduced in Parliament. Kreilkamp notes how Victorians opposed to anti-cruelty laws critiqued the “hypocrisies and class biases” in proposed legislation, pointing out that such arguments could “also function as a shrewd rhetorical weapon on the side of those opposing any new regulation whatsoever” (2-3). Yet these debates were taking place in a legislative arena that women had no access to.

Despite this inhibition of access, Brontë's writing demonstrates a sharp engagement with debates about animal welfare and the complex reflection on class politics these debates involved. In Chapter Two I discussed Gilbert Markham's dismissive reference to his brother's badger baiting in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and how this brief comment reveals Brontë's critical engagement with contemporary debates about the anti-cruelty laws. Brontë's depictions of animal suffering display a nuanced analysis that is sensitive to class structures, as Arthur Huntingdon's discussion with his servant about his horse also reveals.

The strong involvement of women in the animal rights movement in England is



particularly associated with the latter half of the nineteenth century. The involvement of many suffragettes in the anti-vivisection movement is well documented, and the link between the discourse of women's rights and animal rights is generally traced to this time.<sup>1</sup> Although the institutions in which early anti-cruelty arguments were voiced were not places that women were able to access, concern for animal welfare is also clearly visible in earlier examples of women's *writing*. Anne Brontë's work is just one example of an expression of such concern in women's fictional writing from the early nineteenth century. Social experiences of gender can also be understood to have influenced early female writers' sympathetic representations of animals and critique of the cruelty practised upon them.

Yet while Brontë reflects on the similar position of women and animals in her writing, it is also clear that her social critique extends beyond the position of women in society. She engages critically with broad social structures and confronts hierarchical systems of control. In the first chapter I explored Brontë's depictions of violence against animals and how she situates this cruel treatment within other oppressive structures. I argued that these violent scenes demonstrate the close attention she pays to the position of animals within human society, ultimately drawing attention to the understanding that animals exist in order to be used by people. Brontë demonstrates how this instrumentalised position is justified by the understanding of animals as other. She connects this understanding of otherness to general structures of domination that extend to the treatment of disempowered people, by demonstrating how characters in her novels refer to other people as animals in order to justify cruel treatment of them.

It is not only Brontë's scenes of violence against animals that reveal her critique of the position of animals within human society. In the second chapter I examined Brontë's

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of women's involvement in the anti-vivisection movement, see Hilda Kean (17-30).

exploration of the instrumentalised position of animals within contexts that are not overtly violent. In particular, I focused on her depictions of the objectified position of domestic animals, drawing attention to her interrogation of how both companion animals and working animals are valued as commodities and objects of exchange. In the second half of the chapter I explored Brontë's exploration of contrasting forms of control, as expressed in the treatment of animals. In particular, I examined her portrayal of governance as an alternative form of control to the violent mastery that I explored in Chapter One. Both are based in hierarchical structures that subject some beings to the control of others.

While Brontë critiques the position of animals within human society, she also engages with alternative relationships between animals and humans. In the third chapter I explored how these depictions of interspecies relationships ultimately encourage a re-thinking of relations of use and understandings of difference between human and animal experience. My exploration of characters' conceptual use of animals in this chapter focused on their thoughtful engagement with animal figures in order to express their own experiences. Rather than using animal imagery as a way of othering people, the figurative use of animal imagery explored in this chapter involves a complex and sympathetic engagement with the experience of animals in order to reflect on characters' own experiences. This use of animal imagery is characterised by an empathetic engagement with difference.

In the chapters of this thesis I have traced a number of encounters between people and animals in the writing of Anne Brontë. When Tom Bloomfield traps birds; when his mother justifies his violence; when Gilberts turns a puppy into a present; when Arthur strikes Dash and when Helen lets him outside - each of these encounters reveals Brontë's complex engagement with an array of human attitudes to animals in her society. Each of these moments reveals Brontë's critique of the understanding that animals exist for human convenience.

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