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Brian Glaser
Chapman University, bglaser@chapman.edu

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Ambivalent Posthumanism: A Few of Stevens' Animals

BRIAN BRODHEAD GLASER

WALLACE STEVENS MADE a single explicit statement about Freud in only one poem, "Mountains Covered with Cats." It contrasts Freud and Stalin and expresses a sure preference for the former figure—Stalin stands for a utopian, dulling vision, whereas Freud more capably sees "the invalid personality" through "the microscope of potency" (*CPP* 318–19). But the poem targets Freud as well. Insofar as the title refers to the Catskills—Eleanor Cook's insightful suggestion (207)—it mocks Freud's eagerness to hear words buried in other words. If the poem's admiration for the ability of the "gray ghost" of Freud to "quickly understand" the "impotent dead" and "How truly they had not been what they were" (*CPP* 319) is genuine, it is framed by a warning that the Freudian hermeneutical method can be carried too far. Among the various things it is, the title of Stevens' poem about Freud is a bit of a cryptic joke about Freud. The poem celebrates Freud's ability to discover latent meanings and essences underneath manifest contents, but it frames this praise with awkward mockery. Why?

Freud's remarks on joking in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* are helpful in explaining. One clearly relevant point he makes is that jokes with a hostile impetus are a vessel through which aggression may be directed at "the great, the dignified and the mighty, who are protected by internal inhibitions and external circumstances from direct disparagement" (105). A mask of humor is appropriate for dealing critically with such a powerfully influential thinker and evidently admired man. Though a jest like Stevens', which requires some conscious thought to process, tends, as Freud points out, to deflate its own comic effect, still, the attempt at humor is a distancing and disarming gesture.

But from a Freudian perspective there is more to such a joking tribute as well. Among the types of jokes Freud discusses are what he calls "nonsense jokes," which he claims give a pleasurable release from inhibitions against playing with thoughts by allowing for the closely related substitute pleasure of playing with words (138). These jokes, like many others, do what Freud calls "joke-work" in which "*a preconscious thought is given over for a moment to unconscious revision and the outcome of this is at once*

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grasped by conscious perception" (166). Nonsense jokes make particular use of one form of unconscious revision—the one Freud calls, reaching back to the analyses of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, displacement. Like dreams, nonsense jokes displace meanings from one image to another, one word to another, one sound to another. These displacements are generally motivated by the desire to circumvent an inhibition or ease a repression.

Read not only as a mocking joke—Freud calls it a kind of "tendentious joke" (90)—but also as a nonsense joke, the title of Stevens' poem exhibits a meaningful displacement. The cats covering the mountains are echoes heard in the name of a chain of mountains when listened to with a Freudian ear, but they are also displaced images, come to along a thread of word associations, standing for mountain lions. Displacement has turned lions into cats. So the joke is not only targeted toward Freud. It is an ironic treatment of the less-than-heroic strain in Stevens' own "personality," in which fear of something wild is acknowledged and submitted to. Stevens had written in "Poetry Is a Destructive Force" of a man who feels himself to have "an ox in his breast":

> He is like a man
> In the body of a violent beast.
> Its muscles are his own . . .
>
> The lion sleeps in the sun.
> Its nose is on its paws.
> It can kill a man. (*CPP* 178)

The power of poetry is exalting, but it is also threatening—clearly too strong for a man to control. Something in the power that poetry has for him threatens Stevens' sense of the integrity of his being, and the lion is a figure for that menace. In "Mountains Covered with Cats," Freud's hermeneutic allows him to see himself experience this threat more manageably as coming from an entity that is part mountain and part cat. One way of responding to one's sense of being threatened by a metaphorical mountain lion is to make a cryptic joke.

Ambivalent Posthumanism

Carrie Rohman, in her study *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal*, identifies a tension in modernist culture between what she calls the Darwinian and the Freudian conceptions of the subject. There is, she claims, a "reductive capacity in psychoanalysis that works to tame the Darwinian threat of human origins" (24). In a criticism of Freudian therapeutic goals indebted to Deleuze and Guattari's arguments against Freud in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Rohman claims that psychoanalysis, "like much of the Western metaphysical tradition, wants to code the human as psychically nonanimal, as mastering its inherent ani-

mal memories that reside in the unconscious" (24). The emphasis in her book falls on exposing writers who must distance the animal as an other in order to shore up an ideal of the human. She celebrates the few writers, such as D. H. Lawrence, who manage to register "the radical alterity of [the animal] and elaborate[] the narrator's profound inability to comprehend its experience" (97).

Rohman's project is shared, in broad terms at least, with Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and Philip Armstrong's *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, though her account of Freud's complicity in the modernist tendency to efface the radical alterity of animal life is particularly pronounced. But "Mountains Covered with Cats" can light up another view on Freud's role in mediating the presences of animal life in modernist culture. Freud's interest in the latent in its many forms, Stevens realized, can reveal how human encounters with animals are rife with subsurface dynamics—anxieties, projections, cathexes, associations.[1] Recognizing radical alterity is one of the many ways that humans can ethically and imaginatively be alongside animals. Stevens credits Freud with the knowledge that animality is not simply a human trait to be mastered, that it is rather a domain of experience and relatedness in which many thoughts and feelings may be latent.[2]

In this essay, I would like to follow the opening into the territory of emotional ambivalence made by "Mountains Covered with Cats" with the purpose of showing that for Stevens animals are not only radically other but also living entities to experience and know with a mixture of positive and negative emotions. Psychoanalytic discussions of how ambivalence is at work in animal imagery and human/animal encounters will play a recurring role in this exploration. My argument is that looking at how the phenomenon Freud discussed as ambivalence is at play in Stevens' representations of animals can give us a sense of how, in the modernist period, cultural encounters with nonhuman creatures involved more than knowing the limits of the human. For Stevens they often also involved the self-aware exploration of an emotionally complex state. In each of the following three sections, I will look at how different kinds of animals—cats, birds, and rodents—aroused distinct sorts of ambivalence in Stevens.

Impractical Cats

Stevens wrote a number of poems with lions in them. "Lions in Sweden," "The Sun This March," "The Man with the Blue Guitar," "The Glass of Water," and "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" mention lions, usually representing them as they are in "Poetry Is a Destructive Force," reposing in potency. Another big cat in Stevens' work is a jaguar, described once at the end of "Jouga." Unlike Stevens' lions, the jaguar is captured in motion, as seen in a dream. But the poem begins on another note:

The physical world is meaningless tonight
And there is no other. There is Ha-eé-me, who sits
And plays his guitar. Ha-eé-me is a beast.

Or perhaps his guitar is a beast or perhaps they are
Two beasts. But of the same kind—two conjugal beasts.
Ha-eé-me is the male beast . . . an imbecile,

Who knocks out a noise. The guitar is another beast
Beneath his tip-tap-tap. It is she that responds. (*CPP* 295)

This is a self-portrait. The masculine self, Ha-eé-me, is perhaps Jaime, a name Stevens, who linked the ocean with the south, might associate with the seaside setting of the poem, but it suggests more strongly a mirthfully ironic representation of the poet's "me." To borrow a word from an earlier and related piece, it is a poem of thorough, retrospective disillusionment. The man with the blue guitar has become an "imbecile" and a "beast" who "knocks out a noise." His world, and his music making, are "meaningless," and the poem ends with a longing for what will happen after he has "gone to sleep" (*CPP* 295) and been visited by the great, in the investiture of an animal. Like the "old sailor" in "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," the self surrogate in "Jouga" responds to a sense of malaise by turning to a dream of big cats.

What will the great cat in "Jouga" restore to the "physical world" of Stevens' Ha-eé-me? In the earlier cat/dream poem, "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," the enlivening power of the animal is clear:

Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather. (*CPP* 53)

The tigers' energy is diffused into the surroundings, as the weather takes on wildly intense coloration, and the power of the cats is on display but harnessed by the dreaming man. This dream is a pretty wish-fulfillment, in which much of what disappoints in the first half of the poem is redressed by the vision in its latter part. In "Jouga," however, it is not so obvious how the "little sound" (*CPP* 295) of the jaguar will answer the frustrations registered by the poem. What is the poet's hope for this animal dream?

The Freudian concept of ambivalence may be useful here. Freud transcribed and reflected on perhaps the most well-known dream of a predatory animal in the modernist milieu, the nightmare of his patient, "the wolf man," in which "six or seven wolves" sat perched in a tree outside of his window (*From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* 29). In Freud's analysis, the wolves represent the patient's father, who, he fears, will castrate him.

This interpretation has been influentially challenged by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who argue in *A Thousand Plateaus* that the wolves represent not a single fear or figure but a process they call "becoming-animal":

> The wolf, as the instantaneous apprehension of a multiplicity in a given region, is not a representative, a substitute, but an *I feel*. I feel myself becoming a wolf, one wolf among others, on the edge of the pack. A cry of anguish, the only one Freud hears: Help me not become wolf (or the opposite, Help me not fail in this becoming). It is not a question of representation: don't think for a minute that it has to do with believing oneself a wolf, representing oneself as a wolf. The wolf, wolves, are intensities, speeds, temperatures, nondecomposable variable distances. A swarming, a wolfing. (32)

At a first look, the reading that Deleuze and Guattari give to the wolf dream seems to offer a fuller interpretation of the function of the running jaguar in "Jouga" than would Freud's. There is little to suggest that the animal poses a threat to the dejected Ha-eé-me, whereas it does seem that the jaguar's intensity and speed could intimate a transformation that has come over the dreamer's consciousness by the end of the poem—what had seemed meaningless noise comes to be a quickening sound, and the bestiality that the poet had sensed in his surrogate is transformed into a more glorified alien being, "the great jaguar" (*CPP* 5). A reading that emphasizes the fluidity of boundaries between human and animal, rather than the fears and longings that inhabit their relation, captures a sense in the hoped-for dream.

I would suggest at this point though that seeing a bit more in Freud's text than Deleuze and Guattari give us can help us to see a bit more in Stevens' poem as well. In his analysis of the dream, Freud does not only perform the kind of unifying reduction that the critique would have one see. Although the anxiety caused by the wolves in the dream has according to Freud a single source, the figures of the animals themselves are also multiplicities, with a number of simultaneous meanings he discovers through an exploration of the wolf man's associations:

> For the proper appreciation of the wolf phobia we will only add that both his father and mother became wolves. His mother took the part of the castrated wolf, which let the others climb upon it; his father took the part of the wolf that climbed. But his fear, as we have heard him assure us, related only to the standing wolf, that is, to his father. It must further strike us that the fear with which the dream ended had a model in his grandfather's story. For in this the castrated wolf, which had let the others climb upon it, was seized with fear as soon as it

> was reminded of the fact of its taillessness. It seems, therefore, as though he had identified himself with his castrated mother during the dream, and was now fighting against that fact. (47)

Understood in the context of the patient's associations, the wolves are mother and father, source of identification and source of threat. A wolf does not have a single meaning as an Oedipal father. Indeed it is potent in the fantasy life of the dreamer because it can function as both sides of an animalistic coupling at once.

If we read this poem as a self-portrait characterized by this kind of two-sidedness or ambivalence, Stevens seems to be doing a bit more than longing for a dream of animal potency to dispel disenchantment with the powers of his art. The middle stanzas of the poem are concerned with the "two conjugal beasts," which are "two not quite of a kind," the man with the guitar and his instrument itself. They make a disappointing music, as a mismatched conjugal pair might do and as the partners wind and sea seem to. If the jaguar is Ha-eé-me's dream of himself as wholly other, it is a flight, a "running" (*CPP* 295), from what he hears in relation to what he would like to hear in his head. But if we hear the jaguar as both man and instrument, the disparaged and the longed-for, "male beast" and "she that responds," then the "little sound" becomes significant not only because it is contrasted with "noise" but because it is "little." We are to listen to the little sound of the jaguar, and hear as the "jag" becomes an audible echo of both the "conjugal" music in the poem and the "jouga," playing in "modern Provençal," in the title (Cook 194). There is little here to love, the poet says. But sound is its own good, the repetitions say. Seen this way, Ha-eé-me does not take flight from a mood by becoming animal. He plays in the absence of meaning and so creates the figure of the wild creature. The jaguar is not an opening into destabilized release from the self as it is known. It is an image in which the dejected poet can see himself in "the physical world" as "two not quite of a kind," one for whom that world is an emptiness and "there is no other," and one for whom, much more hopefully, "There are many of these beasts that one never sees" (*CPP* 295).

Blackbird

The class of animal Stevens most often hears is the bird. This is in part because of where and how he spent his life and in part because of the romantic tradition of poetry that influenced him. The poem that most clearly acknowledges the confluence and tension between these two domains of exposure to the sounds of birds is "Autumn Refrain":

> The skreak and skritter of evening gone
> And grackles gone and sorrows of the sun,
> The sorrows of sun, too, gone . . . the moon and moon,
> The yellow moon of words about the nightingale
> In measureless measures, not a bird for me
> But the name of a bird and the name of a nameless air
> I have never—shall never hear. (*CPP* 129)

The nightingale is not a bird for Stevens as an American poet, for it is not native to America. The grackle is his bird instead. In this sense, Stevens' poem grapples with what Lawrence Buell calls the "environmental unconscious," and this poem writes against a distorting influence of English romantic poetry on the perceptions of animal life in American verse. Like Gary Snyder's tactics and those of others Buell refers to, Stevens' "approach has been to take a form of readily recognizable spatialized experience, so recognizable as to be taken for granted, and to achieve a certain bringing to awareness by exposure of chronic unawareness" (26). His poem makes the "skreak and skritter" of grackles audible for a poetic tradition that has perhaps not learned to listen for them, even if these sounds are to be heard only in memory as the poem begins.

But why the repeated and somewhat uncharacteristically dramatic assertion that he will never hear the nightingale? One answer to this is that this is a poem of late middle age, in which the poet acknowledges the finitude and limits of the choices remaining to him in life, and performatively discovers that he will never make, literally or metaphorically, the costly crossing hearing the nightingale would entail. Another answer lies in the opposition between evening, which is gone at the start of the poem, and night, which has begun. The nightingale is "not a bird" for the poet but "the name of a bird and the name of a nameless air." The nightingale is any bird heard at night which the poet pursues, as Keats does, seeking a merger with or dissolution into its song. Stevens will never hear birdsong this way. He has instead chosen stillness, "Being and sitting still" (*CPP* 129), after the grackles at evening have left.

Read this way, Stevens seems to be eschewing what Gregg E. Gorton calls in an essay on the psychodynamics of human-bird relations "projective" understanding of the nightingale (162). He will never hear birdsong as the voice of an immortal surrogate, and so will seek to hear instead the sounds of birds without identificatory distortion. The contrast between the singular nightingale and the various grackles in the poem lends weight to this reading. To hear a number of real birds, as opposed to an imagined single one, is to hear the birds not through an essentializing idea of them but as they exist and make their sounds. Stevens does not hear *the* grackle because he will not hear *the* bird per se. Instead he hears the "skreak and skritter" of various birds.

Still he is left with a "desolate sound," which raises the possibility of identification at some level with the nightingale, particularly since one of the chief sources of birdsong is a male's search for a mate. This sound has

come from the grating of the "evasions of the nightingale" with a "skreaking and skrittering residuum" (*CPP* 129), and at this late point in the poem Stevens has moved toward a kind of private use of language that suggests a heightened awareness of what is happening inwardly. The birds have left him, and he has chosen not to follow—hence the desolation. But the sound comes from somewhere, within or in the real world. What is the source of the desolate sound?

A remark Gorton makes in his discussion of the effects of birdsong on humans is relevant here. Using Lacanian terms to discuss Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and other poems, he points out that the songs of birds can make humans experience the way that language mediates their experience as a kind of confinement, or "coop": "I will argue (along with Lacan, Chomsky, and others, albeit from diverse perspectives) that *Homo sapiens* is caught always within the invisible 'bars' of the symbolic register and the very structure of human language itself" (179). The desolate sound at the end of "Autumn Refrain," on this reading, would be the "words about the nightingale," and it would suggest that Stevens has gone from recognizing himself as opposed to a Keatsian attitude toward the bird to finding that his own words get him no closer to a real experience of the sound of birds. He is without the romantic desire to merge into the being of the bird and leave his humanity behind, but is rather the poorer for that, because the language he refuses is only a part of the language that separates him from the nightingale.

That reading of the desolate sound would emphasize the function of the "refrain" in the title as a verb and stress how the poet has chosen to mark his difference from romantic views of nature and has accepted that this leaves him alienated from much of what calls to him in his environment. But the play on the word is a sign of the ambivalent relationship to the sounds of birds that runs through the poem. The poet cannot refrain from speaking about the nightingale in the way that the grackles can: "not a bird for me." He struggles against the force of the word "bird" in bringing together what he would like to keep entirely distinct—grackles and the nightingale. He answers the dangerous synthetic force of this word, one from the "yellow moon of words about the nightingale," with "skritter," a sound he invents. Insofar as it seeks to challenge the force of known language in the sonic field of the poem, the word is perhaps a posthuman description, but it is an ambivalent one—his utterance is both a careful attempt to hear the sounds of grackles without the concept of the nightingale and, in its placement, an acknowledgement that he cannot know the world of either imagined birds or real ones. His language is the key in which the birds' sound is heard and desolate.

A Rodent Gallery

A late poem of Stevens' in which a similar kind of solitude is passed through by an animal presence is "The Plain Sense of Things." After a

writing life spent celebrating and testing the powers of the imagination, Stevens comes in this poem to name its efficacy at its ownmost limits. James Longenbach's biography takes its name from this central poem, about which he says that Stevens rejects "the world of poetry as a place to dwell" and chooses a poetry that makes "the world of ordinary experience seem hospitable" (304). As a gesture along these lines, Longenbach says, Stevens equates "the return of ordinary experience with a rat's low vantage point on the world" (303). What is significant about the rat, on this reading, is that like the grackles in "Autumn Refrain" it is a figure for sensory experience that is not filtered through an elevating set of ideals:

> The great pond,
> The plain sense of it, without reflections, leaves,
> Mud, water like dirty glass, expressing silence
>
> Of a sort, silence of a rat come out to see,
> The great pond and its waste of the lilies, all this
> Had to be imagined as an inevitable knowledge,
> Required, as a necessity requires. (*CPP* 428)

It may be that it is the world as seen by the rat that Stevens is describing here, but what is more readily apparent is that he attributes both a curiosity and a silence to that animal. The "silence of a rat come out to see" is an image of what the imagination must do "After the leaves have fallen" (*CPP* 428), in the season of barrenness and cold. Remarks of Freud's about rat symbolism, made in at least two places in his work, cast some light on the pitilessness of this passage. Rats, Freud writes, are thought of as the carriers of dangerous diseases; but they are also associated with babies or children ("Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis" 214, 216). In a sense these passages treat the rat as a condensation of these two aspects of the animal's psychological charges or meanings. There is danger in the finality of this scene, a sense of latent threat in the very plainness of it, the eerie reflectionlessness. The rat's attraction to "waste," a part of its danger, is described directly. But at the same time the rat's presence is a birth of a kind, in which the new "knowledge" that the imagination discovers at its limits is described as a kind of silence from one who has just "come out." The necessity named at the end of the poem carries this birth imagery further—the emergence of this new knowledge cannot be restrained. Connected with a recurrent squeamishness about the physicality and corporeality of birth that runs throughout his poetry, Stevens represents the imagination's arrival at the plain sense of things as a dangerous birth in this poem to emphasize both its urgency and its unpleasantness for him.[3] The rat is a deeply ambivalent image of hope.

Another rodent appearance in Stevens' poetry replicates this suspension of negative valuations. In both "Dance of the Macabre Mice" and

"The Blue Buildings in the Summer Air," Stevens uses mice as symbols of a kind of critical skepticism that Freud can help us to appreciate. In the first of these poems, published in 1935, Stevens uses a contrast between a statue of "The Founder of the State," an armed man on horseback, and a group of mice crawling over it, to criticize the symbolic language in which autocratic regimes argue for themselves:

> We dance it out to the tip of Monsieur's sword,
> Reading the lordly language of the inscription,
> Which is like zithers and tambourines combined:
>
> The Founder of the State. Whoever founded
> A state that was free, in the dead of winter, from mice?
> What a beautiful tableau tinted and towering,
> The arm of bronze outstretched against all evil! (*CPP* 101)

The grandiosity of the statue—its language, its sword, its posture—is deflated with a remark about the indefatigability and ubiquity of mice. "The horse is covered with mice" (*CPP* 101), say the mice themselves. Promises of purity or absolute reform, fascistic or communist ideals of the state, must face the limits of their ability to control how creaturely life goes on without regard for the mighty moral gestures of leaders and their displays. In this respect, the horse of the statue is something of a totem animal in the sense in which Freud discusses this in *Totem and Taboo*, and the mice might be thought of as anti-totems. Freud argues that "the totem system . . . was a product of the conditions involved in the Oedipus complex" (132). What he means by this is that the system of social organization in which a group sees itself as protected by an objectified or animated spirit—often an animal—is attributable to the group's ambivalent memory of doing violence against its patriarchal founding leader. The totem animal stands for that patriarch. Stevens' macabre mice expose a dynamic that Freud argues underlies the phenomenon of totemism and associated taboos: ambivalence. The mice are the ambivalent response that a community has to such a leader, by covering him and his totem animal. They are a swarm of jubilant but threatening members of the family created by this figure, and they reject the special status that the armed leader declares himself to have. Like the rat in "The Plain Sense of Things," these animals are figures for ambivalence, but instead of this being, like the horse, an ambivalence that is frozen into a grandiose form that suits the theatrical needs of a regime, it is an ambivalence that moves with an irrepressible energy of inquiry.

The mice in Stevens' other mouse poem, "The Blue Buildings in the Summer Air," work in a similar way. In this poem, Stevens' target is not authoritarian government but Puritanism. "Cotton Mather died when I was a boy," begins the poem, and the metaphoric meaning of this remark becomes apparent by the end of the poem when the mice are exhorted to "go nibble at Lenin in his tomb" (*CPP* 196). Puritanism has had a long life in American culture, Stevens is saying, and it persisted into his own formative years. This gives him a particularly close understanding of the psychodynamics of Mather's own pursuit of ironclad evidence of his special bond with God:

> Cotton Mather died when I was a boy. The books
> He read, all day, all night and all the nights,
> Had got him nowhere. There was always the doubt,
> That made him preach the louder, long for a church
> In which his voice would roll its cadences,
> After the sermon, to quiet that mouse in the wall.
> (*CPP* 196)

The mouse that haunts Mather is the voice of a nonbeliever in his church, one that shares one of the numerous buildings in the poem without participating in the spirit of faith for which the buildings have been built. So there is "eminent thunder from the mouse" and "grinding in the arches of the church," which leads Stevens to wonder whether the "mouse should swallow the steeple, in its time" (*CPP* 196). Though he decides that this could never happen, the mouse is a voice that torments the Christian conscience by pointing out an animal's self-sufficient capacity to co-exist in the spaces that believers would rather see as monuments to the totality of their vision of creation.

Just as Stevens and Freud shared an interest in exposing the ambivalence that underlies patriarchal social organization held together by the spectacle of righteous force, so the two shared an interest in exposing the illusory nature of Christian belief. In *The Future of an Illusion*, published about fifteen years before Stevens' poem, Freud argues that Christianity is a defense against humanity's sense of helplessness at the hands of nature and of mortality, or Fate (21). Stevens' mouse is the voice of nature, reminding the users of the "buildings" of faith that it is in part simply their need for shelter that inclines them to the grand, "Byzantine" (*CPP* 196) structures of their belief. It is again the voice of critical objection, of skepticism, that opposes the theatricality of moral conviction with the reminder that absolutes are, however tempting, untenable. It is a symbol for an ambivalent response to absolutes, an ambivalence that is latent in social worlds that are organized in the pursuit of certainty and enduring order.

Stevensian Posthumanism

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud makes an unconvincing argument about the instinctual lives of animals: "the germ of a living animal is obliged in the course of its development to recapitulate (even if only in a transient and abbreviated fashion) the structures of all the forms from

which it is sprung" (37). Freud is discussing the conservative nature of instinct in humans in the context of his larger consideration of what he called the repetition compulsion, and he uses somewhat suspect analogies with the animal world to demonstrate the existence of a drive in humans just as deep-seated as the urge for pleasure. His desire to support his theory with concrete organic instances leads him to generalizations about animals that he cannot substantiate.

Returning to Rohman's arguments against Freud's presentations of animality, we might see this as quite damning evidence of his framing of the therapeutic process of analysis as in conflict with an animal substratum of the psyche. As an assessment of Freud alone, there is likely a good deal of truth to that. But an account of the imagination of exchanges with the animal element in the human psyche in the modernist period would do well to supplement Freud's view with one that Stevens articulates in the tenth section of "Esthétique du Mal":

> He had studied the nostalgias. In these
> He sought the most grossly maternal, the creature
> Who most fecundly assuaged him, the softest
> Woman with a vague moustache and not the mauve
> *Maman*. His anima liked its animal
> And liked it unsubjugated, so that home
> Was a return to birth, a being born
> Again in the savagest severity,
> Desiring fiercely, the child of a mother fierce
> In his body, fiercer in his mind, merciless
> To accomplish the truth in his intelligence. (*CPP* 283)

The conservative dimension of animal instinct that Freud remarks is also described by Stevens, in a scene in which an anima's animal produces "a return to birth." Like Freud, Stevens associates the animal with an instinctive reversion to origins. But for Stevens the "savagest severity" is not a drive to be mastered or overcome. It is a desire to "accomplish the truth." There is here no split between the Darwinian and the Freudian subject—what the subject of this poem wants is to be at home as an animal. Seeing Stevens' encounters with animals as probing through layers of complex attitudes and responses can give us a sense of the ferocity of this desire.

Chapman University

Notes

[1] It is possible that Stevens' reference to Freud in this poem is connected with comments he made about him in two essays. He claims in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" that Freud advocates a "surrender to reality" and is therefore "inimical to poetry" (CPP 651). He claims in "The Irrational Element in Poetry" that Freud, although "responsible for very little in poetry," has "given the irrational a legitimacy that it never had before" (CPP 783). I am though inclined to read this poem as focusing on Freud's method of reading for subsurface dynamics and latent content because of the last lines of the poem: "And quickly understand, without their flesh, / How truly they had not been what they were" (*CPP* 319).

[2] In this his animals can be contrasted, in schematic terms, with those of Marianne Moore, whose "stable, often hard-crusted animals," according to Mary Allen, "more closely resemble *things* than any in American literature" (98).

[3] For my discussion of this discomfort, see "Masculine Fecundity and 'Overinclusiveness': Imagery of Pregnancy in Wallace Stevens' Poetry," 60–65.

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