Feral Narratives: The Multispecies Worlds of Max Aub and Andrei Platonov

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Abstract

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In the twentieth century, the definitions and capacities of language, symbolic reasoning, and representation emerged as central preoccupations in studies of modernity, while modernist literature and art brought radical new perspectives and forms into focus for new audiences. At the same time industrialization, urbanization, and compression of time radically transformed both human interactions and more-than-human relationships. In this dissertation, I investigate parallels between the more-than-human imaginaries revealed by the works of Max Aub and Andrei Platonov. Some of their most formally experimental fiction foregrounds the experiences of nonhuman animals and plants, positioning them as active participants in human history. In so doing, they allude to the more-than-human worldmaking practices running through literary history, while drawing on their own experiences and observations to explore multispecies survivance in the Anthropocene. Consequently, their richly intertextual fictions share a critical preoccupation with definitions of the "human" and "nonhuman," the rhetoric of

anthropomorphism and dehumanization, and the intersection between utopian projects, knowledge production, and anthropogenic change. Their inclusion of plant and animal characters in modernist fiction, I argue, connects ancient more-than-human dialogic storytelling to the formal experimentalism of twentieth century literary practice, and in so doing, Aub and Platonov defamiliarize and ultimately resist hegemonic narrative production.

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My son has helped me remember to set my work aside sometimes. Before I knew words like “more-than-human” my parents and grandparents taught me to attend to the lives of the animals and plants. I attend to them still.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a theater in Moscow with me. The curtain is down, the lights are dimmed. The year is 1933. What we're interested in here is not necessarily the play that will be performed or the film that will be viewed. We're scanning the faces in the audience, trying to discern, in the darkness, who's there. Any number of faces might interest us, but I'm looking out for two men in their early thirties.

Over the past few years, I have found myself repeatedly imagining this theater in Moscow in June of 1933, during the first Moscow Theatre Festival. The curtain is about to go up, and in the darkness, the audience thrums with anticipation, someone coughs, and there is much whispering, maybe a baritone chuckle, or the audacious shout of some joker urging the curtain operator to hurry up. If the date is June 2nd, then they are assembled to watch a film, "The Road to Life." The next day, the audience would be gathered in the Moscow Art Theater to watch the film "Armored Train." If the date is June 5th then they might be watching the film "The Peasant Woman from Ryazan" or if this is the Moscow Art Theater then the play that is about to begin is an adaptation of Gogol's "Dead Souls" (Morris 221).

I am looking for Max Aub, who turned thirty on June 2nd, and has traveled all the way from Valencia, Spain to see what Soviet theater is like. Not too far away is the other person I am looking for, Andrei Platonov. He is 33 and might be wearing a rumpled suit, perhaps the same one he will to Maxim Gorky's funeral three years later. Platonov has already fallen out of favor with Stalin, and this has made his life as a writer in Moscow hard, but he is working on the short story "Happy Moscow," and the play "14 Little Red Huts." These two writers don't know each

other, or even speak the same language, and I can't confirm that either one ever learned of the other's existence.

Why imagine them together in this theater then? Well, aside from the fact that Aub really did attend the festival, and Platonov probably did, I imagine them there because it's the only physical space likely to ever have been visited by both of the two writers who are united in the pages of this dissertation. And a theatre is a propitious place to start when the investigation at hand is concerned with the creative endeavors of two authors whose writing is politically engaged but dialogic, attentive to the material conditions of embodied experience, and deeply sensitive to the function of language.

And research, I would argue, is also a creative endeavor, and as such, imagining how things might have been and how they could be can be a powerful methodology. Thus, I begin with an imaginary scene as a sort of homage to these two writers whose engagement with socialism and utopian projects promising to level the hierarchies of the past produced a shared interest in socialist realism, but whose experiences and disillusionment with authoritarianism would instead prompt them to produce screenplays, plays, poems, and fiction that trouble the conventions of realist art.

I bring Aub and Platonov together here because they are united by more than a few twists of autobiography or the tantalizing possibility of a chance encounter in a Moscow theater. What brought them both into that theater was a potent combination of idealism, or perhaps more accurately, political engagement, and an intensely dialogic approach to writing. Because they both lived through historic periods saturated with propaganda, and because they were both profoundly stymied by official bureaucracy, they developed a critical stance toward the functions of language. At the same time, they both took the speech of the masses seriously, both en masse

and individually, no matter how colloquial or uninformed or ungrammatical. And more than most other authors of their generation, they knew firsthand that official language is not only used for art, it is also used as a weapon.

This attention to the double-edged sword of language—on the one hand the machinations of the state that can consign a person or their child to a distant concentration camp or labor camp, and on the other hand the protestations of those whose language is disregarded and erased from history is what, I propose, has led to one of the most striking common features in the work of both writers—they gave serious thought to multispecies relations and more-than-human worldmaking.

Max Aub

Aub's parents, Susanne Mohrenwitz and Friedrich Aub, both Jewish, were French and German respectively, and lived in Paris when he was born in 1903. During his childhood, he spoke French and German. At the start of WWI, however, when he was eleven, his family moved to Spain (Fundación Max Aub). There he began to learn Spanish, the language in which he wrote articles, essays, novels, poems, plays, and screenplays for the rest of his life. The challenges Aub faced in regard to the border crossings and travel documents that circumscribed his mobility did not begin in the 1940s: the immediate cause of his family's relocation to Spain was that his father, a traveling salesman of costume jewelry, had been stranded outside of France when WWI started, and as a German citizen he was unable to reenter France to reunite with his family in Paris. Instead his family moved to Spain to reunite with him. Shortly after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, as a young man, Aub traveled back to Paris to work as the cultural attaché for

the Spanish Republican government. As cultural attaché he commissioned Pablo Picasso to paint *Guernica* for the international exhibition in Paris where it was first displayed. Aub returned to Spain in 1937 and worked first for the National Theater Council and then as the translator and screenwriter for *Espoir: Sierra de Teruel*, the Spanish film adaptation of a novel about slowing the advance of Franco's troops, written by the French author André Malraux. Meanwhile, Franco continued advancing northward through Spain, and when Barcelona was finally occupied in 1939, Aub joined those fleeing the city by crossing into France in a truck with the film crew.

Thus Aub arrived in France once again, but this time, as an asylum seeker without papers. There he began writing his magnum opus, *Laberinto mágico*/*The Magic Labyrinth*, a novel cycle in Spanish and about Spain that he paradoxically began in exile in France, the country of his birth. Michael Ugarte writes that "*Laberinto mágico* is created from a dialogue between a voice in exile and a land which is now silent" (736). Bernard Sicot describes how, as the Nazis marched toward Paris, Aub was denounced by the Francoist ambassador there, setting in motion the dangerous machine of police bureaucracy. The image of Aub caught in the machinations of police paperwork is a distorted and inverse image of Aub's depictions of himself, which he explored in questions of authenticity and games of authorial intrusion in his fiction and visual art later on. His later frequent exploration of portraits and self-portraiture, their textual corollaries of biography and autobiography, as well as the questions of credibility and provenance they raise have roots in these experiences. Subsequent denunciations added increasingly distorted traits to police files in which Aub was designated "'sujeto peligroso,' hebreo de nacionalidad alemana,' 'nacionalizado español' 'comunista y revolucionario de acción'" ("dangerous subject, Hebrew of German nationality, nationalized Spaniard, communist involved in revolutionary action"; Aguirre-Otieza 133, Aub, *Diarios 45*.)

In 1940 Aub was arrested and imprisoned in the Roland Garros Stadium, a detention center, and from there transferred to camp Le Vernet de'Ariège (Sicot 399). Ottmar Ette records Aub's condemnation of the bureaucratic procedures of French fascism in which he had become enmeshed, trapped by index cards recording the details of a series of anonymous denunciations, the power of which, Ette writes "Aub was forced to experience with his own body" (72). Friedrich Katz describes the Vernet camp and the end to which those index cards might have consigned Aub, writing, "for many of the refugees the terrible living conditions under which they found themselves was the least of their worries. The armistice the Petain government signed with Hitler specified that all of these refugees would be returned to Germany and commissions of the Gestapo were sent to the camps to set up lists of the people they wanted. The Spanish refugees remained in internment camps and the French government began to send some of the most prominent of them back to Spain where Franco had them shot" (5).

Gilberto Bosques Saldívar, the Mexican consul who issued tens of thousands of Mexican visas to Jews and Spaniards trying to get out of Europe arranged for Aub's release from Vernet, but he was released into the so-called "Free Zone" now controlled by Petain's Vichy government, allied with Nazi Germany. In Marseille, Aub contacted French writers like Malraux, organizations like HICEM and the American Emergency Rescue Society headed by Varian Fry, and Bosques, who gave him a job with the Mexican consulate. Unfortunately, Bosques could not prevent Aub from being arrested again in 1941. This time he was taken to Nice, and deported to a French concentration camp in Djelfa, Algeria. The prickly pear cactus, which was by then endemic throughout southern France, Spain, and North Africa, would have been visible as a ruderal species, flourishing along roadsides and train tracks, throughout his journey.

Aub's escape from the concentration camp in Djelfa was facilitated by two pieces of paper: a letter from Bosques and a fortuitous clerical error. In 1942, Bosques notified officials at the camp through official diplomatic channels that he had secured transport for Aub to Casablanca where he would depart for Mexico, however, it is likely that Aub was only able to leave because his Jewish identity had never been recorded in the camp's official files (Sicot, 426). Instead, Aub had been classified as a Spanish Republican, (later, Aub also refers to himself as an "antifascist")and as such, Bosques succeeded in getting him out of the camp and all the way to Morocco, where he boarded a ship in Casablanca filled with other Jewish refugees fleeing Europe and seeking asylum in Mexico.

Andrei Platonov

Platonov, born in 1899 on the outskirts of the provincial city of Voronezh, was a poet, ardent revolutionary, and eldest son who began working as a teenager in the same railyard as his father to supplement the family income. As the Platonov scholar Thomas Seifrid notes, he was "one of the few genuinely proletarian writers" who was writing in the immediate postrevolutionary period (Seifrid, 2009, 4). Indeed, Platonov's early newspaper articles and poetry attest to his earnest commitment to achieving a utopian future in which science and technology would play a decisive role. In response to widespread famines and starvation in the early twenties, he gave up writing to become a land reclamation engineer for the regional government, and spent much of that decade "overseeing the agency's efforts to prevent future droughts" (Seifrid, 2009, 10-11). This work put him on the frontlines of the Soviet "battle against nature," a battle with which he grew increasingly disenchanted as his work was stymied by

bureaucratic machinations and the misapprehension of local people assigned to work on his projects.

Less than ten years after Viktor Shklovsky elaborated his theory of *ostranenie* or estrangement, in prose in the article, "Iskusstovo kak priyom," he boarded a plane and flew to the steppe city of Voronezh to visit Andrei Platonov, a young and formerly prolific Bolshevik writer who had recently given up writing to work as a land reclamation agent, or as Shklovsky put it in his *Third Factory,* to "clean up rivers" (Shklovsky, 125). Shklovsky says "all these rivers we studied in geography books… They don't exist" [Все эти реки, о которых мы учили в учебнике географии: Воронеж, Битюг, Хопер, Тихая Сосна., их нет] Instead, he describes dried up riverbeds choked with reeds, and underneath the reeds, the river is hardly discernable in the meagre moisture of the drying mud. While this description of the disappointing state of the river systems that made agriculture possible in the region—and whose majestic courses graced the pages of the young Shklovsky's textbooks—sets the stage for his ironic quips about the banality of the rural life he finds Platonov leading, it also proves to be a particularly apt introduction to Platonov's later literary works. And it is precisely Shklovsky's surprise at finding the rivers he thought he knew depleted and "overgrown with reeds" [Они заросли камышом] that indicates exactly where Platonov's attention lies, and where it will remain throughout the rest of his literary career. Shklovsky, perhaps unconsciously, registered what a century of literary critics have ignored: Platonov was concerned with anthropogenic climate change, and his entire aesthetic project, culminating in the novels *Chevengur* and *The Foundation Pit*, grew out of that concern, as organically as the reeds that drew moisture from the overgrown and dissipated riverbed.

Shklovsky, on the other hand, could hardly stand the steppe, and he describes Comrade Platonov driving a “courageous trough called an automobile” [ездит на мужественном корыте, называемом автомобиль] on roads infested with gophers, visiting towns with prosaic, “not fun” names like “Большая Гнилуша" (“Big Stump”; 125). While he certainly would have understood the immense importance of rivers in relation to Soviet agricultural production, he does not appear to relish his time with Platonov. Instead, the urgency of Platonov’s obsession seems, only occasionally, to break through the tone of ironic detachment that characterizes much of Shklovsky’s account, as when he writes, “Есть места, где нет воды на сорок верст. Пустыня ползет сюда по оврагам. Реки зарастают, сохнут, высыхают совсем. Тогда на дне их копают колодцы” (“There are places where there is no water for forty versts. The dessert crawls in through ravines. Rivers become overgrown, they go dry, they dry up completely. Then… dig wells” 125). Surely this is not the textbook account he learned in school, surely this is Shklovsky repeating what Platonov has told him, adopting, momentarily, the same desperate tone—what Mikhail Bakhtin would call quasi-direct speech. The concept of quasi-direct speech, or speech in which the author’s voice is at least partially discernible within a character’s speech, can help readers appreciate what Aub and Platonov’s nonhuman animals are saying.

Part One of this dissertation is titled “’Almost Able to Talk’ and ‘Faithfully Translated’,” in reference to the characterizations of the speech of the two key figures under investigation: Platonov’s bear hammerer, Misha, and Aub’s erudite crow ethnographer, Jacobo.

In “Chapter 1. Animal Language and the Modern Novel,” an examination of the history of animal speech in European narratives culminates in my claim that animal focalization is not only a curious anomaly but is instead integral to the development of the modern novel. Folktales and performances that flourished in oral tradition, incunabula like Aesop’s Fables and the Bible,

and the street literature that print technology engendered all feature notable examples of animal focalization. Two authors often considered crucial to the development of the European novel, Miguel de Cervantes and Leo Tolstoy also provide case studies of animal focalization which in turn informed the respective development of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Viktor Shklovsky's theory of *ostranenie* (defamiliarization.)

"Chapter 2. Bear Life" presents a modern variation on the ancient technique of animal focalization. Platonov's portrayal of Misha's ability to think and work but inability to speak and be understood is a twentieth century animal satire that offers readers the means to reflect on the function of language, definitions of the human, and the difference between thought and action. In addition to Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie*, Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben provide conceptual frameworks for terms like *animal laborans* and *bare life* that undergird my analysis.

"Chapter 3. Bird's Eye View" takes up Aub's narrative, a fiction disguised as an ethnography written by a crow observing the French concentration camp, Vernet d'Ariege where Aub was twice imprisoned. In this chapter, I investigate how the national, institutional, and disciplinary history of anthropology and art history in Mexico proved essential to the development of Aub's critical response to the problems of Renaissance humanism. In addition to extending my arguments about animal focalization, Gerard Genette's comprehensive study of paratext and Sylvia Wynter's posthumanist thinking help me identify how Aub's crow problematizes the disciplinary conventions in social science and art history research.

Whereas the first part of this dissertation is concerned with the animals who are vanishing most rapidly from our world, the wild[1] mammals and wild birds. In 2018, Yinon M. Bar-On (a

[1] "Wild" is such a troublesome adjective. Here it might be better to say "not domestic" for the sake of those who will point out that crows have adapted to live alongside humans in various urban ecosystems. The fact remains that crows are not as numerous, nor proliferating as rapidly as poultry. And at the same time, bears too can become synanthropes and live alongside humans when limits on their habitat force them into proximity. Both Misha and

quantitative biologist), Rob Phillips (a biophysicist), and Ron Milo (a systems biologist) undertook the task of calculating the weight of all life on planet earth. Their work shows how tiny the percentage of earth's biomass is now claimed by wild mammals and birds. In the process of estimating and calculating biomass distribution by species, they note that "[o]ne of the most fundamental efforts in biology is to describe the composition of the living world," framing their work in terms that echoes the kinds of representational claims sometimes made by artists and authors. Not only have humans irreversibly altered the earth's terrain, the acidity of oceans, the gases in the atmosphere, and the climate, humans have radically changed the composition of life on earth. In the twenty-first century, human and livestock biomass outweighs the combined biomass of all wild mammals. Two hundred years ago, the reverse was true.

However, humans remain equally insensible to the species whose biomass outweighs all other life: the arthropods among mammals, plants, and even bacteria. Part Two of this dissertation "Burdock, Cockroach, Cactus, Cochineal" takes up the nonhuman life that surrounds humans, but appears easiest for humans to ignore. "Chapter 4. The monstrous, unclean little world," explores plant blindness and the documented antipathy humans express toward everything from athropods, particularly insects, to bacteria, with a particular focus on species that have been labelled as weeds, pests, and pathogens. These are the species most often employed in dehumanizing propaganda. And disturbingly, in the twentieth century, new chemical and technological processes made it possible not only to imagine but to enact the complete eradication of species. The uncomfortable contrast between efforts to preserve endangered species and eradicate populous species who pose problems to humans is the subject of this chapter.

Jacobo are examples of this phenomena, common throughout human history, and growing more so as some contact with humans becomes inescapable.

"Chapter 5. Comrade Burdock" considers how weeds have figured as the vegetal villains in human narratives for millennia, especially as an agricultural threat: infiltrating fields, receiving care intended for crops, leaching nutrients from the soil, sheltering pests, nourishing pathogens, and crossing boundaries. This chapter explores alternative and contested imaginaries by investigating late nineteenth and early twentieth century Russian efforts to think with weedy plants and recognize their capacities for active participation in convivial world-making. The plant scientist Nikolai Vavilov theorized a complex relationship of care and adaptive mimicry that allowed weeds to flourish among the grains they evolved to resemble. Platonov, I propose, anticipated contemporary posthumanist discourse on interspecies interdependency, positioning weedy plants such as burdock (*Arctium lappa*), orache (*Atriplex heterosperma*), and nettle (*Urtica dioica*) as ideal comrades in his novel *Chevengur*. Not only do they survive environmental stressors and feed other species during famines, but they also "grow in a fraternal way among the other unauthorized grasses" forming a deeply rooted vegetal "International of grass and flowers." He elaborates keen affective ties binding humans, and weeds together in close physical proximity, forming a more-than-human-entanglement of the dispossessed.

"Chapter 6. Mexican Red," follows Aub on his escape from the Algerian concentration camp Djelfa, and made his way to Mexico, travelling on roads and passing through ports where the nopal cactus, *Opuntia ficus indica*, dominated the landscape. Almost two decades later, in 1964, he published *Juego de cartas (Game of Cards)* both an epistolary novel and deck of playing cards in which the same cactus appears. Players read the letters on the back of each card to discover who the dead protagonist, a man named Máximo Ballesteros, really was. Unsurprisingly, the illustrations on the cards have garnered less scholarly attention than the text itself. In these illustrations, particularly those for the suit of diamonds, Aub tells another story

about how relationships can establish identity. There the nopal cactus appears as the constant companion to the red diamonds: a visual reference to the relationship between the cactus and the scale insect *Dactylopius coccus* which makes carmine. By taking a deep dive into the history of Mesoamerican inconography depicting the multispecies relationship between nopal and cochineal insect, and following Silvia Rivera Cuiscanqui's methods of image analysis, I reveal how Aub deploys visual rhetoric to problematize colonial resource extraction. I look at how the nopal travelled from the Americas to West Africa and the Mediterranean where it became endemic—and within a century began to appeared in landscape paintings throughout the alongside other signifiers of colonial land relations. In this chapter, I examine Aub's allusion to the indigenous technology of cochineal production as exemplifying Donna Haraway's elucidation of sympoiesis of multi-species worldmaking.

In Dipesh Chakrabarty's foundational article, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," he traces the philosophical underpinnings of this disregard through Giambattista Vico and Benedetto Croce. According to Chakrabarty, Vico's assertion that men can only understand what they make, informs the tradition that divides human history from natural history, and ends up in Karl Marx's epigraph about how "men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please" (Chakrabarty, 202). This is why, Chakrabarty explains, that for humans, that which is "apart from human concern and human 'language'" cannot be comprehended as existing or not existing and so in effect, it "does not 'exist' because it does not exist for humans in any meaningful sense" (203). Chakrabarty argues that even though twentieth century arguments began to complicate "the Viconian one," they "continued to justify the separation of human from natural history."

Aub and Platonov are remarkable in that they break down the separation between human history and natural history by imagining the more-than-human experiences that cannot be comprehended. As it happens, such practices of imaginative storytelling were not so new. What Aub and Platonov did was reformulate some of the egalitarian and utopian tropes of folktale, fable, and street literature for the twentieth century.

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PART I: “Almost Able to Talk” and “Faithfully Translated”

Chapter 1. Animal Language and the Modern Novel

Since time, therefore.

Since so long ago, can we say that the animal has been looking at us?

What animal? The other.

—Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)" (372)

With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world…

—Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176

Tracking animal stories back in time to some primordial wilderness is a futile task: if we go back far enough, we risk losing whatever distinction between humans and nonhuman animals that we might have—however erroneously—carried with us on this wild goose chase. What we surmise is this: currently evolutionary biologists think *Homo sapiens* appeared around 315 kilo (thousand) years ago. There is possible evidence of symbols carved into bone around 120 kya. The oldest representational art, currently (because new contenders could be discovered at any time) a painting of a stout warty pig on cave walls in Sulawesi dating back to a minimum of 45.5 kya, follows abstract images by about 25 kya. Other images in the same area, created slightly later (up to 32 kya), represent more pigs with some human figures hunting them.

Are animals the de facto muses of our earliest artistic impulses? What constitutes art in human prehistory is a fraught question, informed by contemporary debates on what might distinguish humans from animals and what distinguishes artmaking from other human behaviors. And who gets to define art, anyway? When 12-year-old Maria de Sautuola accompanied her amateur archeologist father, Marcelino, on an 1879 visit to some caves he had discovered in

Altamira, she had no idea that the images of steppe bison, horses, and deer she noticed on the ceiling would come to be known as the "Sistine Chapel of Prehistory." In fact, public response to the Marcelino de Sautuola's 1880 book on the discovery were decidedly skeptical: the images were initially dismissed as an elaborate fraud. However, as more cave paintings in the complex at Altamira and in other caves in Northern Spain and Southeastern France came to light over the following decades, the discourse surrounding them shifted as they became the primary exemplars of a new concept: "paleolithic art." Eduardo Palacio-Pérez's genealogy (in the Foucauldian sense) of the term traces separate ethnocentric imaginaries in European science and humanities discourse which became synthesized under this rubric. He shows how two classification projects converged: the first was the study of the origin of the human species and the second comprised ongoing efforts to define "art." Ultimately, at the end of the nineteenth century European art historians came to classify all artistic practice into two categories: the first was art which corresponded to European artistic conventions (and middle-class tastes) and the second was "primitive art." "Paleolithic art," Palacio-Pérez argues, became a branch of primitive art. This definition positioned the images in the Altamira cave complex on a timeline designed to suggest progressive development, such that the designation of all the art produced within diverse aesthetic traditions outside of Europe, now classified as "primitive," could then serve as evidence that non-European artistic practice was less advanced. These classifications had obvious implications beyond the field of art history, serving to shore up old justifications for colonial land dispossession on that had been deteriorating under the effects of a wide variety of critiques. The Western European location of what were believed at the time to be the first representational images formed a cornerstone of these assumptions. However, the cave paintings in Sulawesi put

the latter supposition to rest: the oldest representational prehistoric art on record is now found in Oceania/Southeast Asia.

Paleolithic art was also supposed to illustrate distinctly human capacities for abstract thought and awareness of social organization. However, pinpointing any biological basis for human exceptionalism has proven shakier and shakier as the study of animal cognition has expanded and incorporated new methodologies. And yet another complication comes from the fact that many of the earliest cave paintings, including the warty pigs as well as the bison, deer, and horses in Europe, may not have been made by *Homo sapiens* at all, but instead by prehistoric hominid cousins.

That leaves the question Leo Tolstoy took an entire book to answer: "What is art?" Plato thought art was an imitation of nature, and a poor one at that—the carpenter and philosopher could both do better, as they produced useful objects or tried to ascertain truths. More than two thousand years later, Tolstoy did not hold artists in much higher regard. In the end (and nearing the end of his own life), he determined that art is something which produces feeling, but good art unites creator and viewer through morally beneficial feeling. (On this basis, he rejected much of his earlier writing.) On the other end of the spectrum, *l'art pour l'art* or art for art's sake is a definition that originated in nineteenth century France. No one can ask the prehistoric pig painters of Sulawesi if they hoped to evoke morally beneficial feelings in their community or if they were painting warty pigs for the sake of painting warty pigs. However, for my purposes, they are artists. I tentatively accept Plato's first premise—art tends toward mimesis (but not always in ways that are immediately recognizable to creator or appreciator), and I accept part of his second premise—art is not always concerned with absolute or ideal truths. Tolstoy's definition I will set aside for the moment.

But let's go back just a little further (and perhaps I can better illustrate what I mean by tending toward mimesis) since our first words—or more accurately the first words uttered by our nonhuman animal forbears—were probably about animals too. Predator-alarm calls are frequently cited by evolutionary biologists as a basic example of referential communication common to several species including a wide array of birds and mammals, including sooty mangabeys, wild sifaka, red-fronted lemur, meerkats, and vervet monkeys. Like certain birds, such as Japanese great tits, vervet monkeys make different alarm calls to distinguish between different predators—the monkeys "produce acoustically discrete alarm calls for eagles, leopards and snakes, and thereby provide information about the predator type to receivers" (Suzuki, 61).

Intriguingly, the ornithologist William Searcy and psychologist Stephen Nowicki have identified evidence of deception in animal signaling systems. Similarly, Jakob Brø-Jorgenson and Wiline M. Pangle assert that "male topi antelopes alarm snort deceptively to retain receptive females in their territories and thereby secure mating opportunities" (E33). More recently, Vukašin Bjelica and Ana Golubović published research on the elaborate performances of dice snakes who feign death to escape predation. Death feigning, they explain, is "present in a wide variety of taxa and usually characterized by the prey lying motionless often along with defaecation, musking and autohaemorrhaging" (PAGE NUMBER). If we take the cognitive capacity for deception (which suggests theory of mind, involving the ability to imagine, to some degree, that another's perspective differs from one's own) as one of the building blocks for fiction, and acknowledge that these false alarm calls and feigned deaths are "about animals," then perhaps we might conceive of such animal words and deeds as proto-animal stories. If deception is a common feature of animal communication beyond the realm of the human, then we might concede that some form of fiction is too.

Vladimir Nabokov, alluding to Aesop, writes "Literature was born not on the day when a boy crying wolf, wolf came running out of the Neanderthal valley with a big gray wolf at his heels: literature was born on the day when a boy came crying wolf, wolf and there was no wolf behind him" (5). Maybe we would do just as well to say literature was born on the day a wolf-cub came running up the from the Neanderthal valley howling man, man when there was no man behind him. After all, the first entry in the Oxford English Dictionary for the word "fable," is to designate "[a] fictitious narrative or statement; a story not founded on fact."

If there is no discernable point of origin for animal stories, let us start instead with the oral narratives that serve as a conduit, as some scholars now believe, through which prehistoric environmental knowledge passes into the present. While the full richness of that environmental knowledge is too broad for my investigation here—and anyway, I am much more concerned with what can be imagined than what can be known—I will argue that certain attributes of animal characterization that flourished in oral traditions remained visible during the transition to print culture in Europe and even exerted a critical influence on the development of the modern novel. Some of the literary techniques that animal characterization helped develop include variable focalization, ostranenie or defamiliarization, and a close attention to speech acts as artifice and mimesis. Indeed, this argument, which I will develop below in a whirlwind tour of the longue durée history of the novel in relation to animal characters, will then carry over into the following two chapters where I will examine specific instances of these techniques more closely in Andrei Platonov's *The Foundation Pit* and Max Aub's *The Crow Manuscript*.

Oral Tradition

But first, how could the oral tradition be a conduit for environmental knowledge? In 1972, Jane C. Beck observed that a folk tale that aligns with historical fact can "be as revealing about a people's past as any archaeological discovery" (109). Beck argues that the giant beaver tales common to several indigenous communities in the Northeast United States might attest to human interactions with the Pleistocene Giant Beaver, *Castoroides ohienses*, a bear-sized beaver that went extinct during the Late Pleistocene megafauna extinctions (most likely due to human hunting). For my purposes, what is most important is the persistence of the giant beaver as a character in the cultural imaginary of a people. In the decades since that article first appeared interdisciplinary scholars have begun to recognize the merit of such arguments. And over the past two decades, championed by scholars like Robert C. Echo-Hawk, the role oral narratives can play in illuminating the realities of deep time by corroborating and complimenting the archeological record has been increasingly accepted across disciplines. Animal tales are not a mere frivolity, they are a lasting and evolving attempt to understand material realities and the complexities of more-than-human relations over incredibly long periods of time.

Oral narratives span several genres, including epic poems, myth cycles, and the folk tales which form the basis for the first part of my argument, so I'll take a moment here to define my terms. "Originally the folk tale was (and still is)," literary scholar Jack Zipes writes, "an oral narrative form cultivated by non-literate and literate people to express the manner in which they perceived and perceive nature and their social order and their wish to satisfy their needs and wants" (7). This definition suits my purposes, as my focus in this and the two following chapters is on the evolution of those narratives over time, and how the animal characters that populated them have continued to play an integral role in human perceptions of nature and the social order,

often serving as carriers of those perceptions into modern novels where other concerns might seem to prevail.

Zipes emphasizes the prehistoric origin of such tales and the agency of those who have handed them down, aptly naming them "carriers and transformers of the tales" (7). In these tales, anything could happen, including "cannibalism, human sacrifices, primogeniture and ultimogeniture, the stealing and selling of a bride, the banishment of a young princess or prince, the transformation of people into animals and plants, the intervention of beasts and strange figures," because these tales "were all based on the social reality and beliefs of different primitive societies" (8). Many oral narratives have been plucked from the oral tradition (a term which encompasses both the narrative itself and the cultural context that facilitated its transmission) that sustained them for millennia, and we may only know them now as they were set down in writing. As they were set down in writing, they became something different—the literary fairy tale (more on animals in print culture below.)

Folktales can be further separated into categories such as fables, wonder tales, animal tales, and fairy tales. For the purposes of this chapter, I will define fables as all tales that are attributed (apocryphally or not) to Aesop, follow the model of his fables, or were inspired by his fables. Aesop's narrative model frequently (but not exclusively) involves animal characters who speak to each other and sometimes humans in a language common to all. To some degree the definition above is expedient and quickly sweeps aside an extensive body of scholarship on the provenance of various fables, allowing even relatively recent and sometimes innovative iterations of the fable to be lumped together with much older and more exemplary ones. At the same time, there are enough doubts about Aesop's very existence let alone the origin of all his fables to necessitate this expediency, at least here, where the task at hand does not require sorting

fables into more precise categories. And indeed, part of the difficulty with definitions is that some fables overlap with other kinds of narrative.

In *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* Vladimir Propp compiles a comprehensive list of the essential features of folk narrative based on the model of Russian wonder tales. Wonder tales begin with a protagonist who breaks a prohibition and is banished or exiled, and then sets out to complete a task, acquiring some useful magical items, often from nonhuman beings he encounters along the way. Often the protagonist meets an animal or a series of three animals who might test him or exchange help and/or gifts with him. Against all odds, the protagonist prevails. Zipes writes that "the timelessness of the tale and lack of geographical specificity endow it with the Utopian connotations—utopia in its original meaning designated no place, a place that no one had ever envisaged. We form and keep the Utopian kernel of the tale safe in our imaginations with hope" (10).

Walter Benjamin may have been thinking of the kind of animal helpers Propp identifies when he writes "in the shape of animals which come to the aid of the child in the fairy tale… [the story] shows that nature not only is subservient to myth, but much prefers to be aligned with man" (9). However, I disagree with Benjamin on this point. Animals who come to the aid of children and other protagonists are rarely so domestic as to signify straightforward subservience or absolute alignment. Let us not forget the many folktale parents who set a tale in motion with the project of abandoning a child in the forest to be eaten by wild beasts. And even in the story of *Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf*, the wolf eats Ivan's horse before ever offering him a ride on his back or giving the youth any useful advice (which Ivan characteristically fails to follow.) The gray wolf may be subservient to myth, but his actions are inscrutable: he does not behave the way humans or wolves might be expected to behave. He apparently not the kind of

wild beast who eats abandoned children, but because he devours Ivan's horse—and might have eaten Ivan had he chosen a different path—that possibility is never entirely foreclosed. His behavior toward Ivan suggests something more like an individual feeling, more of a degree of sympathy toward Ivan than any beast-wide alignment with man.

This distinction between the individual animal character and the animal as a type is a defining feature of other developments in the history of the animal tale such as the beast epic, discussed below. Of course, folk tales predate scientific taxonomies and the sorting of animals into species, but they often incorporate intergenerational knowledge about species-specific behaviors that attest to close more-than-human relations. At the same time, the animals in folktales are rarely reducible to a mere type: even in the simplest fables, individual animal characters "have different trajectories and therefore different existences," in other words, the rudimentary experiences that Éric Baratay cites as components of a biography.

And to further complicate matters of genre definition, Mikhail Bakhtin makes his own list of folk literature and performance, contrasting all folk narrative forms and aligning them with the novel as the "artistic prose genres that gravitated toward it." Indeed, in contrast with the ideological authority of poetic forms, Bakhtin saw these folk genres as shaping the novel's development. He writes:

> …on the lower levels, on the stages of local fairs and buffoon spectacles, the heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all "languages" and dialects; there developed the literature of the fabliaux and Schwänke of street songs, folksayings, anecdotes, where there was no language-center at all, where there was to be found a lively play with the "languages" of poets, scholars, monks, knights and others, where all

> "languages" were masks and where no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face (273).

Bakhtin never mentions the animal performances (and indeed, animal costumes) that were common feature in local fairs and buffoon spectacles, although who but animals could be better equipped at signaling that all languages are masks, and no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face? Aesop's fable, "The Fox and the Mask," might serve to illustrate this idea (and Bakhtin was probably familiar with it, given the scope of his readings in Latin, German, and Russian—all languages in which the fable appeared.) In the fable, a fox goes into an actor's house, and finds a mask. With his paws on the mask, he says, "What a beautiful head! Yet it is of no value, as it entirely lacks brains" (Townsend's translation, Fable 27 in the Perry Index.) I say this fable "might serve to illustrate" Bakhtin's assertion that "no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face," not solely because of the content, but also because of the reception and publication history. While the conventional definition of a fable is widely regarded as a narrative vehicle for a moral, in actuality, fables never perfectly illustrate the moral attached to them. (The Oxford English dictionary definition of fable: "A short story devised to convey some useful lesson; *esp.* one in which animals or inanimate things are the speakers or actors.") The useful lesson conveyed by *The Fox and the Mask* is neither immediately apparent nor conclusively absolute. Different translators and adapters of the novel have changed the content and appended widely variable morals to the end. The first printer of Aesop in English, William Caxton, shifts the fable and meaning in a direction that may have served as an inspiration for Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias" a few centuries later. Caxton changes Aesop's fox into a wolf, and the mask into a dead man's head; the warning is that glory can't preserve what prudence has lost. Jean de La Fontaine retains the fox but replaces the mask

with a bust representing vanity among the aristocracy. But these are fables in the printed form, and for the moment, I am still concerned with the oral tradition, and the concerns of narratives "on the lower levels," the level of "local fairs and buffoon spectacles."

In medieval Europe, fragmentary animal tales began to cohere into beast epics, a global genre that aggregates multiple fables into a sprawling narrative. The defining feature of beast epics is that they always feature a named animal protagonist, descriptions of social hierarchy, and some element of satire. James Simpson, the scholar of medieval literature who has written extensively on one of the most popular and widely translated beast epics of the period, *Le Roman de Reinart*, defined the genre for the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, writing that although they are an incredibly variable genre, examples of which can be drawn from every continent, "important common points remain, not least how such material maps and describes the contours of human experience, not only charting the world beyond the village but, through the mimicry of human activity and traits imputed to speaking animals, exploring our relations with those strangest of creatures, our human neighbors" (128). I see this overt attention to mimesis, where literary artifice is yoked to believability, and the concomitant thematic focus on exploring relationships imagined as both inherently hierarchical and predicated on radical alterity as the very features animal focalization will deposit in the modern novel. Moreover, beast epics are particularly open-ended in that at their most allegorical, they can function as satires focused on human society without ever shedding the beast trappings that allow them, in Simpson's words, to harness "imagined animals as tools for narratives as varied and problematic as the exploitation and commoditization of actual creatures" (129).

Folk tales—fables, wonder tales, and animal tales—tend to be dialogic, making them difficult to define. In common usage, the word "dialogic" simply refers to the inclusion of

dialogue, but Bakhtin conceived of dialogism as much more powerful—for him a dialogic work both shapes and is shaped by other works. Folk tales are dialogic because they exist in intimate conversation with many other tales, and they alter those tales and become altered by them in the process. This process is not limited to the genres common to a particular language or culture, folktales traveled great distances across many languages, and both fables and wonder tales were altered by intercultural exchange. As I will discuss in greater length in Chapter 3, Aesop's fables were one of first non-religious texts translated into Nahual the language of the Aztec or Mexica people. And some wonder tale scholars suggest that architectural features encountered by exiled protagonists in the Russian tales allude to Byzantine travel, while other scholars working with wonder tales in Western Europe suggest links to the wonders of the so-called New World. This capacity to absorb and impart a wide variety of genre conventions will become, for Bakhtin, one of the defining features of the novel. But even folk tales leave their distinctive fingerprints all over the other narrative forms (and speech genres!) with which they come in contact, and as they are passed along, they become marked by the fingerprints of those other forms and genres too. However dialogic, folktales tend to be concise—they can be told in one sitting.

Indeed, most folktales stand alone as relatively short stories, but beast epics with their extended repertoire of recognizable characters, irreverent and tricky protagonists, and episodic narrative constructions, catapult dialogism into a much longer structure. Beast epics, which were both orally transmitted (and even accompanied by music) and collected and compiled in manuscripts, are a striking example of double-voicedness, avoiding the monologic style, or ideological unification, that had been a hallmark of most long narrative forms up to that point, with ancient epic poetry serving as the prime example. Here, I'm drawing on Bakhtin's work on double-voicedness and monologic style in his 1934 essay "Discourse in the Novel":

> The double voicedness one finds in prose is of another sort altogether. There—on the rich soil of novelistic prose—double-voicedness draws its energy, its dialogized ambiguity, not from individual dissonances, misunderstandings or contradictions (however tragic, however firmly grounded in individual destinies), in the novel, this double-voicedness sinks its roots deep into a fundamental, socio-linguistic speech diversity and multi-languagedness. True, even in the novel heteroglossia is by and large always personified, incarnated in individual human figures, with disagreements and oppositions individualized. But such oppositions of individual wills and minds are submerged in social heteroglossia, they are reconceptualized through it. Oppositions between individuals are only surface upheavals of the untamed elements in social heteroglossia, surface manifestations of those elements that play on such individual oppositions, make them contradictory, saturate their consciousness and discourses with a more fundamental speech diversity.

A longer dialogic narrative allows for greater complexity in narrative development and consequently, the interiority of individual characters can be explored at greater length. I agree with Simpson's assertion that "such sophisticated and subversive materials chart the edges and limits of humankind in their interrogations of social or gender conventions, as well as of the ambition of lang[uage] to describe and tame nature" (128). In beast epics, the interrogatory potential of folk tales becomes more fully realized, and the perspective of those being described and tamed as parts of nature becomes more fully developed. As the utopian imaginary that Zipes identifies in folktales increases in length, new avenues for subversion open up, and critical

challenges to social and linguistic conventions can take on increasingly complex and playful forms.

The rise of printing technology marks the real distinction between folk tales and fairy tales: fairy tales are the literary manifestation of a body of narratives that had previously been transmitted orally. As such, fairy tales preserve some of the elements of the folk tale while reflecting more modern concerns and the tastes of an increasingly (in some places) literate and reading public. In their composition too, fairy tales retain the hallmarks of oral transmission, while also exhibiting some of the traits of text-based narrative. However, disentangling the transmission history is challenging because many folktales moved in and out of print: literary fairy tales were sometimes adopted by oral storytellers and modified in the retelling and folktales published in books sometimes supplanted other oral variations. Furthermore, folktales crossed shifting national borders and languages with relative ease, albeit often with alterations acquired in the transition.

By the time this wide range of folk genres were written down (and rewritten), curated, and transformed into literary texts in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, they were saturated with the social conditions and aesthetic concerns of the late feudal conditions. As Zipes suggests (and I agree) these texts "can be equated with the wish fulfillment and utopian projections of the people i.e., the folk, who preserved and cultivated these tales" in pre-capitalist societies (8).

The kind of wish fulfilment and utopian projection Zipes describes, involving the possibility of slipping free of social constraints associated with one's position in society, transgressing apparently rigid boundaries and borders, and upending of hierarchical power flourishes in another arena of print culture too. The sixteenth century proliferation of print

technology, combined with innovations leading to cheaper production of paper, contributed to the elaboration of these themes in visual rhetoric through cheap "penny prints," a form of transnational "street literature," with language-specific iterations such like Catalan auques, Castilian aleluyas, and Russian lubki (Gomis and Salman, 97).

In addition to the popularization and adaptation of theatrical productions and literary classics, and enhancing religious rituals, Gomis and Salman have identified how penny prints also addressed "new audiences (lower classes, children, peripheral languages)," standardized "(folk/fairy) tales over a long period of time," and provided a discrete and easily transported means of "supporting, evading, or resisting the edifying strategies initiated by ideological institutions" (105). While Gomis and Salman focus on the role of penny prints in the spread of plays, literature, and what they refer to as "(folk/fairy)" tales in the Netherlands and Spain, they indicate some of the terrain that helps uphold my argument in future chapters. Namely, penny prints attest to the translation of what Bakhtin calls "carnivalesque" into an accessible print culture available to the lower classes, children, and people speaking what Gomis and Salman refer to as "peripheral languages[2]." Consequently, penny prints devoted to "The Upside-Down World" provide evidence of the enduring legacy of carnivalesque language and visual rhetoric, forming a bridge between their performance in the oral tradition to their appearance in the cultural production of later literary texts. This type of print provides countless examples of wish fulfilment and utopian projection by illustrating radical reversals of accepted hierarchy. Animals who have switched places with humans abound in "Upside-Down World" prints: horses ride on human backs, pigs roast humans for supper, and dogs beat their masters.

[2] A salient point in relation to regions under Russian and Spanish Imperial rule, where linguistic diversity was extensive while literacy—particularly in imperial language—remained an exception rather than a rule until the beginning of the twentieth century.

From Ancient to Modern: Talking Animals in the Bible and Aesop's Fables

Animal focalization has survived in two distinct textual traditions that stretch back millennia: Aesop's fables and Bible stories. The provenance of the Old Testament lies beyond the realm of this work, but biblical animal focalization is worth mentioning as a counterpoint to that which occurs in fables. There are surprising similarities in animal focalization in both of these narrative traditions, and they are both notable for their translingual proliferation as incunabula in the early years of printing technology in Europe. Therefore, the immense influence Aesop's Fables and the Old Testament exerted on the transition of animal focalization into print culture should not be underestimated. And because Aesop's Fables are not always the first text that springs to mind in relation to the spread of printing technology in Europe (the first incunabula containing Aesop's fables may have been printed as early as 1465, within ten years of the Gutenberg Bible), just as the Bible is not the first text one might go to in search of animal focalization, I will outline some notable parallels between these two very distinct narrative traditions. In particular, I want to draw attention to parallels in the function a language, particularly in relation to counternarratives that emerge in response to demonstrations of monologic discourse.

The Gutenberg Bible is famous as one of the earliest exemplars of the printing press technology in Europe. If we start our study of literary history from this point—as some scholars do—then we start with two talking animals. The Old Testament notoriously contains a talking serpent, but it also contains a talking ass. In each of the exchanges in which they participate as speakers, an ambivalent relationship between humans and nonhuman animals is established, and

in each, the nonhuman animal exhibits knowledge that the human involved doesn't. Thus, the serpent and ass are portrayed as having their own individual perspective and motives, independent of the human or humans with whom they interact. Moreover, the nonhuman animals in question decisively shape the destiny of their human interlocutors.

The serpent's conversation with Eve in the Garden of Eden is immediately interesting because the first two characters introduced in the book of Genesis, God and Adam, are both absent. This conversation, the first true conversation in the bible, is a conversation between subalterns. Here we can see Bakhtin's "principle of outsideness" at play (168). Prior to this moment, God has issued several commands, but Adam has not responded to them with any speech of his own—not even nonverbal affirmation—within the narrative frame. God has watched Adam name all the animals, but they don't appear to have spoken to each other about it. When one speaks, there is seemingly no need for the other to reply. There is something surreal in this arrangement, as if no real voiced speech ever happens this is discourse at the most monologic end of the spectrum.

Surprisingly, the serpent is the first speaker to address Eve directly. Not even Adam has spoken to her yet. When God first brought Eve to Adam, he is moved to speak, but about—not to—her. He refers to her as "this" saying, "This is once bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. This shall be called woman: because she was taken of the man" [Hoc nunc os ex ossibus meis, et caro de carne mea: haec vocabitur Virago, quoniam de viro sumpta est.] (CITATION) Because he says "this (here)/hoc" and "this (feminine)/haec" perhaps his speech was meant for God, or perhaps it was only a soliloquy. Maybe he wasn't used to speaking to anyone else. In any case, Adam gives her a name just as he has done with all the other animals.

Thus, when the serpent addresses Eve and she responds, readers of the Bible encounter dialogue for the first time. That's right, the first dialogue in the bible is between a human character and a nonhuman animal. Sylvia Wynter helpfully glosses Lukacs's characterization, following Bakhtin, of the epic form as having nothing to do with questions: "The hero is essentially at one with the values of his world" (96). At the start of Genesis, God and Adam are playing by the rules of the epic so there is no need for dialogue. God commands, and there is no need for Adam to answer. His agreement is implicit. It's not even completely clear when God is speaking to Adam or just speaking, as was his wont when he blessed the "great whales and all manner of feathered fowls in their kinds" without expecting any response from them, long before Adam was created.

If hermeneutics were your preferred mode of literary analysis, then you might pinpoint the novel as beginning here. Another striking feature of this first biblical dialogue is that from the first words, when the serpent alludes to God's rules about what fruit Adam and Eve are allowed to eat, the dialogue is double voiced. The serpent and Eve's dialogue is about what God meant, and each repeats the rule according to their own interpretation. Eve's response to the serpent's suggestion that she and Adam can't eat whatever they want is, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." (Gen. 1:003:002-3). The serpent speaks directly to Eve in response, entering into the first dialogue between two characters by raising the possibility that what God said was not true. The serpent answers her, "Ye shall not surely die…" (Gen. 1:003:004). These are two characters with different motives, and they each know something different. A reader unfamiliar with this story might wonder who is hiding something, what is hidden, and what will happen next. And neither of these characters appear to

be fully in accordance with "the values of his world," so even in this early modern rendition of an ancient text, we begin to catch a glimpse of Lukacs's definition of the novel, which Wynter summarizes as "With the novel form, the rupture of the hero and the now inauthentic values of his world begins. The novel is in essence a question mark" (96).

But this is not the novel form, and neither the serpent nor Eve are the heroes in this story. And you probably already know what happens next. It won't be until the Fourth Book of Moses (Numbers) that an animal will speak again.

This time, an ass speaks. The man on her back, Balam, is trying to defy God by riding to join Balac and the lords of Moab to curse Moses and his people. God told him not to, and when Balam decided to go anyway, God sent and angel with a sword to block the way. The first time the ass sees the angel ahead, she suddenly turns off the road into a field, but Balam smites her, and they get back on the road. Soon she sees the angel again, this time between two walls in a vineyard, and in an attempt to turn aside, she pushes Balam's foot into the wall and again he strikes her. Then the angel finds "a narrow place, where there was no way to turn, either to the right hand or to the left, and" this time, "when the ass saw the angel… she fell down under Balam." Again, Balam strikes her with his staff, but now, "the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balam: what have I done unto thee, that though smites me thus three times?"

And Balam, apparently so enraged by her repeated turning aside from the road that he takes no notice of his ass's newfound voice he claims that she mocked him, and he threatens her saying if he had a sword, he'd kill her on the spot. She reminds him that he's been riding her since he was a baby, and she asks: has she ever mocked him before? "No," he concedes. This is

their only exchange. Balam is so angry he makes baseless claims, but the ass, using logic and a rhetorical question talks him down. She engages Balam in dialogue.

Finally, he notices the angel standing in the way "with his sword drawn in his hand." Balam throws himself to the ground in obeisance, and the angel asks him why he struck the ass three times. Without waiting for a reply, the angel explains that he was blocking Balam's way because Balam was defying God. If the ass has not turned to the side, the angel would have killed Balam and let her live. Even though he beat the ass for repeatedly turning aside, by doing so, she had saved his life. Balam acknowledges that he has sinned, says he didn't realize the angel was there, and says he'll go back the way he came. But this time the angel says he can pass and go join the lords of Moab. When Balam arrives, he immediately says "…I can say nothing at all save what God putteth in my mouth that I must speak." Then, instead of cursing Moses, he blesses him, and when Balac asks him why, Balam says, "… must I not keep that and speak it, which the LORD hath put in my mouth?"

Balam's speech is different from the ass's. After the encounter with the angel Balam, who has ostensibly always been able to speak, only says what God puts into his mouth. While God is also responsible for the ass's speech, he only opens her mouth, and her speech, informed by memories of carrying Balam on her back when she was a baby, appears to be entirely her own, expressing her own feelings. It would be easy to surmise that God didn't put words into her mouth, he only enabled her to speak. Before God opened her mouth, she was already communicating with Balam nonverbally, but he was unable or unwilling to understand her. Human inability to interpret the nonverbal cues of animals is, in fact, a common trope in literary representations of dialogue between humans and nonhuman animals and this trope will be explored in much greater detail in the following chapter.

Aesop's animal fables also contain animals who can talk and reason, but whose identities are neither magical nor mythological. That is, they belong to the quotidian realm that the novel will eventually encompass, and not the temporal realm of national history, of "firsts" and "only" that belongs to the epic. They exhibit the same traits that later nonhuman animal characters in literary fiction will exhibit: because their reality is quotidian the question of how and why they speak remains unresolved; they embody unequal power relations; possess a wide range of physical, mental, and emotional predilections and abilities; while the narrative frame often centers the smallest, weakest, and/or most vulnerable among them. Curiously, these traits correspond to the way Aesop supposedly describes himself in the stories he told about the period before he became a writer of fables.

La vida del Ysopet con sus fabulas hystoriadas/Aesop's Fables, with a Life of Aesop, first translated into Castilian and published in it's entirely in Spain in 1489 (after another earlier, incomplete 1482 version) contains a fictional biography of Aesop followed by an extensive collection of his fables. There the genre of the fable is defined:

> It is to be noted that the poets, took this word fable from defando, which means "to speak," for fables are things not done but imagined, and they were invented so that by imagining the speech of nonrational animals one to another, the customs and semblances of men might be made known. (Keating and Keller, 8)

Clark E. Keating and John L. Keller contend that the twenty-five-page fictional biography of Aesop's life—from which the above quote is drawn—"should be regarded as an important contribution to the rise and development of the European novel" (Keating and Keller, 3). This apocryphal account of Aesop's life, appended to one of many collections of his fables

recorded in the second century, was included in the first print translations of collections of Aesop's fables into both Russian and Spanish, as well as numerous other languages. Fedor Gozvinsky was the first translator of Aesop's Fables into Russian in the sixteenth century, while the translator of the first Spanish edition published in the fifteenth century remains anonymous.

Jeremy Lefkowitz explores Aesop's experience of enslavement as a key to understanding his fables, noting that in one of the earliest accounts of his life, he is described as writing down his "stories and fables" only after securing his freedom from slavery. Of course, even early accounts of the life of Aesop may be apocryphal, but Lefkowitz nonetheless probes the differences between the stories Aesop told during his enslavement and those he only began to tell afterwards, noting that the former tend to be autobiographical in content and structured for oral transmission while the latter adhere to the genre conventions of the fable. In his analysis, Aesop is able to record his stories and fables only after gaining his freedom, so "writing and archiving function to mark the transformation of Aesop into a fully-developed fabulist" (235). He draws attention to the fact that the stories attributed to Aesop during his enslavement tend to focus on Aesop's body and immediate physical surroundings. Furthermore, the stories show him reacting to threats to his bodily safety and physical autonomy, forcing him to improvise his responses using whatever comes to hand, Lefkowitz writes. In so doing, "Aesop discovers, over and over again, a way to resist or challenge his master's threats and commands by manipulating matters in such a way that his master and anyone else within earshot—ends up learning a kind of 'lesson'" (240). Lefkowitz is primarily concerned with the differences between the stories and fables, but I am interested in how the animal characters in his fables exhibit some of the same traits, and find themselves facing similar threats, as those he faced in the stories.

In one of the earliest stories in which Aesop appears as an enslaved character, he is working in the field with two other enslaved men. The stories are narrated, ostensibly by Aesop himself, but in the third person. The Aesop character in the story is mute, and two other men discuss his muteness and decide to take advantage of his inability to speak in his own defense by eating some figs and blaming Aesop. When the men first refer to Aesop's muteness, their speech makes them sound as if they are looking at him, and yet the reader can't tell if he is within earshot of the schemers. In any case, they are not described as taking any action to hide their intentions from him. The reader might surmise that they assume Aesop is unable to understand their speech, or that they don't care if he does, since they've determined that his muteness makes him incapable of doing anything to stop them or protect himself.

They steal the figs and eat them. The anonymous "master" in this story comes home craving figs, finds them missing, and when the schemers blame Aesop, the "master" is duly fooled. He summons Aesop so he can beat him for eating the figs. Only then does Aesop take action, and indeed, he goes to extraordinary lengths to prove his innocence, effectively turning himself inside out to prove that he isn't hiding anything. He seizes a bowl of warm water, drinks it, then gags himself until he vomits bile to reveal the emptiness of his stomach. Using only gestures, he then suggests that the other men do the same, at which point the missing figs are located in the other men's vomit, and they, the true culprits, are duly stripped and beaten. Lefkowitz sees this story as emblematic of a pattern that recurs throughout the stories of Aesop's period of enslavement: "the slave Aesop's body—particularly in its susceptibility to physical abuse—remains a significant element in his performances throughout his enslavement… threatened in some way; although powerless, Aesop makes use of something 'at hand' and somehow parlays it into a lesson-bearing performance" (241).

In the story of the stolen figs, my attention is drawn to Aesop's muteness, which underscores his powerless status as a slave, making him vulnerable even to the schemes of those who share his status. At the same time, this ostensibly autobiographical story contains an intriguing paradox: the Aesop in the story is mute, yet Aesop is simultaneously understood to be the original storyteller. Aesop's muteness is never explained, nor are the means by which he later gains the ability to speak. The deceptively simple story of the stolen figs isn't only about "just desserts;" it's also a kind of meta-story in which Aesop physically performs within the story what his narrative accomplishes: what goes on inside the enslaved man's body is as important as what goes on within his mind. While Aesop-the-character is vomiting, Aesop-the-author is simultaneously confronting the reader with a new kind of interiority, still very subtle and not yet fully realized, but precursor to what Bakhtin calls "inner speech [внутренняя речь]" (321).

Rather than accepting the monologic episteme of the epic, Aesop's narratives are always already hybrid, bringing multiple points of view into conflict, and putting the reader into direct contact with characters whose interiority is rarely revealed to the reader in other genres—even when that character can't speak. The epic, as a genre, focuses on the supposedly lofty exploits of heroes, and is unconcerned with what happens in the thoughts and digestive tracts of enslaved people. In a sense, the other characters in Aesop's story, even the other enslaved men, accept those conventions—they even count on that unconcern in order to escape punishment. When mute Aesop is about to be beaten and he drinks the water and gags himself in desperation, the third person narrative perspective is not aligned with the interests of the anonymous "master," but instead with the interests of the enslaved Aesop, in defiance of the prescribed hierarchies governing monologic epics. With this insight, the reader already knows Aesop is innocent and doesn't need to examine his vomit to discover this fact. What the reader sees is Aesop-the-

storyteller and Aesop-the-character superimposed on one another, the former gaining credibility through the latter's innocence. For if Aesop-the-character is willing to subject himself to vomiting up the bilious dregs from the bottom of his empty stomach, Aesop-the-storyteller is every bit as willing to narrate himself doing so. The storyteller, in the guise of an impartial third-person narrator, is also bringing something out from within him—his own point of view and experience. Until Aesop is accused of the theft, his character is entirely flat, and others speak about him. When he seizes the water however, he becomes three-dimensional, capable of hiding something and divulging something. His interiority takes shape. His desire not to be beaten for someone else's theft suddenly becomes manifest, and the voice of the storyteller, the third person narrative perspective, and the performance of the character converge when his interiority is revealed.

Bakhtin describes how different kinds of inner speech, in the "languages" common to other genres, both oral and written, might be intentionally introduced into the novel, or "they might be treated completely as objects, that is deprived of any authorial intentions—not as a word that has been spoken, but as a word to be displayed, like a thing" (321).

In his fables, Aesop grants this kind of inner speech—the interiority of those who are least powerful and whose interiority is therefore most opaque and least voiced in the epic—to nonhuman animals. Such representations of animal language, particularly the quasi-direct speech that blends the author's voice with the inner speech of nonhuman animal characters, would eventually shape the novel. This fictional biography of Aesop paints an intriguing portrait of the original fabulist as someone who was born mute whose face and body were sometimes described as "monstrous." If Aesop's appearance dehumanizes him, his initial inability to speak links him to animal experience. In the story about the figs, as in the more widely known animal fables,

readers are invited to think more carefully about characters who might not otherwise be imagined as capable of communication. Ultimately, Aesop's animal focalization provided models for both Cervantes and Tolstoy, and they, in turn, made exemplary contributions to the development of the modern novel, which Bakhtin writes "always includes in itself the activity of coming to know another's word, a coming to knowledge whose process is represented in the novel" (353).

Coloquio de los perros/Dialogue of the Dogs and Psychoanalysis

Don Quixote is often cited as the first novel, and for reasons too plentiful and diverse to adumbrate here. Elsewhere however, Miguel de Cervantes engaged in "imagining the speech of nonrational animals one to another," so that "the customs and semblances of men might be made known." This is precisely what he does in the novella *Coloquio de los perros /Dialogue of the Dogs,* published in 1613 in the collection *Novelas Ejemplares/Exemplary Novels.* It's worth noting here that Cervantes, like Aesop, was affected by a physical disability and reportedly spent part of his life enslaved. After spending some time in Rome, Cervantes joined the Spanish navy. A battle wound immobilized his left arm, and three years later, he was captured by Barbary pirates who retained him as a slave for at least two years until he was ransomed back to Spain.

Framed by a story about the brief marriage of a pair of opportunists—a soldier, Ensign Campuzano, and a lady, Doña Estafanía de Caicedo—the dialogue takes place over the course of one night in a hospital where two dogs discover they can speak. Much has been written about the title of the collection and how each story might conform to unstable definitions of "novel" and "exemplary," but I will merely note that throughout his work, Cervantes engaged in the kind of polysemic wordplay his novel title exemplifies. What exactly these stories are examples of, how they relate to the earlier Italian novella form of Giovanni Boccaccio and Marguerite de Navarre,

and in what way exactly they can be described as new or "novel" are questions outside the scope of this work. What is important here is that Cervantes was adapting genre conventions across languages, creating narratives both exemplary and new enough in form to mark the formation of a new genre, the modern novel. Let us not forget that Bakhtin defines the novel as capacious enough to absorb diverse genre conventions and languages, yielding inherently polysemic narratives. The early twentieth century literary scholar Américo Castro described Cervantes as working to illuminate a "double truth" by layering comic materialism over tragic idealism[3].

In the frame story, Licentiate Peralta runs into an old friend, the aforementioned Ensign, who regales him with the story of a marriage in which neither party was exactly what they seemed, and both were trying to take advantage of the other for their own gain. After the deceitful marriage comes to a disastrous end, Campuzano goes to a hospital in Vallodolid to sweat out the syphilis he has contracted, and while there, he explains to his incredulous friend, he overhears a conversation between two dogs, Berganza and Cipión.

In setting up the colloquy, Cervantes explicitly alludes to Aesop's fables and even employs language echoing the fictional biography of Aesop (published in Spain over a century earlier), while also playing with reversals between nonhuman animal and human. Campuzano claims that hearing the dogs speak was no dream, but Peralta protests, "we're back to the time of Methuselah, when pumpkins talked; or Aesop's days when the cock conversed with the fox and animals talked to each other!" ("Si se nos ha vuelto el tiempo de Maricastaña, cuando hablaban las calabazas, o el de Isopo, cuando departía el gallo con la zorra y unos animales con otros!") Campuzano replies:

[3] This idea echoes, in part, some of Turgenev's analysis in his 1860s essay, "Hamlet and Don Quixote." Platonov elaborates on some of Turgenev's central ideas in his own fiction.

> I should be one of them, and the biggest beast of the lot… if I believed that those times had returned, and I should be an animal too if I didn't believe what I heard, and what I saw, and what I shall dare to swear with an oath which will bind and compel the most incredulous person to believe it. But although I may be wrong, and what I think is true is a dream and to persist in it were nonsense, won't it interest you, Mr. Peralta, to see written down in the form of a colloquy the things that these dogs, or whatever they were, had to say? (192)
>
> -Uno de ellos sería yo, y el mayor… si creyese que ese tiempo ha vuelto; y aun también lo sería si dejase de creer lo que oí y lo que vi, y lo que me atreveré a jurar con juramento que obligue y aun fuerce, a que lo crea la misma incredulidad. Pero, puesto caso que me haya engañado, y que mi verdad sea sueño, y el porfiarla disparate, ¿no se holgará vuesa merced, señor Peralta, de ver escritas en un coloquio las cosas que estos perros, o sean quien fueren, hablaron? (folio 240 r.)

Thus, Cervantes links the enjoyment of fiction, and specifically, curiosity about what nonhuman animals might talk about, to a reader's willingness to suspend disbelief. The renowned Cervantine scholar (and translator of Jorge Luis Borges) Luis Andrés Murillo reports that the twentieth century consensus was that Cervantes' *Coloquio de los perros/The Colloquy of the Dogs* was second only to Don Quixote in originality (174). The reason for this originality, Murillo argues, rests on Cervantes' strategic deployment of genre conventions, particularly that of the sixteenth century prose dialogue was an expository form. That is, before going to the dogs,

the prose dialogue used dialectical development of a theme as mode of instruction. In the dialogue between Cipión and Berganza, Cervantes takes the dry pedagogic trappings of the dialogue, and wraps them around the fantastical and picaresque adventures of a pair of talking dogs. And as I have already indicated, he alludes to Aesop throughout, perhaps in homage to earlier author of supposedly instructive tales about fabulous talking animals.

Indeed, when Berganza first exclaims to Cipión, "I hear you speak and I know that I am speaking to you, and I cannot believe it, for it seems to me that our speaking goes beyond the bounds of nature" ("…oyote hablar, y sé que te hablo, y no puedo creerlo, por parecerme que el hablar nosotros passa de los terminos de naturaleza;" 195, fol.241r-v). The dogs' delight in their newfound capacity for speech and rationality echoes the definition of fable from the *La vida del Ysopet con sus fabulas hystoriadas/Aesop's Fables, with a Life of Aesop.* There, fables are defined as accounts of "things not done but imagined, and they were invented so that by imagining the speech of nonrational animals one to another, the customs and semblances of men might be made known*" (*cosas nunca hechas, más fingidas, y fueron halladas, porque por palabras fingidas de las animalias irracionales de las unas a las otras, la imagen y costumbre de los hombres, fuesen conocidas.") In response to Berganza's disbelief, Cipión says, "…this miracle is greater in that not only are speaking, but we are speaking coherently, as if we were capable of reason, when in fact we are so devoid of it that the difference between the brute beast and the man is that man is a rational animal, and the brute irrational" ("…y viene a ser mayor este milagro, en que no solamente hablamos, sino en que hablamos con discurso, como si fueramos capazes de razon, estando tan sin ella, que la diferencia que ay del animal bruto al hombre, es ser el hombre animal racional, y el bruto irracional"; 195, fol.241v).

Later episodes in the many adventures of the dogs will suggest quite the opposite, that in fact, man is not such a rational animal[4] after all, and "the brute" is not so irrational. Many of these adventures seem to revisit the scenes of Aesop's fables but with different outcomes. When Berganza works for shepherds, for instance, he recounts a story about "crying wolf" from the perspective of a dog. In Aesop's fable, the lie was less the result of calculation than invention, whereas Berganza discovers that the shepherds who cry wolf are doing so in order to get choice cuts of mutton by blaming wolves for slaughtering sheep. Berganza, like Balam's ass, is wrongly castigated—beaten even—for a neglecting his duty of protecting the sheep. Berganza laments:

> There were no wolves, but the flock was dwindling. I wanted to say what was going on, but was dumb,; and all this left me bewildered and distressed. 'Good heavens!' I said to myself. 'What is the answer to this? Who is going to reveal the truth and say that it is the defenders who are causing the offence while the watchmen are sleeping, that the people in charge are the thieves and the guardian is the killer?' (204)

> No auia lobos, menguaua el rebaño; quisiera yo descubrillo, hallauame mudo. Todo lo qual me traia lleno de admiracion y de congoja. «¡Valame Dios!», dezia entre mí, «¿quién podra remediar esta maldad? ¿quién sera poderoso a dar a entender que la defensa ofende, que las centinelas duermen, que la confiança roba, y el que os guarda os mata?» (fol. 246v)

[4] This is Aristotle's definition, which Rene Descartes will ultimately reject, instead positing in 1637 his famous line "cogito ergo sum [je pense donc je suis]." On the other hand, Descartes did not think, as Aristotle did, that animals possessed any capacity for reason at all. A few centuries later Karl Marx would recuperate and modify Aristotle's phrasing to express his conviction that man is not so much a rational animal as a laboring animal. Hannah Arendt then takes Marx's formulation as a springboard for her argument about *animal laborans*, which is discussed at much greater length in the following chapter.

In commiserating with Berganza, Cipión makes an observation about the need for trust to maintain harmony in everyday life that is intriguing in a text preeminently concerned with both quotidian falsehood and the suspension of disbelief required for the enjoyment of fiction. He also alludes to the pedagogic conventions of the dialogue as something to avoid, forgoing the opportunity to "preach" in favor of getting on with the story, while at the same time, interrupting the reader's suspension of disbelief by making a direct reference to the artificial nature of the dialogue, saying, "The worst of it is that it's impossible for people to get on in the world if they don't trust others. But let's stop here, for I don't want it to look as if we were preaching" ("...pero el daño está en que es impossible que puedan passar bien las gentes en el mundo, si no se fia y se confia. Mas quedese aqui esto, que no quiero que parezcamos predicadores; passa adelante"; 204, fol. 246v)

Later, after running away and finding work as a guard dog in a rich house, Berganza's experience with the household maid alludes to Aesop's fable "The Thief and the Dog." However, the maid is more interested in bribing the dog's silence so she can meet her lover than she is in theft, and prompted by his own scruples about accepting her bribes, Berganza begins to attack her every night.

As Berganza continues to tell the story of his life, Cipión continues listening quietly, occasionally exerting a subtle influence on the direction and shape of narrative with his brief comments and interruptions. The relationship between the two dogs, the one effusive and the other more reserved, while conforming to the expectations a reader of prose dialogues of the period might bring to this text, has also been the subject of much enduring conjecture. This

seventeenth century development of animal focalization would also have a direct effect on twentieth century thought.

More than three centuries later an adolescent Sigmund Freud was signing letters to a close friend using the name Cipión. Citing Ernest Jones's 1953 biography of the father of psychoanalysis, Edward C. Riley quotes a letter from Freud to his fiancé, Martha Bernays, in which he tells her about how he and his friend Eduard Silberstein learned Spanish—and after coming across the *Coloquio de los perros/Dialogue of the Dogs* in a language primer—and appropriated their names for their secret use in personal correspondence. In describing this friendship to his fiancé, the young Freud exclaims, "How often have I written: Querido Berganza!" (95). In an effort to identify parallels between the narrative and the dialogue essential to psychoanalytic method, Riley describes Cipión and Berganza as being "like parts of ourselves, inseparably involved in narratives which are partly our own and partly those of others. They are involved with each other as intimately as analyst and patient" (5). While Riley sees the relationship in psychanalytic terms, his characterization of how readers approach the text could just as well be used to identify Bakhtinian dialogism. Riley suggests that this early encounter with Cervantes may have shaped Freud's later appreciation for, and use of, narrative methods in his psychoanalytic practice. "The dogs' situation," he explains, "mimics the presumable pristine conditions in which first came the human ability to communicate verbally, and after that extended communication in narrative form" (95).

I see some clearer signs of influence. When Berganza seems to misspeak, and then justifies what he has said, he might as well be describing what has come to be identified as a Freudian slip, saying, "[i]n affairs like this the tongue never stumbles unless the intention first gives way" (201). And when he struggles to articulate everything that's on his mind, he comes close to

expressing a sense of helpless dismay at the conflict between what Freud would call the conscious, unconscious, and preconscious mind, saying "I am not only amazed at what I am saying, but alarmed at what I'm failing to say" (203).

Similarly, Belén del Rocío Moreno traces Freud's literary aspirations through his letters to Silberstein, many of which are written entirely in Spanish. She notes his appreciation for the epistolary form and asserts that he and Silberstein "habían escogido el español como la lengua de sus confidencias; era pues el idioma oficial de sus secretos [had chosen Spanish as the language for their confidences; moreover, it was the official language of their secrets]" 272. Moreno argues that this correspondence became the foundation of Freud's later development of psychoanalytic theory. In mimicking the *Coloquio de los perros/Dialogue of the Dogs,* Freud refined an epistolary style, she says, in which he learned to write for another, accommodate the Other. In other words, Cervantes's use of animal focalization contributed to the psychoanalytic theories that exerted so much influence over twentieth century psychology and literary theory.

Kholstomer **and Defamiliarization**

Tolstoy began writing *Kholstomer,* an eponymous novella about the life of a horse, in 1863 while he was writing *Cossacks*, and exactly 250 years after Cervantes published *The Dialogue of the Dogs*. Tolstoy didn't finish the novella immediately, and the narrative contains a few abrupt changes focus and style, perhaps marking the points at which he set the draft aside and later returned to working on it with different ideas. Tolstoy finally finished and published *Kholstomer* in 1886, the same year he published *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

Kholstomer transposes some of the perennial preoccupations that probably sprang from his own difficult experiences—familial relations, self-consciousness, sex, altruism, and death—into

the biography of a horse, who appears at the beginning of the story as an aging piebald gelding. Despite the many traits Tolstoy and Kholstomer have in common, the story of the aging horse is something more than biographical. In this narrative, Tolstoy, a man spent a considerable amount of time thinking about horses, allows himself to imagine how horses might experience their lives. Not only is this a narrative experiment in perspective for him, but it is also an existential question with philosophical—or perhaps even religious—implications. In *"Who, What Am I? Tolstoy's Struggles to Narrate the Self*, Irina Paperno observes that Tolstoy's quest to understand selfhood was never limited to human experience. She points to a diary entry from July 21, 1870, in which he wrote:

> I went for a swim. My horse, tied up [to a tree], looks at me when I emerge from the water. Does it know that this is the same I who rode it [to the pond]?
>
> Kant says that space and time are forms of *our* thinking. But in addition to space and time, there is yet another form of our thinking: *the individuality.* For me, a horse, I, and a bug are all individuals… but does the horse think in the same way? (48: 126) (Paperno, 146).

This question shapes his novella from the moment the narrative frame opens with a description of the horse Kholstomer who has, in his advanced age, fallen into the hands of a newly wealthy provincial landowner. Kholstomer stands alone, licking an oak stanchion, and gives no outward sign that he will become the novella's protagonist, let alone the sole narrator for several chapters. And yet, "there is something in fiction," William Nelles writes, "that virtually demands the production of animal narrators" (188). If one can accept that (and I hope one can after reading this far!) he adds, "[o]ne might then consider whether there is something in animal narration that demands the production of animal focalization" (188). As Nelles's

observations suggest, narration and focalization are distinct, though sometimes they overlap. Gerard Genette can tell us how.

Seeking to synthesize and clarify earlier attempts to identify whose perceptions the reader has access to in a story, Genette developed the concept of "focalization." He worked to create a means of gauging, with greater precision, exactly what sensory experience and information the reader has access to as they read. For instance, in Tolstoy's story, *Kholstomer*, an omniscient narrator first introduces the stable yard at dawn where the horses grow restless as the sun rises. Genette would call this a *nonfocalized* narrative, or a narrative with *zero focalization*. In a nonfocalized narrative, the narrator is not a character in the story: the writer writes in what is sometimes called third person voice. However, as the narrative progresses, Tolstoy gently transfers the reader from an external nonfocalized perspective, in which she can only perceive what anyone might perceive if they happened to be standing unnoticed in the stable yard, into a focalization that allows her access to Strider's thoughts. The first step is almost unnoticeable, while the herdsman, Nester, saddles him up, Strider lifts his head "to show his willingness," but his willingness might be inferred from that gesture, so focalization remains uncertain. But then, a few sentences later, after Nester is on his back, the reader is plunged into Strider's consciousness: "He knew that before starting there would be much shouting, and that Nester, from the seat on his back, would give many orders to Vaska, the other herdsman, and to the horses" (126, Maudes translation) One page after that, the reader is securely anchored in Strider's perceptions, even though the narrator remains outside the story, describing Strider's thoughts (rendered in what Bakhtin calls free indirect speech) in the third person voice, "'I know that as soon as we get out on the road he will begin to strike a light and smoke his wooden pipe with its brass mountings and little chain,' thought the gelding" (127). Strider's entire thought

process is rendered in internal focalization within the single quotation marks here—the reader knows and perceives exactly what Strider knows and perceives, until the narrator interrupts to add the three words "thought the gelding." Genette would call this variable focalization, and even he admits this can be difficult to distinguish from nonfocalization.

How is that possible? Well, Genette identified a persistent confusion, even among scholars, between mood and voice, or in his words, "*who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective*? and the very different question *who is the narrator*? —or, more simply, the question *who sees*? and the question *who speaks*?" (186, Narrative Discourse). In the last quoted sentence from Strider, above, Strider sees, and the third person omniscient narrator speaks. A reader might be forgiven for pausing here to puzzle out this distinction—as even Genette calls the difference "apparently obvious but almost universally disregarded" (186).

In *Kholstomer*, the distinction between who sees and who speaks is almost collapsed when, about halfway through the novella, the horse Kholstomer begins to narrate his own story, in a first-person voice. Humble and stoic by nature, for the first five chapters, Kholstomer appears resigned to his fate: pestered and ignored by the younger horses, troubled by old injuries, and mistreated by the negligent herder Nester. He might never have told his story, but one night after he is tormented by a group of younger horses who bite and kick him, and then suddenly the oldest of the mares, Vyazapurikha, steps forward and sniffs him. She had known him when he was young, before he had been so changed by age and ill-usage. The two horses exchange sighs of recognition, and the other horses gather around as *Kholstomer* begins to speak. For several chapters, he narrates his life in first-person speech. The other horses discover that he isn't a pitiful old workhorse a direct descendent of the first Orlov trotter—a horse prized by aristocrats. Kholstomer's piebald markings made him ineligible for breeding, so when he showed signs of

being attracted to Vyazapurikha he had been gelded and then sold. Nikita Serpukhovskoy had been his owner[5] while running through a fortune of two million rubles, though the concept of ownership, Kholstomer explains, had always seemed alien to him.

In one of the most famous passages from the novella, Tolstoy addresses the human concept of ownership from Kholstomer's perspective and in Kholstomer's voice:

> …it was not those who called me their horse who treated me kindly, but coachmen, veterinaries, and in general quite other people. Later on, having widened my field of observation; I became convinced that not only as applied to us horses, but in regard to other things, the idea of mine has no other foundation than a base, animal instinct in men, which they call the feeling or right of property. A man says "my house" and never lives in it, but only concerns himself with its building and maintenance. A merchant talks of "my cloth store", but has none of his clothes made of the best cloth that is in his store. There are people who call land theirs, though they have never seen that land and never walked on it. There are people who call other people theirs, but have never seen those others, and the whole relationship of the owners to the owned is that they do them harm. There are men who call women their women or their wives; yet these women live with other men. And men strive in life not to do what they think right, but to call as many things as possible their own. I am now convinced that in this lies the essential difference between men and us. Therefore, not to speak of other things in which we are superior to men, on this ground alone we may boldly say that in the scale of living

[5] In an episode with clear parallels to the scene involving Alexei Vronsky and Frou-Frou, Nikita, pursuing an errant mistress, drives Kholstomer beyond the limits of the horse's considerable stamina, causing him to suffer an injury that ruins him for the rest of his life.

creatures we stand higher than man. The activity of men, at any rate of those I have had to do with, is guided by words, while ours is guided by deeds (142).

If Kholstomer had not been speaking to the other horses, this passage would exemplify what Bakhtin calls quasi-direct discourse. Quasi-direct discourse is "inner speech" whose "entire emotional structure" belongs to a particular character, "but transmitted in a way regulated by the author" (319). Because Kholstomer has an audience, he seems engaging in direct speech, but the composition of his speech is more literary than vernacular. His speech is clearly "regulated by the author" since the question of how he is communicating with the other horses is never resolved within the novella. Thus, Kholstomer's words are situated at the very edge of inner speech. Bakhtin uses the term "quasi-direct discourse," a term I will return to again at greater length in the following chapter, to indicate moments when the author's voice and inner voice of the character under focalization in that moment merge, becoming indistinguishable from one another, as is certainly the case in the passage above.

This moment when Tolstoy subsumes his own consciousness into that of the horse Kholstomer becomes one of the centerpieces in Viktor Shklovsky's 1917 essay, "Art as Technique." In the essay, Shklovsky argues that art functions through a process of ostranenie, or defamiliarization/estrangement/de-automatization (I will use the translation most apt for the given context). By removing the reader from a habitual relationship with the thing described, a position that allows her to take that thing for granted, art reorients her into seeing the thing as if it were a strange thing perceived for the first time.

Before moving onto the passage above form *Kholstomer,* Shklovsky first introduces his analysis with an anecdote he has taken from Leo Tolstoy. In a diary, the novelist recounts how,

while pottering about and tidying his room, he forgets whether or not he dusted his couch. The action had become so routine as to warrant no special notice, but if routine could erase an action so recently performed, then what of lives given over to routine actions? This observation forms the basis for Shklovsky's argument that art is not about economy of expression—efficient and effortless communication is, for him, the antithesis of art. Instead, art makes the routine action—the familiar object, the common phrase—significant by making it appear unfamiliar, uncommon, and ultimately, memorably strange. "By 'estranging' objects and complicating form," in Shklovsky's words, "the device of art makes perception long and 'laborious.'" He continues, "Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity." (6).

Tolstoy defamiliarizes more-than-human relations, allowing the reader to experience the process of creativity by seeing the world of nineteenth century Russia through the eyes of an aging horse.

Animal Focalization in the Twentieth Century

Let us return to Genette's definition of focalization, but this time consider how the technique is used by Platonov and Aub in the narratives explored in the two following chapters. Above, I suggested that readers might require a moment to puzzle out the "question *who sees*? and the question *who speaks*?"—because even Genette himself says the difference is "apparently obvious but almost universally disregarded" (186).

The difference between the point of view that orients the narrative perspective, and the narrator can indeed be subtle enough to comfortably disregard, but to disregard Platonov's kaleidoscopically deft shifts from one perspective to another, often from within the constraint of the third person narrator's voice, is to miss half the pattern that gives his stories meaning.

Consider, for example, the difference in how two characters, Voshchev and Chiklin, approach the work of digging. Voshchev has just arrived, and as he follows a crew of workers out to the dig site, the landscape is described in these terms: "The mowed wilderness smelled of grass that had died and the dampness of bared places, making more palpable the general sorrow of life and the vain melancholy of meaninglessness" (12). This perception corresponds to Voshchev's perspective as his central problem thus far in the novel has been his failed attempts to think his way to an "inner meaning" and his inability to locate meaning outside himself, as when he addresses a leaf he has picked up by saying, "You did not possess the meaning of life" (3, 5). This failure, combined with the loss of his job, has already led him to become "more secluded in the cramped space of his sorrow" (9). However, as he begins to dig alongside Chiklin, a less contemplative character who "concentrated his impassively thoughtful face down into the ground and plunged his spade into the soft topsoil," Voshchev takes heart too. Even so, Voshchev's euphoria is tempered by a certain ambivalence, echoing his earlier concern for the experience of the fallen leaf:

> [H]e was now ready to admit that childhood might, after all, grow up, that joy might become thought, and that future man might find peace in this reliable building, in order to look out from its high windows into a world stretched out and waiting for him. Already he had forever destroyed thousands of rootlets, grass blades, and little soil shelters of diligent creatures, and he was now working in cramped narrows of dreary clay (13).

When focalization shifts immediately to Chiklin, who had already "outstripped him," in the following sentence, the experience of digging feels entirely different: "Chiklin… had long ago left his spade and taken a crowbar, to pulverize compressed layers of rock lower down.

Annulling nature's old order, Chiklin felt unable to understand it" (13). And what's more, Chiklin doesn't seem to be bothered by his lack of understanding. Voshchev's moment of hopefulness is almost immediately extinguished in the anguish of destroying the "little soil shelters of diligent creatures," but Chiklin has no such compunctions, and in the following paragraph he thinks about the alienness of the clay, the fact that the work brigade is undermanned, his hurry to break up the ground, the beating of his heart, the sweat on his back. His interiority is less anguished, he remembers how "the girls had loved him" when he was younger and how he had spent some time in prison after overturning market stalls while carousing.

In contrast with Tolstoy and Platonov's use of heterodiegetic (meaning the narrator is outside the story) variable focalization (where the reader drifts into the consciousness of different characters), in *The Crow's Manuscript*, Aub employs homodiegetic focalization. His narrator is the crow Jacobo, and everything the reader learns (aside from paratextual material in the prologue—more on that in Chapter 3) is filtered through his perspective. Jacobo often uses first-person voice, although he also describes human labor of the kind Voshchev and Chiklin are engaged in above, but only as a detached observer, not as a participant:

> Hurtan horas al sueño para romper la tierra, entretienense en aplanarla, en abrirle hoyos, en perforar montes, de día y de noche sudan en empleos inútiles, labran la madera, funden metales, barren las calles, corren tras una pelota. Nada de todo eso es funcional. Y así andan echando pestes de su mundo, como si no fueran ellos los que fabrican su esclavitud (204.)

> They forgo hours of sleep to break the earth, they occupy themselves with flattening it, opening up holes, boring into mountains, day and night they sweat over useless work, carving wood, forging metal, sweeping streets, chasing a ball. None of this serves a purpose. And in this way, they go around pestering their world, as if it weren't they themselves who created their own slavery.

Nonetheless, Platonov may have more in common with Aub than with Tolstoy. Both Platonov and Aub describe digging in these passages as a destructive activity. While the labor of "opening" holes might be supposed to be the first stage of a construction project, the reader is left with an impression of futility.

In the following two chapters, I will show what happens when animal focalization puts the reader into the consciousness of an animal character like Jacobo who surrounded by humans. I've chosen to work with *The Foundation Pit* and *The Crow Manuscript* for this purpose, because unlike other twentieth century texts containing animal focalization, Platonov and Aub's animal characters are not humans who have undergone a transformation, they aren't confined within the rigid constraints of a purely allegorical narrative, and they are both draw on the long history of animal focalization outlined above while simultaneously exploring some nascent ideas (like the role of speech acts in constructing social relations, the inability of any participant within that those social relations to comprehend the function of the whole, and the more-than-human character of social relations) explicitly articulated within structuralism, poststructuralism and posthumanism many decades later.

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Chapter 2. Bear Life: Animal Laborans and Free Indirect Speech

At the end of 1920s, when Andrei Platonov was drafting *The Foundation Pit,* he was beginning to reconsider his definitive turn away from the literary "contemplative life" in favor of a life of action (Seifrid, 11). Viktor Schklovsky visited him at this time, and Platonov articulated the dichotomy between contemplation and action that prompted the decision. Perhaps, even then, his thinking was influenced by Ivan Turgenev's famous essay on the difference between literary characters who act, and those who doubt, "Hamlet and Quixote," a binary that appears to have informed his techniques of characterization in several of the novels he would write later.

During the three years following the 1917 revolution, Platonov had been actively involved in the proletarian culture (Proletkult) movement, writing prolifically and publishing articles and short stories in a wide variety of provincial outlets. His first two books, an enthusiastic treatise on the benefits of widespread electrification and a book of poetry "The Blue Depths," gave him his first tastes of real success as a writer in 1921 and 1922. However, in order to confront the Russian famine of 1921-1922, Platonov began to devote himself almost exclusively to civil service work in rural areas. As the Platonov scholar Thomas Seifrid notes, he was "one of the few genuinely proletarian writers" from the immediate postrevolutionary period (Seifrid, 2009, 4). Indeed, Platonov's early newspaper articles and poetry attest to his earnest commitment to achieving a utopian future in which science and technology would play a decisive role. In response to widespread famines and starvation in the early twenties, he gave up writing to become a land reclamation engineer for the regional government, and spent much of that decade "overseeing the agency's efforts to prevent future droughts" (Seifrid, 2009, 10-11).

After being elected to serve on the Central Committee of the Union of Agricultural and Forest Work, he moved to Moscow with his wife and young son.

Almost immediately after the move he lost his committee position, but within a few months, he found a new position as Chief of the Department of Land Reclamation in Tambov. He left his family behind and set out for the distant city, like Voronezh, a former border fortress on the edge of Imperial Russia's steppe frontier. This work put him on the frontlines of the Soviet "battle against nature," a battle with which he grew increasingly disenchanted as his work was stymied by bureaucratic machinations and the misapprehension of local people assigned to work on his projects. Mieka Erley ties his waning enthusiasm for the "battle against nature," to a transition in his writing from a militant tone to something "more satirical" (Erley, 735). After working on state infrastructure projects by digging wells, building dams, and installing electrical plants, by the time he was writing *The Foundation Pit* he began, in the words of Jonathan Brooks Platt, to grow "increasingly critical of utopian technological fantasies" (McQuillen and Vaingurt, 222) As this increasingly critical stance emerges in his work, the sensitivity to anthropogenic environmental damage that surfaces in his earliest work become even more pronounced. His struggles to align his political convictions with his experiences as a land reclamation agent would, within a few years, lead him to write the short essay "On the First Socialist Tragedy," which Erley calls an "environmental manifesto" (Erley, 736). In that essay, he frames the attempt to battle nature as a zero sum game, such that humans will lose no matter what because their dependence on the natural world—of which they are also a part—is absolute. This is, for Platonov, the first socialist tragedy, but as the title of his essay indicates, he appears to suspect that more may follow.

Profoundly unhappy in Tambov, far from his wife and child and beset by bureaucratic difficulties and interpersonal conflicts, he started to write at his old frenetic pace, and he also began identify as a writer again—perhaps even as a poet. He was writing stories and thinking about returning to the literary career he had abandoned during the famine. In a letter from that time, he chides his wife Maria for hoping he might pursue a more conventional path, writing:

> It wounds me in the part of your first letter when you talk about Pirogova. Is it possible that, if I understand correctly, you burst into tears about your friend being the wife of a rich shipyard manager? And you, you seem to think, are the wife of a tramp. Darling, "shipyard manager" is a job, not a measure of a man's worth. It's just a position. I could've done the same. Could it be that the wife of a poet is really so lowly as to envy the wife of a bureaucrat?
>
> Меня больно уязвило то место в первом письме, где ты говоришь о Пироговой. Неужели, если я правильно понимаю, ты заплакала, что твоя подруга – жена богатого начальника верфи? А ты, дескать, жена босяка. Милая, «начальник верфи» это должность, а не достоинство человека. Это всего-навсего служба. И я бы мог быть не меньшим. Неужели женой поэта быть так низко, что стоит завидовать жене бюрократа.

He published several of his stories after returning to Moscow again—but even before that he was writing and sending fiction back to Maria for publication: the first part of the letter above contains detailed and emphatic instructions about how she should approach publishers. By 1929 he was preparing his first novel, *Chevengur* for publication, and the draft of *The Foundation Pit*

was already underway. His preparations were all in vain, however, as the final draft of *Chevengur* would not be published in Platonov's lifetime. In 1929 Platonov also visited some of the first kolkhozes and sovkhozes as a journalist for Социалистическое земледелие/Socialist Agriculture and Сельхозгиза/Socialist Rural Economy (46). On those visits, he took notes not only about how people were faring; but he was also attentive to the lives of animals living and working on collective farms. Even in his notes he employed animal focalization and dark humor to record harsh realities: in one entry he uses free indirect speech to imagine a plaintive conversation between starving kolkhoz horses:

> The collective farm horses, the horses of the poor, i.e. very emaciated, thin animals. So they disrupt the work of the tractor[s]; "Give me a piece of sugar, or I'll leave the collective farm! I joined the collective farm just for the sweets! Nothing else!!"
>
> Лошади колхозов, лошади бедноты, т. е. очень истощенные, худые животные. Ст[ало] быть, они срывают тракторн[ые] работы; «Дай кусок сахару, а то вы йду из колхоза! Я и вошел в колхоз из-за сладкого! Исключительно!!» (Записные книжки. С. 46–48)

By the time he was writing *The Foundation Pit*, Platonov knew that hard work and technological ingenuity could not solve every problem, and the novel reveals him working to understand, for personal reasons and for the good of socialism more generally, what the proper balance between labor, contemplation, and political action should be—and who is both responsible for and best-equipped for those activities. This was not an easy task at the end of the

1920s, the first years of Joseph Stalin's Five-Year Plan. Especially for an author whose work was increasingly under the eye of government censors.

The novel chronicles the efforts of a group of workers tasked with digging a vast pit to lay the foundation for a large public housing project. Even as they work on the kind of infrastructure project that accompanied rapid industrialization efforts and participate in the violent reconfiguration of a nearby peasant village into a collective farm, the diggers take some satisfaction in imagining future generations who will enjoy the utopian safety and comfort of the building that will rise from their worksite. When they are reprimanded for not digging fast enough, they agree to work harder thinking, "it was necessary to hurry up and get the earth dug and the home built or else they would die and it would be too late. Life might be ebbing away now like a flow of breath, but it could still be organized to future use through the structure of the building—for the sake of immovable happiness to come, and for childhood" (22). They consider their toil, as well as the suffering they endure and inflict, a small price to pay to secure a socialist future for the generations to come, even if they cannot be certain they will experience it themselves. However, some of the characters, in particular Voshchev, entertain doubts in equal measure with utopian hope. The novel's resolution confirms such doubts: in the end, many of the characters have died and the building remains unbuilt. Instead of creating something tangible for the use of "future man," they have succeeded only in creating a void where the future can be buried, and it turns out that they have been laboring not for the future, but only for survival. Platonov finished writing *The Foundation Pit* in 1930.

His earlier writing demonstrates enthusiastic involvement with the proletarian culture movement and attests to his autodidactic approach to Marxist theory. Later on, in his novels, Platonov uses the techniques of fiction to interrogate earlier convictions and explore his growing

uneasiness with state policies. In an addendum to *The Foundation Pit,* he gives a startlingly explicit account of his concern about the survival of the "soviet socialist republic" that prompted him to undertake the project, and then adds "this alarming feeling is what constituted the theme of the work" (150). But even as he writes these lines, he seems to realize that such an alarming feeling, once expressed can only bode ill for both him and the publication of his book. He is like Voshchev in this moment, digging himself into a hole and doubting that his effort will have the outcome for which he hopes. "The author may have been mistaken," he continues, but instead of backtracking on his earlier statements, he proceeds, and goes much further. "…[T]his mistake occurred," he writes, "only as a result of excessive alarm on behalf of something beloved whose loss is tantamount to the destruction not only of all the past but also of the future" (150). This justification did not impress the censors.

Throughout most of the novel, Platonov's tone is more measured, or at least his growing alarm is obscured by oblique literary allusions, animal focalization, and the folk tropes of oral tradition: in short, the literary techniques he gleaned from his upbringing which one of his early translators, Anthony Olcott describes as occurring in "a kind of half-peasant half-proletarian world," and from reading widely (ix). In the *The Foundation Pit,* and particularly in the figure of the bear "hammerer" Misha, Platonov deliberately employs Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin's strategy of using Aesopian language to evade censorship, however, Platonov's own idiosyncratic—and indeed, Aesopian—approach to satire renders Misha's plight especially poignant. And it proves ineffective in shielding him from the aggressive censorship of the 1930s. Platonov also continues to play with the juxtaposition of the active and doubting character types elaborated by Ivan Turgenev: Don Quixote and Hamlet.

Golden Age Traces: Saltykov-Shchedrin and Turgenev

The Foundation Pit is often described as a satire. The novel's atmosphere is so dark and the satirical elements so indiscriminately biting, however, that for some it overshoots the mark and as a result, precisely who, or what, the object of this satire might be remains an open question without an easy answer. Mirra Ginsburg, the first to translate *The Foundation Pit* into English in 1973, argues that "Platonov brings the action, the characters, and the language itself down to ultimate absurdity," and "carries *The Foundation Pit* beyond irony, beyond satire, to a point where everything becomes a tragic parody of itself" (xi). The excessive and all-encompassing quality Ginsburg identifies is no accident; Platonov himself wrote that true satire "subordinates everything else: the charm of words, the action of plot, and the character of the protagonists" (167). If that sounds extreme, it is because Platonov believed satire to be the "great art of the intellect and the enraged heart" existing not to entertain, amuse, or console, but instead requiring "teeth and claws" (168). These teeth and claws, or more precisely, the fact that one of the protagonists in *The Foundation Pit* is an animal—a "proletariat" bear, complicates the novel's categorization as a satire, causing some scholars to argue that this fantastic beast catapults the text into the realm of the surreal rather than the satirical.

This is because in the animal satire tradition that stretch from the medieval Reynard beast epics to George Orwell's *Animal Farm,* humans are largely (but not always entirely) absent. Misha lives among humans. And he does not act like the animals in satires usually act—as human substitutes—essentially, humans costumed as animals. Misha evinces both tenderness and the "enraged heart" required for satire. Indeed, when he is most enraged, he can "almost speak."

One of the satirists Platonov writes about with admiration is Saltykov-Shchedrin who famously described his own satirical practice as one that enabled him to outwit censors by adopting Aesopian speech[6].

If Platonov hadn't been aware of Saltykov-Shchedrin's approach to censorship evasion by 1925, he might easily have come across the quote "Я — Эзоп и воспитанник цензурного ведомства" ("I am Aesop and a student of the censorship department") in a review of a collection of Saltykov-Shchedrin's letters in the July edition of *Novy Mir*, a literary journal in which Platonov's own writing also appeared around the same time.

In addition to Aesopian language, Platonov continued to play with pairing the two character types Turgenev designated as "Hamlet" and "Don Quixote." According to Turgenev, a Hamlet doubts everything, including himself, and consequently, his self-doubt paralyzes him, making him incapable of decisive action, incapable even, of love. A Don Quixote on the other hand possesses an unshakable faith that drives him to act without thinking, even when he is mistaken. Turgenev sees the Don Quixotes of the world as noble men of action, whereas the Hamlets languish in self-pitying uncertainty.

In *Chevengur*, Platonov pairs a somewhat Hamlet-type protagonist, Sasha Dvanov, with an extremely Don Quixote-type sidekick, Stepan Kopenkin (complete with Rosa Luxemburg as

[6] Я — русский литератор и потому имею две рабские привычки: во-первых, писать иносказательно и, во-вторых, трепетать.

Привычке писать иносказательно я обязан дореформенному цензурному ведомству. Оно до такой степени терзало русскую литературу, как будто поклялось стереть ее с лица земли. Но литература упорствовала в желании жить и потому прибегала к обманным средствам. Она и сама преисполнилась рабьим духом и заразила тем же духом читателей. С одной стороны, появились аллегории, с другой — искусство понимать эти аллегории, искусство читать между строками. Создалась особенная, рабская манера писать, которая может быть названа езоповскою, — манера, обнаруживавшая замечательную изворотливость в изобретении оговорок, недомолвок, иносказаний и прочих обманных средств. Цензурное ведомство скрежетало зубами, но, ввиду всеобщей мистификации, чувствовало себя бессильным и делало беспрерывные по службе упущения. Публика рабски восторженно хохотала, хохотала даже тогда, когда цензоров сажали на гауптвахту и когда их сменяли. На место смененных цензоров являлись другие, которых также сменяли и сажали на гауптвахту (248).

the Dulcinea and a Rocinante named Proletarian Strength.) In The Foundation Pit, he repeats the formula, but this time with Voshchev as the Hamlet and Chiklin as the Don Quixote.

In contrast with Turgenev's clear preference for Don Quixote, Platonov positions his Hamlets as thoughtful protagonists capable of selflessness, while his Don Quixotes' impulsive actions often lead to dire consequences. While Kopenkin is certainly capable of violence, most of the time he remains affable and loyal (both Don Quixote traits, according to Turgenev), whereas Chiklin's affability and loyalty are much more restrained, and he has absolutely no compunctions at all about committing murder.

Homo Laborans and Bare Life

This prismatic technique of refracting the conceptual underpinnings of Marxism through the consciousnesses of different characters is what makes Platonov's fictional narratives so different from his earlier nonfiction. While some of Platonov's essays, particularly the early ones, express ideological certainty in a monologic voice, most of his fiction is intensely dialogic in nature. Focalization in *The Foundation Pit*, for example, is exceedingly complex: initially, there appears to be zero focalization, but then increasingly frequent instances of free indirect speech attest to the shifting focalization strategies (varied focalization) barely constrained by the heterodiegetic (third person) narrator. In other words, at first everything that happens is narrated in an omniscient third person voice (albeit a voice redolent of Platonov's distinctive style), however, as the story progresses, the reader is thrust into the minds of various characters whose innermost thoughts are relayed in the voice of an omniscient third person narrator who remains outside the story. (I described some instances of shifts between the characters Voshchev and Chiklin in the previous chapter.) Platonov's focalization strategies and use of free indirect speech

have not received much attention from English-language scholars, and I will attempt to remedy that oversight now.

As a youth, forced to leave school early to contribute to the family income, Platonov assiduously managed to continue his education by reading widely and voraciously. As a mature author, his writing follows a similar process, but instead of testing his ideas against those of different authors, he tests his ideas through the perceptions, experiences, and interactions of different characters. One of the reasons so few of Platonov's works were published is that the language in his novels was so intensely and blatantly dialogic. Not only was Platonov the kind of writer who filled notebooks with snippets of overheard dialogue, he was also sensitive to the ways in which people adopt, repurpose, and repeat the speech of others. His writing is rich because precisely because it is intertextual on so many levels.

Several characters in *The Foundation Pit* raise some of the same questions about labor, work, and action that Hannah Arendt would directly address three decades later in her book *The Human Condition*. Arendt begins her prologue with the launch of Sputnik-1, a historical event which took place in 1957, six years after Platonov's death. Arendt draws attention to the popular feelings provoked by the launch, which inspired, rather than unadulterated "pride or awe" in human "power and mastery," a surprising sense of "relief about the first 'step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth" (1). After first referring to this quote from an American reporter, she emphasizes the universality of the sentiment, noting that Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's (whom she doesn't name) tomb bears words she cites as "Mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever[7]" (1). Arendt identifies her argument as consisting of two parts: "the twofold flight

[7] The full quote (which first appeared in, Воздухоплавание в наше время // Современный мир. — 1912. — № 7. — С. 260 also appeared as Arendt describes, on his "funeral obelisk") is: Человечество не останется вечно на земле, но в погоне за светом и пространством сначала робко проникнет за пределы атмосферы, а затем завоюет себе все околосолнечное пространство.

from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self" (6). Much of Platonov's literary output expresses a similar ambivalence: he articulates a pride an awe in human achievement (particularly in his earliest writing), but much more than this—and much more eloquently, he expresses a conflicted yearning for humanity to be freed from the bonds of material existence and a simultaneous anxiety about what such freedom might entail. Arendt connects this kind of ambivalence to the human condition in the modern age, addressing the same apparent irreconcilability between the material and the ideal that pervades Platonov's writing. Arendt's concerns about the modern age are related the abstraction of modern science, which has created realms in which "speech has lost its power" and the way in which a glorification of labor has foreclosed critical examination of the organization of societies in which production and efficiency are the highest goals. For Arendt, the labor necessary for survival, or even the reduction of all human ambition and value to the cliché of merely "earning a living," reduces humans to existing as animal laborans.

At first, Platonov might seem less concerned with speech that has lost power than he is with speech acts that have become all too powerful—to call someone a kulak (or a kulak agent, as one literary critic called Platonov) in his novels is to effectively sentence them to death. However, part of the profound tragedy of *The Foundation Pit* is that a language so used no longer allows people to "experience meaningfulness," in Arendt's words, "because they can talk

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Tsiolkovsky also famously wrote (in his 1901 treatise on hot air balloons in the 19th century):
"Голубая даль, таинственные небеса, пример птиц и насекомых, всюду летающих, — вечно манили человека подняться в воздух, чтобы наслаждаться с высоты красотами природы, чтобы переселяться беспрепятственно в сказочно богатые страны, чтобы, словом, сделаться истинным царём земли."
[TRANSLATION] I suspect that the opening image, "Голубая даль" or "Blue distance," may have served as the inspiration for the title of Platonov's book of poetry, "Blue depth," while the succeeding description of the flight of birds and insects also appears frequently throughout much of Platonov's oeuvre. As a reader of literary text and scientific tract alike, Platonov might well have drawn poetic inspiration from a booklet on the possibilities of constructing a flying machine. Indeed, like Platonov, in this passage Tsiolkovsky fused scientific ambition and spiritual longing using the activities of animals as a model.

with and make sense to each other and themselves" (4). The beings—both humans and nonhuman animals—in *The Foundation Pit* are bereft in the failure to make sense to each other and themselves.

Arendt asks "[w]hat we are doing," and then proceeds to answer that rhetorical question with an extended historiography of labor, work, and action to show how the (problematically universal) relationship to these activities has shifted dramatically since ancient times. Platonov wrestles with a similar question about what we are doing, and if we allow Arendt to guide us, we can begin to grasp that the characters Voshchev, Chiklin, Misha, and Nastya personify some of the problems with labor, work, and action in the modern age that Arendt identifies. This is why focalization and free indirect speech are so essential to his narrative strategies in *The Foundation Pit*. By showing readers what his characters are thinking, he can illustrate the distance between what they say, what they think, and how they act.

However, while Arendt speaks directly to the relationship between terms like *homo faber* (man the maker) and *animal laborans* (man the working beast), she is not overly concerned with how nonhuman animals might fit into the larger schema she traces. Platonov is concerned with how nonhuman animals fit in, and in the figure of the nonhuman animal—Misha the bear hammerer—he finds a figure in which the breakdown of language and the material conditions of the most rote forms of labor are united. The blacksmith's bear is not a wholly different being from the humans among whom he lives and works, his experience of "oppression" and his inability to make himself understood is merely the most extreme on a spectrum of privations. In "What Is the Animal Class?" Katherine Perlo describes a blurring at the farthest extreme of oppression, noting how "animals, as the lowest of the low, can serve as a benchmark" of the specific kind of "powerless, moral invisibility, and absence from politics" Antonio Gramsci

associates with hegemonic subordination and Guyatri Spivak with subaltern status. “Indeed,” Perlo continues, “the status of any human class can be gauged by the extent to which its members are ‘treated like animals’” (6). In the notebooks where he jotted down ideas while composing *The Foundation Pit*, Platonov suggests a similar blurring of categories between the human and nonhuman, writing “This is not an animal, but basically a person [Это не животное, а прямо человек.]” (Записные книжки, 33). A few pages later, he describes the “typical man of our time,” as “naked, without soul or property [голый — без души и имущества]” (42). This description threads together several definitions of nonhuman animals,[8] although Platonov goes on to suggest this naked and soulless state is only temporary—the typical man is located “in the dressing room of history, ready for anything, but not the past [в предбаннике истории, готовый на все, но не на прошлое]” (42). However, when he describes humans as naked, soulless, and without property, he draws on a Marx’s 1844 definition of the animal as “produces only itself.” However in excess of themselves, nonhuman animals, according to Marx, produce only what is immediately needed for survival.

Giorgio Agamben, elaborating on Arendt’s analysis, goes one step further by drawing on classical distinctions between bios, the way life is lived, and zoe, life as the survival of an organism. For Agamben this distinction is central to Western production of the idea of what constitutes humanness, as bios distinguishes humans from animals and even plants, all of which have zoe in common. Arendt saw this distinction as being founded upon distinctions in labor, Agamben sees this distinction as being distilled in “states of emergency.” When a government

[8] Jacques Derrida refers to the nakedness of animals in mirror image: he writes of feeling embarrassed by being confronted, while naked, by the gaze of his cat. He goes on to describe at length the “unnudity” of animals. Rene Descartes, as I have noted, redefines humanness and incidentally abolishes the widespread acceptance of animal souls in the name of reason. According to Marx, the nonhuman animals’ capacity to produce only itself, quoted above, seems to include living spaces—what Pierre Bourdieu might call a habitus, and what contemporary biologists might call by the same term, if not “niche creation”—as he admits “They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc.”

seizes control of all life to a degree that bios is no longer possible, humans are reduced to existing only as zoe—essentially as nonhuman animals concerned only with the material conditions necessary for mere survival, that is, for bare life.

Which brings us back the Arendt's definition of animal laborans and our examination of the four main characters listed above: Voshchev, Chiklin, Nastya, and Misha.

Voshchev

The novel opens with Voshchev who shares Platonov's sensitivity to the land and its more-than-human denizens. In the first sentence, Voshchev is fired on his birthday for standing around and thinking at work, a fault that has been duly recorded and makes it almost impossible for him to get a new job. He sets off to wander the countryside, preoccupied and hungry, in the throes of an existential crisis. He picks up a dead leaf and says, "I'll find out what you lived and perished for" and then reflects that "[e]verything lives and endures in the world, without becoming conscious of anything" (5). His affinity for nonhuman entities remains one of his defining traits throughout the novel as he continues to pick up and eulogize leaves, twigs, and the pebbles he digs out of the earth. That night he tries to fall asleep lying prone in a gully, and hearing a distant dog barking "in a weak voice of doubt," he reflects that he and the dog are alike—"living only thanks to [their] birth" (3).

When the local trade union questions him about getting fired, he explains that he was "thinking about a plan of shared general life," hoping to think "up something like happiness," and then adds, as if defending his line of thinking by assigning it a purpose they will comprehend and value: "inner meaning would have improved productivity" (3). They decline to give him a job, saying, "Happiness will originate from materialism… not from meaning" (4). Given his

reflections on "everything" that "lives and endures in the world," it is clear that the "plan of shared general life" that had absorbed his thoughts in the factory where we worked extends beyond the human. He understands what Anna L. Tsing, Jennifer Deger, Alder Keleman Saxena, and Feifei Zhou, the creators of the digital project *Feral Atlas* unequivocally state, namely, that "[e]very event in human history has been a more-than-human event." (website).

The short exchange between Voshchev and the anonymous members of the local trade union can also be read as an illustration of the distinction between Agamben's zoe and bios. However, even though the local trade union's emphasis on material life is concerned only with what Agamben classifies as zoe, Voshchev seems to be thinking of both bios, in his preoccupation with happiness, as well as zoe, in his invocation of "shared general life." However, the supposition that not only humans, but plants and animals as well might have an interest in "happiness" and "inner meaning" is a radical challenge to Western constructions of humanness.

After his unsuccessful visit to the local trade union, Voshchev leaves town and continues his journey through a natural world rapidly being transformed by humans. The next place he lies down to sleep is in a "grassy thicket" in a hollow in the "wilderness," but he is awakened in the middle of the night by a mower who tells him to "get up and leave the site" (9). Voshchev replies, "It's not a site, it's a superfluous place," but the mower retorts, "From now on it's a site… Come and have a look in the morning. Soon this place will be hidden forever beneath construction" (10). Voshchev follows the mower's instructions to sleep in the barracks nearby—really "a barn on a former vegetable plot," where the foundation pit work brigade are sleeping (10). In the morning, he meets and joins the other laborers, led by Chiklin, a tireless worker and enthusiastic communist capable of both murderous violence and charitable tenderness. Chiklin

has just assumed the role of temporary brigade leader—because "ground labor was the trade he knew best" (12). It is Chiklin too, a little while later, who finds a dying woman, Julia, hiding with her daughter in an abandoned tile factory; when the mother dies, leaving the child an orphan, he carries the girl back to the barracks and the workers adopt her. When Chiklin and his boss, Prushevky, go back to Julia's remains, they notice that "her long bared legs were covered by a thick down, almost fur, that had grown because of diseases and a lack of shelter; some ancient energy had reawakened and begun to transform the dead woman—even in life—into an animal growing a pelt (55). This detail echoes Voshchev's sense of kinship with the dog he hears barking in the night before his arrival at the pit, at a moment when he too lacked shelter. This lack of shelter signifies their exclusion from the social order of humans: Voshchev as an unemployed laborer without a family or home, dismissed from the trade council as "a man without consciousness," and Julia because her bourgeois background, single motherhood, and illness (probably epidemic typhus), have combined to render her a pariah. As outsiders, both Voshchev and Julia have been subjected, what Agamben calls an "anthropological machine of the moderns" which "functions by… animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human" (37, The Open). In other words, Voshchev's affinity with a barking dog and Julia's fur signify their exclusion from human society, and inclusion in the category of animals—whose lives can be disposed of as such—despite their human appearance. Those who have been subjected to this "machine of the moderns" enter into "bare life," which means their lives and deaths have been completely separated from bios, and as zoe alone, their lives and deaths become entirely subject to the whims of the totalitarian state. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* Agamben identifies "the exemplary places of modern biopolitics," as "the concentration camp and the structure of the great totalitarian states of the twentieth century"

(10). While Voshchev's animalization is cut short by his acceptance into the ranks of the foundation pit workers, Julia has been abandoned to her fate by society, and she dies in the basement of the abandoned tile factory.

Chiklin and Nastya Meet Misha

Shortly after Julia's daughter, the orphaned little girl Nastya, is adopted by the pit diggers, a radio is installed "so that during the time of rest each of them might acquire the meaning of mass life from a loudspeaker" (50). Through such details, Platonov tracks the transformation of land and people: what once was a vegetable plot became a barn and is now a barracks with a radio. He is simultaneously tracking the process of the social construction of reality, creating a parallel between the infrastructure projects that alter the land and the production and mass consumption rhetoric shapes social realities.

But even before the radio was installed, the characters in *The Foundation Pit,* subordinate to the dictates of true satire, already spoke in propaganda phrases taken out of context and strung together into a pastiche of early Soviet rhetorical styles, making them sound disconcertingly alike, even when they disagree. Increasingly, the workers think en masse, and these multiple streams of consciousness, joined into a veritable torrent of consciousness, is composed of layers of close first person voices Platonov piles on top of one another, without clearly indicating where one character's interiority ends and another's begins. These disorienting shifts in perspective are embedded within a rural landscape rendered dystopian by the effects of Stalin's Five-Year Plan, littered with the corpses of slaughtered and starving animals and teeming with flies, even in the midst of snowstorms. Soon Nastya, whose mother had coached her to hide her bourgeois class identity begins to speak and think in the same way, and even

surpasses the others with the disturbing vehemence of the violent slogans she has learned from the loudspeaker and later at school.

The first to meet the "proletariat" bear is Comrade Pashkin, chairman of the Area Trades Council, followed by Chiklin and Nastya. Without knowing he is a bear, they have all heard local reports of "the most oppressed hired hand of all, who had worked for nothing on propertied farmsteads almost since the beginning of time, and who was now laboring as a hammerer in the collective farm forge" (106). In his official capacity as chairman, Pashkin "felt altogether distraught about the district's last unknown last proletarian, and he wanted to deliver him from oppression as soon as possible" (107). Thinking it will be a quick job, Pashkin leaves his car idling outside the forge, his wife waiting in the passenger seat. He plans on rescuing "this residual exploited laborer" and then disbanding the local trade-union for not serving their members better. However, unlike the other characters, Pashkin appears confounded by the fact that "the district's unknown last proletarian," has turned out to be a bear and not a human. The peasant who first mentioned "the most oppressed hired hand of all" neglected to mention this fact, and Pashkin himself seems unable to put words to the situation, let alone do anything about it. He merely enters the smithy and then leaves, "hanging his head as if he did not know what to do with himself" (107).

When Chiklin, and Nastya enter the forge shortly thereafter, they express no surprise. They see a worksite remarkable in its normalcy: the blacksmith is urging the hammerer to work harder, just as the pit diggers were urged to dig faster at the beginning of the novel. The blacksmith calls the bear by the name Misha, a standard Russian name for bears. Like the other workmen, Misha complies with the blacksmith's exhortations and the air fills with the scent of his singed fur. When the blacksmith allows, he steps away to drink half a bucket of water, then,

"[a]fter wiping his wearily proletarian face" he spits into his paw and gets back to work (107). He becomes completely humanized by his compliance with human norms—his workmanlike movements—and by his designation as a "hammerer." Platonov's description emphasizes his "humanity," as Misha behaves like any other worker in wiping his tired face— which is definitively a face in the original Russian, and not, as one might expect, a snout or muzzle.

Chiklin tells the blacksmith that he needs Misha's help "to point out kulaks," the peasant class that Stalin had designated as class enemies and an impediment to collectivization. The collective farm activist has called for dekulakization, and Chiklin is eager to get started, having already killed a peasant by punching him in the stomach, merely because he "thought the bastard was presenting himself for a blow" (82). In school, Nastya has learned to write, "Liquidate the kulak as a class!" While Misha hammers out horseshoes and tears up fences to feed the smithy's fire, the blacksmith finally agrees to allow Misha to accompany Chiklin and Nastya. To get Misha to stop working, he tells them to hit the church bell used to signal lunchtime, "Otherwise he won't budge—he's a stickler for discipline!" (108)

It's a strange moment, because the blacksmith, who does not seem to be working, but switches between speaking to Chiklin and Nastya and managing Misha's work, makes this assertion about his assistant's character that cannot be immediately verified. Misha doesn't speak and so cannot contest this statement, although he understands the blacksmith's commands. In showing the blacksmith's unreliability in describing Misha's character, Platonov suggests that subsequent assumptions about him, voiced by other characters, might also be suspect. Platonov appears to be using Aesopian language to evade censorship, but other characters create thier own narratives, using quasi-direct speech, by behaving like authors of Misha's story who speak for him but really voice their own thoughts.

Watching him work, Nastya says to Chiklin, "He suffers too," which seems like a reasonable observation given Misha's "blackened and scorched" appearance," but then she goes on to add, "so that means he's for Stalin, doesn't it?" And Chiklin replies, "You bet it does!" (108) Then when they ring the bell to summon him from the smithy, Misha drops what he's doing and:

> …immediately straightened himself and sighed a steadfast sigh as if to say, "That'll do for now!" After lowering his paws into a bucket of water to soak the cleanness back into them, he went off outside for the receipt of his food. The blacksmith pointed him towards Chiklin and the bear calmly followed the man, holding himself habitually upright on his hind paws alone (109).

Misha is still being exploited, as Pashkin had surmised. The ringing of the bell wasn't summoning him to eat, but instead summons him to yet another task. When Pashkin found out the hammerer was a bear and consequently failed to "deliver him from oppression as soon as possible" he had walked away defeated—apparently not only not knowing what to do about Misha, but not knowing what to do with himself, either. Now the question of what to do about Misha, and by extension, what to do about one's own identity as a human, is extended to readers.

Platonov skips over the question of whether or not animals can be categorized by social class, and proceeding as if it were a foregone conclusion that they can, demonstrates that here class identity is of primary importance while species identity scarcely warrants consideration. But perhaps it is not quite that simple.

In her commentary on *The Foundation Pit, Свободная вещь/Free Thing* Olga Meerson draws particular attention to Platonov's technique of skipping over such questions and rushing

readers into foregone conclusions they might not otherwise accept. Whereas the Soviet literary critic Viktor Shklovsky coined the term "estrangment" [ostranenie], Meerson argues that Platonov engages in anti-estrangment [neostranenie]. The goal of "estrangment" was to prompt readers to see commonplace objects and situations in a new light by rendering them so strange they could finally be recognized for what they really are. According to Meerson, Platonov inverts Shklovsky's technique by presenting the extravagantly implausible as if it were completely unremarkable without giving any explanations, preventing readers from raising the logical or moral objections they otherwise would (46). Meerson gives Misha as a prime example of this inversion, explaining that the bear's labor and class consciousness humanize him by way of a Marxist logic that Platonov never explicitly names. Meerson explains that Karl Marx saw labor as the activity that separated "Man" from animals, and considered class consciousness as the sole provenance of man (47). Like Brodsky who refers to Misha when he calls Platonov "the first serious surrealist," Meerson sees the "fantastic humanization of the bear" as a departure from reality. Seifrid, on the other hand, helpfully points out that according to Platonov's brother, there actually was a captive bear "working" for a blacksmith in their neighborhood when they were growing up (131). Seifrid's quotation marks around the word "working" raise the question of what kind of work a bear can realistically do in a smithy. Without opposable thumbs, real bears, unlike the fictional Misha, would have a very hard time holding a hammer[9], let alone "hammering humanly" while manufacturing four horseshoes in quick succession (108). It seems likely that the real blacksmith's bear and probable model for Misha was indeed laboring for the blacksmith, but laboring for him as a performer.

[9] A growing body of evidence suggests that many species of bears are capable of engaging in occasional tool usage, however all of these instances involve tools improvised from rocks or twigs, not human tools like hammers.

Bears have a long history in the Russian imaginary as both workers and performers. As Seifrid notes, in folklore they were often characterized as hard workers and popular wooden children's toys depicted the action of a bear hammering an anvil (131). Throughout Europe, and especially in Russia, bears raised in captivity were trained to "dance" and to act in traveling shows. For many, professional bear-training was associated with the Romany, Tatars, and trans-Volga peasants, although capturing baby bears and keeping them as pets was a common enough occurrence in the provincial homes of landowners and officials that a variety of texts from the nineteenth and twentieth century record this phenomena (78). Jane Costlow analyzes the role of bears in texts written by Lydia Zinovieva-Annibal, Vasily Rozanov, and Vsevelod Garshin, among others, examining human-bear relationships as revealing "the possibilities and consequences of all human discourse in speaking for, with, and through creatures who do not speak to us in our own language" (78).

Costlow also describes how captive bears were trained to perform "a standard repertoire of comedic scenes, many with a satiric effect: village girls looking in a mirror and hiding from their betrothed; a solder walking with a stick over his back; walking like an old man; children stealing peas; an old woman making pancakes" (80). Bears often performed the kind of satire Platonov dismisses in his literary criticism, satire designed to entertain and amuse, without "teeth and claws." In fact, bear trainers often removed the teeth and claws of the bears who worked for them, pierced their noses with rings or rope to make them easier to control.

When troupes of performers passed through villages, bears also participated in a peasant ritual in which bears and their trainers visited peasant homes, seeing which ones the bears would willingly enter. This ritual illuminates Misha's behavior in the next scene in *The Foundation Pit*, when he follows Chiklin and Nastya as they go through the village streets identifying,

terrorizing, and assaulting peasants who have been designated kulaks by the local party activist. Costlow frames her study of human-bear encounters with a few lines of a poem by Nikolai Kliuev that offers instructions on "how to bring the bear to your threshold" (77). Such rituals and performances, occurring regularly in villages and towns, would have been "one of the principal ways in which Russians would have encountered bears" (78). Costlow draws on Garshin's childhood recollection of one of these more-than-human rituals:

> …they led the bears into peasant huts—and if a bear agreed to go in of his own free will, they led him up to the front corner and sat him down, delighting in his consent as a good sign; but if he wouldn't cross the threshold, no matter how they entreated and cajoled, the masters grew sad, that the neighbors said:
>
> —There's something there, he knows it (78).

In *The Foundation Pit*, as they visit and enter the homes of peasants, Chiklin narrates Misha's actions with Stalinist phrases, but if the dialogue were removed, and the scene were viewed from distance, it would closely resemble Garshin's description: Chiklin leads Misha up to peasant homes and it is Misha who then decides if they will enter. In Platonov's telling, however, Chiklin, whose behavior parallels that of the bear trainer of old, narrates very different reasons for Misha's decisions to enter some peasant homes and not others. According Chiklin, Misha has an unerring ability to identify the wealthiest peasants, the "kulaks," subject to Stalin's policy of liquidation. The bear's entrance, once a good sign, now means the opposite. In this way, Platonov deftly shows how good fortune has become cause for suspicious, while also drawing attention to the function of narrative and performance.

At the same time, Platonov supplies glancing insights into Misha's memories, beginning with his initial encounter with Nastya. Misha has his own interiority, unadulterated by the

narratives other characters supply for him through their speech acts. The first instance of a close first person glimpse of Misha's interiority is precipitated by Nastya's attempts to catch his eye. While the blacksmith and Chiklin discuss him as if he were an object (or a worker to be transferred from one work site to another), Nastya engages with him more directly, as a potential interlocutor. First they exchange glances, and Misha squints one eye and thumps his belly to make her laugh. As they walk down the snowy street, Misha suddenly sees Nastya "as the if she were the forgotten sister together with whom he had fattened beside his mother's belly in the summer forest of his childhood." He then looks around to see if he can find "anything to snatch or break off and give to her as a present?" (110). Shortly thereafter, he stops in front of a house and roars, and Chiklin exclaims, "Kulaks!" Then Chiklin goes into the yard and opens the gate from inside for Misha who is referred to throughout this sequence as "the bear" rather than by his name or as the hammerer he was earlier. "The bear" then explicitly steps "across the boundary and into the property."

Seifrid describes Misha as "an avenging agent of death as he goes through the village finding out and killing its kulak inhabitants" (131). However, unlike Chiklin and several other characters in the novel, Misha never definitively kills anyone. He roars, throws things and people around, tweaks a boy's ear, squeezes a man, and knocks another man briefly unconscious (with a fist wrapped in a pancake), but each one either runs away or speaks after the encounter. Certainly, after the violent expropriation of their property and homes during a blizzard, and their subsequent forced deportation—set adrift on a raft in the river—many will die, but Misha is not directly responsible for these deaths. He is, after all, a bear who, Seifrid allows, might also be "understood, on the other hand, as a human who has been reduced to a state of animality… a symbol of extreme enslavement" (131). But what if Misha remains on the threshold between

animal and human? Can he remain a symbol of extreme enslavement even if he is understood to be an animal?

Anthony Olcott, one of Platonov's translators, describes his childhood world as "half-peasant, half-proletarian," and it does not seem at all far-fetched to surmise that Platonov was familiar with the ritual Costlow describes, given his marked familiarity with many other aspects of peasant life, records of the ritual still being performed in the twentieth century, the presence of a performing bear in the area where he grew up, and the fact that a contemporaneous poet like Kliuev explicitly invoked such rituals in his poetry. Platonov admired Garshin's work; in a critical review of a young playwright, he writes, "Garshin was a fine writer, and young authors who are starting out have the right to learn from him" (327).

Platonov's life traces a trajectory that reverses the arc of oral literature's evolution into increasingly complex and extended forms after the emergence of print culture in Europe. After his long complex narratives were deemed unpublishable by censors, the only kind of writing work Platonov could get was in retelling folktales and fairytales. Even when Platonov had fallen out of favor and his earlier literary output had been partially forgotten, his collections of folktales and fairytales, published as children's books gained a wide audience.

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Chapter 3. Bird's Eye View

"My interest in humans is perhaps due to the fact that in spite of everything, they're the animal that can teach us the most about our own perfect mode of life. They've remained so far behind because of the limited development of their intelligence, but even so they've accomplished something, as all things do—plants, insects, the tiniest creatures living and dead." —Jacobo, *Crow Manuscript*

Manuscrito cuervo/The Crow Manuscript is an outlier in Max Aub's considerable oeuvre which consists not only of plays, screenplays, literary criticism, poetry, but also well over 100 works of fiction. Published serially in Aub's literary journal, *Sala de Espera/Waiting Room*, in 1950, the novella was then included in the 1955 anthology, *Cuentos ciertos/True Stories* (Maggi, 1). *The Crow Manuscript* is an outlier in the collection—and in Aub's body of work—because of the narrator's unusual identity: he is a crow named Jacobo. While unusual identities abound in Aub's novels—indeed, a careful consideration of the social construction of identity is a central theme in his work—Jacobo is the only nonhuman animal. His voice is irrepressible nonetheless, and he cannot resist the chance to enumerate his noteworthy qualities, but his singularity can be vexing for a scholar more accustomed to parsing the biographies of fictional human characters than their nonhuman animal compatriots. Fortunately, Jacobo introduces himself with characteristic bravado, noting that he belongs "to the most illustrious corvine family [la más ilustre familia corvina]," going on to describe his "good stature, sparkling eyes, lustrous coat, aquiline beak, aggressive foot, noble carriage, strident caw [buena estatura, ojos brillantes, pelaje lustroso, pico aguileño, pata agresiva, porte noble, croar estridente]" (Aub trans. Kirkland 9, Aub

188). In other words, he is not just any nonhuman animal, he is an exemplary representative of the corvid species.

A standalone narrative, *The Crow Manuscript*'s multi-layered paratextual structure and critical examination of twentieth century knowledge production link the novella to some of Aub's most experimental works of fiction. Even in this slim novella, he was working through ideas that took more than one book to fully explore. *The Crow Manuscript* also shares a setting and some themes with Aub's magisterial more well-known series of novels about the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, *The Magic Labyrinth/El laberinto mágico*. Like *The Crow Manuscript* several novels in *The Magic Labyrinth* cycle include detailed accounts of the concentration camps where Aub was interned in 1940-42.

The Crow Manuscript has other merits which have been understudied in English-language literary scholarship. Only one translation of the text—and a much abridged one at that—has been published in English, in the New York literary journal *New Directions* in 1982. Furthermore, while the translator Will Kirkland's rendition of the novella is thoughtful, the source text is so dense with intertextual allusions and elaborate word-games that, as Eugenio Maggi has pointed out, any translator would struggle mightily to retain even some of the intertextual and multilingual vernacular richness of the original. Nonetheless, some of these allusions and word-games bring Aub's most important themes into focus. Moreover, because the novella was first serialized and then collected into an anthology, there are numerous discrepancies between source texts, both in the form of editorial changes made by the author and in the form of typos introduced during subsequent printings.

While *The Crow Manuscript* can certainly be slotted into Aub's large body of fiction about the experiences of Spanish Republicans in French concentration camps, I propose that the

novel also forms a bridge between novels that are much more experimental in form and seemingly wide-ranging in subject, namely *Vida y obra de Luis Alvarez Petreña/The Life and Work of Luis Alvarez Petreña* and *Jusep Torres Campalans*. Then *Juego de cartas/Card Game* (the subject of Chapter 6) forms the fourth and final book in what could be regarded as a tetralogy. Both *The Life and Work of Luis Alvarez Petreña* and *Jusep Torres Campalans*, much like *The Crow Manuscript,* are framed by elaborate paratextual games that complicate both the author and the subject's identity. (*Card Game* is an exception which both prolongs the paratextual game that form the basis for *Jusep Torres Campalans* while also inviting readers to actually engage in playing a card game.) These formal innovations at first appear to function merely as clever framing devices, but soon become so entangled with each work's central theme that the narrative thread would be broken without them.

The Life and Work of Luis Alvarez Petreña is an epistolary novel comprised of the letters, diary entries, and other ephemera of the eponymous Luis, a self-styled "mediocre writer," with an introduction and notes written by an editor named Max Aub. This might seem like a straightforward situation, where Aub-the-author simply disguises himself as an editor, but in actuality, Aub's performance of himself as editor is counterbalanced by his performance as Luis. He uses the devices Gerard Genette defines as "onymity," and "pseudonymity" simultaneously. Genette writes, "[a]s an element of the genre contract, the author's name is caught up in a complex whole whose boundaries are hard to trace and whose constituent parts are equally hard to inventory," and, he continues, "[t]he contract is what it all adds up to—which is almost always provisional (41-42). The introduction includes a brief biography of *Luis Alvarez Petreña,* some of the Aub-the-editor's recollections of him, and a letter from him to Aub-the-editor. While the first part of the novel was published in Valencia in 1934, Aub revisited the text throughout his

life. With each return he added new material to the narrative, including exchanges between Luis and Aub-the-editor. Some episodes appeared in literary journals in the interim between the publication of each subsequent edition. So a very different *Luis Alvarez Petreña* came out in Mexico City in 1965, over twenty years after the initial publication of the first version, and yet another was published in Barcelona in 1971, the year before Aub's death. Writing in 1996, Juan Olezo Simo claims that "If there exists in contemporary Spanish narrative, writing that captures the key principle of postmodernity that is the dissolution of the work of art and the expansion of its components in multiform textuality, then it is, without doubt, *Luis Alvarez Petreña* [Si hay en la narrativa española contemporánea una escritura en la que se plasme ese principio clave de la Postmodernidad que es la disolución de la obra de arte literaria y la expansión de sus componentes en multiforme textualidad, ésta es sin duda Luis Alvarez Petreña]" (1). At the same time, he saw the novel as "the Spanish novel that captures with the most symbolic depth the aesthetic crossroads at the end of the 20s and beginning of the 30s [la novela española que captó con mayor profundidad simbólica la encrucijada estética de finales de los años 20 y principios de los 30]" (13).

With *Jusep Torres Campalans* Aub plays a similar game, but the stakes are higher. Aub positions his fictional Jusep as one of the forgotten originator—alongside Pablo Picasso—of Cubism. A veritable bricolage of genres ranging from bildungsroman to lavish exhibition catalogue, in *Jusep Torres Campalans* Aub documents Jusep's entrance into and retreat from the European art world. Again, he performs the role of Aub-the-editor, while occupying a multitude of pseudonyms to create an exhaustive array of biographical ephemera including notebooks, reviews of exhibitions of Jusep's paintings, and interviews with diverse artists and writers, both real and fictional. This accumulation of artifacts, accompanied by Aub's comprehensive

commentary, troubles the borders between text and paratext by riddling the narrative of Jusep's fictional life with authorial incursions that make frequent reference to meticulously arranged and historical facts, some of which are patently fictionalized and some of which are not. Aub also enlisted Mexico City's intelligentsia to play along, and Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes gamely complied by applauding Aub's recuperation of this seminal but forgotten Catalan Cubist now living in Chiapas, Mexico. Dolores Martínez Fernández sees *Jusep Torres Campalans* as a work in which Aub sets out to satirize the proliferation of art monographs on "mediocre artists," citing the relationship between *Don Quixote* and chivalric romances as a comparison, but like Cervantes, she says he ends up so far exceeding the requirements of satire that he produces a new genre himself (91). Sebastiaan Faber considers *Jusep Torres Campalans* much more than a "literary hoax," calling the book a "highly political text that succeeds on two counts of extreme import to Spanish exiles like Aub: by investigating "the relation between art or literature and politics, and the relation between fiction and reality" (237) First published in 1958, Aub's monograph on the fictional artist accompanied a show in the prestigious gallery of the Excelsior newspaper in Mexico City featuring paintings attributed to Jusep that Aub had, in fact painted himself.[10] Fernández counts "caricatures" of lesser known works by "Picasso, Matisse, Vlaminck, Picabia, Leger, Mondrian, [and] Kandinsky" among the artwork Aub created for the exhibition (96). Of course, Aub's performance of Aub-the-editor is also a character in this story, engaging in a pseudonymous practice Genette refers to "as *imagining the author"* (Genette, 47). Genette observes that there are subtle gradations in this practice, and Aub passes through several of them on his way from *The Life and Work of Luis Alvarez Petreña* to *The Crow Manuscript* to

[10] The personal correspondence between Aub and his daughters in the archive at the Cambridge Library includes letters from one daughter to another featuring at least one marginal drawing signed "JTC" raising the possibility that at least part of the fictional artist's oeuvre may have included contributions from or collaborations with family members.

Jusep Torres Campalans. Continuing the mania for documentation that characterizes *The Life and Work of Luis Alvarez Petreña* Aub revels in the inclusion of Jusep's receipts, detailed communications with disgruntled neighbors and former employers, chance encounters with old friends, and the articles and attestations of contemporaneous critics. In a particularly entertaining performance of "imagining the author," he recounts, in first person, Aub-the-editor's frustrating attempts to contact and interview the reclusive artist who is living in a Maya community in the mountains of Chiapas, like twentieth century Paul Gauguin in Tahiti.

This resemblance may have carried a special critical acuity in Mexico, where European primitivism that drew on pre-Columbian aesthetics—as both Gaugin and Pablo Picasso acknowledged doing—remained a contested movement. Gauguin had been regarded as an influential painter and model for Mexican artists a few decades earlier, in the nineteen twenties when muralism was emerging (Acevedo 123). In *Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino*? Mari Carmen Ramírez notes that Latin American artists from the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siquieros to the Bolivian diplomat Germán Quiroga Galdo described Pablo Picasso as a "point of reference" or "influence" (344). On the other hand, Peruvian muralist José Sabogal, who had lived in Mexico City in the early twenties—where he had met José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siquieros—attended an exhibition of Mexican art in Peru in 1937 and wrote that the artists " introduced a new, purer way of seeing things, and acknowledged the unsung masters from earlier times whose works of art nurtured and sustained priceless links to the past." Sabogal continues, "[t]hese masters were revered in guides to the renewal; among them, Paul Gauguin was the most significant artist as far as we are concerned, because the nature of his work positions him as a major precursor of our current painting in the Americas" (418). However, David Brading describes how later "tension between indigenous

roots and universal, if not futurist, ambition, led Siqueiros and Orozco to criticize Rivera's work, arguing that his narrow nationalism was an unoriginal synthesis of archeology, popular narrative, and Gauguin-style primitivism [tensión entre las raíces indígenas y la ambición universal, por no decir futurista, condujeron a Siqueiros y a Orozco a criticar la obra de Rivera, aduciendo que su nacionalismo estrecho era una mezcla poco original de reivindicación arqueológica, narrativa popular, y primitivismo tipo Gauguin]" (282). Max Aub occupied a unique position on the periphery of this discourse: he had known Picasso in France, and indeed, as the cultural affairs attaché for the Spanish Republic in France, had arranged for the republic's acquisition and exhibition of Guernica in 1937, the same year Sabogal was writing about Gauguin's influence on Mexican art in Peru. The guestbook where Aub's daughter, María Luísa (Mimín) collected the drawings, poems, and signatures of household guests reveals that Siquieros had visited at least once in 1948, when he drew an intense two-page illustration of a *Bos taurus* muzzle-shaped mountain with some tiny human figures at the base and summit.

In Aub's 1960 counterfactual novella, *La verdadera historia de la muerte de Francisco Franco/The True Story of the Death of Francisco Franco,* Aub lists his friend Siquieros and Rivera among the intellectuals who frequented a Mexico City café in the afternoons. He imagines them sitting at one table from three to a little after six in 1939: "they talked about literature, the Spanish war, art; each other, usually bad. About theatre, politics, trips, news of those who weren't there. They discussed magazines of their own and others. About movies [hablaban de literature, de la guerra española, de arte; unos de otros, mal por lo común. De teatro, de política, de viajes, de las noticias de los ausentes. Comentan las revistas propias y ajenas. De cine" (24). In *The True Story of the Death of Francisco Franco* these intellectual discussions as overlap—in space if not in time—with reminiscences of both the Mexican

revolutionaries and the fraught memories of the Spanish exiles, or "refugees" ("refugiados") who arrived in Mexico in the 1940s. Ignacio Jurado Martínez, the protagonist of the story, is driven to assassinate Franco in an attempt to get his noisome Spanish clientele to return to Spain. Their loud voices made him appreciate the ill-fated last Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc, who, he reflects, knew how to "lose silently [perder callando]" (29). In 1887, a massive statue of the sixteenth century emperor was erected in Mexico City, and when Aub came to Mexico, he lived within walking distance of the monument. In bas relief at the base, there is a depiction of the emperor being tortured by the Spanish because they believed he knew where the city's gold was hidden. In 1949, the monolith was moved to sit at the center of a proposed plaza at the intersection of the Paseo de Reforma, but the plaza was never built. However, the following year, Siquieros began work on the *Tormento de Cuauhtémoc* [*Torture of Cuauhtémoc*] mural in the Museo de Palacio de Bellas Artes, not far away.

In the collection of poems he wrote during his time in a French Algerian concentration camp, *Diario de Djelfa/*Diary of Djelfa, Max Aub begins to connect the attitudes and practices of Spanish and French fascists with the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain in the fifteenth century. This becomes the rudimentary framework for what will become an increasingly anticolonial stance in his work. Aub's personal experiences, which he connected to colonial violence, seem to have made him even sympathetic to the postrevolutionary cultural milieu in Mexico, where he encountered artists like Rivera and Siquieros creating art informed by pre-Columbian visual rhetoric and engaging in artistic practice designed for public consumption on a massive scale.

Taken together, *The Life and Work of Luis Alvarez Petreña, The Crow Manuscript, Jusep Torres Campalans,* and *Card Game* (see Chapter 6) illuminate a critical response to the core

values of Renaissance humanism, marking a radical reassessment of the role of art, the exceptionalism of humans, and European cultural universalism. These texts, spanning nearly thirty years of Aub's career as a writer—from the 1936 publication of *The Life and Work of Luis Alvarez Petreña* to the 1964 publication of *Card Game*—reveal Max Aub to be one of the progenitors of literary postmodernism and an early formulator of posthumanist critique. *The Crow Manuscript* reveals Aub's deep engagement with the disciplinary shifts and continental rifts underway in the fields of literary theory, anthropology, and art history as well as his sensitivity to the affordances of earlier animal focalization strategies of Aesop and Cervantes and the conventions of seventeenth and eighteenth century street literature.

Art, Art History, Anthropology, Archaeology, and Ethnography

The Crow Manuscript is the slimmest text in my hypothetical tetralogy, but the novella performs an outsized task, forming a bridge not only between *The Life and Work of Luis Alvarez Petreña* and *Jusep Torres Campalans* but also spanning the geographic bifurcation at the center of Aub's life: the first half spent living in Western Europe and the second half in Mexico. Put another way: *The Life and Work of Luis Alvarez Petreña* is a European novel, while *The Crow Manuscript,* despite the French concentration camp setting, is not. Instead Aub's critical response to concentration camps in France and Algeria takes shape within a critical tradition that already existed in Mexico, allowing him to develop a distinctly transatlantic animal satire installment in a body of work that moves toward the posthumanism of contemporary scholars like Sylvia Wynter.

By the time Aub arrived, Mexico had gone through two centuries—and two constitutions worth—of transformation since becoming a nation in 1821 following the War of Independence.

Each government, albeit with divergent motives and employing different strategies, sought to incorporate pre-Columbian history and art into a nation-building narratives. Juan José Saldaña and Consuelo Cuevas Cardona detail how private colonial collections and the holdings of prior institutions such as the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia, y Etnología were consolidated in a Museo Nacional that first opened to the public in 1831 (312). Political instability left the museum on shaky footing for decades until the first indigenous[11] president in the American continent, Benito Juarez, made decisive efforts to safeguard pre-Columbian cultural production alongside scientific research. As part of the 1867 *Ley de Instrucción Pública/Law of Public Instruction* promoting national education, Juarez formalized the establishment and government support for the Museo Nacional. In addition to housing collections governed by institutional directors of "anthropology and ethnology," and "history and archaeology," Saldaña explains that the museum became "the first institution in Mexico for professional scientific research (Botany, Zoology, Geology, Paleontology, and Minerology)" (309).

This robust history of government support, educational reform, and the development of rich public institutions produced generations of capable scholars, widespread interest in national history, and space for housing and public viewing of the pre-Columbian art that continuously surfaced throughout the nation, especially in Mexico City.

[11] Benito Juarez's autobiographical *Apuntes para mis hijos* [*Notes for My Children*] offers clues to his thinking on the subject of these narratives. He offers an implicit model for indigenous participation in the national identity on the first page, where he refers to his parents first as "Indians of the primitive race of the country [indios de la raza primitiva del país]" and then, in the next sentence, refers to his grandparents as members "of the Zapotec Nation [de la nación zapoteca,]" (13). While both sentences use the terms "country [país]" and "nation [nación]," in these two sentences he shifts from racializing colonial language to the liberal narrative of national belonging, positioning the Zapotec Nation as preceding and surviving within the Mexico he leads.

International interest, then, was not only the product of colonial curiosity about primitive cultures, but also the product of policies that linked the nation's present to the imperial Aztec past. This was likely a factor in Franz Boas's decision to create the International School of American Archeology and Ethnology in Mexico, and that location probably also shaped the critical approach to anthropology he was able to develop there. Rosemary Levy Zumwault writes that in 1905, Boas and the Mayan "hieroglyphics specialist" Charles Bowditch were writing to each other about the possibility of finding someone to "take up the ethnology and linguistics of Mexico" and dreaming of opening a school of archeology in Central America (123). By 1906 Boas was actively seeking support for the establishment of "a school parallel to the Archaeological Schools of Rome, Athens, or Palestine" in Mexico. Levy Zumwault describes his four goals for the school as "1) to strengthen the instruction of archaeology in the United States, and particularly at Columbia; 2) to expand the field for archaeological research south to Mexico; 3) to train young scholars in the study of archaeology and ethnology, as well as to cultivate Mexican anthropologists; and 4) to draw European and Canadian universities into the work of Mexican archaeology" (124). Importantly, Boas saw the involvement of Mexican anthropologists and museums as essential to the success of the school (126).

While Boas took a step toward dismantling the racist hierarchies that had conditioned the work of earlier anthropologists, the name of his school and his stated goals for the work he would undertake there demonstrate that he never saw his project as grounded in anthropology alone. Indeed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was little distinction between anthropologists and art historians, and both disciplines overlapped with archaeology. In the introduction to *Art History and Anthropology: Modern Encounters, 1870–1970,* Peter Probst and Joseph Imorde trace the origins of anthropology and art history from their emergence in

nineteenth century Europe, listing "medical doctors, geographers, psychologists," and others as the first curators and directors of the museums on which both disciplines depended. Despite national and linguistic differences in disciplinary traditions, they write, "what they all had in common was a historical and comparative perspective with a particular focus on the Cultural Other, that is, non-Western societies" (3). They argue that while belief in progress united anthropologists and art historians, they also saw conceived of progress as destroying the societies they saw as "primitive." Probst and Imorde characterize anthropologists and art historians as paradoxically believing in both progress and the "the toxic dynamics of modernity," and endeavoring to engage in a "rescue mission that used the colonial outposts of progress, as it were, to save what was left from its deadly effects" (4). This is a generous characterization of the romantic primitivism artists like Gauguin espoused. Susan Hiller offers a more acute analysis in *The Myth of Primitivism*. "In borrowing or appropriating visual ideas which they found in the class of foreign objects that came to be labelled 'primitive art'," she writes, "and by articulating their own fantasies about the meaning of the objects and about the peoples who created them, [European] artists have been party to the erasure of the self-representations of colonized peoples in favour of a western representation of their realities." Anthropology is part of the process too:

> While anthropology tries to turn the peoples who are its subject-matter into objects, and these objects into 'theory', art tries to turn the objects made by those peoples into subject-matter, and, eventually, into 'style'. Both practices maintain, intact, the basic European picture of the world as a hierarchy (ii).

Curators often tasked merchants and missionaries with collecting artefacts, producing and distributing widely used manuals for collection. This is very similar to the approach Karl Linnaeus had adopted over a century earlier to amass the specimen collections that became the basis for his taxonomic system. And indeed, the history of entanglements between different colonial collecting projects are too knotty and numerous to enumerate here. "The shift from rural, manual work to industrial, mechanical labor" write Probst and Imorde, "and the corresponding transition from traditional building materials like mud, wood, and stone to steel, glass, coupled with machine manufacturing, had created a heightened interest in handmade, preindustrial decorative arts and the world of ornament" (4). Like Tolstoy in "What is Art?" and Walter Benjamin in the "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production," both anthropologists and art historians were attentive to the loss of what Benjamin calls "aura" facilitated by mechanical labor—and I would add, the increasing degree of labor alienation it facilitated. What unites the very different paradigms of these distinct disciplines (and Tolstoy and Benjamin) is an interest in how the context—material and cultural—shaped preindustrial arts in a way that could not be replicated by machine.

Rather than forcing all cultural production into a hierarchy whose apotheosis could only be modern Europe, Boas acknowledged that cultural production is best understood as relative rather than hierarchical, the product of material and cultural conditions. The study of these material and cultural conditions, practiced by geographers and anthropologists, like Boas's student and colleague Margaret Mead, became known as ethnographic research. But it also had implications for art historians and artists who had embraced the concept of "primitive art." In the introduction to his 1926 book, *Primitive Art*, Boas writes:

> There must have been a time when man's mental equipment was different from what it is now, when it was evolving from a condition similar to that found among the higher apes. That period is far behind us and no trace of a lower mental organization is found in any of the extant races of man. So far as my personal experience goes and so far as I feel competent to judge ethnographic data on the basis of this experience, the mental processes of man are the same everywhere, regardless of race and culture, and regardless of the apparent absurdity of beliefs and customs… Some theorists assume a mental equipment of primitive man distinct from that of civilized man. I have never seen a person in primitive life to whom this would apply" (1).

When Max Aub disembarked from the *Serpa Pinto*, the ship that had carried him across the Atlantic, in Veracruz, Mexico at the beginning of October in 1942, a revalorization of public art was already well underway in Mexico. Esther Acevedo explains that muralists were initially invited into museums to illustrate the national identity, but when Lazaro Cardenas installed the Instituto Nacional de Antropología [National Institute of Anthropology] in the Castillo de Chapultepec, to form a new Museo Nacional de Historia [National History Museum], murals in the building served an increasingly pedagogical purpose (57-58). She argues that muralists increasingly engaged in a historiographic practice using visual rhetoric to illustrate the significance of the museum's extensive collections of artefacts of daily life in Mesoamerican communities[12].

[12] The artists who painted murals for the Museo Nacional de Antropología [National Anthropology Museum] in 1964 continued this tradition, while definitively breaking with the revolutionary and nationalist discourse of their predecessors.

Less than two months after Aub disembarked, and a few thousand miles to the north, Franz Boas died in the arms of Claude Levi-Strauss during a dinner in New York. Within a few years, Aub's home in Mexico City on Calle Euclides, a few blocks to the north the vast Parque de Chapultepec, would place him within walking distance of the National Museum of History in the Castillo de Chapultepec. The museum continued to grow after Aub's arrival, splitting in two in 1964 when the new Museo Nacional de Antropología [National Anthropology Museum] opened. Aub's letters to his daughter and her family in England demonstrate his interest in these changes, as in 1964, when he refers to the popular association between torrential downpours in Mexico City and the installation of the monolith of Tlaloc[13] outside the new museum.

Paratext and Imprisonment

The Crow Manuscript is a novella detailing the life of prisoners in a French concentration camp, Le Vernet D'Ariege, in 1940, a period when Aub himself was first[14] imprisoned there. It is not a straightforward novella and would best be defined as an important early (or only?) example of *multispecies metafiction*.

Aub swathes the voice of Jacobo, the corvid author of *The Crow Manuscript*, in paratextual layers, like tissue paper cradling a precious and fragile artifact that must travel a long way by arduous means. And indeed, Jacobo, after initially saluting his crow readership, becomes conscious of the possibility that his manuscript could fall into human hands instead, and consequently addresses his potential human readers, excusing himself, in essence, for the gulf separating them. "If these lines happen to fall before human eyes," he writes, then he apologizes for not being able to say where he was born. Quite cleverly, Jacobo contrasts his perspective with

[13] Tlaloc is an embodiment of earth and god of rain, associated with fertility.
[14] Aub would be denounced again, again arrested, and returned to Camp Vernet in 1941.

that of humans, illustrating the difference by means of the significance humans assign borders. "Men have concluded that their place of birth is of utmost significance to their future," he writes. "That is to say: if in place of Nest A, you were born in Nest B, the conditions of your life would change completely." After running through a few examples of nationalities assigned by birthplace, he adds, "Throw in passports to make it all clear. Can you imagine a crow being French or Spanish for the simple fact of having been born on one side or other of the Pyrenees?" And he goes on to write that while of course he came out of an egg, he is reluctant to introduce himself this way to humans, because "seen from the human perspective, someone who doesn't know where they were born or who their parents are is a dangerous entity."

Jacobo's voice does indeed cross a wide chasm, in two distinct regards: 1) for readers to accept Jacobo, they must suspend disbelief—his story comes from the realm of the fabulous and incredible to stake a claim in the realm of the quotidian and credible and arrives by bridging borders separating each species in the animal kingdom. And 2), if belief can be suspended sufficiently to accept Jacobo as the narrator of this text (or even if—maybe especially if—one remains conscious of Aub as his human author) his voice reaches readers from behind the barbed wire of a concentration camp, and in that sense, readers may also appreciate the fact that this voice has reached them at all. Max Aub's elaborate care in presenting the crow's voice to readers, the legerdemain involved in nestling something as strange as a crow's voice in multiple paratextual layers designed to foster a sense of verisimilitude, is reminiscent of two other authors of metafiction who were stranded in French coastal cities, looking for the means to leave Europe around the same time as Aub: Vladimir Nabokov and Anna Seghers.

Each of these authors built narratives around the discovery of a manuscript. Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and *Lolita* are wrapped in a similar paratextual tissue, and while they don't contain animal

narrators, their narrators have other credibility problems that are temporarily dispelled by relatively sober prologues, the former written in the most professorial voice the problematic narrator himself could muster, and the latter composed by one John Ray, Jr. Ph.D. Likewise, Anna Seghers novel, *Transit*, is nestled within a story about a manuscript found in a dead man's suitcase.

J.R. Bululu, the owner of the suitcase in which *The Crow Manuscript* is first discovered, was more fortunate, describing his discovery of a strange notebook in his suitcase after leaving Camp Vernet at the end of 1940 (like his author, Aub). He goes on to describe the camp and Jacobo, though he says he did not know the crow well. Bululu concludes, "These pages have gone around the world, like my suitcase, completely by chance, and if I give them up for publication now, it is only as a bibliographic curiosity and reminder of the past, which as they say, cannot be repeated now that everyone knows that the time of wars and concentration camps has ended." [Maybe note that he uses words associated, in Spanish, with the end of a children's story?]

There are other "lost" manuscripts and suitcases worth mentioning here too, starting with one of Aub's own. En route to a French concentration camp in Djelfa, Algeria, Aub was forced to leave his suitcases—he describes the roadside as seeded with abandoned luggage—containing one his manuscripts, an event recorded in a poem contained in the collection *Diary of Djelfa* (*Diario de Djelfa*) and recalled decades later in 1970, in a letter to Rafael Prats Ribelles. Azner Soler quotes the letter in his introduction to the collection. Aub also describes escaping from the camp in Djelfa carrying the suitcase containing the manuscript (in notebooks like Jacobo's) for the *Diary of Djelfa* (*Diario de Djelfa*) itself.

Taken as a group, the recurrent motif of the lost manuscript, the manuscript left behind, or the manuscript discovered in a suitcase by someone other than the author becomes a literary

testament to the rushed departures, precarious arrangements, and perilous escape plans of all those who struggled to escape the Nazis and their allies in France, Italy, and Spain. The motif pays tribute to the unknowable number of lost manuscripts in suitcases that were never found, like the one Walter Benjamin carried across border from France into Spain. He still carried the suitcase when he checked into the Hotel de Francia in Portbou after being told by the Spanish police that they would deport him back to France the following day. This information prompted Benjamin to commit suicide—he understood it as a death sentence. The manuscript he had considered valuable enough to carry over the mountains and the suitcase that contained it were never found.

In the twenty-first century interest in stories about the discovery of lost suitcases from that period persist, and even carry a special weight. In Mexico City in 2007 a suitcase was discovered containing the negatives of several Spanish Civil War photographers who fled Franco. Trisha Ziff's 2011 documentary, *The Mexican Suitcase* (*La Maleta Mexicana)* explores the discovery of the suitcase and the biographies of the photographers whose work it contained.

Therefore, even this small detail from the prologue of *The Crow Manuscript* bears a historical weight that has not diminished but instead continues to accrue significance as part of what Benjamin referred to as the "wreckage" of a catastrophic human history. In his essay "On the Concept of History," he describes an angel who cannot turn to face the future but instead regards the past so, "Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm

irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward."

After Bululu divulges his reasons for "giving up the manuscript for publication," he includes a description of the physical characteristics of the manuscript (it is written in a pink notebook with covers printed with a multiplication table and brand name "The Incomparable"), some notes about his transcription, and a paragraph of acknowledgements. On the following page, Abéu Máximo Albarrón (a name that clearly echoes Aub's) is listed as the translator, while the prologue and notes are credited to Bululu, and finally, there is a dedication to the "the many who knew the one and only Jacobo in Camp Vernet."

The Crow Manuscript is comparable to works of metafiction written by Nabokov and Seghers, as well as Latin American authors like Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortazar, in that questions about the manuscript's authorship, veracity, and provenance invite the reader to take a more active and participatory role in deciphering what is true, and how truth can be assessed in a work of fiction. In part, the authors formulate these questions by manipulating genre expectations: each of these short fictional works are presented by their narrators, often corroborated by elaborate prologues, as something else entirely. Seghers's unnamed narrator has found a novel in the suitcase of a man who committed suicide when the Nazis occupied Paris, but the reader never sees that novel, instead the narrator describes his reaction to reading the novel and how it influenced his attempt to assemble all the paperwork he and the deceased novelist's widow need to leave by boat from Marseille. Whereas *Pale Fire* appears to contains a poem by the murdered John Shade accompanied by an increasingly paranoid and autobiographical commentary by his colleague Charles Kinbote. Jorge Luis Borges's 1946 microfiction "On Exactitude in Science" ("Del rigor en la sciencia") is the most succinct of all,

framed as a short quotation from a 1658 text, *The Travels of Prudent Males* (Viajes de varones prudentes) by Suárez Miranda.

Thus, we have a memoir by a mechanic whose subsequent decisions are inspired by the discovery of a novel and a memoiristic commentary inspired by possession of a colleague's poem. Borges is an outlier, writing in a shorter form, he has dispensed with all paratextual framing devices except for those that signal that the text is a quote and then the brief attribution of the quote to Suárez. Aub goes the farthest afield in selecting a genre as the Trojan Horse[15] to contain his fiction: Jacobo is writing a thesis on humans, or an ethnography based on a crow's view of a French concentration camp he takes as a case study illustrative of human society writ large. In this regard, the genre of *The Crow Manuscript,* as what is essentially an ethnographic record of strange practices written by an outsider, is perhaps closest to Borges's "On Exactitude in Science."

Jacobo employs the social science and natural science methodologies of close observations of behavior and interaction, thick description, and analysis common to the discipline of anthropology and, it is worth noting, to zoology as well. His authorial stance necessarily distances the reader from the circumstances the crow describes: this is the quintessential bird's eye or even God's eye view. This privileged position, a constructed vantage point once used to reinforce the claims of objectivity made by European scientists, is actually, in Jacobo's case, the physical position he occupies. In part, the god's eye view draws upon a construction of the human as overlapping with God, informed by Cartesian epistemes that separate thought and matter, so that knowledge production becomes as disembodied as possible, and embodied knowledge is viewed with suspicion. Jacobo's view, however, neatly merges Cartesian duality:

[15] An apt metaphor since the Trojan Horse was a human-crafted animal, composed and presented in compliance with the genre conventions of a gift, but turning out to contain humans intent on a very different purpose.

he looks down on humans from bird's eye view because he physically occupies a space above them, due to the affordances of his body, in other words: his body is one that can fly.

From this position Jacobo makes claims that serve to satirize the erroneous assumptions of anthropologists, as when he refers to the concentration camp as an "important cultural center" created in 1939 for benefit of the Spanish, which, he writes, "casts doubt on the traditional slander that makes them [the French] out to be extreme chauvinists."

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945 contains a thorough description of the camp's history, detailing how, "In February 1939 the French Army reactivated the World War I army base and prisoner of war (POW) camp at Le Vernet for the internment of 26,000 troops of the 26th Catalonian Division, anarchist refugees from the Spanish Civil War" (171). The camp was overcrowded and conditions were grim. After the war began in September of that year, most were sent on to worker companies. Subsequently, a wide variety of political prisoners on the right and the left were sent to the camp, although the Belgian Rexists and Flemish fascists immediately became Nazi collaborators when they were released in 1940. When the Vichy Interior Ministry took control of the camp at the beginning of November, they determined to make it the harshest men's penal camp (171).

Jacobo's narration allows for a kind of satirical layering of subjectivities discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Bakhtin's concept of quasidirect speech, in which the author's beliefs are embedded within the speech—or even thought—of another character. This dialogic strategy is the mirror image of Saltykov-Schedrin's use of Aesopian language or reading "against the grain," allowing the author to mean the opposite of what his characters say, without completely dispelling the ambiguity generated by that friction. Thus, buried beneath Jacobo's misapprehensions about the purpose of the concentration camp, Aub's facetious mockery of the

guards can be discerned. In a short subsection titled "The Division of Men," Jacobo writes, "Men are divided into those inside—prisoners, internees, and the detained—and those outside—soldiers with or without rank. The latter are uniformed inferiors who serve those inside." And in an earlier section, Jacobo describes the guards as being "available to serve the internees, going conscientiously about their work. They wear uniforms like the bellhops in the best *hotels."* (The italics are Aub's, or rather, Jacobo's, as he explains in his introduction that he intends to use them for human words with meanings that defy corvid comprehension.)

Jacobo's inability to see that the camp constitutes what Giorgio Agamben identifies as a state of exception, a space set apart from the other kinds of spaces humans inhabit, informs his interpretation of human activities. The focus of his study, he writes, is on those imprisoned in Camp Vernet rather than on the guards. He goes on to formulate an appeal to a scholarly body of crows, writing, "I hope the Board for Extended Research will find some young crow to study the outsiders; the completion of such a work would function as a compliment to this essay." Like the other authors of metafiction listed above, Aub incorporates frequent direct appeals to authoritative audiences into the narrative as well as intertextual fragments from a dazzling array of outside sources, both fictional and real. In so doing, these authors situate the reader within a fictional space where they are consistently assailed with scholarly conventions for establishing credibility. In his introduction, Jacobo writes:

> The facts aren't gathered here according to my wishes, but because they really happened. I've rejected any story that struck me as suspect, even if the informant was credible. I've attempted to follow the most rigorous procedures possible.

> I could have given more leeway to the narrative at the cost of authenticity had not exactitude, note-taking, and method been my raison d'être. Either one is erudite, or one is nothing.

Indeed, Jacobo further demonstrates his erudition by constantly alluding to other texts, quoting other authors at will, and even including materials written by others for express inclusion in his thesis. Evidence of Jacobo's collegial relations with some of the prisoners comes in the form of long quoted sections about the history and geography of the surrounding countryside "courtesy of Professor Morales of the University of Barcelona, Barrack and Quarters B" and a precis of the regional history of the Catholic Church "courtesy of Professor Lowenthal, University of Cologne, Barrack 33."

It would be tempting to connect this voracious appetite for extratextual material to natural crow behavior—crows are widely regarded as avid collectors—if other human narrators were not so prone to do likewise. In fact, if one allows Michel de Montaigne a seminal place in the development of the scholarly essay, such lengthy quotes and disquisitions must be accepted as the norm rather than the exception. However, Aub's Jacobo has another motive beyond conformation with essay conventions: he is working to dispel prejudices against crows common in fables, epigrams, and idiomatic expressions.

Dialogism and Print Culture

Jacobo's assertation at the beginning of this chapter that humans "have remained so far behind because of the limited development of their intelligence," models the rhetoric of ethnographers and art historians that Boas was explicitly addressing and trying to dispel in the

passage above. By positioning Jacobo as a corvid anthropologist engaging in an ethnography of humans, Aub engages in the kind of double-voiced discourse for which animal satire has proven particularly well-suited. Jacobo's attitude satirizes a specific kind of authority, but at the same time, and without negating the satiric element, his assessment also defamiliarizes human exceptionalism—inviting readers to wonder why a crow would deem the development of their human intelligence limited. As Bakhtin explains:

> The prose artist elevates the social heteroglossia surrounding objects into an image that has finished contours, and image completely shot through with dialogized overtones; he creates artistically calculated nuances on all the fundamental voices and tones of this heteroglossia… every extra-artistic prose discourse—in any of its forms, quotidian, rhetorical, scholarly—cannot fail to be oriented toward the "already uttered," the "already known," the "common opinion" and so forth. The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of any discourse… On all its various routes toward the onject, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living, tension-filled interaction. (278-9).

Aub is a prose artist of exactly the kind Bakhtin identifies. And this may be one of the reasons his work is not more widely read. His skill in calculating the nuances—"the fundamental voices and tones" of heteroglossia—lies in his familiarity with a breathtaking array of texts and sensitivity equal to his dramaturgic sensitivity to the "living, tension-filled interaction."

Of course Aub, or rather, Jacobo, makes direct references to Aesop's Fables and the Bible, as well as the numerous sayings [refranes] and adaptations of those texts. After decrying interpretations of the Book of Genesis suggesting that when Moses released a crow the bird flew

away, while the dove he released returned, Jacobo writes that crows have always been given a "bad name [mal nombre]" (198). Following the same lineage of animal focalization outlined in Chapter 1, Jacobo moves from biblical narratives to fabulists, writing:

> We have always had bad press, without even talking about the fabulists, who as is customary among humans in general, and more so among writers, demonstrate a complete lack of knowledge of the subject they deal with.
>
> [Siempre hemos tenido mala prensa, sin hablar siquiera de los fabulistas, que, como es costumbre general humana, y más de los escritores, muestran un desconocimiento absoluta de la materia que tratan] (199).

If nothing else, Aub's interest in the ephemeral street literature of the penny print is evidenced by his creation of his own printed broadside series which he called *El Correo de Euclides*/*The Euclid Post,* a reference to the street he lived on, Calle Euclides. The Centro Virtual Cervantes contains a digital archive of *El Correo de Euclides* which always contain New Year's wishes on one side, with his signature and one or two aphorisms, and a story presented as news on the other side. Headlines include references to the discontinuity of time, a proclamation that a terrible mistake has been made—humans were never intended to live on earth, or that God created the world in response to an erroneous report from the C.I.A. In 1964, the year *Card Game* was published Aub signs off by writing that he sends "LA VERDAD (y nada más que la verdad) [THE TRUTH (and nothing but the truth)]" (Centro Virtual Cervantes).

Starting in the seventeenth century, Catalan auques (singular auca, meaning goose), the closely related Castilian aleluya, and Russian lubki (singular lubok) made visual cultural production accessible to mass audiences through the combined appeal of cheap print technology and various combinations of absurd, beautiful, crass, and religious imagery accompanied by text. Auques, aleluyas, and lubki were regionally and culturally specific vernacular manifestations, patchwork pieces in a larger popular media landscape with a vast (near global) reach. The same themes and tropes appear to have travelled across national and linguistic borders, becoming reinterpreted by local artists and printers—sometimes many times over. Likewise, characters from popular plays, folktales, and even novellas could migrate into this cheap print media. Auques, aleluyas, and lubki (and their corollaries throughout Europe and Latin America) are rife with animals characters. And often these nonhuman animal characters are participants in a tremendously popular and enduring scene, commonly referred to as "The World Turned Upside Down," (see figure 1 below for an early example of an English penny print with this title.)

These scenes of a "topsy-turvy world" sometimes allude to the wheel of fortune and have been linked to other vernacular fantasies such as "the Land of Cockaigne" or the children's game of "opposite day." In addition to a sun and moon buried underground, women and men wearing each other's clothing, and beggars giving alms to rich men, scenes of nonhuman animals enacting fantastic scenes of power reversal seem to be an especially popular subject. These scenes of a reversed world, in Spanish "el mundo al reves" fed an apparently insatiable appetite, and were copied, recreated, and altered to create innumerable culturally specific variations for centuries (see figures 2-3 below). They also illustrate the atmosphere of violent absurdity and carnivalesque social critique that permeates the worlds Misha and Jacobo occupy.

In figure 1, an eighteenth century etching from England, sixteen panes depict different scenes, each bearing a short caption. Nonhuman animals appear in twelve of the sixteen panes: the first pane is an introduction to the conceit, and the following two show role reversals within families (a boy spanks his father, a girl feeds her mother pap, a wife is a soldier and her husband "spines and nurses the childe"). These scenes form a short anthropocentric prologue to the decidedly more fantastical and gruesome scenes that follow: an ass whips a miller carrying sacks of flower, a horse blacksmith forges shoes for another horse who shoes the farrier, and in one particularly complicated scenario, "A fish is Here upon Land Angling for A man [in?] water, An Aple tree bears fishes, A fish seizes an eagle and a Lamb a Lyon." Finally, the implicit violence becomes increasingly explicit and even bloody in the penultimate four panes: "a rabbit roasts a man and a cock bastes him, will you have a sup?"; birds catch humans—who are themselves already caught in a love triangle, in nets; "the Ox is turned Butcher" and hangs a man by his heels to slaughter him, and then, "The Hogez are of killing a man, one stickes him and the other takes his blood for to make black pudding for Taylors." The final pane, by way of a conclusion, brings resolution of sorts, or at least an end to the butchery, by showing a sun and moon with peaceful faces underground beneath a prosaic landscape.

Several of the captions in this broadside contain a mixture of description and commentary. The voice of the commentator, which appears to directly address the reader, adopts into a type of speech that resembles Mikhail Bakhtin's quasi-authorial voice: we can't be sure whose opinions are the basis for the commentary. There is no way for the reader to ascertain the degree to which a real author speaks through the words of this anonymous narrator. At first the commentary consists of little more than what might pass, on a stage, for a facetious side address to the audience, as when horses sit astride the backs of men, and the caption reads, "A very

Singular way of Fighting, the horses ride their masters." This facetiousness is aligned with a human perspective, one characterized by ideals of detached observation, even objectivity. Near the end however, as the violence becomes more explicit, the animal's voices seem to seep into the narrator's statements, as when the "Rabbitt roasts" a man in a fire on a spit over a roasting pan while the "cock basts" him, and the sentence concludes with the question, "Will you have a sop?" Who but the Ox Butcher could give the final assessment in his caption which reads, "This Meat makes a sorry broth, he is good for Little Roasted or Boyled, worse in Pyes and stinks Fry'd"?

This upside-down theme is developed multiple times in much more elaborate form in aleluyas and auques, where the animal antics and characterizations are more fully developed and prominent. These prints typically consist of forty-eight images each accompanied by a rhymed couplet (or *rodolin*, another common name for the prints is *auques de rodolin*). Here the interactions between humans and nonhuman animals became more complex: Este cotorro insensata/esta pobre mujer dice/"saca la pata" or "This foolish parrot tells this poor woman, 'Stick out your paw.'" A cat catches a rat to give to a grateful human who appears to bat at it from below. Rats surround a cat in a trap to laugh at him, and in this they closely resemble the mice in a widely circulated lubok featuring political satire where mice who have successfully hunted and captured a cat have tied their prisoner up to carry him away.

However, auques and aleluyas, like other forms of street literature, were not confined to radical reversals of social order—they also became the means by which the public became familiar with scientific ordering systems, classifications, and hierarchies. One 1855 auca from Juan Llorens shows different (also included below) shows different types of birds, including the

biblical “bad press” about crows about which Jacobo complains. The names the crow as the “traitor” inside Noah’s arc.

Moreover, Jacobo’s text satirizes the ordering systems, classifications, and hierarchies humans create throughout his text, including sections titled “De la especial [About Species]” and “De las jerarquías [About Hierarchies]” (209, 211). In the former, Jacobo claims that “humans belong to the same species as dogs, cats, cows, horses, sheep, burros, geese, pigs, oxen, and goats,” and then offers a series of unflattering colloquial expressions about each of the domestic animals specified (209). Jacobo sets himself apart as a nondomestic animal who therefore occupies a different class than species such as humans.

From this privileged position, he writes with the self-assurance of early ethnographers. Jacobo’s manuscript compresses a survey of different genres of human textual history into a deceptively short narrative while maintaining the tone of a nineteenth century ethnography. He writes that humans cannot go anywhere, and cannot even be born without papers, and that on those papers they affix a photograph. After wondering what possible use such a practice might have, Jacobo dismisses it, saying it probably has something to do with a solar myth.

In the section on hierarchies, Jacobo struggles to articulate a concept he sees as “impossible to explain, one of the foundations of human society” (211). He goes on to ask, “How is it comprehensible that one crow could be worth more or less than another, being that he is a crow?” (211). He notes that all crows are black, and that’s that. Then his description of human hierarchies turns to the camp guards who wear signs of rank on their sleeves and medals on their chest. And Aub introduces another paratextual fold: a parenthetical statement about the gold and silver of the medals written in an almost admiring tone includes a footnote saying this statement

appears to have been inserted in the handwriting of a magpie. This is, apparently, the dialogism of birds!

Jacobo goes on to describe La Fontaine's verse fable, "Le Corbeau et le Renard" ("The Crow and the Fox") as "such outrageous barbarity" ("barbaridad tan ultrajante"; 199). He then turns his attention to theater, which he considers to be a gilded cage in which the masses go to watch "drunks, servants, and the incurably insane play a variety of roles." He considers theatrical productions to be "one of the most horrendous vices of mankind, a singular example of their cruelty (uno de los vicios más horrendous de los hombres, ejemplo impar de su crueldad"; 199). Indeed, the wide variety of text-based genres Jacobo discusses in the course of his ethnography of humans is astounding.

In this regard, Jacobo is reminiscent of those exemplary dogs, Scipio and Berganza, to whom Cervantes granted not only speech but the erudition to explicitly craft the structure of their narrative through the conventions of a seventeenth century Spanish dialogue or *coloquio*.

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PART II. Burdock, Cockroach, Cactus, Cochineal

Chapter 4. "The monstrous, unclean little world"

In the spirit of an upside down world, I will now turn to the species who command the least human attention and affection: plants, insects, and even bacteria. Two provocations will form the starting point: 1) in the twentieth century we can see how industrial agriculture alters land relations and more-than-human entanglements in the material world, and these changes are evident in the imaginary landscapes of fiction as well and 2) simultaneously, in the twentieth century, humans develop the technological (chemical and biological) means to eradicate single species with greater precision. While this would probably be unthinkable if the target were a mammal, insects and weeds are fair game. Insects and weeds often fall beyond the scope of human care. In 1919 Vladimir Lenin identified a terrifying nonhuman enemy poised to kill millions of Russians. "Comrades," he declared at the Seventh All-Russia Congress of Soviets in December, "Comrades, we must concentrate everything on this problem. Either the lice will defeat socialism, or socialism will defeat the lice!" (Lenin et al, 1965) The lowly body louse he named, *Pedicula humanis*, was not the real culprit however, but only the vehicle, or vector, by which typhus, the real threat to socialism, spread. Lenin's metonymy consolidates the invisible and omnipresent threat of a deadly contagion into the fragile body of a tiny insect. Other nonhuman enemies preceded the louse; almost a decade earlier, in his 1901 pamphlet 'Chto Delat?' ('What is to be Done?') Lenin had likened the enemies of the Bolsheviks to *plevely* (плевелы), a type of poisonous weed mentioned in the Bible, notoriously indistinguishable from the cereal crops in the grain fields where the weed thrives (Lenin et al, 1902, p. 115). The message was clear, diseases and enemies might be everywhere, but insects could be crushed and weeds could be pulled out. In other words, such enemies could be vanquished, or even eradicated

entirely. In Lenin's rhetoric on more-than-human entanglements, as in the propaganda that developed these motifs in subsequent decades, a wide variety of synanthropic insects and weeds signified various threats menacing the body politic—and consequently socialism itself—across multiple scales: lice and bedbugs menaced the citizen's body just as cockroaches menaced food stores and diverse weeds menaced the arable body of the motherland. Or as an official in Chevengur puts it, "I'm going out to look for weedlots in one province… earlier socialism was threatened by lice, and now it's weeds…" (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 298)

The same year that Lenin named the louse an enemy of socialism and declared battle on typhus, the writer Andrei Platonov witnessed the mechanism that accounted for the devastating spread of the disease—the train. At that time, he worked as a railway employee in Voronezh, a city that had been occupied by the White Army and then the Red Army in turn a couple of months earlier, in October (Seifrid, 2009. 6). His work on trains on the front lines of the Russian Civil War, positioned him to witness firsthand the mass displacement, crowded conditions, and louse infestations that fueled the epidemic spread of typhus throughout Russia. Within a few years, as a land reclamation agent during the famine that followed the terrible drought of 1921 in the same region, he saw weeds overtake the abandoned fields where crops had been cultivated. Nonetheless, and perhaps more than any other early Soviet writer, Andrei Platonov defied party rhetoric in elaborating strikingly sympathetic portrayals of interspecies relationships between displaced humans and the very insects and weeds repudiated in propaganda. In his novel *Chevengur*, primarily set during the period of the Russian Civil War and written 1927-1928, Platonov challenges Lenin's pronouncements by depicting heterodox multispecies affective entanglements, going so far as to suggest that not only are weeds *not* enemies they exemplify the traits of ideal comrades (as I will discuss in at greater length in Chapter 5), and that insects can

even become valued friends. As the protagonist of *Chevengur* plaintively asks, "Why can't he love a cockroach…?" (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 293) In so asking, Platonov imagines a radical more-than-human solidarity, problematizes the characterization of synanthropic species as mere enemies, and anticipates posthumanist developments in contemporary anthropocene studies.

"Friends and Enemies"

Some of nonhuman enemies Lenin identified and their evolution in visual rhetoric functioned as proxies for other enemies—both human and abstract. The classification that unites all of the examples under present consideration—regardless of kingdom—is that they are synanthropic. This means they live alongside humans and often depend on human activities for their very survival. Synanthropes such as body lice or bindweed are neither domestic nor wild, but they live where humans live (sometimes, as with lice, in uncomfortably close proximity), and their shared tendency to multiply rapidly while interfering with human endeavors has rendered them and their ilk common symbols of impurity, contamination, and contagion. Some synanthropes certainly presented very real threats to socialism, and perhaps for this reason, they took on a powerful figurative significance in early Bolshevik rhetoric that continued to evolve over time. In the examples below, these entities appeared alongside or became conflated with human enemies, or else embodied dangers either invisible to the naked eye or too abstract to be represented without the aid of some concrete symbol which these cross-species surrogates provided.

A nineteen-twenties poster bearing the title, 'Druz′i͡a i vragi' ('Друзья и враги') or 'Friends and Enemies' by the artist Dmitriĭ Stakhievich Orlov offers a guide to rural pests and benefactors. They are all arrayed in black squares (reminiscent of the simple scientific diagrams

in children's textbooks) that form a dense black-and-white border around a colorful central image of two peasants, a priest, and a mass of oversized and googly-eyed worms and insects that seem to writhe in every direction. The surrounding images, contained in the scientific-looking boxes, visually illustrate a system of classification in which the category of enemies begins with the field mouse in the first box and the scarab beetle in the second, and ends with the beetle grub in the penultimate box, followed by two humans who share the last place; they are the kulak and the priest.

Weeds do not appear in this system, but they are alluded to in the inclusion of a simple mechanical device as the final "friend" in the illustrated list opposite the "enemies." As Ruth Hibbard points out in a blog post for the Victoria and Albert Museum, the friendly device in question is a "trier" a small machine for sorting grains that separates the desirable seeds of cereal crops from the weed seeds which would otherwise be missed if the sorting were done by hand. One weed that presented a particular problem for grain harvesters for millenia is *plevely* (плевелы), specifically *plevel p'i͡ani͡ashchiĭ* (плевел пьяня́щий), often translated as "tares," but more commonly known in English as "darnel" or "poison darnel," which crops up in both the biblical parable of the tares and in Lenin's 'Chto Delat?' ('What is to be Done?'). *Plevel p'i͡ani͡ashchiĭ,* poison darnel, or *Lolium temulentum* as the weed is known to botanists, has contaminated grain crops, seed stores, and flours throughout history. Comparable to the spread of body lice and typhus, it is likely that both the consumption and planting of cereal grains mixed with poison darnel increased during the civil war and in subsequent famines because seed was scarce and the means of meticulously sorting it were limited. The phenomena of contaminated grain consumption associated with grain scarcity and social upheavals that disrupt seasonal patterns of harvesting, sorting, and processing grain crops is well known. The toxic or

intoxicating properties of poison darnel may actually be the product of a symbiotic relationship between the weeds and the endophytic fungus, *Neotyphodium*, that lives within it (Thomas, 2019, p. 197). When grains are unsorted or insufficiently sorted, the fungus has more opportunities to spread to uninfected seeds. Thus, grain requisition and transport via train may have further contributed to increasing contamination and dispersal throughout Russia, paralleling the out-of-control spread of body lice and typhus. And, as I will describe in greater detail below, at least one character in *Chevengur* suffers from some of the symptoms associated with such intoxication.

The year after Lenin proclaimed the louse capable of defeating socialism, Clara Zetkin recorded another reference to a nonhuman threat. Once again, Lenin deployed the spread of weeds in an analogy, only this time, the analogy may have accrued greater significance given ongoing grain shortages and decreases in the amount of land under cultivation. In a discussion on sexual "intoxication" and the "filth" of capitalism, Lenin addressed women's sexuality directly, saying, "And if harmful tendencies are appearing, creeping over from bourgeois society into the world of revolution – as the roots of many weeds spread – it is better to combat them early" (Zetkin, 1969, p.108) Platonov himself developed similar imagery in the first half of Chevengur, demonstrating a deft ability to wield the rhetorical devices he would upend in the latter half of the novel. In one passage, the protagonist Sasha Dvanov reflects that "the revolution had weeded absolutely clean the few spots where there had been sprouts of culture," so that something new could grow, "if only the winds of war did not carry from western Europe the seeds… of capitalistic weeds" (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 293). And yet even here, where the spread of weeds stands in for the contagion-like spread of "harmful tendencies" Platonov's language is more ambiguous. The new plant he imagines is not necessarily domestic, and the noxious "capitalistic

weeds" may be only one type of weed economic system among many, leaving open the possibility for the "International of grass and flowers," (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 223) which does indeed appear later in the novel. Strikingly, both Lenin's analogy suggesting a subterranean and even rhizomatic spread, and Platonov's introduction of the wind dispersal of seeds accurately describe two modes of the particularly adept spreading capabilities exhibited by many of the plant species most commonly identified as weeds.

Additionally, both analogies name a non-specific weed, though Lenin's weeds, nekotorykh sornykh rasteniĭ (некоторых сорных растений), are different than Platonov's weeds, bur͡ʹiana (бурьяна), which might just as easily be called "wild grass." And while Lenin rarely speaks of weeds, when he does so, he only makes metaphorical use of them to warn against enemies or harmful tendencies. Platonov also speaks of various kinds of weeds and "wild grass" generally, however, he also frequently names specific species, describing their physical (and even emotional) characteristics in great detail. This may seem like a paltry detail, however, it illustrates a larger point: Lenin's use of weeds in general as the mere means to a rhetorical end exemplifies the "plant blindness" defined by Mung Balding and Kathryn J.H. Williams as a lack of interest in, knowledge of, or concern for plants, upon which we are perpetually and entirely dependent for food and air, to say the least (2016, p. 1).

Weeds in general were a recognizable sign of hunger, the only cause of death that claimed more life than typhus in the late teens and early twenties. After the revolution, fields left fallow by displaced peasants were subject to 'invasion' by hardier plants that could subsist with less water and without human care. Additionally, Bolshevik grain requisitions and uncertainty about land tenure caused some peasants to see sowing and harvesting as even more of a gamble than usual. These factors are summarized in a short piece in 1932 in the British paper, *The*

Observer, which describes "an amazing neglect of the fields which seems to have resulted in one of the greatest weed crops in history" and reports that "[t]he harvesting combines which are used on the fields sometimes cannot function because of the weeds, which obstruct the stacking of the grain and naturally very much reduce the yield of the planted area." In *Chevengur* Platonov similarly describes a countryside seething with rumors about grain requisition and fields overgrown with weeds. Platonov records these conditions in the town of Chevengur itself, where the former inhabitants of Chevengur, "had sown and planted nothing for three years now, since they had been counting on the end of the world, but the plants multiplied from their parents and established among themselves a particular balance between wheat and thistle" (Platonov, et al.; 1978, p. 223).

The same plant blindness renders the weeds of later propaganda posters almost indeterminate, even as they evolved bodies clearly identifiable with specific human "types" or caricatures of enemies. Images of women weeding and men mowing down weeds with a scythe were ideologically coded became increasingly frequent by the nineteen forties.

Another poster from the early twenties features a giant (several times larger than the humans in the poster) "typhus louse," depicted in stark white[16], climbing down from the battlefields of the civil war into the baths and laundries of Russia; this is "a new peril[17]" figured as an iteration of the White Army. At the top of the poster, immediately above a battlefield where tiny bodies sprawl on barren ground, the text reads, "The Red Army crushed the White Guard parasites—Yudenich, Denikin, Kolchak." In the black space through which the giant

[16] Interestingly, body lice who carried typhus were often actually visibly red in color, due to the fact that the bacteria caused internal hemorrhaging in their semi-transparent bodies, so that as the blood in their digestive tracts filled their bodies, they turned red. For this reason, typhus was sometimes called "red louse disease" (Angelakis et al. 2015, p. 2)

[17] Translation as it appears on the Wellcome Library website.

louse descends—a space and louse that visually dominates the poster—the accompanying text warns, "a new calamity overtook it—the typhus louse." At the bottom of the poster, beneath the bathing and clothes-washing people menaced by the louse hovering in the darkness above them, a straightforward call to action concludes: "Comrades! Eradicate contagion!"[18] Aside from the ideological message contained in the conflation between the White Guard and typhus, at the most basic level, this iteration probably made intuitive sense to many people, corroborated by widespread associations between conflict and the spread of epidemic typhus, and possibly borne out by their own lived experience. Platonov was more circumspect, so that in *Chevengur*, in a description of the sentiments of practical-minded city dwellers, tired of abstract ideas, who reflect "that the stars could be turned into a handful of rationed millet, while it is the typhus louse that carries ideals" (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 138).

The New Calamity

Chevengur begins with Zakhar Pavlovich, a man without a fixed home or family of his own, who nonetheless possesses a prodigious genius for repairing and inventing things. At the funeral of a fisherman friend, he encounters the little boy who will become the novel's protagonist, Sasha Dvanov, the fisherman's orphaned son. A large peasant family takes Sasha home to live with them, but eventually when food is scarce, they send the child out to beg. After being hired to care for a sick woman while her husband is at work, he eventually finds his way back to Zakhar, who then becomes a true adoptive father. Like Platonov, Sasha joins his father working for the railway in his teens.

[18] The translation is mine.

Sasha's "consciousness of community" imagines a radical equality across species, reaching even to the distant shores of the material existence and potential affect of nonliving entities such as trains. In so writing, Platonov makes a radical extension of Karl Marx's assertion that "nature is the inorganic body of man" and steps into the realm of contemporary posthumanist and postmetaphysical discourse. This consciousness of community is analogous with his desire to feel with, and "live their life with" other entities. As Oxana Timofeeva observes, "Platonov, this very unorthodox and strange Marxist, reveals subjectivity, inherent in a tragic dialectics of nature, as a desire—a desire for communism that overwhelms all living beings" (2016, p. 106). After Sasha arrives in the community of Chevengur, Platonov will explore the affordances of such more-than-human solidarity at greater length.

When Sasha recovers from his illness, he is sent to investigate the possible spontaneous generation of socialism among peasants in the steppe. Along the way he acquires a companion, Stepan Kopenkin, and after passing through a series of chaotic and desolate villages, they become separated before finally meeting again after both end up in Chevengur, a place that is also called "communism." In Chevengur, a community led by a man named Chepurny and Sasha's foster brother Prokofy, nothing has been planted for three years; it is a place that "doesn't collect property, it destroys it" (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 156). From that point onward, Sasha joins the inhabitants in their confused attempt to spontaneously generate utopian socialism without planting or producing anything.

Lenin's 1901 pamphlet weeds were merely a figurative threat, but by 1919, when he declared "grain, fuel, and the battle against typhus" the foundation of socialism, the threat of weeds overtaking cropland had become literal. Moreover, grain cultivation, fuel for the trains that transported grain, and the typhus epidemic were not only contemporaneous, they were

tightly bound together in a co-constitutive causal relationship that Platonov, more than any other author of the period, seems to have recognized and deemed worthy of describing in minute detail. Within the first few pages of the novel, as Zakhar passes through steppe settlements, Platonov describes the extreme precarity of agricultural communities, prevalence of hunger, and widespread displacement in the decade before the revolution.

This cycle of catastrophic hunger and displacement created the conditions in which feral species, including various types of weeds and insects, as well as the contagious bacteria they host, could thrive. With the body louse as vector, epidemic typhus spreads in crowded spaces, particularly when clothing and bedding are shared and seldom washed. In Russia migrant workers from rural villages who left home after the harvest season to earn money working in cities during the winter were particularly susceptible to the disease (Patterson, 1993, p. 365). A pathbreaking study comparing nearly three centuries of tree ring reconstructions and records of typhus outbreaks in Central Mexico corroborates observations in historical documents linking typhus outbreaks and drought (Burns, Acuna-Soto, and Stahle, 2014, p. 445). During cyclical droughts, crop failures and high grain prices in Mexico drove environmental refugees into cities where, like their Russian counterparts, they endured crowding and limited access to water for laundering clothing and bedding, and where lice and the typhus they carried proliferated and spread. Platonov signals a recognition of these patterns in the passage above which he elaborates later in the novel. Zakhar Pavlovich continues on his route, finding entire villages emptied of human occupants, overgrown with common weeds such as nettle, burdock, and orache. And as the novel progresses, Platonov draws attention to another mechanism that fueled the unprecedented scope of the typhus outbreak in Russia, namely trains.

In *Feral Atlas*, Anna Tsing reminds us that "Every event in human history has been a more-than-human event" (2020) and describe the feral ecologies that emerge alongside and even shape human infrastructures. Ruderal species like nettle, burdock, orache, and darnel have a predilection for the disturbed soil of construction sites, plowed fields, and roadsides. Similarly, synanthropic insects like the louse, bedbug, and cockroach have evolved within the environments that humans create for themselves by living in clothing, bedding, and houses. Even the spread of bacteria and fungi such as the *R. prowazekii* that causes typhus and the fungal endophyte, *Neotyphodium* that grows in symbiosis inside its host darnel, depend upon human infrastructure to spread. "By beginning with the attunement between an infrastructure and an entity as the source of out-of-control spread," Tsing et al. argue, "scholars might get used to the idea that humans and nonhumans together are equally involved in self-transformation and in transforming world history and ecology." (2020) A closer examination of *R. prowazekii* and *Neotyphodium* and their distinctive entanglements with feral species and human hosts reveals the validity of this statement, a validity Platonov acknowledges in *Chevengur*.

Uniquely adapted to feed on human blood alone, *Pedicula humanas corpus*, more commonly known as body lice, have accompanied their human hosts since prehistory, probably evolving as a species distinct from head lice when humans began wearing clothing (Perry, 2014, p. 223). The precise origin of the bacteria that causes epidemic typhus, *R. prowazekii*, but descriptions from the fifteenth and sixteenth century already associated the disease with famine and war (Angelakis et al. 4). In *Voyna i mir* (*War and Peace*) Leo Tolstoy described the widespread infestation of body lice documented among Russian soldiers when he described the Eighth Infantry's evening ritual of "settl[ing] down round the fires for the night—some repairing their footgear, some smoking pipes, and some stripping themselves naked to steam the lice out of

their shirts" (Tolstoy, trans. Maude, 1942, p. 1204) Recent advances in paleomicrobiology indicate that French soldiers retreating from Russia also suffered from an outbreak of epidemic typhus, one so severe in fact, that it may have precipitated their retreat. Paleomicrobiologists such as Angelakis et al posit that epidemic typhus "has arguably determined the outcome of more wars than have soldiers and generals" (Angelakis, Bechah, and Raoult, 2016, p. 1)

In Russia, up until the nineteenth century, epidemic typhus outbreaks were frequent but relatively contained because the majority of the population remained in one place. Laws constraining travel, the prohibitively high costs of transportation, and the state of the roads limited the spread of the disease. In the nineteenth century trains began to facilitate the rapid transmission of typhus from one region to another, a phenomenon tragically illustrated in 1887 by Anton Chekhov's 'Tif' ('Typhus') The story begins with Lieutenant Klimov feeling disoriented and unwell on the train from Petersburg to Moscow; when he arrives home, he immediately falls ill, unwittingly infecting the sister who nurses him back to health. Nonetheless, even at the end of the nineteenth century, typhus outbreaks remained comparatively limited in scope. In 1917 however, famine, revolution, and social unrest prompted unprecedented numbers of people to leave their homes and take to the roads, traveling by foot and by train and carrying body lice and the bacteria *R. prowazekii* with them. World War I had already provoked typhus outbreaks along the front (even Sasha notices that after the war begins the trains run more frequently), and the subsequent movements of people displaced by conflict and civil unrest catapulted those regional outbreaks into major urban centers, leading to a catastrophic spread of epidemic typhus throughout all of Russia following the October Revolution.

By the time Platonov wrote *Chevengur*, the relationship between body lice and typhus bacteria was well documented and widely known. Platonov, like Lenin, explicitly refers to the

"typhus louse," however Platonov records what Chekhov may have suspected and contemporary research confirms: the role of trains in accelerating the out-of-control typhus by increasing the mobility of lice and their human hosts. He frames Sasha's encounters with louse infested revolutionaries and displaced peasants with visits to train stations and travel on crowded trains, passing the night alongside other soldiers scratching their bodies in their sleep. Platonov's insights are an exception to the rule: Robert Argenbright laments the dearth of historical sources documenting a postrevolutionary typhus epidemic of unimaginable proportions, describing the millions of people seeking escape from civil war and famine, and investigating how the railroad brought together "masses of desperate lice-ridden people" (Argenbright, 2008, p. 259). Platonov describes the crowded conditions on trains and the chaos that reigned in many stations through Sasha's brief stint with the Red Army. After waiting for days at the station for a troop train, Sasha arrives in a distant town, and immediately goes "to the Revolutionary Committee and talked with the people there; they complained about the absence of cloth for Red Army underwear, because of which people were teeming with lice…" (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 49) Back at the train station, "ten or more nameless people sat on the floor and hoped for a train which would take them to a better place. Without complaint they suffered the torment of revolution and patiently wandered the steppes of Russia in search of bread and salvation." (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 50) After boarding another train, Sasha aids in the train's escape from the White Army, only to face sabotage and desertion further down the track, finally culminating in a terrible train crash—a common enough occurrence at the time due to widespread confusion. Corroborating Platonov's depiction, Argenbright writes, "the central government struggled against disorder in the railroad system, with the unintended result that the railroads usually functioned well enough to keep people and lice in circulation." (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 260)

Fearing he might be blamed for the crash, Sasha wends his way through wastelands, trainyards, and along railroad shacks, making detours "so that he wouldn't be stopped… for a document check," improvising the kind of route displaced people all over Russia were devising for themselves (Olctott, 1978 p. 56). Finally, Sasha boards another crowded train, arrives home again at last, and falls ill with typhus, much like Chekhov's Lieutenant Klimov. Sasha's typhus, "repeated itself, not leaving the patient's body for eight months," (Platonov et al.; 1978, p.58) effectively living its life with him, and drawing an intriguing parallel between the biological exigencies of *R. prowazekii*'s life cycle and Sasha's consciousness of community. Later, we will see an exploration of this relationship pushed further in the relationship between the poisonous weed *Lolium temulentum* and its symbiotic fungus, *Neotyphodium*. Like Sasha, the bacteria also "could not enter into anything separately." Timofeeva's attention to the subjectivity Platonov extends to all living things in the form of a desire for communism applies here too, as not even the typhus-carrying lice that Lenin saw as a threat to socialism are denied this subjectivity, this consciousness of a biological form of community, and sharing with Sasha a lack of consciousness of the self "as a firm independent object."

Consciousness of Community

It is possible that even though Sasha eventually recovers under Zakhar Pavlovich's loving care, he actually never is separate from typhus again, as he seems to exhibit some signs of Brill-Zinsser disease, the name given to delayed relapses of epidemic typhus caused by latent bacteria that remains within the body and can reactivate long after an initial infection. Indeed, Sasha suffers from a similar illness once more, later in the novel, much as he did earlier in the novel, upon his return home after being sent out on the road to beg by his foster family.

Sasha's Red Army experiences involving lice, trains, and typhus demonstrate Platonov's grasp of the material conditions that gave rise to an epidemic of such proportions. At the same time Platonov's treatment of contagion on an individual scale is distinctly tender. In *Chevengur*, care for the sick is notably free of fears of contagion, and instead proximity to sickness seems to strengthen familial bonds, stimulate affection, and even generate feelings of intimacy. During Sasha's long bout with typhus, Zakhar feeds him by hand and carefully constructs a fine coffin as a further expression of love. At precisely this moment, the "foster" appellation that had always previously accompanied Zakhar's designation as Sasha's father falls away for the first time: "…Zakhar Pavlovich made a coffin for his foster son, a strong, beautiful coffin… the last gift of a master craftsman-father to his son." (Platonov et al.; 1978, p.59)

On a visit to his supervisor Shumilin's home, Sasha finds the man feeding his wife who also has typhus. While she eats, she comforts her small son, who seeks relief from the cold by cuddling up to her feverish body (Olctott, 1978, p.60) Throughout the town, as wind carried colder air into houses, other children similarly warmed against bodies of typhus-stricken mothers. Shumilin explains that he works all day and feeds his wife all night, wishing for a better future. But Sasha replies:

> "It's not so bad the way it is now," Dvanov answered. "When I was sick and Zakhar Pavlovich fed me with a spoon, I liked that."
>
> "What did you like?" Shumilin hadn't understood.
>
> "When people are fed directly from hands right into their mouths." (Platonov et al.; 1978, p.63)

— Так — тоже ничего, — ответил Дванов. — Когда я болел и Захар Павлович кормил меня из рук, я это любил.

— Чего ты любил? — не понял Шумилин.

— Когда люди питаются из рук в рот. (Platonov, 2006, p.46)

In spite of the many kinds of suffering Platonov describes throughout Chevengur, sick and dying characters in the novel always receive care. Even Sasha's foster family who were at best neglectful of his wellbeing and sent him out on the road as a child to beg when they had no food, allow him to lie on the stove for a month recovering after he returns shivering and delirious—possibly experiencing his first bout of typhus. When they turn him out again after he recovers, he only survives as the result of a young welder's love for his sick wife. The young welder hires Sasha—at that point begging without much success on the street—to sit with her. The sick young wife seems "as beautiful to him as his mother had in the reminiscences of his father" (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 36). She loves Sasha too, calling him by his full name, Alexander, and "he lived and helped the woman with the self-denial of late childhood, which no one before had received of him" (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 36) The welder's wife's sickness is never specified, however, it is clear that those who come into direct contact with her (namely, her husband and Sasha) have no fear of contagion, instead, they are infected, as it were, by love and devotion, and she, in turn, loves them as well.

Unsurprisingly, Sasha feels pity even for plants of Chevengur, as when he worries about the other Chevengurians, fearing that they might suddenly disappear or "die off by degrees," while examining the "humble body" of a blade of grass. His concern encompasses even the blade

of grass as he reflects that "[i]t was possible too that it should not be preserved, when there would be no one left" (Platonov, et al.; 1978, 326).

Sasha's capacity for more-than-human pity provides a key to the novel, and helps illustrate Timofeeva's reading of Platonov as articulating a desire for communism that unites the most exploited plants, animals, and humans in their overwhelming and often inexpressible desire for communism. Timofeeva, predators are merely the parasites best equipped as exploiting the defenseless, and capitalism follows this model. In her reading, the ecological turn of contemporary utopian fantasies "of going back to wonderful nature" will offer no relief to the plight of "'inferior' plants and animals, migrants and worders" (Timofeeva, 2016, p.105). Instead, she argues, Platonov envisions, in communism, a truly universal transformation far exceeding human concerns, that subverts the hierarchies of all exploitation.

"Why can't he love a cockroach?"

Near the end of *Chevengur*, everyone becomes distressed by the illness of an elderly man named Yakov Titych. If Sasha (or anyone else in the community) carried latent typhus, it is possible that the bacteria had been transmitted to Yakov Titych. Certainly, the inhabitants of Chevengur would have been especially susceptible to typhus given their penchant for sharing clothing and sleeping side-by-side.

On the other hand, another possible cause of Yakov Titych's terrible stomach pain could be attributed to consumption of *Lolium temulentum*, the *plevely* from the biblical parable Lenin appropriated twenty years earlier to illustrate the contamination of Bolshevism. A close reading yields provocative details that support this reading, since "the men of Chevengur wandered about the steppes picking plants and grubbing roots, stuffing themselves on raw vegetables" (Platonov

et al.; 1978, 248), and when a guest arrives, he is "called to come eat at the field, where for the first course he was given grass soup and for the second a mush of vegetables" (Platonov et al.; 1978, 310) Whenever food is mentioned, it is clear that the Chevengurians subsist exclusively on foraged plants whatever remains of the food stores in the houses of former inhabitants who have left, been driven out, or were killed. Both of these food sources may have included *Lolium temulentum*. As I pointed out above, *Lolium temulentum* and the endophytic fungus living within it, *Neotyphodium*, were more likely to be present in flour milled during times of scarcity, as would have been the case for any flour the Chevengurians found in houses. Similarly, as a synanthropic plant that grows among grain crops, but with more hardiness and drought resistance than the domestic grains (particularly when aided by *Neotyphodium*), conditions in Chevengur favored the spread of *Lolium temulentum*.

The relationship between Lolium temulentum and the Neotyphodium that accompanies it, living within it, is more symbiotic than the relationship between the humans, body lice, and typhus, but is equally dependent on physical proximity and the close contact that allows for transmission. Thus, like Sasha and the *R. prowazekii* that lived inside of him, the Neotyphodium also cannot "enter into anything separately" and to an even greater degree than Sasha, cannot even exist "as a firm independent object."

Platonov never mentions *plevely* by name in Chevengur, but that is no proof that he didn't have that plant in mind when he described Yakov Titych's symptoms, which correspond precisely to those associated with human consumption of *Lolium temulentum*. Most grasses are, however, notoriously difficult for most people to identify, particularly those that, like *plevely*, have evolved to mimic their neighbors (Thomas, 2019, p. 197) The Chevengurians do not actively engage in cereal cultivation, and their collective uncertainty about many things suggests

that they might not have known about *plevely*, even though Platonov, after his years of working as an ameliorator, very likely would have. And there are further clues, as when he describes the growth of “other unauthorized grasses“” or the “wild inappropriate grass” of the passage below (Platonov et at.; 1978, pp. 197, 118)

In fact, Platonov formulates an explicit comparison between Chevengurians and the weeds in a grain field, seemingly picking up fragments of Lenin’s imagery and rhetoric, but rearranging them to evoke sympathy rather than fear of the spread of *plevely*:

> Pashintsev agreed, then told them about weeds. In the destroyed days of his youth he had loved to watch the pitiful doomed grass grow among the millet. He knew that the proper day would come and the women would without mercy pluck baskets full of wild inappropriate grass, cornflowers, clover, and milkweed. These grasses were prettier than the unattractive grains. Their flowers resembled the sad eyes of dying children. They knew they were to be torn up by sweating women. That kind of grass though is more alive than any cowardly grain, because after the women had passed by it grew again, in un-countable, deathless quantities. "That's poverty for you, too," Pashintsev made the comparison, regretting that he had finished off "Death to the Bourgeoisie." "We've got more power in us and we're more sincere than any other elements .... " (Platonov et at.; 1978, 118)

> Пашинцев согласился и рассказал про сорную траву. В свое детское погубленное время он любил глядеть, как жалкая и обреченная трава разрастается по просу. Он знал, что выйдет погожий день и бабы

> безжалостно выберут по ветелке дикую неуместную траву — васильки, донник и ветрянку. Эта трава была красивей невзрачных хлебов — ее цветы походили на печальные предсмертные глаза детей, они знали, что их порвут потные бабы. Но такая трава живей и терпеливей квелых хлебов — после баб она снова рожалась в неисчислимом и бессмертном количестве. (Platonov, 2006, p. 85)

The inhabitants of Chevengur, in their painful concern for Yakov Titych, develop their own theories about his illness. They remember look to his residence in a house somewhat apart from the rest, and his friendship with the cockroach that lives there as somewhat suspect. To them, his illness is distressing, in part because he experiences it alone—his physical separation from the others is regarded as a troubling sign that communism in Chevengur has not yet been achieved. Chepurny, the de facto leader of the community, feels ashamed by the stomach pain Yakov Titych suffers from, “”knowing that in Chevengur property had lost its value and that the proletariat was firmly united, and yet here were separate torsos living apart, racked helplessly by torments, so that people here were in no way united” (Platonov, et al. 278). He sees the singularity of Yakov Titych’s illness as an indictment, revealing a lack of unity among the Chevengurians. Initially, Chepurny is tempted to blame Yakov Titych’s multispecies affective ties, seeing his sickness as the direct result of his physical distance from the other human inhabitants of Chevengur and his affection for a cockroach. In language that aligns with early Bolshevik rhetoric, he questions Yakov Titych’s emotional to a synanthropic insect. Sasha, however, challenges this notion with language that reaffirms the model of close coexistence—a multispecies solidarity—earlier embodied by weeds:

"Yakov Titych, you shouldn't have fallen in love with that cockroach," said Chepurny. "That's how come you got sick. If you lived right on the border of people then they could have made the social conditions of communism work on you, since it's clear that on your own you got exhausted. The entire microbe filth has flung itself at just you, and otherwise it would have attacked everybody and you'd only have got a little bit."

"Why can't he love a cockroach, comrade Chepurny?" Dvanov asked uncertainly. "Maybe he can. Maybe the fellow who doesn't want to have a cockroach will never want a comrade for himself either."

Chepurny immediately fell deeply thoughtful, during which it seemed as though all his senses stopped, so that he understood everything even less. "In that case, then please, he can get attached to a cockroach," Chepurny said, trusting Dvanov.

"His cockroach can live as he likes in Chevengur too," Chepurny concluded with that consolation. (Platonov et al.; 1978, p. 278)

— Ты, Яков Титыч, зря таракана полюбил, — сказал Чепурный.

— Оттого ты и заболел. Если б ты жил в границе людей, на тебя бы от них социальные условия коммунизма действовали, а один ты, ясно, занемог: вся микробная гада на тебя бросилась, а то бы — на всех, и тебе досталось мало...

— Почему, товарищ Чепурный, нельзя таракана любить? — неуверенно спросил Дванов. — Может быть, можно. Может быть, кто не хочет иметь таракана, тот и товарища себе никогда не захочет. Чепурный сразу и глубоко задумался — в это время у него словно приостанавливались все чувства, и он еще более ничего не понимал. — Тогда пускай, пожалуйста, привлекает таракана, — сказал он, чтобы положиться на Дванова.

— Таракан его тоже живет себе в Чевенгуре, — с утешением закончил Чепурный. (Platonov, 2006, p. 195)

"Eradicate Contagion!"

Outside of *Chevengur*, if the plot of Vladimir Mayakovsky's play, *Klop* [*Клоп*] or *Bedbug*, written the year after Platonov finished writing *Chevengur*, is any indication, there was no room in the utopian future for nonproductive humans and insects, nor could any friendship between such undesirable elements end in anything other than tragedy.

Chevengur was never published in its entirety during Platonov's life. Throughout the thirties, his work was repressed, and he was only able to publish short pieces, sometimes under a pseudonym. At the end of the decade, his teenage son was arrested and sent to a labor camp. After two years, the boy returned, suffering from the tuberculosis that would end his life (Platonov et al.; 1978, xiii). Soon, Platonov would contract tuberculosis as well.

The same critic, Vladimir Yermilov, who denounced Mayakovsky's plays, attacked Platonov in 1946. In his introduction to *Chevengur,* the translator Anthony Olcott quotes a part of the diatribe Yermilov published in the *Literary Gazette*, proclaiming, "The Soviet people breathes the clean air of heroic hard work and creation in the name of communism. The

monstrous, unclean little world of A. Platonov's heroes is repellent and hostile to the Soviet people" (Platonov et al.; 1978, xiv).

Thus, Platonov's writing became subject to the same rhetoric of contagion he had problematized, his very words labelled an affront to cleanliness and health. And yet, once imagined, the revolutionary desires of weeds and the possibility of friendship with insects could not be unimagined.

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Chapter 5. Comrade Burdock and the Conviviality of Weeds

Disturbance-adapted, ruderal, and synanthropic plant species—especially the ones people call weeds—have figured as vegetal villains in human narratives for millennia. Their activities often appear as a threat to agriculture, and thus, to human society: infiltrating fields, receiving care intended for crops, leaching nutrients from the soil, sheltering pests, nourishing pathogens, and crossing boundaries. Or they might, by virtue of their ability to thrive on rubbish heaps and ruins, remind people of the kinds of catastrophic events that cause humans to abandon buildings and settlements: drought, disease, famine, natural disaster, war.

Disturbance-adapted plants, as their name suggests, are specially adapted to grow in disturbed soil, flourishing on construction sites, roadsides, and among crops. Ruderal species take root both linguistically (rudus is Latin for rubble) and literally in rubble; they do well where rubbish, refuse, and other debris have been left to accumulate. Synanthropic species are any undomesticated species of plant or animal that has evolved or adapted to survival in proximity to humans. All these plants flourish in the liminal space between the wild and the domestic, upsetting the binary between those realms and all they signify in the human imaginary.

In the twentieth century, as agriculture in some parts of the world was transformed by industrialization and other technological developments, it became possible to imagine the eradication of entire species of weeds. When people began to regard the extinction of some species (like those that would come to be classified as “endangered”) as an urgent problem, the annihilation of other species came into focus as an achievable goal. Humans were no longer inclined to take weeds for granted as a nuisance, nor even accept them as a necessary evil, but instead began to see them as an existential threat with a technological solution.

Against a backdrop of conflict, famine, and epidemic the early Soviet author Andrei Platonov proposes other possible relationships with weeds, most notably in the novel *Chevengur* which remained largely unpublished during his lifetime. This paper traces human-weed relations through the nineteenth and early twentieth century texts that informed Platonov's work, drawing connections between his more-than-human entanglements and the thinking of twenty first century anthropologists, philosophers, and posthumanists as well as his contemporaries, the botanist Nikolai Vavilov and poet Anna Akhmatova. Platonov's efforts to think with weeds marks a sharp departure from Soviet policies as well as a prescient challenge to characterizations of human-plant relations that prioritize efficiency and productivity and have come to dictate agricultural practices in many parts of the world today.

Mimicry, Co-opted Care, and the Enemies of Socialism

Platonov was three years old and Vavilov was fifteen when Lenin published "What Is to Be Done?" in 1902. The pamphlet's title is an homage to a revolutionary 1863 novel bearing the same title by Nikolai Chernyshevsky. Twenty years later, Lenin would designate the typhus louse the enemy of socialism, but in 1902 he singled out one weed, tares (плевел пьяня́щий), as the enemy, alluding to a parable in the bible. Tares, or *Lolium temulentum*, are also known as "false wheat," "darnel ryegrass," or "poison darnel" in English and are indistinguishable from the cereal crops they grow among and the effects of eating them can range from mild intoxication to death. "Tares" also serves as the origin for the term "tare-weight" in English and in cognate form in Russian (вес тары) as well as many other European languages. "Tare-weight" is also a synonym for waste, the extra weight of a container or packing materials, an etymology

that demonstrates how commonly the weed was harvested and weighed with the wheat it so closely resembles.

In the parable, the enemies of a farmer, Matthew, creep into his field at night and plant tares. When his servants ask if they should root out the weedy seedlings, he tells them to wait, not wanting to damage his grain crop in the process. He explains that when it's time for harvesting the wheat he'll tell the reapers to cut down the tares first and burn them in bundles, and then gather the remaining wheat afterwards. (Suggs et al. 1282). In his analogy, Lenin elides the human planters, figuring[19] his supporters as the "wheat," and the tares themselves—rather than those who plant them—as the enemy infiltrators. "In a word," Lenin writes, "our task is to fight the tares" (115). Unlike the farmer Matthew in the parable, in "What Is to Be Done?" Lenin advocates "pulling up the tares" in order to "clear the soil for wheat," before circling back to his biblical allusion by asserting that socialists "must prepare for the reapers, not only to cut down the tares of today, but to reap the wheat of tomorrow [должны готовить жнецов, которые сумели бы и косить сегодняшние плевелы, и жать завтрашнюю пшеницу]" in other words, to eradicate present enemies and win future support. In Lenin's analogy, implicit violence seems to characterize humanity in the form of the reapers, while the multitudes of "wheat," or supporters, much like the "tares" among them, are equally passive as plants.

Lolium temulentum was a particularly fearsome threat because the species engages in crop mimicry, also known as Vavilovian mimicry in honor the early twentieth century plant geneticist who first hypothesized and described the phenomenon that has been extensively studied since then. This capacity for mimicry, exhibited by a variety synanthropic plants all over

[19] An inversion of anthropomorphism: a notable instance of phytomorphism.

the world, is an evolutionary trait that allows weeds to receive the care intended for crop plants while evading various eradication strategies intended for weeds.

The agronomic scientist J. Scott McElroy explains how mimicry is the result of a complex relationship between "a model—the crop or desirable plant; a mimic—the weed; and an operator—the discriminating agent, possibly human, animal, or machine." He goes on to describe twenty-first century proposals to recognize certain kinds of mimic resistance to herbicide as yet another form of mimicry, writing, "[i]n this context, Vavilovian mimicry is the adaption of the weed mimic to be perceived by the operator as visually, physically, or biochemically indistinguishable from the crop model" (207). Clearly, mimics have evolved to be excellent recipients of care while evading violence, even as human attempts to enact chemical eradication become increasingly sophisticated. Recently, a team of researchers who identified some of the genetic markers for the phenotypic variation that produces mimicry, formulated the relationship of "three players" in terms less flattering to human "operators": "(1) the model, the crop that is imitated; (2) the mimic, the weed that imitates the model and (3) the dupe, the farmer that identifies and removes the weeds" (Ye et al. 1474).

Lolium temulentum has appeared in grain crops, seed stores, and flours across Afro-Eurasia throughout history. Both the consumption and planting of cereal grains mixed with *Lolium temulentum* increased during the Russian Civil War and the famines that followed because grain for consumption and for planting was scarce and the means of meticulously sorting it were limited. The phenomena of contaminated grain consumption associated with grain scarcity and social upheavals that disrupt seasonal patterns of harvesting, sorting, and processing grain crops is well known and widely recorded. However, more recent science indicates that the toxic or intoxicating properties of poison darnel are really the byproduct of a symbiotic

relationship between the weed and the endophytic fungus, *Neotyphodium*, that lives within it (Thomas 197). When grains are unsorted or insufficiently sorted, the fungus has more opportunities to spread to uninfected seeds. Thus, the grain requisitions carried out by train further contributed to the spread and dispersal of the darnel host and neotyphodium symbiont during the late nineteen teens and twenties. Therefore, the mimic carried a companion under its capacious disguise, the model remained grain, and humans, aided by arms and trains, were the operators—or dupes.

One might imagine that Platonov, given his revolutionary ideals and firsthand experiences with famine, would have sided with the wheat, and for a time he seems to have done so. In his late teens Platonov joined his father who was working at the railyard, in an effort to augment the family income, and in this regard, as the Platonov scholar Thomas Seifrid notes, Platonov was "one of the few genuinely proletarian writers" from the immediate postrevolutionary period (4). Indeed, Platonov's early newspaper articles and poetry attest to his earnest support for the revolution and vision of a utopian future in which science and technology would play a central role every realm of human life, including agriculture.

While Platonov worked for the railroad in Voronezh, the city was occupied first by the White Army and then the Red Army within a span of a two months (Seifrid 6). As a railroad worker on the front lines of the Russian Civil War, Platonov witnessed firsthand the mass displacement, crowded conditions on trains, and forced grain requisitions. A few years later he was working as a land reclamation engineer for the regional government during the famine that followed the terrible drought of 1921 in the same region, and he saw weeds overtake the abandoned fields where crops had been cultivated. He spent much of the nineteen twenties "overseeing the agency's efforts to prevent future droughts" (Seifrid 10-11). This work put him

on the frontlines of the Soviet "battle against nature," a battle he grew increasingly disenchanted with as his work was stymied by bureaucratic machinations and the mistrust of those assigned to his projects. During that time, he also seems to have been thinking about where the conquest of nature might lead. Mieka Erley tracks the development of Platonov's environmental concerns related to "the apocalyptic threat of desertification," pointing out his participation "in a continuous discourse of desertification originating in Russia's 1891 drought" (733-4). However, As his enthusiasm for the "battle against nature" waned, Erley explains that his militant tone transformed into something "more satirical" (735). *Chevengur* reveals the development of thinking that results, in 1934, in the publication of an article titled, "On the First Socialist Tragedy" which Erley identifies an environmental manifesto (736). Finally articulating the argument he wrestles with in writing *Chevengur*, in that article Platonov asserts that nature can't be forced to continuously increase production to meet human needs. Indeed, in *Chevengur*, he acknowledges that even the weeds and "unauthorized plants" might have reasonable needs of their own.

In his novel, primarily set during the period of the Russian Civil War and written in 1927-1928, Platonov challenges Lenin's pronouncements by depicting heterodox multispecies affective entanglements, going so far as to suggest that not only are weeds *not* enemies, they exemplify the traits of ideal comrades. It could be said that he proposes an alternative narrative about mimicry, suggesting that humans might do well to mimic the convivial relations exemplified by communities of weeds.

Chevengur begins with Zakhar Pavlovich, a man who "lives life unequipped" having no fixed home or family but possessing prodigious gifts for repairing and inventing things. Indeed, Zakhar seems to have no need for human society, but he does allow himself one comfort: he

covers his face with a burdock leaf when he lies down to sleep. At the funeral of a fisherman friend, he encounters the little boy who will grow up to become the novel's protagonist, the fisherman's orphaned son Sasha Dvanov. At first a large peasant family takes Sasha home to live with them, but eventually the starving family sends the child away to beg. The boy eventually finds his way back to Zakhar, who then becomes a true adoptive father. Like Platonov, Sasha joins his father doing railway work in his teens, but lacking Zakhar's mechanical genius, his relationship with trains was different, though no less profound, and foreshadows the capacities that will render him uniquely suited to life in the community of Chevengur later on:

> …his attraction was not the curiosity that comes to an end with the discovery of a machine's secret. He was interested by machines in the same way as he was interested by everything active and living; what he wanted was less to know them than to feel them, to live their life. So, on his way back from work, Sasha would imagine he was a locomotive and produce all the noises of a locomotive in motion. As he fell asleep, he would think that the village hens had all been asleep for a long time, and this sense of community with hens or a locomotive brought him satisfaction. Sasha was unable to ever act separately; first, he would look for something similar to his action, and then he would act—not out of his own need but out of sympathy for something or someone (56).

In short, Sasha's "sense of community [сознание общности]" renders all species, even nonliving entities like trains, worthy of fellow-feeling. Here Platonov makes the first step toward a heterodox extension of Karl Marx's assertion that "nature is the inorganic body of man" and reaches the threshold of contemporary posthumanist and post-metaphysical discourse. Sasha's

consciousness of community is analogous with his desire "less to know them than to feel them, to live their life [скорее хотел почувствовать их, пережить их жизнь, чем узнать]" with other entities. Moreover, Sasha can extend this sense of community beyond the bounds of machines and animals and into the realm of the most vulnerable beings, even straggling grass and passing strangers, subsuming his sense of self in the process:

> Sasha had no consciousness of himself as a solid and self-sustaining object—he was always imagining something or other with his heart, and this left no room for any representation of his own self… ….he had no aims of his own, but then he had no inner resistance to fellow feeling for another life—whether it was the frailty of a the stunted grass out in the yard, or a chance nighttime passerby, coughing from lack of shelter in order to be heard and pitied. Sasha would hear and pity. (57)

For Sasha, the trains, chickens, straggling grass, and coughing stranger are not merely providing background noise. They are not passive participants in Platonov's narrative either; and his writing teems with the activities of life that are normally suppressed by literary conventions rendering plants anonymous, interchangeable, or even dispensable altogether. In translation it is a common practice to substitute one plant for another, particularly when a specific plant is not well-known in the target language. This is, in fact, how the biblical weed became tares, a name that had previously been associated with vetch in English. One early translator of *Chevengur*, Anthony Olcott, occasionally chooses to translate "burdock" as "thistle," and while thistle is a common name for plants from many families, English-language readers might be inclined to

associate the name with *Onopordum acanthium* rather than *Arctium lappa*. Constance Garnett, on the other hand, occasionally translated "burdock" as "nettle," even in the passage from *Fathers and Children* discussed below (where Michael Katz's translation is used.

As the Russian political philosopher Oxana Timofeeva writes, "Platonov, this very unorthodox and strange Marxist, reveals subjectivity, inherent in a tragic dialectics of nature, as a desire—a desire for communism that overwhelms all living beings" (106). Sasha's arrival in the community of Chevengur, a settlement with few remaining human inhabitants and a profusion of weeds and "unauthorized plants," and furthermore, a place several characters see as analogous to communism, enables Platonov to explore the affordances of such more-than-human solidarity at greater length.

In the immediate post-revolutionary period, after recovering from a life-threatening illness with symptoms consistent with epidemic typhus, Sasha gets a job investigating the possible spontaneous generation of socialism among peasants in the steppe. Along the way he acquires a companion, Stepan Kopionkin, and after passing through a series of chaotic and desolate villages, they become separated before finally meeting again after both end up in Chevengur, a place several other characters tell him is also called "communism." There nothing has been planted for three years; and in fact, "Chevengur doesn't collect property, it destroys it" (230).

Of course, in Lenin's pamphlet weeds were merely a figurative threat, but by 1919, when he declared "grain, fuel, and the battle against typhus" the foundation of socialism, the threat of weeds overtaking cropland had become literal. In the steppe, whole villages had emptied out after enduring the catastrophic effects of armed conflict, famine, and epidemic typhus. In Chevengur, Sasha's foster brother, Prokofy, one of the sons in the peasant family who had

initially adopted him, goes out on the road to beg. When he returns to his home village, he reports: “No mother and no children. Nettles in the huts instead of people” (49).

Lenin’s message was clear, diseases and enemies might be everywhere, but insects could be crushed, and weeds could be pulled out or cut down. In Lenin’s pamphlets and speeches, and in the propaganda that developed these motifs for decades to come, a variety of synanthropic insects and weeds functioned as effective signifiers of threats menacing the body politic—and consequently socialism itself—across multiple scales: lice and bedbugs menaced the body of the “New Man” just as cockroaches menaced food stores and weeds menaced the arable body of the motherland. As one hapless bureaucrat about to depart for the steppe in the latter half of *Chevengur* remarks, “I’m supposed to be going to look for steppe grass. A few years ago it was lice that threatened socialism. Now it’s steppe grass” (426).

Vegetal Existentiality and A Dignity Complete in Itself

Platonov makes an early literary step toward posthumanism by envisioning the revolutionary potential for inverting existing social orders as having radical implications beyond the taxonomic kingdom of humans. Alexei Radakov’s 1917 poster represents the exploitation of workers and peasants by a stratified society in a pyramid crowned by the Tsar; the lowest of the strata are composed of humans bowed by their labor and the weight of those above them. A banner dividing each stratum, explains their conception of their own role in relation to the lowest, “We reign. We are praying for you. We judge you. We are protecting you. We feed you. And you work!” Among the laboring bodies on the lowest level, a peasant grasps a sickle and a sheaf of grain; and Platonov seem to look beyond the frame, to where the grain toils, extending

his understanding of the hierarchical system in which humans exploit one another to include the plants and animals humans believe they protect and feed. In an extended hierarchy, in which the labor of edible plants is exploited for human use, weeds might figure as vegetal dissidents. After all, they live among domestic plants, but resisting exploitation and defying instrumentalization, they do not consistently and obediently sacrifice their photosynthetic labor to meet human needs—might they not be regarded as vegetal revolutionaries?

In *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, the phenomenologist Michael Marder suggests that plants furnish "the prototype for post metaphysical being" writing:

> The figure of the plant (which, like a weed, incarnates everything the metaphysical tradition has discarded as improper, superficial, inessential, and purely exterior) furnishes the prototype for post-metaphysical being. Plants are the weeds of metaphysics: devalued, unwanted in its carefully cultivated garden, yet growing in-between the classical categories of the thing, the animal, and the human (for the place of the weed, much like that of existence itself, is precisely in-between) and quietly gaining the upper hand over that which is cherished, tamed, and "useful" (90).

In the novel *Soul* [*Джан*], completed several years after *Chevengur*, Platonov's protagonist Chagataev formulates vegetal existentiality as "a dignity complete in itself." While saving hibernating tortoises from the cold of the Ustyurt desert he realizes that even though humans tend to rely on other humans for companionship, "it is possible to exist with only animals and voiceless plants as your neighbors," as they might too be counted among the "things

that mattered enough for a whole human life." As he considers what help he can offer his more-than-human community, particularly those struggling to survive through the winter, Chagataev thinks:

> Surely not every animal and plant could be sad and wretched; this was a dream or pretense of theirs, or some temporary disfigurement they were suffering from. Otherwise one would have to assume that true enthusiasm likes only in the human heart—and such an assumption is worthless and empty, since the blackthorn is imbued with a scent, and the eyes of a tortoise with a thoughtfulness, that signify the great inner worth of their existence, a dignity complete in itself and needing no supplement from the soul of a human being. They might require a helping hand from Chagataev, but they had no need whatsoever for superiority, condescension, or pity (120).

Moreover, requiring occasional help, as we shall see, was not a condition of plant and animal life alone—nor is the capacity to offer it uniquely human.

Warmth, Proximity, and "Desiring Beings"

Before arriving in Chevengur, or "communism" as the inhabitants sometimes refer to their community, Sasha travels, mostly on foot, through scattered steppe settlements. His job description is vague, but he meets with peasant soviets in small villages and makes recommendations to increase agricultural production. At first, he follows streams and gullies to

locate tiny hamlets, but eventually, he emerges onto the watersheds of the steppe, and finds the uplands almost entirely uninhabited by humans, instead they are an ecosystem unto themselves. He finds very little wheat, "[t]here was nothing but wild grass, which provided food and shelter to birds and insects" (96). Initially, this landscape of bird, plant, and insect conviviality looks uniform to him. "One evening, however, he had nowhere to spend the night and he could find shelter only in the warm grasses high on the watershed" (96). The warmth of the weeds suggests their indiscriminate hospitality as a shelter, welcoming bird, insect, and human alike with their protective warmth. And warmth stands out as an unusually evocative term, connoting the kind of coziness usually ascribed to warm-blooded mammals. Among the weeds, and entering the sleepy state in which his "sense of community" was first invoked earlier in the novel, Sasha suddenly begins to experience the land as a plant would, effectively engaging in an activity scholars in the plant humanities today call "thinking with plants"—but only momentarily because thoughts of his official duties, quickly followed by exhaustion, intercede:

> He lay down and dug his fingers into the soil beneath him. The earth felt rich and fertile, but it wasn't being plowed. Dvanov remembered about the province's horselessness, and then fell asleep (64).

He wakes up at daybreak when he senses another human body beside him, and his first instinct is to pull out his revolver. But the stranger tells him not be frightened, saying "I got cold in my sleep and I saw you lying there. Let's hold one other for warmth and go back to sleep." Sasha then "hugged him and they both got warm" (96).

The first time Platonov describes Sasha's sense of community, his particularly keen fellow-feeling emerges in relation to trains, chickens, "stunted grass," and a coughing stranger in the night. However, in that earlier instance, while falling asleep within the confines of a house, his imagined proximity contrasted sharply with his physical separation from a community of machines, animals, plants, and strangers. The anthropologist Anna Tsing writes provocatively, "[d]omination, domestication, and love are deeply entangled. Home is where dependencies within and among species reach their most stifling. For all its hyped pleasure perhaps this is not the best idea for multi-species life on earth." In the steppe watershed, where trains and chickens are absent, the warm weeds and cold stranger echo the earlier iteration but outside of the "stifling" paradigm of domesticity. Moreover, both physical and metaphysical proximity now converge in Sasha's consciousness of community, as his sense of self appears once again to be subsumed by the closeness of others, as when "[h]e always imagined something with his senses and this crowded from him any conception of himself..." (6).

Thus, Sasha overcomes his human instinct to fend off a stranger's encroaching proximity with violence and instead shares his warmth, the one meagre resource transmitted to him by the weeds, and which he now transmits through the very proximity he initially sought to defend with violence. In sleep, outside, the two humans become part of the landscape, altered by the weedy capacity to give shelter and warmth, and they become more weedlike as a result, not in their passivity or immobility, but in their conviviality.

When Sasha wakes up, he picks up his line of reasoning from the night before and asks, "Why doesn't anyone plow here? This is black earth! Is it because there aren't any horses?" (97). But the stranger can't think clearly right after waking up, and replies, "I'd tell you, but without bread I can't turn my mind to anything at all. Once there were people—but now they're just

mouths. Understand?" (97) Sasha does not understand but he finds a little bit of bread in his pocket and gives it to his companion. He does not offer his last morsel of food in a transactional exchange for information, instead he advises the man to let his mind "turn to stomach stuff" (Russian would be good here) and sets out to find answers somewhere else. While Sasha does not understand the stranger's statements, readers might be inclined to see them as following a line of ancient reasoning, one in which hunger is common to all living beings, but humans are singular in possessing a capacity for thought and feeling—and these capacities in turn are what qualify humans as possessors of souls.

In *Plant Thinking*, Marder helpfully outlines the ancient underpinnings of philosophical debates about the ability of plants to experience desire, and thus, possess a soul, as expressed by what he calls their "nutritive faculty" (38). Plato included plants as "desiring beings" capable of experiencing sensations, and thus exhibiting "intelligence as discernment" (39). Marder summarizes pseudo-Aristotle's rejoinder thus:

> What is capable of receiving nourishment is subject to the feelings of hunger, craving, and satisfaction depending on whether nutrients are available at any given moment. On this view, desire (first and foremost, plant desire, to which we are also privy whenever we are hungry or thirsty) is negative, predicated on lack, and satisfiable exclusively in those brief intervals when the organism is sated. Against the background of this deficient or defective desire, the exuberance of vegetal life is but a veneer overlaying a profound absence of fulfillment, the default state of living, hetero-affected beings reliant on something outside of themselves (4).

Marder, however, offers a cogent counterargument to pseudo-Aristotle's disqualification of plant desire as purely negative or "deficient," taking Plato's reasoning one step further, writing that if what pseudo-Aristotle says is true, "then the plant is the most desiring being of all precisely because it is the one most dependent on exteriority." (And indeed, this very dependence, a predicator for the kind of interdependence Platonov explores in *Chevengur*, will be examined in greater depth below).

These arguments about plants as "desiring beings" also clarify the logic linking the stranger's two statements, first, that he can't think without food, and second, that there used to be people but now there are only mouths. It's possible to see his statements as an assertion that hunger deprives humans of the grounds for claims to humanness—humans cannot think without nutrients. A "deficient or defective desire" for food can render us akin to plants, robbing us of the interiority we treasure; a space explored in literature and a repository for the soul. What happens to our humanness, if, like plants, we become only mouths—all exteriority—do we lose our very souls? In this passage, Platonov approaches the same conclusion Marder draws; rather than regarding the experience of hunger as diminishing humans through the extremity of their biological need for nutrients, he places them alongside, rather than above, all other "desiring beings." By Plato's metric, this would render them ensouled. For Platonov what appears even more important is that even in such extremity they, like the warm weeds that shelter them, are able to share resources.

Like the weeds, Sasha provides the shelter of his body and food within his reach freely—as if his "sense of community" allowed him to draw not only warmth from the grass, but a spirit of openhandedness and tolerance of proximity. As Sasha continues on his way, the plantlike

sense that allowed him to feel the soil's richness by digging his fingers into it intermingles with his sense of human responsibilities; "[h]e was thinking about the day when water would be shining on the high, dry ground—that, he thought, would be socialism" (97). Once again, two possible readings present themselves. On the one hand, Sasha appears to equate water in the uplands with the kind of irrigation projects Platonov himself undertook as a land reclamation agent, but on the other hand, some of the later passages in *Chevengur* indicate that his definition of socialism could no longer be contained strictly within the confines of Lenin's interpretation of Marxist principles and the massive infrastructure projects they entailed. By the end of *Chevengur*, he is clearly thinking about plant desire in terms that align with proletarian activities, describing how the path there was hidden by "tall, peaceful grass, which had seized all the land around Chevengur not from greed but from life necessity" (285)

The inhabitants of Chevengur often view weeds as paragons of socialist virtue, exemplifying ideals of conviviality that humans struggle to emulate. The de facto leader of Chevengur, inasmuch as one exists, Chepurny, defines communism as "the reciprocal feeling of the masses," and explains to another character, Kesha, that communism is "a job for the whole proletariat at once, not just one by one." What Chepurny describes as "a reciprocal feeling of the masses" sounds more like an affective state rather than political doctrine, suggesting that for the Chevengurians, communism will be achieved when Sasha's consciousness of community is shared by everyone living there. After voicing his thoughts to Kesha, Chepurny turns toward the steppe ecology surrounding them, and considers:

> …the tall Chevengur grass, where wheat, goosefoot, and nettles all grew in fraternal closeness… The tall grass gave off the damp breath of the life of grains and grasses—

> ears of rye and small tabernacles of goosefoot lived there without harm to one another, embracing closely and keeping one another safe. Nobody had sown them and no one was bothering them… Pondering the overgrown steppe, Chepurny had always said that it too was an International of cereals and flowers, guaranteeing plentiful nourishment to all the poor without the interference of labor and exploitation (325).

Here it becomes clear that what Chepurny regards as an "International of cereals and flowers" are an indeterminate combination of steppe land and cultivated fields that have been left fallow and become overgrown with weeds and volunteer plants. Burdock grows in particular profusion, crowding out the domestic wheat that has sprung up without being sown. As we have already seen, burdock is heavily freighted with significance in Russian literature in general, and in this novel in particular. However, it seems burdock had a special significance for Platonov himself, and by recognizing this significance, as we will see, we can better understand how this "this very unorthodox and strange Marxist" became willing to think with weeds.

Burdock, Death, Violence

At the heart of the novel *Chevengur*, there is burdock [лопух]. And in the heart of the town of Chevengur, in the main square, burdock also grows. At first it seems that this is because burdock, like nettle and orache, is a trope related to hardship and misfortune in Russian and Soviet literature, and *Chevengur* is unequivocally a novel of hardship and misfortunate.

Perhaps the most notorious invocation of burdock in Russian literature occurs in Ivan Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Children*. While burdocks have long been associated with

encroaching wilderness and abandoned structures in the Russian imaginary, the link between burdock and human death, particularly as a symbol of what the afterlife might offer, can be traced back to Turgenev's character Yevgeny Bazarov. As a student of science and revolutionary thinker, he rejects religion, and rather than envisioning an afterlife for himself, he instead imagines burdocks drawing nutrients from his decomposing body. In *Fathers and Children* Bazarov mocks his more moderate friend, Nikolai Kirsanov, who dreams of a better life for Russian peasants, represented in his mind by "a little white hut." Bazarov laughs at the ineffectual sentimentality of such dreams, quipping, "Well, he will live in a white hut, and burdock will grow out of me, what then?" This materialist response to liberal idealism became a rallying cry on all sides—reviled by the religious and embraced by young radicals, until burdock became a shorthand for nihilism, materialism, and even revolution.

Many scholars see Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* published in 1863, the year after Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*, as the younger generation's response to Turgenev's novel. Some of the characters share the same last name as Turgenev's mild-mannered family, the Kirsanovs, and one of the protagonists, Lopukhov, is a medical student like Bazarov. Indeed, Lopukhov's patronym contains the root "lopukh" [лопух] or burdock, indicating that his progenitor was burdock, perhaps even the burdock that grew on Bazarov's grave, as several scholars have suggested. Thus, not only weeds grew out of Bazarov's grave, but an entire literary legacy grew out of him as well.

Bazarov's statement laid the groundwork for the argument Platonov embedded in *Chevengur*, directing our attention to the substrates of labor and consumption exemplified by the burdock and other plants that digest, decompose, and break down organic bodies, both living and

dead. Indeed, in an essay about the writing of Richard Aldington, Platonov holds Bazarov up as an exemplary figure, writing:

> Someone, a long time ago, already spoke in the same way to women and even men. That person plainly provided all the information about spermatazoa, about intestines and about daily bread, by the sweat of their brow pulled by from the soil by peasant plowmen at the same time as love and kisses were percolating through the active forces, the then intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie. But that character (a nihilist from Russian classical literature, rendered by Turgenev) was more honest, more sincere than his English counterpart described by Aldington, and, most importantly, he knew precisely what he needed to do in life, and he acted in accordance with his worldview. Turgenev clearly defined the value of such heroes: he respected them a little, because he admitted that in them there was a certain germ of something worthwhile for the future, and he smiled at them a little, emphasizing their practical incompetence (and the ironic smile of the author was at times much more serious than the deliberate hatred [преднамеренной ненависти] of Dostoevsky's irony in his corresponding works) [в соответствующих его произведениях] (Sobranie, 223)

Burdock is the key to understanding a discourse tradition in Russia that pitted natural phenomena against faith in the possibility of afterlife proffered by Orthodox Christianity. When Platonov writes of Fyodor Dostoevsky's "deliberate hatred," he alludes to the author's reaction to the materialist discourse Bazarov's epigram about burdock produced. Dostoevsky, like many

others, sees the Bazarov's glibness about burdock growing on his grave as a rejection of faith and an emphatic embrace of nihilism. In the *Brothers Karamazov*, the pious lady explains her crisis of faith to Father Zosima, saying:

> "Oh, how thankful I am to you! You see, I shut my eyes and ask myself if everyone has faith, where did it come from? And then they do say that it all comes from terror at the menacing phenomena of nature, and that none of it's real. And I say to myself, 'What if I've been believing all my life, and when I come to die there's nothing but the burdocks growing on my grave?' as I read in some author. It's awful! How—how can I get back my faith? (64)

About two decades before Dostoevsky began writing *The Brothers Karamazov*, the burdock motif had already acquired political meaning beyond the scope of Turgenev's novel, in large part as the result of the 1863 publication of Nikolai Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel, *What Is to Be Done?* which many scholars see as a response to *Fathers and Children*. Some of the characters share the same last name as Turgenev's mild-mannered character, Kirsanov, and the protagonist Lopukhov is a medical student, like Bazarov. Lopukhov's name contains the root "лопух," [*lopukh*] or burdock, so that the literal translation of his name suggests that his progenitor was burdock, perhaps even the burdock that grew on Bazarov's grave as several commentators have already suggested. In his novel, Turgenev elaborated on a longstanding association between burdock and decay to link the weed, in Bazarov's words, more specifically with human death, particularly to the death of a person who put no faith in the afterlife.

Chernyshevsky capitalized on Turgenev's work, jumping into the whirlwind of discourse that made Bazarov's statement so incendiary, while at the same time elaborating another meaning of burdock, the association between burdock and "fool." In fact, the brief three-part preface to his novel is titled "The Fool [Дуракъ]" and the second part further elaborates on the same trope.

However, going back to Turgenev, there is another nuance of Bazarov's conception of death, important to this argument and often overlooked: namely, his negation of faith in a Christian afterlife also contained a marked rejection of domestic conventions. While Bazarov's atheism-—or nihilism—has been much discussed, his rejection of heteronormative family life is equally striking. Katz's translation captures what he actually says thus:

> "When I meet a man who can hold his own next to me," he said with slow deliberation, "I'll change my opinion of myself. Despise! Why, just today, for example, as we were going past our bailiff Philip's cottage—the one that's so fine and white— you said, 'Russia will attain perfection when the poorest peasant has a house like that and each one of us should help bring that about . . .' Meanwhile, I've conceived a hatred for the poorest peasant—Philip or Sidor—those for whom I'm supposed to jump out of my skin and who won't even thank me for it ... Besides, what the hell do I need his thanks for? So, he'll be living in a fine white hut while I'm pushing up burdock; well, then what?" (84)

One might imagine Proshka's absent family, replaced by nettles, in the passage from *Chevengur* quoted earlier, as occupying a similar hut. And indeed, at the beginning of *Chevengur* Zakhar Pavolovich passes through a village in which the human inhabitants are all absent and weedy plants and synanthropic animals are ascendent, the same contrast between those who occupy nice white huts and the burdockian outsiders becomes apparent. He passes "huts full of

childless silence," where "[b]urdocks that had long overgrown their norm were waiting for the huts' owners beside gates, on paths, and in all the familiar, well-trodden places where not a single plant had been able to grow before; they were swaying like future trees" (12). Platonov's many descriptions of weeds encroaching the spaces people once regarded as their own is not only material, but also gestures toward a metaphysical claim rooted in the material world, like the one Bazarov made, and almost anticipates Marder's argument:

> Weeds will outlive metaphysics—of this we may be absolutely certain. But perhaps the greatest vegetal impurity, from the metaphysical standpoint, is the plants' overreaching to the existential domain (usually reserved for human beings alone) and their partaking of freedom, the temporal order, and wisdom (or intelligence). If, as a rejoinder to Heidegger, plants not only are but also exist, then their ethical and political status, too, will need to be revised in order to reflect their purchase on life, which has been up until now objectified under the lens of a crude metaphysical scrutiny. Vegetal existentiality, referring to the time, freedom, and wisdom of plants, will come to define the positive dimensions of their ontology (90).

At the same time, Platonov chooses terms that limn the distinction between domestic and wild, describing the songs of "[y]ellowish green birds from the fields" who "had moved into the huts and were even occupying the main rooms" as "busy" and "proprietorial" legitimizing their occupation of domestic spaces through their domestic and quotidian activities (12).

The field has overtaken the village: in addition to the busy and proprietorial birds, cereal crops from the moisture-holding thatched roofs rather than in the dry fields parched by drought. The burdocks especially stand out in all this growth and activity because they appear to miss the absent humans by "waiting for the huts' owners beside gates, on paths, and in all the familiar, well-trodden places," and even mirror their behavior. In fact, Platonov describes both humans and burdocks using the verb "to live wild [одичать]" (4). The village inhabitants who did not go to Kyiv to beg or Luhans'k to work during times of drought and famine, "turned off into the forest and overgrown gullies, where they took to eating raw grass, clay, and bark, and lived wild [повернули в лес и в заросшие балки, стали есть сырую траву, глину и кору и одичали]" (4). In times of catastrophic hunger people fled to the forst to "live wild" occupying the spaces normally under the domain of wild plants and animals, and even subsisting on the same sources of nourishment as them.

Meanwhile the sparrows, living in houses like Bazarov's Phillip, remain domestic, and in those abandoned spaces "beside gates, on paths, and in all the familiar, well-trodden places," the burdock grow wild, implying that before, even as weeds, they were somehow civilized by living alongside humans, and the fact that they await the return of their missing companions suggests a desire to return to that state, as if resisting the inclination to turn into a veritable forest of weeds.

Platonov revisits this dichotomy throughout his fiction—in his notes for *The Foundation Pit,* he seems to envision the Soviet Union as a rewilding of philosophy itself, alluding to Plato's academy when he writes, "The Academy is gardens, but the soviet one is Unionized taiga [Академия это сады, а советская это тайга Союзная]" (33)

Whereas Bazarov alluded to the profusion of burdock that could grow from his decomposing body as a negation of religious feeling, Platonov seems to see in that image a

sublimation of self in intimate multispecies entanglement, a place where a more expansive consciousness of community can flourish, and ultimately flower as a substitute for religion.

In one of the more disturbing passages of *Chevengur*, the least poor and most religious of the peasants are rounded up by Chekists and executed. One man, mortally wounded and terrified of dying alone, asks the man who shot him to hold his hand. His executioner does not immediately respond, and the dying man "[n]ot waiting for the hand… grasped a burdock leaf and clung to it for help, entrusting to it the life he had been unable to live out" (272). He holds onto the plant as he dies, and his killer, who had been slow in offering his own hand, is unexpectedly "agitated" by the realization that the dying man "just like the proletariat, wanted comradeship…" (272).

The burdock is a complex participant in this scene that obliquely recalls Bazarov's quip, but also reveals the plant as mutely capable of offering the kind of help, friendship, and companionship no human in the scene is willing to provide. Furthermore, it is only through the association between the dying man and the burdock that his killer is, ironically, able to recognize their shared humanity. The burdock is an ideal comrade, offering comfort and inspiring a belated empathy.

Shortly thereafter, when the Chepurny strides through Chevengur and inadvertently crushes a plant underfoot, noticing how it "laid its dying head on the leafy shoulder of a living neighbor" (290). As he walks on his feet feel "comfortable in the warmth of the dusty burdocks growing fraternally among the other unauthorized plants" (290). He images the weeds "close-knit defense against the low-lying spaces," and further reflects on their role as participants in his utopian vision for the future:

> But for this vegetation, but for these patient fraternal grasses that were like unhappy people, the steppe would have been unendurable; but the wind bore through the grass the seed of its multiplication—and man, with pressure in his heart, was walking through it toward communism. (290)

In passages like this, Platonov formulates a vision approaching vegetal kinship, framing their position in relation to humans in terms aligned with Donna Haraway's articulation more-than-human "making with" or sympoeisis.

The One Beloved Burdock

Platonov's recurrent descriptions of burdock begin to accrue new significance with each invocation, and indeed, burdocks appear more frequently in the novel than some of the human characters responsible for some of the most decisive actions. While Turgenev and Chernyshevsky provide valuable context for situating the burdock in *Chevengur* within a discourse tradition in Russian literature concerned with revolution and the afterlife, only in Platonov's review of Anna Akhmatova's poem *Willow* can we find the final, most necessary evidence of his special regard for plants in general, and possibly one burdock in particular.

Anna Akhmatova's poem *Willow* was published in the first half of 1940 in an anthology of her earlier work, titled *From Six Books.* In Jennifer Reeser's translation the heart of the short poem reads:

> And the voice of man was never dear to me,
> but the breeze's voice—that I could understand.

The burdock and the nettle I preferred,

but best of all the silver willow tree.

И не был мил мне голос человека,

А голос ветра был понятен мне.

Я лопухи любила и крапиву,

Но больше всех серебряную иву (Izbrannye stikhotvoreniia, 9).

At the end of the poem, the willow's death leaves the poet mute, as if she had lost a brother. The entire collection predictably elicited a negative review that year in June from Victor Pertsov, one of the same critics who had denounced her in the nineteen twenties. Platonov's review of the collection contradicts Pertsov's almost point by point, but his praise for Akhmatova, prepared and apparently even typeset for the July issue of the journal *Literaturnaya gazeta*, was never included. That same July, Vavilov was sentenced to death, though he was sent to a labor camp when his sentence was commuted. By that fall, the publishing house which had printed Akhmatova's *From Six Books* received a reprimand for their "gross misjudgment" in printing an "ideologically harmful," book and the entire run was pulped (Kornienko 696). Platonov's review remained unpublished until many years after his death 1951 and Akhmatova's in 1966.

What is most striking about his review is not only his open enthusiasm for an author who had suffered much—as Platonov himself had[20]—under official censure. It is that in stark contrast

[20] At the time he wrote the review, Platonov's teenage son was not yet released from the labor camp where he had been sent under dubious charges in 1938. In October, the same month Akhmatova's publishing house was reprimanded by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of

with both her critics and supporters, Platonov rejects the procedure of symptomatic reading later developed by Paul Ricoeur into his theory of the "school of suspicion" (Felski). Instead, Platonov argues that the eponymous willow in Akhmatova's poem is not a metaphor at all—he explicates the poem as an autobiographical account of her childhood affection for one particular willow. Platonov writes:

> A person's attachment to people usually comes after childhood. In childhood, a person loves their mother, this love is not the same as the humanism of the adult; in childhood, a person loves "inanimate" objects—burdock, willows, or something else—but loves them not in a crowd, not pantheistically, but individually. Other willows did not replace the poet's one, beloved, dead willow, and the death of this single willow was just as sad an event as the death of a brother. This natural feature of a child's soul is portrayed by the poet with the utmost precision; the peculiarity of a poet is also depicted: having gained the experience of maturity without losing the childhood in oneself, without forgetting one's childhood affections. (455)

Both Lenin's pamphlet and the biblical parable of the tares end with the triumphant activity of reapers mowing down the weeds. *Chevengur* also documents a human propensity for violence, however, even though they are imbued with desire and "a dignity complete in itself," weeds are not the enemy in Platonov's narrative—other humans are—they are the menace crouching in the

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the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, Platonov's son was sent home with a terminal case of tuberculosis. Platonov's son, Alexander, died in 1943, the same year as Vavilov, both as a direct result from their imprisonment in labor camps.

hidden expanses of the steppe. The novel ends with the arrival the White Army and the death of most of the Chevengurians, but violence at the end is only the last of many instances of violence pervading the novel. Only the weeds are able to make good on their consciousness of community because only they are capable of growing “in fraternal closeness.”

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Chapter 6. Mexican Red

Max Aub's *Juego de Cartas* or *Card Game*, comprises a double deck of playing cards bearing text on one side and images on the other. Initially created as a gift for friends, in 1964 Aub's friend, the anarchist Alejandro Finisterre (like Aub, an exiled Spanish Republican living in Mexico City) published the first edition of the deck for wider distribution. Together the cards are commonly regarded as an epistolary collection of vignettes forming a sort of novel or set of connected short stories when "played."

The winner of the game, as the instructions indicate, is whoever determines who Máximo Ballasteros really was. But the question of who Máximo Ballesteros was proves much harder to answer than one might expect. No one can precisely identify his occupation, the reasons why he married his wife, Carmen, or had affairs with other women, or even what his motivation for committing suicide may have been (if indeed that is how he died—a rumor circulates through the letters that his wife, or someone else, may have killed him.) On back of the jack of clubs, a man named Mauricio, tasked with writing an obituary, writes to his friend Jorge to ask what kind of work Máximo did, noting that none of the friends of the deceased can answer that question, and it doesn't seem tactful to ask his widow. Several characters speculate, with apparent puzzlement, about why Máximo married Carmen, why she married him, and why they stayed together. Many of the letters are from women (and at least one man) who claim to have had sexual relationships with the dead man; others are from the many friends and enemies he seems to have accrued. Almost everyone has something to say about his character. A man who knew him for at least three years, Luis, writes to someone named Enrique that Máximo was difficult to decipher, describing him through animal metaphors as a mix of "lion, hare, and fox; brave, cowardly, and mistrustful" on the back of the ace of diamonds. In another letter, this one on the

five of diamonds, Emilio, who used to drink with Máximo, writes to Salvador that he does not believe people are capable of recognizing what they do not know. This logic underpins the entire novel—the letter writers who work the hardest to convince others that they know all about Máximo are the ones who seem the least reliable as the game progresses. An illegible letter-writer, on the seven of spades asks the rhetorical question behind the game: "What was Máximo like?" Then writes, "como creías que era," or "however you think he was." Nonetheless, on the comodín card (the joker, or wildcard), a character named Rita writes a single line to Clo: "Valia por todos" ("It was worth it for everyone.") With this ingenious form, Aub effectively doubles the dialogic nature of his narrative: the epistolary novel can contain a multiplicity of voices while the deck of playing cards allows them to be reshuffled and rearranged. Aub's instructions wryly note that the game is for entertainment purposes only, no bets are required, and the cards can also be used to play solitaire.

Tellingly, an irate Emmanuel chastises one Doroteo on the six of clubs, asking who gave him the right to judge others. The letter connects the impulse to judge others to the infantile (in Emmanuel's eyes) mania of a stamp collector who strives to acquire one exemplar of every type. But people playing cards engage in the same type of activity to build a strong hand from the cards they are dealt. In this context, what first emerges as a cacophony of opinions begins to take shape around some of Aub's most salient themes. The question of how a person is known, and what they are known for, is examined from almost every angle.

Interestingly, while scholarship on the card's text is robust and growing, scholarly attention to the illustrations is almost entirely nonexistent, especially in English, yet these very images are what make the deck recognizable as a game to be played. Playing the game, in this

sense, becomes an analogue of the act of reading, so the images are what make the reading of the novel possible.

The temptation to ignore the images on the faces of the cards and play the game according to the narrative created by the text on the back is an apt analogy for the logocentric efforts of scholars, locked within the confines of their disciplines, who have overlooked the rich illustrations on the faces of the cards as a secondary consideration, a kind of superficial adornment. However, a deck of cards with no images cannot function: the letters are part of a deck of cards, and without the randomizing effect of game play dictated by the recognizable numbers, suits, and face cards, the order in which they are read is not only arbitrary, but less fun. However, by attending more closely to these images, I mark a new path for critical analysis that remains untapped in some of Aub's other works as well. Indeed, I propose to situate Aub not only as a literary postmodernist, but also as an artist and as a scholar engaged in the historiography of art who made important contributions to the visual rhetoric of global modernism, postmodernism, and institutional critique. Indeed, if the characters writing about Máximo agree about anything, it is the fact that appearances can be deceiving.

In order to make the case for Aub as a visual artist and historiographer of art, I need to take you back to the fifteenth century, from which point we can trace the displacement, dispersal, and exploitation of a specific species of cactus and the scale insect that lives in symbiosis with it, that coincides with—and even marks—the development of scientific theories preoccupied with systems of hierarchical classification that assigned value to cultural capital, species, and at the same time, exclusionary categories of "Man."

A longstanding and changing relationship between humans, cacti, and scale insects shaped the world into which Aub was born into in 1903, how his identity was classified in police

files in Vichy France in 1940, and the visual art and literary traditions from which Aub's work emerges and in relation to which it can be better understood. Clearly, this work is interdisciplinary, but it is more than that too—collaboration across disciplines, as I will show, problematizes taxonomic thinking, destabilizing the most basic classifications. This work reveals complex entanglements across species as well, calling on us to rethink more-than-human relationships as well as the ways in which they are narrated and categorized. My intervention, and the methodology behind this long discursion into natural history and art history, will, I hope, unlock the radical critique at the heart of one of Aub's most overlooked and most important compositions, *Juego de Cartas*.

The Cactus

The nopal cactus has many names in many languages, though scientific nomenclature designates it as *Opuntia ficus-indica* (an allusion to the unrelated fig and a record of the confusion that conflated the American continent and "the Indies.") Even in English, there are many names to choose from, however, perhaps the most common—the one you may be most likely to recognize—is "prickly pear cactus," although there are actually many species of prickly pear (sometimes hyphenated or combined into one compound word) as well.

One of the places where I have seen this cactus is on the road leading up to the Alhambra, which overlooks the city of Granada in Spain. Riding a bus up the winding road to visit this architectural gem, the last foothold of Islamic rule in the Iberian Peninsula, I saw stone outcrops, caves with wide low entrances, and nooks where people have carved out makeshift dwellings for

centuries, if not millennia. And everywhere, in spite of the eroded[21] soil, there were prickly pear cacti.

It was roughly from this vantage—from below—that Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon would have looked up toward the Alhambra as the year 1491 drew to a close. It was there that they seem to have agreed to fund Christopher Columbus's journey across the Atlantic, in a battle camp below the walled and fortified palace complex Nasrid emir Mohammed ben Al-Ahmar built on Roman ruins a couple of centuries earlier. [citation] In Arabic, Al-Hamra means "The Red One," and indeed, even today, in Granada you can buy postcards on every street corner depicting the palace complex at dusk glowing a warm orangey-carmine against the black-green of the hillside and the deepening blue sky.

The fall of Granada, which coincided with and facilitated the funding of Columbus's journey (he describes seeing Abu Abdullah Muhammad XII, the last Muslim Sultan of Granada, hand over the keys to the city) and the ensuing enslavement, forced conversion, and mass expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian peninsula, locates Granada as the site from which the dehumanization of colonization and the transatlantic slave trade were launched, and it is easy to imagine such a site as haunted. While Granada is often associated with the pomegranate, which Ferdinand and Isabella incorporated into their blazon, the plant that crowds in at the edges of postcard photographs, climbs the hillsides, and visually defines the landscape by flourishing there today, is the prickly pear.

How, and when, then did the prickly come into the picture? It is likely that the cactus was among the first American plants carried back to Spain (Griffith 1918). Spaniards were on the look-out for plants that might grow in the dry/sandy soils and warm climate of Southern Spain,

[21] In fact, the prickly pear has recently been proven effective in ameliorating the effects of erosion.

and the cactus was hardy enough to survive the sea journey with little water. It was probably first grown in royal gardens, and then propagated more widely before escaping to a weedy feral existence outside of garden walls. From Spain, the cactus traveled to Italy, North Africa, and throughout the Mediterranean. As a ruderal plant it quickly became endemic. Thus, in Spanish the cactus is known as nopal, tuna, higo chumbo, and chumbera; in Italian as fico d'India; in French as figuier de Barbarie; and in English as prickly pear or Barbary fig. These allusions, both geographic and botanic, conflate multiple species of plant and at least three continents.

In actuality, several American civilizations, from present-day Peru to the Caribbean, grew the prickly pear and interacted with it extensively in day-to-day life through a range of agricultural, culinary, and cultural activities. The widespread human use of the plant, as well as its "feral capacities" has made it hard to identify where the cactus originated, though recent research suggests it was first domesticated in present-day Central Mexico. There, maize is the crop popularly associated with the Mesoamerican cultures, but prickly pear, or *nopal* (from the indigenous nopalli), is the symbolic foundation of the Aztec (Mexica) Empire.

For the Mexica, *Opuntia* was not merely inert matter—a key symbol and integral component of material history, a component of substrates and colorants, and a common feature in background landscapes—it was an embodied being with polysemous worldmaking capacities. A closer inspection of nopal iconography suggests that in the Mexica imaginary, this particular cactus displayed some of the characteristics more commonly reserved for humans and associated with human bodies in contemporary Western thought. For example, the Mexica linked the prickly pear, *nochtli*, or tuna, the nopal's fruit, with the human heart, while cochineal, the carmine red made from the desiccated bodies of *Dactylocopius coccus* was known as *nocheztli,* the blood of the nopal. This explicit association with the human circulatory system may have

shaped, or been shaped by, practices relating to the handling and use of the colorant as well as attitudes toward the cactus itself. And while the ubiquity of the nopal and its fruit in Mexica iconography are already well-documented, the cactus's unique manifestations of an embodied existence have drawn much less attention. Moreover, nopal and nocheztli, are often linked in visual rhetoric, which makes sense, given their commensal relationship, so scholarship focused on one without the other obscures a dimension of the life cycle of both as well as the significance of images referencing the relationship between the two. I will explore the nopal's unique status as a plant with a body and agency, in other words, a being that could be dismembered, eaten, produce blood, and even grow edible hearts. Ultimately, the body and blood of the nopal were essential ingredients in the cultural production of the Mexica and recurrent components with divine associations in iconography related to the Mexica identity before, during, and after Spanish colonization as iconography on the back of the Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada and folio 43 recto of the *Codex Mendoza* reveal.

The Cactus on the Back of the Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada

After leaving Aztlan under the direction of the god Huitzilopochtli, the Mexica spent many years in the desert undergoing a series of trials and tribulations. Finally, they arrived at Lake Texcoco, and built their imperial city, Tenochtitlan, in the center of the lake. They knew where to end their journey and start a new civilization because that's where they saw an eagle land on a nopal cactus, with the *atl-tlachinolli* or war-glyph emerging from its beak while clutching the fruit of the cactus in its talons, just as Huitzilopochtli had said they would. However, the nopal, or *Opuntia ficus indica,* was much more than a divine landmark for a propitious building site. We need look no further than the Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada (Temple

of the Sacred War) to find evidence of the singular significance of this polysemous cactus body which, along with its heart-shaped fruit, and the carmine said to be its blood, played a crucial role in Mexica architecture, art, cosmology, diplomacy, identity, history, and religious observance.

In monograph published in 1927, Alfonso Caso describes how the stone monolith he calls Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada [the Temple of the Sacred War], was unearthed the previous year from its resting place within the foundation of the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City. Caso describes how, almost a century earlier, in 1831, within a decade of Mexico's existence as a newly independent republic, the monolith's presence had been recorded by a government minister who called in a conservator from the National Museum, who in turn called in the Director of the National Archive, only to determine that large artefact was, at that time, too difficult to remove (7). And there it remained there for another hundred years, one seat of power buried beneath another, until construction workers came across it once again in Caso's time (7). The teocalli was not so much discovered as rediscovered, and perhaps the recuperation was only undertaken in the early twentieth century because the monolith could then serve as a cornerstone for the post-revolutionary project of elaborating a unifying identity for the Mexican nation.

And indeed, even in the nineteen-twenties the basalt monument, covered in medium-relief carvings, proved challenging to extract (7). Furthermore, it had suffered some damage on the back, which had been facing upwards and had been, according to Caso, transected by a sewer line (10-11). He describes the monument as a shaped like a "truncated pyramid," exhibiting the dimensions, on a miniature scale, of contemporaneous temples of the Late Post-classic period (Caso, 10; Townsend, ??). This is precisely why Caso calls the monolith *teocalli*, the Nahuatl word for temple. Scholars today regard the *teocalli* as a temple-shaped throne, probably

belonging to Motēuczōmah Xōcoyōtzin, the *huey tlatoani* or emperor under whose reign the empire of the Mexica expanded for the last time and who presided over contact with Europeans.

The entire structure is about four feet tall with steep steps leading up to a platform or seat about two thirds of the way up (see Figure 1). All surfaces except the bottom and the thirteen steps that make up the stairs display elaborate medium-relief carvings mostly depicting various important gods; however, I will focus primarily on the images carved into the back of the monolith after briefly describing the front to provide context necessary for my interpretation. What we might call the backrest of the throne bears a solar disk with Huitzilipochtli on one side and Tezcatlipoca-Tepeyollotl on the other. Michel Graulich identifies the latter as a representation of Motēuczōmah Xocoyotzin (Moctezuma II) as Tezcatlipcoa—who was in turn wearing the jaguar-skin-and-head raiment of Tepeyollotl (155-207). The fact that Motēuczōmah Xocoyotzin appears here as Tezcatlipoca-Tepeyollotl on the same plane as Huitzilipochtli indicates his divine nature as an emperor personifying a god. From the mouths of both figures emerge the *atl-tlachinolli* or war-glyph.

With her face—and most importantly mouth—facing up, Tlaltecuhtli is carved into the seat itself; she is an "earth monster" from whose dismembered body the earth was formed. A *huey tlatoani,* like Moctezuma, seated there might be understood as rising from her mouth. In his seat, he would obscure the solar disk, but the flanking figures with their *atl-tlachinolli* would be visible on either side of him, and the war glyphs seem to curve upward toward his ear level.

Finally, at the terminal front of each of what we might call the armrests of the throne, there appear is a damaged vessel whose structure is consistent with *cuauhxicalli,* or ritual containers used to hold the hearts of sacrificial victims. A *huey tlatoani* sitting on the throne

would have two hearts within easy reach of his hands, indeed, we might even imagine that each of his hands would naturally rest precisely on top of the hearts in the *cuauhxicalli*.

The damaged back of the throne is the real focus of my analysis. The back, which would not have been visible to an audience facing a seated *huey tlatoani,* contains the largest solid plane of basalt, and therefore the relief-carving there is the largest. Unlike the other carvings, the one on the back depicts what we might understand as an entire scene, or even an ecosystem: the eagle is alighting on the nopal, the *atl-tlachinolli* glyph emerges from his beak, and each talon grips a cactus fruit. The abundant growth of the spreading nopal occupies the central place in this scene. If the basalt surface were divided into thirds, the nopal would exceed its allotted space and crowd into the top and bottom third—the solar realm of the eagle above and the earthy, watery realm of an indistinct chthonic goddess below. In this context, the nopal itself constitutes a plant body, pictured in its entirety like the bodies of the gods on other surfaces of the monolith, and occupying—even exceeding—the central space on the back of the *teocalli*. The cactus is equal to or greater than—in terms of size, completeness, and centrality—all the other bodies carved into the basalt, with its base submerged in obscure water and its fruit pushing into the solar space of the eagle ruled by the god Huitzilopochtli. Each penca or paddle is covered in sharp spines, with at least ten fruits visible, exhibiting the vestigial florescence. In Mexican iconography, these fruits resemble human hearts, in color and shape. This resemblance is heightened when the fruit is depicted with petals remaining at the top, creating a stylized scalloped edge commonly used in Mexica imagery to indicate the point at which a body part is separated from the rest of the body, with the stamens united and terminating in a circle, forming a tubular protrusion like a severed artery.

The bottom third shows a chthonic goddess, supine, her head positioned upward like Tlaltecuhtli's head on the seat of the throne. This murky body is not only underwater but spatially located at the very bottom of the monolith, as if the nopal's abundant growth and many fruits were crowding it out of the frame, or as if it were continuously sinking out of sight. While this goddess has been identified as Tlaltecuhtli in the past, perhaps most notably by Caso and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, more recently in *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City* Barbara Mundy identifies the body as that of the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue, the "jade-skirted" goddess of lakes and rivers. Mundy supports this claim by identifying a visual allusion to her name in the undulating bands of water, the faint outline of a paper-fan head adornment on the almost-entirely-effaced left side, a glimpse of her eponymous skirt, and her feet with toes touching the extreme bottom right corner of the carving (47). This is the most damaged part of the monolith, and it is hard to make out the details which are obscured by the carved undulations of the waves, the strangely cramped and seemingly unnatural position of the body, and the degraded clarity of the carvings, however, scholars agree on the general position of this goddess (which Mundy notes is rare, likening it to victims of heart sacrifice in manuscripts) and the fact that from her the nopal emerges. In either case, Tlaltecuhtli but Chalchiuhtlicue, Mundy's observation that the goddess's physical location and position "draws on long-standing spatial diagrams with cast-down females," similar to the Coyolxauhqui stone at the base of the Templo Mayor, and echoing "the image of a sacrificed female deity depicted in the *Codex Borgia*" (Mundy, 48). The *Codex Borgia* image also shows an eagle landing on the spine-covered cactus growing from the body of the fallen goddess in question.

As Mundy notes, at the root of this powerful nopal, we might expect to see instead the heart of Copil, the great-nephew of Huitzilipochtli. It was from his heart that the cactus on which

the eagle landed is said to have grown and he is often referred to as the first sacrifice of Tenochtitlan. In this rendering, however, Copil's heart, flung into Lake Texcoco at Huitzilipochtli's request, is not visible. If the body under the waves belongs to Tlaltecuhtli, we might suppose that she ate his heart, as she eats everything that falls to her, and then that the nopal grew from her mouth, producing, in the form of prickly pears, fruit for Huitzilopochtli's eagle to consume. David Carrasco has described the Aztecs as "obsessed with the problems and possibilities of eating," arguing that they "developed a sophisticated cosmology of eating in which gods ate gods, humans ate gods, gods ate humans, children in the underworld suckled from divine trees, and adults in the underworld ate rotten tamales!" He goes on to assert the importance of attending to the fact that "at certain points in their sacred history, the Aztecs conceived of their sky as a devouring mouth and the earth as a gaping jaw." (434)

The top two-thirds of the carving contain the image—eagle, war glyph, and nopal—that appears today, albeit in a slightly modified and stylized iteration, on the Mexican flag and coat of arms. Indeed, the government minister who decided to leave the monolith in the foundation of the national palace two hundred years ago described the monument in terms that reduced it to a mere depiction of the national escutcheon. He could only see the back, which was facing up, and perhaps because the image was already widely used and oft repeated, the slab of basalt may not have struck him as particularly remarkable. I cannot help but wonder if any trace of the goddess at the base, absent in the flag and coat of arms, was visible and ignored or if that part remained hidden like the relief carvings on the other sides.

The monolith's subsequent recovery has brought the previously hidden carvings to light, allowing for a more holistic approach to understanding the iconography, not only as disparate elements, but in conjunction. In my view, the carvings on the front and back are closely related,

not only containing some of the same images, but the same arrangements of constituent elements, almost like mirror images. Furthermore, in order to undertake a truly comprehensive analysis of the iconography, we must recuperate other absences and imagine the bodies of Moctezuma Xocoyotzin (or a preceding *huey tlatoani*) and his audience as participants in the iconographic meaning-make for which the throne served as a privileged site.

The repeated images consist of the atl-tlachinolli and the upward facing head of a chthonic goddess. And of course, at an even more basic level, all of these images serve to emphasize mouths and what comes out of them. The war glyph which appears twice on the front of the throne, coming from the mouths of Huitzilipochtli and Tezcatlipoca-Tepeyollotl as they flank the solar disk, appears only once on the back of the throne, but at the same level, and facing outward rather than inward. If Moctezuma Xocoyotzin were to occupy the throne, his seated position would be analogous to the eagle on the back, with one notable difference: while the two war glyphs on the front are positioned to enter his ears, it is from the mouth of the eagle on the back that the single war glyph emerges. If the basalt of the throne were to suddenly become transparent, then Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, the solar disk, and the eagle would merge. It would appear that the eagle's war glyph came from Moctezuma Xocoyotzin's mouth, and that glyph would merge with the body of Huitzilipochtli. Tezcatlipoca-Tepeyollotl would stand behind the eagle, with his war glyph slightly overlapping one wing. The hypothetical transparency of the basalt and the overlaying of images it would produce might seem far-fetched, but it aligns with the function of hearing and speaking for a *huey tlatoani* wearing his *ixiptla*, alludes to the two most important warrior classes of the Mexica together in relation to the emperor, and underscores the close relationship between the prickly pear and the human heart.

If we imagine Moctezuma Xocoyotzin sitting on his throne once again, but this time with human hearts in the *cuauhxicalli*, we will notice that his hands are in roughly the same position as the talons of the eagle on the back. This relationship is further borne out by the etymology of the word *cuauhxicalli* a Nahua word meaning eagle vessel for containing hearts (Sullivan 119). Caso has already argued that the iconography on the back of the throne functions as mandate to collect captives for sacrifice by waging war. The correspondence in position between Moctezuma Xocoyotzin and the eagle appear to corroborate that assertion, while also uniting the eagle motif of one warrior class with the jaguar motif of the other, here alluded to in the representation of his embodiment of the jaguar-clad Tezcatlipoca-Tepeyollotl, so that the symbols of both warrior classes join Huitzilipochtli in producing the war glyph. However, I'm even more interested in what's happening below—on parts of the throne that have commanded less historical attention over the past century, namely, the correspondence between the goddess heads and the open question of what—or who—corresponds to the nopal.

Is the nopal the physical manifestation of Copil's heart, the plant offspring of Tlaltecuhtli or Chalchiuhtlicue, or merely the logical next step in a natural process of consumption, decay, and reconstitution in which all beings—all species, objects animate and inanimate, and gods—are active participants? While of these interpretations are valid, they focus on the individual. The nopal, with its many limbs and many hearts, not to mention its capacity to grow a whole new plant from a cutting is a much better representative of dividual ways of being. Thus, I see the nopal as simultaneously the headless body of the *huey tlatoani* and a physical manifestation of the collective body of the entire polity of the Mexica.

Above, I outlined the parallels between the position of Moctezuma, seated on his throne, and the eagle, depicted on the back. I won't negate those parallels now; instead, returning to the

conceit of transparent basalt, I want to draw attention to the fact that while his head occupies the same space as the solar disk and the eagle, and his hands clutch hearts like the eagle's talons clutch the prickly pear fruit, the rest of his body: his torso, arms, and legs, occupy the same space as the nopal. Perhaps most importantly, like the cactus, he rests upon—or rises from—the body of a fallen goddess. Moctezuma's body is the key to interpreting the back of his throne—and by mapping a human body onto that scene, we might see the eagle functioning as the ixiptla-clad head of the nopal. As an *ixiptla*, the eagle would grant the capacity to perceive and speak as a god, as indeed, the war glyph suggests. The many-hearted and many-limbed nopal part of this multispecies body draws life force directly from primordial deities capable of giving life and taking it away, and then consolidates that life force into a form the gods above can consume. The presentation of a ruler as an axis mundus of this kind is not without precedent. In *Blood and Beauty: Organized Violence in the Art and Archaeology of Mesoamerica and Central America,* John W. Hoopes and David Mora-Moran note that on occasion, in public performances of divine abilities, Maya rulers would represent themselves "as the World Tree or the stalk of the Young Maize God" (307).

For the Mexica, many plants exhibit varying degrees of animacy and embodiment: there is the tree in Mictlan with breasts that drip milk into the mouths of unborn souls, and trees that give birth to gods, gods that give birth to trees (or cacti!), and the fig trees whose skin became amatl paper[22]. Molly Bassett, in her study of contemporary practices among Nahua speakers in Mexico, suggests that the language itself allows for a spectrum of animacy, and that in religious

[22] The ritual use of paper as a vehicle for blood in burnt offerings to gods and the common application of carmine to paper, considered in light of the categorization of carmine as cactus blood, raises intriguing questions regarding the relationship between cultural production and burnt offerings.

observance, speakers grant animacy to plants, stones, and things that might not be otherwise (or always) be assumed to possess animacy.

Among them all, the nopal is unique in giving the Mexica nocheztli, or blood, the carmine used throughout many of the codices. While other trees might bleed, the blood of the nopal was collected, refined, and used for cultural production, in other words, *nocheztli* was distinctly precious. Sacrifice and bloodletting, in some form, were common themes in codices, and the fact that they were often illustrated using *nocheztli* is further evidence of Elodie Dupey García's assertion that "the Nahua did not think of color in the abstract but conceived of colors on the basis of their material manifestations" (99). Moreover, Dupey García elaborates, "[t]he relationship between color and its material manifestations often determined the uses and meanings of colors in Nahua society…" (99).

Before taking up the *Codex Mendoza* to facilitate a deeper analysis of the cochineal's representation and use, I want to turn briefly to a different codex to revisit the relationship between nopal and eagle one more time. In *Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate*, Elizabeth Boone Hill describes the first page of the Fejérváry-Mayer Codex, as "the most often reproduced page of all the Mexican codices" explaining that it is "both a cosmogram of the central Mexican world and a 260-day almanac, in which another almanac is embedded" (114). The central figure is Xiuhtecuhtli, "the lord of the year and time," while indicating the cardinal directions and intercardinal loops radiating out from him there are richly colored and symbolically significant plants, animals, and the dismembered body parts of Tezcatlipoca (114). Here too, in the intercardinal loop illustrating the Southwest, the nopal and eagle appear together. The eagle is positioned with an open beak, descending on the nopal fruit and flower crowing the cactus. Beside the eagle's head, the ribcage of Tezcatlipoca, the god Moctezuma Xocoyotzin is

shown personifying on the backrest of the teocalli, drips blood toward the central figure on the page, "as if the body of the god of divination were nourishing the lord of time at the center" (116).

Named for the Spanish Viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, who may have commissioned the seventy-one folios of the codex in the middle of the sixteenth century, the *Codex Mendoza* is one of the earliest and most well-studied codices. Davide Domenici suggests scholars throughout the twentieth century have been drawn to this codex because it has historically been attributed to the Nahua *tlacuilo* or painter-scribe, Francisco Gualpuyogualcal, providing evidence of "Indigenous agency in the early colonial Americas" (2). Recently, however, questions about the codex's provenance, production, and content have been raised, notably by Daniela Bleichmar, Jorge Gómez Tejada, and Juan José Batalla Rosado. Painted primarily with Mexica pigments applied to Spanish paper, the first half of the codex depicts many aspects of Precolumbian life in the Central Valley of Mexico. The second half consists of a *matrícula de tributos* or list of tributes—essentially what the surrounding subject provinces sent to Tenochtitlan. Another document, predating the *Codex Mendoza*, produced on large folios of amate, and called simply the *Matrícula de Tributos* appears to provide the source material for the second section of the Codex Mendoza, though there are some minor differences. Batalla Rosado argues that the *Matrícula de Tributos* is a precolonial text, copied into the *Codex Mendoza* a few decades after the original was written by the same scribe who oversaw production of the original. He suggests that this scribe was part of the royal court of the Mexica and worked with six other scribes to produce the original. The same scribe, according to Batalla Rosado, later oversaw the production of the codex, completing the entire work on his own (31).

Folio 43 recto of the *Codex Mendoza* shows ten places and seventeen tribute items, including gold, jade, bundles of feathers, textiles, and battle regalia. The codex contains several visual references to nocheztli and refined cochineal in different forms: as place names and as tributes. The goods listed are divided by category with quantities of each listed (and glossed in Spanish), while place names appear as glyphs (also glossed), in a column on the lefthand side. Here the placename Nocheztlan is represented by a bowl of cochineal. The association between cochineal and blood is clear, even in this representation of the refined pigment, in that the bowl of red balls, representing cakes of cochineal, are crowned by a prickly pear fruit and the glyph for blood. Stephanie Wood, writing for the Visual Lexicon of Aztec Hieroglyphs states that this is what distinguishes cochineal from other bowls, such as another common colorant, achiote, which looks the same but without the cactus or blood. She also notes that the toponymic glyph for Nocheztlan and the bowl of cochineal are virtually interchangeable glyphs. Daniele Dehouve appears to concur, and notes that many place glyphs incorporate visual allusions to religious rites, writing in a recent article that "there is a unique repertoire of signs operating in both the ritual and divinatory areas in toponyms. Although the signs perform different functions, the existence of this repertoire shows that it is not relevant to make a drastic distinction between the images and the glyphs" (85).

In the tributes listed, we see another form of cochineal, this time as appearing as a quantity of red balls or dots in bags. Next to these bags, there is a bowl of gold, indicating perhaps, to contemporary readers, how valuable cochineal was. It was valuable because it was used as one of the main colors in the Mexica palette, a color discernable in art of all kinds, including codices like this one. In *Painting the skin: pigments in bodies and codices in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica*, Elodie Dupey Garcia describes how the material composition of colors

was, for the Mexica, inseparable from their meaning. So if cochineal is the blood of the nopal, and the ruler of the Mexica occupied a position that corresponds to that of the body of the nopal in relation to the gods Tlaltecuhtli and Huitzilipochtli, and if the ruler's blood can be understood as a divine life source, then cochineal seems to circulate through the regions controlled by the Mexica like an incarnation of the blood of society itself, drawn toward the heart—Tenochtitlan, and returning out again, perhaps, in the cultural imaginary, or in visual rhetoric reinforcing Mexica power, colored in this cochineal red.

Frances Berdan has mapped the provinces listed as suppliers of the material goods that appear in the matrícula de tributos. The movement of tributes flowing inward to the city of Tenochtitlan is reminiscent of the depiction of Tezcatlipoca's blood flowing toward Xiuhtecuhtli on the page of the Fejérváry-Mayer Codex. Such a flow toward a central figure seems, at first glance, to contrast sharply with Carrasco's description of the "cosmic jaws" located above and below. On further consideration however, both Carrasco's point about cosmic jaws in the Mexica imaginary and Hill's elaboration of the first page of the Fejérváry-Mayer Codex indicate a way of thinking about the circulation of life-giving matter, a sort of cosmic economy of exchange or circulatory system, controlled by the heart. In *The Natural History of the Soul in Ancient Mexico*, Jill Leslie McKeever Furst has shown that of the three sites within the human body where a soul resides, for the Mexica the heart was "not only the seat of the soul, but also the locus of human identity, talent, and endeavor" (20). Furthermore, the apparent difference between matter flowing inward and matter being devoured above and below is really the result of the perspective of a viewer looking at images that occupy a two-dimensional plane. In practice, Tenochtitlan functioned as a center into which both captives and tributes flowed, glorifying the emperor and the gods he served. The map of Tenochtitlan on the first page of the Codex Mendoza shows this

spatial relationship—in all parts of the city people are busy with tasks and each part is divided by canals reminiscent of the intercardinal loops radiating from Xiuhtecuhtli in the Fejérváry-Mayer. The four-lobed structure of the city in the former and space in the latter replicates the structure of the heart, and as Jill McKeever Furst explains, the heart "may provide the one model for the more schematic tetralobed shape of the Mesoamerican center of the world" (38). Unsurprisingly then, at the center, a nopal crowned by an eagle appears like an axis mundus, repeating the visual rhetoric on the back of the teocalli. Much like the nopal which draws sustenance from its surroundings to produce and hold aloft an abundance of nourishing fruit, so too are valuable and life-sustaining materials drawn into Tenochtitlan. And while human sacrifice and tribute goods might seem to belong to two very different categories, there are important the similarities between the two. Most importantly, the blood of captives sacrificed in Tenochtitlan and the cochineal submitted in tribute to the Mexica can equally be understood as the blood required for the universe to function.

In *Contested Visions in the Spanish Colonial World*, Magaloni Kerpel touches on the significance of the nopal's centrality as "the cosmic world tree" of the Aztecs, at the heart of an important scene in the sixteenth-century Codex Mendoza, where, she writes, "the action… therefore takes place both in geographic space (the small island of Lake Texcoco) and a symbolic one (the center of the earth) where the mythical time of the gods interacts with human history: the space of revelation" (85). Understandably, the nopal, representing the center of the geographic, temporal, and cosmological world, was a crucial figure in Aztec art, preserved today in the center of the Mexican flag.

Monica Domínguez Torres's study of indigenous heraldry in colonial Mexico and Peru reveals that the nopal, a motif in the coats of arms granted to the indigenous commanders who

fought for Spain, remained a potent symbol even as it became translated into colonial genres of visual rhetoric, where it marked shifting power dynamics and epistemologies under Spanish rule. In particular, Domínguez Torres draws attention to two heraldic devices created in 1791 by a family claiming to have descended from Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, the ruler of Tenochtitlan killed during the treacherous sacking of the city by Hernán Cortes's troops, and Moctezuma Ilhuicamina, an important earlier ruler who had considerably expanded the Aztec Empire. The images of the two coats of arms combine indigenous nopal imagery within the visual genre of the Spanish blazon. Domínguez Torres writes:

> *The alleged blazon of Moctezuma Xocoyotzin reproduces the general format of Charles V's coat of arms, except for the introduction of Aztec symbols in two of the fields—a tunic and a xiuhuitzolli [a crown-like diadem] adorning two place-names, most notable the nopal, or prickly-pear cactus… This visual strategy seems to celebrate the legend that the last Aztec Emperor willingly subordinated to Charles V's rule and that his royal insignia therefore became part of that of the Holy Roman Empire. In contrast, the blazon representing the first Moctezuma celebrates the independent and leading status of Mexico-Tenochtitlan… It uses typical Aztec symbols such as the solar-disk banner and the eagle on the cactus plant as external ornaments of the blazon, imitating at the same time solutions devised by the sixteenth century indigenous rulers for the heraldic symbols of their communities* (112).

What is especially striking about these images is that the nopal, which the Spanish had effectively displaced from the cosmological center of the universe, is that it is simultaneously

represented as decentered in heraldic devices, while geographically the species, *Opuntia ficus-indica*, which certainly still flourished in its native habitat, had also, by that time (1791), eventually spread to the very Rome alluded to as the foundation of the Spanish Crown's authority in the heraldic imagery. In Tenochtitlan, the nopal was not only a plant but also a place and a cosmological center, whereas subsequent depictions of the nopal suggest indigenous strategies of resistance to the dictates of colonial visual rhetoric since the prickly pear remained associated with Tenochtitlan. These practices also reveal indigenous negotiations of Spanish credentialing systems, whereby the epistemologically significant nopal is successfully mapped onto significant sites within the colonial imaginary. The figurative association between the prickly pear and Rome also anticipated the feral capacity of the cactus, whose range was already spreading, and would eventually include Rome.

Spanish colonial imaginaries, on the other hand, could not accommodate the world-making capacities of the nopal and disregarded the cosmological significance of the plant, and redefined it as a resource and commodity. As I will demonstrate below, the cactus was primarily important as the host plant for the scale insect cochineal, and as such, became a natural resource to be exploited in emerging plantocratic global commerce. Nonetheless nopal was a world-maker and would participate in ongoing remaking of the natureculture of the world.

Uprooted from both the soil and the cultural resonance of indigenous American cultural practices, the prickly pear took on new associations in Africa and Europe, visible in orientalist paintings as a stock feature in landscapes signifying alterity, barrenness, and ruin. The seventeenth-century botanical renderings of Basilius Besler and Arnoldus Syens gave way to Stephen James Ferris "Cactus at the Alhambra" and "Spanish Gypsy Home," Auguste Renoir's

"Still Life with Flowers and Prickly Pears," and Peder Monsted's "At Noon on a Cactus Plantation on Capri."

The Scale Insect

If you've ever eaten a strawberry yogurt, sipped a Campari cocktail, worn lipstick, or taken the antibiotic azithromycin, you have almost certainly ingested the insect Dactylopius coccus (Greenhawt et al, 96). The red dye made from the crushed bodies of the cochineal insect has historically been among the safest and strongest red dyes humans have used. The color known today as carmine, crimson lake, natural red 4, and E120 is all produced by the insect cochineal, and continues to be used extensively to color medicine, cosmetics, beverages, and foods, as well as a vast array of consumer goods. A single cochineal insect is tiny—several could fit on your fingertip—but in spite of its diminutive size, cochineal is also a good candidate for the epithet "The Red One."

Female cochineal insects are sessile, meaning they do not fly, instead they prefer to stick to the prickly pear cactus where they hatched, patiently consuming the cactus while they await fertilization, egg laying, and eventually death. Cochineal insects were domesticated thousands of years ago, and their red dye was used extensively by Mesoamericans. In the Codex Mendoza, bags filled with cochineal (marked by brilliant dots of red) appear alongside ocelot pelts and jaguar claws as tributes paid to sovereign empires. When Spaniards learned about the dye, they seized control of cochineal production and trade, annotated indigenous records of tributes with Spanish amendments (requiring the same quantity of dye be paid to them instead), and loaded their treasure ships with cochineal, as well silver and gold. They also destroyed indigenous records of dye production, and restricted access to cochineal in order to enjoy a worldwide

monopoly on a dye that revolutionized the textile industries of almost every region of the world. For centuries, the distinctive brilliant carmine of cochineal was (mis)known as Spanish Red, and as a staple of global trade, it colored everything from the wool uniforms of the British redcoats to silk robes in Asia.

However, just as an examination of the role of cochineal in global trade reveals increasingly complex interdependencies between regions, nations, and communities, a closer examination of the insect itself has, in recent years, yielded insight into the complex interspecies entanglements at microscopic levels within the microbiome of the insect itself. Long misidentified as the parasite (rather than symbiote) of the prickly pear, cochineal insects are actually hosts in their own right, containing their own distinct but interconnected ecologies of bacteria and fungi in their gut microbiomes.

The Suitcase and the File

As a writer whose incursions into visual art are regarded as little more than marginalia or even dismissed as part of an elaborate "literary hoax" which can be effectively studied within the discipline of textual scholarship, Aub is hardly known to art historians at all.

Aub would later describe, and even photograph, a battered suitcase containing notebooks, in which he had written the poems that comprise his *Diario de Djelfa*, a poetic record of his time in the Algerian camp. In his introduction to the book of poems, Aub wrote about the suitcase and notebooks, and even included a photograph of the suitcase itself, which reappeared in several editions of *Diario de Djelfa.* Scholars, however, have contested this account, noting Aub's counterfactual literary tendencies (see below), and suggesting that either the suitcase, or possibly the notebooks contained therein, or both, may in fact have been invented by the author to add

credibility and substantiality to his testimony about the camps or to function as a symbol of the weight of such firsthand accounts or a representation of the immense absence of so many other suitcases, so many other accounts of life—and so many deaths[23]—in so many other concentration camps.

The fact remains that the photograph of the suitcase is an early example of Aub's strategic deployment of visual rhetoric, and while scholars have questioned the authenticity of the suitcase and its contents, they have nonetheless treated the image itself as an afterthought, dependent on the text. I would suggest that as an object whose fraught materiality Aub intentionally imbued with significance, the suitcase itself is an *objet trouvé* or ready-made worthy of the attention of art historians. If the suitcase in the photograph does in fact contain the notebooks Aub describes, it could be called an assemblage. Such an assertion is not particularly revelatory—Aub moved within the same French and Spanish avant-garde circles in the twenties and thirties in which ready-mades proliferated—what is surprising is that this assertion has not previously been made.

Furthermore, in provoking the kinds of questions about authenticity and experience that scholars have debated, the photograph of the suitcase is a record of Aub's performance of a role within a Holocaust narrative that continued to delimit his humanity by requiring him to conform to popular definitions of "truth" shorn of the complications of his artistic practices. Therefore, just as the ready-mades of the Dadaists and Surrealists can be seen as antecedents of Fluxus ready-mades, so Aub's suitcase is a particular kind of ready-made, a container for text that can be rearranged to arrive at different meanings about the relationship between individual, material

[23] Seen in this light, one wonders if the heraldic blazons invented in 1791, linking the family of Don Diego Mendoza Austria y Moctezuma to the former rulers of Tenochtitlan might have served a similar function, as documents created to support the claims of the survivors of genocide.

reality, and artistic production, that he will elaborate further in the box containing *Juego de Cartas*.

In 1951, frustrated that his request for a visa to travel to France had been denied, Max Aub wrote to the President of France from his home in Mexico City. His three-page letter, describing his denunciation, arrests, and imprisonment in a concentration camp in Djelfa, is ultimately an attempt to clear his name in order to obtain a visa so he can visit his aging parents. However, it also offers some insight into the development of ideas that would produce *Jusep Torres Campalans*, and ultimately, *Juego de Cartas,* a game in which cards are used to figure out *who* a man was, with the explicit acknowledgement that the results will be different every time. On the second page of his letter, Aub writes:

> Ya sé que estoy fichado, y que esto es lo que cuenta, lo que vale. Que lo que diga la ficha sea verdad o no, eso no importa, ni entra en juego. Es decir que yo, mi persona, lo que pienso, lo que siento, no es la verdad. La verdad es lo que está escrito. Claro que yo, como escritor, debe comprenderlo mejor que nadie. Es decir que la que vive de verdad son los personajes y no las personas…. Yo, Max Aub, no existo: El que vive es el peligroso comunista que un soplon denuncio un día, supongo por justificar un sueldo. Ese soy yo, y no yo, Max Aub, ese que yo conozco y con quien hablando, y que con el mayor respeto le escribe. Tal vez lo esté haciendo con una pequeña esperanza que este Max Aub de papel que le presento, pueda vencer al otro de cartoncillo que tiene fichado la policia (72).
>
> [I know that I'm in a file, and that's what counts, what matters. That whether what the file says is true or not isn't important, nor does it even come into play. That is to say, I,

> my person, what I think, what I feel, is not the truth. The truth is what is written. Of course, I, as a writer, must understand this better than anyone. That is to say, that those who really live are characters, not people… I, Max Aub, don't exist. He who lives is a dangerous communist that some informer denounced, I imagine, for pay. This is I, and not I, Max Aub, he who knows with whom he's talking and with whom he is writing with the greatest respect. Maybe I'm doing this with a small hope that the Max Aub that I show you on paper will vanquish the other cardboard one the police have on file…]

Here, I want to draw your attention to two key points. The first is the word "juega" which means play and comes from the same root as the "juego" or game, in *Juego de Cartas*. The second is the word "ficha" which is harder to translate, though it can mean card, so a more literal translation than the one above would render the second sentence, "…whether what the card says is true or not isn't important, nor does it even come into play." *Juego de Cartas* and *Jusep Torres Campalans* can be read as Aub's further, playful, investigation of the problem he identifies, namely, that the question of truth never came "into play" in his police files. In *Juego de Cartas,* this question of truth is all that remains once all the unreliable narrators, the letter writers, have had their say about Máximo. The text alone—or even a deck of cards or a file folder full of texts, Aub seems to suggest, cannot establish the truth of a person's identity.

In my translation, I've translated the colloquial expression, "estoy fichado" to being "in a file." However, the root of the verb in the phrase, "fichar" comes from a French word, "ficha" with Latin roots, meaning a little chip or card. In places where Spanish is spoken today, a "ficha" could be anything from a phone token to a bibliographic record to a poker chip, but it also retains the sense of an identifying card in that it a still common word used for index cards, and really,

any card or even placard affixed to something and containing the name or identifying features of that thing. In a classification system, a "ficha" is a label. *Fichas are the currency of both museum exhibits and police files.*

Therefore, in a discussion of the many classificatory errors that plagued categorization of the prickly pear, one finds the root for the same word, functioning in the same way, "There is a specimen (fiche No. 201.7) in the Linnaean herbarium at Stockholm (S), which certainly represents *Opuntia ficus-indica* in the commonly accepted sense and which bears the number 16 referring to *Cactus ficus-indica* of Wynte (1753) with the corresponding phrase-name. There appears to have been some confusion over this plant, however, and the deletions and corrections in the phrase on the sheet indicate that its identification has undergone a three-step change with reference to the taxa numbered 17 (C tuna), 16 (C. ficus-indica), and 15 (C. opuntia) in Linnaeus's Species plantarum of 1753 (Leuenberger 623-4). The prickly pear, it appears, like Aub, was also "fichado."

In *Dear Science and Other Stories*, Katherine McKittrick explores black knowledge and creativity as an alternative to the damaging and racist of methodologies and epistemologies of biocentric knowledge production. Following Sylvia Wynter's "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désetre" McKittrick thinks through academic disciplinarity as an iteration of the taxonomic thinking undergirding colonial and plantocratic knowledge systems. She writes:

> The rigid and restrictive underpinnings of disciplinary thinking become apparent when we notice that categorization—specifically the method and methodology of sustaining knowledge categories—is an economized emulation of positivist classificatory thinking (thinking that is produced in the shadows of biological determinism and colonialism).

> Generic. Genus. The learning system and its attendant methodology produce an ungenerous taxonomy that segregates kinds and types of knowledge as well as the spaces where ideas are generated. The taxonomy is ranked and funded accordingly. In this learning system, the (fictive) differences between humans swell (McKittrick 38).

The Illustrator

Aub continued to include paper ephemera in subsequent works produced in Mexico, and the somber material significance of such "documentation" is evident in the fact that his own fate under the Vichy regime was so disastrously determined by a series of denunciations recorded on cards in the French police's file, and then conversely, that his ultimate escape was facilitated by correspondence between Bosques and the officials running the Djelfa camp and the fact that his classification in their files referred to him as a Spanish Republican of "German" lineage rather than as a Jew. Aub's fascination with the inability of official documentation, bureaucratic, artistic, or scholarly, to accurately represent an individual was perhaps most fully expressed in *Jusep Torres Campalans* (discussed earlier in Chapter 3.) Published in 1958, at the same time as the opening of a gallery show in Mexico City featuring work by the fictitious Catalan painter who, Aub asserted, had invented Cubism.

In his article, "The Truth behind 'Jusep Torres Campalans': Max Aub's Committed Postmodernism" Faber's insightful analysis of the book is marred only by the comic lengths he, like other literary scholars goes to in order to situate Aub's paintings and drawings within the field of literary criticism under the domain of textual scholarship, as if they were mere appurtenances of the text. Faber writes, "The book was a model in its genre, painstakingly documented and profusely illustrated," and "[p]rominent intellectuals like Octavio Paz and

Carlos Fuentes praised Aub's discovery of this missing link in the history of Cubism." Jusep Torres Campalans, of course, was not actually real, or as Faber writes, "Aub had quite simply invented him, convincing his influential friends to play along. And the artwork was all his. *Jusep Torres Campalans*, then, is an exceptionally well-orchestrated literary hoax." It is striking that after describing the book as "profusely illustrated," and writing "the artwork was all his," Faber then dispenses with Aub's images with the designation "literary hoax." This reading of Aub's visual art obscures the evolution of a postcolonial aesthetics involved in Aub's sophisticated parody of European "image-imperialism" that anticipates Joselit's proposal to:

> …Take the semiotic cacophony of cubism as a prime example of European modernism. Here, the multiplication and scrambling together of various sign systems and diverse cultural references (to, for instance, non-Western art and Renaissance perspective) offer the viewer an impossible invitation to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable differences. Like so many tendencies and movements within European modernism, cubism offered a means by which nominally autonomous spectators were confronted with contradictory psychological and phenomenological positions through personal acts of looking. Sometimes this work could be politicized, but only at the cost of its remaining on the peripheries of mainstream forces of modernization in the position of an alienated avant-garde (Joselit 58).

By looking at the text alone, Faber arrives at a similar conclusion, arguing that "Jusep Torres Campalans should be read as a serious history, commentary and critique of modernism, a critique that, moreover, manages to transcend its object." He goes on to assert that "this 'meta-modernist' biography takes advantage of modernism's achievements while at the same time

overcoming its limitations" and as such, "it can be seen as one of the first true examples of postmodernism in Spanish letters" (237). And as such, Faber neglects to say, the exhibition and book— "profusely illustrated"—are also significant early examples of postmodernism in Mexican visual art. In fact, the exhibition itself is ripe for recuperation as a strikingly early foray into the realm that would be exuberantly explored several decades later by European and North American artists like Marcel Broodthears and Andrea Fraser under the auspices of institutional critique.

Perhaps Aub's critical attention to "image-imperialism" and allusions to Mesoamerican could also plausibly be characterized as an attempt to move toward what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui calls "sociology of the image" (12). In *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: On Practices and Discourses of Decolonization* she takes into consideration "how visual cultures, while helping to make sense of the social as they do in all societies" play an additional role in response to the ongoing effects of colonialism, having "developed along their own path, at once revealing and updating many unconscious aspects of our particular social world" (12). In the wake of "the cultural and civilizational confrontation" that began in the sixteenth century, the image has done what words could not. "Words have a peculiar function in colonialism," she writes: "they conceal rather than designate, a function made particularly evident in the republican phase, during which the state adopted egalitarian ideologies while at the same time erasing the citizenship rights of the majority of the population" (12). While her assessment is rooted in her work in Bolivia, we can see that what she says about the concealing function of words alongside the erasure of rights is a salient observation with broad application to other chapters in this dissertation as well. Aub certainly appears to agree, in his quote above, that "words became a fictional record, plagued with euphemisms that veiled reality instead of revealing it" (13).

The Deck of Cards

Juego de Cartas is a deck of playing cards, designed by Aub, usually described as an epistolary narrative about Máximo Ballasteros, a dead man whose (somewhat) unexpected demise generates a flurry of letters, speculation, and intrigue between friends, acquaintances, lovers, and wife. Aub created the cards as a gift for friends, though he made sure they were printed to look like an ordinary pack of cards. He even included instructions, or rather rules, that follow standard proscriptions for cutting and dealing and playing the cards. The next set of instructions offers other possibilities for play, assuring players that they may proceed "con la seguridad de que el resultado será siempre diferente [with the certainty that the results will always be different.]" His sense of humor further emerges in the following sentence, "Es juego de entretenimiento; las apuestas no son de rigor [This game is for entertainment purposes, betting is not required.]" Finally, the instructions note that the game can be played as solitaire, and that the winner is whoever figures out who Máximo Ballasteros was. But this is a fool's errand, as the rest of Aub's work attests: a card cannot determine a person's identity. Rivera Cusicanqui's "sociology of the image" presents another option, as she argues "[I]mages offer us interpretations and social narratives which since precolonial times have illuminated the social landscape and offered us perspectives and critical understandings of reality" (13).

From an art historical perspective, or better still, through the lens of "sociology of the image," a deck of playing cards provides rich ground for analysis. Cards offer many examples of repeated images that work together within a commonplace and widely known signification system. Additionally, playing cards, like Aesop's fables, were some of the first non-religious materials printed materials that were widely circulated—with notable adaptations—in the

Americas. In fact, Cañizares-Esguerra cites the earliest decks as originating in Lima and Mexico writing:

> The Mexican deck also suggests the quick adaption of printers to the local demands of indigenous elites. It includes designs of Aztec games (juggling, flying poles, trained monkeys) as well as Aztec rulers and religious heroes: Cuauhtémoc, Moctezuma and Quetzalcoatl. The names of the heroes are printed in Roman script along with their corresponding Aztec logographic signs (79).

This convention repetition and history of adaptation makes Aub's departures from convention particularly notable. At the same time, the deck is itself another entry in the long and varied history of playing card production, since decks of cards have been redesigned for centuries, usually in compliance with slight regional variations, and the unique variations of one deck can thus be understood as conventional in that departures from, or innovations on, pre-existing forms of signification are actually the norm rather than the exception. To the extent that the deck of cards is recognizable as a deck of cards, and playable as such, the deck of cards is another kind of ready-made object. As Cañizares-Esguerra observes:

> By 1593, Aztec lords had incorporated Christian and classical historiographies into their annals, along with new Iberian legal forms of paperwork, including wills, petitions, probanzas (submissions of evidence) and property deeds. The lords, to be sure, did not exclude playing cards from the new arsenal of manuscript and print culture they chose to consume (79).

Red Diamonds and Green Nopal

In *Juego de Cartas*, each suit bears two symbols: the usual recognizable suits are paired with their older historical card suit symbols which have, for the most part, been relegated to decks of fortune-telling cards like tarot and lenormand. Hearts are accompanied by cups, their usual counterpart, spades appear alongside (or within) coins, and clubs are joined by swords. There is one exception: diamonds are paired not with a traditional European symbol, but with a paddle of the nopal cactus, the *Opuntia ficus* or prickly pear cactus.

Historically, the symbols employed to designate each suit in a deck of European playing cards might vary from place to place, but were roughly analogous, such that someone from one place would still be able to recognize the suit and play the game in different place. Some usual symbols included: bells, acorns, leaves, and shields. No European deck made use of a cactus paddle as a symbol, however, early Spanish decks from the fourteenth century show a green club that somewhat resembles Aub's cactus paddles. As this is the one departure from the norm, and Aub was certainly sufficiently well-traveled to have seen enough regional variations of cards to know that diamonds should correspond to coins, bells, or acorns, he must have had some purpose in including the nopal, surprisingly, alongside the red diamonds. And indeed, I will argue below that color is the key to discerning his purpose.

The images on the cards appear hastily drawn using a permanent marker. As one might expect, this produces colors which are supersaturated, highly chromatic, and somewhat transparent where they overlay one another. The palette of images in the entire deck is limited to four colors: red, green, yellow [or gold/ochre], and black, though blue appears on half the cards, but only on the other (back/verso) side of the cards, as the border around the text. On the other half of the deck, the border is red, and this is how the double deck can be divided into two

constituent parts to make a double deck. Thus, each image is repeated, so that, for instance, the seven of hearts appears twice, and the face image is exactly the same while the text on the back is different, and the border around that text is red on one and blue on the other. Therefore, it is easy to split the deck into two decks in which the images are exact copies, while the back is differentiated both by the color of the border and the text enclosed within that border.

The ace of diamonds depicts the paddle of a cactus with the site of the cut (where the paddle was severed from the plant) and nine spines drawn in black, as well as the "A" for *as* or ace. The paddle itself is green, and superimposed over the paddle, is the red diamond outline, thickly drawn, with the two side-points just barely stretching past the paddle's edges. All of images and two letter "A" s are sketchily drawn, as if done hurriedly; the cactus's spines are particularly sketchy, as if they were an afterthought or a necessary but common detail to be dispensed with quickly. At the same time, the heavy edges of the red diamond make it appear forceful, or even more intentional or important than the other marks on the card face. This cactus paddle image is notable in that it has fewer distinguishing features (aside from the red diamond outline superimposed squarely on its center) than many of the others—fewer spines and/or textural crosshatching, no eye or arms or belly button (as appear in the three of diamonds, described below). However, the color black appears here, but not on all the diamond cards.

Another card on which black appears is the rey, or king, of diamonds/cactus. The figure of the king is merely suggested by two black points for eyes, a Dali-esque mustache, and a beard consisting of four downward strokes. The beard-stroke on the right-hand side is the longest, while the one next to it is shortest, and the other two are almost equal in length, giving the beard a slightly disheveled appearance.

I argue that Aub chose the prickly pear cactus to accompany the red diamonds as a coded visual allusion to the relationship between *Opuntia ficus* and cochineal. If, indeed, the red diamonds represent *Dactylopsius coccus*, then the king of that suit whose most prominent feature is a slightly disheveled beard, may be King Philip II of Spain, who lost many ships in 1587, including a treasure ship returning from the American continent to the English privateer, Sir Francis Drake, off the coast of Cadiz. The embarrassing defeat was later known as "singeing the Spanish King's beard," which may account for the unevenness of the four beard hairs the king of diamonds/cactus has in Aub's drawing. A 1550 portrait by Titian shows Philip II sporting a beard similar to the one on the king in the deck of cards, while a seventeenth century portrait by Anthony Van Dyck shows a comparable beard on the "Young Man with a Spanish-style Beard and Moustache."

These images reveal that the evolution of Aub's postcolonial critique was not solely textual but also developed in visual rhetoric, where he elaborated a subtle referendum on Spanish resource extraction of the colonial period and the orientalist tropes that pervade European art. By 1964 Aub identified himself as a "Spanish Mexican," and like other Latin American artists, he seems to have been intent on, and to some degree succeeded in, figuring out an "alternate way of being Western." As Ramirez writes, "Latin American culture, by reason of its colonial legacy, is inscribed in the Western tradition and has always functioned within its parameters. The specificity of its 'alternate way of being Western' resides in its appropriation, recycling, or 'repossessing' of Euro-American culture to respond to the needs of the Latin American real" (61).

Juego de Cartas **and Fluxboxes**

In her article "Fluxus and the Transitional Commodity" Natalie Harren coins the term "transitional commodity" to identify exactly how the fluxboxes produced by Fluxus drew "revolutionary potential not only from the object model of the Dada readymade but also from experimental music and performance which had brought about the expansion and extension of the work of art in both space and time via a turn to score based practices newly literature, collaborative, and participatory in nature" (45). Aub's *Juego de Cartas* was published in 1964, the same year as the first Fluxus edition, "a booklike edition" titled *Fluxus 1* as well as some of the more well-known subsequent editions such as that which contained Ben Vautier's *Trou Portatif (Flux Holes)*, employs a comparable object model of the Dada readymade, was informed by Aub's work as an experimental playwright, and enacts a comparable "expansion and extension of the work of art in both space and time via a turn to score based practices newly iterature, collaborative, and participatory in nature" (46). Consequently, the term "transitional commodity" can be applied to *Juego de Cartas*, and some of the most compelling conclusions of Harren's analysis will illuminate how Aub's pack of playing cards can most productively be understood and situated alongside contemporaneous art.

Harren enumerates "the basic characteristics of the Fluxus object: small, tactile, interactive, antispectacular, and lowly, as well as collaboratively produced, containerized, and portable" (47). *Juego de Cartas* meets these criteria, as long as the requirement of collaborative production is not too stringently enforced. As Harren allows, a rotating cast of artists often submitted work to George Maciunas, a founding Fluxus member, who then assembled boxes together based on what he received from artists and the supplies available. Opening and interacting with such a box, Harren explains, "transforms the experience of reading a beholding into a performative haptic, and collaborative encounter" (48). Similarly, the experience of

playing Aub's cards surely became, for the players a kind of performative haptic and collaborative encounter that cannot be captured in descriptions of the work as piece of epistolary fiction.

Fluxboxes sometimes contained "loose cards" and embraced an "allographic approach informed by the discipline of music, which entailed, and author-work relation mediated by delegated instructions" (51). The instructions that came with Juego de Cartas perform a comparable function, and the allographic approach, in the cards, may be attributed to the pairings of two different symbols for each suit, such that the associative logic of the pairs would be ascertained through play rather than contemplation.

To return to the subject of collaborative production, while Aub designed the cards and asked his friend Finisterre to print them, he treated his role as the artist behind the game with an insouciance that Fluxus artists also exhibited. "Where the artist's signature does appear," in Fluxus productions, "it is often as a self-conscious joke," Harren writes (54). In *Juego de Cartas*, Aub's signature never appears, but the distinctive signature of his fictional creation, Jusep Torres Campalans does appear, his initials enlaced in the words "Joker" and "Comodin" (the Spanish term for the joker card.)

In one of the more provocative correspondences between fluxboxes and Aub's playing cards, Harren describes how Vautier's *Flux Holes* unleashes an "errant taxonomic structure" by inviting the viewer to notice the holes that surround them, beyond the bounds of the box itself. This boundedness, and the use of a container that inevitably elicits defiance "of the very principle of containability that the boxes as containers seem to propose" is both a useful reading of Aub's suitcase as well as an illumination of his return, decades later, to yet another type of container—a box of playing cards.

Perhaps the most compelling correspondence of all, however, is what Harren describes as "The accumulation of physical traces on the objects—fingerprints, creases, tears, stains," which she equates to a "a historical catalogue of the bodies that have handled them" (64). Aub's cards, like the fluxkits, seem to revel in corporal humor and associations, so that the cactus paddles inscribed with eyes resemble nothing so much as phallic graffiti. This emphasis on the body, is not limited an image on a card, but mediates interaction with the object itself, as it is touched and experienced through tactile exploration. The invitation to handle fluxboxes and *Juego de Cartas* stands out in contrast with the pop art multiple, which, even in contact with the body in the form of jewelry, remains a commodity to be worn, rather than an object to be handled. For this reason, in both instances "preservation is always frustrated by the body's trace. Fluxus objects," like Aub's cards, are destroyed a little, then returned to their boxes and put away, held in reserve until reengaged. They pose an attack on the commodity that magnetizes use-value and exchange-value and that model—through a deprivileging of materiality that is paradoxically highly material—associative, connective modes of thought" (64).

Thus, alongside Fluxus, *Juego de Cartas* also offers "a unique model of subject-object relations and community-formation at the earliest identifiable moment of postmodernism" (69). It is fitting, perhaps, that these two different kinds of objects, the fluxbox and the deck of cards, operating within systems of associative logic, inviting associations that extend beyond their respective boxes through physical interaction with objects that are immanently mass-produced, multiple, and replaceable, should turn out to have an unrecognized counterpart in each other. And if these two models exist, helping us, as Harren concludes "think through contemporary concerns about the political and symbolic functions of art objects, the relationship between performances and their objects, the participatory turn in art, and new modes of subjectivity,

authorship, and artistic labor modeled therein," then how many more models may also exist, waiting to be found.

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CONCLUSION

In the end, I do not know if Max Aub and Andrei Platonov ever actually sat in the same theater together in 1933 in Moscow. Still, I continue to imagine them in that darkened room together, sitting not far away from each other, as complete strangers, on velvet seats perhaps, wondering what will happen next. I like to pause here, in the moment before the curtain rises and the stage lights spill out over the audience, to catch them in this moment of not knowing. Today their future is known to us: we know what happens next.

Platonov may have already had an inkling. Two years earlier in 1931, as Evgeny Dobrenko notes, Stalin had described the writing in one of his stories as a kind of gibberish ("какой-то тарабарский язык") rather than real language (14). After that, Platonov had difficulty getting his work published, but in 1933 the worst of his troubles were still yet to come. Maxim Gorky, who had occasionally helped him secure work died in June 1936. Platonov appears momentarily on film among the writers who have been assembled for Gorky's lavish state funeral. He looks thin and uncomfortable, his suit is rumpled, and his face is worn. Gorky did not always approve of Platonov's writing, but he had been a powerful protector. This moment marks a turning point for many writers of the period, and the look on Platonov's face is grim.

That same year, in July 1936, a military uprising in Morocco and Spain led to the Spanish Civil War. In 1938 Platonov's son was denounced as a spy, tried, and sent to a labor camp where he contracted tuberculosis, was released, and eventually succumbed to the illness.

In 1940 Aub, exiled from Spain, was denounced in France and detained in for the first time. By 1946 Platonov could no longer find publishers for his fiction, and instead he began

reworking folktales for widespread publication. The same year, Aub's family arrives in Havana, and he accompanies them to their new home in Mexico City.

1951 was the year of Platonov's death. He had contracted tuberculosis, probably while caring for his son. Aub's father passed away the same year, in Spain, and he was unable to obtain a visa to attend the funeral.

Aub survived. In 1956, Aub he became a Mexican citizen and was able to travel to Europe once again. He lived for almost two more decades, writing and publishing until the very end. Nonetheless, he knew his readership was limited. In a 1967 interview with Maria Embeita Apud, later quoted by Eugenia Meyer, he confesses, "...somos escritores que interesan a lo que se llama crítica universitaria, y no a la crítica viva: quedar en los libros y en las tesis universitarias, ¡qué le vamos a hacer!" ("...we are the writers of interest to what they call academic criticism, and not living criticism: stay in the books and university theses, that's what we'll do!")

One might say that Aub and Platonov walked out of a theater in Moscow in 1933 and into a world reshaped by censorship, totalitarianism, and war only to have their work entombed within university theses like this one. What an ironic fate that would be for two authors who are singularly engaged with their surroundings, both deeply concerned with human fate and profoundly attuned to anthropogenic change and the more-than-human world through which they moved. Fortunately, their fiercely imaginative narratives have outlived their authors, and new generations of readers are discovering Misha and Jacobo, the burdock and the nopal cactus, the grasses and the weeds.

In a world that has been reshaped by industrialization, urbanization, and the compression of time on a global scale and is now facing existential threats as a direct result of human action, the multispecies relationships that Aub and Platonov reveal bear testament to a century of

turmoil and conflict without losing sight of the more-than-human historical actors. They are extraordinary in their insistence that we are all in this together. In Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, Donna Haraway writes that the urgent task at hand "is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present" (1). This dissertation is an effort to identify and elucidate imaginative models of kin-making practice, where making stories with nonhuman beings is one way of surviving troubled times. Aub and Platonov exemplify the mode of creation Haraway describes, they "make trouble," they respond "to devastating events," and they "settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" in the narratives I have examined in these chapters (1). They provide models for resisting anthropocentrism and defying the foreclosures of hegemonic narratives. And perhaps most importantly, they extend an invitation to readers—past, present, and future—to engage in the ongoing dialogic practice of imagining how we might share a life on earth together.

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