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# Poor, Bare, Forked: Animal Sovereignty, Human Negative Exceptionalism, and the Natural History of *King Lear*

LURIE SHANNON

[T]hou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but  
such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings!  
—*King Lear* (3.4.105–7)<sup>1</sup>

EACH POINT OF SPECIFICATION that *King Lear* offers in this extremely familiar assessment of the terms and conditions of human estate signifies by comparison to the bodily forms and natural capacities of nonhuman animals. It is worth reminding ourselves: the comparison is negative. Like reports of Diogenes' infamous appearance at the Academy, when he brandished a plucked capon to gloss Plato's classification of man as a "featherless biped," this passage unravels the species pretensions of humanity.<sup>2</sup> Here, however, we detect neither searing comedy nor the bark of the Cynic's satiric correction. Despite the obvious lament in Lear's exclamation, his declaration offers a rather scientific account of human embodiment, a zoographic or comparative description that proceeds in an entirely privative mode. To specify man as poor, bare, and forked

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from Shakespeare's works are taken from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 5th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Diogenes Laertius reports of Diogenes of Sinope (the Cynic philosopher also known as Diogenes the Dog): "Plato had defined Man as an animal, biped and featherless, and was applauded. Diogenes plucked a fowl and brought it into the lecture room with the words, 'Here is Plato's man.' In consequence of which was added to the definition, 'having broad nails.'" See *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1925), 6.40. See also John Leon Lievsay, "Some Renaissance Views of Diogenes the Cynic," in *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, ed. James McManaway (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948), 447–55.

(and as a “thing,” at that) is to classify him as a helpless, radically exposed animal that goes on (only) two feet.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, I propose that we take the zoographic content of Lear’s speech literally. Sometimes contemporary discussions of “post-humanity” can take Enlightenment “humanity” for granted, either suggesting that it was, at some point, actually achieved or disregarding the alternatives it confronted. Attending to the cross-species reference in Lear’s vision of embodiment, however, opens a perspective from which to challenge the historical and intellectual adequacy of what commentators have repeatedly posited, in philosophical terms and outside of time, as “the question of the animal.”<sup>4</sup> To invoke the totalizing, abstract grammars evident in that phrase is, inevitably, to establish a certain kind of human opposite and to enact the “human-animal divide” that language purports only to describe. A zoographic reading of *King Lear* and its wide-ranging resources, however, suggests evolving historiographic ways to see humankind within a larger cross-species milieu—as part of a more “zoopolitan” environmental or ecosystemic conception. Introducing his discussion of sovereign power and “bare life,” Giorgio Agamben suggests that to speak in this way of “a *zoē politikē* of the citizens of Athens would have made no sense,” even though Aristotle “defines man as a *politikon zōon*.”<sup>5</sup> But as his narrow reference to *Athenian citizens* makes clear, Agamben’s conception of the bare life that serves as an originary exclusion from Greek politics and that (following Michel Foucault’s account of biopolitics) would become the object of modern sovereign authority concerns *an aspect of human life*; it does not engage a question of species or how

<sup>3</sup> See also Falstaff’s equivocal remarks on his own status as a biped: “[I]f I fought not with fifty of them, I am a bunch of radish. If there were not two- or three-and-fifty upon poor old Jack, then I am no two-legged creature” (1 *Henry IV*, 2.4.183–85).

<sup>4</sup> This rhetorical formulation is commonplace in criticism and animal studies. See, for example, Matthew Callarco and Peter Atterton, “Editor’s Introduction: The Animal Question in Continental Philosophy,” in *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought*, ed. Matthew Callarco and Peter Atterton (London: Continuum, 2004), xv–xxv. For critical philosophical attention to this problem, see Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2002): 369–418; and Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), 1–2 (citing Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a4). Agamben glosses the “simple natural life” (within the human) that is excluded from the *polis* and located instead, in Athenian contexts, within the *oikos* as “reproductive life,” not remarking the gendered nature of that political exclusion/seclusion. He then rehearses an Aristotelian human-exceptionalist political vision without comment: “Human politics is distinguished from that of other living beings in that it is founded, through a supplement of politicality . . . tied to language, on a community not simply of the pleasant and the painful but of the good and the evil and the just and the unjust” (2–3). In this respect (a vein too vast to give its due attention here), we can see a likeness between women and animals as foundational political exclusions.

we might speak about power, membership, and exclusion across that barrier.<sup>6</sup> While this habit of calculating political exclusion solely within human confines (without taking note of that limit) doubtless marks most traditional political and philosophical discourses, it does not represent the horizon of what has been thought, nor does it account for the vagaries of historical possibility on this front. Michel de Montaigne, in his immense essay quarreling with human epistemological adequacy, proposes to unite humans and animals “*pour nous ramener et joindre au nombre*,” which John Florio renders as “to bring vs vnto the generall throng” of living creatures.<sup>7</sup> The present essay reads *King Lear* in a countertradition on the question of species, a zoographic tradition that makes this larger fabric or “generall throng” its frame of reference—rather than making man the measure of all things.

#### QUESTIONING THE PARAGON

Lear’s sense of human poor-ness refers to our underprovisioned entrance into the world and corresponding need for education and extended nursing, in direct contrast to notions of animal self-sufficiency, moderation, and innate knowledge that, at the turn of the seventeenth century, had long been in circulation. The bareness of humans might seem to go without explanation, but it provokes questions as obscure of resolution as whether any animal other than man may fairly be termed “naked.” The “lendings” necessitated by human nakedness suggest, of course, secondhand coats commandeered from other creatures’ more sufficient bodies. “Poor” and “bare” are humble enough minimal states. But Lear’s third term, “forked,” introduces an even more pointedly negative gloss on the human body’s bipedal uprightness by evoking the useless “legs” of the mandrake root and the split tongue of devilish speech. Calling man “forked” deflates the normally valorizing accounts of upright status, accounts—from Aristotle to Aquinas to Milton—that stressed the vertical vector of the human body as enabling both a contemplative gaze and an ontological movement toward divinity.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In his discussion of the ban of the *wargus*, or wolf-man, Agamben argues, “That such a man is defined as a wolf-man and not simply as a wolf . . . is decisive here. The life of the bandit . . . is not of a piece with animal nature [which is] without any relation to law and the city” (*Homo Sacer*, 105). For a very different account of animals and the law, see my “Hang-Dog Looks: Animal Trials and Cosmic Membership,” in *The Zootopian Constitution* (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> For the French text, see Michel de Montaigne, “Apologie de Raimond Sebond,” in *Les essais*, ed. Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 459; online at <http://artfl.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.0:3:11.montaigne> (accessed 5 May 2009); and Michel de Montaigne, “The Apologie for Raymond Sebond,” in *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne . . .*, trans. John Florio (London, 1603), 252–351, esp. 264. (Subsequent references are cited within the text.)

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, 494a (“Man is the only animal which . . . has the head up above in the sense in which ‘up’ is applied to the universe”); see Aristotle, *History of Animals*,

Such traditional exaltations of humankind promote it as a uniquely privileged species, enacting what has been termed a “human exceptionalist” cosmology.<sup>9</sup> In the specific contexts of animal forms of life, human exceptionalism is a flexible but historically persistent reckoning that singles out “the human” for solitary elevation and apartness, usually by asserting that humans, as such, are distinguished by the possession of a unique, hierarchizing attribute (most often an immortal soul or the use of reason). With this gesture, human exceptionalism encloses the vast and diverse remainder of non-plant life forms within what may well be the most extreme categorical compression in our thought: “the animal.” Animals are “animal,” in this logic, by their lack of that attribute chosen to singularize humanity. In human exceptionalist thought, “animals” thus share what we might call a signature animal deficit. Measured by that shortfall, they are grouped by a negative or privative method—a method that Lear applies to humans instead.

The shapes of human exceptionalism, however, are not invariable over time, and we can distinguish pre-Cartesian instances from later developments of the *cogito ergo sum* doctrine on which the post-Enlightenment species definition of “the human” has largely been based. While variant strains of the much-invoked human-animal divide can be found across history, the modern specificity of that divide as a self-enclosed (if always unstable) binary opposition derives substantially from René Descartes, whose philosophical project exploited his research efforts as a vivisectioning anatomist. As is more than well known, Descartes’ seventeenth-century framework proved essential to modern science and liberal thought. In the specific context of a history of creatures, the *cogito* also elaborated a border between an allegedly thinking man, the *cogito*, and his opposite, the instinct-bound beast or *la bête-machine*.<sup>10</sup>

Yet earlier dispensations consistently complicate that divide between man and beast, in specific ways beyond the blurring that is endemic to any binary

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*Books I–X*, trans. A. L. Peck, 3 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1965), 494a (1.55). See also Aristotle, *De partibus*, in *Parts of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (London: William Heinemann, 1955), 686a (367); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 1a:91, 3; and John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2d rev. ed. (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2007), 7.506–15. For a richer inventory of this conceit, see “‘With his face towards heaven’: The Upright Form of Man,” in C. A. Patrides, *Premises and Motifs in Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982), 83–99.

<sup>9</sup> Informed by late twentieth-century analyses of racism and sexism, utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer first assessed human exceptionalism in terms of its “speciesist” assumptions; see *Animal Liberation*, rev. ed. (New York: Ecco, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane (1931; repr., New York: Dover, 1955), 1.79–130, esp. 1.115–18. See also Descartes’ letters to the Marquess of Newcastle (dated 23 November 1646) and Henry More (dated 5 February 1649), reprinted in Tom Regan and Peter Singer, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1989), 13–19.

construction.<sup>11</sup> Even in an earlier, classically humanist (and surely human-exceptionalist) source, such as Pico della Mirandola's *On the Dignity of Man* (1486), we see something less binary than a sheer human-animal divide. Extolling the "great and wonderful happiness of man," Pico specifies humanity's uniqueness in terms of a plenary participation in everything else. According to Pico's Christianization of Aristotle's typology of souls (that is, the vegetative, sensitive, and intellective souls),<sup>12</sup> God placed in man "every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life. The seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him. If he cultivates vegetable seeds, he will become a plant. If seeds of sensation, he will grow into brute. If rational, he will come out a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God. . . . Who does not wonder at this chameleon which we are?"<sup>13</sup> The demographics of this passage (and the many others like it) make a *menagerie* of man.<sup>14</sup> Its logics offer a cultural-historical confirmation of Donna Haraway's recent claim, based on the frontiers of technoscience, genetics, and feminist political criticism, that we have always been hybrids and "have never been human."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, in more historical terms, Gail Kern Paster has shown that widely predominant understandings of the four humors as material components of embodiment, shared by humans and animals, sufficiently undercut notions of human difference to make "identification across the species barrier" virtually habitual in early modern representations.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Boehrer and Erica Fudge have demonstrated that, at the level of signification, the mutually erosive interpenetrations characteristic of all binary configurations apply here, too. That is, the boundaries of human and animal are foundationally blurred by the fact that neither enclosing concept can proceed without the other as its negative case. See Bruce Boehrer, *Shakespeare among the Animals: Nature and Society in the Drama of Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); and Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), and *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> The dispersedly soul-ful Aristotelian picture broadly distributes "soul" by using it to name that factor which makes a thing alive, as opposed to the exclusively human souledness we see in Judeo-Christian accounts; see Aristotle, *De anima*, in *On the Soul*, trans. W. S. Hett (London: William Heinemann, 1957), 2.2–3 (73–85). See also Katharine Park, "The Organic Soul," and Eckhard Kessler, "The Intellective Soul," both in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, gen. ed. Charles Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 464–84, 485–534.

<sup>13</sup> Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis (1965; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998), 5.

<sup>14</sup> In assertions of human uniqueness, these traditions could easily be hybridized and often were. See, for example, *The Covrtyer of Covnt Baldessar Castilio Diuinded into Foure Bookes*, trans. Thomas Hoby (London, 1561), book 4, sig. Tt1v. On Portia's German suitor in *The Merchant of Venice*, who "When he is best, he is a little worse than a man, and when he is worst he is little better than a beast" (1.2.86–87), see Boehrer (1–5, esp. 1).

<sup>15</sup> Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004), 150 (emphasis added).

Whether speaking philosophically or materially, then, early modern man was not measured by the contemporary dualistic terms of a human-animal divide.

For Pico, human exceptionalism is a positive source of wonder and celebration. He presents a kind of providential exceptionalism, one where an omniscient man is alone endowed with the capacity to self-fashion; his essence is existential (to be formed) rather than “natural” or inbuilt.<sup>17</sup> Rather than standing opposite to beasts in a human-animal divide, this man possesses the attributes of each element of the cosmos in order to complete the self-fashioning task he alone is assigned—despite the deeply ironic fact that it takes both plant fertility and a chameleon to represent him. In Shakespeare’s version of this menagerie-man (an account given of Ajax in *Troilus and Cressida*), “This man . . . hath robbed many beasts of their particular additions. He is as valiant as the lion, churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant” (1.2.19–21). In *The Tempest*, a dazzled Ferdinand even applies the plenary human principle across the otherwise strong barrier of gender difference to praise Miranda: “But you, oh, you, / So perfect and so peerless, are created / Of every creature’s best!” (3.1.46–48). These notions instance human exceptionalism, to be sure, but it is an exceptionalism fueled by nonbinary and potentially antiexceptionalist material.

Common phrasings in early modern English likewise suggest a less binary and more capacious demographic. Indeed, the word “animal” itself is, in relative terms, uncommon. As one of the banditti in *Timon of Athens* urges, “We cannot live on grass, on berries, water, / As beasts and birdes and fishes” (4.3.427–28). This inventory-like list draws its cadences from Genesis. In the sixteenth-century English Bible, the larger group “living creatures” is more frequently presented in list fashion by spelling out “the fish of the sea,” “the foule of the heauen,” and “euery beast of the fieelde.”<sup>18</sup> These familiar formulations appear widely across early modern writing. Indeed, the separate mention of beasts, birds, and fishes

<sup>17</sup> In contemporary philosophical contexts, Agamben offers an astoundingly similar model of man, although without Pico’s explicit celebratory tone. Critiquing Carolus Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* (1735), Agamben writes, “To define the human not through any *nota characteristic*, but rather through his self-knowledge, means that man is the being which recognizes itself as such, that *man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human*.” Agamben’s conclusion remains human-exceptionalist: he calls for an end to positive articulations of the human in favor of a revelation of “the central emptiness, the hiatus that—within man—separates man and animal.” In this respect, Agamben’s man shares his DNA with those rescued by Prometheus in the *Protagoras* (discussed further below): he is an animal without properties or characteristics. Unlike either the *Protagoras* or *King Lear*, however, Agamben reasserts a signature animal deficit with almost positivist certainty; there exists an emptiness that (all) animals lack. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), 26, 92.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1:26, 2:19, et passim. These and subsequent citations are from the Geneva Bible; see *The Bible: That Is, the Holy Scriptures Contained in the Olde and New Testament . . .*, STC 2166 (London, 1595). Further references to this edition appear in the text, unless otherwise noted.

conveys a sense of quasi-proprietary domains or spheres of action for diverse animal kinds.<sup>19</sup>

As is also evident in this itemizing formulation, the more likely term is “beast.” However, “beast” offers no direct synonym for the modern word “animal,” since “beast” (at least when referring to nonhumans) normally intends a land creature, usually a quadruped or, more narrowly, a livestock animal. The evident bias in Shakespeare’s usage on this point is simply staggering: while his works contain 141 instances of the term “beast” and 127 instances of the term “creature,” the word “animal” appears *only 8 times*.<sup>20</sup> For each of these three terms, Shakespeare’s reference is sometimes to “humans” and sometimes to “animals.” Another focused test for this less binary sense appears in the seventeenth-century translation of William Harvey’s 1628 treatise on the circulation of the blood, *De Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus*. It is as likely to translate Harvey’s Latin term “*animal*” and its declensions as “creatures” or “living creatures” as it is to use the “English” term “animal.”<sup>21</sup> In its most extreme formulation, then, the blunt category of “the animal” (a homogenizing conception whose “*bêtise*,” or “asininity,” Jacques Derrida derides)<sup>22</sup> and the particularly binary human-animal divide it serves are creatures of a later modernity and the lingering philosophical stagecraft of its Enlightenment inheritance.

Nevertheless, if we take early modernity—in official terms, and on the whole—to subscribe to a less simply binary but still predominantly human exceptionalist view, we must stop to puzzle the implications of *King Lear*’s extraordinarily downbeat instance. Man normally appears as at once the condensed expression and the ultimate triumph of divine creation. To give only two concise examples, the anatomist Andreas Vesalius refers to man as “the most perfect of all creatures . . . fitly called a microcosm by the ancients” and Sir Walter Raleigh describes man as “a little world . . . an abstract or model, or brief story of the universal.”<sup>23</sup> But

<sup>19</sup> Duke Senior in *As You Like It* attends to this sense of proprietary domains when he questions how bucolic his court’s resort to Arden really is, given the deer hunting that comes with it: “And yet it irks me,” he muses, “the poor dappled fools, / Being native burghers of this desert city, / Should in their own confines . . . / Have their round haunches gored” (2.1.22–25).

<sup>20</sup> See Martin Spevack, *The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1973), 96–97, 250–51.

<sup>21</sup> See my “Invisible Parts: Animals and the Renaissance Anatomies of Human Exceptionalism,” in *Animal Encounters*, ed. Tom Tyler and Manuela S. Rossini (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 137–57. See also William Harvey, *The Anatomical Exercises: “De Motu Cordis” and “De Circulatione Sanguinis” in English Translation*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (1953; repr., New York: Dover, 1995), ii et passim. For a profound treatment of the theological and theoretical implications of “creatureliness,” see Julia Reinhard Lupton, “Creature Caliban,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51 (2000): 1–23.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida, 400.

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Vesalius, “To the Divine Charles V. . .,” in “*On the Fabric of the Human Body*,” *An Annotated Translation of the 1543 and 1555 Editions of Andreas Vesalius’ “De Humani Corporis Fabrica,”* ed. and trans. Daniel Garrison and Malcolm Hast (Evanston: Northwestern UP,



Shakespeare here does something quite different and disassociates man from this perfection. *King Lear* positions man not as the paragon of creation or even, in Hamlet's sharp-toothed variant, "the paragon of animals" (2.2.308). Man remains exceptional, certainly, but in *King Lear* he is creation's *negative* exception.

By what logic can this "human negative exceptionality" be articulated—in the play and in the period? From what standpoints might humanness be reckoned calamitous, instead of wondrous, as Pico finds it? Moreover, if *King Lear* measures humanness in terms of a negative exceptionalism, how does that affect our historical sense of the constellation of beings from which this human is excepted? In considering these questions, I offer not a holistic reading of the play, but an archaeology of the terms of what may be its most singular statement. By unearthing the animal underpinnings of Lear's exclamation on man, I hope to animate a broad concept of "zoography": those discourses and modes of writing that are undergirded by animal or broadly taxonomic structures of reference across species. A critical conception of zoographic discourse clarifies the broad impact of period practices of animal specification, and it also gives a name to thought (whether pre- or post-Cartesian) that runs in antiexceptionalist directions. In the context of *King Lear*, this zoographic dimension draws extensively on the genre—or discipline—of natural history.

Before turning to Renaissance natural history, however, I want to attend briefly to one other possible basis for human negative exceptionalism (or even a theology of human abjection): the downside risk inherent in the proposition of an immortal soul. The possession of an undying soul that escapes the "this-world-only-ness" circumscribing the lives of other creatures represents the key human exceptionalist criterion in contexts immediately before Descartes. As a point of comparative "anatomy," having such a soul is a good thing; it provides access to eternity in accord with various theological dispensations of salvation. But this unique possession of an immortal soul also exposes humans to the unique risk of the possibility of sin. A concise example of this reflection—from Donne's verse epistle "Sir, More than Kisses"—goes like this:

In best understandings, sin began,  
Angels sinned first, then devils, and then man.  
Only perchance beasts sin not; wretched we  
Are beasts in all, but white integrity.<sup>24</sup>

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2003), <http://vesalius.northwestern.edu> (accessed 31 January 2008); and Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* [1614], in *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh*, ed. Thomas Birch and William Oldys (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1829), 2:58, section 5. The classic discussion of microcosmic man is Leonard Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975).

<sup>24</sup> John Donne, "To Sir Henry Wotton," in *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), ll. 39–42.

Beasts, then, are immune to sin; they can be seen to possess a certain “integrity,” even a “white” integrity, that “we” lack, to our harm.<sup>25</sup>

As Donne exclaims more passionately in one of the Holy Sonnets, this possession of a soul makes man vulnerable in ways that no other part of the cosmos is:

If poisonous minerals, and if that tree,  
Whose fruit threw death on else immortal us,  
If lecherous goats, if serpents envious  
Cannot be damned; alas, why should I be?<sup>26</sup>

From this standpoint, the soul is an Achilles heel, displacing even the vulnerable body as humanity’s weak point. In a related but less ambivalent gesture, Nietzsche would lament mankind’s evolutionary reliance on consciousness as a reduction to our “weakest and most fallible organ.”<sup>27</sup> Man stands categorically above the beasts for Donne, to be sure; but his distinction is the ambivalent one of possessing a unique capacity to swerve, or fall, from type. A rational soul is “proper” to man, but it follows inevitably that the capacity for improper choice is thus his too. While this risky side effect of a rational soul is to be preferred to a “brute” reliance on the allegedly automatic functions of instinct, careful consideration of the categorical apartness of humanity, like Donne’s, begins to muddy the values that the distinction is supposed to support.

I have sketched out the scenario for a human negative exceptionalism based in theological considerations, a scenario grounded in the uniquely human vulnerability that the privilege (and risk) of one kind of soul entails. But there are inherent limits to this doubtful line of thinking; regretting the soul—what Macbeth concisely terms “mine eternal jewel” (3.1.69)—does not comport, ultimately, with religious first principles, which necessitate that such doubt be cut off, overcome, or answered. This is, in fact, exactly what Donne goes on to do. Once he questions damnation—asking, “Why me and not goats?”—he cuts short the inquiry with self-critique: “Who am I that dare dispute with thee

<sup>25</sup> While in the human racial contexts of *Titus Andronicus*, whiteness indicates a lack of bodily integrity (“Ye white-limed walls! Ye alehouse painted signs! / Coal black is better than another hue / In that it scorns to bear another hue” [4.2.99–101]), the brilliantly white-coated ermine provides the best referent for this animal whiteness. In Henry Peacham’s emblem on this animal’s purity, he proclaims that it prefers to be devoured by the dogs than to “defile his daintie skinne” in muddy places, shaming those who, by comparison to the beast, “not care a rush, / With how much filth, their mindes bespotted are.” See *Minerva Britanna or a Garden of Heroical Deuises* (London, 1612), 75.

<sup>26</sup> Donne, “Holy Sonnet IX,” in *Complete English Poems*, ll. 1–4.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “*On the Genealogy of Morals*” and “*Ecco Homo*,” trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollindale (New York: Vintage, 1967), “*On the Genealogy of Morals*,” 2.16.

/ O God?"<sup>28</sup> Religious faith does not support a fully negative exceptionalist assessment of the human soul's meaning.

These available theological and skeptical grounds, however, do not specifically account for the human negative exceptionalism of Lear's exclamation. Obviously, the status of faith is under the most extreme question in the play; the restoration of orthodoxy and faith so evident in Donne is notoriously absent. In terms of the connections between theological skepticism and a zoographic reading, William R. Elton describes what he terms "the beast-in-man pattern" (the notion of a human capacity to descend to bestiality), which he helpfully considers an aspect of Lear's "piety-skepticism configuration."<sup>29</sup> As Elton elaborates, beast-in-man patterns in "apologetic tracts demonstrate the skeptical affiliations" of Lear's "equation" of the cosmic positions of "man and beasts."<sup>30</sup> The function of bestiality in this formulation, however, remains primarily engaged with a theological human-exceptionalist model of humankind, one in which humankind sacrifices its privilege and is brought down low, like a beast and as a beast, by subtraction and weakness. Lear begins by equating the human and animal when he seeks to be "a comrade with the wolf and owl" (2.4.211), and he immediately recasts that comradeship in these negative terms, concluding, "Man's life is cheap as beast's" (l. 269). As I hope to show, however, Lear takes humans down one critical increment further, and by a different metric than the familiar one that figures animals through lack.

In keeping with his pursuit of a theologically oriented skepticism, Elton further suggests that "to appreciate *King Lear*, less a twentieth-century naturalistic view than a more exalted medieval and early Renaissance view of man's hierarchical place . . . is requisite."<sup>31</sup> For zoographic purposes, however, to fix this traditional hierarchy as the horizon of reading is to restrain the range of its alternatives and limit potential skepticisms by kind. Without advocating a "twentieth-century naturalistic view," the balance of my comments explores how Lear's language depends less on a theologically determined skepticism that equates man and beast and more on a sixteenth-century natural-historical view, one drawn from the vocabularies of a thriving world of natural history writing in which pagan, secular, and protoscientific discourses all have their force. In animal contexts, natural history's impact shows how a relay of mind-body dualism (from religious belief to Cartesian philosophy) had a contradictory and sometimes rival mode of human specification based instead on cross-species reference. In the contexts of

<sup>28</sup> Donne, "Holy Sonnet IX," ll. 9–10.

<sup>29</sup> William R. Elton, *King Lear and the Gods* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1966), 191.

<sup>30</sup> Elton, 192, 190.

<sup>31</sup> Elton, 192.

*King Lear*, this means considering exposure to the storm as a literally elemental question of weather on skin.

#### THE EARLY MODERN HISTORY OF NATURE

Modern science since Darwin has engaged the long work of undoing our largely post-Romantic sense of “Nature” as an entity that presides homogeneously over time, moving us reluctantly towards an unfixed nature whose very “processes” might unfold irregularly and unpredictably; we discover a natural history of ruptures (or, increasingly, disasters). Natural history writing at the seventeenth century’s turn is both “literature” and “science,” before those practices had come to be seen as separate disciplines. It operated compendiously as a general report on knowledge, a narrative sum total of things known about the broadest range of phenomena; there was no sense of evolutionary change, but there were marvels. Nicholas Jardine and Emma Spary assert the “importance of the roles assigned to natural history in the commonwealth of learning”; they describe its status as a kind of “universal discipline, prior to political social, and moral order,” one that shared with “civil and sacred history in the revelation of the workings of divine providence” and that served as the ground for both speculative natural philosophy and more pragmatic efforts to ameliorate the conditions of life.<sup>32</sup> Its main instance and ongoing model was Pliny the Elder’s *Historia naturalis*, from the first century AD; this encyclopedic text held great sway in the early modern period, due to its central place in the grammar school Latin curriculum and in vernacular translations such as Philemon Holland’s, published in 1601. Indeed, early modern authors drew some of their most memorable animal ideas from Pliny’s natural history, including favorite notions about beavers’ “stones” and bear cubs being born without shape.<sup>33</sup>

Natural history’s major English Renaissance iteration is Francis Bacon’s 1605 *Advancement of Learning*, which, with a modern boldness, even proposes to outline things not yet known in “kalendars of doubts.” Bacon conveys the scope and inclusiveness of the genre when he defines natural history as “of three

<sup>32</sup> Nicholas Jardine and Emma Spary, “The Natures of Cultural History,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. N. Jardine, J. A. Secord, and E. C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 3–13, esp. 3.

<sup>33</sup> “The Bievers . . . gueld themselves, when they see how neere they are driven, and bee in danger of the hunters: as knowing full well, that chased they bee for their genetioires: and these their stones, Physicians call Castoreum.” Of bear cubs: “At the first, they seeme to be a lumpe of white flesh without all form, little bigger than rattons, without eyes, and wanting hair; onely there is some shew and apparence of claws that put forth. This rude lumpe, with licking they fashion by little and little into some shape.” See *The Historie of the World. Commonly Called, the Natvrall Historie of C. Plinius Secvndvs*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1601), 8.30, 8.36 (pages 212, 215–16) (cited below as “Pliny”).

sorts: of nature in course; of nature erring or varying; and of nature altered or wrought; that is, history of creatures, history of marvels, and history of arts.”<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the divisions and subdivisions of Pliny’s “Inventorie or Index” lay out the *Historia*’s comprehensive eclecticism. The *Historia* approaches the universe by means of astronomy and traverses the earth by means of geography; it offers a section on “the woonderfull shapes of men in *diverse countries*”; it catalogues “land creatures, and their kinds,” “all fishes, and creatures of the water,” “flying fouls and birds,” and “Insects” (each in its own chapter), giving extensive coverage to pharmacology, mining and minerals, painting, sculpture, and architecture.<sup>35</sup> Capacious, even rambling, natural history aspires to a maximally comprehensive documentation of what exists.

In a recent account, historian of science Brian W. Ogilvie usefully characterizes early modern natural history as a “science of describing.” Starting with the beginnings of natural history in the late fifteenth century (when Renaissance humanist philology sought to reconstruct texts of classical natural description), Ogilvie focuses on the sixteenth-century additive practice of cataloguing new species. His analysis concentrates on botany rather than zoology; plant encyclopedias vastly outnumbered histories of animals, mainly because of botany’s practical role in the *materia medica*, or pharmacology.<sup>36</sup> For complex professional and affective reasons, however, the collecting impulse at the heart of sixteenth-century natural description eventually so privileged the discovery of the “new” as an end in itself that the medical rationale faded. Key botanists shifted their attention to growth and form over medical application; over the century’s course, as some became more interested in “uncommon plants,” novelties (like the famous black tulip), or decorative flowers, the pretense of medical usefulness was abandoned.<sup>37</sup>

In this shift, botany became more like zoography, insofar as the animal encyclopedias had never appealed primarily to utility (medical or otherwise), let alone to a sense of order. Instead, period zoography appealed more directly to a proliferative aesthetic, one driven by curiosity and inflected by a taste for the fantastic. As David Freedberg emphasizes, natural historians “began with a commitment to the local and, never relinquishing that, ended by reaching across oceans and into the starry heavens”; their passion for accumulating data meant

<sup>34</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. William Aldis Wright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), book 2, 8.5, 1.2.

<sup>35</sup> Pliny, sigs. a4v, a1r.

<sup>36</sup> Brian W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006), 49–50. Animal encyclopedias, too, had referred to medical applications for animal parts and substances, but practical or applied zoology came more to the fore in the seventeenth century, with the growth of physiological investigation (50, 51).

<sup>37</sup> Ogilvie, 38–46.

that their work “stopped short of all but the most perfunctory of theories” of a larger or systemic order.<sup>38</sup> In Ogilvie’s account of the later, seventeenth-century demise of natural history as a mode of knowledge, we see a shift away from its focus on particular description, toward systematic classification and modern, ordered taxonomies instead.<sup>39</sup> (Recall the title of Carolus Linnaeus’s pivotal 1735 text: *Systema Naturae*). A more systematic classificatory effort, of course, requires as much likening of creatures as differentiations of them.

In this context of a passion for cumulative inventories, the exemplary early modern zoographic work is Conrad Gesner’s massive *Historia Animalium*, published in Zurich in four parts (with separate volumes on live-bearing quadrupeds, egg-laying quadrupeds, birds, and aquatic creatures) between 1551 and 1558.<sup>40</sup> Gesner’s history of animals was produced by an elaborate network of international correspondents, as Aristotle’s had been, and it brought together kinds of information that the modern disciplines would later separate. For each animal entry, Gesner “included a picture, a learned account of its name in several languages, a physical description, an account of its habits, the medical use of its parts, its use in food, and a large section he called philology that summarized references to the animal in history, literature, and art.”<sup>41</sup> Gesner and his vernacular adaptors (like the Englishman Edward Topsell, who published *The Historie of Fovre-Footed Beastes* in 1607) offered what now seems like a crazy quilt of knowledge, like the “Chinese encyclopædia” noted by Jorge Luis Borges and enshrined in the opening paragraph of Michel Foucault’s *Order of Things*, where Foucault comments on the present impossibility of its strange taxonomy.<sup>42</sup> In this, these zoographers simply followed Pliny’s example of a formally capacious approach to information.

Thus, their texts are not formless, although they may be “undisciplined”; their organization privileges a commitment to the description of particulars over any quest for a general or biologically systematic classificatory scheme. One zoographic effect of this pervasive sixteenth-century governance by particulars is a dispersed attribution of what I am calling “animal sovereignty” across the various “kinds” or species of creatures. If before Descartes the conglomerated

<sup>38</sup> David Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx: Galileo, His Friends, and the Beginnings of Modern Natural History* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002), 10.

<sup>39</sup> Ogilvie, 271.

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed account of one chapter of Gesner, on the fox, see William B. Ashworth Jr., “Emblematic Natural History of the Renaissance,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, 17–37, esp. 17–18. Ashworth calls the Gesner volumes “the most widely read of all Renaissance natural histories” (17).

<sup>41</sup> Ogilvie, 44.

<sup>42</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), xv.

singular so familiar to us as “the animal” had less force, there were instead *several* categories of living kinds—the beasts of the field, or land creatures; the fish of the sea; the birds of the air—and within those categories, open-ended enumerations of individuated kinds unfolded.

#### ANIMAL SOVEREIGNTY

Although animals chronologically come first in the account of creation in Genesis, with the arrival of man they are subjected to the newcomer: “Let vs make man in our image according to our likenesse, and let them rule ouer the fish of the sea, and ouer the foule of the heauen, and ouer the beastes, and ouer all the earth, and ouer euery thing that creepeth and moueth on the earth” (Genesis 1:26). The 1611 King James translation varies slightly from the Geneva Bible’s by using the term “dominion.”<sup>43</sup> The human authority established in Genesis is so central to the concept of “the animal” as we know it that “sovereignty” may be the last thing that comes to mind as an attribute of animals.<sup>44</sup> The Genesis story subordinates animals to man and situates them as the law’s first subjects (and, after the Fall, its abjects). However, the “humanity” of sovereignty as an attribute is equivocal indeed. A telling example (from George Gascoigne and Francis Kinweltershe’s 1566 *Jocasta*) makes vivid the central place of animal submission in a conception of sovereignty: “A mightie Conquerour . . . not content to haue subdued many Princes, and taken from them their kingdomes and dominions, did . . . cause those Kinges whome he had so ouercome, to drawe in his Chariot like Beastes and Oxen, thereby to content his unbrideled ambitious desire.”<sup>45</sup> The extremity of sovereign force doubly requires animal reference to represent it: its “subjects” are made beasts and its extremity is measured as “unbrideled.” Likewise, in *1 Tamburlaine the Great*, Tamburlaine dramatizes his triumph by harnessing defeated kings to his chariot, “with bits in their mouths, reins in his left hand, [and] in his right hand a whip, with which

<sup>43</sup> “Let vs make man in our Image, after our likenesse: and let them haue dominion ouer the fish of the sea, and ouer the foule of the aire, and ouer the cattell, and ouer all the earth, and ouer euery creeping thing that creepeth vpon the earth.” *The Holy Bible, Conteyning the Old Testament, and the New . . .*, STC 2216 (London, 1611), Genesis 1:20–26, esp. 1:26.

<sup>44</sup> Contemporary conceptions of sovereignty (most evident in renewed critical attention to political theorist Carl Schmitt’s extensive considerations of global power and states of exception to constitutional authority) represent a specific evolution of the concept, one with its pivotal chapters in just these contexts of the Reformation and of European absolutism. See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, ed. and trans. George Schwab (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> *Jocasta*, trans. George Gascoigne and Francis Kinweltershe, in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres . . .* (London, 1573), description of the first dumb show, 73 (ll. 11–15).

he scourges them," shouting "Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia!"<sup>46</sup> Montaigne himself challenges the account of human power over animals as fictional, calling it "that imaginary Soveraigntie, that some give and ascribe vnto vs aboute all other creatures."<sup>47</sup> Whether in a deconstructive or mythographic sense, animals play a requisite role in the production of human political sovereignty in the first instance.

"Sovereignty," however, further operates in distinct but related ways in early modernity. In Philemon Holland's translation, for example, Pliny refers to "a certaine hearbe called Calaminth, most soveraigne and singular against the biting of Serpents: wherewith the Lizards, whensoever they have fought with them, cure their wounds by applying it thereto" and to "the root of a wild rose, called the sweet Brier or Eglantine" as the "sure and soveraigne remedie for them that are bitten with a mad dog."<sup>48</sup> The exotic "root of Costus," he writes, "is of a most excellent and soveraign smell," while "the Olive tree also hath a kind of liquor which issueth out of it: and thereof is compounded a certain soveraign salve . . . which is singular good to draw up wounds, and to heale them cleane."<sup>49</sup> What is "sovereign" is what is "singular," "sure," and "excellent." Obviously, this pattern of usage refers to the purposes of botanical natural history that we have just considered: the specification of the pharmacopeia of nature, in which the sovereign-ness of a remedy is what matters most about it. The adjective "sovereign" is widely used, then, to describe the specific properties of particular features of the natural world—their potencies—with an almost performative emphasis on their insuperable efficaciousness or operation.

The "properties" of a thing make it sovereign; the unfolding or enactment of those sovereign properties makes that thing the kind or sort of thing that it is. This sense of operative properties defines animal natures, as well as those of plants. In Thomas Elyot's 1531 *Boke of the Governour*, we hear this impulse to ramifying constitutional dispersal in the cosmic structure. Assessing the placement of all elements of the cosmos "accordynge to the soueraintie of theyr natures," he claims that "euery kynde of trees / herbes / birdes / beaustis / and fishes / besyde theyr diuersitie of fourmes / haue . . . a peculier disposition *appropriated* vnto them."<sup>50</sup> The term "appropriated" goes further than the more usual term, "appointed," to suggest that dispositions are held as "proper" "property"—they are self-owned. Such dispositions are not "peculier" in the sense

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One*, in *The Complete Plays*, ed. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 4.3 sd, l. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Montaigne, "Of Crueltie," 251.

<sup>48</sup> Pliny, 8.27, 41 (pages 210, 220).

<sup>49</sup> Pliny, 12.12, 17 (pages 364, 370).

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour* (London, 1531), sigs. A3r, A3v (emphasis added).



that they are “odd,” but in the sense that they are consistently particularized and unique. Rebecca Bushnell offers a helpful definition from Thomas Wilson’s *Rule of Reason* (1551): “Property is a natural proneness and manner of doing, which agreeth to one kind, and to the same only.”<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, John Caius (author of the first book of dog breeds in England, a physician, and the English correspondent for Gesner’s volumes) stresses the power of particularity in his subtitle to *Of English Dogges* in 1576. It lists “the diuersities, the names, the natures, and the properties” of different dogs as the book’s subject.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the phrase “to differ like dogs” reflected a sense of extreme variety and not adversarial difference.<sup>53</sup> Caius’s preface attests that “an ignoraunt man woulde neuer haue bene drawne into this opinion, to thincke that there had bene in England such variety & choise of dogges, in all respectes . . . so diuerse and vnlike.” Referring to the rank of hunting dogs, Caius advances the proposition that “they cannot all be reduced and brought vnder one sorte”; that he will have to explore “certaine specialties” in order to “apply to them their proper and peculier names.”<sup>54</sup> Proper and peculiar: the conjunction and the context indicate these words mean the same thing, that the proper is (the) peculiar, in a distributive language of governing properties, sovereign endowments, or “manner[s] of doing.”<sup>55</sup>

What Elyot refers to as a “peculier disposition,” Shakespeare calls a “particular addition.” We have already seen that in *Troilus and Cressida*, the description of Ajax inverts the Prometheus story to rob the lion, the bear, the elephant, et cetera, of “their particular additions”; Shakespeare coyly uses just the same logic in Sonnet 20 to describe gender differentiation (Nature “by addition me of thee defeated, / By adding one thing to my purpose nothing” (ll. 11–12)).<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Rebecca Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996), 80, citing Thomas Wilson, *The Rule of Reason, Conteyning the Arte of Logique* (London, 1551), sig. B7v.

<sup>52</sup> John Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges, the Diuersities, the Names, the Natures, and the Properties*, trans. Abraham Fleming (London, 1576).

<sup>53</sup> In 1653, Izaak Walton proposed that the various kinds of bait “differ as much as dogs do.” See Izaak Walton and Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Angler, or The Contemplative Man’s Recreation* (New York: Modern Library, 1998), 221.

<sup>54</sup> Caius, “To the well disposed Reader” (sig. A4r); sig. B2r (fol. 4).

<sup>55</sup> In contemporary contexts, this sense of animal sovereignty seems to be a historical precursor of the “capabilities” model for animal rights recently elaborated by Martha C. Nussbaum in *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2006). See also the view of capabilities articulated by the protagonist of Coetzee’s *Lives of Animals*, who sets “to be full of being” as a standard: “the sensation—a heavily affective sensation—of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world.” See J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 33.

<sup>56</sup> Although it exceeds the scope of the present essay to pursue this very important point, we can glimpse the degree to which gender in early modernity can be read as a case of “breed” or even

His fullest exploration of this formula, though, occurs in *Macbeth*, and it relies directly on Caius's inventory. Macbeth's incitement of Banquo's murderers to their bloody task involves challenging them about whether or not they are really "men." When they avow that they are, Macbeth undermines this claim as a meaningless universal, and he uses the degrees of difference expressed by dog breed distinctions to do so:

Ay, in the catalogue you go for men,  
As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,  
Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves are clept  
All by the name of dogs.

(*Macbeth*, 3.1.93–96)

For Shakespeare here, the idea that all these are "clept / All by the name of dogs" falsifies them somehow. What really matters are the differences among them; the most important categorization, what Shakespeare calls the "valued file" (l. 96) is one that

Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,  
The housekeeper, the hunter, every one  
According to the gift which bounteous nature  
Hath in him closed, whereby he does receive  
Particular addition, from the bill  
That writes them all alike.

(ll. 97–102)

Since the more valued catalogue is the one that "distinguishes," we see the same valorization of an itemization of proliferating difference as in Caius's "catalogue." The particular addition is that property which makes a thing what it is and makes it go how it goes.<sup>57</sup> Following a "proper" course does not mainly mean one restrained to juridical or decorous limits, but a course "owned by" or

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"species" difference, insofar as "particular additions" determine each of these categories. In the period, gender is routinely referred to as a "kind." See my "Nature's Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness," *Modern Philology* 98 (2000): 183–210. In theological contexts, there was also a recurrent (if not fully mainstream) question about the humanity of women as such. See Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 12–14; Manfred P. Fleischer, "Are Women Human?"—The Debate of 1595 between Valens Acidalius and Simon Gediccus," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 12.2 (1981): 107–20; and Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 71–82.

<sup>57</sup> The metaphor of "nature's bias" encodes this sovereign, self-regulated power of motion in things, referring to the governing weight implanted in the ball in the game of bowls (discussed in Shannon, "Nature's Bias," esp. 210). See also Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Preface, Book I, Book VIII*, ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 54, 60.

pertaining specifically to the object or being in motion. It is a kind of self-title or virtual copyright in a creature's "own" way of working.

I will turn now to the ways that this animal sovereignty—with its terms of autonomous embodiment and notions of self-sufficiency drawn from the natural histories—comes to define human conditions. My case study will be *coatedness*. While animals appear sovereign, integral, and perfect in this respect, humans are marked by radical insufficiency. Important work by Ann Rosalind Jones, Peter Stallybrass, and others in material culture, gender, and performance has shown how, in early modernity, characteristics like sex or social station are effectively acquired through the visible fashionings of cloth, ranging from the markings of livery to cross-dressing onstage.<sup>58</sup> As I show here, the larger question of human estate also comes down to a matter of dress, or—more precisely—a state of undress. From this zoographic perspective, one in which extensive animal references are fundamental, beasts stand not only as the guarantors of the very idea of "Man" and suppliers of metaphor, but also as literal outfitters.<sup>59</sup> Even as period energies seem visibly dedicated to distinguishing man from beast, attention to the animal references structuring such discussions has the consequence of locating key terms used to define "Renaissance man" within the discourses pertaining to the creatures who populate the natural histories. A zoographic reading thus proceeds in tension with an anthropocentric confidence making man the ultimate measure for all things, then or now. Natural history shows us that particular species, instead, as uniquely diminished—"naked" in both literal and cosmic degrees.

#### BORROWED COATS

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Actaeon's pursuit of a stag leads him to discover, in its stead, the naked Diana bathing in a forest pool. A vividly Ovidian recompense is paid him. Diana

by and by doth spread  
A payre of lively olde Harts hornes upon his . . . head. . . .  
She wrappes him in a hairie hyde beset with speckled spottes,  
And planteth in him fearefulnessse. And so away he trottes,  
Full greatly wondring to him selfe what made him in that cace.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

<sup>59</sup> Donna Haraway might call this tangled companionship a historical instance of the "naturecultures" of knowledge itself. See *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 5 et passim.

<sup>60</sup> Ovid's "Metamorphoses": *The Arthur Golding Translation 1567*, ed. John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2000), 3.229–30, 233–35.

With this play on the word “case”—at once a set of circumstances and the body’s material form—Actaeon is dressed for death and ultimately brought down as a stag. While the poem hauntingly narrates the lingering human consciousness the hunter retains after losing his capacity for human speech, Actaeon’s “case,” in a fatal crash of species ontologies, is spelled out in his coat. Garbed in what Shakespeare in *As You Like It* calls the “leathern” and “velvet” hide of the deer (2.1.37, 50), Actaeon experiences the human dominion that the hunt is designed to enact.<sup>61</sup> This coat makes him vulnerable. But *proper* animal coats signified just the opposite. In Jones and Stallybrass’s compendious material history of the social meanings of clothing in the period, the zoontological question of whether such analysis might extend to animals “dressed” in their own “coats” does not arise. But in the archive of natural history, we see that the “coveredness” of animals—their not being really “naked”—figures their self-completeness or natural sufficiency: the integral animal comes equipped with a good-enough coat already on its back.

The moralizing potential of the integral animal is evident in George Wither’s emblem on “vertue” (Figure 1), from *A Collection of Emblemes* (1635).<sup>62</sup> It shows a crocodile, and it carries a long poetic gloss listing the weapons people hoard (pistols, swords, locks, and bars). But it goes on to claim that these defensive weapons often fail. Instead, Wither avows:

If, therefore, thou thy *Spoylers*, wilt beguile,  
Thou must be armed, like this *Crocodile*;  
Ev’n with such nat’rall *Armour* (ev’ry day)  
As no man can bestowe, or take away:  
For, spitefull *Malice*, at one time or other,  
Will pierce all borrowed *Armours*.

Animal coats not only provide actual clothing for man, who lacks a “nat’rall *Armour*”; as the emblem’s simile suggests, they also supply the compensatory metaphors that serve to supplement man’s lack of integral bodily provision. In either case, the supplement is “borrowed,” just as Lear’s characterization of a “poor, bare, forked animal” emphasizes.

The natural histories lavish enormous verbal and visual attention on the details of animal coverings. Here is Topsell’s vivid English distillation of Aristotle and Gesner on the hyena’s coat: the hyena has a “body like a wolfe, but much rougher haire, for it hath bristles like a horsses mane all along his back, & in the middle of his back it is a litle crooked or dented, the colour yellowish,

<sup>61</sup> On the cultures of the hunt, see Edward Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001).

<sup>62</sup> George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne* (London, 1635), book 2, illustration 50 (112).



Figure 1: "Vertue," in George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes* (1635), 112.

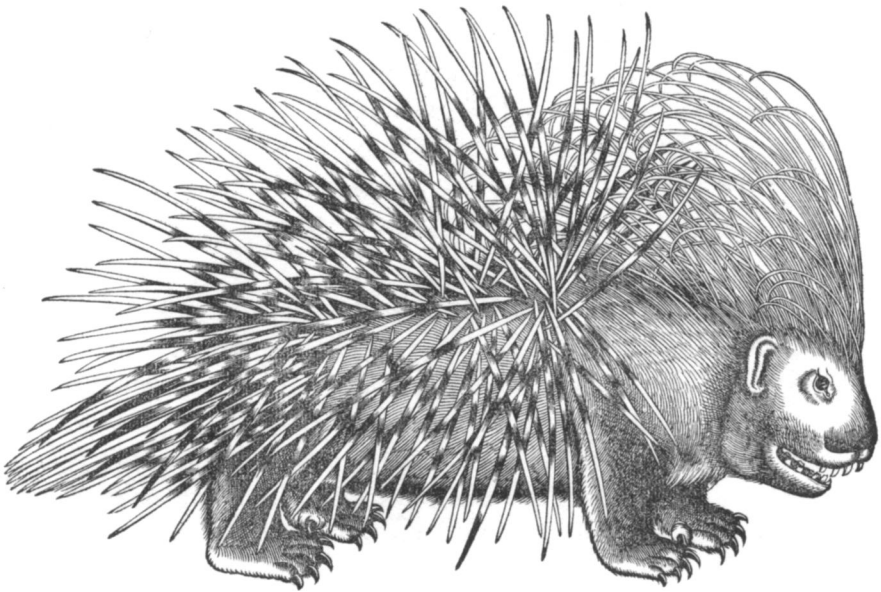


Figure 2: Porcupine, in Conrad Gesner, *Historia Animalium* (1551), 632.

but bespeckled on the sides with blew spots, which make him looke more terrible as if it had so many eies.”<sup>63</sup> In the case of the “deere-goat,” Topsell offers an extremely particular description along with speculation about the way the engineering specifications of this animal’s body support and protect its life and activity. He explains:

The colour [is] in the Winter blacke, and red, set one with another, the beard like a Goate, but more diuided and turned backward; his haire very long euen to his knees, a mane full of bristles, stretched out in length through his whole necke, but especially about the toppe of the shoulder blades, where it standeth like bunches, being in colour darker then in other parts of the body; and the hinder Legges are couered with longer and harder haire downe to the pasterne, (as I thinke) for no other cause but to defend them from harme in his leaping.<sup>64</sup>

The precision so evident in Topsell’s descriptions extends as well to the detailed illustrations of animal bodies and their equipage, most of which were original in Gesner and simply copied in the English volume. The image of Gesner’s porcupine, for example (Figure 2), betrays an almost forensic attention to the dangerous spines that defend the creature against predators, even illustrating differences among the types of spines outfitting its body. Like Wither’s crocodile, this creature wears its own, proper “Coat of Maile.” The hedgehog, likewise, bristles with self-protective gear, in its pelt and the finely rendered nails (Figure 3). As another example of the intensity of interest in animal coats, the image of the ram (Figure 4) exemplifies both the martially defensive natural provisioning of animals (with its elaborate horns) and the foul-weather preparedness made manifest in the creature’s shaggy wool, itself the very source of borrowed warmth for early modern humans. A good natural-historical description—just like the bodies it inventories—would be incomplete without a reckoning of the body’s surface in both its tactile richness and functional efficacy.

#### THE NAKED ANIMAL

Period writers invoke similar bodily specifications in human ethnographies of the inhabitants of the Americas. Here is Thomas Harriot’s description of “Princes of Virginia” among the indigenous peoples in *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*: “They weare the haire of their heades long and bynde opp the ende of thesame in a knot vnder their eares. Yet they cutt the topp of their heades from the forehead to the nape of the necke in manner of a cokscombe.” The “priests,” he goes on to say, “weare their heare cutt like a

<sup>63</sup> Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Fovre-Footed Beastes*, STC 24123 (London, 1607), 436.

<sup>64</sup> Topsell, 119–20.

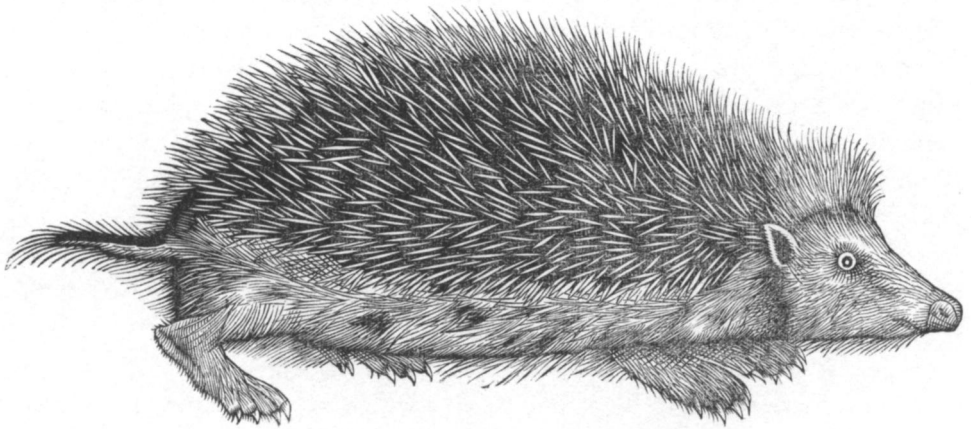


Figure 3: "Hedg-Hog," in Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Fovre-Footed Beastes* (1607), 277.

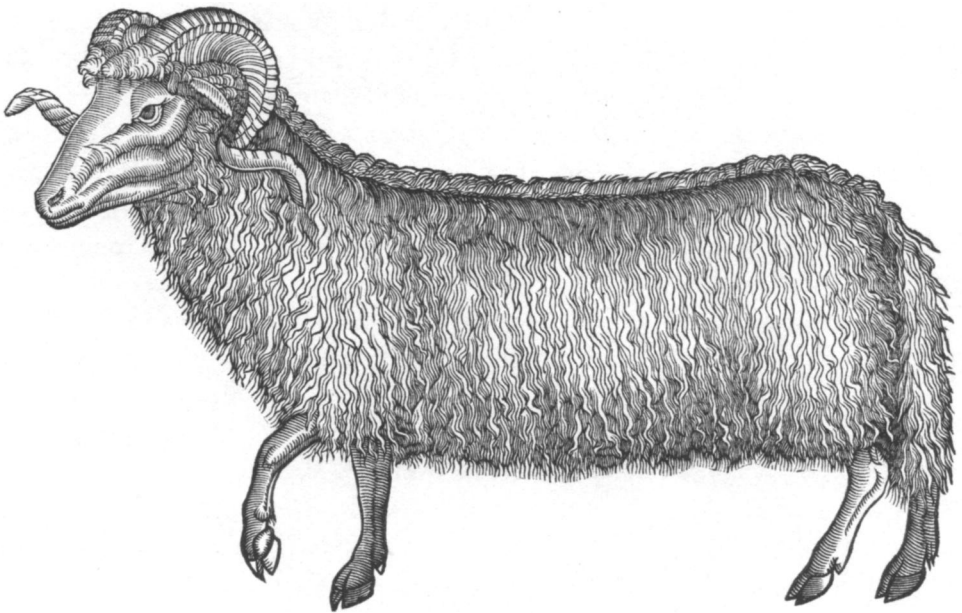


Figure 4: "The Ram," in Topsell, *The Historie of Fovre-Footed Beastes* (1607), 732.

creste, on the topps of thier heades as other doe, but the rest are cutt shorte, sauinge those which growe aboue their foreheads in manner of a perriwigge" (Figure 5). In each descriptive specification, we find cross-species comparisons made: "like a horsse's mane" and "in manner of a cokscombe" are typical of the particularity of natural-historical description. Such descriptions of the culture of hair, in Harriot's text, lead directly into discussions of dress or costume, which is a matter of "skinnes." Describing a "winter garment," Harriot reports how "skynnes are Dressed with the hair on, and lyned with other furred skinnes." Secotan priests (those of the "perriwigge" style), "weare a shorte clocke made of fine hares skinnes quilted with the hayre [fur] outwarde"; "the rest of thier bodie is naked."<sup>65</sup> As Montaigne ironically asks after listing the extensive relative virtues of the inhabitants of the New World, "All that is not very ill; but what of that? They weare no kinde of breeches or hosen."<sup>66</sup>

"The rest of thier bodie is naked." As what human being's is not? At the same time, nakedness seems to be a condition to which no other animal is subject. Indeed, nakedness versus coatedness may be as important an approximation of any distinguishing principle between "man and beast" as more familiar criteria, like sentience, the possession of language, social and moral punishments, the capacity to lie, cooking habits, tool use, the apprehension of death, or an eternal soul. One sense of the human as the "naked animal" derives, of course, from Genesis, where the accession to knowledge and sin triggers the shameful onset of a *new* estate: nakedness. Genesis describes Adam and Eve before the Fall, asserting "they were both naked . . . and were not ashamed" (2:25); the first thing the next chapter records after their eating the apple is that "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knewe that they were naked, and they sewed fig tree leaues together, and made themselues breeches" (3:7). It seems fair to say that the Fall engenders an active concept of nakedness, and certainly so in its sense as a new moral condition.

God, dissatisfied with the fig leaves they had managed to make on their own, covers the skin of Eden's departing citizens with the skins of others, borrowing their traveling coats from the furred beasts: "Vnto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coates of skinnes, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). As Jones and Stallybrass demonstrate, these animal skins are a form of "livery" for Adam and Eve, indicating their being bound to God.<sup>67</sup> Yet this lending, as a cross-species marker for the human sinner's identity as "God's," also raises an equivocal problem of cross-species relatedness. Martin Luther glossed this

<sup>65</sup> Harriott, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (Frankfort, 1590), sigs. A1r, A3r, B1r.

<sup>66</sup> Montaigne, "Of the Caniballes," 107.

<sup>67</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, 269.



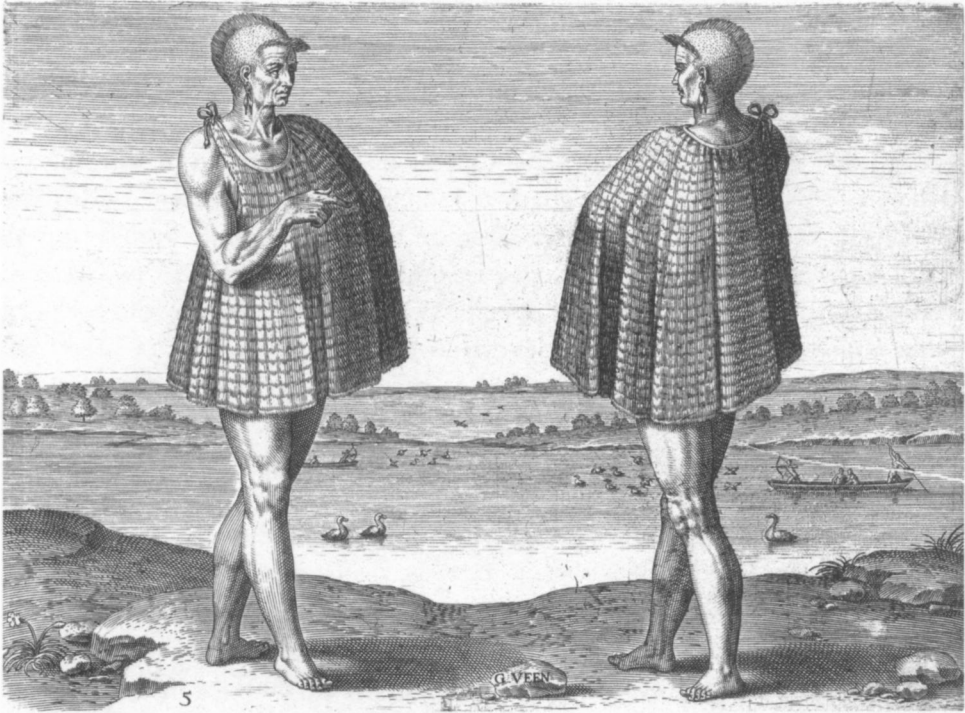


Figure 5: "On[e] of the Religeous men in the towne of Secota," in Thomas Harriot, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1590), sig. A3r.

Biblical passage to suggest an analogy between the animal whose skin has been taken and the body of man, arguing that its death was a reminder of ours: "God clothed them with skins of slain animals to remind them that they were mortal and lived in (*constant*) danger of death."<sup>68</sup> But such an analogy contradicts other aspects of the theological order of being, especially humankind's distinctive access to eternal life. Certainly the layering-on of a second skin, a more adequate one that originally belonged to another creature, spells out the radical insufficiency of man, not only *vis-à-vis* his need for the supplement of divine grace, but in terms of a dependency on some beastly addition to perfect a shortfall in the terms of human embodiment.

The instability of this solution to the cosmic exposure that human nakedness represents persistently troubled the security of the human in Renaissance natural histories. From that standpoint, man appears uniquely unequipped or underprovisioned. And despite the clear impact of Aristotelian biology on Renaissance natural history, Plato, too, has a major impact here by means of the Promethean story of the human lack of attributes or capabilities. Prometheus

<sup>68</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Commentary on "Genesis,"* trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 1958), 1:85–86; quoted in Jones and Stallybrass, 271.

and his brother Epimetheus were delegated a power of assigning abilities to all living creatures; Epimetheus begged the privilege for himself. After outfitting creatures with “defenses against mutual destruction” (that is, defended bodies and means of self-preservation), Epimetheus “devised for them protection against the weather . . . thick pelts and tough hides capable of warding off winter storms. . . . He also shod them, some with hooves, some with thick pads of bloodless skin.” When, however, he had “absentmindedly used up all the powers and abilities on the non-reasoning animals . . . he was left with the human race, completely unequipped.” Prometheus returns to discover “the other animals well provided with everything, [and] the human race . . . naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed,” and so he steals practical wisdom and fire from Hephaestus and Athena in order to provision man (a theft for which he was famously punished).<sup>69</sup> Pliny’s *Historia naturalis* tells the same story about underprovisioned man: “Of all other living creatures, man [Nature] hath brought forth all naked . . . To all the rest, given she hath sufficient to clad them everie one according to their kind: as namely, shells, cods, hard hides, prickes, shagge, bristles, haire, downe feathers, quilts, skales, and fleeces of wooll. . . . man alone, poore wretch, she hath laid all naked upon the bare earth.”<sup>70</sup> The descriptive particularity of this catalogue of coverings contrasts starkly with the characterization of “man alone” as wretchedly “all naked.”

Man is “wretched” not only in his literal nakedness, but also in his general unreadiness and unpreparedness for the world. Recurring evidence for this modulation from literal nakedness to cosmic underprovisioning refers to man’s need to be taught, usually under compulsion.<sup>71</sup> Pliny laments, “As for all other living creatures, there is not one, but by a secret instinct of nature knoweth his owne good, and whereto he is made able: some make use of their swift feet, others of their flight wings: some are strong of limme; others are apt to swimme, and practise the same: man onely knoweth nothing unlesse hee be taught.”<sup>72</sup> Man’s limited access to medical knowledge plays a special role in this respect. A dialogue in Plutarch’s much-circulated *Moralia* concludes that medical knowledge comes, for animals, “through the force and perfection of naturall vertue” and not, as for man, “by way of apprentissage.”<sup>73</sup> Plutarch

<sup>69</sup> Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992), 321a–321c.

<sup>70</sup> Pliny, “Proëme,” book 7 (page 152).

<sup>71</sup> This point is stressed in Giovanni Battista Gelli’s *Circe* (1549), which retells the episode from Homer’s *Odyssey* in which Ulysses and some men transformed into beasts debate the relative merits of human estate. See *Circes of Iohn Baptista Gello*, trans. Henry Iden (London, 1558).

<sup>72</sup> Pliny, “Proëme,” book 7 (page 152).

<sup>73</sup> Plutarch, *The Philosophie, Commonlie Called, the Morals Written by the Learned Philosopher Plutarch . . .*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1603), 569.

inverts conventional privileging of applied reason over what he calls natural reason (instinct), defining man's "undress" as a unique lack of knowledge—and a special ability to make mistakes. In Donne's meditations on his own near death and recovery, he argues that "we shrinke in our proportion, sink in our dignitie, in respect of verie meane creatures, who are *Phisicians* to themselves. The *Hart* that is pursued and wounded, they say, knowes an *Herbe*, which being eaten, throwes off the arrow. . . . [Man] is not his owne *Apothecary*, his owne *Phisician*, as they are."<sup>74</sup> To be physician to oneself sets a high standard of integral autonomy.

Many of these medical examples—and a great deal more of them—had been brought together in an entire chapter of Pliny's natural history. Its title argues the case for itself: "What Physicall hearbes certain creatures have shewed us, to wit, the Harts and Stags, the Lizards, Swallowes, Torteises, the Weasell, the Storke, the Bore, the Snake, Dragon, Panther, Elephant, Beares, stock Doves, house Doves, Cranes, and Ravens."<sup>75</sup> Clysters (learned from observations of the Egyptian ibis), bloodletting, and a host of herbal remedies and antivenoms all find their original instance in animal knowledge and medical practices. In the very grammars we have just seen Donne use, Pliny records that "the Bore, when hee is sicke, is his owne Physician, by eating yvie and crab-fishes, such especially as the sea casteth up to shore."<sup>76</sup> The species with the knowledge deficit is man, who not only requires the physical subsidy of another's skin, but also must borrow knowledge and techniques from beasts.<sup>77</sup>

The sovereign self-sufficiency claims for animals find their strongest early modern expositor in Montaigne, whose 1576 *Apologie for Raymond Sebond* may be the single most zoographic text in the archive. While most accounts of this essay treat its famous skepticism in a phenomenological and theological vein, the major ground of his assertion of the vanity of human knowledge is zoographic, even political (or zoopolitical). The essay proceeds largely from an observation of the diversity of animal embodiment: if we know that diverse

<sup>74</sup> John Donne, *Devotions on Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (Montreal: McGill-Queens UP, 1975), 20.

<sup>75</sup> Pliny, 8.27 (page 211).

<sup>76</sup> Pliny, 8.27 (page 210).

<sup>77</sup> These notions provide a fresh context for understanding *The Tempest's* Caliban, who provisions Prospero (whose status as an all-powerful knower or magus is thereby ironized) by "show[ing] [him] all the qualities o'th'isle, / The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile" (1.2.340–41). His knowing reassurance of the fearful Trinculo and Stephano—"Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises, / Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not" (3.2.137–38)—also derives from these conceits of classical natural-history writing. The grounds for Caliban's claim to the island, then, are about not only prior political tenure but also his knowledge of natural history.

species have varying sensory apparatuses, we can infer that our sensorium is only partial and not commensurate to the “truth.” Montaigne expostulates: “*Who knows . . . whether diuers effects of beasts, which exceede our capacitie, are produced by the facultie of some sense, that we want? And whether some of them, have by that meane a fuller and more perfect life then ours?*”<sup>78</sup> “Perfection” is a powerful physiological and moral concept in the period, one most familiar from naturalizations of male superiority over female incompleteness. Here, Montaigne borrows the term authorizing male power over females to describe the plausible, and sometimes likely, superiority of beasts to man.

Montaigne specifically explores the argument that man is left unequipped by nature (calling it a “daily” complaint that he hears), and he goes on to rehearse in luxuriant detail the Plinian catalogue of animal coverings.<sup>79</sup> These daily lamenters say that

man is the onely forsaken, and out-cast creature, naked on the bare earth, . . . having nothing to cover and arme himselfe withall but the spoile of others; whereas Nature hath clad and mantled all other creatures; some with shelles, some with huskes, with rindes, with haire, with wooll, with stings, with bristels, with hides, with mosse, with fethers, with skales, with fleeces, and with silke, according as their qualitie might need, or their condition require.<sup>80</sup>

While Montaigne argues that humankind, logically, must have been included in nature’s general endowment, he does so by means of an anti-human exceptionalist argument: “*Nature,*” he proposes, “*hath generally embraced all hir creatures: And there is not any, but she hath amply stored with all necessarie meanes.*”<sup>81</sup> By logical inference, if not by empirical assurances, man should be complete. Even so, Montaigne later restates the human complaint—in the specific terms of coatedness: “*Truely, when I consider man all naked . . . and view his defects, his naturall subjection, and manifold imperfections; I finde we have had much more reason to hide and cover our nakednes, than any creature else.*” He continues, “*We may be excused for borrowing those which nature had therein favored more than vs, with their beauties to adorne vs, and vnder their spoiles of wooll, of haire, of fethers, and of silke to shroude vs.*”<sup>82</sup> Pelt envy, perhaps? In any case, here, human species-being is spelled out in the lack of a coat.

<sup>78</sup> Montaigne, *Apologie for Raymond Sebond*, 343 (emphasis added).

<sup>79</sup> Pierre de La Primaudaye, writing in 1594, attributed this “complaint” to atheists (Elton, 193).

<sup>80</sup> Montaigne, *Apologie*, 262.

<sup>81</sup> Montaigne, *Apologie*, 262.

<sup>82</sup> Montaigne, *Apologie*, 280.

## ZOOGRAPHIC LEAR

I offer an end to these considerations by returning, at last, to *King Lear*. Abridged here in rough order, *Lear's* catalogue of animal references astonishes. Its menagerie includes dragons, monsters, brutish villains, goatish dispositions, the Dragon's Tail and Ursa Major, mongrels, curs, coxcombs, apish manners, hedge-sparrows, cuckoos, asses, horses, sea-monsters, detested kites, serpent's teeth, wolvisk visages, foxes, oysters, snails, a mongrel bitch, wagtails, rats, halcyon beaks, geese, bears, monkeys, ants, eels, sharp-toothed unkindness, vultures, wolves, owls, creatures, lions, cocks, lice, pelicans, hogs, dolphins, worms, sheep, civet cats, house cats, mastiffs, greyhounds, spaniels, bobtail tikes, swimming frogs, toads, tadpoles, wall-newts, mice, deer, vermin, nightingales, herring, boarish fangs, cowish terror, tigers, prey, dog-hearted daughters, crows, choughs, beetles, larks, wrens, furred gowns, swine, adders, butterflies, toad-spotted traitors, a dog, a horse, and a rat. This is not to count repetitions of these names or foul fiends, incubi, centaurs, demons, and spirits—to whatever taxonomic or cosmic order they may belong.

If such animal references uniquely populate the *Lear* text, then the presence of a naked man among the *dramatis animalia* of the play only completes the natural-historical circle. Edgar, in putting on a guise of madness, takes on "the basest and most poorest shape / That ever penury, in contempt of man, / Brought near to beast" (2.3.7–9). But it is his "nakedness" that establishes his classification. Edgar is routinely labeled "the naked fellow." When he recounts his strategy at the end of the play, he tells how he "shift[ed] / Into a madman's rags, / t'assume a semblance / That very dogs disdained" (5.3.190–92). As *Lear* opines, "Through tattered clothes small vices do appear; / Robes and furred gowns hide all" (4.6.164–65). Edgar's act of camouflage vividly imagines "Bedlam beggars" with "numbed and mortified arms," who prick and spot their bared skin with "pins, wooden pricks, nails, [and] sprigs of rosemary" (2.3.14–16). Only madmen, the logic goes, approach beastly immunity to such violence against the unprotected skin. Only beasts are adequately empowered and provisioned by nature to endure such exposure. From the zoographic standpoint I am outlining, Kent's cutting insult to Oswald that "A tailor made thee" (2.2.55–56) speaks not just to one class-presumptuous servant, but comprehensively of all humankind as a kind.

The storm that unfolds on the heath constitutes a set of "pins and pricks" to worry a skin inadequate to its assault. Indeed, this storm is ferocious enough, according to one Gentleman, that it makes even those self-sufficient animals take precautionary shelter; it makes "the cub-drawn bear [to] couch, / The lion and the belly-pinched wolf [to] / Keep their fur dry"; by comparison, he exclaims, *Lear* goes "unbonneted" (3.1.12–14). The Fool, too, notes this about *Lear*:

"Alack," he cries out, "bareheaded?" (3.2.60). Meanwhile, Kent even calls the physical force of weather on Lear's body "the *tyranny* of the open night" (3.4.2 [emphasis added]). Finally, in perhaps the play's most famous lines, the old king reads straight from the zoographic script provided by the natural histories that I have been describing. Contemplating "naked" Edgar (e.g., l. 28), he laments that Edgar "answer[s] with [his] uncovered body this extremity of the skies" (ll. 100–101). Posing what is often seen as an existential question, "Is man no more than this?" (ll. 101–2), he answers it zoographically. Lear calculates man's pathetic condition when unsubsidized by animal debt: "Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. . . . Thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (ll. 102–7). Offering to take off his borrowed coats and reduce himself to a human truth stripped of its animal supplements, he cries, "Off, off you lendings!" (l. 107). With animal indebtedness subtracted from the account, an insufficient humankind hovers not at nothing, but at something short even of that. As the natural histories show, a "poor, bare, forked animal," in its flagrant insufficiency, is barely an animal at all.

*Lear* thus not only anatomizes man, philosophically, and finds him wanting; it taxonomizes man, literally, and finds him naked. In this respect, Shakespeare draws on the writings of natural history that had shaped the curricula of the sixteenth century and informed the writings of all who were trained in them. Despite early modernity's reputation for an invention of humankind in terms of some new omnicompetence, *King Lear* exposes an abject humanity's underprovisioning in the face of the environment and its sheer incapacity before the great dramas of self-fashioning Pico had celebrated. When Lear disassembles the human edifice erected by thinkers such as Pico, however, he does not offer the zootopian community of a writer such as Montaigne, whose "generall throng" held out with equanimity a certain ideal of cross-species community. Instead, the reduction of human-ness falls past that leveling mark to enter the deficit territory usually reserved for beasts. Instead of containing all creaturely capacities in a plenary way, *Lear's* negative-exceptionalist man is *a creature without properties*, a natural-historical oxymoron whose embarrassment derives specifically from the protocols of embodiment developed and circulated so extensively by classical and vernacular encyclopedias of living things. Such a vision—at the heart of this central early modern reflection on the cosmic condition of humanity—suggests the surprising ways that Renaissance natural history informs humanity's taxonomic place. This privative sense of man results from both comparative reference across species and a zoographic notion of animal integrity. Beneath the "extremity of the skies," man is that unready animal who lacks a coat.