The Tradition of Theriophily in Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns.

Rosemary Moody Canfield

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ABSTRACT

In *The Happy Beast in French Thought of the Seventeenth Century*, George Boas used the word "theriophily" to describe an aspect of primitivistic thought which stresses the superiority of animals to human beings and suggests that man should model his life more closely on that of the animals. The present study proceeds from an analysis of the elements involved in theriophily to a survey of the work of three late eighteenth century poets, William Cowper, George Crabbe, and Robert Burns, in order to discover the importance of the tradition of theriophily as an influence on their thought and in their poetry.

The study focused not only on explicit statements of the principles of theriophily in the poems and in the correspondence of Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns, but also on a careful analysis of animal imagery in their works, which revealed implicit meanings related to theriophily.

As a result of the study, two principles were established: first, the tradition of theriophily was a major influence upon the thought of three significant British writers of the late eighteenth century; second, the importance of that influence could not have been ascertained without the analysis of animal imagery.
The second principle was demonstrated in the chapters which dealt individually with the three writers, where the explicit statements of theriophily were minimal in comparison with the imagistic evidence.

The first principle was evidenced in that concepts associated with theriophily provided a new approach to the work of Cowper, Crabbe and Burns, whose common search for a lost Paradise involved a consideration of the differentiation between man and beast. In William Cowper, explicit statements of the traditional superiority of man, which coincide with his Christian professions, were modified by personal obsession, so that Cowper's imagery revealed his identification of himself with animals and his attempt to place them, and therefore himself, in a flimsy Eden of his own imaginative creation. George Crabbe's conventional Christian position was denied by imagery which consistently suggested that man was like the animals around him. But Crabbe refused to construct an Eden based on bestial conduct. Instead, like earlier moralists, he used theriophily to suggest that man improve his conduct. Finally, in the work of Robert Burns, theriophily was seen to be the basis of an ideal social and moral order in which man would live in harmony with nature. Clearly, then, the study of theriophily could help to explain apparent contradictions in the thought of writers who are preoccupied with the problem of man's relationship to nature.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since he first began to assess his own position in the world, man has tended to assume that there is a distinct differentiation between his species and the "lower creatures," and that they are in a position of subservience to him. The account of the creation in Genesis presents man as the culmination of God's creative process. Because man is created in God's image, he shall "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1.26). But his original dominion does not include the power of life or death; in the Garden of Eden there are only herbs for food. Every creature "wherein there is life" (Gen.1.30), including man, is to be a vegetarian. Following the account in Genesis, Milton, too, emphasizes the fact that man's dominion is limited. He does not have permission to kill fish, fowl, beast, or even reptile. Admittedly, man is superior in the creation,
the Master work, the end
Of all yet don; a Creature who not prone
And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd
With Sanctitie of Reason, might erect
His Stature, and upright with Front serene
Govern the rest, sel'-knowing, and from thence
Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n.

But although he governs other creatures, for food man is
given only the fruits of the Garden, "Delectable both to
behold and taste," and not its living creatures.

When man falls, all of nature suffers along with him.
Adam and Eve attempt to clothe themselves in leaves; God
makes "coats of skins" for them. Milton leaves the source
of the skins uncertain, as possibly animals who have been
killed, possibly the cast-off coats of creatures who slough
them off periodically (P.L.x.217-18). Because it is Christ
who clothes man in Paradise Lost, Milton clearly wants to
avoid the concept of Christ as destroyer. But God's ap­
proval of man's new role as killer is evidenced by Abel's
sacrifice of his first-born lambs and their fat to his
God (Gen.4.4). Milton shows the new dominion of Death
and Discord not only by turning beasts, fowls and fish
against each other (P.L.x.707-14), but also by causing
other living things either to flee man or to pursue him,
and in turn by using man as a sinful agent for the de­
struction of animals. Furthermore, man's power over
"Beast, Fish, Fowl" becomes a similarly sinful desire to
tyrannize over his own kind (P.L.xii.63-90). It is this
contempt for life which characterizes the savage kings in
Pope's "Windsor Forest." To them, neither the killing of
beasts nor that of subjects is important. Men have become Nimrods, who pursue their own kind for sport.3

But despite man's fall, in orthodox Christian thought he retains the right to dominate the earth. Often he thinks of himself as God's representative. Thus Marsilio Ficino, the fifteenth century Italian Platonist, asserts that as the vicar of God, man uses not only the elements, but also all the animals which belong to the elements, the animals of the earth, of the water, and of the air, for food, convenience, and pleasure, and the higher, celestial beings for knowledge and the miracles of magic. Not only does he make use of the animals, he also rules them. . . . Man not only rules the animals by force, he also governs, keeps, and teaches them. . . . Hence man who provides generally for all things, both living and lifeless, is a kind of god. Certainly he is the god of the animals, for he makes use of them all, rules them all, and instructs many of them.*

In Hooker, the doctrine of plenitude somewhat modifies the idea of the preeminence of man. If the creation was not made for God's use but as a reflection of his glory, "all things for him to shew beneficence and grace in them,"5 we might suppose that the animal world was not created merely as a source of "food, convenience, and pleasure" for man. Yet the more arrogant view persists, justifying every kind of cruelty man can inflict upon lower links in the Great Chain of Being.

This study concerns itself with that particular attack upon man's assumptions of superiority to animals which is called "theriophily" by George Boas in his pioneer study, The Happy Beast in French Thought of the Seventeenth
Boas defines theriophily as a belief in the superiority of the animals to human beings and the corollary that man should model his life in one way or another on that of the animals. Following Boas, I shall include in my survey not only the wild animals, which the first root of the coined word suggests, but also domestic animals, along with insects, birds, fish, and reptiles.

As Boas points out, theriophily is a form of primitivism which has never been thoroughly explored. His study dealing with the theriophile, Montaigne, and his opponent, Descartes, involves a major conflict of ideas in French seventeenth century thought. My study of Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns will indicate the confusion and conflict in English eighteenth century writers whose stand is less explicitly stated, but who are nevertheless strongly influenced by the tradition of theriophily. As important writers in a period which immediately precedes and foreshadows the romantic "return to nature," these writers merit detailed study in every aspect of their attitude toward nature. Yet even in Lodwick C. Hartley's thorough study, William Cowper. Humanitarian, the evidences of theriophily which are implied in some of Cowper's work are not mentioned. Cowper's contemporary, Crabbe, is conventionally praised by critics as a realist in his treatment of external nature and of human nature. Yet the implications of theriophily for the definition of human nature have not been drawn out of Crabbe's works. In the work
of Burns, a third significant poet of this period in which nature is so important, the concept of theriophily is the basis not only of thought but also of poetic technique. Yet studies of Burns which treat his religious questionings and his revolutionary tendencies fail to note that theriophily is the common denominator in his thought.

Like *The Happy Beast*, this study of evidences of theriophily in literature must necessarily be limited in scope. Hopefully, it will point the way to similar studies of other writers in the major European literatures. The method of the study, however, differs from that of Boas. Because the work to be examined is poetry, rather than expository prose, the analysis must include not only explicit statement of the concepts of theriophily, but also the analysis of images involving animals, which can be implicit suggestions of theriophily. In order to provide a framework for later analysis of the poetry of Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns, I shall attempt in this chapter to outline the directions in which theriophily may go, and the implications for man and society of some of its assumptions about animals, particularly the basic philosophical issue of man's differentiation from other forms of life.

In differentiating man from other living creatures, philosophers have arrived at conclusions which shock humanitarians. In *The Happy Beast*, Boas describes the storm which greeted Descartes' declaration that animals are mere machines whose actions have been patterned by their creator. This
position, probably derived from St. Thomas's *Summa Theologica*, was intended by Descartes to be merely incidental to the argument that only man's reason made him other than a machine. However, animal-lovers argued and protested. It is interesting that Hooker avoids denying reason to lower creatures. Instead, he asserts in *Ecclesiastical Polity* that it is a matter of degree. One may distinguish between unknowing natural agents and "those which have though weak yet some understanding what they do, as fishes, fowls, and beasts have." Each level of life has its own kind of superiority: as stones exceed plants in durability, and as plants exceed stones in fertility, so beasts may very well exceed man in sensible capacity, just as man exceeds the lower animals in his possession of a soul. The idea that each level of life has its own proper excellence is frequently reiterated, for example, in Akenside's "The Pleasures of Imagination," where the poet admits that animals may be superficially superior to man in size or symmetry, but then proceeds to outline man's preeminent qualities, his creative wisdom, his power to will and to act, and his capacity to design and discriminate.

If man has his own proper virtues, he should not permit himself to descend to a lower level in the natural order. Pico points out that man, unlike other creatures, can choose to ascend or descend. He can fall into bestiality or be reborn into divinity. Writing on the "Immortality of the Soul," Pietro Pomponazzi (1426-1525), the influential
Aristotelian philosopher, divides nature into vegetative, sensitive, and rational states, with man wavering between sensitive and rational. A human being can become almost totally rational, thus achieving his highest potentiality; neglecting his rational self, he can fall into the sensitive state, thus becoming a beast; or he can live in the mixed state between the two levels. In the "Essay on Man" Pope rebukes man for aspiring in either direction:

What would this Man? Now upward will he soar, 
And little less than Angel, would be more; 
Now looking downwards, just as grieved appears 
To want the strength of bulls, the fur of bears. 
(I.173-76)

When he attempts to become a god, man assures himself of misery. Similarly, human beings "sunk to Beasts, find pleasure, end in pain" (IV.23). It would seem that what distinguishes man from other creatures is his dissatisfaction. If he observes "Each beast, each insect, happy in its own" (I.185), Pope asks, what right has supposedly rational man to question his own station? It is the same persistent human discontent which leads Rasselas out of the "happy valley," convinced that either man has "some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense which must be satisfied before he can be happy." For Pope and Johnson, man's dissatisfaction with his life is simply a fault in his nature and not an indication that his position is less acceptable than that of the animals.

But not all writers accept man's condition without
envying that of animals. In The Happy Beast, Boas cites ample evidence to prove that theriophily is "probably as old as human misery." Plutarch's Gryllus, who has been transformed by Circe into a pig, would not change his condition back to that of humanity. In a delightful dialogue, which is certainly a tour de force but probably also is intended to raise serious philosophical questions, Gryllus argues with Odysseus, his would-be savior, "You are also trying to persuade us, who live in an abundance of good things, to abandon them, and with them the lady who provides them, and sail away with you, when we have again become men, the most unfortunate of all creatures." After arguing that beasts are at least as virtuous as men, Gryllus points out that unlike men, they are free from the desires which proceed from imagination and illusion. Pigs can sleep well in mud; they do not need luxurious robes and tapestries. Their temperance gives them the contentment which human beings rarely achieve. This kind of attack on luxury, which begins by comparing the wants of men with those of animals, becomes fused with a primitivistic attack on civilization, particularly in Pliny, who maintains that man has attained superiority over other creatures at the cost of happiness.

The argument voiced by Philo Judaeus that nature is a stepmother rather than a mother to man is refuted by Montaigne in his "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (1580), which is probably the most influential modern discussion of the
grounds of differentiating between men and animals. Observing that beasts are intelligent and efficient, man infers that

nature, led by a certaine loving kindnesse, leadeth and accompanieth them (as it were by the hand) unto all the actions and commodities of their life; and that she forsaketh and leaveth us to the hazard of fortune; and by art to quest and finde out those things that are behovefull and necessarie for our preservation; and therewithall denieth us the meanes to attaine by any institution and contention of spirit to the naturall sufficiency of brute beasts: So that their brutish stupidity doth in all commodities exceed whatsoever our divine intelligence can effect. Verily, by this account, wee might have just cause and great reason to terme her a most injust and partiall step-dame: But there is no such thing. . . . Nature hath generally imbraced all her creatures: And there is not any but she hath amply stored with all necessary meanes for the preservation of their being.  

Montaigne points out that man's skin becomes tough enough to protect him when it is left uncovered, and that the capacities of his limbs make up for the lack of natural weapons.

Many writers have struck upon the animals' ability to seek out their own medicines as an indication of nature's greater kindness to them, or perhaps as a sign of the animals' greater practical intelligence. Each beast is his own medical specialist, Gryllus says. Sick swine catch crabs; tortoises poisoned by eating snakes are wise enough to seek out marjoram; and Cretan goats who have been shot with arrows eat dittany to make the arrowheads fall out. In the same tradition, John Donne meditates that man's gigantic
imagination does not help him in times of sickness. True, the physician calls up the powers of nature to cure man. But man cannot cure himself.

Here we shrink in our proportion, sink in our dignity, in respect of very mean creatures, who are physicians to themselves. The hart that is pursued and wounded, they say, knows an herb, which being eaten throws off the arrow: a strange kind of vomit. The dog that pursues it, though he be subject to sickness, even proverbially, knows his grass that recovers him. And it may be true, that the druggist is as near to man as to other creatures; it may be that obvious and present simples, easy to be had, would cure him; but the apothecary is not so near him, nor the physician so near him, as they two are to other creatures; man hath not that innate instinct, to apply these natural medicines to his present danger, as those inferior creatures have; he is not his own apothecary, his own physician, as they are.21

Nature's unkindness to man is often illustrated by the necessity of work, resulting perhaps from the biblical curse of Adam, perhaps from man's perpetual dissatisfaction with his lot in life. Thomson's evil spirit, Indolence, seduces the poet himself by calling man the "Outcast of Nature," the least fortunate of all living creatures, because he must work to support himself and his ambition.22 Although Indolence's subjects end in a dungeon of torpor and disease, from which they must be rescued, clearly Thomson feels the partial truth in the persuasive argument.

Those very qualities which seem to set man aside from the animals may be the source of his misery. As I have noted, unhappiness can result from his aspirations to a higher state or his descent to a lower state. Nor is his reason always an unmixed blessing. If man alone reasons,
man alone worries about the future. The lamb which is to be killed for man's feast is blessed by the inability to anticipate his death. Pope points out in the "Essay on Man":

Had he thy Reason, would he skip and play?
Pleased to the last, he crops the flowery food, And licks the hand just raised to shed his blood. Oh blindness to the future! kindly given, That each may fill the circle marked by Heaven. (I.81-86)

The soul which defines man subjects him to the possibility of eternal damnation. In "Holy Sonnet IX," John Donne receives only the answer given to Job when he asks:

If lecherous goats, if serpents envious Cannot be damn'd; Alas; why should I bee?23

For Dr. Faustus, the Pythagorean metempsychosis which Pomponazzi mentioned would be preferable to his approaching fate:

Were that true,
This soul should fly from me, and I be chang'd
Unto some brutish beast! all beasts are happy,
For, when they die,
Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements;
But mine must live, still to be plagu'd in hell.24

Whether restrictions on man come from religious laws or social conventions, they cost him a freedom which the animals have maintained. The attitude which Lovejoy and Boas characterize as a "soft" primitivism contrasts "the naturalness of the animal way of life and the conventionality of the human."25 In no area is this natural freedom more evident than that of sexual behavior. In Ovid's Metamorphoses, it is noted, Myrrha envies the animals, who are permitted incestuous relationships if nature prompts
them. In Elizabethan and seventeenth century poetry, this form of "soft" primitivism is conventional. For example, Surrey contrasts "What pleasant life, what heaps of joy, these little birds receive" with the estate of "weary man," in "want of that they had at will." Donne's poem "Confined Love" states the theme even more clearly:

Are Sunne, Moone, or Starres by law forbidden,
To smile where they list, or lend away their light?
Are birds divorc'd, or are they chidden
If they leave their mate, or lie abroad a-night?
Beasts doe no joyntures lose
Though they new lovers choose,
But we are made worse than those.

Often the desire for "natural" love is specifically associated with primitive societies. Thus in the Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville, in which Diderot presents Tahitian society as a model for man, the Tahitian Orou declares that the European sexual conventions which have been described to him deny natural laws, eliminate human freedom, and make the condition of civilized man worse than that of the animals.

But as Lovejoy and Boas point out, cultural primitivism may go in one of two directions: that of what they call "hard" primitivism, which yearns for a more spartan, robust, and temperate existence, or "soft" primitivism, which emphasizes freedom and sometimes seems to advocate license. Similarly, a "soft" theriophily would model an epicurean life for man on the seeming lack of restraint among other living creatures, while a "hard" theriophily sees animals as seemingly exempt from the traditional post-lapsarian general
corruption. From them, then, man can learn true morality.

We have already seen evidence of such a view in Plutarch's dialogue between Gryllus and Odysseus, in which Gryllus points out the misery of man, resulting from his love of luxury. At the heart of Gryllus's argument is the premise that virtue which is achieved spontaneously is superior to virtue which must be attained by effort. If so, animals, who are virtuous without instruction, are superior to men.\(^{30}\) Gryllus proceeds to support his contention that animals normally have all the virtues which are sometimes found in human character: courage, temperance, fidelity, and restraint in mating. Although some animals participate in human licentiousness, Montaigne writes, many are as faithful as the halcyons: "Their hens know no other cocke but their owne; they never forsake him all the daies of their life; and if the cocke chance to be weake and crazed, the hen will take him upon her neck and carrie him with her wheresoever she goeth, and serve him even untill death."\(^{31}\) Menander adds justice to the list of animal virtues, contending that the superior animal achieves the highest place, while in human society, the sycophant or the evil man is most successful.\(^{32}\) To prove their superior capacity for friendship, Montaigne relates accounts of dogs which would not leave the corpses of their masters, as well as his own observation of friendship between one animal and another. Again, dogs are superior to man in trust and faithfulness, for "there is no creature in the world so treacherous as
man." In his "Satire against Mankind," Rochester comments,

Birds feed on birds, beasts on each other prey;
But savage man alone does man betray.
Pressed by necessity, they kill for food;
Man undoes man to do himself no good.

In compassion, too, man falls short. Leaving Athens after his former friends have all deserted him, Shakespeare's Timon "will to the wood where he shall find/ The unkindest beast more kinder than mankind." In Lear, Albany calls Regan and Goneril less compassionate than the "head-lugged bear." Indeed, one evidence of man's corruptness in a natural world which has somehow retained at least a portion of its innocence is the delight he takes in butchering every living thing, including his own kind. In Mandeville's story of the Roman merchant confronted by a hungry and talkative lion, the lion's most telling argument for human inferiority is that while he hunts by instinct, it is "only man, mischievous man, that can make death a sport. Nature taught your stomach to crave nothing but vegetables; but your violent fondness to change and great eagerness after novelties have prompted you to the destruction of animals without justice or necessity, perverted your nature, and warped your appetites which way soever your pride or luxury have called them." Clearly this is a variation of the biblical and Miltonic account, in which through the fall both men and many beasts became carnivorous. But as Gryllus points out, man's motive is not hunger but luxury. He "makes use of
every kind of food and does not, like beasts, abstain from most kinds and consequently make war on a few only that he must have for food. In a word, nothing that flies or swims or moves on land has escaped your so-called civilized and hospitable tables." 38 That same sadistic quality in man which finds pleasure in the death of other creatures is often turned against his own kind. "As for warre," Montaigne writes, "which is the greatest and most glorious of all humane actions, I would faine know if we will use it for an argument of some prerogative, or otherwise for a testimonie of our imbecilitie and imperfection, as in truth the science we use to defeat and kill one another, to spoile and utterly to overthrow our owne kind, it seemeth it hath not much to make it selfe to be wished for in beasts, that have it not." 39 Immoral man may even corrupt the beasts with whom he lives. In "Windsor Forest," Pope comments parenthetically upon the beagles who have been taught by man to hunt the hare:

(Beasts, urged by us, their fellow-beasts pursue, And learn of men each other to undo.) (123-24)

The natural morality of beasts, which contrasts so obviously to the unnatural sinfulness of man, is evidenced not only by simple studies of animal gratitude, such as the story of Androcles and the lion which Montaigne retold, 40 but also by the fact that animals gratefully accept their lot, while as Pope and Johnson point out, human beings are perpetually dissatisfied. After his jealous mistreatment
Ford's Bassanes soliloquizes:

Beasts, only capable of sense, enjoy
The benefit of food and ease with thankfulness;
Such silly creatures, with a grudging, kick not
Against the portion nature hath bestow'd:
But men, endow'd with reason and the use
Of reason, to distinguish from the chaff
Of abject scarcity the quintessence,
Soul, and elixir of the earth's abundance,
The treasures of the sea, the air, nay, heaven,
Are verier beasts than beasts.\textsuperscript{41}

Such an indictment makes human dissatisfaction not merely an aspect of the human condition, as in \textit{Rasselas}, or even an unwise defiance of the order of nature represented by the Great Chain of Being, as in Pope's "Essay on Man," but a sinful ingratitude toward the God of nature, Who provides man with whatever he needs.

The soliloquy of Bassanes, however, is making a moral point without denying to man his traditional superiority in having both reason and a soul, in contrast to animals, who possess only sense (or instinct). Not every writer has been willing to deny reason to the animals. In his attack on the Stoic assumption that animals are irrational, Plutarch catalogs instances of intelligence in over a hundred species, ranging from elephants to hedgehogs, from seals to crocodiles;\textsuperscript{42} of course, the title of the Gryllus dialogue speaks for itself.

If we do not believe that animals can reason, the fault may be in us, rather than in them. This is the implication of Aesop's fable, "The Lion and the Statue." Arguing that men are stronger than lions because they are more intelligent,
a man shows his lion antagonist a statue of Hercules over­
coming a lion. But the lion says that nothing has been
proved. It was a man who made the statue. Aesop's moral,
"We can easily represent things as we wish them to be," is
the broader meaning of the fable; but the realization
that it is human beings who write to glorify human intel-
ligence leads us to the whole question of communication.
Montaigne points out that it is our nature to condemn what-
ever we do not understand. We call a foreign traveler
bestial and stupid simply because we do not understand
his language. But man is presumptuous in assuming that
animals cannot communicate with man; the fault may be ours.
Indeed, they can communicate with each other, by sound and
bodily motions, just as we do. If they could not, how
could such complex societies as those of bees operate? To
indicate that the lack of communication may be the result of
human stupidity, rather than animal incapacity, Montaigne
lists men of antiquity who did communicate with animals,
and refers to Plato's description of the age of Saturn, when
one of man's chief advantages was his ability to communi-
cate with beasts.

The theriophile, then, raises a number of questions
about the relationship between language and intelligence and
about the nature of language itself. He also demands that
we define clearly what we mean by reason. Just as Gryllus
argues that beasts are more virtuous than men because they
do not have to be instructed or exhorted to virtue but
perform virtuous acts spontaneously, so he reasons that beasts are more intelligent than men because they are naturally wise:

For if you speak the truth and say that Nature is their teacher, you are elevating the intelligence of animals to the most sovereign and wisest of first principles. If you do not think that it should be called either reason or intelligence, it is high time for you to cast about for some fairer and even more honourable term to describe it, since certainly the faculty that it brings to bear in action is better and more remarkable. It is no un instructed or un trained faculty, but rather self-taught and self-sufficient—and not for lack of strength.¹⁷

It is generally agreed that primitive man observed other living things and learned from them. Probably he modelled his society on what he saw of the ants and bees, Pope theorizes. "To copy Instinct then was Reason's part" ("Essay on Man."III.170)—in other words, man had been given reason so that he could survive and progress by observing the animals and imitating them. It is his ability to imitate the animals that offsets man's obvious helplessness, according to Rousseau. Moreover, man could learn the wisdom of every other species, and thus find his subsistence more easily than any of the others, Rousseau argues in the Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes.¹⁸ But the argument which Rousseau utilizes to prove man's superiority to animals can just as well indicate that man is a jack-of-all-trades and perhaps a master of none. If like Rochester we define wisdom as achieving one's ends, animals are superior:
If therefore Jowler finds and kills his hare
Better than Meres supplies committee chair,
Though one's a statesman, th'other but a hound,
Jowler in justice will be wiser found.

If reason is essentially a capacity to discriminate,
we must recognize the fact which was acknowledged as far
back as Aristotle and Pliny that animals have inexplicable
likes and dislikes for each other,\(^5\) and perhaps even the
conjecture that the songs of birds evidence a power to select one note instead of another, in accordance with an abstract idea of beauty.\(^5\)

But if man's vaunted reason is nothing but sense-perception, then we have no basis for differentiation between human beings and other living creatures. Such a position is taken by the French libertin and epicurean Gassendi\(^5\) and by Marin Cureau de la Chambre, who points out thirty years before Locke that animals, like human beings, appear to have memory and the capacity to anticipate, as well as instincts.\(^5\) Thus there may be more than cynicism behind Thersites' reply when Achilles wants to send a letter to Ajax: "Let me bear another to his horse, for that's the more capable creature."\(^5\)

What, then, can we conclude from a survey of animal morality and animal intelligence? Gryllus concludes that animals are rational, differing in intelligence from individual to individual and species to species just as human beings do.\(^5\) This is Montaigne's argument, too, in a work intended to humble man rather than to elevate animals. "We
are neither above nor under the rest: what ever is under the coape of heaven (saith the wise man) runneth one law, and followeth one fortune."\(^{56}\) Later in the "Apology," Montaigne makes the statement that "there is more difference found between such and such a man, than betweene such a beast and such a man."\(^{57}\) Not surprisingly, this comment is derived from Plutarch's conclusion to the Gryllus dialogue. Other literary references to animals which imply a letting down of the traditional barrier between man and other creatures appear in works which would not seem to let themselves to such an idea—in Castiglione's \textit{Courtier}, for example, when Messer Federico praises a self-possessed young man who appears to be ruled by reason instead of by appetite, and comments, "This quality is nearly always found in men of great courage, and we also see it in those brute animals that surpass the rest in nobility and strength, as the lion and the eagle."\(^{58}\) In \textit{Lear}, the dominance of animal imagery suggests, according to Harrison, that most men and women are beasts, "and only the exceptional few redeem 'Nature from the general curse.'"\(^{59}\) Comparing his ungrateful daughters to polecats, horses, and Centaurs (IV.vi.124-26), the mad king is yet sane enough to see that Cordelia differs from her sisters far more than they differ from the most lecherous animals.

But if we retain any sympathy for the human species, we must also respond to the sufferings of animals. Describing the butchering of a bullock, Mandeville cannot agree
that animals are mere machines: "When a creature has given such convincing and undeniable proofs of the terrors upon him and the pains and agonies he feels, is there a follower of Descartes so inured to blood as not to refute by his com­miseration the philosophy of the vain reasoner." To the humanitarian, the empathy a human being feels with an animal must be evidence that there is little difference between us, probably more difference between butcher and humanitarian than between humanitarian and suffering beast.

But thoroughgoing primitivists do not stop by denying the traditional differentiation between man and beast. To them, man's miseries result from the fact that he is un­natural. This theory is evinced by man's need to turn to animals for instruction:

Is this not a general indictment of human weakness, to seek the answer to our most urgent and greatest questions among horses and dogs and birds: how we should marry and beget children and educate them, as if we had no evidence from nature concerning these things in ourselves, but the customs and feelings of the brutes could declare and testify that our life deviated from nature, since we erred and went astray in the very beginning concerning primary matters? It is reason and social life, Plutarch continues, which have led man away from natural simplicity, adding that the less complex the form of life, the less susceptible to imagination, the more closely it adheres to the "one road which nature prescribes." In living naturally, plants exceed animals as much as animals exceed man.

Man's alienation from nature is indicated by his habit of hunting for sport, which, as we have seen, is often
indicted on various grounds. In the Forest of Arden, Jaques insists that the duke who has lost his throne to a usurper is himself guilty of seizing a kingdom not rightfully his:

\[
\text{we}
\]
\[
\text{Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse, To fright the animals and to kill them up In their assigned and native dwelling-place.} 63
\]

Occasionally, hunting is seen as part of a life close to nature. In "The Enthusiast; or, the Lover of Nature," Joseph Warton yearns for a simple life where he "may hunt/ The boar and tiger through savannahs wild."64 But a more conventional opinion is that of Jaques, denying man's dominion over the beasts and asserting that hunting is merely a reflection of his pride and cruelty, his alienation from nature.

The theriophile may also argue that it is unnatural for man to eat meat. The biblical account of man's change in eating habits after the fall is only one source of this tradition. Plutarch traces it to Pythagoras:

Can you really ask what reason Pythagoras had for abstaining from flesh? For my part I rather wonder both by what accident and in what state of soul or mind the first man who did so, touched his mouth to gore and brought his lips to the flesh of a dead creature, he who set forth tables of dead, stale bodies and ventured to call food and nourishment the parts that had a little before bellowed and cried, moved and lived.65

Plutarch notes that man eats not the fierce animals who might threaten him, but only the tame and appealing ones. Similarly, Mandeville's spokesman, Cleomenes, argues in "The Fable of the Bees" that "it is not greater cruelty or
more unnatural in a wolf to eat a piece of man than it is in a man to eat part of a lamb or a chicken." In his notes to "The Grumbling Hive," Mandeville points out that we ordinarily refuse to eat animals who have been well-known to us, a fact which seems to imply a sense of guilt, "some strong remains of primitive pity and innocence, which all the arbitrary power of custom and the violence of luxury have not yet been able to conquer." Just as it is illogical for man to eat other creatures and yet object to being eaten, so it is similarly illogical for him to assume that the human species must be more beautiful than other natural creatures. Montaigne argues that only human pride can explain such an unwarranted assumption. Viewed objectively, the beasts which "most resemble man are the vilest and filthiest of all the rout: As for outward appearance and true shape of the visage, it is the Munkie or Ape . . . as for inward and vitall parts, it is the Hog." Yet man prefers his own beauty, which exists only in his deluded imagination, to the real beauties of nature. The extreme expression of the idea that man is less responsive to natural beauty than the animals, incidentally, is found not in Renaissance or eighteenth century literature, but in the work of a nineteenth century American writer. Thoreau deplores man's consistent indifference to nature: In their reaction to Nature men appear to me for the most part, notwithstanding their arts, lower than the animals. It is not often a beautiful relation, as in the case of the animals. How little appreciation of the beauty of the landscape there is among us!
The implication that the traditional opposition between nature and art is an aspect of man's alienation from nature is evident in The Praise of Folly. It is Folly herself who agrees that Gryllus is wiser than Odysseus. Those people are happiest, she explains, who avoid learning and follow nature, "since she is in no respect wanting, except as a mortal wishes to transgress the limits set for his status. Nature hates counterfeits; and that which is innocent of arts gets along far the more prosperously." Folly then points out that the happiest living creatures are those controlled only by nature. Bees not only appear contented but also produce wonderful architecture and a utopian society; but horses, which are more similar to man and are subservient to him, share in man's misfortunes, even destroying their own lives in man's activities, such as racing and war. The lives of flies and birds, more remote from man, are far more desirable. "At every level of life, what nature has ordained is more happy than what is adulterated by art." When Erasmus has Folly thus voice one of the standard arguments of the primitivists, he may be joining in one of the standard attacks on primitivism in general and theriophily in particular: that it does not lead men to humility, as Montaigne had intended, but rather permits them to justify their passions, to live without artificial checks upon their conduct, indulging their desires, especially in sexual matters. It is as much man's instinct to seek variety in women as it is the instinct of a cat to chase a
mouse, Chaucer's manciple maintains, and

God it woot, ther may no man embrace
As to destreyne a thyng which that nature
Hath natureelly set in a creature.73

Yet the moral of the tale implies that man has the capacity to choose continence. A similar ambivalence is evident in Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois. Bussy, the hero of the play, is praised by his king as a noble savage, an unfallen man, an eagle; he is condemned by Monsieur, a less noble character, for being "a man/ That dares as much as a wild horse or tiger;/ As headstrong and as bloody," who would do anything in order "to feed/ The ravenous wolf of thy most cannibal valour."74 Clearly many writers are no more certain whether to admire or to deplore animal traits in a human being than they are whether those traits are more or less noble than those of the human species.

There is no such ambivalence in Rochester's view of man. The most celebrated rake of his era insists that man would be better off if he lived by instinct, like the animals. He himself would

be a dog, a monkey, or a bear,
Of anything, but that vain animal,
Who is so proud of being rational.75

Reason is an ignis fatuus "Which leaves the light of nature, sense, behind,"76 and is useful only for pointing out to man that he must obey his instincts.

It is clear, then, that just as primitivism can motivate man toward many different Utopias, so theriophily will vary both in its interpretations of animal conduct and in
its implications for human life. We are confused as to what we see in animals. Is it the lack of accurate data, the dependence on tall tales and myth which have caused our confusion, or is it that, as Aesop's lion insists, each of us sees what he wishes to see?

Although, as we have seen, the argument between Gryllus and Odysseus has persisted through the centuries, the question of theriophily becomes increasingly important in that period late in the eighteenth century when writers are becoming increasingly uncertain about the question of man's own nature and his relationship to external nature. In an age which Bronson asserts is characterized by efforts to explore new issues without rejecting the heritage of previous decades and by a resulting "uncommittedness," it is to be expected that the always puzzling ideas of the theriophile should be treated very differently by different writers, and even inconsistently by writers who respond to the cross currents of their time—to evangelicalism, to humanitarianism, to the democratic ideals of the French Revolution and the subsequent reaction against the Terror and the Napoleonic threat, to a new realism and to the continuing influence of Rousseau and the "noble savage" school.

The purpose of this paper is to examine evidences of theriophily in three roughly contemporary writers of this transitional period. As products of a rural environment, they could hardly have avoided asking what man's relationship to the animals about him is, and what it should be. As
well-read men, they would have encountered the tradition of theriophily in literature. Crabbe's early fondness for Aesop's *Fables* and later study of travel books, along with his extensive reading in Greek, Latin, and French works, would have brought the concepts of theriophily before him. We know that he was familiar with Mandeville, whose work has been cited in this chapter. Burns's animal poems rely on the Scottish tradition which Daiches traces to the fifteenth century, and which may account for such poems as Burns's "The Twa Dogs." But Burns would also have encountered the tradition of theriophily in his study of English Renaissance drama and in his exhaustive reading both in classical and in French literature. Cowper's thorough formal education was highly classical. Vincent Bourne, his master at Westminster, wrote animal fables which evince, according to Hartley, "the tenderness for animal life achieved by one who drank almost exclusively from the classical stream." The classical statements of theriophily would then have been transmitted to Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns either directly or through Montaigne, whose "Apology of Raymond Sebond" has been called the source of that deep sympathy with animals which characterizes the thought of Shaftesbury, Pope, and most of the other intellectual leaders of the century.

Although in this chapter my focus has been on explicit statements in the tradition of theriophily, the intensive study of these poets must entail a careful analysis of a
less direct form of statement, that is, the animal imagery through which they reveal attitudes which sometimes conflict with their explicit statements. The order of consideration is determined by the degree to which each writer breaks free from the traditional hierarchical concept of man's superiority to the beasts. In William Cowper, the first poet to be studied, explicit statements of the traditional concept which coincide with his Christian professions are modified by personal obsession, so that Cowper's imagery reveals his identification of himself with animals and his attempt to place them, and therefore himself, in a flimsy Eden of his own imaginative creation. George Crabbe's conventional Christian position is denied by imagery which consistently suggests that any search for unvarnished truth must point out man's similarity to the animals around him. But where Cowper refuses to admit "bestiality" into his Eden, Crabbe refuses to construct an Eden based on bestial conduct, but like earlier moralists uses his theriophily to suggest a better way for man. Finally, in the work of Robert Burns, the tendencies toward theriophily which are obvious in Cowper and Crabbe are merged and strengthened. Cowper's admiration of animals and Crabbe's unsentimental view of them, Crabbe's insistence that "good" men are like "good" beasts and Cowper's yearning for an Eden in which only "good" beasts exist are united in Burns's vision of a social and moral order in harmony with nature, clearly posited upon the basic philosophical assumptions of theriophily.
NOTES


2Milton (VII.539).


7(Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1938).

8Boas, pp. 82-83.

9Hooker, I, 166.

10Hooker, I, 166-67.


15 Boas, p. 18.


18 Lovejoy, I, 397.


25 Lovejoy, I, 398.

26 Lovejoy, I, 400.


40. Montaigne, II, 192-94.
42. Plutarch, "Whether Land or Sea Animals Are Cleverer," in Moralia, XII, 319-486.
44. Montaigne, II, 179-80.
45. Montaigne, II, 159-62.
46. Montaigne, II, 159.
47. "Beasts Are Rational," XII, 527.
Boas, p. 125.


Boas, p. 133.

Boas, pp. 120-22.

Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, in Complete Works, p. 843 (III.iii.308-309).

"Beasts Are Rational," XII, 531.

Montaigne, II, 168.

Montaigne, II, 178.


Mandeville, pp. 118-119.


Shakespeare, As You Like It, in Major Plays and the Sonnets, p. 504 (II.1.60-63).

"The Enthusiast; or, the Lover of Nature," in Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, p. 563 (II. 198-99).

Plutarch, "On the Eating of Flesh," in Moralia, XII, 541.

Mandeville, p. 271.

Mandeville, p. 114.

Montaigne, II, 202-203.


Erasmus, p. 46.
72Boas, p. 93.


74George Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois, in English Drama 1580-1642, p. 346 (III.11.448-51).

75Rochester, p. 31 (ll. 5-7).

76Rochester, p. 31 (ll. 13).


78René Huchon, George Crabbe and His Times (1754-1832), trans. Frederick Clarke (New York: Dutton, 1907), p. 29.


80Crabbe, Life, p. 135.

81Crabbe, Life, p. 141.


86Hartley, p. 209.
CHAPTER II

THERIOPHILY IN THE WORK OF WILLIAM COWPER

Cowper's position as a precursor of romanticism has been assigned to him by Hoxie Fairchild partially because of "his tenderness toward worms, hares, and slaves."¹ That quality in Cowper which Hartley calls humanitarianism² can be related to a new sensibility which was to be fully developed in nineteenth century romanticism,³ to the rise of evangelicalism,⁴ and even to the development of a "religion of humanity in which Nature and man were reconciled."⁵ Those writers who attempt to assess Cowper's attitude toward animal life on the basis of his poetry alone are sometimes confounded by a study of his letters, where what was called a tragedy in poetry is sometimes treated merely as material for poetry or for a witty comment. These contradictions within the body of Cowper's works have inevitably led critics to very different conclusions. In this study I shall attempt to reconcile them by an examination of Cowper's use of animal imagery in relation to the question of differentiation between man and the animals, which remains an unsolved problem for Cowper to the end of his life, and to the related concept of theriophily, which clearly tempts Cowper as his conviction of his own damnation intensifies.
Frequent references in the Correspondence to gifts of venison, fowls, and oysters exchanged between Cowper and his friends make it clear that Cowper, though a humanitarian, was no vegetarian. He is not squeamish about man's killing animals for food. In a letter to his bookseller, Joseph Johnson, he speaks in a matter-of-fact manner about a cook's fastening the legs of a dead turkey to a post and pulling out the sinews. Although in The Task Cowper deplores the fact that the sportsman's pleasure is based on the deaths of living creatures, he makes it clear in the playful poem, "To the Immortal Memory of the Halibut on Which I dined This Day," that he has no compunctions about eating that which man has killed:

Thy lot thy brethren of the slimy fin
Would envy, could they know that thou wast doom'd
To feed a bard, and to be prais'd in verse. (p. 360)

Fallen man is permitted to eat flesh, Cowper asserts in Book VI of The Task: "Carnivorous, through sin, / Feed on the slain, but spare the living brute!" (ll. 457-58). Moreover, the necessities of country living prompt strenuous measures against pests. A letter from Cowper's evangelical friend, the Rev. John Newton, to the poet, dated Dec. 8, 1780, contains a message from Mrs. Newton recommending poison to kill insects and vermin in Cowper's house and garden. Even though Cowper keeps pet hares, whom he preserves from the hunter (Task. III.326-51), he writes quite casually to his absent neighbor, Mrs. Throckmorton, that a
rabbit "has been shot for devouring your carnations." In one passage in The Task, Cowper writes that he would omit from his list of friends, as "wanting sensibility," anyone who needlessly sets foot upon a worm (VI. 563); yet elsewhere he permits man to kill mice or snakes which invade his territory:

If man's convenience, health
Or safety, interfere, his rights and claims
Are paramount, and must extinguish their's.
(Task. VI. 581-83)

This doctrine is reiterated in a letter to the Rev. William Unwin, son of the Unwins with whom he lived: "You observed probably . . . that I allow the life of an animal to be fairly taken away, when it interferes either with the interest or convenience of man. Consequently snails, and all reptiles that spoil our crops, either of fruit, or grain, may be destroyed if we can catch them." Similarly, the production of food involves utilizing animals and even killing them. When the hay is ruined by excessive rainfall, farmers use cattle to trample down the crop. The wealth of Aetna can be calculated in terms of flocks and myrtles. These references treat man as the lord of creation, animals as lower forms of life which are treated as economic entities, not brothers, certainly not as man's superiors.

The traditional assumption that at the time of the creation man was given dominion over the animals is explicitly stated by Cowper in The Task:
Wond'ring stood
The new-made monarch, while before him pass'd,
All happy, and all perfect in their kind,
The creatures summon'd from their various haunts
To see their sov'reign, and confess his sway.
(VI.352-56)

Even after the fall of man he is still theoretically superior to the beasts. In the Olney Hymn, "Jehovah-Jireh, The Lord Will Provide," God substitutes a ram for Isaac, commanding that "yon ram shall yield his meaner life" (p. 434). When Cowper closes a letter with love sent from all, "down to the very dog"; when he writes that only a "brute" would be ungrateful to a new friend; when he refers to graceless man's seeing nature "with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds," he is reflecting that traditional attitude. Cowper's conservative tendencies are further shown in disapproval of any deviation from natural order. He sees evil and danger in man's attempts to ascend in balloons, for "if a power to convey himself from place to place, like a bird, would have been good for him, his Maker would have formed him with such a capacity." The moral of the fable, "The Bee and the Pine-apple," is that one should submit to his proper state in life rather than aspire to another.

But other attitudes are also important in Cowper's work and thought. His feelings toward horses are markedly ambivalent. Himself a poor horseman, he writes to a friend that riding bothers his tender skin and dramatizes his fears humorously in the "Diverting History of John Gilpin," whose
horse is totally uncontrollable. Even among enthusiastic horsemen, Cowper would rejoice "that I had not a beast under me whose walk would seem tedious, whose trot would jumble me, and whose gallop might throw me into a ditch. What Nature expressly designed me for I have never been able to conjecture. . . . I am sure, however, that she did not design me for a horseman." When the Rev. Morley Unwin, in whose home he is living, is thrown from a horse and killed, Cowper's distrust of horses must certainly have been intensified. He later writes of a runaway accident which has cost at least one life and muses that taxes on wheels and horses have probably preserved his life. A metaphor in a letter reveals Cowper's attitude: he compares the publisher of The Task to "some vicious horses, that I have known. They would not budge till they were spurred, and when they were spurred, they would kick." But from a safe distance, Cowper's admiration of horses is notable. In an early poem he compares a friend to "the best courser on the plain," and in The Task he deplores man's savagery to "the flight-performing horse" (VI.426) which raced and died, only to have his inferior master "suppose/ The honours of his matchless horse his own!" (VI.437-38).

Other traces of an ambivalence in Cowper's attitude toward the conventional differentiation between man and beast are seen in his discussions of slavery. As Hartley points out, even by the eighteenth century there was no
general agreement as to whether the negro slave was an animal lower than the ape or a noble savage superior to civilized man. Thus Cowper's evil slave-trader thinks of his victims as animals, with "paws," who lie on their backs in the ship "Like sprats on a gridiron." But the slave himself questions whether his captors have human feelings and suggests that they are his inferiors, the real brutes. These are the same comments which Cowper's animals sometimes make about their human oppressors, and they indicate an ambivalence in Cowper's attitude toward the conventional differentiation between man and animal. Cowper also asks whether a creature's position in the hierarchy can be changed. Slavery destroys "all bonds of nature" and makes the slave a brute, at least in manners:

He feels his body's bondage in his mind;
Puts off his gen'rous nature; and, to suit
His manners with his fate, puts on the brute.29

But in the stories of Balaam and Misagathus, mistreatment inspires animals

with a sense so keen
Of inj'ry, with such knowledge of their strength,
And such sagacity to take revenge,
That oft the beast has seem'd to judge the man.
(Task.VI.475-78)

In Cowper's story the horse of Misagathus refuses a leap down a precipice, the explicit command of his death-defying master; later the horse rushes to the cliff, shakes off his master, and sends him alone to the death he deserves. Here Cowper seems to suggest an idea associated with theriophily. The horse is superior to the man in reason and in morality.
What we find in Cowper, then, is a basically ambivalent position. Sometimes he accepts man's traditional dominion; sometimes he tempers it with humanitarianism; sometimes, explicitly or implicitly, he raises the question as to whether or not the theoretical differentiation between man and beast exists in fact. This ambivalence is evident in the various ways in which Cowper himself "uses" animals.

On the simplest level, Cowper often speaks of needing animals for diversion from his unhappiness. He keeps three pet hares, a succession of dogs, even eight pairs of tame pigeons, whom he feeds each morning. He finds comic relief in animals, in "pigs, the drollest in the world" and in the tortoise-shell kitten whose antics he describes to Lady Hesketh, hoping his friend will see her in "her present hilarity." When his beloved spaniel, Beau, begins running after females, Cowper worries that he may be stolen. His concern, admittedly, is selfish: "I could by no means spare my dog." Animals also provide Cowper with items of amusing gossip. He is interested in a tame lion seen at the fair and in the tale he hears of the long African snake which, when full of its food, is vulnerable to being eaten by ants. Although his poem, "On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in His Cage," has been cited as evidence that Cowper does not believe in caging birds for human amusement, in his correspondence the poet appears to show no guilt in speaking of his own caged birds. He
must treat his wit as he does his linnet: "I keep him for the most part in a cage, but now and then set open the door, that he may whisk about the room a little, and then shut him up again."  

Cowper also uses natural creatures as a decorative element in natural scenery. In his summer parlour he can listen to the wind in the trees and to birds singing, not to the barking dogs and screaming children he would hear in town. For lovers, especially, "Sweet birds in concert with harmonious streams" are important. Cowper writes to his cousin, Lady Hesketh, that spring in the country is compounded of blossoms and the "singing of nightingales in every hedge." In these examples we can see a common pattern in Cowper's verse and correspondence: the tendency to use animals as a part of the scenery disposed for man's pleasure.

Another use of nature's creatures, closely related to that of man's pleasure in his surroundings, is as an inspiration and a subject for poetry. When Cowper writes of dewy grass and birds singing among the apple blossoms, he concludes, "Never poet had a more commodious oratory in which to invoke his muse." The crises in the animal kingdom which Cowper celebrates in verse are often differently treated in prose. The incident of the goldfinch which escaped from its cage but refused to leave its friend, related by Cowper in "The Faithful Friend," is summarized in a letter to the Rev. William Unwin, with the following comment:
"I am glad of such incidents; for at a pinch, and when I need entertainment, the versification of them serves to divert me."^42 When Mrs. Throckmorton's caged bullfinch is eaten by a rat, Cowper writes, "It will be a wonder if this event does not at some convenient time employ my versifying passion. Did ever fair lady, from the Lesbia of Catullus to the present day, lose her bird and find no poet to commemorate the loss?"^43 The result of the domestic tragedy is the light poem, "On the Death of Mrs. Throckmorton's Bullfinch."

But many other references show that Cowper often thinks of animals as individuals, not just as objects of man's perception or stimulants for his pleasure and art. Nicholson points out that in Cowper we are always aware both of the perceiver and of that which is perceived, which has a life of its own as a cow or a bird, not just as an element in the poet's imagination.^44 It is this respect for other creatures which leads Cowper to his mastery of even the smallest details. In the evangelical tradition, nature reveals the glory of God.^45 Thus every detail in nature is important: "tous s'égalisent par rapport à Dieu qui brille et se révèle aussi merveilleusement dans les uns que dans les autres."^46 Golden points out that in "Retirement" Cowper pity's the melancholy man who cannot perceive God in nature.^47 Cowper's own madness, as Quinlan points out, takes a form in which "the chief symptom is a deadening of his perceptions
and the failure to appreciate the world about him. To Cowper, nature is not God, but it reveals God; and when one cannot respond, one must fear that he is damned. As we shall see, it is in relation to this fear that Cowper's ideas and images most strongly suggest theriophily, for the man who is damned can hardly be considered the lord of creation, or even a creature as fortunate as the beasts.

In a number of ways, then, the natural world appears highly symbolic to Cowper. In the traditional sense, every creature is linked with every other creature in a natural order under the sovereignty of God. No relationship is preposterous. In the Olney hymn, "I Will Praise the Lord at All Times," the plaintive song of the turtle dove echoes the groans of the crucified Christ (p. 475). Traditionally, too, Cowper's nature sometimes operates in a kind of code. Just as man celebrates by the use of fireworks, so nature has her modes of celebration:

The ocean serves on high,  
Up-spouted by a whale in air,  
T'express unwieldy joy.  
("On the Queen's Visit to London," ll. 18-21)

If man understood, Cowper writes in The Task, he would be able to see God as the cause of all natural events (II. 160-205). Any incident, like a passing bird "may prove, when understood,/ A harbinger of endless good" ("A Poetical Epistle to Lady Austen," ll. 87-90). It is this tendency toward a symbolic view of the natural world which is seen in Cowper's fables. In "The Retired Cat" a presumptuous
cat who is trapped in a drawer learns that the world does not revolve around her (pp. 407-409). From "The Pine-apple and the Bee" we learn that we "Can gather honey from a weed" (p. 297) and need not insist on something unattainable in order to find fulfillment. Like all fables, Cowper's are closely related to theriophily, for they equate animal conduct with human conduct, sometimes emphasizing the foolishness which is common to both levels of life, as when Cowper points out that both Lady Throckmorton's dog Fop and many human beings die exhausted from vain pursuit ("Epitaph on Fop," pp. 418-19), sometimes emphasizing a nobler quality in animals, such as the devotion of the goldfinch who will not leave his friend even to attain his own freedom ("The Faithful Friend," pp. 355-56). Sometimes Cowper's symbolic view of the natural world results in an equation between the precarious circumstances surrounding animal life with the equally perilous human condition. He writes to the Rev. William Unwin about the kittens who fearlessly approached a viper, an example of the fact, Cowper notes, that we are never in more danger than when we think ourselves secure.50

Sometimes Cowper's symbolic approach to nature leads him into comments which are associated with theriophily of the moralistic strain. He cannot truthfully assert that man is always morally superior to other living creatures. Like the horse of Misagathus, Cowper's dog Beau "shall
mortify the pride/ Of man's superior breed" ("The Dog and the Water-Lily," ll. 39-40), prompting Cowper to hope that he can show as much love for God as Beau has shown for him. Elsewhere, however, Beau is scolded for killing a bird merely for the sake of pleasure:

My dog! what remedy remains,
   Since, teach you all I can,
I see you, after all my pains,
   So much resemble man!  
("Beau's Reply," p. 426)

In this poem, the spaniel argues that he has merely obeyed nature's command, and in nature, killing one's natural prey is no "crime." This pair of poems emphasizes Cowper's own uncertainty as to the moral excellence of animals.

The question of man's supposed moral superiority is always raised when Cowper sees man's inhuman behavior toward other creatures. The cockfighter, who is already under Cowper's displeasure for blaspheming and betting on the Sabbath, is even more evil because he makes money from the agonies of his bird,

   a cock--whose blood might win him more;
   As if the noblest of the feather'd kind
   Were but for battle and for death design'd.
("A Tale, Founded on a Fact," ll. 8-10)

Another cruel master, angered by his cock's momentary cowardice, ties the live bird to the kitchen spit, but is himself struck down by divine vengeance. Such a man is proof of what man without grace can be, Cowper says, adding parenthetically that we only call him a man because the "howling wild/ Disclaims him" ("The Cock-Fighter's Garland,"
11. 13-14). Even with the modifying statement concerning grace, the assumption that a man without compassion is not fit to be a part of nature is in the tradition of theriophily.

Although Cowper welcomes gifts of game for table use, he disapproves of hunting. Thus he writes to Lady Hesketh that his friend, Mrs. Throckmorton, expressed regrets "that they had no gamekeeper, because, for that reason, they could not furnish us with game in their absence." Yet despite early excursions "with my pencil in hand and my gun by my side," Cowper soon comes to view the hunter as the prototype of brutishness, or man's descent to a position lower than that of the animals. Hartley points out that fox hunting is associated by Cowper with card playing, duelling, and other aristocratic vices which conceal man's inner savagery, and concludes that in the earlier poems Cowper opposes hunting as the Puritan opposed bear baiting, "not because of the pain to the animals but because of the pleasure of the participants." However, Cowper's frequent comment that most of his neighbors are mere squires, "purse-proud and sportsmen" and his statement that he associates with few of the other country gentlemen because they are obsessed with sports, for which Cowper has "not the least relish," would indicate something more than a mere Puritan antipathy to pleasure. When a hunter fell from his horse, most of his friends "were too much fox-hunters to trouble themselves at all about him," Cowper
writes. It is this lack of sensitivity and compassion, as well as of intelligence, which to Cowper degrades the sportsman, so that he is an animal or a creature even lower than an animal. On one occasion, Cowper admitted a party of fox hunters on foot. In a letter to Lady Hesketh he describes the ensuing events. The huntsman, he says, showed "a sagacity that would not have dishonoured the best hound in the world, pursuing precisely the same track which the fox and the dogs had taken." At the ritual death, Cowper notes the similarity between the expressions of "rational delight" on the hunters' faces and on those of the dogs. In "The Progress of Error," Cowper writes that the only difference between the sportsman and his beagle is that the beagle's scent is superior (ll. 85-87). And in "Conversation," he suggests that the fox hunter's

only fit companion is his horse,
Or if, deserving of a better doom,
The noble beast judge otherwise, his groom.
(ll. 412-14)

The horse's superiority is obvious. In "Beau's Reply," the poem in which Cowper's spaniel defends himself for having killed a bird, the dog points out that at least he had restrained himself from killing Cowper's pet linnet. Thus a dog, whose hunting can be justified as instinctive, is capable of self-discipline which bloodthirsty hunters cannot manage. In his attitude toward hunting, then, Cowper follows the "hard," moralistic tradition of theriophily which has been noted in Montaigne and Mandeville.
In Cowper, as in Montaigne, the matter of man's alienation from nature inevitably involves the biblical curse and the traditional suspicion that even if nature became corrupted through the fall of man, it is somehow still more innocent than man. How then can we warn men not to become brutes? Cowper vacillates in his answer. If, as he writes in The Task, "Nature is but a name for an effect,/ Whose cause is God" (VI.223-25), we must praise "brutes" for their obedience to nature. Unlike men, who are "Fretful if unsupply'd" with food (The Task.V.31), cattle wait patiently and obediently for their master's gift. Men change even their speech to accord with fashion; birds never alter their assigned song. For "nature unsophisticate by man,/ Starts not aside from her Creator's plan" ("Conversation," ll. 451-52). The difficulty civilized man has in making an adjustment to nature is outlined in "Retirement." The statesman in the country soon becomes restless, unlike his "ambling pony" (l. 467). The horse put out to pasture is perfectly happy:

But when his lord would quit the busy road,
To taste a joy like that he has bestow'd,
He proves, less happy than his favour'd brute,
A life of ease a difficult pursuit. (ll. 631-34)

Man, on the other hand, cannot achieve so happy a relationship with nature. Cowper appears confused as to what man's relationship with nature should be. He does not approve of the "squalid sloth" of the gypsies in The Task (I.579) because in his eyes they have betrayed their rationality and
their humanity, like the equally lazy aristocrats who stay in bed until noon. The thresher's life is far superior, for work in a natural environment is "the primal curse,/ But soften'd into mercy" (Task.I.364-65). Cowper proceeds to praise the ceaseless action in nature, the alternation of toil and rest. Like Rousseau, who believed that every young Émile should master a craft, Cowper considers work an essential part of an ideal existence. Such a philosophy does not attract the primitivists who seek a Tahitian existence as effortless as possible.

Perhaps one reason that Cowper feels a natural life for man implies activity is his admiration for vitality, which he associates with nature. As Lord David Cecil points out, vitality was the common quality which drew Cowper to human friends as unlike as John Newton, Lady Austen, Mary Unwin, and William Hayley, and probably the quality which gave him such delight in his animal friends. In civilized man, nerves have replaced animal vigor, Cowper writes. When he despairs of salvation, it is his animal spirits which enable him to carry his burden. In the spiritual despair of his later years, he can count on respite in the afternoon and evening, "not because I am more spiritual, or have more hope, at these times than at others, but merely because the animal has been recruited by eating and drinking." In 1792 Cowper writes to the
eccentric schoolmaster, Samuel Teedon, "God knows how much I feel myself in want of animal spirits, courage, hope, and all mental requisites."64

A careful study of Cowper's animal images makes it clear that his envy of animal vitality proceeds directly from the terror of damnation, which can afflict only human beings, and which Cowper believed through most of his lifetime was to be his ultimate destiny. As Hartley65 and Quinlan66 point out, self-abasement is part of the evangelical tradition; it is not surprising, therefore, to find Cowper referring to himself as a worm, the term which seemed best suited to unregenerate man. In the hymns entitled "Mourning and Longing," "Jehovah-Shalom, the Lord Send Peace," "Not of Works," and "The Narrow Way," man is called a worm, variously "sordid," "feeble," and "vainglorious." Only grace can save him. Thus "Lively Hope, and Gracious Fear" is more optimistic:

But God has breath'd upon a worm,
And sent me, from above,
Wings, such as clothe an angel's form,
The wings of joy and love. (p. 466)

In Cowper's poems, too, the metaphor appears frequently. In "Charity," God views men as "worms below" (l. 592); in "Truth," men foolishly praise themselves, when they are only worms (l. 412); and in "Hope," repenting man must admit that he is only a worm, and that all "pow'r belongs to God" (l. 711).
Sometimes, in the Miltonic tradition, Cowper equates the worm with the serpent of sin which preys on man, rather than with man himself. Thus in "The Progress of Error," the "serpent error twines round human hearts" (l. 4), and "the pois'rous, black, insinuating worm" conceals her nature from man (ll. 7-8). In "Truth," it is not error but pride which is "the subtlest serpent" (l. 476). Again, in "The Happy Change," Cowper speaks of serpents in the heart of man, and in another Olney hymn, "Hatred of Sin," sin is the serpent's tooth which instills poison in man.

The relationship between worms, flies and sin is expressed at length in "Conversation," as part of Cowper's attack on hypocritical religious fanaticism, which seeks the applause of men,

And, while at heart sin unrelinquishe'd lies,  
Presumes itself chief fav'rite of the skies.  
'Tis such a light as putrefaction breeds  
In flyblown flesh whereon the maggot feeds,  
Shines in the dark, but usher'd into day,  
The stench remains, the lustre dies away.  
(ll. 673-78)

Sensational novelists who corrupt young ladies are

flesh-flies of the land;  
Who fasten without mercy on the fair,  
And suck, and leave a craving maggot there.  
("The Progress of Error," ll. 324-26)

Thus as "mice, worms, and swarming flies" threaten Cowper's prize cucumber (Task.III.555), so the vermin and insects of sin threaten Cowper himself. They may torment him with thoughts of the damnation which Cowper believed was inevitable for him. References such as the following occur
frequently in his correspondence:

My spirits this morning are in some small degree better than usual, the wasps and hornets having been less busy about me at the time of waking than they generally are.68

Just as worms can represent either man or his attackers, so also the flying insect metaphor may represent either a creature which attacks man, or man himself. In the latter case, often the fly is opposed to the spider. For Cowper, as Golden points out, the web is a symbol of confusion which man creates himself or which entraps him; in either case, he must escape from the web in order to achieve salvation.69 Critics spin biblical commentaries "as fine/ As bloated spiders draw the flimsy line" ("The Progress of Error," ll. 494-95). Their readers must escape from the web. In "Expostulation," it is only Providence which can destroy the "web" of evil (l. 331), and even the weakest web or error can "catch a modern brain" (l. 629). An entry in the diary kept by Cowper during his last madness stresses the relationship in Cowper's mind between the fly and the web. Cowper laments, "I have been but a poor Fly entangled in a thousand webs from the beginning."70

The fly also reminds Cowper of the transience of life. Most human beings pursue dreams, he writes in The Task:

The million flit as gay
As if created only like the fly,
That spreads his motley wings in th' eye of noon,
To sport their season and be seen no more.

(III.133-36)
To God, man is "A poor blind creature of a day,/ And crush'd before the moth" ("Submission," p. 462). To God "all nations seem/ As grasshoppers, as dust" ("Expostulation," ll. 344-45).

In the evangelical tradition, strongly influenced by Calvinism, which is the basis of Cowper's religious convictions, man deserves only damnation. If he receives the gift of grace, he will be saved. But Cowper's own brief period of assurance was soon replaced, for a still unexplained reason, by an even stronger conviction that he had no hope of salvation, but was doomed to eternal torment. In such a situation, even the brief life of a fly would be preferable to that of Cowper himself. In 1782 Cowper writes with fascination of the farmer who died believing that he was as mortal as his two mastiffs, that "no part of either would survive the grave." One feels Cowper would have welcomed that conviction, in preference to his own, that he was less fortunate than other living creatures. In "The Progress of Error," he admonishes the sensual and profane:

   Envy the Beast, then, on whom heav'n bestows
   Your pleasures, with no curses in the close.
   (ll. 267-68)

But ordinarily Cowper is less concerned with the possible damnation of others than with his own certain torment. Like the romantics, Cowper thinks of the sea as the great unreasoning element where storms gather to threaten man; but
unlike them, he consistently relates the titanic forces of nature to his own damnation, as he does in the late, despairing poem, "The Castaway." It has been noted that natural catastrophes become a manifestation of God's displeasure toward man in general and Cowper in particular. Those killed in the earthquake in Sicily are not necessarily more guilty than others; but they are "marks" chosen by God to warn others (Task.II.154-60). The arguments of Cowper's friends cannot convince him that he deserves better of God, for God is as illogical in marking men for damnation as in choosing one insect or another for death.

In Cowper's case, then, the question becomes not whether he is damned, but when he will meet his fate. The constant companionship of what MacLean calls Cowper's "terror in a garden" is reflected in some of the events which the poet mentions in his letters and in his poetry. There is violence in Cowper's garden. If Cowper himself had not intervened, the innocent kittens might have been killed by the snake. Periodically, Cowper reports a death. A rabbit, a dog, a goldfinch—all meet their doom. In the most ironic incident of all, a raven's eggs survive the storm only to be eaten by man. Thus fate (or God) is unpredictable, "frowns in the storm with angry brow, / But in the sunshine strikes the blow" ("A Fable," p. 303). In this fallen world, "ev'ry drop of honey hides a sting, / Worms wind themselves into our sweetest flow'rs" (Task.VI.830-31).
But the threat for other living creatures is only death; the possibility for other human beings is heaven; the certainty for Cowper is damnation. He is an exception even to the uncertainty which affects other human beings. Cowper is as certain of his being the object of God’s wrath as Rousseau was certain of being the object of a general human conspiracy.

In Cowper’s mind there is a persistent ambivalence as to the nature of God. Is God, as in the "Prayer for Children," the dove who protects creatures from "the rav’rous bird of prey" (p. 449), which may symbolize death or, more probably, sin? Or is it God himself Who hunts man? Hoosag Gregory, in his psychoanalytical study of Cowper, argues that the poet’s dislike of hunting can be explained by his identification with the hunted animal. Certainly much can be made of the stricken deer in The Task, although in succeeding lines he is likened to Christ, which would be unlikely if God were the hunter. But we must not expect that kind of logic from Cowper, perhaps not from any artist. If Cowper believes, at least subconsciously, that it is God, not sin, that damns him, and that God has condemned him as capriciously as He condemned the Sicilians, then in his own relationship to animals we can see Cowper outdoing God in parental justice and mercy. Cowper’s pets would be more than a distraction from his terror, if we accept such a hypothesis, and his feeling for animals would become more
than disinterested humanitarianism. It would become an acting out of the ideal God-man relationship.

As Hartley points out, the parental role of God is both traditional in evangelical works and personally applicable to Cowper, who was deeply affected by the early loss of his mother. There is both tradition and personal association behind the many images in Cowper's poetry which compare human beings to fledglings, protected beneath the wings of God ("Dependance," p. 473). In the hymn, "Jehovah-Shammah," God guards his elect, "As birds their infant brood protect,/ And spread their wings to shelter them" (p. 441). Cowper's yearning for parental tenderness is further reflected in the dream about which he wrote the poet, William Hayley, in April, 1792. He dreamed that a robin perched on his knee, then "crept into my bosom. I never in my waking hours felt a tenderer love for anything than I felt for the little animal in my sleep." Cowper reflects that he could not show unkindness to Hayley any more than he could reject "poor Bob and trample him under my foot, for which I should deserve death." In an important statement about animals, Cowper writes that men, as "lords of the creation," usually abuse animals. Perhaps then "here and there a man should be found a little womanish, or perhaps a little childish in this matter, who will make some amends, by kissing, and coaxing, and laying them in one's bosom." The kindness Cowper has in mind, then, is not merely parental, but maternal.
In Cowper's protected world, the hare and the dove need not fear man, and the squirrel can even dare to scold him (Task.VI.305-20). Sheltered by Cowper, Puss the hare "has lost/ Much of her vigilant instinctive dread,/ Not needful here, beneath a roof like mine" (Task.III.340-41). But as Golden points out, Cowper's world is his retreat from the city, from the kind of prominence which apparently produced his first attack of insanity, and the world of his pets is a refuge not in nature, but in a house, where hunters cannot attack them. His hare Puss must be retrieved, in the comic chase he describes to the Rev. John Newton, if she is to survive. And his dog cannot go blithely in search of females, if he is to be safe.

That sense of singularity which led Cowper to believe in his unique damnation operated, Hartley believes, to make the poet more aware of a sacred individuality in all the elements of nature. Certainly he is a tolerant parent to the animals whose lives touch his own. He comments humorously that although the braying of an ass disturbs him, "It would be cruel to mortify so fine a singer, therefore I do not tell him that he interrupts and hinders me." The letters reflect his permissiveness: "My bird is washing himself and spurtles my paper, so adieu, my dear Mrs. Frog," he writes on one occasion, and on another, his dog hampers the letter-writing because "He will be in my lap, licking my face, and nibbling the end of my pen."
The lamented hare Tiney preserved his wild nature to the end, and "when he could, would bite," Cowper writes in the "Epitaph on a Hare" (p. 352). Cowper is as tender of his animals' health as a mother, refusing to give his dog Beau a bath for fear he may contract rheumatism and when Beau does fall ill, sending him to consult an expert huntsman, wise in dog medicine. Every evening the hares have their run of the house, and if human beings come to call, the door cannot be opened, even to Cowper's elegant friend, Lady Austen, or to the future prime minister of England, William Grenville, calling to solicit Cowper's vote. Clearly Cowper is saving his animals from every kind of suffering and even inconvenience in his power, and demanding very little from them in return. We may suspect this is the relationship with God for which he would have hoped. But he continues aware that he is less fortunate than his pets. Not nature, but God is in this case the cruel stepmother of theriophile tradition, who treats man worse than beasts.

Cowper's identification of himself with the animals around him affects his attitude toward freedom—whether physical, moral, political or aesthetic. Himself the victim of an arbitrary God, Cowper does not seem to approve of God's tactics. He writes to the Rev. John Newton in 1783 that one has to be managed, not scolded out of sin. "A surly mastiff will bear perhaps to be stroked . . . but if you touch him roughly, he will bite," he observes. Yet
in "Hope," he conventionally deplores man's disobedience—he is "a wild ass's colt" (ll. 131-32), and in the hymn "Ephraim Repenting," he dramatizes a passage in Jeremiah in which Ephraim admits the justice of God's chastisement and appeals for His mastery:

My God! till I received thy stroke,
How like a beast was I!
So unaccustomed to the yoke,
So backward to reply. (p. 440)

Part of Cowper's delight in animals comes, we have seen, from their vitality, a quality which is closely related to freedom. He remembers a young cousin as "A kitten both in size and glee,"90 and, as we have seen, he permits great liberties to his pets. Yet human children should be disciplined, he writes in "The Progress of Error," using a metaphor which stresses a human similarity to animals:

Man's coltish disposition asks the thing;
And, without discipline, the fav'rite child,
Like a neglected forester, runs wild. (ll. 360-62)

In "Charity," slaves are compared to horses, in that they share the same love of freedom:

The beasts are charter'd--neither age nor force
Can quell the love of freedom in a horse. (ll. 170-72)

But in The Task, bondage makes men bestial:

All constraint
Except what wisdom lays on evil men,
Is evil; hurts the faculties, impedes
Their progress in the road of science; blinds
The eyesight of discovery; and begets,
In those that suffer it, a sordid mind
Bestial, a meagre intellect, unfit
To be the tenant of man's noble form. (V.448-55)
Cowper then adds that even a slave can have another form of liberty, that freedom which we call grace. In Quinlan's words, "the slave whom God loves is really the freeman, and his unenlightened owner, not enjoying the liberty to know God's works, is a bondsman to ignorance."91 Cowper displays a brief enthusiasm over the movement which led to the French Revolution, for example anticipating the fall of the Bastille:

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For he who values liberty confines
His zeal for her predominance within
No narrow bounds,  (Task.V.393-95)
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and yet he does not believe in building a new order upon the ruins of the old, for "it is not for man by himself, to bring order out of confusion; the progress from one to the other is not natural, much less necessary, and without the intervention of divine aid, impossible; and they who are for making the hazardous experiment, would certainly find themselves disappointed."92

Cowper's mind is divided between a delight in freedom and a fear of it. Just as he is uncertain whether or not an ideal master would free or tame his animals, so he is uncertain as to what God's real intention for man may be. Order would demand discipline, God's discipline of man, and man's discipline of himself. In obedience to God, man should "guide his horse/ Obedient to the customs of the course" of virtue ("Truth," ll. 13-14). But does God permit man any freedom except obedience to Him? Cowper
praises freedom, not obedience, in the "Free But Tame Red-breast," neither "rudely bold" nor "spiritlessly tame," his bosom "always in a flame" (p. 415).

As a poet, Cowper argues for freedom of the imagination; Pope's example "Made poetry a mere mechanic art:/ And ev'ry warbler has his tune by heart" ("Table Talk," ll. 654-55). Cowper praises Charles Churchill for turning aside from the road of tradition, like a spirited horse ("Table Talk," ll. 668-91), and argues that the vitality is worth the risk:

would you sell or slay your horse
For bounding and curvetting in his course;
Or if, when ridden with a careless rein,
He break and seek the distant plain?
No. His high mettle under good controul,
Gives him Olympic speed, and shoots him to the goal.
("Table Talk," ll. 304-309)

Cowper compares himself to a bee, flitting from flower to flower in search of poetic themes ("Annus Memorabilis, 1789," p. 386), to a nightingale singing "Beneath a wintry sky" ("To the Nightingale," p. 414) and modestly, to the grasshopper who chirps his music and would "rather skip than fly" ("Table Talk," l. 579). Although Golden argues that Cowper's prevailing attitude toward the imagination is "fear of its delusive and lawless tendencies," MacLean notes that "the winged fancy, the runaway horse, the grasshopper" dominate The Task, symbolizing the new and freer poetic form which Cowper uses in that poem. Cowper's persistent identification of himself with spirited, vital
creatures suggests that only in the poetic imagination could he escape from bondage to an arbitrary God Who damn men but not "lecherous goats" or "serpents envious." 95

The conflict between Cowper's own tendencies and his religious obsession makes it impossible for him to decide whether to disapprove of animals and all things brutish or bestial or to envy them. He is bound to distrust his animal instincts, to castigate the rule of the senses in present day Englishmen, as he does in "Expostulation." Gluttony is a sin, "For nature, nice, as liberal to dis pense,/ Made nothing but a brute the slave of sense" ("Progress of Error," l. 214). Yet the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah "stamps disgrace/ Baboons are free from" on human beings ("Expostulation," ll. 416-17). In "Anti-Thelyphthora" Cowper satirized a proposal to permit polygamy in order to minimize prostitution. The champion of this plan, "Sir Airy," believes that marriage is too confining. In the future, man "May rove at will, where appetite shall lead,/ Free as the lordly bull that ranges o'er the mead" (ll. 60-61). Yet in "The Doves" the devotion of two turtle doves is presented by Cowper as "A lesson for mankind" (p. 304), and in "A Tale," the chaffinch's loyalty to his mate, who has nested at the top of a ship's mast (pp. 422-24), is similarly in the tradition of theriophily, which so often presents animal mates as models for man.
It may be that the glorification of domesticity is Cowper's way of escaping from the problem of sex as a factor in human life. He can praise the domestic virtues without committing himself to the entire creative process, which depends upon the application of "animal spirits" to specific action, just as he lived for so many years in a domestic relationship with Mary Unwin without committing himself to a full marital relationship.

Throughout Cowper's work appears this theme of escape, often phrased in terms of a possible Eden. Cowper would like to locate or to create a golden world, an Eden, in the present natural world. It would be a place or a kind of life or a state of mind notable chiefly for the absence of conflict between its inhabitants and for relief from the terror which haunted Cowper. The original lost Eden is pictured in Book VI of The Task as a place where man was a rightful monarch, himself bounded by "the law of universal love" (l. 360). Cowper's picture of the change which followed man's first sin is in the biblical and Miltonic tradition which was outlined earlier in this study:

*Ev'ry heart,*
Each animal of ev'ry name, conceiv'd
A jealousy and an instinctive fear,
And, conscious of some danger, either fled
Precipitate the loath'd abode of man,
Or growled defiance in such angry sort,
As taught him, too, to tremble in his turn.
Thus harmony and family accord
Were driv'n from Paradise; and in that hour,
The seeds of cruelty, that since have swell'd
to such gigantic and enormous growth,
Were sown in human nature's fruitful soil.
(11. 372-83)
In that lost Eden, God inflicted no terror on man, and man inflicted no terror on the animals. But if that golden age is gone forever, where can man find a new Eden, a model for his present life? Some primitivists sought a return to a simpler kind of life, closer to nature, modeled after the freedom of animals. In this tradition is Cowper’s regret for the loss of vigor which civilization has cost man:

I can hardly doubt that a bull-dog or a game-cock might be made just as susceptible of injuries from weather as myself, were he dieted and in all respects accommodated as I am. . . . (at least in many generations). Let such a dog be fed in his infancy with pap, Naples biscuit, and boiled chicken; let him be wrapped in flannel at night, sleep on good feather-bed, and ride out in a coach for an airing; and if his posterity do not become slight-limbed, and puny, and valetudinarian, it will be a wonder.96

In The Task, Cowper equates the innocent gaiety of the lark with that of the peasant:

The innocent are gay—the lark is gay,
That dries his feathers, saturate with dew,
Beneath the rosy cloud, while yet the beams
Of day-spring overshoot his humble nest.
The peasant too, a witness of his song,
Himself a songster, is as gay as he. (l.493-98)

In an epigram, he associates innocence with the negro slave, who is compared to a lamb because both are "harmless things"; their blood is "the blood of innocence."97 But Cowper does not hope for an earthly paradise of noble savages. Nor, as we have seen, does he have hopes that a new Eden can be built on the ruins of the old institutions. Eventually a new golden age will come, of course, in that
future era after the Last Judgment, when the land is purged from sin:

The lion, and the libbard, and the bear
Graze with the fearless flocks; all bask at noon
Together, or all gambol in the shade
Of the same grove, and drink one common stream.
Antipathies are none. No foe to man
Lurks in the serpent now. . . .
All creatures worship man, and all mankind
One Lord, one Father. (Task.VI.773-84)

But between the lost first paradise and the future Eden, there is another approximation to Eden which is available to man in his present situation. It involves a withdrawal from the city, the "crowded coop" (Task.III.634) or "crowded hive" ("Vanity of the World," p. 437) to a kind of wilderness admittedly more like the pruned "wilderness" where Cowper walked so often than the "wild domain" of The Task, where the lion rules his subjects more mercifully than man (VI.407).

For a number of reasons Cowper prefers the country to the city. Kenneth MacLean suggests a psychological motivation, the neurotic need for relative isolation, which is related to the poet's unstable mental state. The metaphors above describe a kind of animal life which is hardly private. In Hartley's opinion, Cowper genuinely enjoyed country living and found a peace in nature which the city could not offer him. Thomas points out that in nature Cowper undoubtedly sees "the symbol of the simple life in which virtue and inward freedom could more easily flourish." Although evangelicalism theoretically frowned
on the unredeemed "natural" man, Thomas notes that that religious persuasion opposed the same forces of luxury which the primitivists opposed. Thus Cowper reflects both influences when he dreads a trip to Cambridge because "I remembered the pollution which is in the world and the sad share I had in it myself, and my heart ached at the thought of entering it again." The object of The Task, as delineated by Cowper, is "to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure, as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue." When the town touches the country, it tends to pollute it and its innocent inhabitants. It is town criminals who prowl the countryside (Task.IV.555-75). Contact with civilization taints the young soldier, once a child "of nature, without guile,/Blest with an infant's ignorance of all/But his own simple pleasures" (Task.IV.623-25) and the "rural lass" (Task.IV.534) who apes the ladies of the city. When one leaves the country, he leaves man's proper life,

Ev'n as his first progenitor, and quits,
Though placed in paradise, (for earth has still
Some traces of her youthful beauty left)
Substantial happiness for transient joy.
(Task.III.297-300)

It is in nature that man can find at least a substitute paradise. The natural life is natural for man:

'Tis born with all: the love of Nature's works
Is an ingredient in the compound man,
Infused at the creation of the kind. (Task.IV.731-33)
To Cowper, then, life in the country is not merely a retreat; it is a movement toward virtue, toward harmonious life. A feeling for nature which at times seems almost mystical is evident in Cowper. In "Retirement," which Martin contends was influenced by Vaughan's "The World," Cowper says that in the country "Traces of Eden are still seen below" (l. 28) and all of nature reminds man "of his Maker's power and love" (l. 30).

For Cowper, life in the country is life in close association with animals. It is significant that when he contrasts city and country in a letter to Joseph Hill, Cowper portrays a coffee-house scene on one hand and on the other a domestic scene in which a little dog howls while a lady plays the harpsichord. The domestic companionship of animals is important in Cowper's Eden. Even more significantly, the decadent city-dweller in "Hope" goes to bed "when the larks and when the shepherds rise" (l. 86), while in the country a lady can "measure the life that she leads" by the song of the nightingale ("Catharina," ll. 47-48). In The Task, evening comes to man and beast alike,

one hand employ'd
In letting fall the curtain of repose
On bird and beast, the other charg'd for man
With sweet oblivion of the cares of day.

(IV.247-50)

Similarly, even though Alexander Selkirk calls himself "lord of the fowl and the brute," at night he follows the
natural pattern:

    the sea-fowl is gone to her nest,
    The beast is laid down in his lair,
    Ev'n here is a season of rest,
    And I to my cabin repair.

("Verses Supposed to be Written by Alexander Selkirk,
ll. 49-52)

In the country, Cowper writes, the soul communes with God "like the nightingale," asking no human "witness of her song." Clearly Cowper not only observed nature, but also himself entered into life according to a natural pattern. The pets who lived so closely with him helped to set that pattern, which perhaps for a time he could believe was that of a pre-lapsarian world. As Cecil comments, animals lacked a soul, "the very name of which made him feel depressed."107

Although the future of his soul depressed him, Cowper was not disturbed by the fact that the natural process leads inevitably to death. In "Yardley Oak," he traces the changes in the tree which bring it to maturity and then to dissolution, commenting that only Adam was spared full participation in this growth process (ll. 167-84). In "The Poplar-Field," Cowper anticipates his own death in a matter-of-fact way, just as in other poems he accepts the deaths of various pets. His submission to the inevitable change which is part of nature is reflected in The Task, when he addresses his hare:

    If I survive thee I will dig thy grave;
    And, when I place thee in it, sighing, say,
    I knew at least one hare that had a friend. (III.349-51)
But if, as Fausset says, Cowper's *Task* is a "first tentative sketch of that art of life in communion with Nature," it is only tentative. Throughout his work there is an evident straining to find a harmony in nature which Cowper could find in himself or among men. In "The Nightingale and Glow-worm," a fable directed at sectarians, the bird does not eat the worm because

*twars the self-same pow'r divine
Taught you to sing, and me to shine;
That you with music, I with light,
Might beautify and cheer the night. (p. 301)

Cowper emphasizes unlikely animal friendships: the hare and the spaniel, the cat and the spaniel. A person who finds a model for man in the domestic arrangements of animals is shocked when animal nature does not live up to his expectations. Cowper recalls the mouse he kept as a pet at Westminster School. When she ate her own young, he turned her loose, and never kept a mouse again. A "Mischiefous Bull" who wants to fight all comers is expelled from Cowper's Eden, where Cowper, the squirrels, the woodpeckers, and the sheep are all peaceful, and transported into verse, where he can be better managed. This qualified acceptance of nature is aptly summarized by Hazlitt who says that Cowper approaches nature with kid gloves on, "as if he were afraid of being caught in a shower of rain, or of not being able, in case of any untoward accident, to make good his retreat home." Clearly Cowper's search for a lost innocence in a lost paradise demands such a
refusal to face nature as it is. Therefore he nostalgically recalls the freedom of childhood in natural surroundings ("Retirement," ll. 399-404), and later despairs of his inability to recapture that pleasure in gardening and in animal companionship which he felt when, though an adult in age, he was somehow a child in innocence. For Cowper comes to a point where nature is "an universal blank" to him because he is denied the grace of God. He cannot commit himself to primitivism because only God's forgiveness will restore him to that harmony with nature which he so desires. One who is denied heaven cannot respond to earth; but if restored to God's grace, he will have both heaven and earth:

Nature, assuming a more lovely face,
Borrowing a beauty from the works of grace,
Shall be despis'd and overlook'd no more,
Shall fill thee with delights unfelt before,
Impart to things inanimate a voice,
And bid her mountains and her hills rejoice;
The sound shall run along the winding vales,
And thou enjoy an Eden ere it fails.
("Retirement," ll. 357-64)

It is undoubtedly Cowper's unwillingness to commit himself to the primitivistic ideas which are implied in much of his work that causes his mixed feelings about Burns, whom he admires greatly. Cowper regrets the waste of Burns's ability in the "barbarism" of the Scottish language and disapproves of Burns's intending merely "to raise a laugh." Cowper feels distaste for the English counterparts of Burns's peasants, the kind of country people who spit on the floor and talk about maggotty pigs ("The Yearly Distress"). Where
Burns finds animal joy among the beggars, Cowper is repelled by the slovenly gypsies described in the first book of *The Task*. In the same section, Cowper describes the yearning for civilization which he assumes would be felt by a South Seas savage who had visited England and later returned to his native island (Task.I.632-71). Virtue is found not among primitive men, "where violence prevails" (Task.I.604), where war and hunting brutalize man, but "in the mild/ And genial soil of cultivated life" (Task.I.678-79). As Smith points out, Cowper does not want to forgo books and eat acorns, any more than he wants Scotch peasants, mischievous bulls or cannibalistic mice in his Eden. Again, Cowper is desperately playing God in his little world, circumscribing it and placing himself in tune with a nature from which he has removed the terror. Not only need the hares not be terrified of him, he is not terrified of them. Cowper’s locale is the house, the garden, the cage. Unable to face nature realistically, as Crabbe was to do, unable to commit himself to it for better or for worse, as Burns was to do, Cowper becomes the prisoner of his own despair and of his own imagination. In a letter he reflects upon the prison which his own desperate retirement has become:

an invisible, uncontrollable agency, a local attachment, an inclination more forcible than I ever felt . . . serves me for prison walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass.
Like his caged birds and confined hares, Cowper has lost his freedom in an attempt to protect himself from terror. But as long as he is attacked by thoughts, he must envy animals their freedom from the curse of Cowper's God.

The ambivalence which we have seen in Cowper's references to animals in his letters and in the animal images used so frequently in his poetry obviously results from the poet's philosophical and emotional confusion about man's place in the universe. Cowper's Christian commitment compels him to think of man as the master of the animals, but his observation of man's cruelty and viciousness propels him toward moralistic theriophily and even toward the unequivocal statement of animal superiority which we shall see in Burns. Cowper's humanitarianism and his sentimental attachment toward his own pets leads him to question the traditional assumption that all of nature is corrupt as a result of the fall of man and occasionally even to suspect that man could live more happily if his life were modelled on that of the animals. Both his philosophical tendency to view the natural world as symbolic and his emotional need to act out a drama of redemption cause him to identify himself with animals, while his own despair impels him to envy the animals' vitality and their exemption from that damnation for which God had evidently destined Cowper. In Cowper's thought, then, are merged concepts associated with traditional Christianity, horrors suggested by strict Calvinism, and speculations
leading toward moralistic and even toward "soft" theriophobia. Although the result could not possibly be consistent, it serves as a useful indication of the confusion felt by a religious man who attempts in a particularly turbulent age to define his own position with regard to the animals, a confusion which is complicated by his own psychological problems. It is not surprising that Cowper's theriophobia is modified into a controlled drama in which Cowper and his pets act out the redemption which the poet himself felt he could not attain, a drama in which the emphasis is not on the animals' superiority to man but instead on Cowper's superiority to his unkind Calvinistic God.

In the poetry of Crabbe, we shall see another use of theriophobia, as a means of showing man how far his conduct falls below God's intentions for him. In place of the kind of escape which Cowper attempted, Crabbe will substitute a confrontation with the bitter truth about man and life, hoping from his realistic appraisal of man as an animal to point the way to a life superior to that of the animals. Thus, unlike Cowper, who, though attracted by both strains of theriophobia, was finally in the mainstream of neither, Crabbe will be seen to operate consistently as a moralistic theriophile like Montaigne and Plutarch.
NOTES


6Letters to Joseph Hill, 21 Jan. 1768, 1 Jan. 1771, in Correspondence, ed. Thomas Wright (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1904), I, 101, 126. All succeeding references to Cowper's letters are to this edition.

7To the Rev. John Newton, 19 Nov. 1781, in Correspondence, I, 383.

8To Lady Hesketh, 9 Jan. 1788, in Correspondence, III, 207.

9Jan. 1791, in Correspondence, IV, 19-20.


1210 May 1790, in Correspondence, III, 457.

1320 Oct. 1784, in Correspondence, II, 257.

14To Mrs. Throckmorton, July 1789, in Correspondence, III, 399.

15"Heroism," in Works, II. 31-32.

16To Samuel Rose, 4 Oct. 1789, in Correspondence, III, 404.
17 To Lady Hesketh, 25 Mar. 1792, in Corres., IV, 175.
18 To the Rev. John Newton, 3 May 1780, in Corres., I, 185.
19 To the Rev. John Newton, 30 Nov. 1783, in Corres., II, 135.
20 To Clotworthy Rowley, Aug. 1758, in Corres., I, 16.
21 To the Rev. William Unwin, 28 May 1781, in Corres., I, 314.
24 "On the Promotion of Edward Thurlow, Esq.," p. 298.
28 "Charity," I. 142.
29 "Charity," II. 152-54.
31 To Lady Hesketh, 27 June 1788, in Corres., III, 292.
32 To Samuel Rose, 5 Nov. 1789, in Corres., III, 406.
33 To the Rev. William Unwin, 18 July 1778, in Corres., I, 149-50.
34 To the Rev. Walton Bagot, 22 June 1790, in Corres., III, 470.
35 W. Powell Jones, "The Captive Linnet: A Footnote in
40 May 1788, in Corres., II, 269.
41 May 1786, in Corres., III, 49.
42 Aug. 1783, in Corres., II, 93-94.
43 To Samuel Rose, 11 Nov. 1788, in Corres., III, 328.
50 Aug. 1782, in Corres., II, 3-4.
51 Sept. 1787, in Corres., III, 154.
52 To Clotworthy Rowley, 1754, in Corres., I, 8-9.
54 William Cowper, Humanitarian, p. 246.
55 To the Rev. William Unwin, May 1774, in Corres., II, 212.
56 To Lady Hesketh, 7 Dec. 1785, in Corres., II, 402.
57 To Lady Hesketh, 3 Nov. 1787, in Corres., III, 176.
59 240.


To Samuel Teedon, 2 Nov. 1792, in Corres., IV, 315.


To Samuel Teedon, 7 Nov. 1792, in Corres., IV, 316-17.

Golden, p. 70.


Quinlan, Cowper, p. 203.


"The Worm and the Thorn," 228.

Corres., IV, 185.

185.

To the Rev. James Hurdis, 13 June 1791, in Corres., IV, 74-75.

P. 54.
81 Revaluation, p. 66.
82 To the Rev. William Unwin, 3 July 1784, in Corres., II, 221.
83 To Mrs. Throckmorton, 17 May 1791, in Corres., IV, 67.
84 To Lady Hesketh, Sept. 1788, in Corres., III, 316.
85 To Lady Hesketh, 5 July 1788, in Corres., III, 297.
86 To Lady Hesketh, 11 May 1790, in Corres., III, 459.
89 17 June 1783, in Corres., II, 79.
90 "To My Cousin Anne Bodham," p. 420.
91 Quinlan, Cowper, p. 211.
93 Golden, p. 113.
94 MacLean, p. 261.
96 To Mrs. King, 19 June 1788, in Corres., III, 283-84.
98 p. 258.
99 Revaluation, p. 61.
100 p. 88.
101 p. 88.
102 Cited by Quinlan, Memoir, 381.

104 L. C. Martin, "Vaughan and Cowper," MLR, 22 (1927), 79.


106 "Retirement," p. 463. This reference is to the Olney hymn, not to the more famous poem of the same title cited elsewhere.

107 Cecil, p. 173.

108 Fausset, p. 189.

109 Works, p. 671.

110 To Lady Hesketh, 19 Dec. 1787, in Corres., III, 194.

111 To Lady Hesketh, 16 Jan. 1786, in Corres., II, 449.

112 Works, p. 385.


115 To Lady Hesketh, 13 Oct. 1798, in Corres., IV, 503.


117 Smith, p. 78.

CHAPTER III

THERIOPHILY IN THE WORK OF GEORGE CRABBE

In dealing with the highly dramatic poems of George Crabbe, critics have arrived at very different assessments of Crabbe's definition of human life. It can be argued that Crabbe's best-known but early poem, "The Village," indicates a despair which rejects Christianity, which sees in life only a succession of "miseries and disappointments" over which man has no control. Yet "The Village" can also be fitted into a larger pattern as only one aspect of a traditional Christian view of life as a moral drama, which is difficult and demanding, but not hopeless. Such an interpretation of Crabbe's poetry would accord with his vocation as a Christian minister. Crabbe's emphasis varies. Sometimes he places man a little lower than the angels; sometimes he stresses his bestiality. In "Inebriety," Crabbe argues that man's nature is bestial both in a state of nature and in civilized society; "Man walk'd with beast, and—so he always will." The poor in "The Village" are savage and bestial; but the drunken lord differs only in manners, for he will "ape the brute, but ape him in the mode" ("Inebriety."III.305). Yet Crabbe rebuked Byron for the "Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog,"
which insists bitterly that man, "By nature vile, ennobled
but by name," is inferior in honesty and loyalty to his
dogs. Crabbe believes that the fault was in Byron's jaun-
diced eye, not in the human species, and prays he will
repent of his evil ways, "That like thy Friend, the Dog,
thou wouldst be mute,/ Or mourn and be above the Brute."
In "The Library," Crabbe expresses the conventional view of
man's sovereign position. Above plants are animals, which
in turn

on their lord attend
And find, in man, a master and a friend;
Man crowns the scene, a world of wonders new,
A moral world, that well demands our view. (11. 321-24)

A careful examination of Crabbe's animal images evidences an
inconsistency like that of Cowper. Sometimes man's dominion
over the animals is accepted and even justified; often indi-
viduals are equated to particular types of animals, either
in admirable or in deplorable qualities of character; occa-
sionally man is presented as inferior to the animals,
either in his tendency toward cruelty or in the "hypocrisy"
and "deceit" which Byron attacked in his "Inscription";
sometimes man's evil propensities are related to his environ-
ment and sometimes to his very nature. Although Crabbe is
as unwilling as Cowper to commit himself to theriophily, his
use of imagery does reveal a tendency toward denying the
conventional differentiation between man and beast. Crabbe
seems to imply that by nature man is no better than the
beasts, and perhaps worse; if he is to rise above them, he must make an effort at common sense and self-discipline. Such opinions suggest those of the moralistic theriophiles.

Like Cowper, Crabbe accepts the necessity for man to use animals as an element in his economy. As a consumptive youth, one of the central figures in Tales of the Hall was told that he must "live on asses' milk" in order to regain his health (XX.12). The fisherman's survival depends on his catch of fish, "Of all his food the cheapest and the best,/ By his own labour caught, for his own hunger dress'd" (The Borough.XVIII.272-73). The pleasure associated with eating good food is frequently mentioned by Crabbe. For example, delicious pullets are used to bribe Rebecca Gwyn in "The Gentleman Farmer" (Tales.III.508), and the oysters sold in the public rooms of Crabbe's Borough are so good that "few themselves the savoury boon deny,/ The food that feeds, the living luxury" (I.67-68). Gluttony is not a very serious sin to Crabbe, who believes

That doctrines sound and sober they may teach,  
Who love to eat with all the glee they preach;  
Nay, who believe the duck, the grape, the pine,  
Were not intended for the dog and swine.  

(Tales.XIX.323-25)

John Dighton is satirized for using his religious teachers' enjoyment of good food as a pretext for his darker sins.

In this imperfect world, Crabbe accepts the fact that wealth is reckoned in terms of animals, which will be killed. One of the advantages of Silford Hall is that "the
delicious ground/ Had parks where deer disport, had fields where game abound" ("Silford Hall," 181-82). It is notable that Crabbe does not speak of birds to be observed, but of "game," which is hunted and killed. In Tales of the Hall, George delights in his sheep for obvious economic reasons, not aesthetic ones:

"Now see my flock, and hear its glory;--none
"Have that vast body and that slender bone;
"They are the village boast, the dealer's theme,
"Fleece of such staple! flesh in such esteem!"

(IV.88-91)

Throughout his work, Crabbe stresses the fact that man depends on his use of the lower creatures for his own survival. In The Borough natives depend on fish for their livelihood. The meagreness of the countryside is reflected in the fact that there are only a few "fat pastures of the rich" with a "single cow" or a riding horse, "stable-fed" (III.166-71). The prosperous squire boasts of his property in terms of oxen:

"Talk of your horses! I the plan condemn--
"They eat us up--but oxen! we eat them;
"For first they plough and bring us bread to eat,
"And then we fat and kill them--there's the meat."

("Danvers and Raynor," 234-37)

The poor farmer, Barnaby, is ridiculed by other farmers because he lacks a dairy, a fine team, a good horse, and a flock of sheep (Parish Register.I.770-86). His social standing is determined by the animals he possesses. In "The Village," the shepherd, tending his flock in the winter, muses on the ironic fact that the sheep he tends "'Are
others' gain, but killing cares to me'" (I.217). But though Crabbe satirizes the greed of men like Squire Danvers, who care more for their oxen than for their needy friends, he also satirizes the country-bred young people who think themselves superior to the animal-based economy which has provided their luxuries. Young Stephen, corrupted by town life, refuses to go home to his father, protesting,

"Have I been taught to guard his kine and sheep? 
"A man like me has other things to keep." 

(Tales.XXI.402-403)

Farmer Moss's town-educated daughter feels herself too good to feed the swine. She no longer knows how "To pass a pigsty, or to face a cow" (Tales.VII.3-4). Both young people are brought to sanity, the girl by a widow's counsel, the boy by his father's whipping. Crabbe respects the kind of knowledge which enables farmers to make a good living from raising livestock, the gentleman-farmer's "skill/ In small-boned lambs, the horse-hoe, and the drill" (Tales.III.49-50).

Like Cowper, Crabbe is acutely conscious of the importance of horses to men. But Crabbe does not share Cowper's dislike of horsemanship or his distrust of skittish or vicious steeds. He is aware of the pride men take in their mounts. George praises newly-acquired property "As men will boldly praise a new-bought horse" (Tales of the Hall.XXII.147). Horses indicate prosperity; the carriages of the wealthy have "high-fed prancers, many a raw-boned pair" (The Borough.XI.40). A prosperous farmer "Who rides
his hunter, who his house adorns" (Tales.III.23) is ob-
viously moving up the social ladder. But horses may also
symbolize needless expense, which can lead to financial
disaster. Blaney ruins himself by gambling, vice, and the
purchase of race horses "at mighty cost" (Borough.XIV.114).
Debtors' prisons are full of men who indulged in follies,
"Victims of horses, lasses, drinking, dice,/ Of every pas-
sion, humour, whim, and vice" (Borough.XXIII.90-91). At
bankruptcy, the horses are sold along with other property

In other passages, however, Crabbe seems to raise the
question of differentiation between horses and human beings.
In The Parish Register, the miller's daughter complains that
her father regards her, like his horse, as a mere possession,
"'prized highly as his own;/ Stroked but corrected'" (I.
319-20). Here Crabbe implies that human beings cannot be
possessed, but I cannot read into the lines a protest
against man's dominion over horses. Certainly Crabbe dis-
approves of cruelty toward man or beast. A tyrannical
schoolmaster damns himself by his own words:

"Students," he said, "like horses on the road,
"Must well be lash'd before they take the load;
"They may be willing for a time to run,
"But you must whip them ere the work be done."
(Tales of the Hall.II.190-93)

In The Borough Crabbe contrasts man's kindness toward horses
with his inhumanity to men:
The grateful hunter, when his horse is old,
Wills not the useless favourite to be sold;
He knows his former worth, and gives him place
In some fair pasture, till he runs his race.

(XVIII.215-18)

The aged poor, on the other hand, are removed from their familiar surroundings and placed in a paupers' house. But usually Crabbe's human beings are indifferent to man and beast alike. After the death of his employer, the aged playboy, Abel Keene, finds he has no job:

Alas! the son, who led the saint astray,
Forgot the man whose follies made him gay;
He cared no more for Abel in his need,
Than Abel cared about his hackney steed.

(The Borough.XXI.163-66)

In "Silford Hall," the relationship between a horse and a human being is used for an extended symbolic purpose. The poem is essentially a story of initiation. The schoolmaster's son, Peter, has led a sheltered life. He is in a sense a child of nature—not the harsh kind of nature depicted in "The Village" or "Peter Grimes," but a softer, gentler rural scene. When he starts out on his errand to Silford Hall, Peter knows nothing of the world. His clothing represents his own innocence: "White was his waistcoat, and what else he wore/ Had clothed the lamb or parent ewe before" (208-9). His family's low social standing is represented by the animal he rides, "his father's nag, a beast so small/ That if he fell, he had not far to fall" (199-200). At the beginning of his journey, Peter assumes that as a human being he is, or should be, in command of the situation. In his hand, he holds the bridle and a whip, "In
case the pony falter'd or rebell'd" (241), and he worries
"Lest the rude beast, unmindful of the rein,/ Should take
a fancy to turn back again" (246-47). But very soon the
boy realizes that he is not as self-sufficient as he
thought. He forgets the advice that he has been given,
loses his way, and is saved only by the horse's wisdom.
He is "by his pony taught" (257).

Soon as he doubted, he the bridle threw
On the steed's neck, and said--"Remember you!"
For oft the creature had his father borne,
Sound on his way, and safe on his return.
So he succeeded, and the modest youth
Gave praise, where praise had been assign'd by truth.

(258-63)

His confusion as to the way to Silford Hall foreshadows the
confusion he feels in his first contact with the world of
wealth and culture, filled with strange customs and shock­
ingly graphic works of art. When Peter leaves Silford Hall,
he mounts the horse, which has been "More largely fed than
he was wont to feed" (703), just as Peter himself has been
imaginatively stuffed. But despite the difference which the
day has brought to man and beast alike, the pony is able to
maintain his equilibrium in the midst of change. He must
find the road home, for Peter "had his mind estranged/ From
all around, disturb'd and disarranged" (706-707). Thus in
his "happy day" of initiation into the larger world, Peter
has depended upon the greater wisdom of the animal, which
can find its way when man is lost in his imagination.
Like Cowper, Crabbe is aware of the role of animals in man's imagination. On the simplest level, they are objects of curiosity and amusement. Thus at Silford Hall Peter is fascinated by the huge folio of beasts and birds, and in "The Learned Boy" young Stephen envisions London as a place of "Wild Beasts and wax-work" (Tales.XXI.209).

Birds and animals are also important as an element in the atmosphere of Crabbe's poems. Smugglers meet in the forest, where the sound of the waters mingles with "The cawing rooks, the cur's affrighten'd yell" (Tales of the Hall.XXI.475). But just as in Cowper's poetry, Crabbe's images often take on symbolic significance. For example, Crabbe uses traditional symbols of corruption in his description of a ruined hall, deserted by all except birds and reptiles:

"Nor path of man or beast was there espied;
"But there the birds of darkness loved to hide,
"The loathed toad to lodge, and speckled snake to glide."

(Tales of the Hall.VII.161-63)

Those creatures of nature which man most distrusts have triumphed over the creation of man. A similar symbolic relationship between natural creatures and man's works or man himself is developed in Richard's account of a pleasant autumn day. The pattern of the rooks, which "had wing'd their sea-ward flight,/ By the same passage to return at night" (Tales of the Hall.IV.54-55) reminds Richard of that journey before him from which there is no return. Here Crabbe operates within the mind of his character, causing
him to deal with nature not as a living force, but as an area where the mind can find parallels for its purposes. Thomas sees this use of nature as a major technique in Crabbe's poetry. Certainly a mind preoccupied with decay, death and the horror which lurks just beneath the surface of life will see such elements in external nature. In Crabbe's description of the baptism of an illegitimate baby, the natural creatures are seen through the mother's despairing eyes. Sparrows

Chirp tuneless joy, and mock the frequent tear;
Bats on their webby wings in darkness move,
And feebly shriek their melancholy love.

(*Parish Register*. I.378-82)

Dominated by the realization of her lover's betrayal, the young mother sees only feeble love, mockery, and lost harmony in those creatures around her.

Because Crabbe's work is essentially dramatic, one must remember that many descriptions of nature reflect his characters' vision of life, not necessarily Crabbe's. As Broman points out, Crabbe does not "refract his characters through the distorting lens of a private fancy," like the Lake poets, but objectively studies characters who see in nature a reflection of their own moods. Such a perception can be rewarding, but it is also dangerous. At the very least, the imagination mistakes external reality. Thus a young man with an inheritance in view "with a new-formed taste" discovers "beauty in a cow" ("The Will," 67), where most aesthetes would not find it. Emerging from a hospital
in the summertime, a man rejoices to see the sheep and cattle, and "all that loves he loves" (Borough.XVII.39). But a change in circumstances or mood changes the appearance of nature. Trapped into proposing to a girl he does not love, a young man sees only misery in the autumn scenery:

All these were sad in nature, or they took
Sadness from him, the likeness of his look,
And of his mind.

(Tales of the Hall.XIII.721-23)

The swallows preparing for flight remind him of his own imprisonment, just as the rooks reminded Richard of death. Similarly, a seduced girl sees only horror in nature on her seducer's wedding day: "The earth a desert, tumult in the sea,/ The birds affrighted fled from tree to tree" (Borough.XX.195-96). As Sigworth points out, this kind of perception, which subordinates all of nature to man's mood, is most clearly reflected in "The Lover's Journey." On the way to see his beloved, Orlando rides through dusty, barren land. In a pasture the objective eye of the poet sees "Small black-legg'd sheep devour with hunger keen/ The meagre herbage, fleshless, lank, and lean" (Tales.X.64-65). But Orlando sees the reflection of his own happy mood: 

"Ay, this is Nature. . . . This ease, peace, pleasure--who would not admire?" (l. 74). In the marshes, seen by Crabbe as "slimy" (l. 123) and "bitter waters" (l. 138), Orlando apostrophizes nature as beautiful in every aspect. But when he arrives to find Laura absent, in his eyes nature
is suddenly transformed, and the lush landscape becomes ugly. In *The Borough* Crabbe points out the importance of man's imagination in a passage which might have been written by a romantic poet. The perceiver looks at the land from a sailboat on the river and sees that the moonlight has transformed the mud at the river's edge to a shiny border, and that the "cattle, as they gazing stand,/ Seem nobler objects than when view'd from land" (IX.165-66). But a corrupt imagination transmits its own corruption to nature, as Peter Grimes, the murderer of young boys, in a sense creates his sterile salt marsh surroundings. Sigworth comments, "The natural surroundings themselves are morally neutral; it is what Peter transfers to them from his own mind which is significant for the story."8 The scenery is not a personification outside of Grimes; instead, the scenery is Grimes. Chamberlain comments, "Grimes is wholly immersed in his sceneries, almost himself the genius of the place."9 In its extreme form, man's power to alter or to create his natural surroundings through his imagination becomes insanity. In "The Insanity of Ambitious Love," the servant, who has rejected his own humble origins to convince himself that he is a wealthy lord, believes that the spider webs in his room are beautiful embroidery.10 Mad with guilt, Edward Shore creates monsters in his own mind: "With brutal shape he join'd the human face,/ And idiot smiles approved the motley race" (*Tales*.XI.429-30). The madness of Sir Eustace
Grey causes him to imagine that he is carried by fiends to a deserted fen, where birds flock "in wint'ry flight" ("Sir Eustace Gray," l. 271). Again, the scene, complete with its living creatures, is the creation of an insane mind.

Even though Crabbe sees nature's insensitivity to man's struggles, as evidenced by the shipwreck in The Borough, the poet does not believe that man's response should be to transform nature into his own creature. It is significant that illegitimate David Morris's bitterness, resulting from his rejection by his father and later by a fanatically religious mother, drives him to rejection of other people and of external nature. Although he does not create an insane world in his imagination, like the insane, Morris rejects the objective view of nature, viewing amateur naturalists with "Contempt" and "Surprise." Men like Crabbe himself, on the other hand, accept the creation on its own terms. Crabbe's biographer recalls how the poet liked to go through the woods, "catching beetles, moths, butterflies" and collecting botanical specimens. In The Borough Crabbe refers to the tradesmen who study birds and microscopic insects as a hobby (VIII.65-66). A weaver sees beauty in moths and butterflies (89). The vicar in Tales of the Hall enjoys observing all living things:

"But men and beasts, and all that lived or moved, "Were books to him; he studied them and loved. "He knew the plants in mountain, wood, or mead; "He knew the worms that on the foliage feed;
"Knew the small tribes that 'scape the careless eye,  
The plant's disease that breeds the embryo-fly;  
"And the small creatures who on bark or bough  
"Enjoy their changes, changed we know not how;  
"But now th' imperfect being scarcely moves,  
"And now takes wing and seeks the sky it loves."
(VI.55-64)

From the objective interest in nature to a sympathy
for natural objects is a short step, since in both cases
the observer is subordinating his own mood to a recognition
that other living creatures have a separate existence which
does not depend on the perceiver. The wisdom of the central
character in "The Widow's Tale" is first revealed by her
behavior toward nature. She walks cautiously, "as if she
hurt the grass," and "if a snail's retreat she chanced to
storm," she seems to beg its pardon (Tales.VII.15-17). The
widow's refusal to think of nature as merely made for man's
use is in accordance with her kindness toward human beings.

It is clear then that Crabbe disapproves and distrusts
man's domination of nature by the imagination as an arro-
gant act that assumes a superiority in man which does not
coincide with the facts. Crabbe's images consistently
equate individual men with individual animals. Although
Crabbe does not generally imply that all beasts are better
or wiser than all men, he describes good men as "good" ani-
mals, bad men as "bad" animals, thus denying that men are
inherently superior to beasts. For example, in "Inebriety"
Crabbe says that drunkenness makes man "An Angel-Devil, or
a human-Beast" (II.12). Sometimes, however, the equation
of man and beast is intended to indicate a character's own incapacity to discriminate between man and beast or between animate and inanimate objects. Just as Pope points out that ladies' feelings may be no different "When husbands, or when lap dogs breathe their last" ("Rape of the Lock." III.158), Crabbe reveals Peter Grimes's inability to care more about the young boys for whose death he is responsible than the fish he catches: "Meantime the fish, and then th' apprentice died" (Borough.XXII.152). In a satirical catalogue which maps a character's mind, as in Belinda's "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux" ("Rape of the Lock." I.138), Crabbe describes the house of a dishonest but wealthy banker as a place with "'room for servants, horses, whiskies, gigs,/ And walls for pines and peaches, grapes and figs'" (Tales of the Hall.VIII.269-70). But again, it is clear that the character's equation of human beings with lower creatures and inanimate objects is not necessarily Crabbe's.

Different animals are used to reflect different human character traits. Trying to make up his mind about marrying a poor but beautiful girl, Belwood is as indecisive as an ass between two bundles of hay:

"Things are not poised in just the equal state, "That the ass stands stock-still in the debate; "Though, when deciding, he may slowly pass "And long for both--the nature of the ass; "'Tis but an impulse that he must obey, "When he resigns one bundle of the hay."

(Tales of the Hall.XV.99-104)
The poor live in an area full of "stables, sties, and coops" (Borough.IX.23), and themselves dissipate in "dog-holes" (I. 25); the implication is that they are animals in suitable surroundings. In The Parish Register, there is a similar equation. In the streets of the poor section of town, "hungry dogs from hungry children steal;/ There pigs and chickens quarrel for a meal" ("Introduction." 194-5).

Greed is frequently represented by animal images. As a Church of England clergyman, Crabbe naturally distrusts those church reformers who attack the tithe system, wondering how they themselves would live if they were in charge of the flocks: would they "Put on the muzzle when they tread the corn?/ Would they, all gratis, watch and tend the fold,/ Nor take one fleece to keep them from the cold?" (Borough. IV.90-93). Abel Keene compares himself to the greedy mouse which stole a great deal of food but found himself too fat to get back through the mousehole to safety (Borough.XXI. 250). A vicious character in The Borough, Blaney, tires of ordinary vice as he loses his youth: "Then as a swine he would on pleasure seize,/ Now common pleasures had no power to please" (XIV.65-66). In this instance, Crabbe is labeling his character. Sometimes, however, Crabbe makes it clear that the character who attacks greed has hidden motives. It is Sir Denys Brand's stinginess which causes him to say to his friends, "'you make yourselves like beasts;/
One dish suffices any man to dine,/ But you are greedy as a herd of swine" (Borough.XIII.186-88). It is an unbeliever who calls bishops "cattle fatt'ning in the stall" (Tales.I.176).

Characters who have nasty tempers are usually referred to by Crabbe or by other characters as dogs or wasps. Thus Justice Bolt views an antagonist in argument as a "rebellious cur" (Tales.I.364), and a card-player dislikes playing with a married couple who "snap and snarl" at each other (Borough.X.183). In general, card-players quarrel both "In waspish youth, and in resentful age" (Borough.X.172). Poets are "A waspish tribe ... on gilded wings,/ Humming their lays, and brandishing their stings" (Tales.V.243-44). Political feuds inflame "waspish" tempers (Tales of the Hall.X.95). A spoiled girl becomes a discontented wife, whom Crabbe calls a "wasp" (Tales.VIII.63).

Often a comparison of man to an animal is comic. A rich steward is thus identified with the "fat spaniel" which waddles beside him (Tales of the Hall.XIII.516). In mock-epic style, Crabbe compares the argumentative Justice Bolt to a turkey which turns on a stray puppy:

He moves about, as ship prepared to sail,
He hoists his proud rotundity of tail,
The half-seal'd eyes and changeful neck he shows,
Where in its quick'ning colours, vengeance glows;
From red to blue the pendant wattles turn,
Blue mix'd with red, as matches when they burn;
And thus th' intruding snarler to oppose,
Urged by enkindling wrath, he gobbling goes.
(Tales.I.376-84)
Sometimes Crabbe implies that men become bestial as the result of circumstance. Deprived of his inheritance, Robin Dingley becomes a wanderer who comes home periodically to be fed, then disappears. Like a "gaunt and hungry fox" (Parish Register.III.561), he is fattened, but he is still wild at heart:

Fatten you may, but never tame the beast;  
A house protects him, savoury viands sustain;  
But loose his neck and off he goes again;  
So stole our vagrant from his warm retreat,  
To rove a prowler and be deem'd a cheat.  

(III.564-68)

A widowed aunt is a dependent so long in a household where the mistress makes "The beasts well-manner'd and the fishes mute" (Parish Register.III.367) that she herself becomes "Mute as the fish and fawning as the dog" (370-71). The transformation may be a change for the better. When at the age of forty-five Sir Owen Dale discovers the joys of culture, he changes from a worm to a butterfly:

He, like th' imperfect creature who had shaped  
A shroud to hide him, had at length escaped;  
Changed from his grub-like state, to crawl no more,  
But a wing'd being, pleased and form'd to soar.  

(Tales of the Hall.XII.142-45)

Voters angling for bribes are compared to race horses. If they "hang off—when coming to the post" the candidate will know it's "spurring time," and increase the amount of the bribe (Borough.V.93-94). The Rev. George Crabbe is more amused than shocked at a squire's disappointment when his favorite nephew, a new minister, has more religious fervor
than the squire finds convenient. When the minister dares to preach against his uncle's sins, the squire is dismayed:

As he who long had train'd a favourite steed
(Whose blood and bone gave promise of his speed),
Sanguine with hope, he runs with partial eye
O'er every feature, and his bets are high;
Of triumph sure, he sees the rivals start,
And waits their coming with exulting heart;
Forestalling glory, with impatient glance,
And sure to see his conquering steed advance;
The conquering steed advances—luckless day!
A rival's Herod bears the prize away.

(Tales.XV.275-84)

Just as Crabbe disapproves of man's drowning the reason in imagination, so he also deplores the rejection of individual reason in favor of mass opinion or action. In his hierarchy of "good" and "bad" creatures he usually places low on the scale men who behave like those living things noted for their highly developed societies. In "The Newspaper," Crabbe describes newsmen gathering news as bees gather honey (149). When they discern that their side is becoming unpopular, they change their allegiances like birds migrating "in vast troops" (145). The lewd, savage men at the quay are also compared to bees (Tales of the Hall.IV.403-404). In "The Family of Love," James Dyson thinks of his workmen as bees, who are occasionally troublesome:

Men who by labours live, and, day by day,
Work, weave, and spin their active lives away;
Like bees industrious, they for others strive,
With, now and then, some murmuring in the hive.

(122-25)

When they are old, the poor move "Like wounded bees, that at their home arrive,/ Slowly and weak, but labouring for
the hive" (Tales.XVII.287-88). But the tendency to surrender the self to a group identity is not associated only with cheap journalism or the necessities of poverty. All men like to be members of the herd:

Man, a gregarious creature, loves to fly
Where he the trackings of the herd can spy;
Still to be one with many he desires,
Although it leads him through the thorns and briers. (Borough.X.353-56)

The evil which can result from man's gregariousness is indicated in a harlot's statement. Like "'ducks in a decoy,'" she says, fallen women "'Swim down a stream, and seem to swim in joy'" (Parish Register.I.455-56), thus attracting other girls to their miserable way of life. Gwyn, the gentleman farmer, believes that man's submission to other men is unfortunate in its effects:

"Because mankind in ways prescribed are found,
"Like flocks that follow on a beaten ground,
"Each abject nature in the way proceeds,
"That now to shearing, now to slaughter leads." (Tales.III.105-8)

Ironically, Gwyn himself is subjected by his wife, his doctor, and a Baptist preacher.

Another pattern which emerges from a study of Crabbe's images involves the division of human beings and the animals which they resemble into two categories, that of the hunters, who are clever, energetic, cruel and triumphant, and that of the hunted, who are doomed to be victimized, betrayed and dominated. Although Crabbe's explicit statements and even his stories hold forth a Christian hope, at least for rewards in the next world, his imagery implies that
man's life is truly a state of perpetual war not unlike that outlined by Hobbes. This is one of the secrets Peter learns at Silford Hall, when the housekeeper points out all the weapons designed by man for killing animals:

There guns of various bore, and rods, and lines
And all that man for deed of death designs,
In beast, or bird, or fish, or worm, or fly—
Life in these last must means of death supply;
The living bait is gorged, and both the victims die.
"God gives man leave his creatures to destroy."—
"What! for his sport?" replied the pitying Boy.—
"Nay," said the Lady, "why the sport condemn?
"As die they must, 'tis much the same to them."
Peter had doubts; but with so kind a friend
He would not on a dubious point contend.

(499-509)

The point made so often by theriophiles, that man alone kills for sport rather than for necessity, substantiates Crabbe's conviction that man is essentially a killer, seeking both animals and other human beings for sadistic destruction.

Because he has no illusions about man's nature, Crabbe does not appear as shocked as Cowper by the fact that men enjoy hunting. Both Crabbe and Cowper lived in a society of hunting squires. Crabbe's son and biographer reports that the poet's patron, the Duke of Rutland, kept a great many racehorses, hunters, and hounds "because it was then held a part of such a nobleman's duty that they should be so."13 The position of gamekeeper was one of the most desirable among the lower levels of society. Thus when one of Crabbe's characters becomes a gamekeeper, he attains
"Guns, dogs and dignity" (Tales of the Hall.XXI.63). Just as Cowper accepted the need to guard his crops, so Crabbe accepts the fact that the gardens and fields around the village are guarded by fences and ditches, "And there in ambush lie the trap and gun" (Borough.I.132). Of course, this is a matter of necessity, not of sport.

Crabbe seems to admire the kind of vitality associated with the more aggressive sports. When the sons of farmers play at horse-and-hounds, they "like colts let loose, with vigour bound,/ And thoughtless spirit, o'er the beaten ground" (Borough.XXIV.322-23). Cruttwell points out a certain admiration in Crabbe for the hard-riding old squire of an earlier, more vital period, in contrast to the pallid, hypocritical gentility of the present industrial age. Old Squire Asgill is remembered fondly by the almshouse men of The Borough as a landowner who would not prosecute anyone for killing a hare. Detesting boundaries of any kind, the squire felt he could permit freedom to his neighbors (XVI).

But although Crabbe could accept the sport of hunting from a distance, at close hand he was as repelled by it as Cowper. According to his biographer, "the cry of the first hare he saw killed, struck him as so like the wail of an infant, that he turned heart-sick from the spot." On a whaling expedition, the boy Richard is similarly troubled:

"Yet some uneasy thoughts assail'd me then:
"The monsters warr'd not with, nor wounded, men,
"The smaller fry we take, with scales and fin,
"Who gasp and die—this adds not to our sins;
But so much blood, warm life, and frames so large
To strike, to murder—seem'd an heavy charge."
(Tales of the Hall.IV.329-34)

In "The Ancient Mansion," which describes the destruction of woods and the killing of birds so that man can undertake a fashionable landscaping plan, the earlier natural scene is described as a place of peace except when someone shoots a gun, "whose loud report/ Proclaims to man that Death is but his sport" (90-91). The occasional hunting incidents then foreshadowed man's later destruction of nature for the sake of another kind of selfish pleasure.

In Crabbe's opinion, man's cruelty to animals is merely an aspect of his sinful nature. His poetic response to an elegy on a bullfinch, the kind of poem which Cowper often wrote, makes it clear that Crabbe is more concerned with human beings than with other creatures. He comments, "I have not a sigh,/ Not one soft line for Birds who pine and die,/ When Man and Maids are dying every day." As a moralist, not a humanitarian, Crabbe questions whether the end of man's existence should be to inflict pain on other creatures. George, who is often Crabbe's spokesman, wonders about man's purpose:

"Was it, life throughout,
With circumspection keen to hunt about,
As spaniels for their game, where might be found
Abundance more for coffers that abound?"
(Tales of the Hall.VII.754-57)

Unfortunately, many men do regard life as a hunt, as Crabbe indicates by comparing human beings with animals who attack
others or with the victims of such an attack. The playwright is subjected to the "serpent-critic's rising hiss" ("The Newspaper," 348), as if the critic were a poisonous snake ready to strike. The professions abound with men who would rather destroy than save. The minister in "The Village" is not a shepherd, but a hunter, striving always "the noisy pack to guide" (310). The sadistic schoolmaster in Tales of the Hall intends to make his students as cowed as trained dogs:

"He who would kneel with motion prompt and quick
"If I but look'd— as dogs that do a trick;
"He still his knee-joints flexible must feel,
"And have a slavish promptitude to kneel;
"Soon as he sees me he will drop his lip,
"And bend like one made ready for the whip."

(XV.347-52)

Greed motivates doctors who peddle fake remedies; Crabbe compares them to "scorpions" (Borough.292). Desperate patients who patronize quacks are compared to "sick gudgeons" who come "in shoals" to the angler's bait (Borough.116-17). Lawyers pervert the law to enrich themselves. They are "eagles" (Borough.199) or, more appropriately, "vultures" (257). Their clients are their "prey" (198, 225) or "The game they hunted" (221). Pursuing young heirs, a lawyer makes "His bait their pleasures, when he fished for fools" (263). His pretended politeness is part of the strategy, for like a "cunning dog, he'd fawn before he'd bite" (281). In another section of The Borough, Crabbe likens predatory lawyers to spiders, into whose small
offices a client

Goes blindfold in, and that maintains the rest;
There in his web th' observant spider lies,
And peers about for fat intruding flies;
Doubtful at first, he hears the distant hum,
And feels them flutt'ring as they nearer come.
They buzz and blink, and doubtfully they tread
On the strong birdlime of the utmost thread;
But, when they're once entangled by the gin,
With what an eager clasp he draws them in;
Nor shall they 'scape till after long delay,
And all that sweetens life is drawn away.
(VI.69-80)

In personal relationships, too, man's aggressiveness
is evident. Justice Bolt, who lost his argument on his
antagonist's home ground, delights in trapping the man be­
fore an unsympathetic audience: "He felt the fish was
hook'd--and so forbore,/ In playful spite, to draw it to
the shore" (Tales.I.342-43). In "The Dealer and Clerk,"
the brutal dealer owns a dog, Fang, who is as vicious as
his master. Fang's snarls are dear to his master because
they have "some likeness to his own" (193), indicating, "'I
snarl and bite, because I hate and fear'" (195). The com­
munity finds it fitting that Fang and his master, who attack
everyone who comes in their way, should meet death together.

By far the greatest number of references to the preda­
tory nature of human beings involves the relationship
between the sexes. Man's desire for a woman, like his urge
to kill animals, involves more than bestial instincts. As
the theriophiles insist, there appears to be in man a cor­
rupt pleasure which arises from dominating another's will
or conscience, of which the beasts are innocent. Thus a squire likes a modest mistress because "he, a sportsman keen, the more enjoy'd,/ The greater value had the thing destroy'd" (Tales.XV.21-22). The parallel between hunting and sexual pleasure is indicated in the old bachelor's story in Tales of the Hall. As he grows older, both his sexual desires and his love of hunting diminish:

"my horses pleased me less,
"My dinner more; I learned to play at chess;
"I took my dog and gun, but saw the brute
"Was disappointed that I did not shoot."
(X.474-77)

It is significant that poachers and hunters are often involved in Crabbe's love stories. In "Villars," a poacher who has been fined, whipped and imprisoned for killing a hare enjoys telling the squire that his wife has been captured, in other words, that a sexual poacher has been successful. In "Hester," a young peer is an avid hunter, loving his horses and hounds best of all his possessions. He seduces Hester, daughter of a gamekeeper, who cannot protect his daughter as well as he protects his master's game. The irony is intensified by the fact that Hester's rural lover is a shepherd, who like her father is incapable of protecting her from the hunter. In Tales of the Hall the story called "Smugglers and Poachers" has a similar parallel. When her beloved Robert is caught poaching, Rachel agrees to marry his brother, James, who as a gamekeeper is responsible for preserving game. But the cruelty
of the system, which forces Rachel into a marriage she does not desire and which ends in the deaths of both brothers, is evidenced by the fact that gamekeepers are ordered to kill game, as well as poachers. Rachel is troubled that James "would shoot the man who shot a hare" (XXI.527). After the tragedy, the "cruel spirit in the place is check'd;/ His lordship holds not in such sacred care,/ Nor takes such dreadful vengeance for a hare" (XXI. 609-11). Just because James's marriage and his attacks on poachers are approved by the law, Crabbe indicates, they are not necessarily morally right.

In the struggle between the sexes, the woman is traditionally considered the victim, at least if she permits a sexual relationship without marriage. Appropriately, Crabbe's victims are described as vulnerable animals. A seduced innocent calls herself a "'lamb that strayed'" (Tales of the Hall.XIX.668). Women are decoyed like birds and caught in a net. They are snared by a fowler. Or they are caught and caged like birds. Thus the aged admirer of a young girl wishes "the child's affection to engage,/ And keep the fluttering bird a victim in his cage" (Tales of the Hall.XI.136-37). But in a flirtation, men can be humiliated. Thus Villars fears that he is merely his lady's "spaniel and her jest" ("Villars," 173), and Henry recalls forgiving the nasty disposition of a dog "Because, like me, he was my Emma's slave" (Tales of the Hall.XIV.189). While
the man seeks a sexual relationship, the female of the species is intent upon a triumph of her own, sometimes a mere submission, usually marriage. Crabbe often compares her to an angler. Pursuing the "Lovelace of his day," Clelia feels that it is time "To bait each hook, in every way to please" (Borough.XV.74) in order to secure the prize. In "The Equal Marriage," a flirt plans to get Finch on "'her hook'" (113). Woman's favors are "The sweet, small, poison'd baits, that take the eye/ And win the soul of all who venture nigh" (Tales of the Hall.XII.211-12). In "The Equal Marriage," the husband describes his own capture. The female, he says, baits her hook

"with kindness! and as anglers wait,
Now here, now there, with keen and eager glance,
Marking your victims as the shoals advance;
When, if the gaping wretch should make a snap,
You jerk him up, and have him in your trap;
Who gasping, panting, in your presence lies,
And you exulting view the imprison'd prize."
(276-82)

But the capture is not always a triumph. The wife in "The Equal Marriage" says she wishes "'My landing-net had miss'd my precious fish!'" (297). Sometimes the fisherwoman is herself caught, like the ruined girl in "The Elder Brother," who recalls that "'"while I thought to bait the amorous hook,/ One set for me my eager fancy took'" (Tales of the Hall.VII.603-604). In contrast, a boy who "hid the snare" finds himself caught in the net of a more skillful girl (Parish Register.II.269-70). Sometimes a lifetime's evasion
is finally ended. Thus old Nathan, who was for years "A sly old fish, too cunning for the hook" (Parish Register. II.29) is caught by a young girl who "for conquest married, nor will prove/ A dupe to thee, thine anger, or thy love" (40-41). Sometimes the female tires of her pursuit. Thus the shy vicar of The Borough remains unclaimed because the girl who was interested in him has found "her tortoise held such sluggish pace,/ That she must turn and meet him in the chase" (III.33-34).

In most of Crabbe's metaphors involving the human sexual struggle, it is interesting that the victim, whether male or female, is compared to an animal, while the victor, whatever his weapons, is the human being. Crabbe tends to place his sympathy on the side of the victim, who is always hurt in the conflict. The devil, too, is more "human" than his victims:

No wonder he should lurk and lie in wait,  
Should fit his hooks and ponder on his bait;  
Should on his movements keep a watchful eye;  
For he pursued a fish who led the fry.  
(Borough. XIX.48-51)

The "friends of sin" who lead Abel Keene to vice in The Borough "Have spread their net and caught their prey therein" (XXI.252). In these instances, when Crabbe's sympathies are with the animal-like victim rather than with the human hunter or angler, the position of theriophily is subtly suggested. But in other contexts, both the predator and his victim are beasts. For example, like
Cowper, Crabbe utilizes the conventional Christian symbol of the serpent as evil personified. Thus in "The Sisters," Jane speaks of the lovers who have deserted her and her sister as ""the fork'd adder and the loathsome snake"" (Tales of the Hall.VIII.752). The hypocritical enthusiast who really wants a harlot, not a wife, is called a ""rep­tile"" (Tales of the Hall.V.380). In another poem, a blackmailer casts a "serpent's look" at her victim (Tales. XVI.383). Sometimes not the sinner, but sin itself is called a serpent, as when a lady speaks of man's "'reptile pride'" (Tales of the Hall.XIII.64). But conscience, too, may be compared to a reptile, operating upon man "'with envenom'd sting" (Tales.XIV.435).

Although Lilian Haddakin contends that Crabbe's scientific studies led him to see man as an insignificant worm, the tale she mentions is one of the few instances, if not the only one, of Crabbe's explicitly comparing man to a worm. As she points out, in "Delay Has Danger," Book XIII of Tales of the Hall, Richard rides through rocks where there are fossils,

shapes of shells, and forms
Of creatures in old worlds, of nameless worms,
Whose generations lived and died ere man,
A worm of other class, to crawl began. (13-16)

The metaphor so common in Cowper's work is not an important element in Crabbe's poetry, perhaps because Crabbe was a Church of England minister who was notably unenthusiastic about the other sects, and the equation of men with worms,
as I have indicated, was a favorite of the evangelicals. Only once, as far as I can tell, does Crabbe equate the serpent with the worm. The blackmailer may well tell a secret, the victim is warned, and advised: "'Think not your friend a reptile you may tread/ Beneath your feet, and say, the worm is dead'" (Tales.XVI.436-37).

Innocence and goodness are frequently symbolized in Crabbe's poetry as birds. A young girl is "'tender as the callow bird'" (Tales of the Hall.XIII.586). Heroines or victimized women are generally doves. Thus Fanny is "a yielding dove" by nature (Tales of the Hall.XIII.386), and later, a "consenting dove" (697). In "The Dealer and Clerk" Crabbe refers to the "widow'd dove" (236), and idealistic George believes that "'The widow'd turtle's'" love endures as "'a deathless flame'" (Tales of the Hall. VII.73). A forgiving heroine is a "relenting dove" (Borough.XX.99). A wife is a "timid dove" (Borough.VIII. 178). A lady has manners like those of "the yielding dove" ("Sir Eustace Grey," 70.) But Crabbe's insistence that appearance often does not coincide with reality affects such images of innocence. In "The Wife and Widow," Crabbe points out man's tendency to prefer weak women to strong ones:

And loves not man that woman who can charm Life's grievous ills, and grief itself disarm; Who in his fears and troubles brings him aid, And seldom is, and never seems, afraid? Nor ask of man the fair one whom he loves: You'll find her one of the desponding doves, Who tender troubles as her portion brings, And with them fondly to a husband clings--
Who never moves abroad, nor sits at home,
Without distress, past, present, or to come--
Who never walks the unfrequented street,
Without a dread that death and she shall meet:
At land, on water, she must guarded be,
Who sees the danger none besides her see,
And is determined by her cries to call
All men around her: she will have them all.

(126–41)

The reason for man's preference is, of course, his ego-

tistical need to feel strong. In trouble, however, he

may grow tired of the "dove" who dominates by weakness:

Love then departs; and, if some Pity lives,
That Pity half despises, half forgives;
'Tis join'd with grief, is not from shame exempt,
And has a plenteous mixture of contempt.

(166–69)

In "Jesse and Colin," a vicar's daughter, Jesse, becomes a
dependent of a wealthy widow, whose servants and companions
all intrigue against each other for her favor. The super-
ficial sweetness of the household hides venomous hatred.
After the niece offers her friendship, Jesse is puzzled
at the combination of malice and kindness in the girl's
character. She is both "Frank and yet cunning, with a
heart to love/ And malice prompt--the serpent and the dove"
(Tales.XIII.301–302). In "Squire Thomas," the furious hus-
band accuses his wife of "'hiding close the serpent in the
dove!'" (Tales.XII.289). In such cases, Crabbe's animal
images imply that in classifying people as good or bad,
innocent or cunningly evil, one must not be misled by ap-
pearances.
But though innocence is sometimes merely a mask for evil, often it is a real quality which is lost through time or through exposure to evil. In "Silford Hall," Peter's initiation into the corrupt world is presented as inevitable. According to Chamberlain, Crabbe distrusts the idea of a rural paradise where innocence can be preserved, believing instead that innocence and maturity are incompatible, and therefore that the loss of innocence is a normal process in maturing. In The Parish Register, Crabbe argues that life's burdens are designed to bring man closer to God:

Say, will you call the breathless infant bless'd,  
Because no cares the silent grave molest?  
So would you deem the nursling from the wing 
Untimely thrust and never train'd to sing;  
But far more bless'd the bird whose grateful voice  
Sings its own joy and makes the woods rejoice,  
Though, while untaught, ere yet he charm'd the ear,  
Hard were his trials and his pains severe!  

(III.225-32)

Thus Stephen's lamblike innocence is associated with his shiftless and listless character:

From beasts he fled, for butterflies he flew,  
And idly gazed about, in search of something new.  
The lambs indeed he loved, and wish'd to play  
With things so mild, so harmless, and so gay;  
Best pleased the weakest of the flock to see,  
With whom he felt a sickly sympathy.  

(Tales.XXI.111-16)

On the other hand, Crabbe obviously sympathizes with the innocent Lucy of "The Mother." Her early life, "unvex'd by want or love," is filled with delight (Tales.VIII.88-89). Crabbe associates her innocence with that of the lark: "The village-lark, high mounted in the spring,"
not with purer joy than Lucy sing" (90-91). When life deprives her of that innocent joy, Crabbe clearly regrets her loss, even though it involves a Christian resignation. In "The Sisters," another Lucy loses her early joy. Her youthful innocence is evidenced by her love of everything in nature, not just of the weak creatures with whom Stephen and Cowper identify:

"Lucy loved all that grew upon the ground,
And loveliness in all things living found;
The gilded fly, the fern upon the wall,
Were nature's work and admirable all." (120-23)

After Lucy and her sister, Jane, are swindled of their money by a banker and then deserted by the men who have professed love to them, they retain a kind of innocence, but not their joy in life. Jane is intermittently mad. One of the poems she composes during a fit of melancholy is essentially a dream of an innocent world, the graveyard, which will be filled with "'flow'rs that once in Eden grew'" (841). There her "'maiden form'" will be laid "'In virgin earth'" (861). There will come the lark and the lamb, as well as Lucy, who is "'As innocent, but not so gay'" (868). Life has enabled the sisters to remain guiltless victims, but has not permitted them to retain the innocent joy of lambs and larks, who are blessed by their inability to anticipate evil, as Pope pointed out in the "Essay on Man." 22

In "Infancy--A Fragment," the loss of joy is presented as an inevitable part of life. The child sees the world as
a paradise. Sailing out in the morning with a party of adults, he anticipates only happiness. As Miss Haddakin points out, it is youth that improves the linnet’s song, making the external world into a paradise.23

The linnet chirp’d upon the furze as well, To my young sense, as sings the nightingale. Without was paradise—because within Was a keen relish, without taint of sin. (81-84)

But as the day goes on, clouds gather, tempers flare, and what had been pure joy for the child becomes merely pleasure, “relief from wretchedness and Pain” (114). Crabbe then sees the child’s loss of joy as an emblem of life itself, which constantly fails to keep its promise of joy:

E’en Love himself, that promiser of bliss, Made his best days of pleasure end like this: He mix’d his bitter sin the cup of joy Nor gave a bliss uninjured by alloy. (123-26)

Thus unlike Cowper, whose loss of Eden was intimately related to his conviction that he was damned, Crabbe sees the loss of paradise as a universal phenomenon, a regrettable but inevitable part of life. In a letter to Mary Leadbeater, a Quaker acquaintance, Crabbe admits playfully that the world has corrupted him:

Am I not a great fat rector living upon a mighty income, while my poor curate starves with six hungry children upon the scraps that fall from the luxurious table? Do I not visit that horrible London, and enter into its abominable dissipations? Am I not this day going to dine on venison and drink claret? Have I not been at election dinners, and joined the Babel confusion of a town-hall? Child of simplicity, am I fit to be a friend to you, and to the peaceful, mild, pure, and gentle people about you? One thing is true—I wish I had the qualification. But I am of the world, Mary.24
It is obvious that Crabbe's emphasis on the effect of the perceiver's mood upon reality is closely related to the theme of the lost Eden. To one possessed by innocent joy, the linnet seems to be a nightingale. Similarly, the hopeful lover is intensely aware of "The night-bird's note, the gently falling dew" ("Master William; or, Lad's Love."134). The lover's "tender tale,/ When sang the lark, and when the nightingale" (Borough.XI.244-45) leads to a sordid seduction of a real-life Juliet. One of the most moving stories in The Borough involves the dream of a condemned man on the night before his execution. He dreams of a walk in the sunshine with his beloved Fanny, "Where dwarfish flowers among the gorse are spread,/ And the lamb browses by the linnet's bed" (Borough.XXIII.307-308). But he wakens from his dream of a lost paradise in harmony with nature to the realization that he is in a prison cell, and that the hour of his execution has arrived.

As a realist, then, Crabbe is aware of the fact that absolute innocence cannot survive in this fallen world. Age destroys the innocent joy of youth; the hunters of this world find their victims; and just as doves may turn into serpents, so each seeming Eden is a dream from which we wake. Like Cowper, Crabbe realizes that he must settle for a lesser Eden in this world, perhaps based on a closer relationship with nature in its milder aspects.
Crabbe is no thoroughgoing primitivist. As he told Mary Leadbeater, he is "of the world." He does not wish to return to a time when England "was steril[sic], wild, deform'd, and beings rude/ Creatures scarcely wilder than themselves pursued" (Tales of the Hall.XIV.395-96). Undoubtedly he thinks of far-off primitive countries in the same way as George, who asks in Tales of the Hall about lands of cannibals, "'Where beast-like man devours his fellow beast'" (IV.164), while women abandon themselves to barbaric pleasures. Although Crabbe pities the poor, even the vicious poor whom he describes in "The Village," he considers them savage and immoral. When he "sought the simple life that Nature yields" (110), he found "a bold, artful, surly, savage race" (112) with no traces of inherent nobility. In the poem "Poins" a repentant Susan forsakes the "wicked Town" to find innocence and goodness in a seaside village. But instead of "The quiet Hamlet of her Soothing Dream" she finds only "Surly & Savage" people. In "The Village" Crabbe urges the sentimentalists who "dream of rural ease" (172) to look within the miserable cottage and see the reality of rural life. The "homely, healthy fare" (166) so often praised, Crabbe says, is "Homely, not wholesome; plain, not plenteous; such/ As you who praise would never deign to touch" (170-71). There are advantages to the civilized life. In "The Lady's Album," Crabbe says that "love had rather take his
lot/ Within a parlour than a cot."27 Love thrives in "a comfortable home,"28 dining "On Savoury food with generous Wine."29 Though Love may speak scornfully of wealth, he

lives to eat--
No Patriarch better--savoury Meat,
And would sigh deeply to be fed
On skim-milk cheese and barley bread.30

Yet as Ainger points out, Crabbe's Tales of the Hall make it clear that vice and misery thrive in the villa as well as in the village.31 In "Silford Hall," the housekeeper describes the pleasures of the gentry:

"The very changes of amusement prove
"There's nothing that deserves a lasting love.
"They hunt, they course, they shoot, they fish,
they game;
"The objects vary, though the end the same--
"A search for that which flies them; no, my Boy!
"'Tis not enjoyment, 'tis pursuit of joy."

(522-27)

Because his activity is meaningful, the gardener's helper, poor and old, but "'Pious and cheerful, proud when he can please'" (546) is happier than his masters.

In his biography of Crabbe, the poet's son cites observations Crabbe made in his commonplace book concerning The Borough which apply even more to the later poems.

Crabbe comments:

I have chiefly, if not exclusively, taken my subjects and characters from that order of society where the least display of vanity is generally to be found, which is placed between the humble and the great. It is in this class of mankind that more originality of character, more variety of fortune, will be met with; because, on the one hand, they do not live in the eye of the world, and, therefore, are not kept
in awe by the dread of observation and indecorum; neither, on the other, are they debarred by their want of means from the cultivation of mind and the pursuits of wealth and ambition, which are necessary to the development of character displayed in the variety of situations to which this class is liable. 

Huchon interprets the story of Jesse Bourn and Colin Grey as indicating that the middle way of life, halfway between the extremes of poverty and luxury, is best. If his beloved loves him, "a modest, intelligent, and generous farmer" living in rural England can approach the idyllic happiness of the pastoral. One must remember that Crabbe is not thinking about laborers, like those in "The Village," but about the well-to-do farm families like that into which he married, the Tovells, who according to Crabbe's son are described in "The Widow's Tale." Although life on such a farm as that of the Tovells is no guarantee of good breeding, it is vital and bountiful, and although Crabbe sees the stained tablecloth and the fat, salty bacon, he also sees the plenteous platefuls of food and the real concern the farmer has for his finicky daughter.

In The Parish Register Crabbe speculates on the change such a life would bring to poor boys from city slums or village hovels. Healthy and well-nourished, "as serpents in the spring/ Aside their slough of indolence they would fling" ("Introduction," 202-203).

Certainly Crabbe's Eden of the middle way between poverty and luxury, country and city, would not be exempt from normal human ills. Like Cowper, Crabbe is very much
aware of the element of decay in life on this earth:

"the sweetest herbs that grow
"In the lone vale, where sweetest waters flow,
"Ere drops the blossom, or appears the fruit,
"Feel the vile grub, and perish at the root;
"And, in a quick and premature decay,
"Breathe the pure fragrance of their life away."

*(Tales of the Hall. VIII. 259-64)*

Change must be accepted both in the natural world and in the human world. But Crabbe appears to differentiate between life in opposition to nature and life in a natural pattern, generally indicated by the pattern followed by animals. In "Silford Hall," Peter's morning is like the lark's: "The lark that soaring sings his notes of joy,/ Was not more lively than th' awaken'd boy" (158-59).

Crabbe's ideal lovers, Colin and Jesse, talk of marriage while "the sweet night-bird" is singing *(Tales. XIII. 512)*.

Evening brings rest to man and beast alike, as shown by the grammatical pattern of a passage from *The Borough*:

> When weary peasants at the close of day<br>Walk to their cots, and part upon the way;<br>When cattle slowly cross the shallow brook,<br>And shepherds pen their folds, and rest upon<br>their crook.<br>
*(I. 117-120)*

In working, too, man follows a natural pattern. Unlike Cowper, who thought of work, however beneficial, as limited to man, Crabbe believes:

"All creatures toil; the beast, if tamed or free,<br>Must toil for daily sustenance like me;<br>The feather'd people hunt as well as sing,
"And catch their flying food upon the wing.
The fish, the insect, all who live, employ
Their powers to keep on life, or to enjoy,
Their life th' enjoyment."
("Preaching and Practice," 134-40)

Thus work is a means to achieving a proper relationship with nature.

When a human being acts in opposition to the pattern of nature, he may be foolish or vicious. In *The Parish Register*, the old couple who marry out of season are compared to birds who, wakened by the moon, "fright the songsters with their cheerless love" (II.375). Peter Grimes, who murders boys because he derives pleasure from cruelty, is rejected by nature. Attempting to catch fish, Grimes curses the "gulls that caught them when his arts could not" (*Borough*.XX.222).

It is obvious to Crabbe that man can never achieve a full reunion with nature. Thus a major theme of the first section of *The Borough* is the ironic contrast between the easy adaptation of birds and porpoises to a storm at sea and the inability of shipwrecked human beings to survive. However he may will to live in harmony with nature, man must to some degree remain an outsider. Moreover, Crabbe is not certain as to the power of man's will against circumstances. He writes to Mrs. Leadbeater,

With respect to our religious associations and fellowship, there is much, I believe, that does not depend upon our own will or our own conviction. We are born with such convictions, and are led, guided, and governed by circumstances and situations over which the will has no control.
Yet as a satirist and a moralist, Crabbe feels that man has some control over his own actions. By nature, as we have seen, man is a beast or worse than a beast. The cock in The Parish Register, like Cowper's fighting cock, is braver and nobler than his master, whom Crabbe calls "inhuman" ("Introduction," 257) and "savage" (265). The old merchant's donkey displays a loyalty and kindness of which his wife is incapable (Tales.XVII). The stingy merchant in The Borough has even corrupted his dogs, teaching them "to scorn the poor" (XIII.19). But if one assumes such examples indicate that man's nature is hopelessly evil, one would err like Hazlitt, who mistakess Crabbe's unsentimental view of the poor for lack of sympathy with them and his realization of man's limitations for a blind worship of authority.37 Just as the moralistic theriophiles used their observations about the nobility of animals to shame man for his immoral behavior, so Crabbe identifies men with beasts in order that they may amend their behavior. Man's passions are associated with his bestiality: "'Uncheck'd, he still retains what nature gave,/ And has what creatures of the forest have'" (Tales of the Hall.XV.62-63). Yet to Crabbe a man who utilizes man's respect for order to justify his own vices is worse than one who errs through bestial passion:

Still has the love of order found a place
With all that's low, degrading, mean, and base,
With all that merits scorn, and all that meets disgrace:
In the cold miser, of all change afraid;
In pompous men, in public seats obey'd;
In humble placement, heralds, solemn drones,
Fanciers of flowers, and lads like Stephen Jones;
Order to these is armour and defence,
And love of method serves in lack of sense.

(Tales.XXI.319-27)

Crabbe's animal images, then, are used to show man's potentialities, both for good and for evil, in what is truly a Hobbesian world of hunter and hunted. If any man has dominion over animals or over other human beings, his power proves only his vitality, his ruthlessness, and his cunning, not his moral superiority. Like Cowper, Crabbe yearns for the lost Eden where man lived in harmony with nature, but as a realist Crabbe must reject the false Edens of perpetual youth, of life in a savage state, and of a natural world created by the perceiver. Instead, Crabbe suggests that man attempt to achieve the moderately happy life which the world permits. While admitting his desire for fine foods and pleasant company, he can stop short of luxurious living; he can live as sensibly as the animals about him, observing their pattern of work and rest. While recognizing his own desire for power, he can discipline himself so as to become more than a predatory hunter. While acknowledging the limitations of fate and circumstance, he can utilize his will and his reason to retain the most admirable animal traits and to suppress those traditionally considered deplorable.
In Crabbe the tendency toward theriophily has reached a middle point. As has been indicated, Cowper's theriophily was primarily an attempt to escape from a frightening religious conviction. Crabbe's theriophily, like that of Rochester, is not an evasion of the truth about life and man, but rather a confrontation of that truth, however frightening it may prove to be. But like the moralistic theriophiles, Crabbe uses the arguments of theriophily to shame man into better behavior, not to suggest that he lead a different kind of life, modeled on that of the animals. It is in this respect that Burns goes far beyond Cowper and Crabbe. Voicing the same arguments, using the same grammatical devices, working with many of the same animal images, Burns will describe an ideal world in which the behavior of animals is seen as a norm for human beings.
NOTES


8Sigworth, p. 110.


13Life, pp. 99-100.


15Life, p. 112.
18 "Hester," ll. 405-18.
21 p. 28.
22 See p. 10.
23 pp. 42-43.
24 7 Sept. 1818, in The Leadbeater Papers, 2nd ed. (London: Bell and Daldy, 1862), II, 357.
25 New Poems, l. 568.
26 l. 578.
27 New Poems, ll. 87-88.
28 l. 92.
29 l. 94.
30 ll. 107-110.
32 Life, p. 170.
33 René Huchon, George Crabbe and His Times (1754-1832), trans. Frederick Clarke (New York: Dutton, 1907), p. 366.
34 Huchon, p. 368.
35 Life, p. 126.
CHAPTER IV

THERIOPHILY IN THE WORK OF ROBERT BURNS

The kind of theriophily which underlies the work of Robert Burns differs from that of Cowper and of Crabbe in that Burns does not feel compelled to relate his philosophy to Christian theology, except on a perfunctory level, but instead advocates man's imitating the animals in order to achieve a life in harmony with nature. Unlike Diderot, Burns expresses his theriophily indirectly; but like Diderot, Burns clearly belongs to the tradition of "soft" primitivism, as defined by Boas and Lovejoy, which has been noted throughout this study.

Even in extensive criticism, Burns has often been dismissed as a writer who lacked a profound reflective or contemplative faculty. His biographer, Franklyn B. Snyder, classifies Burns as a poet whose primary goal was to reproduce human life, rather than to comment upon it. Snyder writes, "for the most part he was content to see, to enjoy, and to reproduce in his verse such elements of this spectacle as had given him most pleasure." Other critics ascribe the seeming contradicitions within Burns's poetry to confusion in the poet's mind. For example, Weston
argues that a divided mind is evidenced by the obvious attraction that a life filled with drink, song, dance and sex has for Burns, in contrast to his occasional praise of respectability and restraint. To Elton, the contradictions in thought found in Burns's various poems mean simply that Burns is a lyrical poet, who "feels different things at different times, and expresses each of them thoroughly." Elton points out that Burns as an individual reflects every element of the Scottish peasant tradition, which itself ranges from devoted support of the Stuarts to martyrdom for the Calvinistic sects, from the narrowest morality to bawdry and licentiousness.

If one assumes that there is no unity in Burns's work, one can find evidence of his striving toward a "better self"; in an early poem, Burns writes that without God's help in ruling his passions, he may again and again desert Virtue, "Again in Folly's path might go astray;/ Again exalt the brute and sink the man." Here the traditional values rule. Man is superior to animals, but without divine grace he may sink to their level. There are enough similar pious and repentant comments in Burns's letters to convince many admirers that the poet was merely a frail Christian, rather than a rebel against established values. But the religious emphasis in Burns's letters occurs chiefly in those directed to Mrs. Frances Anna Wallace Dunlop, a proper lady whose favorite poem was "The Cotter's
"Saturday Night," and Mrs. Agnes Craig M'Lehose, a separated but virtuous wife whose platonic relationship with Burns is evident in the letters from "Sylvander" to his "Clarinda." As Snyder points out, both Mrs. Dunlop and Mrs. M'Lehose ("Clarinda") were concerned about the poet's soul; it was natural that Burns would attempt to reassure them by making pious and conventional comments.6

Just as critics have found merely a psychological or religious confusion in Burns's attitude toward human morality, so they have dismissed his attitude toward nature as simple and superficial. Christina Keith, for example, comments that like Rousseau, Burns is inspired by "the sound of running water, in solitude."7 Although Daiches notes that Burns frequently pictures animals as men and men as animals,8 he fails to see a thematic implication in such an identification, but argues that Burns, unlike Wordsworth, finds no spirit in external nature from which man can derive insight, but simply uses nature for a pleasant setting, keeping it "on a small scale and close to man."9 A careful study of Burns's animal images, however, reveals not a divided soul but a consistent faith, not the simple acceptance of a natural setting but a belief that only in the lives of animals can man find insights by which to live, and that these insights demand of every man what the romantic artist demanded of himself—in Northrop Frye's terms, "a union of himself, as
a living and creating being, with nature as process or
genesis."\textsuperscript{10}

Like Cowper and Crabbe, Burns recognizes the economic
importance of animals. Although the improvident may sell
their plough oxen for ale, as in the song "O gude ale come"
(p. 701), most of the men in Burns's poem are aware of the
importance of their "horses, pleughs, and kye" ("The
Cotter's Saturday Night," l. 67). In the third "Epistle
to John Lapraik," Burns makes a visit conditional on his
crops and livestock:

\begin{quote}
But if the beast and branks be spar'd
Till kye be gaun without the herd,
An' a' the vittal in the yard,
An' theekit right,
I mean your ingle-side to guard
Ae winter night. (ll. 37-42)
\end{quote}

In "Elegy on the Year 1788," the fate of the Spanish em-
pire is less important than cattle, sheep, and a dry well
(pp. 360-61). A dowry includes "A cow and a cauf, a yowe
and a hauf" ("Jumpin John," p. 309). The rollicking song,
"Hey for a lass wi' a tocher," reflects a practical atti-
tude toward marriage. The singer is not charmed by mere
beauty:

\begin{quote}
0, gie me the lass that has acres o' charms,
0, gie me the lass wi' the weel-stockit farms.
(p. 637)
\end{quote}

Burns realizes that his very independence of "the Great-folk"
depends on his farming ability:

\begin{quote}
For me! sae laigh I need na bow,
For, Lord be thanket, I can \textbf{plough};
And when I downa yoke a naig,
\end{quote}
Then, Lord be thanket, I can beg.
("A Dedication," ll. 13-16)

As we have seen, ambivalent feelings about horses were not uncommon in Burns's period. On one hand, horses were essential for transportation, and a good riding horse was an admirable creature. On the other hand, a skittish horse could cause the rider's death. Furthermore, members of the "horsy" set were addicted to fox hunting, often to the exclusion of any other interests, such as literature and the arts. Like Cowper and Crabbe, Burns comments on the country squire's similarity to his mount: "Here passes the Squire on his brother—his horse" ("Song," p. 28). But Burns is well aware of the economic importance of the horse. As a farmer always on the edge of insolvency, he is impatient when a horse dies. He writes to William Nicol, "That d---nnde mare of yours is dead." But he adds somewhat more sympathetically that "the poor devil . . . had been jaded and quite worn out with fatigue and oppression." One gathers that Burns's regret is a compound of economic loss and real sympathy. In many poems, Burns stresses the bond of affection and respect between his animal characters and their masters. In "Tam o' Shanter" it is the mettlesome mare, Maggie, who is the real heroine, saving her master from the witches at the cost of "her ain gray tail" (l. 216). Burns's own horse, Jenny Geddes, is his "Pegasean pride" ("Epistle to Hugh Parker," l. 19), loved no less because she is viewed realistically as a
tired mare with an "auld brown nose" (l. 22). In "The Auld Farmer's New-year-morning Salutation," there is a close identification between the old farmer and his mare Maggie, who is "stiff an' crazy" (l. 7) like himself.

He speaks to her of their life together:

Monie a sair daurk we twa hae wrought,
An' wi' the weary warl' fought!
An' monie an anxious day, I thought
We wad be beat!
Yet here to crazy age we're brought,
Wi' something yet. (ll. 91-96)

Commenting on Burns's attitude toward animals as reflected in such poems, Lodwick C. Hartley contrasts the parental relationship between Cowper and his pets with Burns's obvious feelings of brotherhood with his animals, and even of comradeship in adversity. Elton points out the individual characterization of Burns's animals. "He does not merely love them, but knows them; he does not merely feel wrath for them, or see them in a kind of splendour, like Blake, or treat them with a humorous feminine tenderness, like Cowper. His sheep are persons; he is a farmer, and knows them by their faces."

At times Burns's respect and affection for animals is stated in terms of moralistic theriophily. The ironic poem, "On a dog of Lord Eglintons," is not unlike the poem of Byron which upset Crabbe:

I never barked when out of season,
I never bit without a reason;
I ne'er insulted weaker brother,
Nor wronged by force or fraud another.
We brutes are placed a rank below;  
Happy for man could he say so. (p. 720)

The question of man's supposed superiority to the beasts is also raised in "The Twa Dogs." After commenting at length upon the misery of the poor, the heartlessness of the rich, corruption at court and boredom on country estates, the talking dogs part, delighted they are "na men but dogs" (l. 236).

In the pattern of moralistic theriophily, Burns uses characteristics traditionally associated with particular animals to point up human weaknesses. Many satirical comparisons reduce human beings to the level of animals, even though they may not go so far as to raise animals above human beings, as in "On a dog of Lord Eglintons" and "The Twa Dogs." Human beings may exhibit the noisy foolishness of jackasses or the stupidity of cattle. In the first "Epistle to John Lapraik," Burns writes that college students "gang in Stirks, and come out Asses" (l. 69). Elsewhere a young man complains that a girl will choose a rich husband, "tho hardly he for sense or lear/ Be better than the ky" ("Song," p. 8). Two congregations are unflatteringly compared to herds of cattle in "The Holy Tulzie," which according to the epigraph describes a war between two sets of fools (p. 53). In "To a Louse," the target is human presumption. In the first part of the poem, Burns addresses a louse, a creature "Detested, shunn'd, by saunt an' sinner" (l. 8).
The poet pretends surprise that such a lowly creature dares to crawl upon the bonnet of which Jenny is so proud. Gradually the focus shifts, and it becomes clear that the louse's progress upward mirrors Jenny's own attempts to elevate her social standing. In the seventh stanza, the poet addresses Jenny instead of the louse:

O Jenny dinna toss your head,  
An' set your beauties a' abroad!  
Ye little ken what cursed speed  
The blastie's makin!  
Thae **winks** and **finger-ends**, I dread,  
Are notice taken? (11. 37-42)

The moral of the poem, "O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us/ To see oursel's as others see us!" (11. 43-44) clearly applies not to the louse, which is behaving naturally, but to Jenny and her fellow human beings, who exhibit foolish pride and pretension. It is clear that in Burns's opinion Jenny is far more foolish than the louse upon her bonnet, which, after all, does not pretend to be other than a louse. Thus the poem, which begins by rebuking an animal and ends by rebuking a human being, implies that in their naturalness animals are superior to human beings.

In Burns's poetry, as in that of Crabbe, the reader must note the character of the speaker, in order to assess the intention of the imagery. Sometimes a satirical reference to animals is a two-edged sword, intended to be used against a speaker of whom Burns disapproves. It is Beelzebub, voicing the opinions of the self-satisfied Earl
of Breadalbane, who calls would-be emigrants a "pack vile" ("Address of Beelzebub," l. 22) and suggests that the "young dogs" (l. 41) be whipped to subservience. It is clear that Burns despises the conservative Calvinists in "The Holy Tulzie," who banish common sense to France because they think it is a "curst cur" (l. 93). Those who apparently despise both beasts and their social inferiors may themselves be inferior. Enclosing a copy of "Holy Willie's Prayer," a masterful attack on religious hypocrisy, Burns writes a verse epistle to the Rev. John McMath, pointing out that Gavin Hamilton, a generous and honorable man, has been "miska't waur than a beast" by a minister who is essentially immoral ("To the Rev. John McMath," l. 25). Such attacks on hypocrisy are an essential element both in Burns's consistent attack on all artifice and in his insistence that man should model his life on the natural life of the animals.

In many poems, Burns stresses his belief that man is essentially a natural creature by affectionately identifying human beings with birds or animals. He addresses Dr. Blacklock as a "gude auld Cockie" ("To Dr. Blacklock," l. 59) and calls his sister a "dainty Chuckie" (l. 57). Lamenting the absence of William Creech, Burns himself "cheeps like some bewilder'd chicken" ("To William Creech," l. 44). There is pride, not remorse, in "The rantin dog the Daddie o't," a poem in which Burns calls himself a
"rantin dog," the father of a bastard. Like a horse, the bard in "Love and Liberty—a Cantata" is "limpan wi' the Spavie" (l. 195). A couplet from "Extempore Verses on Dining with Lord Daer" emphasizes the casualness of the poet's shifts from animal to human being. In the presence of a nobleman, Burns behaves like a bridle-led horse and also like a ploughman. He walks into the parlor, "goavin's he'd been led wi' branks,/ An' stumpin' on his ploughman shanks" (ll. 22-23). Even kings are merely creatures.

In "A Dream," Burns refers to the Hanoverian court as a "royal nest" (l. 32) and hopes that the Prince of Wales will improve with age, as a disappointing colt sometimes becomes a fine horse: "Yet aft a ragged Cowte's been known,/ To make a noble Aiver" (ll. 91-92).

Burns's belief that man is a natural creature affects his attitude toward man's killing of animals. In "Tam Samson's Elegy," the poet clearly appreciates the pleasure Tam Samson derived from a merry life of curling, fishing, and hunting, before he was caught and clapped into "Death's fish-creel" or—in another metaphor—stalked and stabbed by Death. The triumph of the animal world over the human hunter is noted by Burns:

There, low he lies, in lasting rest;  
Perhaps upon his mould'ring breast  
Some spitefu' muirfowl bigs her nest,  
To hatch an' breed;  
Alas! nae mair he'll them molest!  
Tam Samson's dead! (ll. 73-78)
In his "Hunting Song," Burns's attitude is similarly un-critical. "Take some on the wing, and some as they spring," the speaker advises, "But cannily steal on a bonie moor-hen" (p. 301). Occasionally Burns points out the harshness in nature itself, as in Death's stalking Tam Samson or in the predatory goshawk's diving "on the wheeling hare" in "The Brigs of Ayr" (l. 68). But he is far more troubled by man's ruthless plundering of nature. In "The Brigs of Ayr," Burns digresses at length concerning man's tyranny over animals. In the autumn, he writes,

The bees, rejoicing o'er their summer-toils,
Unnumber'd buds, an' flow'rs' delicious spoils,
Seal'd up with frugal care in massive, waxen piles,
Are doom'd by Man, that tyrant o'er the weak,
The death o' devils, smoor'd wi' brimstone reek:
The thund'ring guns are heard on ev'ry side,
The wounded coveys, reeling, scatter wide;
The feather'd field-mates, bound by Nature's tie,
Sires, mothers, children, in one carnage lie:
(What warm, poetic heart but inly bleeds,
And execrates man's savage, ruthless deeds!)  
(ll. 29-39)

An incident which occurred while Burns was sowing grain prompted the poem "On Seeing a Wounded Hare," in which he calls hunters "INHUMAN" and "barb'rous" (p. 369). Burns explains the circumstances in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, in which he encloses the poem:

Two mornings ago as I was, at a very early hour, sowing in the fields, I heard a shot, & presently a poor little hare limped by me, apparently very much hurt.--You will easily guess, this set my humanity in tears and my indignation in arms.15

But not wishing to offend "the Major" (Mrs. Dunlop's son,
Andrew), who is evidently a hunter, Burns quibbles, "whatever I have said of shooting hares, I have not spoken one irreverent word against coursing them." In a letter to Alexander Cunningham, he protests against hunting on the basis of principle, not sentimentality:

You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow, who could shoot a hare at this season when they all of them have young ones; & it gave me no little gloomy satisfaction to see the poor injured creature escape him.---Indeed there is something in all that multiform business of destroying for our sport individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, that I could never reconcile to my ideas of native Virtue and eternal Right."

Like Cowper and Crabbe, Burns feels that there is an element of evil in the human soul which is absent in animals. As committed Christians, Cowper and Crabbe were forced, at least explicitly, to relate this evil to the fall of man and to suggest that it could be remedied by grace or by works. But to Burns, the fall of man is evidenced by his unnatural behavior and can only be remedied by a reunion with nature, in which man becomes a part of nature, participating in its processes and imitating its creativity. It is unnatural, then, to kill animals which have young; it is also unnatural to kill for pleasure, rather than for need. In "On scaring some Water-Fowl," Burns restates the same criticism of human cruelty made by Plutarch, Rochester, and Mandeville:
The eagle, from the cliffy brow,
Marking you his prey below,
In his breast no pity dwells,
Strong Necessity compels.
But Man, to whom alone is given
A ray direct from pitying Heaven,
Glories in his heart humane--
And creatures for his pleasure slain. (19-26)

Man kills for pleasure, not need, and then hypocritically praises himself for his humanity.

The insidious evil in one human heart is described in one of Burns's few references to worms:

So vile was poor Wat, such a miscreant slave,
That the worms even damn'd him when laid in his grave.
In his scull there is famine! a starv'd reptile cries;
And his heart it is poison! another replies. (p. 531)

Unlike Cowper, who equates man with the worms in order to emphasize his distance from God's perfection, Burns has his worms reject a human being because he is empty-headed and, more important in Burns's philosophy, empty-hearted. Most of the poet's comments about evil stress this standard of values. Evil is cold-hearted; good is warm-hearted. In a letter to Clarinda, Burns defines "Worth" as "Truth and Humanity respecting our fellow-creatures" and "Reverence and Humility" toward God. The first qualities, he says, result from "unbiassed Instinct"; the second are the product of reflection. By nature, then, man is honest and kind. Evil qualities must be acquired, not inherent. Burns writes to Rachel Dunlop, "We come into this world with a heart & disposition to do good for it, untill by dashing a large mixture of base Alloy called Prudence alias Selfishness,
the too precious Metal of the Soul is brought down to the blackguard Sterling of ordinary currency. In his "Epistle to a Young Friend," Burns says that few men are hardened in evil,

But Och, mankind are unco weak,
    An' little to be trusted;
If Self the wavering balance shake,
    It's rarely right adjusted (ll. 21-24)

This is the poem in which Burns warns that illicit love "hardens a' within, / And petrifies the feeling!" (ll. 47-48). The evil of illicit love resides, then, not in the act itself, but in the selfish motivations of the action and in the effect on the human heart.

Sometimes Burns blames man's evil actions not on his selfish or weak nature, but on the difficult situation in which he is placed in the world. In a variation of the "Nature as a cruel stepmother" argument which Montaigne attacked in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond," Burns writes,

Perhaps the nature of man is not so much to blame for all this[man's selfishness], as the cursed[deleted] situation in which, by some miscarriage or other, he is placed in this world.—The poor, naked, helpless wretch, with such voracious appetites and such a famine of provision for them, is under a kind of cursed necessity of turning selfish in his own defence.—Except here & there a Scelerate who seems to be a Scoundrel from the womb by Original Sin, thorough-paced Selfishness is always a work of time.

In his "Poem on Life," Burns compares Satan to a spider enticing man into his web with "Bright wines and bonnie lasses rare" (l. 27). But often Burns appears to blame
God or nature, not Satan, for the difficulties man has with his appetites. The difference between the conventional values held by men like Burns's father, who, as Fitzhugh points out, saw life as a struggle between animal instinct and reason, in which man attempts to exalt himself above his passions, and Burns's attitude is seen in the early poem, "A Prayer, in the Prospect of Death." In it, Burns admits feeling the pangs of conscience, which suggest he has been weak, frail, even intentionally sinful. But he also feels it necessary to point out God's part in man's error:

Thou know' st that Thou hast formed me,  
With Passions wild and strong;  
And list' ning to their witching voice  
Has often led me wrong. (p. 16)

Considering the difference between his passions and his powers of gratifying them, man does surprisingly well, Burns seems to say. This is the point of the "Address to the Unco Guid." Rigid moralists should realize that "To step aside is human" (l. 52). In a letter to Robert Muir, Burns is less guarded than in much of his poetry. If there is eternal life, he speculates, surely a man who has behaved honestly, "even granting that he may have been the sport, at times, of passions and instincts," goes to a Being "who could have no other end in giving him existence but to make him happy; who gave him those passions and instincts, and well knows their force." A poet, in particular, is mistreated by nature or by his
Burns bemoans a poet's helplessness. He is more defenseless than the lion, the bull, the ass, the snail, the wasp, even than a woman. Nature is a "cruel step-mother and hard,/ To thy poor, fenceless, naked child--the Bard!" (11. 23-24). But the poet's helplessness before criticism is a less serious evil than his helplessness in the face of overpowering passions; Burns writes:

"Take a being of our kind; give him a stronger imagination and more delicate sensibility, which will ever between them engender a more ungovernable set of Passions, than the usual lot of man; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as, arranging wild-flowers... in short, send him adrift after some wayward pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of Lucre; yet, curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that only Lucre can bestow; lastly, fill up the measure of his woes, by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity; and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a Poet."  

The discrepancy between the desires of a sensitive, passionate soul and his ability to fulfill those desires is stated concisely in a letter to Margaret Chalmers. Burns speaks of the evils of poverty and of the even worse evils of his own moods and desires, concluding:

"There are just two creatures I would envy, a horse in his native state traversing the forests of Asia, or an oyster on some of the desart shores of Europe. The one has not a wish without enjoyment, the other has neither wish nor fear."

"It is not man's instincts, then, that are at fault; it is the world in which he attempts to follow their promptings. Burns's demand that God be less "rigidly righteous"
is consistent with the admiration he expresses for Milton's Satan, "my favorite hero," as he puts it. In 1787, he writes to William Nicol that he has bought a pocket Milton, which he carries about with him, "in order to study the sentiments—the dauntless magnanimity; the intrepid unyielding independence; the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship, in that great personage, Satan." Burns explains that it is the poet's very nature to pursue what the world considers follies and whims, until he falls like Lucifer. Clearly the fall of Lucifer is the result of his created nature and the situation in which God placed him, Burns implies, not of a willful sin. When the pious Clarinda objects to similar comments about Satan, Burns makes a more moderate statement. He admires Satan's fortitude, he says, "the wild broken fragments of a noble, exalted mind in ruins.—I meant no more by saying he was a favorite hero of mine." In any case, it is clear that Burns views the world in which man has been placed and the natural passions which mark the most vigorous human beings as an almost impossible combination. The fault appears to be the Creator's, not the creature's, if He holds up standards which man can not attain without denying his natural instincts and passions.

In his "Address to the Deil," Burns scolds Satan for his worst trick on mankind, the production of unexpected impotence:
Thence, mystic knots mak great abuse,
On Young-Guidmen, fond, keen an' croose;
When the best warklum i' the house,
By contraip wit,
Is instant made no worth a louse,
Just at the bit. (ll. 61-66)

One would not expect such a trick from the Satan Burns admires, who generally aids sexual activity. This comic reference in "Address to the Deil" points up the fact that in Burns there are two very different principles of evil—the conventional Calvinistic concept, which defines evil as giving in to the instincts, and the concept of evil in the bulk of Burns's poetry, which involves repressing the natural instincts. There are also two principles of good represented in the poetry; clearly, Burns worships the God of nature, not the negative God whom the Calvinists consider absolute goodness. It is not, as Snyder implies, merely rebellion against restrictions which motivates Burns, but rather a philosophy of life which defines evil as hard-heartedness, selfishness, negativism, and obedience to artificial rules rather than to the dictates of nature. In Fitzhugh's words, Burns responds "fully to the forces of life, and he finds that respectability is a denial of humanity and a loss of vitality." One of the forces of respectability is the Scottish conservative Calvinist church.

In the "Elegy on Peg Nicholson," Burns mourns for a bay mare which is "floating down the Nith" as a result of
mistreatment by her owner, a minister. Her plight represents the predicament of the Scottish people, thwarted and warped by "Auld Licht" (strict) Calvinism:

Peg Nicholson was a good bay mare,  
And the priest he rode her sair:  
And much oppressed and bruised she was—  
As priest-rid cattle are, &c.; &c.  
(p. 401)

To Burns the Calvinistic church is a destructive institution. He cannot accept the religion of "Holy Willie," which views sinners without compassion and which encourages hypocrisy. Burns cannot worship the God of the Calvinists, Who is so vengeful that He orders a crop failure whenever He is displeased with his people. It is significant that beneath the Calvinism of Cowper, who was willing to accept earthquakes and arbitrary damnation as the proper acts of a just God, Burns discerns the perception of a natural God. He writes to Mrs. Dunlop,

how do you like Cowper? Is not the Task a glorious Poem? The Religion of The Task bating a few scraps of Calvinistic Divinity, is the Religion of God & Nature; the Religion that exalts, that ennobles man.

Burns's own religion is described by Snyder as "a mild Deism, in part emotional, in part rationalistic," by Margaret Sherwood as a gathering up of external nature, animate and inanimate, into the physical and emotional life of man in order to create an "organic unity between man and nature." Religiously and philosophically, Burns looks both backward and forward—backward to the fresh, frank, sensual era
reflected in pre-Reformation Scottish poetry, on which many of his own songs were based, including the most sensual, and forward to the period of romanticism, in which poets were consciously to seek the organic unity that is implicit in Burns's poems.

Burns's impatience with restrictions is reflected in his attitude toward the relationship between the sexes. Marriage is a convenience. After his own marriage, he writes to the Rev. Mr. Geddes that by marrying, he has "secured myself in the way pointed out by Nature and Nature's God." Extra-marital sexual relationships, undertaken for natural reasons, are more inconvenient than wrong. The naturalness of such encounters is stressed by Burns's very language, which often reflects earlier Scottish proverbs or songs. For example, a girl is told in the song, "Ye hae lien wrang, lassie," which is ascribed to Burns by Legman,

Ye've loot the pounie o'er the dyke,
And he's been in the corn, lassie;
For ay the brose ye sup at e'en,
Ye bock them or the morn, lassie.

As Legman points out, "to let the poney over the dyke" is a familiar Scottish expression for losing one's virginity. The horse, which represents the male organ, is, of course, a runaway, a rebel against restriction. The pregnancy which results and the morning-sickness which reveals it are treated as natural effects of a natural action. On the other hand, Burns finds true sexual immorality in marriages
for the sake of money. The young girl who marries the old man in the song, "What can a young lassie do wi' an auld man," has sold herself "for siller and lan't!" (p. 430).

Her only hope is to break his heart so that he will die, and she can find a better partner. In "Country Lassie," a girl explains why she has chosen a poor boy for a husband instead of one who has "crops and kye" (l. 19):

O gear will buy me rigs o'land,
   And gear will buy me sheep and kye;
But tender heart o' leesome loove,
   The gowd and siller canna buy:
We may be poor, Robie and I,
   Light is the burden Loove lays on;
Content and Loove brings peace and joy,
   What mair hae queens upon a throne.

(ll. 33-40)

In the ballad, "Wha'll m[o]w me now," a pregnant servant girl points out the injustice of a moral code which praises a kind of marital prostitution while it condemns her for the same act outside of marriage:

Our dame can lae her ain gudeman,
   An' m[o]w for glutton greed;
An' yet misca's a poor thing
   That's m[ow]n' for its bread. (ll. 17-20)

Basically, of course, restrictions upon sexual activity result from sanctions enforced by religious institutions, which have removed man from his Eden and alienated him from nature. Burns comments in a verse letter to Alexander Findlater that he envies the rooster his freedom:

Had Fate that curst me in her ledger,
   A Poet poor, and poorer Gager,
Created me that feather'd Sodger,
   A generous Cock,
How I wad craw and strug and r[ol]ger
   My kecklin Flock! (p. 399)
The only reason Burns cannot act like his rooster is that the church interferes. If he were a rooster, he would have

Nae cursed CLERICAL EXCISE
On honest Nature's laws and ties;
Free as the vernal breeze that flies
   At early day,
We'd tasted Nature's richest joys,
   But stint or stay. (p. 399)

Political institutions, too, abridge the freedom which men and women find in nature. As spring approaches, Mary, Queen of Scots, imprisoned in England for political reasons, realizes her alienation from nature:

Now laverocks wake the merry morn,
   Aloft on dewy wing;
The merle, in his noontide bower,
   Makes woodland echoes ring;
The mavis mild wi' many a note,
   Sings drowsy day to rest;
In love and freedom they rejoice,
   Wi' care nor thrall oppresst.

Now blooms the lily by the bank,
   The primrose down the brae;
The hawthorn's budding in the glen,
   And milk-white is the slae:
The meanest hind in fair Scotland
   May rove their sweets among;
But I, the Queen of a' Scotland,
   Maun lie in prison strang. (ll. 17-24)

In one of the songs, Burns singles out another civilized institution, warfare between nations, as a force which alienates man from nature. Although it is spring, when "The birds rejoice in leafy bowers," and "The bees hum round the breathing flowers" (p. 549), a mother is "de-lightless" because her Willie is far away at war. She contrasts her condition with that of the thrush, whose
mate will help her:

But I, wi' my sweet nurslings here,
Nae Mate to help, nae Mate to cheer,
Pass widowed nights and joyless days,
While Willie's far frae Logan braes.

(p. 549)

In the last stanza, her accusation becomes explicit:

O wae upon you, Men o' State,
That brethren rouse in deadly hate!
As ye make mony a fond heart mourn,
Sae may it on your heads return!
How can your flinty hearts enjoy
The widow's tears, the orphan's cry:
But soon may Peace bring happy days
And Willie hame to Logan braes! (p. 549)

The political institution is an instrument of disruption and death; it is evil and destructive because its leaders have "flinty hearts." In such poems we can see Burns's definition of evil. It is institutional, negative, and always hard-hearted. It is, therefore, unnatural.

Even though Burns thoroughly enjoyed being lionized in Edinburgh and maintained many of the friendships which resulted from his stay there, he usually sees in great wealth and high social position a source of unhappiness. Like Crabbe's innocent hero, Peter, who is told by the housekeeper how little joy is really found in Silford Hall, Burns's country dog is informed by his pure-bred friend that the rich invent ills from sheer boredom:

They loiter, lounging, lank an' lazy;
Tho' deil-haet ails them, yet uneasy;
Their days, insipid, dull an' tasteless,
Their nights, unquiet, lang an' restless.

An' ev'n their sports, their balls an' races,
Their galloping thro' public places,
There’s sic parade, sic pomp an’ art,
The joy can scarcely reach the heart.  
(11. 207-14)

Yet in this vain pursuit of happiness, the rich enslave the poor as ruthlessly as they destroy the world of animals. Burns writes to Mrs. Dunlop about his visit to a snobbish lady, who expressed disdain for her social inferiors,

those creatures who, tho' in appearance, Partakers & equally noble Partakers, of the same Nature with madame; yet are from time to time, their nerves, their sinews, their health, strength, wisdom, experience, genius, time, nay a good part of their very thoughts, sold for months & years, anxious Drudges, sweating. weary slaves, not only to the necessities, the conveniences, but the Caprices of the IMPORTANT FEW.38

He adds that the lady looked down on "the unpolished Wretches, their impertinent wives and clouterly brats, as the lordly Bull does on the little, dirty Ant-hill, whose puny inhabitants he crushes in the carelessness of his ramble, or tosses in the air in the wantonness of his pride.39 But despite the lady's distaste for the lower classes, Burns believes that at least potentially, ordinary peasants can be happier than their unnatural superiors. Even though they may be poor, they can live in a relationship with nature which is not possible for those who are enslaved by institutions. One of the few passages in Burns's poetry which refers specifically to the noble savage tradition stresses the seeming incompatibility between love and wealth:
How blest the wild-wood Indian's fate,  
He woos his simple Dearie;  
The silly bogles, Wealth and State,  
Did never make them eerie. ("Song," p. 538)

But unlike some theriophiles, Burns rejects the idea that man cannot find happiness in this world, either because he is more corrupt than the animals, or because he is subject to damnation, or because he is less well equipped for life, or because his restless imagination will not permit him to be happy. Like Cowper and Crabbe, Burns recognizes the fact that the Eden of childhood is irrevocably lost. The song beginning, "I dream'd I lay where flowers were springing" follows the same pattern as that of Crabbe's "Infancy." In his dream, Burns is happy, surrounded by flowers and birds, "By a falling, chrystal stream" (p. 4); but suddenly the sunny sky is overcast, and the poet's world grows stormy. In the second stanza, Burns makes the obvious comparison to life:

    Such was my life's deceitful morning,  
    Such the pleasures I enjoy'd;  
    But lang or noon, loud tempests storming  
    A' my flowery bliss destroy'd. (p. 4)

In "Despondency, an Ode," Burns again looks back to an innocent childhood:

    Oh, enviable, early days,  
    When dancing thoughtless Pleasure's maze,  
    To Care, to Guilt unknown!  
    How ill exchang'd for riper times,  
    To feel the follies, or the crimes,  
    Of others, or my own!  
    Ye tiny elves that guiltless sport,  
    Like linnets in the bush,  
    Ye little know the ills ye court,  
    When Manhood is your wish!
The losses, the crosses,
That active man engage;
The fears all, the tears all,
Of dim declining Age! (ll. 57–70)

Here even more clearly Burns reveals his association of human innocence with animals in a natural surrounding. But childhood passes, and man must find a different kind of Eden. The popularity of "The Cotter's Saturday Night" undoubtedly was based on the readers' desire to believe that somewhere there was such a world of good, pure people who were truly happy. In the poem, Burns stresses his conviction that happiness and virtue dwell in the cottage, not in the palace, and that the Scottish cottagers are a "wall of fire, around their much-lov'd ISLE" (l. 180). Actually, as Dent points out, the cottagers Burns knew were more likely to spend Saturday night getting drunk in the tavern than reading the Bible at home. Most of Burns's poems are more realistic. His characters realize that in their Eden there is no rest from labor, no margin for ill-fortune, and that "When sometimes by my labor I earn a little money, 0/ Some unforeseen misfortune comes generally upon me; 0" ("Song," p. 21). Yet the farmer's son who looks so realistically upon life swears he'll "ne'er be melancholy, 0" (p. 21), just as in the song relating the poet's dream, Burns concludes that whatever fortune might bring in the adult world, "I bear a heart shall support me still" (p. 4). The secret is in the heart, and close contact with nature somehow keeps the heart from being corrupted. In
the "Epistle to Davie," Burns asks,

What tho', like Commoners of air,
We wander out, we know not where,
But either house or hall?
Yet Nature's charms, the hills and woods,
The sweeping vales, and foaming floods,
Are free alike to all. (ll. 43-45)

Happiness does not depend on rank or wealth or learning,
he continues.

If Happiness hae not her seat
   And center in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
   But never can be blest:
   Nae treasures, nor pleasures
      Could make us happy lang;
   The heart ay 's the part ay,
      That makes us right or wrang.
   (ll. 63-70)

In glorifying man's feelings, Burns tends also to glorify
his instincts, especially his need to mate and reproduce.
Crawford notes as a recurring theme in Burns the idea
"that love is the only thing that makes life worth living
for the poor."41 Certainly Burns sometimes makes comments
to that effect:

   And why shouldna poor folk mowe, mowe, mowe,
      And why shouldna poor folk mowe:
   The great folk hae siller, and houses and land,
      Poor bodies hae naething but mowe.
   ("Why should na poor folk mowe," p. 533)

But his attitude is usually more positive; in other words,
it is not that the poor have nothing but love-making, but
rather that the rich have nothing but riches. Their sexual
activities are unsatisfying because they do not involve
their hearts.
There's nought but care on ev'ry han',
In ev'ry hour that passes, O:
What signifies the life o' man,
An' 'twere na for the lasses, O.

(Green grow, &c.)

The warly race may riches chase,
An' riches still may fly them, O;
An' tho' at last they catch them fast,
Their hearts can ne'er enjoy them, O.

(Green grow, &c.)

But gie me a canny hour at e'en,
My arms about my Dearie, O;
An' warly cares, an' warly men,
May a' gae tapsalteerie, O!

(Green grow, &c.)

(p. 44)

This version of "Green grow the rushes, O," like the more explicit alternate version, implies that the fullest joys of sexual union are reserved for humble rural people. Their activities involve the heart, not the reason, which teaches man to be selfish; they are instinctive, and thus dictated by nature, which supplies all her creatures with a pattern of life.

In the poetry of Cowper and Crabbe, the reader occasionally finds a grammatical pattern which suggests a close relationship between man and nature. In Burns's poetry, such patterns occur regularly. In "The Cotter's Saturday Night," a grammatical parallel emphasizes the parallel between the daily routines of cattle, crows, and men:

The miry beasts retreating frae the pleugh;
The black'ning trains of craws to their repose:
The toil-worn COTTER frae his labor goes. (ll. 12-14)
Burns begins his second verse letter to John Lapraik with an adverbial clause suggesting that human time is natural time, not clock time:

While new-ca'd kye rowte at the stake,
And pownies reek in pleugh or braik,
This hour on e'enin's edge I take,
To own I'm debtor,
To honest-hearted, auld Lapraik,
For his kind letter. (ll. 1-6)

Often the construction suggests not a subordination of nature to man but an inexorable relationship, as in "She says she lo'es me best of a":

While falling, recalling
The amorous thrush concludes his sang:
Then, dearest Chloris, wilt thou rove
By wimpling burn and leafy shaw,
And hear my vows o' truth and love,
And say, thou lo'es me best of a'.
(p. 587)

Here both the thrush's song to his mate and the speaker's words to his lass are the results of nature's promptings. The "Ode to Spring," which Burns produced as the result of a bet from a friend that such an ode could not be both conventional and original, illustrates Burns's use of the adverbial clause construction to indicate man's identification with the creatures of nature. The poem begins as follows:

When maukin bucks, at early f[lick]s,
In dewy glens are seen, sir;
And birds, on boughs, take off their m[ow]s,
Amang the leaves see green, sir;
Latona's sun looks liquorish on
Dame Nature's grand impetus,
Till his p[leg]go rise, then westward flies
To r[leg]ger Madame Thetis. (p. 601)
In the general mating, human beings participate. Near the brook there is a flowery bower:

There Damon lay, with Sylvia gay,
To love they thought no crime, sir;
The wild-birds sang, the echoes rang,
While Damon's a[3se beat time, Sir.

(p. 601)

In this ultimate harmony with nature, Damon attempts to "beat time" with the thrush, the blackbird, the linnet, and finally the lark. The fact that he finally mistimes "his thrust" and is "out o' tune, Sir" (p. 602) does not negate his considerable achievement, within the limits of human capability.

The union with nature through sexual union is an experience not limited to the male partner. Burns does not share Crabbe's double standard, which warns the female that sex outside of marriage can lead to the destruction of her reputation, and warns the male that marriage as a condition for sexual activity can lead to the loss of his happiness. Legman points out Burns's keen interest in the sexual experience of women, which is indicated by the fact that the feminine-identification songs among the erotic poems collected by Burns are almost always either written by the poet himself, or significantly revised by him.43

In many of Burns's poems, the female speaker looks to nature for the signal to make love. For example, at night, "When Jockey's owsen hameward ca'"("Young Jockey was the blythest lad," p. 428), the speaker knows that soon it will
be night, "When in his arms he taks me a" (p. 429).

Springtime suggests love-making to women as well as to men:

   While birds rejoice in leafy bowers,
   While bees delight in opening flowers,
   While corn grows green in simmer showers
      I love my gallant weaver. (p. 517)

In "Dainty Davie," the speaker responds to "rosy May" (p. 560). In the morning, she will seek Davie as the hare seeks her food; at night, she will "flee to his arms," as all creatures go to "Nature's rest" (p. 561).

   Frequently Burns places the lovers' meeting in a natural setting. In "On a bank of Flowers," Willie sees Nelly asleep "On a bank of flowers in a summer day" (p. 408). When she awakens, he pursues her into the woods, overtakes her, and finds her "Forgiving all and good" (p. 409). In "Lassie wi' the lintwhite locks," the speaker proposes a walk to "the breathing woodbine bower" and a moonlight ramble "Through yellow waving fields" to "talk o' love, my Dearie O" (p. 593). The "one day of Parting Love" with Highland Mary was spent beside the Ayr, while "The flowers sprang wanton to be prest,/ The birds sang on ev'ry spray" (p. 391). Man's animal nature is emphasized by the final song of "Love and Liberty," for the beggars sing about love-making in shelters built for animals:

    With the ready trick and fable
       Round we wander all the day;
    And at night, in barn or stable,
       Hug our doxies on the hay. (ll. 262-65)
But if sexual union is union with nature, it is an act in time and therefore subject to change, like all natural acts. When Burns was with Highland Mary, "too, too soon the glowing west/ Proclaimed the speed of winged day" (p. 391). Time and space separate lovers. Furthermore, those very grammatical devices which indicate the coming of night, of spring, and of union can also indicate a lover's alienation from nature, resulting from the absence of the beloved. Because Menie scorns him, the lover cannot respond to "rejoicing Nature" in the spring-time ("Song," p. 253). The ploughman, the "Seedsman," and the shepherd all participate in the creative activities of the spring. But the lover goes to his bed when all other creatures awake:

> when the lark, 'tween light and dark,  
> Blythe waukens by the daisy's side,  
> And mounts and sings on fluttering wings,  
> A woe-worn ghaist I hameward glide. (p. 254)

The rejected lover wishes for winter, "When Nature all is sad like me!" (p. 254). In "The Banks o' Doon," the bird that sings beside its mate reminds the lover of a happier day, before his beloved was false (pp. 455-56). Like Crabbe, who dramatized a lover's changes of mood in "The Lover's Journey," Burns realizes that man's perception of nature may depend on the response of his beloved:

> Sweet fa's the eve on Craigie burn,  
> And blythe awakes the morrow,  
> But a' the pride o' Spring's return  
> Can yield me nocht but sorrow.--
I see the flowers and spreading trees,
I hear the wild birds singing;
But what a weary wight can please,
And Care his bosom wringing. (p. 603)

If his secret love spurns him or loves another, the lover will surely die. Burns, however, suggests that human beings simply accept change as a condition of their existence:

Let not Woman e'er complain
Of inconstancy in love;
Let not Woman e'er complain
Fickle Man is apt to rove;
Look abroad through Nature's range,
Nature's mighty law is CHANGE;
Ladies would it not be strange
Man should then a monster prove.—

Mark the winds, and mark the skies;
Oceans ebb, and oceans flow:
Sun and moon but set to rise;
Round and round the seasons go:
Why then ask of silly Man,
To oppose great Nature's plan?
We'll be constant while we can—
You can be no more, you know. (p. 589)

Sometimes love endures through all seasons:

Thus seasons dancing, life advancing,
Old Time and Nature their changes tell,
But never raging, still unchanging,
I adore my Bonie Bell. ("Bonie Bell," p. 516)

But even if circumstances, changed affections, or death separate those lovers who seek union with nature, nature itself endures, as Burns indicates in his Scottish version of the Adonis myth, "John Barleycorn: A Ballad." The grain is personified as a creature which survives every seeming attempt to destroy it. When it is ploughed down, it comes back up; when it is cut down, cudgelled, drowned in water, and crushed, it is transformed into life itself:
And they hae taen his very heart's blood,
    And drank it round and round;
And still the more and more they drank,
    Their joy did more abound. (ll. 45-48)

That process of the regeneration of humanity which Burns and his contemporaries came to see was not to be effected by political change is constantly possible, Burns implies, in a life in union with nature. Such a life inevitably involves both destruction and creation. In his creative work, often man must destroy. Unlike the lark, which merely perches near the daisy, bending it "mang the dewy weet" ("To a Mountain-Daisy," l. 9), the ploughman must crush the field flowers in order to plant his crops. Similarly, in order to protect his crops, the gardener must attack the rabbits which invade his garden ("The Gardener wi' his paidle," p. 407). Nature itself conspires in the destruction of animals, as in "The Vision," when the rabbit in the cabbage-patch is betrayed to the gardener by the "faithless snaws" (l. 5), which reveal his tracks. But the purpose of the daisy's destruction and the rabbit's death is the eventual increase of life. The gardener who preserves his produce during the daytime participates in another creative activity at night, as Burns points out in the familiar structural pattern:

    When Day, expiring in the west,
    The curtain draws of Nature's rest;
    He flies to her arms he lo'es the best,
    The Gardener wi' his paidle. (p. 407)

Such tools as the gardener's paddle and the farmer's plough have obvious secondary meanings. In "Brose and Butter,"
the "dibble" is both the gardener's planting tool and the male organ:

    The laverock lo'es the grass,
    The paetrick lo'es the stibble:
    And hey, for the gardiner lad,
    To gully awa wi' his dibble! 

One cannot escape the implication that there is a kind of violence involved in both agricultural activity and sexual intercourse. But unlike the hunter, whose motive is merely selfish and corrupt pleasure, the gardener, the ploughman, and the lover are in harmony with nature. A farmer who may have been forced to destroy daisies, mice, and rabbits in order to produce food can walk with his lass in the "rustling corn" ("Song, composed in August," l. 31) with "ilka happy creature" (l. 32), knowing that he has behaved naturally. It is not violence which is unnatural; it is "The Sportsman's joy, the murd'ring cry" (l. 23) of selfish, sterile pleasure that marks the hunter as an alien in nature.

    Probably in order to express the violence involved in the sexual pursuit, Burns, like Crabbe, frequently compares the male to a hunter and the female to his prey. In his personal "Epistle to J[ohn] R[ankine]," Burns compares Betty Paton to a partridge injured by a poacher, who had gone "a rovin wi' the gun,/ An' brought a Paetrick to the grun'" (ll. 38-39), thinking no one would know about it. Her resulting pregnancy is minimized: "The poor, wee
thing was little hurt; / I straiket it a wee for sport" (ll. 43-44). Insulted by the possibility of his being fined, Burns swears that he will get his money's worth in future poachings. The same metaphor occurs in "On a bank of Flowers," when Nelly runs away "As flies the partridge from the brake" (p. 409), but, as we have seen, permits herself to be overtaken. In "Let me in this ae night," the lass refuses to trust her lover, insisting that "The bird that charm'd his summer day,/ And now the cruel Fowler's prey" (p. 607) is a lesson for "witless woman." Another explicit hunter-lover identification is found in "My lady's gown there's gairs upon't," when the titled lord who is presumably hunting is actually on the track of humble Jenny. Here, of course, the metaphor unites Burns's concept of the male as pursuer with his insistence that love in the cottage is preferable to love in the mansion.

But like Crabbe, Burns varies from poem to poem in his attitude toward women. As I have pointed out, he sees little difference between the sexual pleasures of men and those of women. Sometimes, as in his unsavory letter to Robert Ainslie, in which he boasts of delighting Jean Armour, eight months pregnant with twins, by a "thundering scalade that electrified the very marrow of her bones,"45 Burns seems to regard women as creatures who must be caught, satisfied, and dominated by men. In
"The Inventory," he compares his property tax to the cost of his children, vowing, "I'se ne'er ride horse nor hizzie mair" (l. 64), as if the act which produced those children was merely riding a woman—his wife and their mother. Such passages have always been difficult for the Burns idolaters to deal with. In many of Burns's works, however, women are regarded with tenderness. In a letter to Deborah Duff Davies, Burns expresses his anger when, as a child, he saw a young maid give up her place in church to a bloated squire. He comments, "Woman is the blood-royal of life: let there be slight degrees of precedency among them, but let them be all sacred." As a future mother, woman is "Nature's darling child" ("Song, On Miss W.A.," l. 21). It is far more characteristic for Burns to think of his Jean as "thou, dear bird, young Jeany fair" ("The Rosebud," p. 323) than as he does in some boastful letters and in "The Inventory." Woman's natural progress through violence to fulfillment is described in "A Ballad." The young heroine, Jean, is happier than "The blythest bird upon the bush" (l. 7). That innocent joy, however, cannot continue in a natural world:

But hawks will rob the tender joys
That bless the little lintwhite's nest;
And frost will blight the fairest flowers,
And love will break the soundest rest.
(11. 9-12)

When Jeanie falls in love with Robie, she experiences "care and pain" (l. 26), without knowing what ails her. At last
Robie asks her to be his mate, she accepts, and love is "ay between them twa" (l. 48). The joy of innocence has been replaced by the joy of a creative life. Clearly Burns believes that love gives women more than it takes from them—not just pleasure, but life as an agent of creative Nature.

In his "Libel Summons," Burns reveals a set of moral standards which are based on his deification of creative nature. Fornication itself is not wrong. But men who disown the girls they have impregnated or try to abort the babies they have fathered are villainous, because they are thwarting nature, which generally provides a safe infancy for its creatures. Burns abhors "The wretch that can refuse subsistence/ To those whom he has given existence" (11. 19-20). His concern about the possible offspring of the wounded hare ("On Seeing a Wounded Hare," p. 369) and his sympathy for the soldier's wife ("Song," p. 549) exhibit the same conviction: that a human being in harmony with nature is responsible for the offspring of his unions, because the offspring are nature's intended end in the reproductive process. Burns's own sense of responsibility for his illegitimate offspring reflects his conviction that the act of mating and the duty to the nest cannot be separated, because the nest is the final expression of nature's creativity.

Clearly, then, life in harmony with nature is not
totally free, either for men or for women. Even the emotions connected with love enslave humanity, as the lover complains in "Scotch Song":

The trout within yon wimpling burn
That glides, a silver dart,
And safe beneath the shady thorn
Defies the angler's art:
My life was ance that careless stream,
That wanton trout was I:
But Love wi' unrelenting beam
Has scorch'd my fountains dry.  (ll. 9-16)

The responsibilities of parenthood enslave him to an even greater degree. Certainly Burns recognizes man's desire to be totally irresponsible, to take "Fortune's road" ("Epistle to Captain William Logan," 1. 2) like the "unbacked Fillie" (l. 5). But the careless freedom which sometimes appears to belong to nature's creatures, especially the young, is inevitably, even ideally, curtailed. As we have seen, many of Burns's poems glorify not the "unbacked Fillie," but the saddle horse. In his satirical poem, "On Glenriddell's Fox breaking his chain," liberty is such a saddle horse, trained for use, though still spirited enough to throw a blundering rider (ll. 6-12). In Crawford's phrase, liberty for Burns "was the essential basis of true order, whereas repression produced only a forced outward conformity that was in reality the reverse of true harmony."47 Man cannot choose unlimited freedom; his only possible choice is between slavery to arbitrary institutions, with their attendant hypocrisy, and the honest
life under the dominion of nature. Although his dull and difficult excise job sometimes makes him feel "like a wild Finch caught amid the horrors of winter & newly thrust into a cage," Burns more often thinks of himself as relatively free:

The SLAVE's spicy forests, and gold-bubbling fountains,  
The brave CALEDONIAN views wi' disdain;  
He wanders as free as the winds of his mountains,  
Save LOVE's willing fetters, the chains o' his JEAN.  
(p. 621)

If contentment and creativity are dependent on man's living in union with nature, it is logical that poetic inspiration, too, would arise from the natural life. Burns's habit of referring to his horse and his muse alike as Pegasus ("Epistle to Hugh Parker," 1. 19; "Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet," 1. 147) indicates his consciousness of this relationship. He sees himself as

THE simple Bard, rough at the rustic plough,  
Learning his tuneful trade from ev'ry bough.  
("The Brigs of Ayr," ll. 1-2)

His muse is inspired by budding woods in the spring, partridges heard in the evening, hares seen in the morning (first "Epistle to John Lapraik," ll. 1-4). No poet ever found the muse, Burns writes, until he had wandered along a "trottin burn's meander," a part of nature, composing "a heart-felt sang" as spontaneously as the birds ("To W. S[impson]," ll. 87-90). Even a poet, then, can be fully human only when he recognizes and accepts his roles as natural creature and as creator by the grace of
Burns's animal images, then, reveal the poet's conviction that only by becoming as much a part of nature as the animals can man regain the Paradise which he alone has lost. The grammatical pattern of Burns's poetry is a pattern occasionally seen in that of Cowper and Crabbe; the frequency with which it appears in the work of Burns stresses the philosophical position which it implies: that man's happiness depends on his following the pattern set by nature and followed by other natural creatures.

As I have pointed out, Burns's value judgments are not those of Cowper and Crabbe. He does not reject the traditional concept of man's dominion over the animals in order to make a moral point, in the tradition of Plutarch and Montaigne, but because he believes that man is himself an animal, not the master of animals or their substitute mother, but simply their brother. Because Burns's God is the God of nature, not the God of the Calvinists or even of the Anglicans, his value judgments have a different basis from those of the other poets in this study. Good is obedience to Nature; evil is disobedience. These standards are reflected in Burns's poems and comments about man's killing of animals and his sexual behavior. Like other animals, man is forced to kill in order to survive; destruction of other life is immoral
only if it is motivated by pleasure, not by need. Like other animals, man is urged by nature to propagate his own kind; sexual activity is immoral only if it is motivated by greed, not by instinct. Like other animals, man is intended to protect his young; immorality does not consist of getting young, but of deserting them. Like other animals, man is motivated to express his joy in nature and in the natural life; only in a natural setting can he find the inspiration to create his own kind of music.

The poetry of Burns is unified, then, by a consistent philosophy which is both a "soft" theriophily, in that it emphasizes the need for a return to animal life, not just to a simpler human society, and a "soft" primitivism of the kind exemplified by Diderot's Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville. The moralists have often attacked Burns as they have always attacked the "soft" primitivists, accusing them of formulating a philosophy in order to excuse licentious behavior; the Burns idolaters, on the other hand, have attempted to ignore the philosophy which so clearly underlies all of his work. But Burns's work cannot be fully appreciated unless the reader discerns the belief revealed by the poet's use of animal imagery: that man finds his lost Paradise only within the limitations which nature imposes, when he works as ploughman, parent, and poet to create and preserve new life.
NOTES


4. I, 112.


15. 21 Apr. 1789, in Letters, I, 324.

16. P. 324.
17 4 May 1789, in *Letters*, I, 330.
23 To Helen Craik, 9 Aug. 1798, in *Letters*, II, 236.
25 To James Smith, 11 June 1787, in *Letters*, I, 95.
27 4 Jan. 1788, in *Letters*, I, 156.
28 P. 442.
29 P. 52.
32 P. 452.
34 Pearl, p. 195.
37 Legman, p. 146.
38 29 May 1788, in *Letters*, I, 224.
39 P. 224.


42 To George Thomson, Jan. 1795, in *Letters*, II, 283.

43 Legman, p. xxxiv.


466 Apr. 1793, in *Letters*, II, 165.

47 P. 80.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

If the concepts associated with theriophily constitute the unifying principle in the poetry of Robert Burns, as the preceding chapter has shown, and major elements in the works of Cowper and Crabbe, as earlier chapters have demonstrated, one may reasonably ask why George Boas, who coined the word "theriophily," insisted in his "Foreword" to The Happy Beast, "Theriophily is a subject ideally suited to illustrate . . . cross-fertilization of ideas . . . . Nevertheless an historian whose attention it captures should not be misled into exaggerating its importance. It is decidedly one of the minor traditions of European thought."

The answer to this critical question lies in the method used to derive evidence of theriophily. In The Happy Beast, a study of the concept as an element in French literature from Montaigne through the seventeenth century, Boas restricted his investigation to explicit statements of the principles of theriophily. In the present study, a more extensive investigation has been conducted. In addition to noting explicit statements both in the poems and in the correspondence of the three writers selected for study, I have sought
by a careful analysis of animal imagery to discover implied meaning.

As a result of the study, two principles have been established: first, the tradition of theriophily is a major influence upon the thought of three significant British writers of the late eighteenth century; second, the importance of that influence could not have been ascertained without the analysis of animal imagery.

The second principle has been demonstrated in the three preceding chapters, where the explicit statements of theriophily are minimal in comparison with the convincing evidence which is imagistic in form.

The first principle, the importance of theriophily in the work of Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns, should be evident from the chapters dealing individually with those writers. In a century when, as James Sutherland points out, "It was Man, walking amid the glad (or sad) creation, that gave to Nature its crowning interest," Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns observed nature, particularly animate nature, in order to discover truths which could direct man toward a better kind of life. Their observations of animals tended to involve two central issues: whether animals were superior to man or equal to him, either in situation or in behavior, and whether man should accept his instincts as valid guides for life, in imitation of the animals. On the basis of their judgments about these issues, Cowper,
Crabbe and Burns speculated as to how man could attain an approximation of that Paradise which he had lost either in infancy or by the fall. Although all of the poets indicated their opinions in statements and images involving animals, no two of them arrived at exactly the same conclusions. Yet all of the conclusions reflected a strong influence of the tradition of theriophily, which is both complex and varied, as the introductory chapter in this study illustrated.

For William Cowper, animals were more fortunate than men because they could not be damned. Their instinctive behavior did not offend God; but man could offend God by his very existence, whether he obeyed his instincts or controlled his passions. Convinced as he was that for some mysterious reason God had destined him for damnation, Cowper looked back to Eden and tried to avoid looking toward a future life in which he would never see Paradise. In place of the two Paradises which were irrevocably lost, then, Cowper was forced to substitute a make-believe world in which he played God to animal pets, whom he restricted so that they could be protected, and whom he treated more indulgently than God had treated him. Cowper's self-identification with animals was based on his belief that they were actually more fortunate than he, because essentially Cowper's God was the "cruel stepmother" of theriophily.
For George Crabbe, men and animals shared a common misery and common vices. But if obeyed, the strong urge to instinctive behavior, which rules man like D. H. Lawrence's "dark gods," led him inevitably to destruction, not to the Paradise which it seemed to promise. Rejecting the Paradise of the noble savage as a literary lie and realizing that any Paradise which the human imagination could create would never exist in reality, Crabbe insisted that the best life possible in this world was one of moderation, in which man used his reason and his will to rule his instincts, selecting for imitation only those aspects of animal behavior which were consistent with Christian values. Crabbe's work, then, falls into the tradition of moralistic theriophily.

For Robert Burns, animals were superior to man only because by his own action man had removed himself from his proper God, nature. By inventing institutions, man had enslaved himself. Only by ignoring or eliminating them, by obeying his instincts and submitting to the pattern provided by nature could man return to that earthly Paradise which was still waiting for him. For Burns, the model for man was not that "noble savage" of distant lands which had been popularized by travel books and travelers' accounts, but the birds and animals in the woods, fields, and stables of Scotland. Burns's work, then, falls into the tradition of naturalistic theriophily.
Since the tradition of theriophily is clearly so important in Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns, investigations of animal imagery in other eighteenth century English poets would seem to be indicated. It is possible that such images would be less important in works which did not evolve from a rural environment; this, in itself, would be significant. Although the present study has illustrated the use of a method which would be valuable in conducting such an investigation, speculations concerning the results lie beyond the limitations of this work.

For three eighteenth century poets, at any rate, the observation of animals suggested valuable truths about man, which were reflected in animal images. As a result of this study, it is evident that the tradition of theriophily is of central importance in understanding the poetry of Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns.
NOTES


LIST OF WORKS CITED


VITA

Rosemary Moody Canfield was born in Des Moines, Iowa, on November 18, 1927. In 1945 she graduated from Ames High School, Ames, Iowa, and enrolled at Iowa State University in Ames, which she attended for two years, before transferring to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. During her senior year at the University of Minnesota, she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and Delta Phi Lambda and was awarded the Capt. DeWitt Jennings Payne scholarship for work in English. In 1949 she received the degree of Bachelor of Arts, magna cum laude. For the next three years she served as a teaching assistant in the University of Minnesota English Department, while pursuing her studies on a graduate level. In 1952 she received the Master of Arts degree. After a period of writing for radio and television and two years as a teacher of English and drama at Mount Vernon High School, Fairfax County, Virginia, in 1961 she became an instructor in English at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. She resigned from the faculty in 1969 in order to resume full-time graduate work as an NDEA fellow. At present she is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Louisiana State University.
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