

Chapter Title: With the World, Or Bound to Face the Sky: The Postures of the Wolf-Child of Hesse

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Book Title: Animal, Vegetable, Mineral

Book Subtitle: Ethics and Objects

Book Editor(s): Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

Published by: Punctum Books. (2012)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv19cwkds.4>

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WITH THE WORLD, OR BOUND TO FACE THE SKY: THE POSTURES OF THE WOLF-CHILD OF HESSE

Karl Steel



The Chronicle of the Benedictine monastery of Saint Peter of Erfurt, in Thuringia, includes two records of boys raised by wolves:

1304 Anno Domini MCCCIII. Quidam puer in partibus Hassie est deprehensus. Hic, sicut postea cognitum est, et sicut ipse retulit, cum trium esset annorum, a lupis est captus et mirabiliter educatus. Nam, quamcumque predam lupi pro cibo rapuerant, semper meliorem partem sumentes et arbori circumiacientes ipsi ad vorandum tribuebant. Tempore vero hiemis et frigoris foveam facientes, folia arborum et alias herbas imponentes, puerum superponebant, et se circumponentes, sic eum a frigore defendebant;

ipsum eciam manibus et pedibus repere cogebant et secum currere tamdiu, quod ex use eorum velocitatem imitabatur et saltus maximos faciebat. Hic deprehensus lignis circumligatis erectus ire ad humanam similitudinem cogebatur. Idem vero puer sepius dicebat se multo carius cum lupis, si in se esset, quam cum hominibus diligere conversari. Hic puer in curiam Heinrichi principis Hassie pro spectaculo est allatus.¹

[A certain boy in the region of Hesse was seized. This boy, as was known afterwards, and just as the boy told it himself, was taken by wolves when he was three years old and raised up wondrously. For, whatever prey the wolves snatched for food, they would take the better part and allot it to him to eat while they lay around a tree. In the time of winter and cold, they made a pit, and they put the leaves of trees and other plants in it, and placed them on the boy, surrounding him to protect him from the cold; they also compelled him to creep on hands and feet and to run with them for a long time, from which practice he imitated their speed and was able to make the greatest leaps. When he was seized, he was bound with wood to compel him to go erect in

¹ Oswald Holder-Egger, ed., "Chronica S. Petri Erfordensis Moderna," in *Monumenta Erphesfurtensia saec. XII, XIII, XIV*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS. re. Germ. 42 (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1899), 326 [117–442]. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. This paper has benefited greatly from conversations with several people, including Beth Bonnette, Brantley L. Bryant, Alison Kinney (as always), Sarah Laseke, Josh Reynolds, Robert Stanton, and Will Stockton.

a human likeness. However, this boy often said that if it were up to him he much preferred to live among wolves than among men. This boy was conveyed to the court of Henry, Prince of Hesse, for a spectacle.]

The other episode, perhaps a version of the same story, runs as follows:

quidam puer a lupis deportatus in Wederavia in una villa nobilium, que dicitur Eczol, qui puer XII annis cum lupis erat in magna silva, que dicitur vulgariter dy Hart. Hic puer isto anno tempore hyemis in nive in vanacione captus [fuerat] a nobilibus ibidem morantibus, et vixit forte ad LXXX annos.²

[In 1344, a certain boy, taken by wolves in Wetterau in an estate named Eczol, who was with the wolves for twelve years in a great

² Holder-Egger, "Chronica S. Petri Erfordensis Moderna," 376. From very early on, the dates of these episodes become confused. Philipp Camerarius, *Operae Horarum Subcisivarum Sive Meditationes Historice* (Nuremberg: Christopher Lochner and Johannis Hofmann, 1591), 362–63, which otherwise exactly copies the *Chronica Moderna*, places both events in 1344; John Molle's translation of Camerarius, *The Living Librarie, or Meditations and Observations Historical, Natural, Moral, Political, and Poetical* (London: Adam Islip, 1625), 239–40, dates both to 1543. Later sources use still other years. I know of only one other medievalist who has written about this material: Gherardo Ortalli, "Animal exempla et culture de l'environnement: permanences et changements," in *L'Animal exemplaire au Moyen Âge (Ve - XVe siècle)*, ed. Jacques Berlioz and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Rennes: Rennes University Press, 1999), 41–50, who cites the Hesse story as an index of changing medieval attitudes towards wolves and the natural world more generally.

forest called the Hart. This boy was captured during winter in the snow by nobles who were in the area for hunting, and he lived for 80 years.]

There is nothing else like this in the Erfurt chronicle material, which tends not to list marvels, but rather to record catastrophic weather, political and papal conflicts, and a depressing number of pogroms, forced conversions and mass suicides, and accusations of ritual murder and Host desecration.³ Barring its date, neither story seems to have any particular reason for being where it is: for example, depending on the manuscript, on either side of the Hesse event the chronicle speaks of a bridge-destroying flood, the Battle of the Golden Spurs, an archbishop's death, a severe winter, or a poisoned noblewoman.

So far as I have been able to discover, the two Erfurt accounts of animal-nurtured children are just as much outliers in medieval textuality as a whole. The many other medieval stories of animal-fostered children differ from the Erfurt material in their subjects' illustriousness. The other accounts borrow from the animal what the genealogies of the Melusina stories borrow from fairy, a way to free noble or sacred foundations from the mundane interdependence of a merely human lineage.⁴ The Erfurt chronicle's stories

³ For ritual murder accusations, see 289–90 (in Mainz in 1285 and 1287) and 323 (in Weißensee, Thuringia in 1303); and for mass suicides, 318–19 (Würzburg and Röttingen in 1298, during the Rintfleisch pogrom).

⁴ See Jacques le Goff, "Melusina: Mother and Pioneer," in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 221–22 [205–22]. Space does not permit me to treat these figures in any detail, but they include Romulus and Remus and Cyrus (all known to the Middle Ages); several figures from chivalric narrative, including Isumbras, Octavian, Sigurðr (in

more closely resemble one in Procopius of Caesarea's sixth-century *Wars of Justinian*, where a she-goat raises an otherwise unexceptional child abandoned during wartime;⁵ just as wavering a line might be drawn between the Erfurt stories and an eleventh-century schooltext by Egbert of Liège in which wolf cubs caress rather than eat a little girl protected by a blessed, red cloak.⁶ The Erfurt chronicle's children, who, from the perspective of nobility, come from and come to nothing, superficially resemble the many feral children stories told from the early modern period to the present day: most famously, Amala and Kamala, two wolf-raised girls discovered in 1920 near Calcutta; Oxana Malaya, the so-called dog girl of the Ukraine, taken from the animals 20 years ago and recently featured in a BBC documentary; and a five-year-old girl from the Siberian city of Chita, never allowed outside her apartment but—per the 2009 police report—conversant

Þiðrekssaga), and Wolfdietrich; a widespread exemplum on the infant adventures of the illegitimate grandson of the King of Crete (Frederic C. Tubach, *Index exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales* [Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1969], #647); and several figures from early medieval Ireland: Cormac; Armengenus, father to Saint Bairre; and Saint Ailbe of Emly, all raised by wolves (Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990), 191–92, 214–18; Charles Plummer, ed., *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 1:65; and William Watts Heist, ed., *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae ex codice olim Salman-ticensi nunc Bruxellensi* (Brussels: Bollandist Society, 1965), 118, 130.

⁵ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, trans. Henry B. Dewing, 7 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), VI.17, 2:11–15.

⁶ Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 93–124.

in the language of the dogs and cats who raised her.⁷ These and other modern accounts of feral children

⁷ For the last two examples, see Tyson Lewis and Richard V. Kahn, *Education Out of Bounds: Reimagining Cultural Studies for a Posthuman Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41–42. Studies of feral children are common (and modern fictional and poetic engagements perhaps inexhaustible). For lists of ancient, medieval, and folkloric stories of feral children, see Charles W. Dunn, *The Foundling and the Werwolf: A Literary-Historical Study of Guillaume de Palerne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), 92–106, whose twenty cases range from ancient Mesopotamia and China to the Amazon forest; Eugene S. McCartney, “Greek and Roman Lore of Animal-Nursed Infants,” *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters* 4 (1924): 16–28 [15–40]; and Michael P. Carroll, “The Folkloric Origins of Modern ‘Animal-Parented Children’ Stories,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 21.1 (1984): 66, 70–73 [63–85]. Barring the brief list in Aelien’s third-century *Varia historia* 12.42, the earliest catalog I know appears in Alexander Ross, *Arcana micro-cosmi, or, The Hid Secrets of Man’s Body Discovered* (London: Thomas Newcomb, 1652), IV.2 (available online at <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/ross/index.html>). Ross, who cites the Hesse story, remarks that, “it is no more incredible for a Wolf to nurse a child, then [*sic*] for a Raven every day to feed *Elijah*.” Representative recent studies, which tend not to differentiate sharply between animal-raised and isolated children, include: Douglas K. Candland, *Feral Children and Clever Animals: Reflections on Human Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Julia V. Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Man, and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 11–69; Michael Newton, *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2003); Kenneth B. Kidd, *Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 3–7; Lucienne Strivay, *Enfants sauvages: approches anthropologiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006); and Adriana Silva Benzaquén, *Encounters with Wild Children: Temptation and Disappointment in the Study of Human Nature* (Montreal:

differ from the Erfurt material, however, by tending to speak of a child at least initially unable to talk, reluctant to eat anything but raw meat, cringing from human contact, and not long surviving reentry into the human community. Perhaps the earliest such case appears in an early seventeenth-century Hessian chronicle: the child, caught by hunters and brought to the local lord, went about on all fours, jumped unusually high, but, once taken to the castle, hid under benches, and died soon afterwards because of his intolerance for human food.⁸

Unsurprisingly, modern engagements with feral children utilize this data to consider human limits. They raise questions about the minimal socialization humans require, about the transition from human prehistory to history, and the leaps from animality to *homo infans*—speechless man—and then finally to speaking, rational humanity. Other engagements think about colonial encounters—the nineteenth-century English had a flair for turning up such stories in India—or judge their believability. Perhaps unwittingly drawing on medieval characterizations of human madness as animalization (as in the stories about

McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006). Only Strivay and Benzaquén give much attention to the Middle Ages or the Erfurt chronicle; most concentrate on Peter of Hanover, Victor of Aveyron, Kasper Hauser, and the many cases that follow, for, as Nancy Yousef observes, the “Enlightenment invented the wild child,” so to speak, in that a widespread interest in the topic appears only in the early eighteenth century (“From the Wild Side,” *History Workshop Journal* 65.1 [2008]: 215 [213–20]). For a treatment of feral children in sympathy with mine, see H. Peter Steeves, *The Things Themselves: Phenomenology and the Return to the Everyday* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 17–47.

⁸ As Wilhelm Dilich, *Hessische Chronica* (Cassel: Wessel, 1605), 173, sets this event in 1341, the account may be just an early modern development of the medieval story.

Nebuchadnezzar, Yvain, and other humiliated nobles), many modern scholars have argued that so-called wolf children were in fact abandoned to the wilderness because of autism.⁹

The Hesse story lends itself easily to such analyses of human limits, as it is not so much about a boy altered by being raised incorrectly as about a pliable substance, contingently lupine or human. The boy is notably passive: *deprehensus* by either wolves or humans; *captus* by wolves; then *deprehensus*, most of what the boy experiences are things that happen *to* him. The wolves *cogebant* him to go on hands and feet, just as he *cogebatur* to walk upright in the likeness of a human. It seems that the boy's only activity is to imitate, to recount what has happened to him, and to wish the humans had let him be. This story, therefore, suggests nurture's superiority to or dominance over nature; or of the absence of any such thing as "human nature." Per Jean Itard, educator of Victor of Aveyron, perhaps most famous now as Truffaut's "Wild Child"—

that moral superiority which has been said to be natural to man, is merely the result of

⁹ For a representative diagnosis, see Carroll, "Folkloric Origins," 67–68, or for a related, much earlier assessment, which identifies as melancholics those who believe themselves to have been transformed into animals, see Camerarius, *Operae horarum*, 343–46. A study of the interconnections between discourses of animality and disability might begin with Heidegger (see Jacques Derrida, "Eating Well," or The Calculation of the Subject," in *Points: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Avital Ronell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 277 [255–87]) or, perhaps more directly, with Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson, *Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior* (New York: Scribner, 2005).

civilization, which raises him above other animals by a great and powerful stimulus,¹⁰

which, in the case of the pedagogy of Itard, meant a refinement and multiplication of the child's desires. The story of the child of Hesse finds its apotheosis in Itard's good revolutionary argument for the improvement of even the meanest sort of humankind.

This interpretation can be improved upon by noting, first, that the Hesse child, unlike the feral children of later centuries, loses nothing because of his peculiar upbringing except his ability, or desire, to walk upright. Since he can still talk, this is not a story about the complete exposure of the human child to its relations and thus of the non-existence of anything human at all. There is something there. But neither is it the story of an authentic self lost by misfortune or rescued by reintegration into its proper, human community. The child has no problem with language, nor does the tale suggest he ever lost it; he assimilates poorly to human society not because he became irreparably animalized, but because he would prefer to be among the wolves. He is therefore no more dispossessed than the boy in Caesarius of Heisterbach's thirteenth-century *Dialogus Miraculorum*. In this work, a moral and doctrinal guide and wonder collection staged as a pedagogic conversation, the master speaks of a girl temporarily kidnapped by a wolf to pluck a branch from the teeth of another; the student responds with his own story, which runs:

Ego quendam iuvenem vidi, qui in infantia a
lupis fuerat raptus, et usque ad adolescentiam

¹⁰ Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, *An Historical Account of the Discovery and Education of a Savage man* [anon. trans. from French] (London: Printed for R. Phillips, 1802), 144.

educatus, ita ut more luporum supra manus
et pedes currere sciret, atque ululare.¹¹

[I saw a certain youth who was snatched up
by wolves as an infant and was raised by them
into adolescence, and he knew how to run on
hands and feet in the manner of wolves, and
how to howl.]

This child has acquired a certain lupine knack but has
apparently lost nothing worth remembering, while he
has gained the quality of being a wonder or inspiration
to young students who perhaps wish that they too
could howl.

Here as elsewhere, disability is situational. The
Hesse child becomes disabled only when the adult
humans capture him and compel him to assume what
they dictate as the proper human posture. An
exemplum from Jacques de Vitry's popular *Sermones ad
status* or *vulgares* tells of a similar effort, but this time
from the perspective of the wolf. Jacques writes,

Dicitur autem quod lupa aliquando infantes
rapit et nutrit. Quando autem infans se nititur
erigere ut super pedes incedat, lupa pede
percutit eum in capite nec permittit ut se

¹¹ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed.
Joseph Strange, 2 vols. (Cologne: H. Lempertz & Co., 1851),
1:261. Judging from the early manuscript evidence, the
student may have been named Apollonius, and he may have
actually told this story; see Brian Patrick McGuire, "Friends
and Tales in the Cloister: Oral Sources in Caesarius of
Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*," *Analecta Cisterciensia*
36 (1980): 242 [167–247], conveniently reprinted along with
another article on the oral sources of the *Dialogus Miracu-
lorum* in a variorum collection, Brian Patrick McGuire,
*Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women, and Their
Stories, 1100-1250* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

erigat sed cum pedibus ac manibus bestialiter
eat.¹²

[A she-wolf stole and suckled some children;
when, however, one of the children attempted
to stand upright and walk, the wolf struck him
on the head with her paw, and would not
allow him to walk otherwise than like the
beasts, on his hands and feet.]

Albert the Great's monumental treatise on animals offers another such story about a pair of wild humanoids caught in the forests of Saxony; the female died from wounds inflicted by hunters and their dogs, while the man learned to speak badly (*imperfecte valde*) and to walk upright on his two feet.¹³ These various bodily

¹² Jacques de Vitry, *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. and trans. Thomas Frederick Crane (London: David Nutt, 1890), 78. These early thirteenth-century sermons belong to a four-part collection including sermons *de tempore*, *sanctis*, and *communes*. For a list of the fourteen extant manuscripts of the *Sermones vulgares*, see Johannes Baptist Schneyer, *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150-1350*, 11 vols. (Aschendorff: Munster, 1969-1990), 3:220-21. For a similar modern case, see the many (contradictory and evidently apocryphal) accounts of the gazelle-boy of the Mideast, captured in 1946 in Iraq or Syria or some other nearby country, capable of great leaps, and tamed only when his captors cut his tendons; for a brief and highly skeptical treatment, see Serge Aroles, *L'enigme des enfants-loups: une certitude biologique mais un déni des archives, 1304-1954* (Paris: Publibook, 2007), 266-68.

¹³ Albert the Great, *On Animals: A Medieval Summa Zoologica*, trans. Irvn Michael Resnick and Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), Vol. 1, 308-9. For the Latin, see Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus libri XXVI*, ed. Hermann Stadler, 2 vols. (Munich: Aschendorff, 1916), II.4, 1:244.

corrections furnish the materials for what Derrida called a “limitrophic” investigation of the human/animal boundary, among others, a study of “what abuts onto limits but also what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised, and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit.”¹⁴ Belonging to a tradition stretching back to Plato and forward to Freud, medieval scholars frequently argue that the stereotypical upright human form allows, reminds, and enables humans to direct their eyes away from mundane desires and toward heaven, while the bestial form—which this tradition presents as quadrupedal and prone to the ground—confines animals to merely terrestrial appetites.¹⁵ The medieval corporeal tradition frequently cites either Psalms 48:21 (“Man when he was in honor did not understand,” etc.) or Ovid’s description of Prometheus’s creation of humans in the *Metamorphoses*, where he makes humans

... into a shape not unlike that of the gods.
 But one way or another, man arose—erect,
 standing tall as the other beasts do not, with
 our faces
 set not to gaze down at the dirt beneath our
 feet
 but upward toward the sky¹⁶

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 29.

¹⁵ For an extended discussion of the “homo erectus” topos, see Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 44–57.

¹⁶ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. David Slavitt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1994), l.79–83.

In a typical formulation, the encyclopedia of Bartholomew the Englishman cites the Ovidian maxim and then explains that the upright human posture means that “homo itaque coelum quaerat, & non tanquam pecus ventri obediens, mentum in terra figat”¹⁷ [“and so man strives for heaven, and is not like livestock obeying its stomach, with a mind fixed on the earth”], while, in another usual interpretation, the twelfth-century *Sentences* commentary of Robert of Melun observes that human bipedality shows that humankind “praeter cetera animantia rectum habet”¹⁸ [“has rulership over other living things”]. Two incarnations of two *teloi*: the human, a subject oriented towards the immutable, looking down on the mutable only to dominate it; and the animal, ever-changing, a dominated object concerned only with mutable, temporary things like itself.

Such interpretations of the human form seek to rescue humans from worldly entanglement. For Freud, standing means smell gives way to sight as the dominant sense: “the fateful process of civilization would thus have set in with man’s adoption of an erect posture. From that point the chain of events would have proceeded through the devaluation of olfactory stimuli and the isolation of the menstrual period to the time when visual stimuli were paramount and the genitals became visible.”¹⁹ Sight pretends to be the least tactile of sensations, the one most removed from what

¹⁷ Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus* (1601; repr. Frankfurt: Minerva, 1964), 48.

¹⁸ Edited in Richard Heinzmann, *Die Unsterblichkeit der Seele und die Auferstehung des Leibes: eine problemgeschichtliche Untersuchung der fröhscholastischen Sentenzen- und Summenliteratur von Anselm von Laon bis Wilhelm von Auxerre* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1965), 86.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 46–47 n1.

it senses, whereas smell, as Valerie Allen observes, gets into us; the

companionable air attends us continually, sustains us in breath, and makes a community of one. Creaturely in itself, the air rearranges subject/object relations as a continuum, and causes our selfhood to expand and contract with the elements.²⁰

By understanding their posture as optical and as non-haptic, by understanding their sensory engagement as unilateral, not interactive, humans promote what Judith Butler terms an “ontology of discrete identity”²¹ and try to reject their precarious involvement in the “primary vulnerability,” best exemplified—not incidentally for this chapter—by infants, a condition shared more or less willingly by all that is.²² To make the inner and outer worlds “utterly distinct,” to grant “the entire surface of the body . . . an impossible impermeability,”²³ the traditional conceptualization of the up-right human self allows humans to believe themselves to be pilgrims just passing through.

Mainstream medieval Christian resurrection doctrine is of a piece with this corporeal argument, because it too presents the human body as properly celestial

²⁰ Valerie Allen, *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 37.

²¹ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009), 31.

²² Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 31–32; though Butler limits her insights to intrahuman relationships, her work lends itself easily to critical animal studies. See for example Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 42–45.

²³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 170.

and unchanging amid a disdained nonhuman world. Resurrection doctrine argued that humans would receive their own body again, intact, in the Last Judgment.²⁴ One strain of Christian resurrection doctrine argued that humans had a core fleshly self, a “truth of human nature,”²⁵ that would remain the same regardless of how humans changed during their lives, regardless of what they ate and how they grew; another, simpler strain imagined that humans could wholly assimilate the animal flesh they ate to their human bodies. Meanwhile mainstream Christian resurrection doctrine, of whatever variety, denied plants and animals any place in the afterlife.²⁶ Once this world and change itself has passed away, there will be nothing left to accuse humans of what they had done. The doctrine allowed humans to imagine themselves as able to injure without being injured. To invoke Butler again: the differential allocation of vulnerability serves fantasies of discrete selfhood by allowing the “properly” invulnerable—in this case, the human subject facing a world of objects—to deny “its dependency [and] its exposure” to others by “exploit[ing] those very features in others, thereby making those features ‘other to’ itself.”²⁷

²⁴ For surveys of medieval Christian resurrection doctrine, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) and Richard M. Grant, “The Resurrection of the Body,” *Journal of Religion* 28 (1948): 120–30, 188–209.

²⁵ Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Food and the Body: Some Peculiar Questions in High Medieval Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 50–66.

²⁶ Francesco Santi, “Utrum Plantae et Bruta Animalia et Corpora Mineralia Remaneant post Finem Mundi: L’animale eterno,” *Micrologus* 4 (1996): 231–64.

²⁷ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 41.

The human imagination thus seeks a body without what it means to be a body, without any of the vulnerability, parasitism, symbiosis, and indeed symmateriality of actual bodies. Conceptualizations of the human subject as lonely, centered, isolatable to an everlasting essence—as in *Everyman*, for example—cannot account for the richness of what thrives within us, in the human microbiome, the life through and with which and *for* which we are. Speaking of the “oxymoronic truism that the human is not exclusively human,” Jane Bennett directs our attention to the six kinds of bacteria that process the raw fat exuded in the crook of our elbows.²⁸ They too are with us, and vice versa, in an interdependence that at once constitutes and dispossesses us. Donna Haraway observes that

human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body [and that] the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm,²⁹

a passage Isabelle Stengers praises for its engagement with

the imbroglia, perplexity and messiness of a worldly world, a world where we, our ideas

²⁸ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 112–13.

²⁹ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1–2. See also Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 34–36, 66–67.

and power relations, are not alone, were never alone, will never be alone.³⁰

The ongoing shiftiness of being is what the assertion of human uprightness means to correct. But the Hessian boy prefers the muck.

Down on all fours, leaping like a wolf, yet, or better, *and* speaking, he refuses the logic of the dominant humanist traditions of the Middle Ages, in which someone gets to be the human subject and something has to be the animal object, there to be dominated, used, and observed by the one subject with a rational, studious posture. This tradition allies with the philosophers who, as Derrida remarked, “have never been *seen seen* by the animal.” Suspending or refusing his human dominance, Derrida allows himself the uneasiness of being caught in his own cat’s eyes; he does not conjure away his uncertainty; and he opposes those who take “no account of the fact that what they call ‘animal’ can *look* at them, and *address* them from down there.”³¹ The same belief in the unilateral availability of the unreflective animal object, the same commitment to a zero-sum game of subjects and objects, must underlay a belief as old as Plato’s *Republic* and repeated throughout the Middle Ages, which held that a human would be rendered speechless if seen first by a wolf,³² if, in other words, the human were made the object of a gaze. The boy, uncommitted to human mastery and, therefore, in no danger of losing it, has allowed himself to be seen. He has been seen seen by the scandalized adults, who see that the boy

³⁰ Isabelle Stengers, “Wondering about Materialism,” in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 371 [368–80].

³¹ Derrida, *Animal that Therefore*, 13. Emphasis in original.

³² For example, see Albert the Great, *On Animals*, 2:1518.

has allowed wolves to address him without, presumably, losing his ability to address them in turn.

So far as the human system is concerned, this speaking, contentedly lupine boy should not be. By training the boy for a good, upright life, the adults rehabilitate themselves according to their own understanding at the same time as they rehabilitate the boy. *Circumiicientes* and *circumponentes* with the wolves, and then, with the humans, *circumligatis*, bound up, his wolf-family probably killed, the boy is now surrounded by people who want him to be happy; who just want him to be happy; who want him to be happy for them. Here I rely on Sara Ahmed's recent *Promise of Happiness*, which counters the notion of happiness as the presumptive highest good by characterizing several dominant social arrangements as "happiness script[s]," "straightening device[s]"³³ which render some lives impossible by compelling "would-be subject[s] to face the right way such that [they] can receive the right impressions,"³⁴ to disorient such subjects from—per classical models—the lower happinesses of the body and towards the higher happinesses of the mind.³⁵ For the Hesse child, it doesn't quite take. He would rather be back with the wolves. His discontent provides what Ahmed calls an "unhappiness archive," in which

the sorrow of the stranger might give us a different angle on happiness not because it teaches us what it is like or must be like to be a stranger, but because it might estrange us from the very happiness of the familiar,³⁶

³³ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 91.

³⁴ Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 54.

³⁵ Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 12.

³⁶ Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 17.

in this case, the self-satisfied happiness of being human, doing it right above a disorderly world.

The adults, reactionaries unreflectively dedicated to their community, show themselves to be far less capable of response than the wolves.³⁷ This is especially notable given wolves' infamously stubborn rapaciousness: one of Marie de France's fables uses a wolf to signify those who "ne peot lesser a nul fuer / sun surfet ne sa glutunerie" ["cannot abandon their gluttony for any price"];³⁸ another features one unable to learn the whole alphabet, because the only word he can form is "lamb."³⁹ Note too that one manuscript of the Hesse story has the child *raptus*, not *captus*, by wolves, which then *rapuerant* their prey: snatching this child is like snatching any meat, but for whatever reasons, something about this young meat strikes them differently. The wolves break with themselves by opening a new relation to humans. Under their care, the boy thrives. The wolves feed him the best food, and they shelter him from the cold by gathering leaves, by enveloping him with their bodies, by digging him a *foveam*. A *fovea*, the den, is a word also meaning "trap" or "pitfall," one of the methods for catching wolves. They have trapped the boy by making a home for it; by capturing the boy, they have given themselves over to being trapped or caught by a new way of life. As they care for him, the wolves find that winter moves them differently. They

³⁷ For a critique of the distinction between reaction and response, see Derrida, *Animal that Therefore I Am*, 119–40, and Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009), 115–20.

³⁸ Marie de France, *Fables*, ed. and trans. Harriet Spiegel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), Fable 50, ll. 24–25; my translation.

³⁹ Marie, *Fables*, Fable 82.

discover how the trees and their own bodies can form a kind of clothing or living, lupine home.

The Erfurt tale thus argues for the cultural basis of even animal nature; or that “culture” might better be called adaptation, if we allow “adaptation” to be impractical, excessive, never quite a perfect fit;⁴⁰ and that adaptation’s shared work of struggle or fun—which might produce a human, a wolf, a tree, an idea—cannot neatly be registered along the axes of nature and nurture, object and subject, passive and active. The Hesse story should therefore not be thought of as a narrative of the return to nature, wherever or whatever that is, or a regressive narrative of the emergence of the beast within.⁴¹ This is a story in which the wolf-boy happens, the wolves-boy happen. The boy has been captured and trained, captured and trained again; and, otherwise sleeping or withdrawn⁴² qualities in boy, wolves, and trees have been activated or made apparent in this odd event. But the chronicle calls the

⁴⁰ For one treatment of this topic, see Morton, *Ecological Thought*, 30, 44–45.

⁴¹ For the meanings of the word “nature” in the Middle Ages (which, unlike modern uses of the term, was not a place one could go out into), see Monica Brzezinski Potkay, “Natural Law in ‘The Owl and the Nightingale,’” *The Chaucer Review* 28 (1994): 369–71 [368–83], Rebecca M. Douglass, “Ecocriticism and Middle English Literature,” *Studies in Medievalism* 10 (1998): 144–47 [136–63], and Sarah Stanbury, “Ecochaucer: Green Ethics and Medieval Nature,” *Chaucer Review* 34 (2004): 4–7 [1–16].

⁴² The term is key to Graham Harman’s object-oriented philosophy and, in part, means to replace the inadequate notion of “potential”; see, for example, Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 187. Adam Robbert, “Further Drafts of an OOE,” *Knowledge Ecology: Nature, Media, Knowledge* [weblog], August 9, 2011 (<http://knowledge-ecology.com/2011/08/09/further-drafts-of-an-ooe/>), sketches an object-oriented ecology sympathetic to my project.

boy *deprehensus, captus, cogebatur*, because it lacks the imagination to find descriptive tools adequate to “horizontally arranged co-participants . . . vibrat[ing] with precious and vital potentialities.”⁴³ Everything is always at once a subject and object, or even always countable as multiple objects generated by each of the distinct various modes in which other subjects—wolves, trees, winter, Chronicle—apprehend it. Given the boy’s self-estrangement, we must also recognize that subjects are objects to themselves. For even without the insights of object-oriented ontologies, we know from psychoanalysis that the boy’s experience and subjectivity are not wholly his to know or experience.

Further routes of engagement remain unexplored: the child’s lupine boyishness as a sign of as yet unforclosed hopes that proper adulthood seeks to erase or tame; his gender—I know of no medieval examples of feral girls—which may be yet another symptom of the presumptive universality of the male subject, but which may also exemplify one who refuses the pretenses of carnophallogocentrism.⁴⁴ In closing, however, I will attend only to the necessary verso of “precious . . . vital[ity],” namely, death and what sustains life, and the problem of eating well.

For the boy to be fed, something had to be killed. What does it mean to be a companion, or more precisely, *concernian* in the woods with wolves; what does it mean to be their messmate, to be given the

⁴³ Eileen A. Joy, “Mattering, the Middle Voice, and Magnanimous Self-Donations: A Response to Jeffrey’s ‘Queering the In/Organic,’” *In the Middle* [weblog], September 5, 2010, <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2010/09/mattering-middle-voice-and-magnanimous.html>.

⁴⁴ For one use of this term, see Derrida, “Eating Well,” 280.

meliozem partem?⁴⁵ In the Erfurt chronicle material, as in medieval textuality in general, wolves are notorious anthropophages.⁴⁶ The chronicle records an attack in 1271 in which wolves eschewed sheep and instead devoured 30 men.⁴⁷ *Melior* might, therefore, be read as describing not the portion size or the cut but the quality, so that the *meliozem partem* is better than the usual run of meat: not mutton, but human flesh, better than animal flesh because of its purported great savor and nutritiousness: Albert the Great observes that if a wolf has eaten a human, it will seek more out “because of the sweetness of their flesh” [propter carnis dulcedinem].⁴⁸ I recall a *Radiolab* story on Barbara Smuts’ time among the baboons.⁴⁹ Abandoning the pretense of being only an observing subject among animal objects, Smuts learns to sit like a baboon and to sound like one. Though a vegetarian, she salivates when she witnesses the troop kill and dismember a young gazelle. Not witnessing, then, but sensorial communion. She feels this as an encounter with her

⁴⁵ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 74: “the ecologies of significant others involves messmates at table, with indigestion and without the comfort of teleological purpose from above, below, in front, or behind. This is not some kind of naturalistic reductionism; this is about living responsively as mortal beings where dying and killing are not optional” (one of the many uses of “messmate” in this book).

⁴⁶ Aleksander Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006).

⁴⁷ Holder-Egger, “Chronica S. Petri Erfordensis Moderna,” 262.

⁴⁸ Albert the Great, *On Animals*, 2:1519; *De animalibus*, 2: 1410. For more on the flavor of human flesh, see Steel, *How to Make a Human*, 118–35.

⁴⁹ Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich, “The Shy Baboon” [radio broadcast], *Radiolab*, February 8, 2010, <http://www.radiolab.org/blogs/radiolab-blog/2010/feb/08/the-shy-baboon/>.

heritage, but her abandonment to another array of care, her gustatory betrayal of both her vegetarianism and the gazelle, might just be called a different framing, remaking certain parts of the world as grievable and others not.⁵⁰ This is not her past, then, but a slippage into another present, where baboons and their desires draw their own lines between subjects and objects, between what should be protected, what can be eaten, and what is outside notice. The boy, eating the *meliorem partem*, likewise may have slipped into being a species traitor.⁵¹ We must wonder whether the boy fled or salivated as the hunters approached.

But to present anthropophagy as particularly shocking is to be a humanist. The Hesse story demands more of us. It demands that we let our *us* slip, come what may. The wolves might have given the child especially good cuts from sheep, according to the Erfurt chronicle, their proper food. Surely from the perspective of sheep, they would still have done a wrong. This point, inspired by critical animal theory's assault on the ethical uniqueness of the so-called rational subject, might be shifted towards still stranger questions of justice inspired by the nonhierarchical thinking of actor-network philosophy and its affiliated schools, which variously complicate divisions between life and death, subjects and objects, semipermanent subjects and shifting configurations, vulnerability and breakability, and so on. For these thinkers, the ethical call might come from anywhere, to anything, without limit.⁵² I think of how Augustine jeers at those who want

⁵⁰ For grievable lives, see Butler, *Precarious Life*, 19–49, and *Frames of War*, 1–32.

⁵¹ I borrow this locution from the motto of Noel Ignatiev's journal *Race Traitor*, "treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity."

⁵² See especially Émilie Hache and Bruno Latour, "Morality or Moralism?: An Exercise in Sensitization," trans. Patrick

to use the commandment “thou shalt not kill” to protect animals: “but if so,” he asks,

why not extend it also to the plants, and all that is rooted in and nourished by the earth? For though this class of creatures have no sensation, yet they also are said to live, and consequently they can die; and therefore, if violence be done them, can be killed Must we reckon it a breaking of this commandment . . . to pull a flower?⁵³

Augustine is being sarcastic, but he might be taken at his word if we choose to think as a flower, which too must flourish. The Dutch physician Nicholaes Tulp (most well-known today from Rembrandt’s 1632 *Anatomy Lesson*) describes an Irish boy, raised by sheep, who was “magis ferae, quam hominis speciem” [“more a beast than a type of human”], whose body and diet had become ovine, who “manducabat solum gramen, ac foenum, et quidem eo delectu, quo curiosissimae oves”⁵⁴ [“ate only grass or hay, with the same choice as the fussiest of sheep”]. The Irish sheep boy and his herd might also be condemned for what

Camiller, *Common Knowledge* 16.2 (2010): 311–30, who set no limits on where the call for justice might arrive; Jane Bennett is also useful here, though *Vibrant Matter* admits to identification “with members of my species, insofar as they are bodies most similar to mine” (104). See also the following exchange between Jean-Luc Nancy and Derrida in “Eating Well”: “[Nancy]: When you decide not to limit a potential ‘subjectivity’ to man, why do you then limit yourself simply to the animal? [Derrida] Nothing should be excluded” (269).

⁵³ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), I.20, 26.

⁵⁴ Nicholaes Tulp, *Observationes medicae* (Amsterdam: Elzevir, 1652), 312–13; the book appeared first in 1641, but I cite this edition because of its ready availability online.

they do to flowers, even apart from the soil erosion caused by grazing, or the intrahuman economic inequities of early modern sheep farming, points that should be remembered even if they cannot be considered here.

I must therefore return to Haraway's designation of our co-constitutive environment as a "symphony." The term elides both the overflowing proliferation and the precarity of lives living together and off each other, whose competing orientations, framings, and interests may be with but not always for each other. A symphonic trope cannot account for what remains, for the irreducibility of wants and needs to a harmony. It is better to think not of a symphony but of a polity, if this polity can be thought of without the singular cephalic supremacy of the ancient metaphor of the body politic. There are uncountable polities, each with its own hierarchies and borders, each incapable in its own way of understanding its others. Object-oriented ontology does not do away with hierarchies, nor does it entirely do away with correlationism. Rather it concocts a non-anthropocentric, universalized correlationism whose infinite centers, to be sure, would be unrecognizable to Kant or perhaps even to Quentin Meillassoux, correlationism's greatest enemy. In this universalized correlationism, subjects are objects that are cared about. Each subject organizes its world, its polity, in its own way, unwilling and indeed unable to let everything into its borders and supremacy without sacrificing its own existence. This is therefore not a flat morality but one of infinite, incommensurable hierarchies.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ I developed these ideas in a brief conversation with Graham Harman at the *Speculative Medievalisms 2* conference in New York City, September 16, 2011; see <http://speculativemedievalisms.blogspot.com/2011/05/speculative-medievalisms-ii-laboratory.html>.

With all this in mind, vertiginously shifting our attention and concern from one call to another, from one justice or injustice to another, with something or someone always slipping from our attention, always knowing—as Žižek demands—our attention to be anamorphic, we can speculatively think as trees, as the earth, as the forest law, as the pleasures of the court of Henry. They too have their thrivings; they have their interests in some polity; because each in its own way must eat, each needs its own limitrophic investigation. Each in its own way suffers the eating of others and thus has its own vulnerable *meliores partem*. When we eat, as we must, we should at least eat as the Hesse story imagines the wolves do, unelevated, amid the eaters, not neglecting to remember that what we eat had its own best part that we have taken, perhaps irrevocably, and that we, not innocent, will be taken in turn.⁵⁶ All bodies can only pretend to be upright; all are down here, constitutively interconnected and subject to an end; all must be immanently somewhere; all belong to others in ways they can hardly know; all subjects; all objects. All can only pretend to have a good conscience.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ This passage tries to meet the demands of Derrida, “Eating Well,” 281–82.

⁵⁷ “Good conscience” echoes Derrida’s many scornful uses of this phrase; for example, from “Eating Well”: “Responsibility is excessive or it is not a responsibility. A limited, measured, calculable, rationally distributed responsibility is already the becoming-right of morality; it is at times also, in the best hypothesis, the dream of every good conscience, in the worst hypothesis, of the petty or grand inquisitors” (286).