

INTRODUCTION

Modernism and the Canine Condition

One of the most perplexing moments in modernist literature comes at the end of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, when an encounter between protagonist Robin Vote and her ex-lover's dog escalates into a fit of mutual barking, whimpering, grinning, and trembling and ends with both participants prostrate and panting on the floor of an abandoned chapel. The scene is disorienting, not least because of Barnes's dogged refusal to clarify the nature of the encounter; her narrator describes Robin's actions ambiguously as "going down."¹ In a letter to Emily Coleman, a friend who was instrumental in preparing the *Nightwood* manuscript for publication, Barnes writes, "When they see each other Robin goes down with the dog, and thats the end. I do not go any further than this into the psychology of the 'animal' in Robin because it seems to me that the very act with the dog is pointed enough, and anything more than that would spoil the scene anyway; as for what the end promises (?) let the reader make up his own mind, if hes not an idiot he'll know."² Despite Barnes's insistence that all but the most obtuse readers should readily grasp what the scene depicts, critics have not reached a consensus about just what this "act with the dog" is. Prior to the so-called animal turn in literary studies, critics interpreted it variously as a thinly veiled representation of bestiality, an empowering reclamation

of presymbolic modes of subjectivity, and a violent act of mastery that reinstates phallic order.³

With the rapid growth of the interdisciplinary field of animal studies in the past decade or so, recent scholarship has taken more seriously the significance of animality in this scene and in modernist literature more generally. Rather than dismiss literary animals as mere metaphors for repressed sexuality, degeneracy, or the dehumanized modern subject, scholars working at the intersections of modernist and animal studies have revealed a more fundamental decentering of the human at work in texts like *Nightwood*. Carrie Rohman, for example, reads Robin's encounter with the dog as affirming a "radical posthumanism" that "deflate[s] the self-importance of humanism by privileging the nonhuman, the undecidable, the nonlinguistic, the animal." In *Stalking the Subject*, her incisive study of modernism's engagement with the question of the animal, Rohman presents Barnes's "posthumanist triumph" as one of the more radical examples of how modernism, in the wake of Darwin's unprecedented challenge to human exceptionalism, "acknowledges the uncertainty of the species barrier." While writers like T. S. Eliot and Joseph Conrad "cope with that acknowledgment" via a reactionary "displacement of animality onto a disenfranchised [human] other," writers like Barnes and D. H. Lawrence respond with an affirmative "privileging of the animal . . . that disrupts the 'human' at its core." By mapping how "modernist texts variously reen-trench, unsettle, and even invert" the traditionally hierarchical relationship between humans and other animals, Rohman reveals the modernist roots of the posthumanist critique of speciesist discourses.⁴ Peter Meedom similarly argues that *Nightwood* challenges the human/animal hierarchy by refusing to "present us with a recognizable description of the human as residing above the animal." Rather than posit "the animal [as] a previous state to which the human can 'return,'" Meedom proposes that the novel's final scene presents Robin and the dog as "creatures that are no longer in a binary world but in a world of multiple differences and mutual loss" of the certainty afforded by individuated models of subjectivity.⁵

Yet even these posthumanist readings of *Nightwood*, though consistent with Barnes's desire to challenge "the debased meaning now put on that nice word beast," do not account for the distinctive dogginess of the final scene.⁶ While Rohman's reading persuasively demonstrates how Barnes "ultimately revises the category 'human'" through "a recuperation of animality," it leaves the corresponding category of "animal" largely intact.⁷ Andrew Kalaidjian

likewise compellingly demonstrates how Barnes dissolves human fantasies of both domination of and escape into nature—revealing instead that “nature’s dark forces are present regardless of how artificially controlled one’s environment is”—yet he concludes that “*Nightwood* ends with a ‘letting be’ of *animal* and human,” thereby effacing the particularity of the dog.⁸ Such erasures of species difference within the category “animal” bring to mind Derrida’s influential critique of that word in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, a 1997 collection of lectures widely regarded as marking an animal turn in his later work (although Derrida insists that “the question . . . of the living animal . . . will always have been the most important and decisive question,” one that he has been addressing all along—“since I began writing, in fact”).⁹ Western humanism’s construction of the animal as a homogenous category neatly separable from the human, Derrida argues, belies the unfathomable diversity and complexity of nonhuman life:

Beyond the edge of the *so-called* human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than “The Animal” or “Animal Life” there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or more precisely . . . a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living and dead, relations . . . among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death. These relations are at once intertwined and abyssal, and they can never be totally objectified. They do not leave room for any simple exteriority of one term with respect to another. It follows that one will never have the right to take animals to be the species of a kind that would be named The Animal, or animal in general.¹⁰

As Barnes signals by adding scare quotes when referencing “the psychology of the ‘animal’” in her letter to Coleman, the creature whom Robin encounters at the end of *Nightwood* is not the animal in this generic sense. Rather, he is a member of a species that, Donna Haraway reminds us, exists in an “obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings”—a relationship in which “none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all.”¹¹

Dogs’ intimate proximity to the human, as the end of *Nightwood* unnervingly illustrates, means that dogs are uniquely positioned to dismantle the humanist myth of a self-transparent subject differentiated from the animal

by its rational autonomy and linguistic ability. While Robin seems to have no difficulty “speaking in a low voice to the animals” as she wanders “the open country” just a few paragraphs before the final scene, it is precisely the encounter with the dog that initiates her descent into what Donna Gerstenberger calls “a world in which human speech is not possible.”¹² The positive tenor of interpretations like Rohman’s is complicated by the fact that the dog is clearly frightened by Robin’s inhuman behavior—he retreats to a corner, “claw[s] sideways at the wall,” and bites at her in desperation—and that both woman and beast ultimately “[give] up.”¹³ The final image of Robin lying on the floor, the dog’s “head flat along her knees,” suggests that the two achieve a communion of sorts, but the novel remains deeply ambivalent about the nature of their connection. Simultaneously “obscene and touching,” this scene evokes, in Haraway’s words, the “brutalities as well as multiform beauties” peculiar to the human/dog relationship, making it representative of the complex engagement with the canine spanning modernist literature, science, and philosophy that is the focus of this book.¹⁴

I read the canine encounter in *Nightwood* as a particularly salient example of a widespread but unexamined tendency in literary modernism: going to the dogs. From the strays wandering the streets of Dublin in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* to the highbred subject of Virginia Woolf’s *Flush*, dogs populate a range of modernist texts yet remain notably underrepresented in critical accounts of the period. When the figure of the dog has managed to garner critical attention within modernist studies, it has typically been dismissed as a mere metaphor for the fragmentation and degradation of the modern human subject. Dana Seitler, for example, reads the final scene in *Nightwood* as expressing “the dehumanizing effects of modernization” by staging “the corporeal ruination of the human.”¹⁵ S. A. Cowan similarly reads a canine image in Eliot’s *Waste Land*—in which a dog threatens to “dig . . . up” a corpse in an ironic betrayal of his role as “friend to men”—as signifying “the decay and extinction of spirit that is [the poem’s] most prominent theme.”¹⁶ And Philip Howard Solomon regards the canine figures in the late modernist fiction of Samuel Beckett as “structural device[s]” that reveal the human characters with whom they are associated to be “lowly dogs.”¹⁷ Even scholars who resist the temptation to read dogs as ipso facto emblems of degraded humanity tend to regard them as representatives of the animal or animality in the generic sense, emphasizing, as Rohman does, how they blur the species boundary in light of Darwin’s revelation of biological kinship between humans and other animals.

Undoubtedly, modernist representations of animals serve in part to register Darwin's challenge to the human/animal binary, and studies like Rohman's lay vital groundwork for understanding modernism's complex and multifaceted engagement with the so-called animal question. The title of Rohman's *Stalking the Subject* encapsulates how "the specter of the animal profoundly threatens the sovereignty of the Western subject of consciousness in modernist literature, and [thus] our understanding of that literature is incomplete without accounting for this complex threat."¹⁸ Recasting Rohman's formulation as "dogging the subject" (the title of my fourth chapter and an implicit theme of the entire book), I build on her work to show how attending to nonhuman animals in their individual and species particularity can yield crucial insight into modernism's response to "the species problematic" that haunts the human subject. In particular, looking at the figure of the dog enables me to go beyond examining modernist critiques of human exceptionalism to highlight another, equally significant implication of evolutionary theory that has been largely ignored within modernist studies: the contingent mutability of species.

By "contingent mutability" I mean something more than what Paul Sheehan has in mind when he notes in *Modernism, Narrative, and Humanism* that the "mechanism of natural selection" explains the human as a product of "chance and necessity rather than divine guidance," with the result that "evolution naturalised the human being by emphasizing its animal origins."¹⁹ Tim Armstrong, too, alludes to but does not fully articulate the contingent nature of species being when he observes in *Modernism, Technology, and the Body* that "Darwinian science suggested a substrata [*sic*] of primitive material within the body and brain, and aroused widespread fears of regression, destabilizing relations between self and world. The body became a more contingent mechanism, incorporating evolutionary survivals."²⁰ Left out of these descriptions are the interspecies relations that propel the contingent mechanism of natural selection, with the result that the human body not only evinces its own animal ancestry but also bears traces of the countless other species in whose company it evolved.

The revelation of the human's "animal origins" or "primitive substratum" complicates any rigid distinction between the human and other animals, but its potential to unseat the human from its privileged position atop the species hierarchy is limited. Social Darwinism and the other teleological interpretations of evolutionary processes that proliferated in the late Victorian era, Rohman notes, betray "a residual humanism" insofar as

they resituate the human at the pinnacle of “a narrative of purposefulness.”²¹ Darwin biographer Peter Bowler explains:

The basic evolutionary position was indeed adopted by a majority of late Victorian thinkers, but their beliefs about *how* we emerged from the apes did not necessarily follow Darwin’s own suggestions and certainly did not anticipate the modern viewpoint. . . . People found that they could reconcile themselves to the prospect of an animal ancestry provided that the evolutionary process was seen as a force driving nature towards a morally significant goal. Instead of seeing ourselves as standing above nature by virtue of our possession of an immortal soul, we became the cutting edge of nature’s drive toward the generation of ever-higher mental states.²²

The humanist frameworks through which evolutionary theory came to be understood in the Victorian era obscure the revolutionary implications of Darwin’s ideas—a point Rohman makes via Elizabeth Grosz, who argues that Darwin’s understanding of species distinctions as always provisional and unstable “uncannily anticipates Derridean *différance*.” By underscoring the arbitrariness with which organisms are classified as species, subspecies, and varieties, Grosz insists, “Darwin inadvertently introduces a fundamental indeterminacy into the largely Newtonian framework he aspired to transpose into the field of natural history: the impossibility of either exact prediction or even precise calculation or designation. . . . This differentiated his understanding of natural selection from that of his contemporaries and predecessors: [evolutionary] science could not take the ready-made or pre-given unity of individuals or classes for granted but had to understand how any provisional unity and cohesion derives from the oscillations and vacillations of difference. The origin can be nothing but a difference!”²³

These “oscillations and vacillations of difference” destabilize the human even more fundamentally than does the fact of human/animal kinship. By pointing to the indeterminacy of species difference, Darwin highlights not only the mutability of species, as Grosz notes, but also the role of interspecies relations in shaping all organisms. In *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin calls this implication of his theory of natural selection an insight “of the highest importance”: “The structure of every organic being is related, in the most essential yet often hidden manner, to that of all other organic beings, with which it comes into competition for food or residence, or

from which it has to escape, or on which it preys.” Evolution, in other words, is always *co*-evolution; each species’ development is both driven and delimited by “the mutual relations of all organic beings.”²⁴ This insight has profound consequences for post-Darwinian conceptualizations of the human. Darwin’s proposition that species—including the human—shape one another through competition, cooperation, parasitism, and predation radically undermines Western humanism’s construction of the autonomous, self-authored subject. To extend Armstrong’s insight, the human body “harbour[s] a crisis” for modernism not only because it retains traces of its “animal” past but also because it is permeated and perforated by the interspecies relations that enabled its “evolutionary survivals.”²⁵ Herein lies the special significance of the dog for modernism’s reconfiguration of the human: as our coevolutionary partners, dogs are specially equipped to expose the human as a contingent being shaped by its material interactions with other species.

Dogs have long been recognized as one of the first domesticated species, yet their coevolutionary relationship with the human complicates even this designation. Domestication is customarily understood as a process of “wild animals’ being transformed into something more useful to humans,” in the words of *Guns, Germs, and Steel* author Jared Diamond. As this definition indicates, humans tend to think of domestication as something that *happens to* animals; that is, humans actively seek out potentially useful species whose members passively adapt to meet human needs by submitting to selective breeding programs. Thus even while Diamond’s study underscores the complexity and limitations of the human role in domestication, his repeated use of the passive voice echoes the familiar narrative of animal submission to human will: “Wolves *were domesticated* . . . to become *our dogs*” (emphasis added). Implicitly, then, domestication remains a process driven by human agency to which animals passively submit. Even those modifications that are not direct results of human intervention are characterized as “automatic evolutionary responses . . . to the altered forces of natural selection operating in human environments as compared with wild environments.”²⁶

But as Diamond’s own account reveals, domestication requires some agency on the part of animals. Cheetahs, for example, “were prized by ancient Egyptians and Assyrians and modern Indians as hunting animals infinitely superior to dogs,” yet despite concerted efforts to domesticate such an obviously useful species—rumor has it one of the Mughal emperors

of India kept a thousand cheetahs in captivity in a failed attempt to breed them—“cheetahs usually refuse to carry out [their] elaborate courtship ritual inside a cage.”²⁷ Although some individual cheetahs can be tamed, the species has resisted true domestication. The limitations of the domestication model have led cultural theorists and evolutionary biologists to propose that the human/dog relationship is best understood not as a one-way process whereby a fully constituted human species molded the dog to suit its needs, but as what Haraway calls a “still ongoing story of co-evolution.”²⁸ Whereas domestication foregrounds human agency, anthropologist Colin Groves argues that the “human-dog relationship amounts to a very long-lasting symbiosis. . . . Humans domesticated dogs, and dogs domesticated humans.”²⁹ A host of recent ethological studies have demonstrated how dogs, in their long history as humans’ working partners and companions, have developed an apparently innate capacity to interpret human gestures—something neither their closest relatives (wolves) nor ours (chimpanzees) can do without training.³⁰ But coevolution works both ways. Whereas domestication is often figured as a process of “humanizing” dogs, coevolutionary logic indicates that the human is likewise “dogged,” and scientists are beginning to understand dogs’ probable role in shaping the course of human biological and cultural development.

Anthropologist Pat Shipman has hypothesized that dogs helped *Homo sapiens* outcompete Neandertals, partially answering the question of why the latter went extinct while the former flourished in the same habitat: “The dominance of modern humans could have been in part a consequence of domesticating dogs—possibly combined with a small, but key, change in human anatomy that made people better able to communicate with dogs.” Shipman points to studies that suggest that the emergence of dogs coincided with the period during which Neandertals were in steep decline, and to a study that indicates “that the modern-human population grew so rapidly [during this period] that it overwhelmed Neandertals with its sheer numbers.” Noting dogs’ likely role in promoting this growth by serving as pack animals and hunting companions, she further speculates that the prominent white sclerae unique to human eyes “could have enhanced human-dog communication,” and that this “reciprocal communication” may have proved “instrumental in the survival of our species” by making humans more efficient and effective hunters.³¹

The human brain might even bear physical traces of our evolutionary cooperation with dogs. Domestication often results in reduced brain size

because it renders certain energy-expensive neurological functions superfluous. But animal scientist Temple Grandin, citing Groves's research, notes that coevolution may have caused *both* human and dog brains to shrink by 10 percent, with the human brain appearing to have shrunk in areas that manage "emotions and sensory data" (especially olfaction) and the dog brain in areas responsible for "planning and organizing." By enabling each other to develop more "specialized" brains, Grandin explains, "dogs and people coevolved and became even better partners, allies, and friends."³² While research of this kind is still in its infancy, it is difficult to believe that humans would not be shaped in part by our evolutionary relationship with one of the oldest "domesticated" species. Thus Haraway warns that "it is a mistake to see the alterations of dogs' bodies and minds as biological and the changes in human bodies and lives, for example in the emergence of herding or agricultural societies, as cultural, and so not about co-evolution."³³ Instead, the mutually constitutive nature of the human/dog relationship irreparably dissolves boundaries between nature and culture, evolution and history.

Although such distinctions are untenable, dogs, by virtue of their intimate relationship with the human, are sometimes regarded as confirming John Berger's influential thesis about the disappearance of "real" animals in modernity. Prior to the rise of industrialized capitalism, Berger argues in his 1977 essay "Why Look at Animals?," animals "were with man at the centre of his world."³⁴ But the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a "rupture" (3) whereby humans became "irredeemabl[y] . . . isolated" from their animal kin (28). Berger attributes this rupture to the forces of modernization: "During the 20th century, the internal combustion engine displaced draught animals in streets and factories. Cities, growing at an ever increasing rate, transformed the surrounding countryside into suburbs where field animals, wild or domesticated, became rare. The commercial exploitation of certain species . . . rendered them almost extinct" (12–13). The animals who remained in physical proximity to the human—in zoos, industrialized agriculture, research laboratories, and a rapidly expanding pet industry—were not real animals at all but only surrogates for the animal companions whom the forces of modernity had expelled from human routines and consciousness. Unlike the real animals they replaced, they could not "scrutinise" the human, making him "aware of himself returning the look" (5).

For Berger, animals' disappearance is ironically most visible in the distinctly "modern innovation" of the pet, a creature "either sterilised or

sexually isolated, extremely limited in its exercise, deprived of almost all other animal contact, and fed with artificial foods” (14). The dog, in this account, is no more capable of scrutinizing the human than is the zoo animal who exists only as a “living monument to [its] own disappearance” (26). Indeed, dogs’ unmatched attunement to the human gaze may well underwrite Berger’s claim that the pet functions only as a “mirror” that reflects to her owner “the-special-man-he-is-only-to-his-pet” (15). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari similarly dismiss pets as “sentimental, Oedipal animals” who “draw us into a narcissistic contemplation.”³⁵ Yet as Haraway demonstrates in an extended critique of this passage, Deleuze and Guattari’s disdain for “little house dogs and the people who love them” exposes how their theory of becoming-animal “feeds off a series of primary dichotomies figured by the opposition between the wild and the domestic.” By virtue of their coevolutionary relationship with humans, dogs are uniquely positioned to dissolve such dichotomies; thus in writing them off, Deleuze and Guattari reject potentially ideal accomplices in their “sustained work against the monomaniacal, cyclopean, Oedipal subject”—a project Haraway and her companions take up in *When Species Meet*.³⁶

Ironically, the trope of the dog as a mirror for human narcissism has its probable origins in dogs’ special adeptness at returning the human gaze. The consequent potency of the canine gaze—itself a product of human/dog coevolution—is evident in Rainer Maria Rilke’s short story “A Meeting,” in which a stray dog attempts to persuade a man to adopt him. The dog follows the man “unobtrusively, devotedly, without an opinion of his own, the way a dog follows his master,” until his “precisely aimed, remarkably sure glances” finally succeed in capturing the man’s attention. Yet the man refuses his request, explaining, “Your nature has a tendency to subordinate itself to mine. In the end a responsibility would arise, which I can’t accept. You wouldn’t notice how completely you had come to trust me; you would overvalue me and expect from me what I can’t perform.”³⁷ The pathos of this scene indicates how, even within the already denigrated category of the pet, the dog is frequently singled out for disparagement or pity. Consider, for example, the sharp contrast between the imploring and devoted dog in “A Meeting” and the inscrutable subject of Rilke’s poem “Black Cat”: “She turns her face to yours; / and with a shock, you see yourself, tiny, / inside the golden amber of her eyeballs / suspended, like a prehistoric fly.”³⁸ While the dog looks at the human and “approve[s] of everything”—his thoughts plain enough for the narrator to report without qualification—the impenetrable

(and frequently feminized) gaze of the cat exposes the human's cosmic insignificance.³⁹ Animals, Rilke proposes in his preface to a book about a cat, are able "to belong our world" to the extent that they "consent . . . to our way of life." In contrast to cats, who belong to a "world . . . which they inhabit exclusively" and that the human cannot access, dogs strive to adapt themselves to the human world: "Their confidential and admiring nearness is such that certain of them seem to have renounced their most ancient canine traditions, in order to adore our habits, and even our errors. This is precisely what makes them tragic and sublime. Their decision to admit us forces them to live, so to speak, at the very boundaries of their nature, which they constantly pass beyond with their humanized gaze and their nostalgic muzzle."⁴⁰

This figuring of the dog as tragically sublime indicates how dogs came to embody the feelings of fragmentation and alienation that accompanied modernity. After all, the rapid urbanization and industrialization that generated a crisis of the human subject in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a similarly profound impact on man's proverbial best friend. In this period in America and Britain, breed fanciers codified standards that would shape future canine generations, municipalities established animal-control practices that would affect millions of urban dogs, and the now multibillion-dollar pet industry began its rise with the introduction of commercial dog food and mass production of puppies. In many ways, the dog became a potent symbol of the modern condition—facing, like the human species, the challenge of adapting to modernizing forces that relentlessly outpaced it.

In particular, dogs became central to debates about the potentially degenerative effects of modernity. Thus, for example, the bourgeois bohemians for whom the semiautobiographical protagonist of Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* expresses such disdain are repeatedly described in canine terms. Tarr's antagonist, Otto Kreisler, "a clumsy and degenerate atavism," is nowhere more pathetic than in his desire to assume the role of a woman's pet dog: "He would be her dog! Lie at her feet!" While pondering this wish, Kreisler smiles—in a description that recalls Rilke's excessively approving dog—"with really something of the misplaced and unaccountable pathos and protest of dogs (although still with a slavish wagging of the tail) at some pleasantry of the master."⁴¹ Max Nordau similarly posits a specifically canine atavism as evidence of human enfeeblement in *Degeneration*, his 1892 polemic against decadent art and literature. Disparaging the "aesthetic

folly” of writers who assign “high importance” to “the olfactory sensations,” he writes, “Smellers among degenerates represent an atavism going back, not only to the primeval period of man, but infinitely more remote still, to an epoch anterior to man. Their atavism retrogrades to animals amongst whom sexual activity was directly excited by odoriferous substances . . . or who, like the dog, obtained their knowledge of the world by the action of their noses.”⁴²

Dogs’ olfactory proficiency likewise explains their prominent role in Freud’s theory of organic repression—the rejection of animality that coincided with the transition to erect posture and enabled the rise of human civilization—in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: “It would be incomprehensible . . . that man should use the name of his most faithful friend in the animal world—the dog—as a term of abuse if that creature had not incurred his contempt through two characteristics: that it is an animal whose dominant sense is that of smell and one which has no horror of excrement, and that it is not ashamed of its sexual functions.”⁴³ Of course, dogs are far from the only species to navigate the world with nose to the ground and to copulate without shame, yet their engagement in such behaviors while in intimate proximity to the human serves as a continual reminder of the repressed animality that resides in the human unconscious. The canine thus became a particularly powerful metaphor through which modernist writers expressed anxiety about the return of the repressed in the form of atavistic regression.

Beyond merely symbolizing a primitive substratum perpetually threatening to erupt from within the human, dogs themselves were undergoing dramatic morphological changes that served as material warnings of the unpredictable and potentially degenerative effects of modern sociocultural conditions. As the titles of breed compendia like *The Twentieth Century Dog* (1904) and *The New Book of the Dog* (1907) suggest, early twentieth-century dog fanciers regarded their historical moment as a pivotal one for the human/dog relationship, following the establishment of the (British) Kennel Club in 1873, the New York-based Westminster Kennel Club in 1876, and the American Kennel Club (of which Westminster became a member club) in 1884. The emergence of these clubs as governing authorities of the purebred dog world in the late nineteenth century represented an unprecedented move toward standardization of breeds that were, by and large, not ancient types but recent inventions. The result was, in the words of Michael Worboys, “nothing less than *the invention of the modern dog*, as the species was reimagined and remade into discrete, separated and

standard physical forms.”⁴⁴ Driving this transformation was a transatlantic purebred dog culture that profoundly reshaped dogs and their place in British and North American societies.⁴⁵ As Herbert Compton explains in *The Twentieth Century Dog*, the show ring came to dictate “the type of perfection to be striven for” in each breed, making “the verdict it issues” of paramount importance for breeders and owners endeavoring to achieve “public fame in the dog-world.”⁴⁶ The kennel clubs thus shaped—quite literally—the future of recognized breeds, consequently raising what one breeder called “the much-debated question as to whether the practice of dog-showing tends to the improvement or deterioration of the breed.”⁴⁷ Breeders and dog enthusiasts on one side of this debate worried that the aesthetic aims of modern breeding were transforming formerly noble breeds into degenerate caricatures of their predecessors.

Others in the purebred dog world, though, held a considerably more optimistic view of the kennel clubs’ impact on the future of dogs. In *The New Book of the Dog*, Robert Leighton notes with approval, “One can nowadays seldom enter a dwelling in which the dog is not recognised as a member of the family, and it is noticeable that the family dog is becoming less of a mongrel and more of a distinguishable and accredited breed.”⁴⁸ Compton similarly embraces the transition of dogs from utility animals to household companions and the consequent efforts of breeders to produce more desirable pets. Further, both writers, though expressing occasional concerns about modifications to specific breeds, offer an overwhelmingly positive assessment of the changes to canine bodies and populations achieved through modern breeding. Criticizing past generations of dog owners for permitting “the promiscuous mingling of alien breeds,” Leighton praises his contemporaries for exerting more calculated control: “At no other time . . . have the various canine types been kept more rigidly distinct or brought to a higher level of perfection.”⁴⁹ Compton not only echoes this sentiment but explicitly aligns the achievements of modern breeding with modernity itself: “The dogs of England have changed almost as much as the map of Europe during the last hundred years. The elaborated type the twentieth century opened upon was as dissimilar to its original family as we to our Saxon ancestors.” Placing the dogs of the past “on a par with mail-coaches, mahogany furniture, oil-illumination, and other obsolete and crude examples of the daily life and civilisation of those days,” he likens twentieth-century breeds to modern technologies like “motor-cars and Marconigrams.”⁵⁰

The phenomenon of the breed dog is itself inextricably linked with industrialized modernity. As Michael Worboys, Julie-Marie Strange, and Neil Pemberton argue in *The Invention of the Modern Dog*, “breed makes dogs modern because it was a new way of thinking about, defining, and increasing the variety of forms within the species *Canis lupus familiaris*.”⁵¹ Of course, the long history of human/dog coevolution saw the emergence of numerous canine varieties, but prior to modern dog breeding, differences between these varieties tended to correspond to differences in their environments and the functions they performed for (or in cooperation with) their human companions. As Martin Wallen observes, “pre-nineteenth-century commentators described [dogs] mostly in terms of variability and adaptable utility,” but the emergence of the concept of the breed dog beginning in the mid-eighteenth century gave rise to a distinctly “modern dog” and correspondingly novel “human-dog relations.”⁵² The production of modern breeds accelerated in the nineteenth century, leading Worboys, Strange, and Pemberton to describe them as “thoroughly Victorian inventions, influenced by industrialization, commercialization, class and gender attitudes, the rise of leisure, and evolutionary thinking.”⁵³ It is hardly surprising, then, that purebred dogs—particularly those bred to occupy laps in the upper echelons of human society—soon became emblems of modern decadence and degeneracy.

Yet dogs’ coevolutionary relationship with the human means that they are more than just metaphors for the modern condition. Recasting Rilke’s characterization of dogs as living “at the very boundaries of their nature,” the texts I examine in this book illustrate that the canine encounter persistently pushes the human to the limits of its own nature. The “few moments” during which the man in Rilke’s “A Meeting” is “truly unsettled” by the look of the dog, coupled with the “longing” glance he casts back after departing, point to the penetrating and destabilizing power of the canine gaze.⁵⁴ And Deleuze and Guattari, despite their wry declaration that “*anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool*,” grant that “any animal” can become one of the “pack or affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale. . . . Even the cat, even the dog.”⁵⁵ A coevolutionary understanding of the human/dog relationship clarifies why works like “A Meeting” figure dogs as *especially* capable of breaching the borders of the human. Because humans and dogs are reciprocally inscribed with morphological and neurological traces of their shared evolutionary history, the dog is eminently capable of drawing the human *out of* the “narcissistic contemplation” into which

the pet ostensibly invites it. As Erica Fudge observes, cohabiting with dogs “requires an imaginative leap. ‘What is my dog thinking?’ is a question that might only be answered by attempting to think with a dog: something impossible to achieve and yet necessary to attempt by anyone who lives with a dog.”⁵⁶ The co-constitutive and cooperative nature of the human/dog relationship thus places interpretive and communicative demands on both partners that disrupt human self-absorption. The profound sense of “responsibility” that the narrator of “A Meeting” experiences indicates that even an unknown dog can hail the human and prompt such imaginative leaps. Moreover, dogs’ prominent position in the larger web of relations to which the human owes its being means that the canine encounter draws the human beyond the isolated subject position reserved for it by Western humanism and into the radical multiplicity of interspecies life.

By examining how modernist representations of dogs ultimately mongrelize the human, revealing its animal origins in more ways than one, this book builds on scholarship at the intersection of modernist and animal studies that illuminates the modernist beginnings of a posthumanist critique of the subject. Landmark studies like Rohman’s *Stalking the Subject* (2009) and Susan McHugh’s *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* (2011) have done much to challenge a critical tendency to fuse posthumanism with postmodernism. In *The Postmodern Animal* (2000), for example, Steve Baker proposes “that there was no modern animal, no ‘modernist’ animal.” Modernism, it would seem, signals a caesura in the history of animal representation, a gap “between nineteenth-century animal symbolism, with its reasonably secure hold on meaning, and the postmodern animal images whose ambiguity or irony or sheer brute presence serves to resist or to displace fixed meanings.” Baker quotes German expressionist painter Franz Marc’s criticism of his cubist and futurist contemporaries for reproducing the “poverty-stricken convention” of “project[ing] *their* inner world” onto animals rather than attempting to imagine subjective experience beyond the human.⁵⁷ D. H. Lawrence voices a similar sentiment when he dismisses “anthropomorphism [as] a bore. Too much anthropos makes the world a dull hole.” Tellingly, Lawrence illustrates his point with an example drawn from the visual arts—in Greek sculpture, he complains, “if it’s a horse, it’s an anthropomorphised horse”—and Baker is quick to delimit his own hypothesis as “essentially art-historical in its emphases.”⁵⁸ As Rohman demonstrates, Lawrence is one of numerous writers whose experimental depictions of animals swiftly undercut any attempt to extend

Baker's critique of modernist art to modernist literature. Indeed, Rohman argues, an "antirationalist recuperation of animality" permeates the very language and form of modernist texts as they perform "the perforation of the humanized subject by its evolutionary connection to animality."⁵⁹

While I do not mean to suggest that literary forms, unlike the visual arts, have the capacity to provide unmediated access to animal experience, several of the writers whose work I examine in the following chapters share Marc's keen interest in nonhuman interiority. Jack London, in his limited-omniscient narratives of canine experience, eschews both anthropomorphic projection and the anthropocentric denial of Darwinian continuity, and his exclusion from most studies of literary modernism belies the impact of his innovations on more celebrated writers like Barnes, Faulkner, and Woolf. Moreover, the coevolutionary nature of the human/dog relationship means that modernist experiments with the canine are vital pieces of a broader reconfiguration of the human. As Cary Wolfe argues, "The figure of the 'animal' in the West . . . is part of a cultural and literary history stretching back at least to Plato and the Old Testament, reminding us that the animal has always been especially, frightfully nearby, always lying in wait at the very heart of the constitutive disavowals and self-constructing narratives enacted by that fantasy figure called 'the human.'"⁶⁰ Throughout the course of this history, few animals have been as "frightfully nearby" as the dog. The scene from *Nightwood* with which I began, and the similarly destabilizing human/dog interactions I examine throughout this book, demonstrate how the modernist dog, like Baker's postmodern animal, "serves to resist or to displace fixed meanings." In this way, it prefigures the posthumanism of Derrida, Haraway, and Wolfe. This posthumanism, Wolfe clarifies, "isn't posthuman at all—in the sense of being 'after' our embodiment has been transcended"; rather, it is "posthumanist" in that it decenters the human, revealing its "embeddedness" in coevolutionary mechanisms and exposing "humanism as a historically specific phenomenon" rather than an ahistorical truth.⁶¹

Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) and *When Species Meet* (2008) generated unprecedented interest among humanities scholars in relations between companion species, but this book begins by demonstrating how writers and scientists in the modernist period were already reaching across disciplinary divides to theorize human/dog coevolution and its implications for the human subject. Chapter 1, "Canine Origins: Jack London and Konrad Lorenz," illuminates London's impact on Lorenz,

the Austrian biologist and Nobel Prize–winning cofounder of ethology whose pioneering approach to canine evolution and behavior profoundly influenced subsequent generations of canid biologists. I demonstrate that London and Lorenz both take for granted the coevolutionary nature of the human/dog relationship as a logical implication of Darwinian theory. In their respective narratives of canine origins, London and Lorenz dramatize the initial contact between humans and dogs as a formative but problematic moment in the course of human evolution. Cooperation with dogs, they propose, fostered physical and behavioral adaptations that enabled the human to transcend its animal origins. In helping to “civilize” the human, though, dogs accelerated modern humans’ much-bemoaned separation from the natural world. The coevolutionary logic of these origin stories thus implicates dogs in broader modernist concerns about the damaging and ultimately degenerative effects of overcivilization. I read London’s fiction and Lorenz’s popular dog books as attempts to redeem the human/dog relationship from this conundrum. By providing a link to humans’ primitive past, both writers ultimately insist, dogs promise to heal the very rupture they helped create.

While chapter 1 concerns a writer not widely hailed as a modernist innovator, the presence of dogs in the more celebrated work of Pound, Joyce, Stein, Faulkner, and others reveals the category of the canine as a particularly rich site for formal experimentation. Chapter 2, “Mongrelizing Form: Virginia Woolf’s *Flush*,” examines how Woolf uses canine being to reimagine novelistic form and character in her speculative biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s cocker spaniel. While *Flush* was long dismissed as a diversion from Woolf’s more serious endeavors—or taken seriously only insofar as it could be read as a feminist or antifascist allegory—I read it as Woolf’s most genre-bending work, revealing how it strategically mongrelizes the Victorian animal “autobiography” epitomized by Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* and Marshall Saunders’s *Beautiful Joe*, the naturalistic animal story developed by Jack London, and the modernist bildungsromans of writers like Joyce, Lawrence, and Thomas Mann. Ever wary of being dismissed as a “ladylike prattler,” Woolf adeptly navigates the literary minefield of animal narratives, resisting both the sentimental anthropomorphism of Victorian animal biographies and the hypermasculine primitivism of London’s Darwinian works. I show how Woolf uses the intertwined *Bildung* plots of *Flush* and Elizabeth to critique the anthropocentrism that underwrites the phallogocentric literary tradition against which

she positions her own work, and to explore how interspecies entanglements give shape to human and nonhuman character alike.

Moving between Jack London's idealized primitive realm and the cosmopolitan settings of Woolf's fiction, dogs occupy a vexed position in relation to the modern city. Chapter 3, "The New Dog: Albert Payson Terhune and J. R. Ackerley," examines the work of two dramatically different figures united by concerns about the incongruity of canine bodies in urban spaces. In modern America and Britain, rapid rural decline and urban expansion combined to put most working breeds out of a job, raising the question of whether (and how) dogs and the human/dog relationship should adapt to the new economy. Terhune's enormously popular Lad stories—which catapulted both him and his collies to fame and made him the highest-paid writer in America—present the working dog as a defender of rural America from the encroachment of a decadent urban modernity embodied by the dandified pedigree dog. Terhune's collie, like his vision of the human/dog relationship, is thus irreconcilable to the space of the city. Ackerley similarly exposes tensions between working breeds and modern urban life, and his Alsatian heroines in *My Dog Tulip* and *We Think the World of You* figure as excess in the context of postwar London. Yet although Ackerley offers an incisive critique of how city life polices canine bodies, he also insists that dogs read, mark, and shape urban spaces. Whereas Terhune represents the city as a man-made, and therefore unnatural, environment, Ackerley positions dogs as active participants in constructing—and potentially transforming—urban modernity.

Chapter 4, "Dogging the Subject: Samuel Beckett and Emmanuel Levinas," outlines the ontological and ethical challenges that emerge from modernism's reconfiguration of the human/dog relationship and intensify in the aftermath of World War II. Specifically, I examine the destabilizing presence of dogs in Beckett's late-modernist fiction—especially *Watt* and *Molloy*—and in Levinas's neohumanist philosophy. Beckett and Levinas situate the dog in a unique position within what Derrida deems the sacrificial structure of Western humanism, wherein the animal is excluded from subjectivity through both discursive and literal sacrifice. The dog, as animal, belongs to a realm of abjection that defines the humanist subject through negation; yet, as Beckett and Levinas insinuate, dogs also participate in the sacrifice of other animals, complicating the ethical quandary in which Western humanism finds itself vis-à-vis the animal. As humans' longtime hunting and herding partners and as consumers of the by-products of

industrialized slaughter, dogs signal the impossibility of a world without sacrifice even as they challenge the sacrificial logic of humanist subject formation. In Beckett's fiction and Levinas's philosophy, dogs disrupt the voice so central to humanist configurations of the subject with their silent call for a posthumanist ethics that accounts not just for the relative alterity of the human other but for the radical alterity and heterogeneity of the animal.

This book foregrounds the novel and its close relatives, the speculative biography and the memoir, not because dogs' presence in literary modernism is limited to these forms—far from it—but because dogs' destabilizing power is especially potent in these ostensibly humanistic representational modes. Rohman discerns a “distinctly modernist formal embodiment of the animal problem” in the innovations of writers like Eliot, Lawrence, Barnes, and Conrad. While Victorian texts register the impact of Darwinian continuity via “a *thematic* and primarily metaphorical interest in animality,” modernist texts, she argues, do so via a “breakdown of traditional literary syntax, structure, and narration [and] the introduction of circuitous and unstable narrative devices”—innovations that “line up with the post-Darwinian eruption of ‘non-human,’ chaotic forces” both within and beyond the human.⁶² This “eruption,” I argue, reverberates with particular force in narrative forms, whose appeal has long been attributed narrowly to their capacity to give shape to human experience. As Frank Kermode postulates in his 1966 study *The Sense of an Ending*, narrative “humanizes time by giving it form,” thus fulfilling a basic need to infuse human experience with order and meaning. We demand stories that “make sense, give comfort . . . [and] testify to the continuity of what is called human nature.”⁶³ By this account, narrative forms define and preserve our humanity by obscuring the radical contingency of the human, thereby enforcing the ever-tenuous human/animal boundary.

Yet, as Sheehan notes in *Modernism, Narrative, and Humanism*, the serializing and totalizing forces of narrative mean that it—like the linguistic archive from which it draws—“has the potential to exceed the limits of anthropological mastery.”⁶⁴ Thus narrative is not necessarily human-shaped; instead, its persistence in the face of the anti- and posthumanisms of the past century demonstrates narrative's potential to transcend the boundaries of human experience, dissolving fantasies of human exceptionalism and rational autonomy. McHugh argues that the appeal of the novel form lies not in its capacity to represent individual human experience—what Georg Lukács famously calls “the autonomous life of interiority”—but instead in

“its usefulness for experiments with multiple perspectives and processes that support models centered on agency rather than subjectivity.”⁶⁵ This capacity, as Ivan Kreilkamp has recently demonstrated in *Minor Creatures: Persons, Animals, and the Victorian Novel*, is partially visible in the Victorian realist novel, which, in its depictions of human-animal relationships, “always contains a creaturely, transspecies presence and potential.” Ultimately, though, Victorian realism “hesitates at the boundary of the human, a boundary that it approaches, worries, and at times transgresses but never jettisons entirely.”⁶⁶

Beginning in the modernist period, the novel—arguably the most human-shaped of literary forms—has been adapted to the task of deconstructing the category of the human and the assumptions of Western humanism via techniques like multiple and fragmented perspectives, stream-of-consciousness and free indirect narration, and interpenetrating and nonlinear temporalities. In this book, I demonstrate both the thematic and formal “dogginess” of modernist novels, linking it to dogs’ special capacity to challenge the humanist underpinnings of traditional literary forms. The modernist techniques in the narratives I examine, moreover, blur disciplinary distinctions by opening up what David Herman calls “a route of access to the strategies for imagining human-nonhuman relationships that are central to multispecies ethnography, trans-species anthropology, cultural ecology and other emergent frameworks for inquiry.”⁶⁷ As Caroline Hovanec points out, modernism historically was “a period of mutual legibility between literature and science,” with fiction writers and scientists alike grappling with the implications of Darwinian theory for understanding and representing animals (including the human). In pursuit of answers, “the scientists found themselves turning to the methods of fiction and poetry to better express animal subjectivity, while the literary writers found themselves adopting the observational techniques of science.”⁶⁸ My focus on modernist canine narratives, then, reveals modernism’s pivotal position not just in literary history but in the continued evolution of modes of inquiry in the natural and social sciences, as well as dogs’ vital role in the ongoing project of deconstructing the humanist subject—a role I discuss in the broader context of literary canine studies in the coda. In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate how modernist narratives figure dogs both as instigators of the crisis of the modern subject and as partners uniquely capable of helping the human and its cultural formations adapt to the turbulent and dehumanizing forces of modernization.