

THE JEWISH ANIMAL IN POST-HOLOCAUST
JEWISH AMERICAN POETRY

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by
Darla Ida Himeles
December 2020

Examining Committee Members:

Miles Orvell, Advisory Chair,

English Sue-Im Lee, English

Laura Levitt, Religion

Alicia Suskin Ostriker, External Member, Rutgers University English (Emerita)

©
copyright
2020

by

Darla Ida Himeles
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

By the time anti-Jewish Nazi propaganda was widely analogizing Jews to rodents and other nonhuman animals in need of extermination, the accusation that Jewish people might be subhuman, or nonhuman, had been informing non-Jewish perceptions of the Jewish people for hundreds of years. As Jay Geller has detailed, casting Jews as lone wolves, or as rats or mice (and beyond), has a long and powerful history. Indeed, this insidious maneuver—dehumanize a threatening community through animalization in order to justify its oppression, or at times, extermination—is familiar to virtually every marginalized community and absolutely relies on consensus that the “natural” order places human beings above animals. This dissertation argues that post-Holocaust, Jewish American poets help us reconsider the boundaries of “human” and “animal” in the American imagination, ultimately creating an animal poetics that flips the script, demonstrating that yes, we are all animals, which demands not only a human commitment to justice and respect between cultures but also to ecological justice and respect between species. Through examining prominent animal poems by three Jewish American post-Holocaust poets, Gerald Stern, Adrienne Rich, and Maxine Kumin, this dissertation asks, “What does it mean to behave like a Jew when it comes to our ecological connections to other animal species?” and, more specifically, “What is the connection between post-Holocaust Jewish American poets, ecologically informed animal representation, and Jewishness?”

My readings model a novel approach to these poets' work by using Jewish traditions, such as *teshuvah* (an atonement ritual) and biblical prophecy, to illuminate layers of meaning in the poems that might otherwise have stayed shadowed, particularly for readers without ready access to a Jewish framework. Because these poets' animal poems are best read as both ecological as well as Jewish, this dissertation makes a case for including animal poems by Stern, Rich, and Kumin in the syllabi and anthologies that represent American ecological literature and ecopoetry—and not just including them, in fact, but contextualizing them within a Jewish framework. All three poets suggest that behaving like a Jew, when it comes to nonhuman animals, means taking responsibility for our brutal humanity as well as our essential animality—which is at least as often noble and good as it is otherwise. By highlighting the value of a Jewish ecocritical lens, this dissertation suggests that there may be as many culturally situated versions of ecocriticism as there are cultures, which could increase our appreciation of our interconnection within and beyond our species. Further, by bringing a Jewish lens to these three Jewish poets' animal poems, this dissertation situates Jewish animality specifically as a source of strength and wisdom. In so doing, this project defiantly counters millennia of efforts to dehumanize Jewish people, instead reminding that all human beings' ability to thrive on this earth requires mutual respect between, and within, animal species. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that these Jewish American poets, who came into their adulthood and poetic expressions in the shadow of the Nazi Holocaust, light the way to a Jewish—and human—animal whose survival will not depend on random birthplace but on the dignifying interconnection of all animal species, and all the varieties therein.

For

Barbara Ann Goldstein, my mother

Betsy J. Reese, my wife

Elizabeth R. Catanese, my best friend

*Thank you for your love and support,
which has sustained me during each hour and page of this project.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation has benefitted from the advice, assistance, and support of many. First, I'm thankful for my committee members. Miles Orvell's kindness and expert guidance have been steady ever since our first meeting at Chestnut Hill Coffee in late winter, 2013, before I had matriculated at Temple. Sue-Im Lee's seminars offered a lovingly brutal bootcamp for my writing and deepened my investment in studying ethnic American literature. Laura Levitt's Foundations of Judaism class cemented my commitment to a Jewish dissertation and opened my eyes to the richness and complexity of Jewish studies. Both Sue-Im and Laura have offered well-timed encouragement and affirmation along my journey, for which I am deeply grateful. I first met my outside reader, esteemed poet, essayist, midrashist, and scholar, Alicia Ostriker, when I studied with her a decade ago while pursuing my MFA at Drew University. Then and now, Alicia's presence in my life has been an honor and a gift.

There are other professors I'd like to acknowledge as well. In fall 2014, I enrolled in Talissa Ford's graduate seminar, *The Way of the Dodo: Romanticism and Extinction*, which is where I developed the argument that would become chapter 4 of this dissertation. I also developed a conference paper based on that project and presented "Maxine Kumin: Animal Cruelty and the Specter of the Holocaust" in 2015 as part of the Society for the Study of American Women Writers' panel at the American Literature Association Annual Conference. Around the same time, one of my mentors at Drew University, Mihaela Moscaliuc, invited me to explore my interest in Gerald Stern's

animals for a critical volume she was editing on his work; my chapter “Kingdom Animalia” appears in *Insane Devotion: On the Writing of Gerald Stern* and formed the basis of another conference paper. I presented “Rukeyser and Stern: Two Approaches to the Jewish American Activist Lyric” on a panel I chaired (*Bard of Pittsburgh: A Roundtable on Gerald Stern*) at NeMLA’s annual conference in 2018. The chapter and conference paper helped me develop the arguments I make in chapter 2. These ideas were further refined through my experience presenting “The Jew and ‘The Dog’: Gerald Stern’s Animal Poetics” at the Association of Jewish Studies conference as part of a graduate student panel entitled *20th Century Jewish Literature Revisited: Graduate Student Works-In-Progress*. I am especially grateful to Laura Levitt for encouraging me to join AJS and propose a paper. My research for chapter 3 began in Steve Newman’s Introduction to Graduate Studies class, in which I wrote three small papers on Adrienne Rich.

Ross Gay, a graduate of Temple’s PhD in English program, helped inspire this path and called me a “wizard” in an email during my first semester at Temple, when I needed it. Michael Waters has been a steadfast cheerleader of my work for a decade, as has Mihaela Moscaliuc. For their various kinds of companionship, mentorship, and for keeping the faith, I’d also like to acknowledge Patrick Rosal, Jena Osman, Brian Teare, Melissa Orner, Ann Brown, Anne Marie Macari, Elizabeth Kim, Stephen D. Kelly, Elizabeth White Vidarte, Vanessa Loh, Carla Anderson, Holly Raymond, Micah Savaglio, Femi Oyebade, Leslie Allison, Dana DiLullo Gehling, Lorraine Savage, Rachael Groner, Shannon Walters, Joan Larkin, Jody Cohen, Anne Dalke, Mary Carol Catanese, Paul Catanese, Yesenia Montilla, Roberto Carlos Garcia, David Crews, Lynne

McEniry, Michelle Greco, Lena Barnard, Lisa Alexander, Cara Armstrong, Samantha Wong, Jean Lacovara, Ken Lacovara, Gloria Willis, Charles Himeles, Darren Himeles, Miles Himeles, and Vanessa Himeles. This is necessarily an incomplete list.

My project is animated by my personal connection to its three primary poets. Maxine Kumin was my teacher during two summer workshops at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and became a mentor and friend. Getting to know Max's end-of-life human and animal companions at PoBiz Farm has enriched my engagement with her work, as have my memories of her "nuts and bolts" approach to poetry instruction and feedback. Gerald Stern was one of the distinguished faculty in residence during my time at Drew University, and I am so lucky to have spent several poetry residencies there basking in his readings, lectures, serenades, and workshops—basking and laughing! I drove up to NYC in the fall of 2018 to interview Jerry about his animal poems, and that interview helped clarify my readings of his animal poetics. And while I never knew Adrienne Rich personally, her work has been a longtime companion on my bedside table and in my imagination. It has been a joy to labor through these dissertation years in the constant company of these poets' words.

None of this could have been possible without my mom, Barbara Ann Goldstein, who has had my back and cheered my path from the start; my dear friend, Elizabeth Catanese, whose insights and suggestions improved nearly every page of this project; and my wife, Betsy Reese, who has sacrificed more than she will admit in service of this project. And while our daughter, Evelyn, likely won't remember the long hours I wrote with her asleep in a carrier on my chest, or the many more hours during evenings and weekends she spent with her mommy while her mama drafted and revised the latter half

of this dissertation, Evelyn's wonder, cleverness, and tenderness can be felt in my best sentences, as can the steadfast love and brilliance of my beautiful wife.

PREFACE: ON THE ORIGINS OF THIS STUDY

Before applying to doctoral programs in English, all of which would require moving out-of-state from my then home of Orland, Maine, I secured a summerlong guest researcher pass at the Raymond H. Fogler Library at the University of Maine, Orono. One day per week in the summer of 2012, I claimed a heavy wood table or window-lit carrel in the library's second-floor reading room, where I divided my time between preparing a Yom Kippur sermon on Gerald Stern's poem "Behaving Like a Jew," investigating doctoral programs, and researching whether the relatively young field of ecopoetry had taken note of the peculiar position that Stern and other post-Holocaust Jewish American poets had assumed in relation to nonhuman animals. I had a hunch that there were important things to be said on the subject, as I had recently written a short paper on animal representation in women's love poems and had abandoned a tangent in which I had started to ask whether Adrienne Rich's and Maxine Kumin's Jewishness held any significance for their distinctive ways of representing nonhuman animals.¹ As I drafted and revised my Stern sermon under the guidance of Rabbi Darah Lerner at Congregation Beth El in Bangor, I also found myself wondering about the space between Stern's "Behaving Like a Jew" and Kumin's poem, "Woodchucks": both poems implicitly encourage readers to behave compassionately toward nonhuman animals, both poems allude to the Holocaust, and both use irony to explore the long and fabled tradition

¹ The paper, "Love in Women's Poems: The Dream of a Common Animal," was completed in fulfilment of Drew University's then MFA in Poetry and Poetry in Translation degree under the direction of Alicia Ostriker. I was fortunate to receive feedback, as well as copy edits, on the paper from Maxine Kumin herself later that year.

of likening Jews to nonhuman animals. The poems pointed me toward what would become a years-long inquiry into what these poems, and others like them, could reveal about animal representation in post-Holocaust Jewish American poetry. In the broadest terms, what could these poems teach us about the Jewish animal?²

The three poets I focus on in this study, Gerald Stern, Adrienne Rich, and Maxine Kumin, repeatedly illustrate in their life's work that we are strengthened by the companions we find in the fields (and roadways) of our lives, and the scholarly companionship I have found within my contiguous fields has proven no less valuable. It is through my graduate studies first at Drew University and then at Temple University that I gained access to the scholarly conversations to which this dissertation now contributes—especially those in Jewish studies, Jewish and ethnic American literary studies, and the overlapping fields of ecocriticism, ecopoetry, and contemporary poetry studies. I am indebted to my dissertation chair, Miles Orvell; my committee members, Sue-Im Lee and Laura Levitt; and my outside reader and former MFA professor, Alicia Ostriker, for helping light the way.

In spite of being Jewish my whole life and spending much of my adulthood trying in poems, essays, and conversations to articulate what being Jewish means to me, it was enrolling in Laura Levitt's Introduction to Judaism course during my last semester of doctoral coursework that finally solidified my dissertation project and gave me confidence to speak from an unapologetically Jewish position. The course, housed in the Religion department at Temple, introduced me to the multifaceted field of Jewish studies,

² Any discomfort caused by the ambiguous term *the Jewish animal* is intentional here, as is also true in my title. The term indicates the pejorative animalization of Jews as well as the animality essential to all human animals. Further, it signals my interest in thinking about animals—in my case, animal representation—from within a Jewish framework.

including its most prominent scholarly organization, Association of Jewish Studies. Through AJS, I met scholars who had embraced the hybrid identity of being professors of literature or American studies *and* scholars of religion or of Jewish studies, such as Benjamin Schreier and Maera Yaffa Shreiber. Schreier and Shreiber served as faculty respondents on a 2018 AJS graduate student panel where I presented a nascent section of this dissertation's second chapter, then titled "The Jew and 'The Dog': Gerald Stern's Animal Poetics." Their affirmation of my use of *teshuvah* as a literary lens and their energetic response to my argument convinced me that as a doctoral student in English, I could still make worthy contributions in the field of Jewish studies.

As is likely the case with many dissertations, the poets I write about in the following dissertation hold personal significance for me as a human animal, and I hope this study honors their work. Moreover, I hope this dissertation offers a new way to conceive of the intersection between Jewishness and animal poetics. In my AJS paper, as in this dissertation, one of my core goals has been to uncover what Jew-authored animal poems might reveal about that intersection and, by extension, what it might mean to "behave like a Jew" toward nonhuman animals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
PREFACE	x
CHAPTERS	
1. READING JEWISH AMERICAN ANIMAL POEMS JEWISHLY: AN INTRODUCTION	1
2. BEHAVING LIKE A JEW, BEHAVING LIKE A DOG: GERALD STERN’S RESTORATIVE ANIMAL POETICS	29
3. JEWISH IDENTITY AND ANIMAL METAPHORS IN ADRIENNE RICH.....	103
4. “THE MURDERER INSIDE ME”: CRUEL ANIMAL DEATHS AND THE HOLOCAUST IN MAXINE KUMIN’S POEMS.....	175
CONCLUSION.....	234
REFERENCES CITED.....	242

CHAPTER 1

READING JEWISH AMERICAN ANIMAL POEMS JEWISHLY: AN INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to behave like a Jew when it comes to our ecological connections to other animal species? And to narrow the scope of my inquiry in terms of time and space, what is the connection between post-Holocaust Jewish American poets, ecologically informed animal representation, and Jewishness? These are two of my core questions in this dissertation project. Answering the latter question has enabled me to model how culturally informed conceptions of ecological literature can enrich the field of ecocriticism more broadly. We read differently when we do so with attunement to the cultural norms and religious underpinnings that distinguish one culture's ecological concerns and expressions from another's, and these differences can help us refine and challenge some of our base assumptions—such as the assumption that factory farming is a necessary evil. When we read Jewish American poets with a specifically Jewish lens, as I do in chapter 4, for example, with Maxine Kumin's factory-farming poem, "The Vealers," we magnify our interspecies connections by noticing, for example, the parallel experiences of routinized cruelty and trauma between raising calves for veal and shepherding humans, like lambs, to be slaughtered.³ For Jewish American post-Holocaust

³ The frequently cited analogy of Jewish people being shepherded to concentration camps like lambs to be slaughtered is contentious in Holocaust scholarship, and for good reason: it denies Jewish agency and erases all the individual and coordinated efforts at resistance, such as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. I refer to the cliché, however charged, because it is a prime example of how the animalization of Jews by non-Jews has historically been pejorative, an attempt at insult, and an attempt at justifying Jewish suffering and death.

poets, the Holocaust often haunts the imagery and metaphors these poets use to write about animals. And for Gerald Stern, Adrienne Rich, and Maxine Kumin in particular, the ethics and imaginations that inform their poetic representations of animals are inseparable from their Jewishness.

What does it mean to read Jewish poets Jewishly? My readings of these poems model a novel approach to answering that question, using Jewish traditions, such as *teshuvah* (an atonement ritual), to illuminate layers of meaning in the poems that might otherwise have stayed shadowed, particularly for readers without ready access to a Jewish framework. I also underscore the value in reading Jewish poets Jewishly by asserting a Jewish American literary genealogy for Stern, Rich, and Kumin that celebrates Jewish American hybridity: these poets descend from the ancient prophets and rabbis, from the great Jewish thinkers and mystics, and from Emma Lazarus as well as from the British Romantics, American Romantics, modernists, and beyond. This dissertation makes a case for including animal poems by Stern, Rich, and Kumin in the syllabi and anthologies that represent American ecological literature and ecopoetry—and not just including them, in fact, but contextualizing them within a Jewish framework. But more importantly, by bringing a Jewish lens to these three Jewish poets' animal poems, this dissertation situates Jewish animality—the long-asserted and pejorative analogy between Jews and nonhuman animals—as a source of strength and wisdom. In so doing, this project defiantly counters millennia of efforts to dehumanize Jewish people, instead reminding that we humans of various tribes are *all* animals and that our survival and ability to thrive on this earth requires mutual respect between, and within, animal species.

The field of Jewish American literary studies is interested in the ways Jewish writers attempt to (re)shape cultural narratives in which Jews are implicated. Much like Asian American literature, Jewish American literature in the early twentieth century initially sought to help Jewish immigrants seem more sympathetic to longer-established, mostly white, Americans; we see this, for example, in Michael Gold's *Jews without Money*, an episodic novel that, as Alfred Kazin notes in his introduction to the 1996 volume, makes the case that poverty is to blame for virtually all human depravity. According to his author's note, Gold intended the book to counter Hitler's propaganda about Jews all being secret international bankers and about American capitalism being "Jewish," thereby making a sympathetic case for immigrant Jews' struggle to realize better lives by pursuing the American dream.

This dissertation's intersection with Jewish American literary criticism is likewise aligned with that immigrant hope in the ideals of America: In his book, *The New Covenant: Jewish Writers and the American Idea*, Sam Girgus argues that the idea of America (as a land of freedom, of opportunity, of justice, and so on) is a prophecy that individual writer-prophets can help interpret and bring into being. He defines the American Idea as a set of values, traditions, and beliefs that are rooted in teachings from Torah and Talmud and therefore essentially Jewish. Girgus builds on Sacvan Bercovitz's *The American Jeremiad*, in which Bercovitz notes, "American writers have tended to see themselves as outcasts and isolates, prophets crying in the wilderness. So they have been, as a rule: *American Jeremiahs*, simultaneously lamenting a declension and celebrating a national dream" (Bercovitz 180). From early Puritan writings through Thoreau and on to the contemporary moment (as of 1978), Bercovitz traces these American Jeremiahs and

their often-anxious prophecies of America's struggle to become a light upon a hill, while Girgus narrows his study to investigating only how *Jewish* American writers have embraced and prophesied on behalf of the American Idea in the twentieth century. He argues that many Jewish American writers take it upon themselves to both interpret this idea to America (meaning to American readers) and to urge Americans to live up to this idea's ideals. Like the biblical prophet Jeremiah making a new covenant with the lands of Israel and Judah, the Jewish American writers of the New Covenant—writers whose work embraces the religion of the America Idea, if you will—are prophets who offer visions, warnings, and encouragement to all who will listen. I align Stern, Rich, and Kumin with their Jewish prophetic heritage in this dissertation because I understand prophecy to be central to American activism, including activism on behalf of the marginalized and activism on behalf of nonhuman animals. As Alicia Ostriker writes, “When I hear the phrase ‘speak truth to power,’ I think: Isaiah. Jeremiah. Amos” (Ostriker, “Secular and Sacred” 186). While Girgus's emphasis in his study is on novelists whose work prophesies about social and political issues, my dissertation applies his argument to Jewish American poets whose prophecies to “America” are primarily ecological, concerning nonhuman animals. Stern, Rich, and Kumin, each in their own way, follow Girgus's New Covenant model by offering visions of American human-animal relationships and prophetic warnings about animal cruelty and the threat of extinction with the intent of encouraging a human-animal connection that tries to flatten the hierarchical divide between us. These poets join other animal rights activists in urging this ethical paradigm shift for the betterment of us all, especially with regard to animal welfare and our attempts to reverse the Anthropocene's trend toward increasing mass

extinction. Whereas Jewish American novelists in the twentieth century sought to teach Americans how to be more fully American, Stern, Rich, and Kumin suggest that nonhuman animals teach us, actually, how to be more fully human.

It makes sense that Jewish American poets post-Holocaust might invest in reconsidering “human” and “animal” in the American imagination, but even so, the (admittedly small) field of Jewish American poetry scholarship has not yet engaged this particular line of exploration.⁴ Because to be a diasporic Jew is to always occupy a hybrid identity between Jewishness and the surrounding nation, language, and culture, to be a Jewish American poet—especially a college-educated, politically progressive, and secular-leaning but culturally proud Jewish American poet—is to have studied the white non-Jewish celebrities of English literature alongside whatever piecemeal Jewish education one’s family and life circumstances encouraged. That piecemeal education likely includes bits of the Jewish literary tradition, whose fiction in particular has taken an interest in the Jewish body as animal: in Saul Bellow’s *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Mr. Sammler fears a second, post-Holocaust “extermination” of Jews in Israel (Bellow 142); in Cynthia Ozick’s “The Pagan Rabbi,” protagonist Isaac Kornfeld believes “Holy life subsists even in the stone, even in the bones of dead dogs and dead men,” a belief which partly motivates his eventual death by suicide (Ozick 440); and of course, reaching back pre-Holocaust, Franza Kafka’s fascination with animal-to-cockroach metamorphosis is relevant there, as is his novella from a dog’s perspective, *Investigations of a Dog*. No

⁴ While this dissertation breaks new ground within Jewish American poetry scholarship, it’s certainly not the first study to consider the animalization of Jews in the Holocaust. One recent example is David Livingstone Smith’s *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*, which explores how and why dehumanization (and, often by extension, animalization) has been crucial to so many acts of intra-human cruelty.

doubt this dissertation's subjects encountered some of these texts, and Kafka is an obvious influence on some of Stern's dog poems in particular.

While Jewish American literary criticism offers an obvious angle from which we can reflect on poetry by Stern, Rich, and Kumin, it is a little harder to find the Jewish ecocritical angle. Kumin and Rich have been included in ecocritical studies more frequently than Stern, but rarely are any of these poets' ecologically oriented perspectives placed within a Jewish framework. One reason may be that when it comes to our ecological connections with other animals, Judaism does not have a single, consistent message. Yes, we all share the Earth in interconnected ways, and the politically and socially progressive Jewish embrace of *tikkun olam* (a Jewish orientation toward working to heal or repair the world) seems to support environmentalism as much as it supports social justice, but does Judaism include animal suffering, or animal rights, in its ethical equations? Before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, animal sacrifice was a central ritual in Jewish religious practice, and shockingly cruel slaughterhouses notwithstanding, many Kosher slaughter practices at least aspire to be as humane as possible (Greenberg). Behaving like a Jew toward nonhuman animals has meant different things in different eras, in different locations, and in different denominations (and in different manifestations of the different denominations), so as with all things Jewish, there is not one "Jewish" approach to nonhuman animals. Recently, a subset of Jewish studies scholars has taken up analyzing the various Jewish approaches to our nonhuman animal neighbors, often from an animal-rights or environmentalist position. Their publications and conference presentations have given shape to the subfield of Jewish animal studies.

Jewish animal studies embraces several discrete concerns, such as animal ethics, animal husbandry, animal sacrifice, Kashrut (Jewish dietary law, which includes rules regarding the preparation and consumption of animals), depictions of animals in Jewish visual culture, and most relevant to this dissertation, literary representations of animals in Jewish texts. Results for the Google search “Jewish animal studies” reliably start with Beth A. Berkowitz as of this introduction’s writing, and rightly so. Berkowitz’s *Animals and Animality in the Babylonian Talmud* uses a critical animal studies lens to establish the complex ways ancient rabbis conceived of animals, animality, and the human anthropocentrism that tends to define human-nonhuman animal relations. This complexity partly issues from the fact that Jewish holy texts offer two different, but related, answers that this dissertation uses as recurring markers. On the one hand is the noteworthy thread of Jewish animal ethics seeded in the Babylonian Talmud, and on the other is Torah’s clearly anthropocentric hierarchies related to human dominion over animals and rules related to animal property. Berkowitz ultimately argues in her *Animals and Animality in the Babylonian Talmud* that the Talmud embraces the paradox between compassion for animals (such as the biblical rule that work animals rest on Shabbat) and domination over animals (such as the very fact of work animals) rather than assert a definitive rabbinic decree on the treatment of animals.

Stern, Rich, and Kumin engage with the same Jewish paradoxes as they write empathetic poems about domesticated and wild animals threatened or murdered by human beings. Stern’s poems suggest that if we look closely at our nonhuman animal kin, we will find intelligence and opportunities for empathy (as in his poem “The Dog”); further, his “Behaving Like a Jew” asserts that respecting and caring for nonhuman

animals (alive or dead) is a Jewish trait. Rich's poems don't settle on an ethics as readily as Stern's; her poems wrestle with whether looking to nonhuman animals for wisdom or need-fulfilment is (mis)using them, just as she signals, with her recurring vixen images, the power and truth she longs for and finds in her nonhuman animal encounters. This ambivalence puts Rich squarely in the paradoxical domain of Jewish animal ethics. The link between animals and Jewishness in Rich's work is admittedly more subtle than it is in Stern's animal poems and certainly more subtle than it is in Kumin's Holocaust-haunted animal poems like "Woodchucks" or "The Vealers." Kumin's poems suggest interspecies nurture as a persistent source of hope while refusing to turn away from human depravity and the murderous component of many species' animal instincts. All three poets suggest that behaving like a Jew, when it comes to nonhuman animals, means taking responsibility for our brutal humanity as well as our essential animality—which is at least as often noble and good as it is otherwise. In this way, all three poets challenge accusations of Jewish animality slantwise, with an implied response of "Thank you; now let me show you what our human animality can teach us all." This dissertation's contribution to Jewish animal studies is significant because it situates Jewish animality as a fact of strength and wisdom, countering millennia of efforts to otherwise shape our narrative.

With regard to those insidious narrative-shaping efforts, another contemporary Jewish studies scholar, Jay Geller, explores the historically anti-Jewish association between Jews and animals in his book *Bestiarium Judaicum: Unnatural Histories of the Jews*. While most of Geller's subjects are German-language writers, his citation of Shylock's response to being animalized in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of*

Venice clarified for me the literary scope of the Jewish animal. When Antonio seeks a loan in Act 1, Shylock addresses his animalization directly: “You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,” Shylock says, before further explaining that Antonio spits upon him and treats him as Antonio might “spurn a stranger cur / Over your threshold” (Act 1, Scene 3). And in Act 4, Shylock’s famous trial scene, Gratiano addresses Shylock with “O, be thou damn’d, inexecrable dog!” before launching into a bizarre accusation that the soul of a wolf who had been hanged for a man’s crime left the wolf’s body, found Shylock, and, as Gratiano explains to Shylock,

whilst thou lay’st in thy unhallow’d dam,
Infused itself in thee; for thy desires
Are wolvis, bloody, starved and ravenous. (Act 4, Scene 1)

The example reinforces the reach of the threatening specter of what Geller specifically calls the “Jew-Dog,” anticipating the permeable boundary between human (Jew) and nonhuman animal (dog) that this dissertation finds in Gerald Stern’s poems in particular. Geller notes of Shakespeare’s audiences, “When Shylock scornfully acts out Antonio’s canid aspersions or when Gratiano testifies to Shylock’s inner lupinity, the play’s audiences may only have heard confirmation that the Jew is, like the wolf, outside the human community” (Geller 201). Geller’s project unearths how “over the past two millennia a vast menagerie of verbal and visual images of nonhuman animals (pigs, dogs, vermin, rodents, apes, and so on) has been disseminated to debase and bestialize Jews” (5). His study mostly concerns German Jewish-identified writers in European modernity (1750 to the Holocaust) who deploy animal figures in their stories and poems to try to “wrest from the Jew-Animal, wherever it roamed, its oppressive force whether by uncovering the conditions for its production in order to subvert its naturalization or by

giving voice to the Jew-as-Animal” (Geller 5, 232). That “oppressive force” resonates unmistakably on this side of the Holocaust, especially when “the Jew-as-Animal” finds its way into Holocaust-haunted poems.

In his afterword, Geller brings readers briefly into the years during and after the Holocaust to note how those Jewish writers closest to the Holocaust in time, space, and lived experience tried to upend or de-naturalize the Jew-as-Animal trope that so endangered Jewish lives. He reads two poems by German Jewish poet Gertrud Kolmar, published in her 1938 volume *Die Frau und die Tiere* (The Woman and the Animals). Most extant versions of the book were destroyed after *Kristallnacht*, and Kolmar herself perished at Auschwitz sometime in 1943 (Geller 221–222). Geller’s readings illustrate how Kolmar builds upon animal references in Torah (especially Lamentations, Habakkuk, and Jonah) to highlight in her poems how “the victimization of animals” offers a fair parallel to “the experience of German Jewry after the Nazi seizure of power” (Geller 221–223). Specifically, Kolmar’s poem “Die Tiere von Ninive” (The Animals of Nineveh) features a “voice calling out” with the words “For their sake! For the sake of all the animals, clean and unclean!” to explain, as Geller paraphrases, “why the inhabitants of Nineveh should not be destroyed” (224); he argues that Kolmar’s reference to these animals “could be to both the human and the nonhuman kind as well as to both pure and the impure (*rein und unrein*) varieties of each,” suggesting that Kolmar may have sought to activate human empathy for animals to help beg protection for the Jews during Nazi rule (225). Geller likewise quotes Emanuel Levinas’s recollection of being a Jewish prisoner in a Nazi camp and enduring how “the other men, called free [...] stripped us of our human skin. We were subhuman, a gang of apes” and Primo Levi’s parallel

recollection that the tattooed number on his arm had “symbolic meaning” that was “clear to everyone: this is an indelible mark with which slaves are branded and cattle sent to the slaughter, and that is what you have become” (Levinas 152–153; Levi 112; both qtd in Geller 227). Geller identifies some of the complicated layers of meaning that Jewish writers create when they speak of the problem of the Jew-as-Animal; Kolmar hopes the association might arouse protective empathy, but on the other side of her and so many other Jews’ deaths, Levinas and Levi are disenchanted with the Jewish animal, to put it mildly.

My dissertation project is possible because of Geller and Berkowitz both; their work has been essential to my own. With regard to the latter, my study gathers conviction from Berkowitz’s work on the Babylonian Talmud, especially her exploration of the dictum so often cited by contemporary Jewish animal rights activists, *tsa’ar ba’ale hayim*, which translates to “the suffering of animals” and is used to mean “don’t cause animals to suffer.” The phrase indicates an early Jewish interest in the ethical concerns connected to animal (mis)treatment and emerges from Talmudic commentary on Mishnah Bava Metzia 2:10, which is based on Exodus 23:5 and, less directly, Deuteronomy 22:4. The Torah verses discuss parallel scenarios involving work animals, a donkey and an ox, with the Deuteronomy/ox verse acting as a revision of sorts of the Exodus/donkey verse. Rava, one of the Babylonian rabbis whose commentary on this Mishnah Berkowitz closely reads, uses the uncommon term *ba’ale hayim*, meaning “possessors of life,” to refer to the work animals; Berkowitz explains that the term is largely a “Babylonian invention” that appears to result from Rava’s creative, and somewhat radical, interpretation of Torah (Berkowitz 109–110). Calling animals *ba’ale hayim*—

“possessors of life”—in the same phrase as *tsa’ar*, which is typically used in relation to human suffering or to the suffering of Israel, “marks a watershed in rabbinic thinking regarding animals, suffering, and the capacity of the one for the other” (Berkowitz 110–111). My dissertation gathers that tradition of Jewish awareness of (and implied concern with) animal suffering that Berkowitz highlights and builds upon Geller’s examination of mostly pre-Holocaust German-language texts to demonstrate that a Jewish animal ethics continues post-Holocaust in Jewish American poetry. And further, like Kolmar and those German Jewish writers who came before her, Jewish American post-Holocaust writers are subtly and sometimes not so subtly representing nonhuman animals in ways that speak back to that historical anti-Jewish animal association that plagued the fictional Shylock and, much more seriously, Emanuel Levinas and Primo Levi.

One of the most prominent examples of a post-Holocaust Jewish American writer who challenges the anti-Jewish animal association is Art Spiegelman, whose *Maus* quotes Adolf Hitler in the book’s epigraph: “The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human.” While *Maus*, a two-part graphic memoir, is a literary rather than a critical work, it also provides important context for this dissertation’s line of inquiry because Spiegelman illustrates the problem of trying to reduce Jewishness to animality. He does this in two primary ways. First, Spiegelman pictorially represents *all* human characters as nonhuman animals. The effect lands differently for differently oriented readers, but for me, Spiegelman’s decision at least partly suggests, much like my dissertation’s subjects, that we are all animals, all capable of “animality” and of suffering. Second, and where Spiegelman’s project most differs, aside from genre, is that he casts different cultural, national, and/or religious groups as different (usually stereotypical) animal species—Jews

are mice, Germans are cats, Poles are pigs, French are frogs, Americans are dogs etc—even illustrating how a Christian (the writer’s French wife) changes species when she converts to Judaism. In this decision to diversify the species that represent diverse humans, Spiegelman closes the distance between human and nonhuman animal: it is possible to forget while reading that our protagonist is a mouse.

The distance between the Holocaust itself and the post-Holocaust Jewish writers who aim to memorialize it seems less important somehow when these writers close the distance between human and nonhuman animals in their work, as happens in *Maus*. Maybe nonhuman animals offer a way for readers’ sympathetic imaginations to reach what might otherwise seem unreachable: the embodied, visceral animal knowledge of suffering, fear, survival, and grief. While Stern, Kumin, and Rich have a geographical remove from the Holocaust, Spiegelman has a generational one; it was Spiegelman’s father who experienced concentration camps firsthand, not the author himself. To help bridge their geographic removes, Stern projects Jewishness onto a roadside opossum in “Behaving Like a Jew” and Kumin projects Jewishness onto woodchucks in her poem of the same name; to bridge his generational remove, Spiegelman turns to nonhuman animal avatars to represent his human characters.

This decision to use nonhuman animals in his work allows Spiegelman some dark levity through puns like “Mauschwitz” and the Loony Tunes-like tension between stalking cats and wily but vulnerable mice, while also enabling him to ironically activate an old anti-Jewish stereotype. As Jeanne C. Ewert reminds in her analysis of *Maus* as a visual narrative, the “image of Jews as rodents is not original to Spiegelman” and “World War II-era propaganda cartoons from *Der Sturmer*” and similar publications capitalized

on the metaphor of Jews as pestilent mice needing to be eradicated (Ewert 92). In reading *Maus* as a work of post-Holocaust witness and testimony, Jill Petersen Adams has noted that Spiegelman's decision to render his human characters in "fable-like depictions" alongside "starkly 'realistic' images (as of *Arbeit Macht Frei* at the gate of Auschwitz)" emphasizes that the memoir is a multi-layered construction that resists closure or redemption, as its fidelity is to "irreconcilable memory" (Adams 239–240). Adams cites Laura Levitt's scholarship on Holocaust commemoration, quoting Levitt that "In order for [Shoah] to speak to us in the present and not once and for all time, it must not be reduced to any single interpretation, lesson, or meaning" (Levitt 205 qtd in Adams 237). Spiegelman's metaphors cannot be contained or neatly reduced either; nor does he want them to be: as Ewert has noted, Spiegelman renders German cats with "dogs on leashes," and "the offspring of a Jewish father and a German Christian mother [...] must be drawn as a synthesis of cat and mouse—tiny mice with tiger stripes." To underscore *Maus*'s irreconciliation and resistance to singular meaning, Ewert notes that "Art observes, in a self-conscious moment, that his Jewish (mouse) therapist keeps cats and dogs as pets, and asks rhetorically, 'Can I mention this, or does it louse up my metaphor' (II, 43)" (Ewert 93–95). In Spiegelman's self-conscious rendering of the stereotypes' or metaphors' breakdowns, Ewert argues, the reader is encouraged "to read the metaphorical equivalence in only one direction: identifying mice as people, rather than Jews as mice" (Ewert 95). Even so, by rendering humans as nonhuman animals, Spiegelman still leaves open the possibility for reading a bidirectional metaphorical equivalence: mice are men, but so too are men mice. In these self-conscious breaking-the-fourth-wall moments, Spiegelman also signals the ludicrousness of dividing human beings into arbitrary

subspecies: the distinctions cannot hold. Shylock famously asks in court, “If you prick us, do we not bleed?” but rather than join Shylock in pleading for recognition of Jewish humanity, I’d argue that Spiegelman’s memoir and Stern, Rich, and Kumin’s poems suggest that pleading for recognition of universal human animality might be at least as worthy an exercise—and one that can extend to causes like animal rights and environmental justice.⁵

While a contemporary poetic interest in environmental justice and animal rights is partly rooted in the pastoral tradition that reaches back to ancient Greek poet Theocritus, the Romantic poets’ challenge to Enlightenment ideals and their disdain for the environmental sacrifices of the Industrial Revolution offers one of the clearest non-Jewish sources for this dissertation’s Jewish American poets. The Romantics created various poetic models for how to celebrate and defend what is wild and natural: famous examples include Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* and “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” Blake’s “The Tyger,” Byron’s “Darkness,” and Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, though other examples by these poets as well as by other Romantics, including Coleridge, both Shelleys, Dickinson, Thoreau, and beyond, abound. Stern, Rich, and Kumin are all significantly shaped by Romanticism, and their poems—and most notably, their animal poems—allude to British and American Romantic forebears and ideals so clearly that the connections cannot be ignored.

Stern, Rich and Kumin also share with the Romantic movement an attachment to the lyric mode’s inherent “drive to connect” (to quote Rich on the “true nature of

⁵ There is a panel in *Maus* in which Art, the protagonist mouse, uses a pesticide bug spray to kill mosquitos midair after he is bit by one. The irony is both darkly humorous and provocative: Is it okay for beings who avoid extermination to try to exterminate others? When is cruelty justified? When is self-restraint justified?

poetry”), its dialogic interest in shared intimacy and understanding. If, as Adorno claims in the final sentence of “Lyric Poetry and Society,” lyric speech is “the voice of human beings between whom the barriers have fallen,” Stern, Rich, and Kumin suggest that in their animal poems, lyric speech may be used to trouble the barriers between human and nonhuman animal beings—if not make them fall altogether (54). With Stern, Rich, and Kumin as case studies, I have come to understand that to be a post-Holocaust Jewish American lyric poet is to build upon Romanticism’s embrace of the lyric voice, the imaginative, the visionary, the revolutionary, and the epiphanic at least as much as it is to embrace the justice-seeking activism of the Jewish prophetic line. This dissertation, then, offers a genealogy of Jewish American poetry that celebrates both its Jewish and non-Jewish literary sources.

To return to my Maine musings in the preface, this dissertation also contributes to the contemporary humanities’ ever-deepening (re)interest in ecological and environmental concerns. Noting what is distinctly Jewish about Stern’s, Rich’s, and Kumin’s animal poems in the context of the environmental movement and, more specifically, the field of ecocriticism, this dissertation demonstrates that a Jewish ecocritical lens can enrich ecocriticism. The term *ecocriticism* was coined by William Rueckert in his ambitious and experimental 1978 publication, “Into and Out of the Void: Two Essays,” and he used it describe a lens through which to read poetry. In the first of the paired essays, “Boxed in the Void: An Essay on the Late Sixties in America,” Rueckert offers a graph that tries to map the various courses of time as understood from a variety of vantage points; he explores linear time, biblical time, mythic time, evolutionary time, and so on. The essay closes with an epistolary poem to Walt Whitman in which the

speaker (apparently Rueckert himself) mourns that Whitman's hopes and expectations for the future of America have all been shot by technology, pesticides, genocide, civil unrest, and Nixon; the assumption that the progression of time brings progress, it seems, no longer rings true from Rueckert's perspective.⁶ The second of the two paired essays, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," defines Rueckert's neologism as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature," an experiment he undertakes "because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in of anything that I have studied in recent years" (Rueckert 73). Ecocriticism, as Rueckert presents it, is a criticism of hope that answers to his first essay's criticism of despair; ecocriticism takes as a core assumption that literature and literary criticism, if afforded enough cultural power beyond ivory towers and MLA conventions, can help save our planet from humanity's catastrophic impact on the Earth's various ecologies. In their memorable representations of various nonhuman animals, Stern, Rich, and Kumin help illustrate how poetry can shift our assumptions about and attitude toward other animal species, which is one of the most important interventions our current environmental crises require. While all three of my dissertation's subjects made it into *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, a tome edited by Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street, all three poets have regularly been omitted from other ecopoetic and ecocritical studies, an oversight that this project hopes to help further correct.

Ecocriticism, after all, owes some of its very roots to Adrienne Rich. Importantly, to model his experiment in ecocriticism, Rueckert cites two contemporary poetry

⁶ Whitman's famous line, "I think I could turn and live with animals," resonates in each of this dissertation's subjects' poems.

collections as exemplars of not only ecological literature but of how ecocriticism points toward better models for living: Gary Snyder's *Turtle Island*, which he concedes is an obvious choice, and less obviously, Rich's *Diving into the Wreck*. Rueckert calls Rich's book "the epitome—for me—of the ways in which poets [...] can be models for creative, cooperative action" (81). He notes that the poems "are about the ecology of the female self" and are relevant to his argument "in their treatment of men as destroyers (here of women rather than the biosphere, but for remarkably similar reasons)" (81). As Rueckert sees it, "A mind familiar with ecology cannot avoid the many profound and disturbing connections to be made here between women and western history, nature and western history" (81).⁷ He goes on to argue that Rich's book is "about the deep inner changes which must occur if we are to keep from destroying the world and survive as human beings"—namely that "if a new ecological vision is to emerge, the old destructive western one must be deconstructed and abandoned. This is exactly what Rich's poems say about men and women" (82). In this foundational essay, Rueckert uses Rich to make the case for what later scholars would call *ecofeminism*, an overlap in the Venn diagram that maps ecology and feminism and asserts, as ecofeminist Rachel Stein concisely states, "that social justice and environmental issues are intrinsically linked" (Stein, "To Make the Visible World" 200). As Stein has argued, Rich is an American ecofeminist rather

⁷ Here Rueckert may be referencing the 1974 book chapter "Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture?" written by Sherry Ortner, which agitated feminist discourse in anthropology when it stated that all cultures favor masculinity and, as the title suggests, link masculinity to culture and femininity to unrefined nature. Rueckert admits his bibliography is incomplete and that some paraphrased sources are left out; still, neither Ortner nor Rachel Carson, to whom the modern environmental movement owes its origin, are even named. This (likely unconscious) reproduction of the cultural violence against women latent in patriarchal society—and crucial to *Diving into the Wreck*—is disappointing.

than an American nature writer in the traditional sense; traditional nature writers, such as Henry David Thoreau, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Robinson Jeffers, and even Ralph Waldo Emerson, whom Stein emphasizes should be included in that tradition, respond to the harmful impingement of “social expansion [...] upon the surrounding natural realm” by “describ[ing] their need to forego human ties in order to immerse themselves in an unsullied natural realm” (Stein, “To Make the Visible World” 199). Neither Rich, Stern, nor Kumin is interested in choosing nature *over* human ties; rather, our necessary interconnectedness with one another and with the natural world is unquestionable in all three poets’ work. Ecofeminism in recent years has taken up the ideal of “the feminist ethic of care,” which is an ethics that challenges notions of social change that valorize traditional (masculine) activism over forms of change-making that rely on more traditionally feminine ideals and behaviors such as caretaking, empathizing, or offering emotional support. Beth Berkowitz cites Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen’s *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, Donovan and Adams’s *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*, and Kathy Rudy’s *Loving Animals: Toward a New Animal Advocacy* as three recent examples of ecofeminism’s concerns with animal well-being. Using Stein’s definition, as enriched by the notion of an ethics of care, it is fair to suggest that this dissertation’s three poets operate within the scope of ecofeminism and that this dissertation’s concerns are themselves ecofeminist in addition to being Jewish.

By highlighting the value of a Jewish ecocritical lens in particular, this dissertation suggests that there may be as many culturally situated versions of ecocriticism as there are cultures. Reading ecologically oriented poetry using culturally

situated analytical tools that are attuned to ecofeminist ideals in particular allows for more precise, and perhaps more useful, eco poetic readings of poets like Stern, Rich, and Kumin, all three of whom differently foreground emotion and empathy in their animal representations. My area of interest here admittedly stands on a fault line in contemporary poetics, as I discovered in the course of preparing for my preliminary exams: *ecopoetry* and *ecopoetics* are contentious terms that divide lyric-oriented poets and scholars (Scott J. Bryson, Ann Fisher-Wirth, Laura-Gray Street, Jonathan Bate) from conceptual or experimental poets (Jonathan Skinner, Aaron Moe, Brenda Iijima, Evelyn Reilly), distracting from the larger goal that all such poets share: creating art that draws attention to the ecological emergencies we are living through with, one can assume, the goal of interrupting or correcting course. Accommodating the debate between apparently accessible or so-called mainstream verse and apparently fractured or “difficult” so-called experimental verse can sour one to criticism altogether when one’s goals have little to do with who has greater claims on buzzwords. For this reason, while scholarship on ecological poetry is an obvious context for this project, I made the decision early to set the distracting debate aside and focus on how *these* poets, from their specifically post-Holocaust Jewish American vantage points, intervene in our ecological moment.

The complete critical context for this dissertation probably cannot be fully accounted for here, as like all writers, my influences and scholarly companions are not all readily apparent to me. Even so, I am indebted to Jewish and literary studies for their capaciousness and for modeling how hybrid interests—in my case, interests in Jewishness, poetry, environmental justice, and animal rights—could cohere across traditional disciplinary boundaries.

On This Study's Rationale

While most conceptions of twentieth-century literature divide the century in relationship to the Second World War, this study specifies the Holocaust, which some Jewish Americans prefer to call the Shoah (meaning “catastrophe” in Hebrew), as the specific Jewish reference point for the rupture that divides the century. This study takes seriously the centrality of that European catastrophe to post-Holocaust Jewish-American consciousness, and it operates under the assumption that poetry after the Holocaust, and informed by it, is not only *not* barbaric, to recall Adorno’s famous declaration, but important. This dissertation joins its poet subjects in believing that poetry, like all art, can spark change, shape our questions and understandings, and increase our capacity for love, empathy, and imagination. It also aligns itself with the lyric tradition’s interest in self-knowledge and personal experience as sources of wisdom. In so doing, this project focuses its scope on the Charles Reznikoff-Muriel Rukeyser lineage that reaches back to Emma Lazarus and arrives at Stern, Rich, and Kumin, which is somewhat different from the Reznikoff-Rukeyser lineage that reaches slightly back to Gertrude Stein and arrives at, for example, Charles Bernstein. These parallel Jewish American poetry lineages cross over and cross-pollinate and therefore should not be construed as bifurcated; indeed, Alicia Ostriker and Bob Perelman, for example, are *both* included in a 2010 anthology on radical Jewish poetics (Miller and Morris). All the same, this study focuses on the former lineage, a post-Romantic lyric tradition that embraces the Romantic assumption of an “I” who may not always speak literally for the poet but who speaks from a relatively coherent self and explores internally held feelings and truths. Stern, Rich, and Kumin use

self-knowledge and personal experience to connect with external histories, environments, and species from a place of recognition and empathy.

A larger project would delve more deeply into the ambiguity surrounding the term *Jewish* and the Jewish identity itself. This ambiguity, which I mostly leave outside my scope, surfaces frequently in recent critical discussions of artistic and literary Jewishness and is worth mentioning. In *After Weegee: Essays on Contemporary Jewish American Photographers*, Daniel Morris breaks from art historian Matthew Baigell who, in his *American Artists, Jewish Images*, limits his understanding of Jewishness in Jewish American art to “art depicting symbols, iconography, language (that is, Hebrew letters), and historical or biographical imagery that Baigell can identify as stereotypically Jewish” in order to instead investigate how Jewish American artists “grapple, often indirectly, with questions of ethnicity and identity” (xv, xvi). Morris explains that Jewish American photographers in fact turn “the camera eye *away from* Jewish people and experiences. Instead, the contemporary Jewish American camera eye is often trained *toward* the culturally, religiously, ethnically, and socioeconomically Other” (xvi). The Jewish American poetic eye, at least as far as this dissertation’s subjects are concerned, is also noteworthy for its training toward the Other, but rather than “a cross-cultural exchange with the distinctly not self,” my interest is in how these poets engage in a cross-species exchange (Morris xvi). Indeed, some Jewish American poets look so far away from their own Jewishness that that becomes a defining feature *of* Jewishness. In his essay in *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, Charles Bernstein writes, “I am no more Jewish than when I refuse imposed definitions of what Jewishness means” (“Radical

Jewish” 13). Jews from Kafka to Lenny Bruce have asserted similar sentiments.⁸ In *The Temple of Culture: Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in Literary Anglo-America*, Jonathan Freedman insists on our cultural moment’s need for an anti-essentialist definition of Jewishness, quoting Paul Lauter: “Jewishness, or even Judaism, is what it has always been: what people acting in history have chosen to make it” (Freedman 7). Jewishness in poetry and elsewhere clearly should not be essentialized or oversimplified, but for these three Jewish American poets—Stern, Rich, and Kumin—their Jewishness is indispensable to their poetics. Examining the Jewish influence on their poetry reveals not only what Ostriker calls the “glinting threads of biblical and liturgical phrasing” that is “tangled in [Jewish poetry’s] DNA” and other more overt signs of Jewishness—such as Jewish subject matter or the tonal tension (self-conscious mixing of sorrow and joy, skepticism and optimism, and/or rage and humor), prophetic modes, dialogic (often argumentative) voicing, or righteousness often indicative of Jewish literary style—but also important insights about the ethics of activism, atonement, and hope (Ostriker, “Secular and Sacred” 185; Morris and Miller). In this project, I primarily consider and define Jewishness in accordance with the ways Stern, Rich, and Kumin express their self-

⁸ This issue of defining “Jewishness” in poetry could be a study unto itself. In Alicia Ostriker’s essay in *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, she cites advice she was once given to “avoid the hardening of categories,” which is maybe, in spite of Judaism’s hundreds of categorical laws, ironically the most Jewish advice there is (“Secular and Sacred” 185). Even so, the category ought to have some boundaries. In Bernstein’s essay “Pounding Fascism” from *A Poetics*, Bernstein argues that the Jewish characteristics Pound most loathed (including equivocation, indeterminacy, and ambiguity) are defining features of *The Cantos*, thus making his *Cantos* Jewish (122). Stephen Paul Miller joins Bernstein and dozens of other Jewish literary critics in claiming that “however one characterizes ‘Jewish poetry,’ you need not be Jewish to write it” (xiv). I think we ought to “avoid the hardening of categories” while still insisting that a poetry can be *like* Jewish poetry if its author does not identify as Jewish, but “Jewish poetry” is a poetry written by self-identified Jews—in all of their wild variations of Jewish self-expression and self-definition.

proclaimed Jewish identities, and I take for granted that though “Jewish” can reference a multitude of characteristics and have ambiguous boundaries, in order to call a poetry “Jewish,” the poet ought to self-identify as such and, in some discernible way, express their Jewishness in their poetry. Relatedly, in this study I use the term *anti-Jewish* where other writers might use *anti-Semitic* to gesture toward the diverse expressions of Jewishness found in the United States and across the diaspora, and I simultaneously allow that these three poets’ expressions of Jewishness have much in common.

This study draws its boundaries in other ways too, of course. All three poets were born in East Coast urban environments—Pittsburgh (Stern), Baltimore (Rich), and Philadelphia (Kumin)—in the 1920s. These poets came of age during the Second World War and learned increasingly horrible truths about the Holocaust as young adults, each of whom came to articulate and write from a shared Jewish American guilt for having been born in the United States and therefore having avoided the European ghettos, work camps, cattle cars, gas chambers, and ovens. For all three poets, an understanding of their own arbitrary survival as Americans, while their relatives in Europe died among the six million Jewish dead, was a foundational source of humility, empathy, and social justice activism. All three poets have been activists on and off the page, energized to varying degrees by anti-war and anti-militarism movements, the Civil Rights movement, feminism, and labor organizing, and all three have urged not only justice and equality but also empathy, tenderness, and nurture as antidote for the “endless depravity,” as Kumin called it, that lives within us all. These three poets shared the same historical moment, grew up within a few hours’ drive of one another, and pursued similar life paths. All three were educated at American institutions of higher education (two of which were women’s

colleges). All three poets were married and had children, with Kumin the only one of the trio to remain in her marriage for life; Rich eventually partnered with writer Michelle Cliff in the seventies and later moved west, to Northern California, and Stern eventually found long-term companionship with fellow poet Anne Marie Macari in New Jersey and New York. All three poets won numerous major awards, taught at numerous universities and writers' residencies, and prolifically published in multiple genres with prominent literary publishing houses. The three knew each other, with Stern and Kumin teaching together for several years at New England College and Kumin inviting Rich to read at the Library of Congress when Kumin was poet laureate, for example, but their lives remained more distinct than connected. Even so, their values, politics, and poetics had quite a lot in common, which helps focus my dissertation: working from a place of such commonality simplifies this study so that the differences between the poets' Jewish expressions and approaches to animal representation, detailed in the chapter summaries below, can most precisely be articulated and appreciated. There are other poets I may have included, such as the slightly earlier Stanley Kunitz ("The Wellfleet Whale," for example, is relevant) or the slightly later Marge Piercy (whose cat poems are also relevant), and when my study expands into a book project, these poets will likely find their place in it. I have chosen Stern, Rich, and Kumin for this study because their three distinct and contrasting approaches to representing nonhuman animals illustrate the continuum from most anthropomorphic to least, and from most overtly Jewish animal representations to least: Stern and Rich suggest the two outer edges, with Kumin in the middle. Further, each poet's animal poetics is distinct and recognizable from first book to last (or, in Stern's case, first book to most recent); each poet writes directly and memorably about

Jewishness and the Holocaust, with Stern and Kumin doing so in some of their best known animal poems; and each provides a different answer to the problem of the post-Holocaust Jewish animal.

Importantly, this dissertation also takes as a core assumption that nonhuman animals are worthy of ethical consideration and that human beings have a responsibility to use our relative evolutionary advantages in the service of protecting our fellow creatures and their environments (which are also our environments) from the recklessness and cruelty of our fellow humans. Relatedly, this dissertation acknowledges the paradoxes in Jewish animal ethics and asserts that doing right by nonhuman animals is, and ought to be, what it means to behave like a Jew. To return to Berkowitz, her chapter on animal suffering concludes with Berkowitz considering Aaron Gross's argument in his book, *The Question of the Animal and Religion*, in which Gross identifies poles similar to those I use in my project: One pole is human "kindness" toward nonhuman animals, a thread in scripture that owes much of its visibility to Rava and much of its more recent importance to the modern animal rights movement (another sign of which may be the seemingly ever-growing number of vegetarian Jews). Gross's other pole is "ascendancy," the principle that places nonhuman animals below human animals, which I prefer to think of as the "dominion" principle, partly for the latter term's similarity to the related animal rights reality of human domination. Berkowitz acknowledges Gross's argument that the Jewish stance of "kindness" toward nonhuman animals that many readers have identified in Talmud cannot be accepted wholesale, because human-caused animal suffering is inevitable in a religion that encourages or even permits the domestication, slaughter, and/or sacrifice of nonhuman animals (Berkowitz 118). This dissertation, like Rava's

reading of the Mishnah, seeks to highlight the Jewish value of being kind to nonhuman animals in spite of these clear paradoxes. As Berkowitz ultimately argues of the Talmudic passage where *tsa'ar ba'ale hayim* originates, the “passage wants, first and foremost, to make animal suffering visible. Its ultimate aim, however, is to identify how very normal and normative is the invisibility of animal suffering within rabbinic discourse” (119). Making the invisible visible is as essential to the pursuit of justice as it is to the labor of scholarship and to the crafting of poems. The Jewishness legible in Stern, Rich, and Kumin’s writings aligns with the justice-seeking activism, political progressiveness, and intellectual openness often found in Reconstructionist and Reform Judaism much more than it aligns with any interest in Halakah, or Jewish law. Their Judaism is not concerned with the rules of religion nearly as much as it is with the poetry, spirit, and hopeful activism and perseverance by which that religion has been sustained. For this reason, this dissertation’s subjects ultimately align with the many Jewish thinkers since the Babylonian Talmud who have joined Rava in noting that Jewish ethical systems can and ought to value nonhuman animals’ well-being.

Using a combination of close reading, criticism, biography, and first-person interviews, my chapters examine not only the similarities but the important differences between Stern, Rich, and Kumin when it comes to their expressions of Jewish identity and to their particular animal poetics: Stern was raised in the most observantly Jewish household, Rich in the least observantly Jewish household, and Kumin in a moderately observant Jewish household. Stern’s animal poetics are explicitly tied to his Jewish identity, and they take poetic risks that approach—without quite falling into—sentimentality in order to arouse, as his poems reliably do, empathy for nonhuman

animals. In chapter 2, I examine how Stern's animal poetics propose permeable species boundaries and invest in dramatic anthropomorphism for the sake of articulating bidirectional empathy between human and nonhuman animal species. In chapter 3, I consider Rich's animal poetics, which decry "using" nonhuman animals for human metaphors and human gains, while I also demonstrate the primal and necessary wisdom Rich has recognized, seen mirrored, and metaphorized in animals of other species. While Rich's animal poetics are least obviously tied to her Jewish identity, I also suggest they may be the most spiritual of the three poets. Jewish identity is more legible in Kumin's animal poems than in Rich's; her Jewish identity is approximately as present as Stern's is in his animal poems. In chapter 4, I examine Kumin's animal poetics as a model for both bearing attentive witness to human-caused animal suffering and intervening with a model for tribal inclusion and affection that signals an expansive understanding of animality—and by extension, of humanity. Of the three poets, Kumin's animal poetics are the most oriented toward animal rights while also being most willing to acknowledge the animal instinct of murder living within us as potently as the animal instinct of nurture. All three poets insist on human animals' interconnectedness with nonhuman animals, but they reach their conclusions in distinct ways.

This dissertation argues that these poets, who came into their adulthood and poetic expressions in the shadow of the Nazi Holocaust, light the way to a Jewish animal whose survival will not depend on random birthplace but on the dignifying interconnection of all animal species, and all the varieties therein.

CHAPTER 2

BEHAVING LIKE A JEW, BEHAVING LIKE A DOG: GERALD STERN'S RESTORATIVE ANIMAL POETICS

*---I am going to be unappeased at the opossum's death.
I am going to behave like a Jew
and touch his face, and stare into his eyes,
and pull him off the road.*

—Gerald Stern, “Behaving Like a Jew”

What does it mean to “behave like a Jew” in contemporary America? Perhaps the mind leaps to stereotypes—to miserliness, Hollywood, or Wall Street. Perhaps you think of lit Shabbos candles or of joyful Hasidic families strolling suburban sidewalks on Saturdays. My suspicion, though, is that if someone suggests you are “behaving like a Jew,” you are at the very least hesitant to assume the association is complimentary. And if you have seen photographs of “No Dogs or Jews Allowed” signs from before the Second World War, or if you are familiar with the historical anti-Jewish propaganda that cast Jews and nonhuman animals—swine, vermin, rats—as equally low creatures, you might worry, even just a little, in spite of decades of social progress since the Holocaust, that this person means you are behaving brutishly, ferociously, pathetically—that you are behaving, somehow, like a dog.

What does it mean to behave like a dog in contemporary America? Even if some of your best friends are dogs, you would likely recoil at the suggestion that you’re behaving like one, given our language’s association of *dog* with “a worthless or contemptible person,” “run-down” (i.e., “going to the dogs”), inferiority, undesirability,

and unattractiveness (i.e., “that bitch is a dog”—however redundant that misogyny might be) (“dog”). Generally speaking, it’s better to be told one is behaving like a Jew than a dog in contemporary America; most Americans take for granted what many others have not historically—that is, the Jew is a human being and therefore a “higher” species than the dog. Such hierarchical achievement seems desirable, but in his poems, Gerald Stern challenges this hierarchy, placing Jew and animal back on the same level.

Of course, declaring that the Jew and the dog—or the Jew and the nonhuman animal, to broaden the scope⁹—are on the same level is not new. Jews have long been associated negatively with nonhuman animals, an association that has fueled anti-Jewishness and genocide by dehumanizing Jews sufficiently to make them more murderable—or in the parlance of Nazi propaganda, exterminable. In *Bestiarium Judaicum*, Jay Geller spends a whole chapter examining the historically anti-Jewish association specifically between Jews and wolves—and their canine cousins, dogs. The pejorative association between Jew and wolf has appeared “in Christian discourse since at least St. John Chrysostom, for whom Jews were ‘more dangerous than wolves,’” and is based on the wolf’s supposed solitariness, ruthlessness, and nefarious sneakiness, not to mention the Jewish body’s frequent stereotyping as “hirsute” (Geller 193). The association has served anti-Jewish propaganda efforts well over the years; Geller writes that “[m]ore than a third of early modern anti-Jewish tractates [...] analogized Jews with or identified them as wolves” (193). In one such tractate, Fritz Hiemer writes, “Every Jew has a lupine countenance, one need only be able to recognize it” (qtd in Geller 194). And in analyzing “hybrid constructions of Jew (explicit or implicit) and wolf (or canid

⁹ In contemporary parlance, behaving like an animal is roughly equivalent to behaving like a dog, of course—just a bit more aligned with rage, violence, and/or messiness.

cousin)” within mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth-century Jewish-European texts, including werewolf figures who are likewise often figured as or analogous to Jews, Geller finds that wolves and dogs “mediat[e] Jewish life and death within their respective historically distinct and distinctly hostile situations: A Gentile Europe resisting Jewish integration in the first-half of the nineteenth century and one increasingly threatening Jewish existence in the first-half of the twentieth” (190–91). The Jewish-canine (and Jewish-nonhuman animal) hybrid persists in late-twentieth and early twenty-first-century American poetry, especially in the works of Gerald Stern.

This chapter examines Stern’s anthropomorphic engagement with nonhuman animals, paying particular attention to his obsession with road kill, which he consistently approaches spiritually and, if you will, Jewishly. While I discuss several of Stern’s most important animal poems, I attend at greatest length to “Behaving Like a Jew” and “The Dog” to illustrate how Stern’s preoccupation with nonhuman animals, particularly with animals killed by human-made machinery, compels reflection on the human causes of and powers to prevent animal suffering even as it brings to a head the tangled ethics of anthropomorphism. Do we have to humanize animals if we are to move our fellow humans to care about them, let alone save them from harm or eventual extinction? Because Stern so often links animals to his own Jewish spirituality and cultural orientation as well as to bodies lost in the Holocaust, he clarifies the importance of Jewish animal poetry. His animal poems dignify the nonhuman animal, the Jew, and the poet, Stern, all at once, offering readers a flawed but heartfelt Jewish animal ethos in which behaving like a Jew and behaving like a dog are both compliments.

In 1973, at the age of forty-eight, Gerald Stern published his first book of poems, *The Naming of Beasts*, in a one-hundred-copy edition with the Cummington Press/Abattoir Editions at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Two of those one hundred copies, each of which bears a slightly different cover design, can be examined at Temple University Libraries' Special Collections Research Center. In so doing, one will discover that Stern has been playing with the Jewish-canine hybrid since even his first collection, as evidenced by this four-line poem:

I called the wolf Josephus,
rooting in his cage,
thoughtful, greedy,
the dogs' Jew. ("I Called the Wolf Josephus")

That Stern calls the wolf not only "Josephus," a first-century Jewish historian of mixed reputation, but also "the dogs' Jew," in a book called *The Naming of Beasts*, aligns Stern with the Adam of Genesis—but with a good deal more history, and historical rumor, on Stern's shoulders.¹⁰ Stern's first major poetry collection, printed later that same year in well over one hundred copies, was his subsequent *Rejoicings*, which includes all but three poems from *The Naming of Beasts*. As of fall 2020, he has published twenty books of poetry and five books of essays, with at least one book of poetry forthcoming.

Stern's influences are wide ranging, including the imagery and vision of Pound and Eliot, the long line of Whitman and Ginsberg, and the music of Williams and Crane (especially, according to Stern, Crane's poem "My Grandmother's Love Letters"), as

¹⁰ For a sympathetic reconsideration of Josephus as a loyal chronicler of a dispersed Jewish people, without whom four centuries of Jewish history might have been all but lost, see Miriam Peskowitz's "Meeting Josephus Head On and Humanly, a Historian's Transgression."

well as an array of other American, English, French, and biblical sources.¹¹ Pound's celebration of fascism during the Second World War renders him the uncle Stern aches to disown but can't quite escape, as evidenced by the fact that Stern's recent collection, *Galaxy Love*, includes four poems exasperatingly referencing Pound: "Bollingen Ezra Pound, 1949"; "Route 29"; "Orson," in which Stern references the "hateful Pound I dragged from place to place" (20); and "Gelato," in which "Pound's / stupid admiration of Mussolini" continues to aggravate Stern (19–20). Even so, Stern shares with Pound a love of classical sources, including ancient Chinese poets and, of course, the Bible. But for Pound, "all the Jew part of the Bible is black evil," while for Stern the Jewish Bible is a source of ethical wisdom and identity formation (Pound qtd. in Torrey 156).

In fact, Stern's foundation in Judaism and Jewish culture shapes his work more than does probably any other influence; Judaism weaves through each of Stern's books and has remained essential to his self-presentation and his poetics throughout his career. Of this dissertation's three subjects, Stern's public persona has been most linked to his Jewishness—he is, to risk oversimplification of a complex identity, the "most" Jewish, at least according to the amount of critical attention his Jewishness attracts. In a tribute essay, Edward Hirsch compares Stern to a great Torah scholar and philosopher: "I think of him as an ecstatic Maimonides writing his own idiosyncratic guide for the perplexed,

¹¹ Stern has discussed being influenced by Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Roethke, and part of Pound's *Cantos*, as well as by Yeats, Crane, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Blake, and Ben Jonson. The longer line he often uses is "influenced by Whitman, by Blake, by the Bible and by Bly, to a certain degree," and he has aimed, especially since the mid-eighties, for "a natural mode of speech, or it has become the natural mode of speech for me—a loose decasyllabic line, an iambic line" ("An Interview with Gerald Stern" 35). On his music, he has also said, "In poetry, the music comes first, and I would never write a bad line, or what I consider a bad line, in order to get some content into the poem. I'd rather lie than make bad music" (Stern, "A Conversation" 113).

helping us to live in the world as it is, converting our losses, transforming death and sadness into beautiful singing” (89). Stern’s Jewishness, however much it might recall the medieval Maimonides, is thoroughly American, irreverent, and “essentially secular,” in Ira Sadoff’s words—even, in terms of Stern’s current level of practice, irreligious. In his essay “What Is the Sabbath?” Stern says he became a “nostalgic Agnostic at the age of thirteen and one day” (17). The Jewish identity is complicated because, especially post-Holocaust, one need not believe in God to identify as Jewish. Especially in American Jewishness, a self-professed Jew can express that identity purely secularly, such as through making matzah ball soup or through the nominal observance of Chanukah; even religious Jews can be considered observant without having to necessarily believe in God. Stern’s American Jewishness is legible because of the Jewish cultural markers, allusions, progressive Jewish American worldviews, and inflections in his work (146).

That Stern’s public persona is more overtly linked with his Jewishness than his contemporaries Rich or Kumin may partly have to do with gender (even the term *Jew* seems to refer to a Jewish man more often in the popular imagination than to a Jewish woman), but it is mostly owed to the fact that Stern announces and reinforces the relevance of his Jewishness in virtually every interview, public reading, and book he publishes. “I’m a Jewish writer,” he tells Sue William Silverman, “so I identify myself as a Jewish writer, but hopefully not just a Jewish writer. That said, I think I have things to say about Judaism that other people don’t” (Stern, “A Conversation” 115). I might argue that my whole dissertation emerged from the same hunch.

Stern aligns his lifestyle with his Jewishness more broadly in an interview with Elizabeth Knight, representing himself as a quintessential wandering Jew: “I’ve been a

crazy wanderer, literally. [...] I actually don't even have a home, I have houses. I think of myself as a Pennsylvanian—I have a house there—but I quickly adapt to the place I live in. I am a good Jew!" (Stern, "A Poet" 45). As he explains, his Jewishness makes him not just adaptable but also aware of his otherness within mainstream and academic cultural contexts:

I don't feel inferior to the Anglos. Of course, I will use English in connection with my own culture, my Jewish culture, my nineteen thirties and forties culture, my Pittsburgh culture. I don't feel any limitation with it, although my professors at Columbia and Pitt often tried to make me, and others like me, feel inferior because I wasn't truly Anglo. I was made to feel very much an outsider, a Jew. (Stern, "A Poet" 43)

This outsider identity is relevant to Stern's empathetic association with nonhuman animals. He has said, "I myself sometimes feel beleaguered as a Jew," but he is aware that his late-twentieth-century American existence is less beleaguered than that of his youth or his parents' youth: "We're no longer in a ghetto. We are, what, enfranchised, liberated, humiliated, reduced in knowledge in various ways, blessed at the same time" (Stern, "An Interview by Gary Pacernick" 41–42). To be Jewish and of Stern's generation is to be both privileged and beleaguered, and holding the 1930s and 1940s viscerally in the body comes with the territory.

Another way Jewishness is held in the body is by way of language and voice, and Stern's voice is thick with it. His syntax and phrasing subtly carry forth the Ashkenazic Yiddish-influenced-English speech patterns of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Jewish immigrants from Europe; those patterns are vocalized in audio recordings and recorded in his writing, particularly his essays. In his poems, we hear the rhythms of the Bible and of Hebrew prayers, which Stern says "are memory to me, a manner of repetition, of modification that is the Hebrew way of organizing poetry, which I think is a big influence

on me. I know that that's an influence on me," demonstrating those very repetitions as he describes them (Stern, "An Interview by Gary Pacernick" 41). In attempting to define Jewish poetry, Alicia Ostriker notes that it usually has "glinting threads of biblical and liturgical phrasing tangled into its DNA," and few English-speaking Jewish poets better support her observation than Stern ("Secular and Sacred" 185). Stern's famous "Behaving Like a Jew" provides an emphatic example in the way it launches from its initial scene-setting into a rousing anaphora describing its speaker's emotional state and actions: "I am sick . . .," "I am sick . . .," "I am going to be unappeased . . .," "I am going to behave like a Jew . . .," and "I am not going to stand . . ." (7, 11, 15, 16, 19). One quarter of that poem's lines begin with *and*, furthering the poem's relationship to biblical anaphora and cataloging. Syntactically and rhythmically, "Behaving Like a Jew" is clearly a Jewish poem by Ostriker's definition, and like so many of Stern's poems, it could also be considered a sort of psalm. Jonathan Monroe hears biblical poetry, especially Psalms and Proverbs, in Stern's cadences, and in an interview with David Hamilton, Stern cites the "quick shifting that you see in the Psalms" as an influence, as well as "the movement from the personal to the political, or the personal to the religious. The personal to the cosmic, even. And in addition the movement, the radical movement, from deep melancholy and pessimism to amazing optimism in just (snaps his fingers) a few seconds" (Monroe 41; Stern, "An Interview with Gerald Stern" 35–36). The intermixing of melancholy with optimism, or of adoration with sorrow, is classic Stern.

It is also classic American Jewishness. Stern's *Early Collected Poems*, which includes his first six poetry collections, is dedicated "to the sorrowful," and sorrow, for Stern, is inextricably tied up with his experience of being Jewish in the twentieth and

twenty-first century. He has said his sorrow stems in part from his “guilt as an American Jew of a certain age who, if I’d been in Europe, would probably have been dead” and notes that such guilt is “[a] very common subject for American Jews in my generation” (Stern, “An Interview by Gary Pacernick” 41).¹² The trauma of twentieth-century Jewish experience fuses with Stern’s personal pain in poems like “The Dancing,” “Behaving Like a Jew,” and “The Jew and the Rooster Are One.” Each of these poems can also be read as a hard-won praise song for life, bringing to mind Jewish traditions like the Kaddish, a God-praising prayer traditionally recited during times of bereavement, or the Passover Seder, a ritualized retelling of great historical suffering that is oriented toward perseverance and life—and in many progressive American Jewish homes, toward activism and social justice. Stern’s poems also of course emerge from that same Jewish American activist tradition, particularly its poets; along with Kumin and Rich, he shares this tradition with forebears like Emma Lazarus and contemporaries like Muriel Rukeyser, Allen Ginsburg, and Alicia Ostriker. Stern joins these poets in creating poems of prophetic witness rooted in Jewish experience.

Finally, Stern’s work is informed by his religious upbringing. Born in 1925 in Pittsburgh, where Stern was raised in an Orthodox-turned-Conservative Jewish immigrant household, Stern studied Hebrew in *cheder*, a religious Hebrew school for Orthodox boys; he is “the grandson of an Orthodox rabbi from Poland,” as he has said in interviews; he had a bar mitzvah; he went to Friday and Saturday services most weeks growing up; he grew up surrounded by Yiddish; and when the time comes, he plans to be buried in the Reconstructionist Jewish corner of a Lambertville, New Jersey, cemetery

¹² Indeed, similar guilt is readily found in Adrienne Rich’s and Maxine Kumin’s writings as well.

(Stern, “An Interview by Gary Pacernick” 47; Stern, Personal interview). In interviews, Stern himself builds evidence for how Judaism shaped him, as exemplified in this excerpt from his interview with Hamilton:

We were conservative [...]. Although earlier, when my grandmother lived with us, my mother’s mother, before she re-married, we were Orthodox. Everybody was Orthodox, there wasn’t a conservative movement in Bialystok or Kiev. We had two sets of dishes. One for, you know, dairy foods, and the other for meat dishes. We had a separate set of dishes for Passover, that were unearthened and unpacked and cleaned and prepared for that holiday. And everything else, candles, whatever. We lived for three or four years, as I recall, in an Orthodox house. There, under my grandmother’s superstition. [...] Going to services regularly. I went every day to *Chedar* from the time I was about five, Monday through Thursday for about two hours each day, from four to six, or from a quarter to four to a quarter to six, to prepare for my Bar Mitzvah. We learned Hebrew and then Friday night we went to services. Friday night services, which were always a little looser, a little less formal, a little more informal, a little more English, than Saturday morning services which were more formal. Almost every Saturday there was a Bar Mitzvah, followed with candy bars, everybody got candy bars. I used to have a friend who wasn’t Jewish who’d come to the services for the candy bars! And the singing of all the songs. (Stern, “An Interview with Gerald Stern” 36–37)

Stern went on from his religious upbringing to pursue his education at the University of Pittsburgh and Columbia University, to teach literature and creative writing at numerous institutions (including Temple University), to raise two children with his former wife, and to win numerous prestigious awards for his poetry, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Wallace Stevens Award, and the Ruth Lilly Prize; he also served as the inaugural poet laureate of New Jersey and was elected as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. He now lives with his partner, fellow poet Anne Marie Macari, in Manhattan. Throughout his prolific and significant career, Stern’s religious foundations have thoroughly informed his worldviews, allusions, rhythms, and questions as a writer.

Another prominent thread that weaves through all of Stern's works is his deep interest in and compassion for nonhuman animals—a compassion that is likewise rooted in Stern's Jewishness.¹³ Stern's reverence for nonhuman animals appears repeatedly in every collection he has published; in every one of Stern's collections, the number of poems featuring animals is greater than the number of poems without. Stern's animals are companions he documents in the garden, along rivers, in his house, and along his travels. The very first poem in *The Naming of Beasts*, "In Kovalchick's Garden," attributes human qualities to a bird; it is surely not a coincidence that this poem, which finds Stern meditating on questions of ownership and of life and death while renting a house from a Polish landlord, brings animal bodies into the same poetic lens as Holocaust memorialization, however subtle the gesture. In the decades since publishing this seminal poem, Stern repeatedly has blurred the boundary between the human and the nonhuman animal body, and especially between the Jew and the nonhuman animal. In this sense, he stands in a long, often unkind, tradition. But rather than debase the one by its association with the other, Stern's poems ennoble and dignify both the Jew and the nonhuman animal by casting the association between them as a positive one.

One of Stern's primary means of blurring the interspecies boundary is anthropomorphism, the literary humanization of nonhuman beings and objects. Stern's

¹³ While my analysis of this intersection does not pursue its relationship to Yiddish culture specifically, Elaine Terranova observes, "Stern's emotional connection to animals is reminiscent of Yiddish folktales and the works of Yiddish writers like I. B. Singer and Isaac Babel. I'm thinking of Babel's story 'Dovecote' where the protagonist is a small boy whose greatest wish is to fill a dovecote with pigeons, but is waylaid by a pogrom, and Singer's 'Gimpel, the Fool,' when, in response to his wife's deception, Gimpel checks in the barn to make sure that his little goat is well. He wishes her a good night and she responds, Maa, 'as though to thank me for my good will'" (Rackin and Terranova 42).

nonhuman animals are philosophers and mystics, protectors and victims, and they sometimes speak, narrating what Stern supposes are their feelings and opinions. Anthropomorphizing nonhuman animals to the point of occasional ventriloquism is a risky poetics for a contemporary American poet, especially a poet who also unapologetically engages sentiment right up to the edge of—but I’d argue not crossing into—sentimentality. While critic John Shoptaw, in his recent article “Why Ecopoetry? There’s No Planet B,” has claimed that anthropomorphism “assumes that nonhumans exist on an utterly alien order of being” and that “we can only project human attributes, not recognize them, in other animals,” which are claims that Stern’s poems challenge repeatedly in their equal positioning of animal and human, Shoptaw ultimately argues that “[t]o empathize beyond humankind, ecopoets must be ready to commit the pathetic fallacy and to be charged with anthropomorphism.” Stern is only an “ecopoet” if we accept a lyric-oriented first-wave ecopoetry definition out of J. Scott Bryson or perhaps Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street (or, for that matter, a definition embraced as late as 2016 by Shoptaw), but no doubt Stern’s poetics—anthropomorphic pathetic fallacy and all—overlaps with the concerns of contemporary ecopoetry in at least one key way: the interconnectedness of life forms is one of Stern’s primary concerns as a poet. In his essay, “Third Worlds: The Poetry of Gerald Stern,” Jonathan Monroe figures this emphasis on interconnectedness as Whitmanic: “Like Whitman, Stern realizes the interdependence of all things: plants, animals, human beings and their objects. It is perhaps this awareness which gives such scope to his writing, and which most invites comparison between these two poets whose worlds are so changed from one another” (Monroe 46–47). Stern has spent much of his career distinguishing his worldview and

cadences from Whitman's in interviews, even as he acknowledges the influence, but this embrace of ecological and environmental interconnectedness that the two bards share is also at the core of most if not all conceptions of ecopoetry. Whether or not Stern "counts" as an eco poet in the first quarter of this twenty-first century, his concerns certainly align with many of those essential to ecopoetry.

And yet, it's difficult to name another prominent eco poet or even contemporary "nature poet" who ventriloquizes nonhuman animals. Talking animals tend to be the stuff of children's books and Aesop's fables, not serious contemporary poetry. Ethically, anthropomorphism is also on shaky ground. On the one hand, Stern's portrayal of nonhuman animals as quasi-humans is a reinscription of dominion, a colonial gesture of dignifying the "savage" through humanization; this reinscription of the hierarchy introduced in Genesis and reinforced dozens of times throughout the Bible is underscored by so much Jewish teaching.¹⁴ On the other hand, in Stern's effort to equalize human and nonhuman animal by way of shared emotional and philosophical realities, Stern joins contemporary Jewish studies/animal studies scholars, such as Beth Berkowitz, in illuminating Jewish arguments for preventing nonhuman animal suffering. Indeed, in his animal poems, Stern models and insists on behavior toward nonhuman animals that is not only against causing suffering but is in fact dignifying, compassionate, and respectful. For him, such radically equalizing and kind behavior toward animals is innately Jewish, aligning his poetics with the Talmudic anti-animal-cruelty teaching of *tsa'ar ba'ale hayim*, a transliterated Hebrew phrase that translates to "the suffering of animals."

¹⁴ "God bless them and God said to them, 'Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth'" (Genesis 1:28, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*).

Stern attends to these issues of human dignity, compassion, and respect toward nonhuman animals most affectingly in his road-kill poems, poems in which he explores the human-nonhuman animal relationship at the sites of collision. His fascination with, identification with, and grief for animals struck down on roads and highways has persisted throughout the decades since his first poem in this genre, “Burying an Animal on the Way to New York,” which appeared in a 1974 issue of *American Poetry Review* and then, three years later, in *Lucky Life*. Two of Stern’s most significant animal poems, the widely taught “Behaving Like a Jew” and the later, borderline-sentimental “The Dog,” are companion road-kill poems that most explicitly illustrate what is at stake for Stern as a Jew, an animal, and an anthropomorphizing poet when he pulls over on a country highway to examine the body of an animal struck dead by a humanmade machine.

This chapter’s organization is a bit like a spiral. In sections 1 and 2, I introduce Stern as Jewish animal poet by offering initial readings of “Behaving Like a Jew” and “The Dog,” placing these poems in dialogic companionship and offering a swift tour of the intellectual and emotional landscape the poems encompass. In section 3, I recircle these poems, revisiting them with deeper and more contextualized analysis and illustrating how reading Stern’s animal poems as Holocaust memorialization, as extensions of a Jewish prophetic mode, and as illustrations of *teshuvah*—reading them, that is, Jewishly—offers a richer understanding of the Sternian Jewish animal and models the kinds of insights a Jewish reading can highlight in Stern’s poetry more broadly.

Section 1: Behaving Like a Jew

In “Behaving Like a Jew,” first collected in *Lucky Life*, Stern describes an emotionally and philosophically stirring encounter with an opossum who has apparently been struck dead by a moving vehicle. The poem opens with the speaker’s—Stern’s—arrival at the scene¹⁵:

When I got there the dead opossum looked like
an enormous baby sleeping on the road. (1–2)

Stern turns immediately to a species-connecting simile, asserting the similarity between a “dead opossum” and an almost certainly human infant precariously asleep “on the road.” From the beginning, he asks his readers to visualize the opossum, if we can, anthropomorphically. By placing the “baby” on the road, Stern also invites his readers’ anxiety into the poem: the opossum may be dead, but it resembles a baby “sleeping,” alive but unknowingly in danger. The simile suggests the opossum’s ongoing vulnerability—to additional damage by cars, we might guess—but it also suggests the vulnerability of others of its kind, of other opossums and nonhuman animals, who are vulnerable always to human violence.

In addition, Stern’s simile enacts what his next lines expand upon: that comparing the nonhuman animal body to a human body helps him tap his “animal sorrow”:

It took me only a few seconds—just
seeing him there—with the hole in his back
and the wind blowing through his hair
to get back again into my animal sorrow. (3–6)

These four lines initiate Stern’s transformation of the opossum from nondescript human

¹⁵ Stern is widely understood to be the speaker in the vast majority of his poems, and he has confirmed in interviews investigating the origins of “Behaving Like a Jew” and “The Dog” in particular that he means for readers to understand him as the narrator in both.

baby into the poem's final image, in which the opossum is anthropomorphized into an adult male Jewish mystic: the opossum is suddenly gendered and has hair blowing in the wind, perhaps like Stern's hair. The "hole" in the opossum's back could have been caused by the fatal impact of a moving vehicle, or maybe scavenger beaks had started their scavenging before Stern arrived; according to Stern, the poem's image actually signifies a bullet hole. Stern recalls in interviews that he wrote this poem after reading an article by Charles Lindbergh in *Reader's Digest* about death; he'd read it in a hospital waiting room while his wife underwent a minor wrist procedure. "I was, of course, full of cancer, heart disease and such, and I was terrified," Stern explains. "I had just passed, driving my wife to the hospital, a dead opossum on the road with a bullet hole in its head and had helped it off the road" (Stern, "An Interview by Gary Pacernick" 43). On the one hand, the wound's location (the back, not the head, in the poem's image) conjures betrayal—being stabbed in the back, so to speak—again bringing this nonhuman animal death into the framework of human pain. The opossum has been essentially—at least almost—murdered by a human driving machine, and Stern is likewise wounded by his unexpected encounter with the aftermath. On the other hand, the hole was likely an act of human compassion: in rural areas, many drivers will, after having struck a nonhuman animal with their vehicles, pull over, take out a gun, and shoot the animal in the head to shorten the animal's suffering. Importantly, Stern cements his assertion of species equivalency when he names his grief "animal sorrow," a state of sadness that he is "get[ting] back again into," suggesting an ongoing familiarity with his own animality and an ongoing identification with animal struggles, suffering, and death. Stern is not only visualizing and conceiving of the opossum's body and wounds in human terms; he is likewise figuring his own

sorrow and wounds in nonhuman animal terms. The poem's remaining descriptions of Stern's emotional, intellectual, and physical responses to the opossum, then, must be understood as emerging from his identification with "animal sorrow."

Stern's animal sorrow is initially mournful but quickly gathers anger as the poem moves from the opossum's body to the increasingly broad physical and philosophical contexts the death exists within for Stern:

I am sick of the country, the bloodstained
bumpers, the stiff hairs sticking through the grilles, [...]
I am sick of the spirit of Lindbergh over everything,
that joy in death, that philosophical
understanding of carnage, that
concentration on the species. (7–8, 11–14)

These lines' associative movement away from the specific subject and image of the opossum is emblematic of Stern's poetic gesture. Also emblematic is Stern's directing his grief and sorrow toward the philosophical and historical structures that cause suffering. According to Monroe, in Stern's poems "one feels horror for the civilization which the intellect has created," the civilization that removes the body from considerations of tragedy and grief (46). It is the same civilization, of course, that could use reason and philosophy to justify genocide.

Stern's animal sorrow is also, though, about the animal itself. Sadoff finds evidence for this partly in Stern's phrase "concentration on the species." In addition to conjuring social Darwinism and concentration camps, Sadoff notes that in this phrase, "Stern's gesture suggests resemblances; he resists the New Testament's assertion that animals are placed on earth for human use" (156–157). Darwin himself, whose concentration on the word and idea of *species* is one of his most famous legacies,

believed that “Man is not a being different from animals or superior to them”; Stern’s poetics build upon this later Darwin, the Darwin brave enough to suggest that human beings are animals with more in common with nonhuman animals than we might like to admit (qtd. in Geller 189). By anthropomorphizing the opossum and animalizing his own emotional response (“animal sorrow”), Stern demonstrates less interest in concentrating on species differentiation than on resemblances across bodies and experiences.

Now, approximately halfway through the poem, Stern’s outrage at the opossum’s death and his identification with the opossum’s suffering translates into action. Sanford Pinsker observes that the poem’s “central tension” is “between thought and action, between the things that ‘sicken’ Stern and those that draw him ever closer to the opossum,” and what draws him closest to the opossum seems to be his decision to do something with his animal sorrow, his human-animal anger (“Weeping” 194). He declares he will take action:

---I am going to be unappeased at the opossum’s death.
I am going to behave like a Jew
and touch his face, and stare into his eyes,
and pull him off the road. (15–18)

The repetitive “I am” is decisive. As Pinsker notes, “Jewish ethics is less concerned with what one believes than it is with what one *does*. For Stern, this translates into a set of concrete actions: pulling his car off the road [...]; touching the opossum’s face; staring into his dead eyes” (Pinsker, “Weeping” 195). Stern’s physically intimate act of compassion is noteworthy not only because it is an action (rather than the typical American grief currency of “thoughts and prayers”) but also because it lifts interspecies connection and resemblance above what is typical even between human beings. It

provides a model for how to treat our fellow creatures. Because this act of compassion is, according to Stern, inherently Jewish, the scene and poem suggest that Jewish behavior toward nonhuman animals—and also, Jewish behavior toward grief and death—is inherently active and compassionate.

Stern reinforces in the final lines of the poem that the Jewish approach to death is not intellectual or philosophical (especially à la Lindbergh); it is physical, embodied, and predicated on our interconnectedness. Religious Jewish grief traditions include the bereaved rending their clothing and receiving community condolences and gifts of food for a set duration; as for the deceased's body, a *chevra kadisha*, an organization of individuals who watch over and care for the dead, tend to the body of the deceased with a ritualized water cleansing and ceremonially clothe the body in white fabric. Jewish mourning entails active touch and care. This is no less true, for Stern, when the deceased is another species. He insists on the physicality of his connection to the opossum:

I am not going to stand in a wet ditch
with the Toyotas and the Chevys passing over me
at sixty miles per hour
and praise the beauty and the balance
and lose myself in the immortal lifestream
when my hands are still a little shaky
from his stiffness and his bulk
and my eyes are still weak and misty
from his round belly and his curved fingers
and his black whiskers and his little dancing feet. (19–28)

For Stern, this encounter with animal death becomes increasingly personal as the poem reaches its end. The opossum's corpse and all it symbolizes fix Stern physically and emotionally in the moment; rather than "lose" himself "in the immortal lifestream," he is attentive and responsive.

Stern's emotional attentiveness lives as much in the content of these lines as it does in their music. The last five lines are signature Stern, both for their turn to what Hirsch calls Stern's "elegiac tenderness" in a poem that otherwise holds such moral outrage and for their music (88). By *music*, I mean a few things: First, there is music in how the common monosyllabic and disyllabic words cluster metrical stresses in spondees and trochees, enacting the blunt force of English's Anglo-Saxon roots. Music also lives in these lines' consonance, especially in the *k* sound punching its grief in each of these final lines but one. And then there is the tender, mournful repetition of *still, my, his, and little*. "Maybe it's the exquisite interpenetration of these two things," he writes: "moral force and tenderness, or brute power and tenderness, that underlies all the music" (Hass et al 23). Such music, such interpenetration, conveys physical presence within "animal sorrow." And in all of this music, this physicality and presence and animal sorrow, is what it means, for Stern, to behave (and sing, and write) like a Jew.

Section 2: Behaving Like a Dog

"The Dog" was first collected in *Lovesick*, which appeared in 1987, ten years after *Lucky Life* gave us "Behaving Like a Jew"; the two poems are clearly in conversation, with "The Dog" enriching not only our understanding of the various layers in "Behaving" but also of Stern's animal poetics more broadly. That enrichment is not without complexity or discomfort. For example, Stern is still "behaving like a Jew" in "The Dog"—observing, grieving, and preparing to take, we can surmise from the poem, compassionate action—but when he speaks as the dog rather than as himself, is he also behaving like a dog? An *actual* dog? Stern has been writing poems exploring human-

canine relations for his whole career—one of his most recent examples is his poem “Merwin” from *Galaxy Love*, in which he remembers W. S. Merwin going out of his way to help a homeless person with a dog—but “The Dog” is Stern’s only attempt to fully embody and speak for a canine. To derive a poetics teaching from Marianne Moore’s “Poetry,” poetry ought to have “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.” In “The Dog,” the fields of the apparently real (a dead dog, a curious human being) and of the apparently imagined (a dog speaking from beyond the grave) are superimposed, making for a complex entanglement of dog and Stern. This entanglement could lead some to dismiss “The Dog” as sentimental. But ultimately, Stern’s risky ventriloquizing anthropomorphism in “The Dog” enables him to reveal just how profoundly unstable the categories of human and nonhuman animal are: moral action, longing, grief, and even Jewishness are not exclusive to either animal category in Stern’s poem. In this way, Stern’s increased risk-taking poetically in “The Dog” enables him to push his animal ethics and poetics further, adding layers to what it means to behave like a Jew.

“The Dog” starts much like “Behaving”: in medias res, at the side of the road, with a figure we can assume to be Stern studying a nonhuman animal apparently killed by a moving vehicle. Like “Behaving,” “The Dog” moves between close observation and broader ruminations, relying on repetition and mostly monosyllabic and disyllabic Anglo-Saxon-rooted words to create its music; it also similarly gathers momentum by way of anaphora and driving meter (in this case, irregular but mostly iambic phrasing) in the final five lines. Also like “Behaving,” these final lines emphasize the complexity of human and nonhuman animal resemblances and complicate humans’ ancient predisposition to place ourselves hierarchically above nonhuman animals. The crucial

difference in this poem is that the dead animal narrates “The Dog” from beyond the grave, so to speak, and Stern—and by extension, Stern’s species—is the subject of the dog’s musings. The script is flipped.

Early in the poem, the dog wonders why he¹⁶ finds himself dead “on the side of the road,” by a “sewer,” with his “white teeth exposed,” waiting in death “so that the lover of dead things could come back / with his pencil sharpened and his piece of white paper” (1–5). Stern, by way of the dog’s voice, self-deprecatingly imagines dead animals perceiving him as “the lover of dead things”; he knows he is predisposed to pulling over to mourn, study, and move dead animals and that, beyond the realm of road kill, death is one of his obsessions as a poet. This characterization is an opportunity for the dog to demonstrate wry wisdom and for Stern to convey to readers that he’s in on the joke—he knows longtime readers have read a version of this poem’s situation before. His self-characterization also introduces the dual truth that while the human—Stern—might feel good about his act of attentive mourning, the dog wants more than to be studied by a man whose “hand is shaking” and whose “pencil must be jerking” as “the terror / of smell—and sight—is overtaking him” and whose contemplation of the dog’s corpse gives him “that terrified faraway look / that death brings” (17–18). The dog wants more than poetry; he wants to be touched. The poem shifts at its volta in line 27 to apostrophe and unfettered pathos: the dog’s plea for a loving connection with “the lover of dead things”

¹⁶ In the poem, the dog is not explicitly gendered. It is valid to read the poem with gender completely open-ended, but because I believe Stern sees himself—and the male opossum from “Behaving Like a Jew”—in the dog, and he genders both himself and the opossum as male, and because using “he/she/they” or “it” to describe the dog either draws excessive and distracting attention to gender or, in the latter case, objectifies the dog, I have made the imperfect compromise to refer to the dog as male. I encourage the reader to remember, within my analysis, that the dog’s gender is ambiguous.

gains the urgency of a climactic monologue or an operatic aria. The poem pushes sentiment to the edge, almost overflowing into melodrama—almost making a cartoon of the very anthropomorphized dog.

Bleeding Together: “Give Me Your Pity”

In the animal poetics and Judaism that Stern brings to the page, behaving like a dog, like behaving like a Jew, means embracing that human and nonhuman animals bleed together—both in terms of blurred boundaries and in terms of shared suffering across species. When we grieve nonhuman animal lives as we grieve our own, and when we allow for the possibility of nonhuman animal emotion and grief, we can see our lives and our survival as interdependent with and in solidarity with nonhuman animal lives. This perspective is at the heart of Stern’s animal poetics, particularly his rejection of interspecies boundaries—of “concentrat[ing] on the species.” In “The Dog,” human and dog bleed together in their grief, in their longing for connection, in their Jewish morality, and even in their selfhood.

As in “Behaving,” “The Dog” enacts a grief that transcends species boundaries.

Early in the poem, the dog narrates the lonely hours of his dying before Stern returns:

I was there for a good two hours whistling
dirges, shrieking a little, terrifying
hearts with my whimpering cries before I died [...]. (6–8)

These lines attribute human qualities to the dog in several ways: first, the dog measures time using “hours”; second, he is “whistling,” and while dogs can make sounds akin to whistling, they can’t quite whistle in the sense of puckered lips and melodically complex song; and third, the dog is whistling “*dirges*.” A human song of grief that is funereal,

ritualized—even religious—would be miraculous to hear from a dog’s mouth, but in the world of the poem we are asked to suspend disbelief. The dog’s mourning his own demise is at once darkly humorous and emotionally stirring, but the irony at play in Stern’s diction is tragic: the dog uses a human expression of grief to mourn a death caused by, we can suppose, human machinery—a car surely driven by a human being. That the dog’s grief expression, like his death, couldn’t happen without human beings enables Stern to use this poem to comment on our human responsibility to nonhuman animals, especially those we have bred and domesticated. In the poem’s final lines, the dog addresses his domestication and the humiliation of having endured human “training”:

I have exchanged my wildness—little tricks
with the mouth and feet, with the tail, my tongue is a parrot’s,
I am a rampant horse, I am a lion,
I wait for the cookie, I snap my teeth—
as you have taught me, oh distant and brilliant and lonely. (34–48)

In these lines are echoes of Kafka’s dog-narrated story, “Investigations of a Dog,” though Kafka’s humorously (almost excruciatingly) philosophical canine narrator does not share Stern’s dog’s understanding that dog food comes from human beings or that the rhythms of dogs’ lives are largely defined by and dependent upon human beings. Indeed, Kafka’s dog is bewildered by dog circumstances involving human beings, such as an apparent dog circus, but struggles to connect the dots. Stern’s dog perceives his material conditions, knowing that he has traded “wildness” for “little tricks,” he has been a good student, and he has suffered immensely from the “distan[ce]” of his human companion—who is a Kafkaesque stand-in, I think, for humanity at large by the end of the poem.

A dirge is also, of course, a mournful poem, so the word becomes a hinge between the dog’s poem world—his poetic monologue—and Stern’s poem itself. The dog’s pre-

death whistled “dirges” give way to his spoken dirge, which is Sternian not only in its authorship but also in its cadences and voice. In “The Dog,” we find Stern’s biblically descended repetition patterns, his familiarly plain diction, and his iambic leanings. The word *dirge* is not only a hinge or a point of permeability between the dog’s dirge and Stern’s dirge in this single poem but also between the dog-as-poet and Stern-as-poet: “The Dog” is a grief-song among Sternian grief-songs, including “Behaving Like a Jew,” whose final lines reverberate in the phrase “little tricks / with the mouth and feet” (34–35). When I asked Stern about this poem’s origin, he described stopping to grieve a dead dog on the side of an Alabama road, on his way to teach at the University of Alabama as a visiting professor—as with “Behaving,” his grief-encounter yielded a dirge (Stern, Personal interview).

In another of Stern’s road kill poems, “Burying an Animal on the Way to New York,” Stern recalls a less tactile encounter with road kill:

Don’t flinch when you come across a dead animal lying on the road;
you are being shown the secret of life.
Drive slowly over the brown flesh;
you are helping to bury it. (1–4)

For Stern, the encounter is funereal, and we, the drivers, are “mourner[s]”:

If you are the last mourner there will be no caress
at all from the crushed limbs
Slow down with your radio off and your window open
to hear the twittering as you go by. (5–6; 11–12)

In this dirge, Stern instructs the reader that no matter how hard it is to recognize the self in the nonhuman animal—even when one is “helping to bury” a dead animal by driving over it (which is not Stern’s ideal action), even when one’s car buries the very last of the remains into the asphalt, when one is “the last mourner” flattening the last of the

creature's body into "a dark spot" on the highway—one must think of oneself as a *mourner*, to "slow down" with one's "radio off" and "window open" to listen, attend, and grieve (4–6, 11). The fragments of spirit that "twitter" in the air are not unlike the dog that whistles dirges before and after his death or the poet who writes poem after poem out of more or less the same roadside scenario.

In "The Dog," Stern is "whistling dirges" that he has created for other animal deaths, weaving from them a new dirge, this time sung through the dog's mouth. In this way, Stern and the dog (and the long line of other dead animals, human and nonhuman) are one in his poem, as is their expression of grief. But their grief is not only united by the expression of human dirges; their shared grief is also united by the animal grief of the dog's "shrieking" and "whimpering" and by the human's "shaking" hand and open mouth and "jerking" pencil (7, 8, 13–15). In body and in spirit—in visceral response and in composed dirge—the animal and the dog's grief fuse.

Within their shared grief, both creatures long for connection, with the dog hoping Stern will "touch my forehead once" and "rub my muzzle" and then pleading with Stern to love and pity him as Stern moves his body, and with Stern longing so deeply to understand the dog that he assumes what he imagines to be the dog's perspective—the dog's prayer of sorts that Stern will lovingly lift his body from its place of indignity—as Stern prepares, we might assume, to in fact answer that imagined prayer (18, 27–31).

And yet, lifting the body is no longer enough for Stern ten years after "Behaving Like a Jew." No, "The Dog" offers a corrective, a kind of *teshuvah*, as I discuss in section 3. In "The Dog," Stern makes explicit what it means to behave like a Jew in the face of animal suffering and animal death: it means to "lov[e]" the animal, to "give [him] your

tears,” to “remember,” to “forgive,” and to “give [him] your pity” (28–31). It means to lift the body by hand rather than use a “shoe for fear of touching” it (22). It also means to acknowledge human animals’ role in making nonhuman animals pitiful; whatever pity the dog begs for emerges from his being taught to beg. The poem’s final lines describe how domestication and breeding have turned the wolf into the dog, a trained companion who performs for the hope of human love and pity. Human beings, “distant and brilliant and lonely,” have bred dogs to be dependent, trainable, and anything but wild. For the dog in Stern’s poem, this reality is a loss. Atoning for that domestication and distance can look like many different actions, one of which might be writing a poem like “The Dog,” in which human and nonhuman animals more explicitly share and struggle within the same moral universe. Indeed, in “The Dog,” what it is to be animal, to be moral, and to behave like a Jew does not differentiate between species.

In Stern’s poems, Sadoff notes, Stern is “willing to lose the boundaries of self to absorb the other” (Sadoff 162). Nowhere is Stern’s desire to “lose the boundaries” between self and other more on display than in his animal poems—where I would argue he doesn’t so much desire to absorb the other as to experience self and other as flowing together. In a recent interview, Stern said, “There are no boundaries” when I cited the “permeable boundaries” between human and nonhuman animals in his poems—in particular, in “Behaving Like a Jew” and “The Dog” (Stern, Personal interview). Indeed, in “The Dog,” Stern layers the dog and the human so thickly that more than simply bleeding together, the two figures—the two voices, and the two species, even—can hardly be differentiated.

The best evidence for this thick layering can be found in the poem's voice: the poem is narrated in Stern's voice from the dog's perspective as the dog observes a human figure, who is also Stern; the Stern in the poem is taking notes that become, we might suppose, the poem we read—so the voice of the poem is a bit like an ouroboros. Stern speaks from the notes of the Stern in the poem through the mouth of the dog, whose voice is both Stern's and clearly not Stern's, mocking him and begging him to do better. Then there is the capacious *we* in the poem, when the dog says, "There is a look we have with the hair of the chin / curled in mid-air, there is a look with the belly / stopped in the midst of its greed" (10–12). The most accessible meaning of the *we* is that the dog speaks for all dogs, describing the canine appearance just at or after death. But there is also of course the simultaneous description of dog and human as one: both species have hair at the chin and bellies whose motion stops at death, and *greed* certainly seems to suggest humanity. In his reading, Sadoff notes that the dog "looks at this 'lover' as man and dog (the metaphor is literally and figuratively touching)," and the moment when the dog refers to *we* is one of those touching points (Sadoff 155). But the chin and the belly are not only evidence of similarity or of boundarilessness between dog and human but also of a deeper reference and a deeper meaning. Recall the "round belly" and "black whiskers" of the opossum in "Behaving," and here we have a point when also "The Dog" and "Behaving Like a Jew" are touching; the latter image of the dog's body recalls the opossum's. When the "lover of dead things / stoops to feel [the dog]" in the next lines, he is, I think, also stooping to feel himself, to feel the opossum of a decade previous, and to touch the grief he carries within him always for those lost in the Holocaust—a reading I will offer in section 3, in the context of Stern's poems being read as Holocaust memorialization

(Stern, “Behaving” 27–28). These layers of embodied selfhood and grief are best considered not as separate layers but as superimposed into a single, merged image.

It is also probably best to avoid differentiating between the “dog’s way” and the “great human heart” in the poem. The dog muses, after hoping Stern “doesn’t use / his shoe for fear of touching me,”

I hope the dog’s way
doesn’t overtake him, one quick push,
barely that, and the mind freed, something else,
some other thing, to take its place. Great heart,
great human heart, keep loving me as you lift me [...] (21–22, 24–28)

The poem continues from there, with the dog begging the “lover of dead things” to lovingly handle his dead body. The part of humanity that would use a shoe “for fear of touching” a dead dog, in other words, is the “dog’s way”; the dog’s way is brutish, quick, and without feeling. The “great human heart” that would treat the dog lovingly is the heart that the dog himself is more in touch with, it seems, than the human is; the human forgets love, often favoring the harsher brute within that wants to act and move on.¹⁷ The dog, supposedly the more brutish one, expresses deep emotional longing. Again, the ouroboros: the dog’s way is to ask the human to be humane while the human’s urge may be more “doglike.” And yet it is the great human heart that writes the poem about the human struggle to meet the dog’s emotional need for the human heart. The similarities and interconnectedness across the two animal species is Stern’s point.

¹⁷ Stern remains fascinated by this brutish human instinct in his recent poem “Baby Rat,” in which he writes:

someone
will kick the baby rat into a sewer
or pick him up with a tissue and throw him back
and get on his phone in a second to rid himself
somehow of the horrible sight [...] (8–12)

Section 3: The Jew and the Animal Are One: (Re)reading Stern's Poems Jewishly

Having introduced two of the major poems this chapter engages in the previous two sections, I will now offer readings that reexamine both poems from a more precisely Jewish angle and that then spiral out, reaching into the larger landscape of Stern's work and beyond it. Doing so will entail visiting other important animal poems that help define Stern's animal poetics further, paying special attention to his poem "The Jew and the Rooster Are One," in order to offer a model for reading Stern, and other Jewish poets, Jewishly. This section briefly starts with a broader contextualization of Stern's work beyond the Jewish tradition in order to help place him in a familiar landscape. Next it considers Stern's anthropomorphism from a Jewish perspective, which is a gateway to the subsequent readings on Stern's animal poems: as Holocaust Memorialization, as extensions of a significant Jewish prophet-poet tradition, and as texts that enact *teshuvah*, the ritual of atonement. In offering these novel readings of Stern's animal poems, I demonstrate that to fully appreciate Stern's work requires a willingness to read it Jewishly.

Contextualizing Stern: A Brief Sketch Beyond Jewish Tradition

Human beings have been exploring the relationship between human and nonhuman animals since long before Gerald Stern, of course. Ancient civilizations on nearly every continent have engaged in totemic practices, for example, considering certain nonhuman animals to be like—or even superior to—human beings and ascribing protective and advisory powers to such animals as well as to other life forms. And the

question of whether animals should be considered “persons,” in the legal as well as moral sense, has been alive since at least 1386, when, as medievalist Edward Wheatley recounts, a sow who had fatally maimed a human baby was charged, tried, and sentenced to hanging in the Norman town of Falaise and then, to underscore her culpability as a *person*, was dressed in human clothing for her hanging. Meanwhile, human distrust and fear of our own animality has had similar longevity, crystallizing in the Enlightenment ideal that humans should actively suppress “the feared beast within,” as Geller notes, in apprehension of the reality “that the animal lies beneath the veneer of our moral and rational comportment and thereby undermines our sense of ourselves as the exception to all other creatures” (188). The fear of the animal within extends into the early American colonists’ suspicion and fear of the wilderness and the beasts (human and nonhuman) therein—a fear at least partly assuaged by Transcendentalist works like Thoreau’s *Walden*. That fear persists through Darwin’s and then Freud’s embrace of the notion that we humans are all just animals, however sophisticated our species. Freud’s identification of what he called the id, the base animal instinct within us, places nonhuman animal instincts (and thus nonhuman animals) as decidedly below higher-order human instincts, an assertion that is one stop on the long slippery slope that has invited some human beings to degrade other human beings by negatively associating them—us—with “lesser” animal beings. The maneuver has not only been used to belittle Jewish people but also the dark-skinned, the disabled, and other marginalized groups.

Stern is likewise far from the first to write empathetically about nonhuman animals in literature. Writers have been approaching their nonhuman animal cousins with empathetic appreciation throughout the history of literature: we see this in the verse from

which Jewish scholars derive the directive to not harm animals, Exodus 23:5—“When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him” (*JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*); in Aesop’s animal-appreciating fables; in Christopher Smart’s eighteenth-century astounding praise poem for his cat, “Jubilate Agno”; in Whitman’s “A Noiseless Patient Spider” in which the poet compares his soul to the soul of a spider, inviting empathy for the spider’s existential plight, “[s]urrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space” (7); and Jewett’s “A White Heron,” in which the titular bird is as worthy of protection as is Sylvia, Jewett’s protagonist: Sylvia sacrifices a potential new friendship with a hunter-ornithologist who is interested in finding the heron’s nest, as well as a financial award, so that the heron might continue to live. Stern’s animal poems partly emerge from this literary history of empathetic animal engagement.

Why Read Stern Jewishly?

Reading Stern’s animal poems from a Jewish perspective highlights differences between Stern’s empathetic engagement with nonhuman animals and that of his non-Jewish predecessors. One key difference is that when Stern associates—never mind conflates—Jew with nonhuman animal, Stern, as a Jew, challenges historically anti-Jewish scripts; rather than lower the Jew’s status by association with the dog or the opossum (or the bat, rat, squirrel, deer, and so on), Stern dignifies both Jew and nonhuman animal into emotionally wise, sensitive, and moral beings. In so doing, Stern enacts his Jewishness in some surprising ways and offers readers a novel approach by which to study his animal poems as well as those of his Jewish American peers.

One need not look further for Stern's dignifying conflation of Jew and nonhuman animal than the final lines of "Behaving Like a Jew," wherein the poet's attentive presence for the opossum and for his own grief is part of what it means, for Stern, to behave like a Jew. Indeed, these lines are emblematic of Stern's Jewish animal poetics when the Jew and the opossum merge: the opossum's features blur with those of a quintessential Jewish mystic as Stern calls forth the opossum's "round belly" and "black whiskers" and "little dancing feet" (27–28). This merging of species turns anti-Jewish animalization on its head, implying that wisdom (ecstatic Jewish wisdom!) lives in the animal. This glorification of and identification with seemingly spiritual nonhuman life brings to mind another visionary Jewish American poet, Allen Ginsberg, whose "Sunflower Sutra" reminds that our bodies are not "locomotives" but, instead, "golden / sunflowers inside, blessed [...]" (47–48). Like Ginsberg, Stern spiritually (and bodily) identifies with nonhuman life in his poem, but the difference is that unlike a sunflower, whose beauty has been agreed upon in white Western culture since at least Van Gogh, an opossum is beautiful and mystical within a paradigm distinct from dominant Western culture. As Sadoff observes, "These lines reflect Stern's resistance to the transcendental and the enlightenment ideal" (157); Stern rejects Lindbergh's "joy in death" and embraces rather than represses the animal sorrow within him and the humanlike capacity for joy and sophistication in the opossum. Stern's identification of the bodily and even moral resemblances across the two species also asserts the resemblances, as the whole poem does, between the present moment on a rural highway and the historical moments and figures that Stern associates with the scene. Pinsker reconnects the poem's final lines specifically to Lindbergh and to Stern's imagining of the opossum as a fellow Jew:

If Lindbergh embodies a Romantic tradition that conflates joy and death, the “black whiskers and . . . little dancing feet” suggest a Romanticism of a very different sort, one that felt the essential holiness in all things and that danced and prayed in an effort to release these “holy sparks” from the vessels in which they were imprisoned [...] the modern Hassidic movement we associate with the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples. (Pinsker, “Weeping” 195)

The last lines of the poem seem not only to offer an alternative philosophy to Lindbergh’s but also to allude to a Jewish mystic, a figure that might symbolize, for Stern, Jews he has known—perhaps even himself. In an interview for PBS’s *NewsHour*, Stern says of the opossum, “I’m talking—I guess—simultaneously about the opossum and a—a *rebbe*—medieval religious leader, with his little dancing feet, and with his black whiskers” (Stern, Interview with Elizabeth Farnsworth). This simultaneity between Jew and opossum recalls the poem’s opening image in which the opossum is compared to a baby.¹⁸ In these final lines Stern “reasserts the correspondence between the opossum and the human, the victim and the Jew (both consequences of historical and religious domination)” (Sadoff 157). This correspondence is important to Stern’s animal poetics; because of the corresponding suffering of animals and Jews, Stern is able to imagine Jewish bodies and nonhuman animal bodies as worthy of tender attention, and as kin.

Anthropomorphism and Jewishness

Likewise, this correspondence in suffering between nonhuman animals and Jews (rather than the anti-Jewish assertion of a correspondence in baseness or evilness) means that Stern’s anthropomorphism, when compared to that of Jonathan Swift’s Houyhnhnms or of Aesop’s tortoise and hare, is addressing a different, specifically Jewish problem. For

¹⁸ The baby also brings to mind Lindbergh’s famously kidnapped baby, suggesting further layers of interconnectedness and resemblance across the poem’s images.

example, in “Behaving Like a Jew,” Stern’s anthropomorphic rendering of the opossum enables him to challenge the biblical hierarchy that would make the opossum less important than a human baby or a Jewish mystic or a Jewish poet driving along a highway; it offers Stern the opportunity to commemorate and memorialize the Holocaust dead and nonhuman animal road kill at once, suggesting that an overarching violence and grief link these victims of hierarchical thinking and of human technology; and it renders the opossum’s body legible and worthy of loving grief for those readers unaccustomed to examining closely or feeling deeply the similarities between human and nonhuman animal life forms—from the hair to the toes. For Stern, behaving like a Jew requires not just picking the opossum up off the road but studying him, seeing himself in him, creating art that memorializes him, and asking readers to join him in not only witness but outrage, love, and grief—animal sorrow—on behalf of the opossum and the other bodies, human and not, that the opossum represents. It’s not that previous anthropomorphizing poets lack such complexity but rather that Stern’s complexity is and must be read as specifically Jewish.

Stern’s next-level anthropomorphism in “The Dog” confirms why anthropomorphism is a risky device in contemporary poetry. First is the risk of not being taken seriously; anthropomorphism can slip easily into the sentimental, the childish, and the genre of fables. In *Still Burning*, a short film about him, Stern admits he still reads Aesop’s fables regularly. Elaine Terranova reads even this influence Jewishly when she connects Stern’s affinity for Aesop with Saul Bellow’s assertion that “[i]n the stories of the Jewish tradition [...], the world, and even the universe, have a human meaning” (qtd. in Rackin and Terranova 42). Perhaps it is only natural for human beings to project

human meaning, to some degree, on other living beings, but Stern seems in his poems to *recognize* human attributes in nonhuman animals rather than simply imagine or project them. Asserting this interspecies resemblance by putting human speech into the mouths of nonhuman animals, as Stern does in “The Dog,” crosses a line that seems to contradict his apparent animal ethics. Indeed, the second risk of anthropomorphizing animal subjects is that it can reinforce human dominion over and oppression of animals. There is a difference between recognizing kinship and dignity in nonhuman animal bodies and ventriloquizing nonhuman animal bodies like puppets. Puppets, of course, are rarely convincing representations of the living—especially when the puppets represent nonhuman animals and appear to speak like humans.

What justifies the extreme anthropomorphism in “The Dog” is its resistance to—or, as Sadoff observes, “deflation of”—anthropocentrism (Sadoff 154). To be a bit more nuanced, the poem’s anthropocentric aspects—the fact that the dog’s voice is expressed in human language, the fact that the poem cannot avoid a perspective that is, at its core, human—is counterbalanced by its complex interweaving of human and nonhuman animal bodies, voices, and ways of being. The human voice in “The Dog” is the portal to a poem experience in which human and nonhuman animal can merge, not unlike the merge of Stern and the opossum. Whether or not anthropomorphism is *necessary* to the expression of Sternian Jewish behavior or to the establishment of interspecies compassion, it works in “The Dog” by enabling Stern to blur not only boundaries but also the center: Just as one could argue that the poem centers death when it simultaneously centers action, which is the work of the living, one could easily argue that the human is centered in the poem when clearly, so is the dog. Each species is centered and decentered in turn, destabilized

into overlapping or unbounded life forms that bleed, for all intents and purposes, the same blood.

To best underscore why Stern's casting the Jew and the animal as one is specifically a Jewish rather than anti-Jewish act, we must go beyond the fact of Stern's Judaism to the larger Jewish practices and rituals with which Stern's poems engage: Holocaust memorialization, biblical prophecy, and *teshuvah*. Reading with these practices in mind clarifies and magnifies the Jewishness of Stern's activism, a reading practice I will build upon in my subsequent chapters on Adrienne Rich and Maxine Kumin. For Stern, the heart of Jewish activism, as we have seen, is found in considering first what it means to behave like a Jew in the face of nonhuman animal suffering and nonhuman animal death, and second, how to correct Western culture's "concentration on the species" so that, instead, we might better attend to the ways we, human and nonhuman animals, are similar.

Holocaust Memorialization

The opening poem in Stern's first poetry collection takes place, as the poem's title indicates, "In Kovalchick's Garden," a Pennsylvania garden Stern imagines is owned by a Polish landlord; in the poem Stern lives, as he once did, on that property with a dying pear tree and a cardinal who is "part wistful, part mordant" because "[s]he is getting rid of corpses" (7–8).¹⁹ Stern calls this his breakthrough poem because in it he found his

¹⁹ In an interview with Pinsker, Stern explains, "Kovalchick was the name of a Polish man who owned a large junkyard in Indiana, Pa., where I was teaching at the time. And I had this strange sense that he was *everybody's* landlord—including mine." When Stern tried to write about the dying pear tree in his yard, his efforts kept falling flat. "Then

voice and stopped self-consciously imitating the poets who came before him. The poem is also significant because Stern refers to the cardinal first as an “it” and then as a “she,” initiating his career-long commitment to de-objectifying nonhuman animals by affording them genders. But Stern also initiates yet another important career-long move in this poem: he finds within the animal kingdom brethren and sistren who help him memorialize the lives lost in the Holocaust—those “corpses” disposed of on Polish land. From the beginning, Stern has drawn animal sorrow from his emotional connections with nonhuman animals, and from the beginning, this grief has been tied to the Holocaust.

In “Behaving Like a Jew,” published just a few years after “In Kovalchick’s Garden,” Stern more explicitly memorializes the Holocaust in his allusive volta toward being

sick of the spirit of Lindbergh over everything,
that joy in death, that philosophical
understanding of carnage, that
concentration on the species. (11–14)

Much critical attention has been paid to Stern’s grief about the Holocaust in “Behaving Like a Jew,” most notably his invocation of Lindbergh—aviator, American hero, Nazi sympathizer, and writer, as we know, of an article whose placement in a hospital waiting room helped create the occasion for this poem. Sadoff notes that Stern “associates Lindbergh, as famous for his sympathies with the Nazis as he is for flying across the Atlantic, as an emblem both of conquest and of anti-Semitism” and that in this part of the poem, “[t]he force of history intrudes on the speaker’s desire for fusion and oneness”; Stern’s grief and identification with the opossum is historically located and layered (157).

suddenly it hit me: I’m forty years old, and I don’t have a thing to show” (Pinsker, *Conversations* 88–89).

Pinsker sees the allusion's referent as even more complex, as referencing the "Lindbergh who later found himself enthralled by the *sturm und drang* of German Romanticism, by philosophies that equated beauty with death, by the cult of Adolph Hitler. As Stern knows, such romanticism led directly to the death camps, where a 'concentration on the species' took a grisly, nightmarish turn" (Pinsker, "Weeping" 194).²⁰ Indeed, in his interview with Gary Pacernick, Stern discusses the allusion directly:

STERN: Reading the article by Lindbergh, I thought of the opossum as a kind of Jew. Perfectly absurd. And I thought of Lindbergh's anti-Semitism, and I thought of the whole view of death that's expressed in that *Reader's Digest* article, almost a kind of mystic love of death, as being totally alien to Judaism.

PACERNICK: Well, you have a Jew as both the one who empathizes with the victim and now you're saying the Jew is the victim.

STERN: "His little dancing feet, his round belly, his beard." [...] He's both, you're right. Exactly. (Stern, "An Interview by Gary Pacernick" 43)

For Stern, every suffering animal, especially every human-wounded animal, doubles as the Jewish Holocaust dead. And when carnage is "philosophical" rather than visceral—located in the head rather than the body—any creature associated more with animality (of the body) than with the intellect is more easily devoured or rendered disposable. The opossum's animal body, like the Jew's pejoratively imagined animal body in Nazi Europe, is disposable in such a paradigm—a paradigm in which humans "concentrat[e]" on the "species"/race/religion/difference between beings when considering which life is valuable and which murderable.

²⁰ Pinsker adds, "There is a risk, of course, that readers will settle too quickly, too easily, for the heroic Lindbergh of old news clips and miss the darker patterns that Stern's charged words make," which is fair criticism ("Weeping" 194). None of the scholarly readings I have encountered have made this oversight.

By figuring the dead opossum specifically as a dancing Jew in “Behaving,” Stern furthers the poem’s interest in mourning and commemorating the Holocaust. Most notably, this relationship is the subject of his poem “The Dancing,” in which Stern writes, in reference to celebrating the end of the Second World War, that he has never

danced as I did
then, my knives all flashing, my hair all streaming,
my mother red with laughter, my father cupping
his left hand under his armpit, doing the dance
of old Ukraine, the sound of his skin half drum,
half fart, the world at last a meadow,
the three of us whirling and singing, the three of us
screaming and falling, as if we were dying,
as if we could never stop—in 1945—
in Pittsburgh, beautiful filthy Pittsburgh, home
of the evil Mellons, 5,000 miles away
from the other dancing—in Poland and Germany—
oh God of mercy, oh wild God. (7–19)

The “little dancing feet” of the opossum in “Behaving” call forth both kinds of dancing referenced in this poem: the joyful and the horrifying. In her reading of “The Dancing,” Ostriker reflects on what Stern might mean by that “other dancing”:

I think he wants me to feel that “other dancing” in Poland and Germany as the dance of the newly-rescued almost-doomed Jews of Europe, a third of them having died indeed. And what of the almost-exhausted gasp of the final line, invoking the God who rescued some thousands, and failed to rescue millions? That God is wild as a wild card is wild—unpredictable. “The Dancing” is, or pretends to be, a poem of antic gratitude. It’s a poem of oxymorons piled high. (Ostriker, “Who’s Minding” 19)

The parallel between Stern’s family dancing an old-world dance in the new world and the remnant of rescued European Jews dancing, in some cases, similar old-world dances in Europe is affecting, but I would push Ostriker’s reading of the poem’s oxymorons further; the “other dancing” is at once the joyful dance of survival and, at the same time, what Sadoff reads as “the corresponding screaming and falling [...] [of] Jews in the

concentration camps”: the violent “dance” of a body fighting against gas, being forced into various horrors, trying to avoid or falling victim to guns or attack dogs; it is the “other dancing” that the Jewish “wild God”—indeed, as in “wild card” or, as Sadoff reads this line, as in an “incomprehensibly ‘wild’ God who permits unmitigated evil”—apparently permitted in and before 1945 (Sadoff 146–47; 157–58). This “other dancing” also alludes to Paul C elan’s famous Holocaust poem, “Todesfugue,” which uses dancing as one of its dark motifs. And all three of these instances of Jews dancing—American joy, European liberation, European suffering and death—are brought together in the “little dancing feet” of Stern’s opossum. While Stern’s survivor guilt does not preclude joy in “The Dancing,” his guilt is lodged in his “animal sorrow” in “Behaving Like a Jew.”

Though it is subtler, Stern’s Holocaust grief and attendant survivor guilt are also present in “The Dog.” Stern’s expression of the dog’s sacrifice and sense of betrayal is certainly a commentary on humanity’s relationship to dogs and, by extension, our relationship to domesticated animals. In addition, I’d argue this expression of sacrifice and betrayal obliquely alludes to Jews learning how to live and, as best as they could, assimilate in pre-Holocaust Gentile Europe; being perpetually denied equal footing within Gentile society; and then being betrayed by the “final solution.” In the context of “Behaving Like a Jew” and of the rest of Stern’s oeuvre, it would be an oversight to ignore the Jewish grief, the Holocaust grief, in “The Dog.” Reading the poems side by side reveals that “Behaving Like a Jew” is implicitly recalled by the latter poem’s scene, narrative, rhetorical moves, and voice, and it is explicitly recalled by the dog’s “hair of the chin,” “belly,” and by phrases like “I want him / to touch my forehead” (10, 11, 18–19). “The Dog” extends the mourning begun ten years previously with “Behaving,”

including the poem's mournful anger, however cloaked that anger may be in irony. Thus "The Dog" suggests, in its merging of human and nonhuman animal betrayal and suffering, that we not only have abused those animals we have trained to be loyal to us but also our own kind—whole categories of people, such as the Jews in pre-Holocaust Europe, who have tried to assimilate into unwelcoming, even genocidal, dominant cultures. In this way, the irony of the dog's human grief is, as in so many Stern poems, not only a commentary on what unites many animal species emotionally but also what unites the material realities and causes of our suffering.

To memorialize or commemorate an event as catastrophic and horrifying as the Holocaust requires a kind of doubling of the self in which the mind holds at once an unspeakable magnitude of death alongside a desire to remember, or even heal, within the realm of the living. The empathetic and material connections Stern identifies between the nonhuman and human body throughout "Behaving Like a Jew" seem rooted in Stern's guilt for being spared firsthand experience of the Holocaust at least as much as they are rooted in his compassion for nonhuman animals; if Stern is both himself and the opossum, then he also makes himself, in a sense, both alive and dead. This poem isn't the first or last time Stern casts himself—or a recognizably Jewish symbol of himself—as both mourner and deceased in the same poem, and he has made this move in more than one Holocaust-inflected poem. In "Soap," for example, Stern considers at length his imagined doppelgänger who lives an alternative history in Europe and dies in a death camp. It is significant that in "Behaving Like a Jew," Stern uses anthropomorphism to cast the dead opossum in the poem's opening and closing images as not just *human* or *Jew* but also as *alive*. In this image, Stern is able to not only blur the line between human

and animal but between life and death: in the realm of the poem, this body is figured not only as dead opossum but also as sleeping baby (a liminal but living state) and as dancing Jew (quite lively). This doubling of the self as alive and dead, or the multiplying of the Jew as alive and dead, offers a way to read many, perhaps most, of Stern's road-kill poems. In Stern's emotional and physical engagement with this victim of human-caused suffering and death, in his act of looking into the opossum's now soulless eyes and "pull[ing] him off the road," Stern is in fact memorializing the Holocaust.

We see a similar act of memorialization in "The Dog," wherein the boundaries between species are not only blurred (or nonexistent), but so again is the boundary between life and death. That the whole monologue of the poem is delivered postmortem suggests ongoing emotions and needs even in death—which is not what many might consider a Jewish orientation toward death!²¹ But when we consider that the dog doubles for Stern and for the opossum in "Behaving," thereby also doubling for the Holocaust dead, the poem's request for loving remembrance, forgiveness, and compassion takes on a more Jewish commemorative and memorial purpose. In Judaism, a common expression of condolence is the wish that the memory of the deceased "be for a blessing"; if the "lover of dead things" can keep "loving" the dog as he lifts his body off the road—if he can fulfill his title as "lover" even beyond death—then the dog's memory will not be a source of guilt for what was left undone but instead a source of peace. The human being writing through the dog knows that right action toward the dead will be healing for the living; the poem itself, especially when read alongside "Behaving," is a sort of Sternian instruction manual for how to Jewishly find wholeness and peace within a state of grief.

²¹ But see Simcha Paull Raphael's *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* on life after death and Jewish understandings of the post-mortem journey of the soul.

Prophecy

As with Holocaust memorialization, reading Stern through the lens of the Jewish prophetic tradition magnifies the Jewishness of Stern's activism and, again, the Jewishness of his animal poems. In his poem "Today It's Easter," Stern writes, "I'm a liberal radical east coast / socialist prophet-adoring Debs-loving Yid" (13–14). Evidence for each of these adjectives can be found throughout Stern's work, and indeed, the prophets in particular have had a career-long influence on him. Stern is not just prophet-adoring, however. He is also, himself, a prophet.

Stern's fellow poet-critics certainly see him this way. In her essay, "Who's Minding the Story? Gerald Stern as Jewish Poet and Tragic Comedian," Ostriker observes that in his work, Stern's mind "leaps through all of Western culture and society," including "all of its prophets—of whom he is one" (Ostriker, "Who's Minding" 20). And in Hirsch's tribute to Stern a decade ago in *American Poetry Review*, Hirsch calls Stern "a sometimes comic, sometimes tragic visionary crying out against imprisonment and shame, singing of loneliness and rejuvenation, dreaming of social justice and community" (Hirsch 89). Stern is indeed a prophet, particularly in the social-outsider, justice-oriented biblical sense, and he frequently cites biblical prophets as influences on him and his work. In an interview with Silverman, Stern calls Amos, a righteously angry prophet, an "ideal person," explaining, "[s]omewhere in the Talmud it says that righteousness is worth all the other commandments put together" (Stern, "A Conversation" 113). In an earlier interview with Pacernick, Stern clarifies that he "take[s] a slightly ironic view of" Amos, whom he calls "that angry, mad, unforgiving prophet":

“I’d be a little kinder than Amos,” he says, and certainly his poetic tenderness demonstrates as much (Stern, “An Interview by Gary Pacernick” 41). Stern actually cites almost every prophet of the Bible in one interview or another (or one poem or another); to Hamilton, for example, Stern says, “I love Ezekiel. I guess I love the mysticism of Ezekiel. The ‘wheels within wheels,’ and the eschatology. Ezekiel and Isaiah” (Stern, “An Interview with Gerald Stern” 36). Mysticism and kindness play important roles in Stern’s poems, but so do other prophet characteristics, such as anger.

When reading Stern, as when recalling the biblical prophets, gentle manners and deference to social mores are probably not the first qualities that come to mind. To be heard, most Jewish prophets have taken for granted that prophecy requires a violation of good manners and civility—a disruption of social norms and social complacency to startle listeners into changing their ways for the greater good. It makes sense that a poet-prophet like Stern would, for example, relentlessly call out the hypocrisy of arts and humanities patrons like “the evil Mellons” or Frick, whose fortunes, however well directed postmortem, were acquired unethically—at least from the perspective of a “liberal radical east coast / socialist prophet-adoring Debs-loving Yid” like Stern (“The Dancing” 17; “Today It’s Easter” 13–14). One could accuse Stern of poor manners and poor taste for holding these particular men accountable when Stern was raised in Pittsburgh, a city with well-endowed arts and humanities institutions that carry these men’s names. Likewise, it is not socially acceptable to dirty one’s hands with the carcasses of road kill or even, perhaps, to write about the Holocaust at all, let alone in poems whose dead bodies are nonhuman animals. In a Holocaust poetry anthology foreword, Stern asks readers to “realize that the purpose of words is not just to redeem the

past, but to explain it, elaborate upon it, talk to it, reason, scold, complain, ignore it, recreate it, repair it. Silence is the enemy; it has always been. Silence, and good manners” (Foreword 17). Using language—poetry—to make sense of the past, especially for reparative justice (“recreate it, repair it”), is the opposite, for Stern, of “good manners.” Likewise, “good manners” have not always served outsiders, such as 1930s and 40s Jews, as well as they might have. In learning to assimilate—to behave appropriately within non-Jewish dominant culture—Jews have both been “humiliated,” to quote Stern, and “reduced in knowledge in various ways” as well as “blessed at the same time” (“An Interview by Gary Pacernick” 41–42). This mixed blessing requires some degree of ethnic erasure and, by extension, some degree of silence.

One of Stern’s most beloved prophets, Amos, anticipates Stern’s anger at hypocrisy and his willingness to counter silence with disruptive language when Amos trumpets God’s rage in the Bible:

I will send down fire upon the palace of Hazael,
And it shall devour the fortresses of Benhadad.
I will break the gate bars of Damascus,
And wipe out the inhabitants from the Vale of Aven. (Amos 1:4, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*)

The curses that follow in Amos are myriad and creative responses to hypocrisy, much like Stern’s curses on those who would philosophize away cruel death (Lindbergh) or would abuse economic and political power (Frick); Amos’s God reveals a similar righteousness:

You enemies of the righteous,
You takers of bribes,
You who subvert in the gate
The cause of the needy! (Amos 5:12)

While moving through varying intensities of anger and sorrow, Amos’s God holds tight to a clear sense of injustice.

The prophetic voice aims to move its audience to despise and correct injustice by evoking emotional responses; in Amos, anaphora and condemning accusations combine to arouse listeners' shame. In contemporary prophetic poetry, the danger of depending on emotional response to instigate change is that the poet often walks the line between being emotionally stirring and taking emotion too far, exaggerating it—which is to say, being sentimental. This is a line Stern often walks in his poems without, I'd argue, crossing it.

American literary sentimentality has roots in ethnic American literature. The first waves of multiple ethnic American literatures in the early twentieth century often relied on stirring white, mainstream readers' pity and affection in order to soften them to tolerating, even caring about, the ethnic minorities who were changing the face of American culture. Literary works like Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* or Michael Gold's *Jews without Money* are both powerful and, at times, sentimental to a degree that makes contemporary readers cringe. Certainly, literary works involving animals are especially likely to tip into the saccharine or sentimental; we see this, for example, in animal stories for young readers, such as *The Velveteen Rabbit* or *Peter Rabbit* or perhaps any children's book with rabbits (certainly *Winnie-the-Pooh*)!

But a distinctively Jewish sentimentality also exists in the popular imagination that, like pejorative animal associations, has been used to belittle Jews. The histrionic Jewish mother is a cliché of Jewish American culture, as is schmaltz, a term for excessive sentimentality that also refers to rendered waterfowl fat in Jewish American cuisine. Neither of these associations is particularly positive: the Jew in American culture is often caricatured as being emotionally over the top, sometimes to the point of neuroticism.

Louis Simpson, in his review of Stern's *Lovesick*, criticizes Stern's strained and oversentimental "performance" of emotion in many of that book's poems—and, implicitly, across much of Stern's oeuvre (Simpson 158).²² While the line between strong emotion and strained emotion—between pronounced sentiment and sentimentality—is subjective, most reviewers find Stern's poems to be brimming with sentiment but not sentimentality. Rackin notes that even when Stern personifies animals, they "are nonetheless unromanticized" and, in fact, "[c]alling up John Clare or Marianne Moore, Stern's descriptions sometimes sound a bit like field notes" (Rackin and Terranova 41). I'm not sure I'd go so far as "unromanticized" "field notes" when describing Stern's animals or his poetry more broadly, but he certainly has a keen attention to detail that keeps his poetry grounded and his sentiment, at least for most reviewers' tastes, believable and unexaggerated.

Jewish poets who work in lyric prophetic modes have often walked this line. Emma Lazarus's repetition of the phrase "bring me your" in "The New Colossus" and Ginsberg's expressions of extreme emotion in "Howl" or "Kaddish" demonstrate how biblically inflected extensions toward the grandiose can, to the contemporary ear, have cadences that risk the clichés of sentimentality. Like Lazarus and Ginsberg, Stern takes this risk in much of his work for the sake of stirring his readers into action—and also like them, he does so without leaving us in a surfeit of overwrought sentiment (or schmaltz).

²² Simpson defines the moment of sentimentality in poetry as "[w]hen language disconnects from fact," and he uses a passage from Stern's poem "Knowledge Forwards and Backwards" to accuse Stern of sometimes "writ[ing] out of his feelings alone or what he thinks feelings should sound like" (158-159). Simpson's implicit argument is that the more Frostian a poet is, the more likable; and the more likable a poet is, the more worth reading. When Stern is most transparently sincere and emotional, as opposed to ironically or intellectually distant or clever, Simpson doesn't like him.

These pronounced emotions and disregarded manners are in service of a larger cause: the Jewish prophetic mode disrupts social norms and activates emotional responses in its desire to elicit from readers just and ethical behavior. In the twentieth century, one could argue that the first Jewish American prophet-poet was Charles Reznikoff, the father of American documentary poetry. In his magnum opus, *Testimony: The United States; 1885–1890*, which was published in various editions between 1934 and 1978, Reznikoff takes late-nineteenth-century courtroom witness testimonies and sculpts them into lineated poems, making minor adjustments for sound or to protect identities, remove judgment results, and the like. Unlike Stern’s lyric testimonies to crimes to which he emotionally responds, Reznikoff’s poems all but ignore the poet’s emotional response, rather focusing on the witness testimonies themselves, which describe acts of racism, sexual assault, theft, and various other crimes. Reznikoff was no doubt haunted by these courtroom books less because of the specific conditions of the crimes than because of the encyclopedic density of accusations, of wrongness, and of how these crimes could and do continue to happen year after year. It is hard to assert with confidence that Reznikoff hopes his *Testimony* will inspire its readers to be better people—though with a title like *Testimony*, such a purpose is not out of the question. Even so, Muriel Rukeyser, the mother of documentary poetry, is a much clearer forebear of Stern’s work than is Reznikoff, however much Reznikoff might share Stern’s (and Rukeyser’s) anger at injustice.

When considering Stern as hierarchy-flattening poet-prophet, it is natural to be reminded of Rukeyser, Stern’s friend and elder. I would argue that Stern’s brand of prophecy is part Amos-Ezekial-Isaiah, part Jeremiah (via Sam Girgus, as discussed in this

dissertation's introduction), and part Rukeyser. While Rukeyser and Stern were born only twelve years apart, their writing careers barely overlapped; Stern's first poetry collection, *The Naming of Beasts*, was published in 1972, just eight years before Rukeyser's untimely death in 1980. Both Jews, both activists, and both differently committed to the lyric authority of the first-person speaker, Rukeyser and Stern share an underexamined link. Rukeyser's environmentally and politically charged writing is a genealogical forebear to Stern's—just as it is to Rich's and Kumin's.

The Jewish American prophetic mode starts with Emma Lazarus, whose famous final lines in “The New Colossus” are spoken through the “Mother of Exiles,” who directs all who approach to forget their ancient lands’ “storied pomp” and instead give America their “tired,” their “poor,” and their “huddled masses yearning to breathe free” (Lazarus 9–11). In so doing, she also subtly mocks America's own, albeit much newer, “storied pomp,” reminding Jewish-immigrant-hating Americans of, as Girgus might say, what it means to be Americans: to warmly welcome immigrants who are especially in need of refuge. Lazarus's sonnet, commissioned for the Statue of Liberty, is a prophetic poem of not only aspiration but warning; if we forget its message of “world-wide welcome,” we forget, it suggests, the very meaning of our land of liberty. By transforming the Romantic, Delacroix-esque figure of French “Liberty” into a calm and welcoming American “Mother of Exiles,” Lazarus speaks truth to power. To those powerful western-European-descended Americans who may have been pushing for stricter immigration quotas and who might have felt a kind of white pride in this French-made statue, Lazarus counters that maternal kindness to all foreigners in need is the actual sign of “might” and is what America ought to offer, which is to say she initiates a

justice-oriented Jewish American prophetic tradition. Ostriker underscores the centrality of prophecy to Jewish American activism when she writes, “When I hear the phrase ‘speak truth to power,’ I think: Isaiah. Jeremiah. Amos” (Ostriker, “Secular and Sacred” 186). These biblical prophets anticipate poets like Lazarus, like Ostriker herself, and like Rukeyser and Stern.

In 1938, just four years after Reznikoff’s first edition of *Testimony*, Rukeyser published “The Book of the Dead,” a long documentary poem sequence that intersperses government records and interviews with lyric persona poems and reflections; “The Book of the Dead” concerns the deaths of over a thousand people, mostly black men, from silicosis after they had tunneled through West Virginia’s Gauley Mountain so the New River could be rerouted for a hydroelectric plant. In her endnote to this project, Rukeyser famously writes, “Poetry can extend the document,” meaning, at least in part, that poetry can add meaning to apparently objective documentations of events (*The Collected* 604). Using a range of documentary and creative sources, her poems document wars, social justice struggles, regional history, famous and not-so-famous biographies, mental health struggles, and personal insights into the life of a mother, a poet, a Jew, and a queer woman; regardless of her subject—whether overtly political and public or more intimate—Rukeyser’s poems offer an authoritative record of an incident and a creative, subjective lyricism that “extend[s]” the incident and its documentation. In her extension of the document—of the facts—her poems are also prophetic acts of witness. When Rukeyser documents the corporate greed and inhumanity that led to, for example, the West Virginia silicosis epidemic, she bears witness not just to enrich readers’ knowledge but to shake us into wanting to prevent such a catastrophe from happening again.

Like the Jewish American prophet poets that precede and follow her, Rukeyser is a poet rooted in her historical moment who also anticipates the future reader, the future nation, the future of poetry, and the future poet who will carry on her work of witness beyond her. In “Witness,” a section of her longer poem “Akiba,” Rukeyser asks, “Who is the witness? What voice moves across time, / Speaks for the life and death as witness voice?” (1–2). And at the end of section 13 of “The Speed of Darkness,” she asks, “Who will speak these days, if not I, if not you?” (8–10). In the same section she conjures

the poet
yet unborn in this dark
who will be the throat of these hours.
No. Of those hours. (4–7)

Stern was not “yet unborn” at the time of Rukeyser’s writing these lines, but his poetry career was still nascent; he is one of the poets who is a “throat” of *these* hours.

Rukeyser’s poems do not share Stern’s obsession with animals, but she does anticipate him in her poem “All the Little Animals,” which describes frogs and rabbits as prophetic symbols of her future child. In the world of her poem, these animals “must lay down their lives in silence” for her son and for her—animals she praises as

part of my living,
[who] go leap through my waking and my sleep, go leap through my life and my
birth giving and my death,
go leap through my dreams,
and my son’s life
and whatever streams from him. (16–20)

Rukeyser’s poems witness a material present as they address, with equal parts warning and hope, the future. She is a poet of witness who speaks with a voice of prophecy.

Stern’s animals are much more fully embodied than Rukeyser’s, less purely symbolic, but his poems do likewise “extend the document” of what it is to be alive in

this century and the last, bearing witness to corporate greed and political corruption as well as, in the case of his animal poems, to animal suffering and death, while gifting readers with the beautiful turbulence of his conscious mind traversing the landscapes of his worries and attachments. And like Rukeyser in “All the Little Animals,” Stern sees the animals around him as tragic, as spiritual, and as wise prophets. In “Albatross 1,” Stern confesses to having killed a “thing”... “that’s spiritual and has two wings”—probably a nod to Coleridge’s albatross and the resulting burden, perhaps also to Dickinson’s “thing with feathers” (Stern, “Albatross 1” 1–2). Stern mourns, “I would rather walk with a cane / than hurt a bluebird,” and then he rages:

I would kill anyone who stuffed
a full-grown frog into a mason jar
and threw him from a third floor window, the glass
cutting his body, penetrating his mouth
and eyes. (4–9)

Stern’s rage is lodged in his verbs—“kill,” “stuffed,” “threw,” “cutting,” and “penetrating”—and his sympathy for the victim, the frog here, arises in the particular bodily details he brings forth—“full grown,” “his body,” “his mouth / and eyes.” As with all of Stern’s lyric narratives, the poem’s narrative works on multiple levels; this poem is about animal death, but it is also about human stupidity and cruelty and Stern’s insistence on empathy within the animal kingdom.

Stern’s fury at this theoretical (or perhaps actual) torturer is not unlike his fury at the “evil Mellons” (“The Dancing” 17) or Henry Clay Frick (“May Frick Be Damned”).

In “May Frick Be Damned,” Stern curses,

may Frick be damned
in Hell forever and ever; may money be stuffed
in all his pockets, may an immigrant
set fire to the money; (8–11)

Stern's death wish for the corrupt Pennsylvanian industrialist, who died several decades before this poem was written, takes root in the same rage directed at the frog torturer; innocent animals, human or not, have had to suffer beneath humans who abused their power, and Stern holds those abusers responsible by not only bearing witness to their cruelty but also cursing their futures like a biblical prophet.²³

Stern understands, like Rukeyser, that to be a poet is to stand within history, to participate in history, and to bear witness with the hope or even the expectation that such documentation of injustice will be reparative. At the same time, Stern is quick to acknowledge "it is not that the poems will even make that past [in this case, the Holocaust] bearable. It is that, in our greatest loss, we have a victory" (Foreword 17). Poetry persists, documenting the wrongs and the sorrows (not to mention the joys) of the past, interacting with the past in ways that are healing—think, poet speaking through a dog to flatten hierarchies between species—so that the future might be kinder. This is today's Jewish prophecy: more Stern, less Amos.

When Stern directs his hunger for justice toward the cause of nonhuman animal suffering, he does so with a desire not only for increased human kindness toward nonhuman animals but also for more interspecies connection. Sadoff notes that the speaker in "The Dog," for example, "immerses himself in the man/dog need to be touched and loved"—the need is both the man's and the dog's, and the longing for connection is consuming for both figures (Sadoff 155). We know from the poem's opening lines that Stern—the man, the "lover of dead things"—has "come back / with his

²³ This and the previous paragraph build upon my reading in "Kingdom Animalia," the chapter I authored in the book-length critical examination of Stern's work, *Insane Devotion*.

pencil sharpened and his piece of white paper” in order to grieve properly, which for him means connecting to the deceased with his senses (4–5). He “stoops to feel” the dog’s body, and the dog supposes that “the terror / of smell—and sight—is overtaking him” (13, 15–16). Stern “come[s] back” to the dog after first encountering him in order to study, to take notes (for his poem, we might assume), and to touch—and touch is what the dog most longs for. “I want him / to touch my forehead once,” he says a few lines after Stern initially bends down to feel the dog’s body,

and rub my muzzle
before he lifts me up and throws me into
that little valley. I hope he doesn’t use
his shoe for fear of touching me; (18–22)

The nature of physical connection that the dog longs for is, of course, deeper than what hands can do: he longs for physical connection that emerges from compassion, respect, and bravery. It’s not enough to lift the dog up and throw him into “that little valley”—the ditch, the shadow of death; the dog longs to be petted on the “forehead” and “muzzle.” He longs to be loved in the way that, as we know from other poems, Stern is likely to love him—a love that comes from a sense of shared grief. Specifically, the dog pleads with Stern,

Great heart,
great human heart, keep loving me as you lift me,
give me your tears, great loving stranger, remember
the death of dogs, forgive the yapping, forgive
the shitting, let there be pity, give me your pity.
How could there be enough? I have given
my life for this [...] (27–33)

How could there be enough pity or forgiveness or compassionate love to balance out the indignity of this dog’s lonely death, his sense that he has given his life in the hope that humanity—or a single human—might “stoop” to love him?

The dog's plea is not really, as Sadoff has suggested, a Whitmanic embrace on Stern's part of nonhuman animals' "placid" contentedness. Whitman famously writes in section 32 of "Song of Myself,"

I think I could turn and live with animals, they're so placid and self-
contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.

While Sadoff is right that like Whitman, Stern "deflat[es] the anthropocentric—the human as a higher being" in his animal poems, clearly Stern wants more than to "stand and look" at animals "long and long" (Sadoff 154). Indeed, he wants to listen to the animals who "sweat and whine about their condition." Allowing space for this shared grief is, after all, how Stern connects.

Just as the dog approaches Stern in search of emotional connection, Stern likewise approaches the dog in search of the same. He is, to recall "Behaving," enacting his established grief ritual so that he might get back into his "animal sorrow" again. As in "Behaving," Stern's "animal sorrow" is an empathic emotional state in which he feels oneness with nonhuman animals, particularly with their suffering. But where specifically is the locus of Stern's "animal sorrow" in "The Dog"? Is it manifested in the figure of "the lover of dead things," stooping to notate and grieve? Is it manifested in the dog's post-mortem dirge on the side of the road? Is it manifested in the poem itself—its conceit, its diction, its music? The answer to all of these questions is yes. This animal sorrow, this oneness, transcends the narrative levels of the poem—the authorial level, the level of the dog's dirge, and the implied narrative level of the human "lover"—just as it transcends

species boundaries. Again, Sadoff is insightful here for understanding Stern's empathetic literary gymnastics, noting that Stern "identifies with the powerless sufferer, attempts to become him or her, and loses his own grounding with spatial confusion and conflation of identities" (Sadoff 158). Similarly, in his reading of "The Dancing," Sadoff argues that Stern's empathetic identification emerges from a sense of woundedness: "Stern finds himself wounded by experience: this wounding emanates from his empathy for the suffering of others" (158). The very conflation I observe in "The Dog" is a product of Stern's empathy, in other words, for the sufferer—for the wounded. We see this too in "Behaving," where the "hole" in the opossum's back becomes an image focal point and a point of "spatial confusion" as Stern leaps into philosophy and history. In his reading of Stern's "The Sensitive Knife," Sadoff similarly notes, "The blood of others becomes the blood of self, implicating the speaker simultaneously in both complicity and empathy (as participant, not as spectator)" (160). Stern's poetics emerge from an orientation that assumes human complicity in nonhuman animal suffering, as well as shared grief, shared blood, and shared longing for connection across species.

Longing for connection typically resolves via either abandoning the longing or via taking action. In "The Dog," both the dog and the human "lover of dead things" have a clear sense of what right or moral action entails. And yet, as in "Behaving"—in which the human speaker says, "I am going," "I will," etc., placing his actions in the unwritten future—"The Dog" leaves out the human's actual removal of the dead animal. Within the poem itself, Stern's actions—or those actions we can guess from the dog's monologue—seem to fall short of the dog's wishes; the dog is annoyed with Stern's seemingly self-centered emotional response. And when the dog calls Stern "the lover of dead things,"

however sincere Stern's grief and mourning may be, the dog reveals his perception that Stern is absurd in his note taking. As far as we can tell in the poem, Stern's initial actions in response to his grief miss the mark.

Reading "The Dog" in light of "Behaving," suggests that the poem's moral compass is aligned with what it means to behave like a Jew. When two individuals use the same compass, either of them might misread or ignore the direction the compass reveals; in the poem, the dog is desperate for the "lover of dead things" to do what they both know is right—be compassionate lovingly attend to the dog's body—but Stern's "contemplating" and note-taking come first. Because the dog and the man share the same (Jewish) moral compass, the dog takes for granted, ultimately, that Stern will do what is right; "keep loving me as you lift me," the dog says to the man he cannot yet know will lift him (28). In Stern's anthropomorphic animal poetics, nonhuman animals know that compassionate humanity can be found within certain kinds of Jewish behavior, so when Stern begins to behave like a Jew—to stoop, to pay kind attention to the body, to grieve—the dog assumes Stern will next lift his body from the road, because that is what it means, in Sternian Judaism, to behave like a Jew.

In terms of the prophetic mode, Stern's poems illustrate the pervasiveness of injustice across the animal kingdom—especially the injustice within and emitting from human beings. Importantly, Stern's cry for justice in response to murder in "Albatross 1" includes a threat to kill the murderer. Like the vengeful God in Amos, whom I would argue is Amos himself, Stern cannot fully suppress the ferocious urge toward murder; in "May Frick Be Damned," he even seems to relish the idea. In "Albatross I" and most of Stern's animal poems, animal innocence becomes victim to human violence (sometimes

through torture, sometimes through car impact, sometimes through so-called mercy shootings), calling into question our assumptions about the distinctions between creatures we deem “wild” and those we deem “civilized.” This self-examination that marks Stern as complicit to human cruelty is foreign to biblical prophets like Amos whose fingers point only outward, but it is noteworthy in Jewish American poets of Stern’s generation. It is also a noteworthy example of Rukeyser’s teaching that “[t]he primary responsibility of the poet is to the human consciousness” (*The Life of Poetry* 52). Stern joins Rukeyser in documenting not only the ugliness (as well as beauty) around him but also, even especially, the human consciousness responding to what it documents. In his angriest or most mournful activist poems, Stern’s self-reflections bear witness to his own humanity as a means of bearing witness not just to his life, or to the lives of nonhuman and human animals around him, but also to a prophetic wisdom that warns of what unchecked violence begets in the self and in the world. Like Rukeyser in “The Book of the Dead,” Stern documents details of corruption and violence in order, I think, to warn future readers that history can and will repeat itself. Like the biblical prophets before them, these two poetic siblings bear first-person, lyric witness to urge readers to pay closer attention to ourselves and our contexts and then to be better, perhaps kinder, perhaps braver, for that attention.

Keeping in mind Stern as Amos-esque biblical prophet, as Jeremiah-esque prophet of the American Idea, and as Rukeyser-esque lyric poet of witness for our day, we ought to reconsider the companion poems, “Behaving Like a Jew” and “The Dog,” examples of Jewish American prophecy. In both, the anger Stern feels on behalf of each roadside dead animal is far-reaching in its targets and deeply personal in its observations

while also being rooted predominantly in what Stern calls his “animal sorrow.” Just as Stern has said he’d be “a little kinder than Amos,” he is also more vulnerable than Amos in his willingness to accept complicity and guilt for his species’ roles in animal suffering and his willingness to weep from woundedness and sorrow rather than mostly from rage (Stern, “An Interview by Gary Pacernick” 41). Furthermore, Stern shares the biblical prophets’ desire to startle their audience into choosing a different future, but his method here is more Rukeyserian: less dependent upon threatening his readers than on asking his readers to share his sorrow, share his frustration, and join his future, better self in “loving” the dog—or any wounded creature—as we “lift” it from its ditch. The kinder, quieter prophecy in “Behaving” and “The Dog” clearly works differently from the rage in “Albatross 1” or in “May Frick Be Damned” (or in Amos), and it represents the best of Stern’s animal ethics and animal poetics.

Similar to Girgus’s version of Jeremiah (again less angry than the actual Jeremiah, perhaps), Stern holds up a mirror so that we—and he—might see our callous indifference to a roadside corpse or our complicity in creating the conditions within which nonhuman animals suffer so greatly. In holding up that mirror, he hopes to move us to care and cheer for animals. He has said he believes “in poetry as a redemptive act, even a holy act,” and that sense of holiness emerges, I think, from his poetic orientation toward prophecy and hope (“An Interview by Gary Pacernick” 47). In his foreword to *Ghosts of the Holocaust: An Anthology of Poetry by the Second Generation*, Stern asks, “Isn’t it in the very nature of poetry to always reserve a place for hope?” (16). Like Rukeyser, Stern’s hope for inspiring justice through his poetry is a critical facet of his prophetic orientation.

Where Stern swerves from Rukeyser and from many other poets who assume prophetic modes is in his animal poems. There, Stern's justice-seeking not only works to inspire kindness toward nonhuman animals but also to assert a stance in the millennium-long tension between the biblical paradigms of dominion and empathy. While Genesis directs human beings to "rule" or have dominion over "the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth," the Talmudic teaching of *tsa'ar ba'ale hayim*, derived from Exodus 23:5, urges human beings to avoid cruelty toward animals. One might imagine a power dynamic in which human beings "rule" nonhuman animals while avoiding cruelty, but in practice, rulership tends to exert some degree of suffering on whomever is being ruled. Therefore, Genesis 1:28 and Exodus 23:5 exist in tension with one another, asserting the supremacy of the human while requiring of the human some measure of restraint (the exact measure, of course, left to interpretation).²⁴ Embracing the tension between the dominion and anti-cruelty teachings—not to mention arguing with and complicating both teachings—is inherently Jewish. Stern's anti-cruelty animal poems are deeply Jewish in their critique of human dominion because they assert a broader, more nuanced vision of human-animal relationships.

Teshuvah

Empathy may be rooted in Jewish behaviors and religion for Stern, but Judaism certainly has found many ways to concentrate on species differences; for easy evidence,

²⁴ Interestingly, the Christian tradition tends to follow the Genesis teaching without explicitly carrying forth any of the tension offered by the Exodus teaching; as David Rhoads explains, "in the New Testament there is no covenant that includes animals, no promises connected with the land, and the metaphors for salvation are overwhelmingly anthropocentric—as if redemption existed for humans alone and not for all of creation" (Rhoads 260).

one need not look further than Kashrut, Jewish dietary laws that rely on valuing and rejecting certain species as food sources. Clearly, Stern's is not an observant Judaism concerned with Kashrut. His is a Judaism of animal sorrow, of animal empathy, and I would argue, of atonement for human wrongdoings toward nonhuman animals. In Jewish tradition, atonement is most deeply associated with Yom Kippur, the last chance in the Hebrew calendar year for Jewish people to practice *teshuvah*—a ritualized form of atonement—to ensure our names appear in the Book of Life.

Like Stern's animal ethics, *teshuvah* is a manifestation of Judaism's emphasis on action: what we *do* with whatever burdens our conscious is what matters most. Grieving that an animal has suffered is a sign of empathy, but more important than empathy is action—and in *teshuvah*, Judaism offers a step-by-step instruction manual for atonement that we can loosely map onto Stern's poetics. Stern's poems enact *teshuvah* for the ways we have strayed from preventing cruelty toward nonhuman animals. Stern's *teshuvah* for the mistreatment of nonhuman animals actually attempts more than atonement for wrongdoing, however; it offers a paradigm shift: the real wrongdoing has not been failing to avoid cruelty but failing to be kind. Stern's *teshuvah* is one that asks Judaism and humankind to do better: to love all species, not just to avoid unnecessarily harming them.

The earliest written instructions Jews have regarding *teshuvah* are transcribed from the Oral Law, gathered in written form in the Mishnah Yoma, a tractate of Talmud concerning the Temple observance of Yom Kippur. By the time the Mishnah Yoma was written, around 200 CE, the Second Temple had been destroyed for over a century, its destruction having put an end to (most of the) animal sacrifice rituals that the Mishnah

Yoma meticulously details and that the Rabbis behind the Mishnah Yoma rejected.²⁵ Mishnah Yoma 8:9, the tractate's final portion, concerns *teshuvah* and concisely notes that Yom Kippur is not a blank check for atonement: Jews are not to sin with the expectation that Yom Kippur will absolve it. Nor are they to seek atonement on Yom Kippur for wrongs against fellow humans before first repairing their relationships with those wronged: God cannot take away our sins, in short; we are responsible for doing the reparative work. Several centuries later, in the ten chapters on *teshuvah* in the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides's Medieval commentary on Talmud and Jewish law, Maimonides expands the teaching on *teshuvah*, further stressing that atonement requires action: one who seeks to atone for wrongdoing should "cry out in tearful supplication" before the Lord, "bestow alms," "distance himself" from repeating the wrongdoing, and "confess publicly"; when the sin is against another person, the wrongdoer should not only make "restitution" but also go through great lengths to beg forgiveness, bringing up to three consecutive committees of up to three other individuals to the wronged person to make a case for being granted forgiveness (Mishneh Torah 2:4, 6, 10).

This process of *teshuvah* should be practiced throughout the year but especially during the Days of Awe (also known as the High Holy Days or High Holidays) that culminate on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. Given this dissertation's subject, it is noteworthy that an animal sound—by way of human breath—is a central part of Judaism's call for repentance. A shofar, which is a ram's horn, is hauntingly blown on Rosh Hashanah and then again on Yom Kippur—a sound that is part alarm, part cry, part yell. Maimonides advises in the Mishneh Torah that aside from the blowing of the

²⁵ For more on the Mishnah Yoma and the Talmudic Rabbis' anti-animal-sacrifice views, see Jacob Neusner, "Saying You're Sorry: Mishnah Yoma 8:9."

shofar being “a Scriptural statute, its blast is symbolic, as if saying: ‘Ye that sleep, bestir yourselves from your sleep, and ye slumbering, emerge from your slumber, examine your conduct, turn in repentance, and remember your Creator’” (Mishneh Torah 3:4). The phrase “turn in repentance” describes well the act of *teshuvah*, as *teshuvah* is a process that usually entails a turning and returning: turning away to distance the self and realize the need for forgiveness, turning back to repent, and turning away again to remove the self from wrongdoing (repeating the various turns again as necessary).

Teshuvah offers us a way to understand Stern’s enduring poetic interest in nonhuman animals Jewishly; it likewise offers a way to use Jewish ethics to approach animal lives and animal bodies differently. Stern’s belief that “[s]ilence is the enemy” and that “the purpose of words” is partly “to repair” the past helps make the case for Stern’s animal poems being read as acts of *teshuvah* (Stern, Foreword 17). “Behaving Like a Jew” does not allude to any divine being, even ironically, though Pinsker calls the poem a “prayer”; if it is a prayer, it is more a prayer of active atonement, an attempt to use language to repair (“Weeping” 194). In “The Dog” and Stern’s other animal poems since “Behaving Like a Jew,” he repeatedly returns to the question of what it means to behave Jewishly in the face of animal suffering and animal death. It’s not enough, as we have seen, to empathize with animal suffering and animal death, to see oneself in the animal, to engage respectfully with the body—all of which Stern describes in “Behaving Like a Jew” as well as in poems as varied as “The Jew and the Rooster Are One,” “The Deer,” “Burying an Animal on the Way to New York,” and “Baby Rat.” To behave like a Jew means also to attempt to understand the animal’s pleas for pity, compassion, forgiveness, understanding, and kind action, and to act accordingly. It requires paying attention to the

ways human beings have caused animal suffering, taking ownership of that responsibility, repenting for it, and doing better. To behave like a Jew is to commit to *teshuvah* in response to the ways we have conceived of and treated animals.

In this age of mass animal extinction, *teshuvah* offers animal studies a lens through which to read Jewish eco-poets or nature poets who write about animals: when we read such poems as acts of *teshuvah*, we make legible the poems' inherent activism. Is it appropriate to think of Stern's poetry itself an act of *teshuvah*? I would argue yes. Stern's animal poems are part-shofar blast (the cry of a prophet!) and part enactment of the process of *teshuvah* that the Rabbis and later Maimonides describes (minus supplicating before God, given Stern's agnosticism). They are also, as we have seen, acts of commemoration for the Holocaust dead—a process one might consider *teshuvah*-adjacent, as commemoration entails a turning and returning to the site of grief with the hope of healing or closure.

When stretching the concept of *teshuvah* to embrace poetics, we can see that Stern pursues *teshuvah* in his animal poems in at least two ways: First, Stern aims to acknowledge and grieve the violence caused by hierarchical conceptions of the animal kingdom, which is a violence in which he feels complicit; this grief embraces at once the nonhuman animals who suffer for our dominion-thinking (to shorthand Genesis) and, as is common in Jewish American poets of Stern's generation, also the Holocaust dead whose suffering resulted from a bigotry emboldened by pejorative associations between Jews and nonhuman animals. Second, Stern's pursuit of healing between human and nonhuman animals not only aligns his poetics with Talmudic anti-cruelty teachings but also takes his poetics even further—to promote and enact kindness to all animals rather

than just to avoid cruelty toward them. Stern pursues *teshuvah* in his animal poems not because he believes his poems alone can fix the damage done; that would be delusional. Furthermore, he knows his poems cannot receive forgiveness—though the dog in Stern’s poem does beg, “forgive the yapping, forgive / the shitting,” and Stern’s poems often read with the vulnerability and candor of confession (“The Dog” 30–31). In Stern’s Judaism, the only “forgiveness” possible is from the living to the living; the dog asks the “lover of dead things” for forgiveness, which is the dog asking all human readers for forgiveness, which is Stern declaring, of course, that the dog desires and deserves human forgiveness. By enacting Stern’s commitment to a less hierarchical conception of the animal kingdom, Stern’s poems model reconciliation with nonhuman animals after millennia of humans—including Jews—making damaging, categorical distinctions from them. Rabbi Tarfon is quoted in the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot 2:16, as has been adapted by many a Jewish writer since (to the point of cliché): “It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.” For Stern in his animal poems, “the work” is the process of poetic prophecy, commemoration, and *teshuvah* on behalf of all animals, human and nonhuman, for the wrongdoing human beings have committed by way of intellectual belittlement, hierarchical conceptions of animal life, and Genesis-inspired dominion-thinking.

To push this interpretive gesture further, Stern’s poetry might be said to be an act of *teshuvah* on behalf of even those humans whose bastardization of the dominion teaching has enabled the creation of subhuman categories of people—categories including “savages,” “bitches,” and various other pejorative animalized analogies. For those who have used nonhuman animal analogies to dehumanize and debase certain

people, such as Jews, by way of forcing a pejorative lens over what is actually a natural association, Stern's poems might also be acts of atonement, of *teshuvah*, for such categorical wrongdoing. Stern's poems enact his belief that the boundaries between species are not meaningful—not even, as he has said, real. In “The Dog,” remember the dog is the wise one; the lover of dead things is the fool. But the fool writes the poem that gives voice to the dog's heart. And in that voice, the dog pleads for compassion from the “great human heart.” The two voices and the two hearts—indeed, the two beings—merge. Stern's animal poems are acts of publicly confessing human wrongdoing and enacting a “turn in repentance.” For Stern, poetry is a turning and a returning, through language, toward reparation.

Stern's turn toward *teshuvah* always starts with acknowledging and grieving the violence caused by hierarchical conceptions of the animal kingdom, and that is no less true when he grieves the Holocaust dead whose dehumanization was closely tied to their being viewed and treated as “animals.” We've seen how Stern flips this pejorative script on human and nonhuman animal association and how his poems often reveal a parallelism, for Stern, between nonhuman animals who suffer and die at the hands of human beings and the victims of the Holocaust. No poem drives home more compellingly that grieving the brutalized animal enables Stern to grieve the Holocaust dead than Stern's poem, “The Jew and the Rooster Are One.” In this poem, Stern acknowledges multiple layers of grief and animal sorrow in his enactment of his anti-cruelty poetics, his *teshuvah*, and he does so with even more complexity and, at least for this reader, discomfort than we might expect.

Let's start with the poem's title. When considered in light of *teshuvah*, the title immediately resonates with an irony and shock that would be missed in a non-Jewish reading: an Erev Yom Kippur folk ritual that most modern Jews no longer practice, *Kaparot*, involves swinging a chicken or a rooster (the bird's gender is supposed to match the human's) overhead before slaughtering it, a superstitious attempt to transfer the human's sin onto the bird; the Rabbis since at least the Rambam (thirteenth century) have condemned this practice, but some Jewish communities practice it even today (Hammer). Before beginning the poem, a reader approaching Stern's work Jewishly, and specifically through the lens of *teshuvah*, would likely recognize in the title this poem's interest in atonement and might enter the poem expecting it to challenge human beliefs and behaviors that insist on human superiority. If the Jew and the rooster are one, the rooster can't take the Jew's sin away. When the Jew sacrificially kills the rooster, he is hardly saving himself; the poem's title suggests the opposite. Keeping this reference to *Kaparot* in mind adds important dimensions to the poem.

"The Jew and the Rooster Are One," however, does not explicitly address *Kaparot*. Rather, it is an ekphrastic poem in response to Jewish painter Chaim Soutine's 1927 painting, *Dead Fowl*,²⁶ one of several of Soutine's expressionist paintings of dead nonhuman animals, including such creatures as roosters, hens, turkeys, rabbits, and cows. Like his other paintings in this series, *Dead Fowl* uses figural, energetic slashes of oil paint to create dramatic contrasts between swaths of dark, murky color and bolts of bright reds, greens, yellows, and blues. The composition is a tight frame around a dead rooster

²⁶ While it's possible that the poem could also refer to the 1924 *Dead Fowl*, the poem's imagery more accurately recalls the 1927 version—where both the speckled blood and the right chair leg are more visible.

posed upside down on a green armchair, its head dangling off the edge, its wings spread; Soutine's tight composition forces the viewer to confront the rooster's humiliating pose and the bloody remnants of his death. As Stern describes in his poem, the rooster has

flecks of blood on his breast and thighs, his wings
resting a little, their delicate bones exposed, a
few of the plumes in blue against the yellow
naked body, all of *those* feathers plucked
as if by a learned butcher, and yet the head
hanging down, the comb disgraced, the mouth
open as if for screaming[.] (5–11)

Though Stern describes only a representation of a dead rooster, he again emphasizes the necessity to look closely at the actual body—for Soutine, whom he supposes uses an actual dead rooster as his subject (as Soutine was known to do), and for Stern looking through Soutine's gaze. Stern's gaze is familiar in its admiration as well as its anthropomorphizing transformation of its subject when he starts to imagine the rooster's life:

this was the angry rooster
that strutted from one small house to another, that scratched
among the rhubarb, he is the one who stopped
as if he were thinking, he is upside down now
and plucked. It looks as if his eye can hardly
contain that much of sorrow, as if it wanted
to disappear, and it looks as if his legs
were almost helpless, and though his body was huge
compared to the armchair, it was only more
horrible that way, and though his wings were lifted
it wasn't for soaring, it was more for bedragglements
and degradation. (21–32)

In these lines, Stern transforms a vision of the rooster alive in his glory to a pitiable vision of a rooster "plucked," overflowing "sorrow," wanting "to disappear," "almost helpless," and "horrible" in his pose betraying "bedragglements" and "degradation." In this transformation, Stern examines, or tries to examine, the rooster through not only his

own eyes but through Soutine's, a comrade of the imagination who later had to abandon relative safety in France during the Nazi occupation in order to seek emergency surgery for an ulcer that would ultimately kill him. Stern taps into what he imagines to be Soutine's terror as a Jew—a terror that may have been present at the time of the painting but certainly was after—as a painter who once “strutted” but finds himself suddenly “stopped” and suffering in a political climate in which he is despised for the kind of animal he is, the kind of person he is. Stern tries to climb into Soutine's reason for painting the rooster so viscerally and, in so doing, superimposes himself, Soutine, the Holocaust dead, and the painted rooster (and the actual posed rooster carcass, and the concept of the *Kaparot* rooster) into one being. In the excerpts that follow, Stern commemorates and grieves many losses at once, bringing the Holocaust, the brutalized nonhuman animal body, the suffering human body, and the contemporary Jewish American self into superimposition to a degree foreshadowed by “Behaving Like a Jew” and “The Dog”:

Whatever else there was
of memory there had to be revenge there,
even revenge on himself, for he had to be
the rooster, though that was easy, he was the armchair
too, and he was the butcher, it was a way
to understand, there couldn't be another, he had to
paint like that, he had to scrape the skin
and put the blotches on [...] (“The Jew and the Rooster Are One” 32–39)

In listing all the ways Stern imagines Soutine to have identified with Soutine's subject, Stern is likewise, of course, listing the various ways he himself identifies with Soutine's subject. If Soutine is the rooster, victim to violence; and the armchair, complicit; and the butcher, degrader if not also killer of the rooster, then Stern likewise is all of these as well, including Soutine himself, fascinated and horrified as he looks and tries to render

what he sees through grief, shame, and anger. That Soutine “had to / paint like that” strikes Stern as obvious, because Stern too has become an attendant “lover of dead things.” For him, as for Soutine, grieving butchered or car-smashed or bullet-killed nonhuman animals is a means not only to approach human violence toward nonhuman animals and human identification with the suffering of nonhuman animals but also to approach the almost unspeakable grief and anger over Jewish deaths in the Second World War:

but it was
more than anything else a kind of Tartar,
a kind of Jew, he was painting, something
that moved from Asia to Europe, something furious,
ill and dreamy, something that stood in the mud
beside a large wooden building and stared at a cloud [...]
even if he stood in the middle of the room
holding his paintbrush like a thumb at arm’s length
closing one of his eyes, he was still standing
in the mud shrieking, he was still dying for corn,
he still was golden underneath his feathers
with freckles of blood, for he was a ripped-open Jew,
and organs all on show, the gizzard, the liver,
for he was a bleeding Tartar, and he was a Frenchman
dying on the way to Paris and he was
tethered to a table, he was slaughtered. (45–50, 53–62)

Stern’s layering of image is chilling: “the mud / beside a large wooden building” could be where the rooster stands beside a barn or coop, or it could be where a Jew stands beside a death camp bunkhouse. The “shrieking” could be any of these bodies’ shrieks, or all their shrieks at once. The rooster was quite possibly tethered “to a table” when he was “slaughtered,” or the table could refer to a hospital operating table, the body that of the Jew painter who Stern suggests was “slaughtered” rather than innocently or naturally fallen victim to a fatally ruptured ulcer. Whether anti-Jewish doctors let him die or anti-Jewish occupiers created the conditions within which Soutine had to choose between

immediate or deferred death, Stern counts Soutine in the Holocaust dead. And, by using the word *slaughtered*, Stern reinscribes his lifelong analogy between nonhuman animal and Holocaust death. In “The Jew and the Rooster Are One,” Stern commemorates and grieves the Jews lost to the Holocaust by way of enacting his specific grief over Soutine’s death, both of whom—Stern through his poem and Soutine through his painting—also grieve the rooster. This rooster slaughtered, the *Kaparot* roosters slaughtered, Soutine slaughtered, the many Jews slaughtered in death camps: all suffered incredible violence at the hands of other living beings who conceived of them as hierarchically inferior.

As Stern’s earlier (and later) animal poems reinforce again and again, Stern believes that human beings are at our moral best when we stand in the truth that we are animals. It is important to him that the Jew and the rooster are one, as are the Jew and the opossum, as are the Jew and the dog, and so on. It is important to him, from a place of Jewishness, that the boundaries and hierarchies between species are revealed to be imaginary; from this knowledge can come true mourning, wisdom, compassion, and hope by way of *teshuvah*. Stern’s animal poems attempt to examine how we have caused nonhuman animals to suffer and to align what it means to “behave like a Jew,” through *teshuvah*, with non-oppressive empathy.

And yet, if Stern’s poems aim to repair root sins, such as the sin of undervaluing nonhuman animals, and the sin of trying to belittle humans by association with nonhuman animals, and even the sins against nonhuman animals that have occurred because of their belittlement, there must be a limit to how far this atonement can go. This is what I believed, anyway, when I began to conceive of Stern’s poetry in terms of *teshuvah*. I wanted to argue that Stern is decidedly not atoning for the massive and crooked leap

between trying to debase human beings by associating them with, say, wolves and trying to exterminate human beings as one might exterminate vermin—he can share in the human guilt of intellectual wrongdoing that led to atrocity, but he does not, or so I believed, go so far as to stand in the Nazis’ shoes and try to atone for death camps. Such atonement, were it conceivable, would not be his burden to bear. And yet the Jew is not just the rooster in Stern’s poem but also the butcher; Stern’s grief-born atonement is complicated, informed, as it must be, by his shame that Jews too had slaves in this country, that Jews too have committed mass-violence, that Jews have enacted cruel rituals involving nonhuman animals—perhaps even his shame at his own murderous fantasies in poems like “Albatross I” or “May Frick Be Damned.” Jews are butchers too, as well as armchairs: Stern’s heaviest burden, and what he has repeatedly claimed guilt for, as well as grief, is his safety in America while other Jews died in the Holocaust.

Rather than remain in his guilt, Stern turns and returns to the solace he finds in his ability to grieve and to, like the dog, craft dirges that remind readers that the Jew and the nonhuman animal *are* one. Mourning the senseless deaths of nonhuman animals enables him to remember his animal sorrow, from which he can approach his grief in response to the senseless deaths of other humans. Admiring nonhuman animals, to slightly rotate my argument here, also enables Stern to better appreciate what it is to live a human life.

This active celebration of nonhuman animals too is *teshuvah* for human cruelty. In his poem “I Remember Galileo,” Stern contrasts Galileo’s description of the “mind / as a piece of paper blown around by the wind” with his own belief that the mind is actually “a squirrel caught crossing / Route 80 between the wheels of a giant truck,” who dances back and forth before breaking free, “his life shortened by all that terror, his head /

jerking, his yellow teeth ground down to dust” (1–2, 6–7, 11–12). Stern muses in the poem over the differences between paper and squirrel, reflecting

Paper will do in theory, when there is time
to sit back in a metal chair and study shadows;
but for this life I need a squirrel,
his clawed feet spread, his whole soul quivering,
the hot wind rushing through his hair,
the loud noise shaking him from head to tail.
O philosophical mind, O mind of paper, I need a squirrel
finishing his wild dash across the highway,
rushing up his green ungoverned hillside. (16–24)

The mind that has the most use for Stern, however well read he is in philosophy and religion and literature, is the mind that knows itself to be animal: the mind keen on survival, the mind that knows terror and is willing to make a dash—whether it survives, like this squirrel, or does not, like so much road kill—to an “ungoverned” hillside.

Ungoverned means not ruled by paper, by philosophy, by intellect. In order to get into the “animal sorrow” necessary to behave like a Jew, for Stern, one must first recognize that nonhuman animals can remind us of how to survive this life. Being aware of our animality does not diminish us; it teaches us.

CHAPTER 3

JEWISH IDENTITY AND ANIMAL METAPHORS IN ADRIENNE RICH

What kind of beast would turn its life into words?

What atonement is this all about?

—Adrienne Rich, “Twenty-One Love Poems”

Adrienne Rich’s animal poems are much fewer in number than Stern’s, and quite different in approach, but reading Rich for her animal poetics similarly highlights a righteous respect for nonhuman animals as well as, though much more subtly, the complexity of her Jewish identity. Before Rich had fully stepped into the identities of activist, feminist, lesbian, or even Jew, she won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award as a senior in college and instantly became a critically acclaimed poet, which furnished her with a platform from which she could light the way for readers and other artists—throughout her long and prolific career—toward braver, more authentic, and more feminist modes of art and life.²⁷ Rich’s poems and essays explore a wide array of themes,

²⁷ Examining Rich’s publication history reinforces her early and long stature as well as her values as a “sometimes activist” and as a public poet writing for a diverse readership (Rich, *Blood* vii). By the time she published one of her most daring poetry collections, *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974–77*, with W. W. Norton & Company, which had been her primary publisher since 1963’s *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, Norton had clearly decided that Rich’s writing was worth its long-term investment. Rich’s eighth book with Norton, *The Dream of a Common Language* was daring in 1978 because of its overt lesbianism and feminism (a book whose energies are “riveted unflinchingly on the nature of interrelationships among women,” as Olga Broumas writes in her review) and because it closely followed Rich’s controversial 1976 prose work, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as an Experience and Institution* and, before that, the book

such as political struggle, the interconnection of art and activism, film, feminism, lesbian love, and the traumas of history. In and beyond the early seventies, Rich's work helped spark a feminist reconsideration of college curricula and of the American literary canon, which was one of her explicit goals as a poet and public figure. In her preface to "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision"—which was written in 1971 for "The Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century," hosted by the MLA's Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession—Rich aligned herself with the Commission's women educators, writers, editors, and publishers who "have for a decade been creating more subversive occasions, challenging the sacredness of the gentlemanly canon, sharing the rediscovery of buried works by women, asking women's questions, bringing literary history and criticism back to life in both senses." (33).²⁸ Rich's provocative and revelatory writing has attracted steady and, at times, contentious critical attention. While the same might be said of Gerald Stern and Maxine Kumin, neither poet has inspired, so far, the same magnitude of books, articles, reviews, and other forms of response, domestically and internationally, as Rich.

Even so, Rich criticism often retreads familiar ground, leaving whole landscapes untouched. One such neglected landscape is Rich's literary representations of nonhuman

that truly made her famous, 1973's *Diving into the Wreck* (Broumas 322). She stayed prolific as a poet and essayist until her death in 2012.

²⁸ She writes in the same preface that "[t]he challenge flung by feminists at the accepted literary canon" is itself "broadened and intensified" by "black and lesbian feminists pointing out that feminist literary criticism itself has overlooked or held back from examining the work of black women and lesbians" (34). Before Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectional* in the late 1980s, Rich's orientation as a feminist working to re-vision the canon was intersectional. Incidentally, as her letters with poet Hayden Carruth make clear, Rich's feminism was profoundly shaped by Black feminists, having taught at City College where, as Dean notes, "coworkers also included a number of black feminists—the poets Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan, and Audre Lorde among them—who would become lifelong friends and allies" (Dean).

animals; in the fifty years between “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” and “Fox,” two poems that bookend the arc of Rich’s animal poetics over time, Rich returns again and again to the ethical problems and metaphorical seductions of using nonhuman animals in her writing. Because of these psychological poles, what I call her “animal ambivalence,” Rich references nonhuman animals in a markedly different way from Stern. As with Stern, though, my argument is that Rich’s nonhuman animal references are shaped by (and insightfully read in light of) her relationship to her Jewish identity. While Rich came to be publicly and personally identified with her Jewishness, this facet of her identity, like her animals, is also often overlooked in most of the criticism.²⁹ Using a mix of close reading, biography, and existing criticism, this chapter strikes new ground in Adrienne Rich scholarship by linking Rich’s Jewish identity to her poetic representations of nonhuman animals.

The chapter is organized in three sections. Section 1 documents Rich’s complex, significant, and hard-won Jewishness, an important facet of her identity and writing. Section 2 comprises the bulk of the chapter: I offer readings of Rich’s animal poetics over five decades of her career, starting with her most anthologized and earliest published poem representing nonhuman animals, “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers.” The poem is foundational for Rich not only because of its animal representation but also because of its skillful tribute to and departure from the white men forefathers of Romanticism. With the tigers, and the poem’s larger conceit, Rich points toward her more overtly feminist future as a poet—a future in which her respect for nonhuman animals will shape an animal poetics that is conflicted but restrained, differing quite a bit from Blake’s rendering of his

²⁹ Unless the critic is directly addressing one of her poems, like “Tattered Kaddish,” that makes Jewishness hard to ignore.

tiger or, for that matter, Rich's rendering of Aunt Jennifer's. Also foundational for understanding Rich's animal poetics are two of Rich's essays; in my readings of the memorable animals in "Notes toward a Politics of Location" and "Woman and bird," I elucidate the ambivalence in Rich's animal poetics by contrasting her conflicting approaches. From there, section 2 tracks that ambivalence and its relationship to Rich's Jewishness through four poems in *The Dream of a Common Language* and, finally, through Rich's vixen series, which culminates in her visceral animal poem "Fox." In section 3, I propose three ways to read Rich's animal poems Jewishly: in terms of the Shekhinah, in terms of Jewish ambivalence about human dominion over nonhuman animals, and in terms of atonement, or *teshuvah*. The chapter closes with a discussion of Rich's "Yom Kippur 1984," ultimately affirming that when considered closely and curiously, and especially Jewishly, Rich's rare but brilliant animal metaphors have much to teach us about the Jewish animal Rich is and about her visionary, liberatory, and justice-seeking poetics.

Section 1: On Rich's Jewishness: Split at the Root and in the Branches

Adrienne Rich projects an inherited ambivalence about her identity onto the nonhuman animals in her poems; to understand how she does this, it is important to first understand Rich's relationship to her own Jewishness. Rich's engagement with her Jewishness—a leftist, radical, activist, non-Zionist, mostly secular Jewishness—is equally important as, and infused throughout, her feminism. In fact, much of the complexity, the embraced double meanings, and even the ambiguity in some of Rich's poems can be linked to the foundational complexity in her Jewish identity; this complex

identity surely informs her affinity for the parts of experience that cannot be singularly pinned down—the multiple manifestations of “I” in her poems, the fragmentary declarations and gestures in her broken couplets and caesura’d lines, and her affinity for certain kinds of abstraction. Like her poetry, Rich’s Jewish identity is tightly braided with her politics, her communities, and her intellectual power and ambition.

Rich was born in Baltimore in 1929 to a half-Ashkenazi, half-Sephardic Jewish father, Arnold Rich, a pathologist who was “one of the very few Jews to attend or teach” at the Johns Hopkins Medical School; and a Lutheran mother, Helen Elizabeth (Jones) Rich, a composer and concert pianist who gave up her professional identity to raise her family (Rich, “Split” 101; Rich, “Adrienne Rich: An Interview with David Montenegro” 264–265). The Riches baptized and raised Adrienne and her sister, Cynthia, Episcopalian and repressed all but the faintest hints of their Jewishness (Fox, “Adrienne Rich”; “Split”). Thus, Rich’s identity formation began with the core dichotomy between acceptable/Christian and shameful/Jewish, even though her earliest years were spent only knowing the Christian part. The journey into understanding and accepting, or integrating, what became a bifurcated identity for Rich is her subject in “Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity.” One of the essay’s origins is the fifth section of Rich’s poem “Readings of History” from *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, in which Rich writes,

Split at the root, neither Gentile nor Jew,
Yankee nor Rebel, born
in the face of two ancient cults,
I’m a good reader of histories. (“Readings” 118–122)

Being a good reader, in fact, put Rich in just the right position to discover the split in her root. In the essay, Rich recalls that in the process of reading her way through her father’s library, she discovered his “Hebrew prayer book” in which was stored “a newspaper

clipping” of her “grandparents’ wedding, which took place in a synagogue,” quietly contradicting what she had internalized from her Christian education: that Jews “seemed not to exist in everyday life” (“Split” 101, 105). The dichotomy Rich explores in the essay is not simply the split between her parents’ identities but also the split between claiming her father’s Jewishness (an action that could be seen as love) and “expos[ing] him” as Jewish (an action that could be seen as dishonor) (“Split” 100). She writes that her father tried to counter her Christian religious education by reading her “Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason*—a diatribe against institutional religion,” as she describes it: “Thus, he explained, I would have a balanced view of these things, a choice. He—they—did not give me the choice to be a Jew” (105). By not giving her the option to choose Jewishness but otherwise raising her to be a free thinker and astoundingly well-read young scholar, Rich’s parents, perhaps unwittingly, gave her the tools she would need to recognize the power of what was repressed and to further recognize her power to name it. “Because what isn’t named is often more permeating than what is,” Rich writes later in the essay, “I believe that my father’s Jewishness profoundly shaped my own identity and our family existence” (112). Even so, Rich didn’t understand that she occupied a “hated identity” until 1946, in high school.

Rich recalls venturing to a cinema to view “films of the Allied liberation of the Nazi concentration camps” and recounts her later rage: “That I had never been taught about resistance, only about passing. That I had no language for anti-Semitism itself” (“Split” 106–107). In her astonishing poem “Eastern War Time,” Rich later explores this legacy and its profound weight on Jewish Americans like her who did not experience the Holocaust personally. She recalls, in the second section of the poem, “an American girl in

wartime” like her younger self, “ignorantly Jewish” with “permed friz of hair” and reading books to try to approach the embodied suffering abroad that she could never fully reach through words alone. Rich also describes Jewish women like herself who respond to being spared the direct terror of the Holocaust by deciding to fight for justice wherever possible; she writes in the poem’s tenth section,

I’m a woman standing
with other women dressed in black
on the streets of Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem,

identifying her poem’s speaker with the Women in Black who gather in Israel (and around the world) to protest war and militarism (“Eastern War Time” 18–20). But before she could discover this adult, chosen iteration of American Jewishness, Rich had to unpack what Allied liberation film reels showed of the Nazi death camps and what their revelations meant for her personally.

A young American Jew coming to understand that her relatives, however distant, were murdered methodically en masse by fascists for being identified religiously, culturally, or racially as Jewish is unfortunately a rite of passage for many, and the subsequent realization that survival and privilege are likewise unearned and randomly determined is part of many young American Jews’ awakenings into their Jewish identities. Rich explores an intermediary stage in her own awakening of this sort in another important essay about her Jewishness, “Notes toward a Politics of Location.” In the essay, she reflects, much as Stern has in his work, on the random fortune of her geography vis-a-vis her Jewishness:

The body I was born into was not only female and white, but Jewish—
enough for geographic location to have played, in those years, a
determining part. I was a *Mischling*, four years old when the Third Reich

began. Had it not been Baltimore, but Prague or Łódź or Amsterdam, the ten-year-old letter writer might have had no address.³⁰ Had I survived Prague, Amsterdam, or Łódź and the railway stations for which they were deportation points, I would be some body else. My center, perhaps, the Middle East or Latin America, my language itself another language. Or I might be in no body at all.

But I am a North American Jew, born and raised three thousand miles from the war in Europe. (“Notes” 216)

None of these realizations about what it means to be Jewish had been encouraged or even welcome within her childhood home. Facts she needed had been kept from her.

In “Split at the Root,” Rich explores how the split between claiming and repressing her father’s Jewishness, which was of course *her* Jewishness, deepened. While an undergraduate at Radcliffe, where she would earn a bachelor’s degree in English in 1951, Rich bought a Marc Chagall print of a rabbi, an affirmation of her Jewish identity, but then denied her Jewishness to an apparently Jewish seamstress (108–109). When her father failed to achieve a timely promotion to professor at Johns Hopkins, possibly because of his Jewishness, Rich recognized that his faith in the power of assimilation had failed him:

... he had believed so greatly in the redeeming power of excellence, of being the most brilliant, inspired man for the job. With enough excellence, you could presumably make it stop mattering that you were Jewish; you

³⁰ Rich here references an anecdote from earlier in the essay when she recalls how, as a white girl in America, it was easy to imagine her location as being in the center of the universe: “When I was ten or eleven, early in World War II, a girlfriend and I used to write each other letters which we addressed like this:

Adrienne Rich
14 Edgevale Road
Baltimore, Maryland
The United States of America
The Continent of North America
The Western Hemisphere
The Earth
The Solar System
The Universe

could become the *only* Jew in the gentile world, a Jew so “civilized,” so far from “common,” so attractively combining southern gentility with European cultural values that no one would ever confuse you with the raw, “pushy” Jews of New York, the “loud, hysterical” refugees from eastern Europe, the “overdressed” Jews of the urban South. (110–111)

And Rich remembers once receiving a letter from her mother advising that she ought to limit her Jewish friends in college “even though ... some of them will be the most brilliant, fascinating people you will ever meet” (111). The more she considered the problems of self-silencing required by attempting to pass, the more she realized her need to embrace her father’s, and therefore her own, Jewish identity—an act that, given the traditionally matrilineal passage of Jewish identity from parent to child, emphatically defied her parents’ efforts to erase the option.

The split between exposure/honesty and repression/dishonesty is one Rich explores at length in her essay “Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying,” in which she argues that women telling the truth or “describing our reality as candidly and fully as we can to each other” is essential to the feminist project, especially when it dissuades women from the manipulative lie of “discretion” for the sake of avoiding discomfort (“Women” 190). Echoing her concerns in “Split at the Root,” Rich writes in “Women and Honor,” “Patriarchal lying has manipulated women both through falsehood and through silence. Facts we needed have been withheld from us” (189). This statement’s relationship to her own father’s (and mother’s) repression of her Jewishness is clear when the two essays are read side by side. This is the same essay in which Rich famously writes, “When a woman tells the truth she is creating the possibility for more truth around her” (191). She is writing, in “Women and Honor,” about the power of lies and truth between women, but the question of whether to boldly claim her father’s Judaism or to follow his repressive

and silencing lead is the same inner battle between opposing instincts, the same splitting. In the end of “Split at the Root,” Rich writes about all the parts of her identity she will need to engage as part of her activism and art going forward; one of those parts is “[t]he Jewish lesbian raised to be a heterosexual gentile” (123). To understand the full extent and influence of the Jewish thread in Rich’s work, it is important to remember that “Jewish” and “lesbian” are related in her self-definition; both stand in for previously repressed and necessary truth.

Rich of course chose to claim her Jewish identity (a few years before she chose to claim her lesbian identity), marrying a Jew so unappealing to her parents—“the ‘wrong kind’ from an Orthodox eastern European background”—that her parents “refused to come” to the wedding, which was held in 1953 “in the Hillel House at Harvard, under a portrait of Albert Einstein”; never mind that her new husband, Harvard-educated economist Alfred Conrad, was actually fairly ambivalent about his own Jewishness and no longer observant (“Split” 114–115). In fact, he had legally changed his surname from Cohen to Conrad earlier in life, a familiar sign of Jewish American assimilation (“Dr. Alfred H. Conrad”).³¹ Rich was still determined to achieve what she believed to be authentic Jewishness in marriage, initially embracing *Kashrut* and other trappings of traditional observance that she appreciated in her in-laws: “I saw it all as quintessentially and authentically Jewish,” she writes, “and I objectified both the people and the culture. My unexamined anti-Semitism allowed me to do this” (“Split” 116). Eventually Rich sketched out a Judaism authentic to herself rather than to a mythic paradigm, and she writes movingly about raising her kids in a common American hybridization of cultures:

³¹ Interestingly, Conrad was an expert in the economics of slavery in the Antebellum South and shared Rich’s leftist and activist political priorities (“Dr. Alfred H. Conrad”).

My children were taken irregularly to Seders, to bar mizvahs, and to special services in their grandfather's temple. Their father lit Hanukkah candles while I stood by, having memorized each year the English meaning of the Hebrew blessing. We all celebrated a secular, liberal Christmas. I read aloud from books about Esther and the Maccabees and Moses, and also from books about Norse trolls and Chinese grandmothers and Celtic dragon slayers. [...] But I don't recall sitting down with them and telling them that millions of people like themselves, many of them children, had been rounded up and murdered in Europe in their parents' lifetime. Nor was I able to tell them that they came in part out of the rich, thousand-year-old Ashkenazic culture of eastern Europe, which the Holocaust destroyed; or that they came from a people whose traditions, religious and secular, included a hatred of oppression and an imperative to pursue justice and care for the stranger—an anti-racist, a socialist, and even sometimes a feminist vision. I could not tell them these things because these things were still too indistinct in my own mind. (117–118)

Like many Jews raised in irreligious or in anti-Jewish households, Rich, in embracing this identity as a young adult, had to simultaneously learn not only how to be Jewish but also how to raise Jewish children. The way she describes her children's Jewish inheritance as descendants of a people known for fighting oppression, pursuing justice, and caring for fellow humans, as well as the Jewish ideal, as she later understood it, of being anti-racist, socialist, and feminist, is an excellent summary of the leftist Jewish politics and social movements that to some degree both Stern and Kumin came to identify with, as did so many of their Jewish poet peers and forebears—Muriel Rukeyser and Alicia Ostriker clearly among them.

As she gained distance from her own stereotyping, objectifying, and fetishizing of “real” Jewishness, Rich came to appreciate that she could *choose* progressive Judaism, thereby making her relationship to her Jewish identity one that sharpens and justifies her commitment to a poetics and life in pursuit of social justice. An illustrative example: While teaching in a program at City College that sought to make college accessible to Black and Puerto Rican students, Rich realized there were two strains of Jews, the Jews

who supported empowering these students of color and the Jews who wanted to keep these students from taking advantage of New York City's public schools. She writes, "I didn't understand then that I was living between two strains of Jewish social identity: the Jew as radical visionary and activist who understands oppression firsthand, and the Jew as part of America's devouring plan in which the persecuted, called to assimilation, learn that the price is to engage in persecution" ("Split" 120). The former strain aligned with Rich's self-perception and commitments as a feminist; the latter strain, with its hoarding of hard-won power, was a Jewishness cut off from its justice-seeking roots.

But Rich did not simply learn these truths about her and her sons' progressive Jewish inheritance and then make private choices accordingly; she became a leading voice and presence in Jewish feminist activism soon after claiming the second of her repressed, silenced identities—that of a lesbian. One way she did this was by becoming active in New Jewish Agenda, an American progressive, grassroots, and activism-oriented organization—particularly in NJA's Feminist Taskforce, which was founded by Rich and fellow Jewish lesbians Clare Kinberg, Elly Bulkin, and Ruth Atkin at NJA's 1985 convention in Ann Arbor. According to Ezra Nepon, author of *Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue: A History of New Jewish Agenda*, the Feminist Taskforce "covered ground that overlapped with many of the other campaigns" within New Jewish Agenda, including "anti-racist organizing, Middle-East peace, and economic justice" (Nepon). The Gay/Lesbian Working Group was also housed within the Feminist Taskforce, as was *Gesher*, an internal newsletter about the goings on in the various chapters of NJA's Feminist Taskforce. Bulkin, writing for the Jewish Women's Archive, recalls how she and Rich joined with several other Jewish feminists to launch *Bridges: A Journal for*

Jewish Feminists and Our Friends, founded in order to make many of the concerns explored in *Gesher*, which is Hebrew for “bridge,” available to communities outside New Jewish Agenda.³² In an encyclopedia entry written while *Bridges* (1990 to 2011) was still publishing, Bulkin notes,

Bridges provides a rare space in the Jewish community: one where lesbian and working-class voices can be heard consistently, heterosexual and middle/upper-class identities are not viewed as norms and dialogues can appear between allies—lesbian and heterosexual, poor/working-class and middle/upper-class. From the outset, *Bridges* has featured work by Jewish lesbians, including Christie Balka, Joan E. Biren (JEB), Elana Dykewomon, Marcia Freedman and Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz. (Bulkin)

The journal was an essential space for Jewish feminists to share ideas, poetry, fiction, translations, and commentary. Just as *Chrysalis* and *Sinister Wisdom* had been fertile soil for Rich (and others) to explore a multifaceted feminism, the publication of *Bridges* created space for Rich’s (and others’) multifaceted Jewish feminism.³³ In “Jewish

³² The journal later subtly changed its name: *Bridges: A Jewish Feminist Journal*.

³³ Feminist publishing mattered to Rich; while she regularly published in mainstream and academic venues like *College English*, *FIELD*, and *New Boston Review*, feminist publications as broadly distributed as *Ms.* and as small as *Amazon Quarterly*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *Chrysalis* were also important homes for her poems and literary activism. As an example, *Chrysalis* was a Los Angeles-based feminist literary magazine that published three issues per year from 1977 to 1980. Its mission statement in issue one, found on the inside of the front cover, describes it as a “hot new magazine of women’s culture” that “will bring together the practical resources generated by feminism” and offer “a feminist look at current affairs” because the editors believe “all issues—not just traditional ‘women’s issues’—need to be analyzed from a feminist perspective.” The magazine features “visual art, poetry, fiction, historical analysis, investigative reporting, theoretical essays,” and “writings from the first wave.” Rich is listed as a contributing editor in the first issue (and for at least the four issues thereafter), and Audre Lorde, Rich’s friend and fellow feminist and lesbian poet, is listed as the poetry editor. Issue one features an early version of “Sibling Mysteries,” which appears, slightly revised, in *The Dream of a Common Language*. While many of those small publications did not survive the 1980s and 1990s, *Sinister Wisdom: A Multicultural Lesbian & Art Journal*, which Rich and her life partner Michelle Cliff co-edited from 1981 to 1983, remains in print today.

Feminists and Their Fathers: An Introduction,” Rebecca Alpert and Laura Levitt claim “Split at the Root” as foundational to their decision to co-edit a special edition of *Bridges*, and Rich’s work was featured and referenced in *Bridges* throughout its publication. According to its mission statement in 2011, *Bridges* brought together “the traditional Jewish values of justice and tikkun olam (‘healing the world’) with insights honed by the feminist, lesbian, and gay movements” and aimed to “deepen the understanding of the relationship between Jewish identities and activism.” If a publication could encapsulate Rich’s priorities as a Jew, *Bridges* would be that capsule.

The intersection of feminism, queerness, and progressive Jewishness is often aligned with a commitment to justice and safety for Palestinians, and Rich, who served on the Jewish Voice for Peace board of advisers and was active in other progressive Jewish activist organizations, stood for Palestinian rights at a time when such views were marginalized even within many progressive Jewish circles. As Brooke Lober notes, Rich was “an influential shaper of politics and culture” within the Jewish feminist movement and joined other Jewish women who were inspired, like Rich, to “apply their feminist politics to questions of ethnicity, race, nation, and state, producing a discourse that resulted in organized Jewish feminist opposition to the violences of Zionism—Jewish nationalism embedded in a state apparatus for the domination of Palestine” (Lober 664). One of the first women to serve as a congregational rabbi, Rebecca Alpert, in her essay, “Jewish Feminist Justice Work: Focus on Israel/Palestine,” credits Rich with helping her to more clearly voice what Alpert calls her own “post-Zionism,” a democracy-affirming position aspiring to “equal rights for everyone in Israel/Palestine” (165). Alpert’s citation affirms the depth of Rich’s commitment and is worth quoting more fully:

I mention Adrienne both in memory of my beloved friend and because of her forthright and brave stances on Israel/Palestine beginning in the mid-1980s that inspired me and others to add, as she did, a fourth question to Hillel's famous inquiry: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?" With her I say, "If not with others, how?" In an essay with that title, she reminded us that feminist principles demand working in coalition, with others. (Alpert 167)

Rich's Jewishness was deep and specific in its commitments and expressions, much like her poetry.³⁴

Even so, Rich's Jewishness is not even mentioned in several of the major newspaper obituaries that paid tribute to her in 2012, an omission as startling as listing her as a National Book Award recipient without mentioning that she accepted the award only on her own terms, alongside the other women nominated (Bancroft; Schudel and *The Washington Post*; Gorman).³⁵ And while Rich explicitly addresses Jewishness in many of her major poems, such as "Readings from History," "Yom Kippur, 1984," "Sources," "Eastern War Time," and "Tattered Kaddish," this facet of her identity, when mentioned at all, is too often nominally included—just another adjective. In actuality, Rich's Jewishness is infused throughout her work, including in her very prosody. Michelle Dean makes the case that Rich's break from traditional form was a break from her father, who hammered traditional prosody into her brain starting at age four. In breaking from her father, her freer forms break with the patriarchy, and, we might say,

³⁴ And like her Americanness, her Jewishness is consciously and unconsciously shaped by the "politics of her location." Rich writes, "As a woman I have a country; as a woman I cannot divest myself of that country merely by condemning its government [...]. I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, feminist I am created and trying to create" ("Notes toward a Politics of Location" 212).

³⁵ *Diving into the Wreck* won Rich (in a tie with Allen Ginsberg) the National Book Award for poetry, which she accepted on stage with Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, the other two nominees, on behalf of all women, rather than on her own (Fox).

choose a feminist Jewishness (by rejecting patriarchy and the assimilation of her father). Dean notes, “There are hints throughout her work that [...] all the flattery she’d received from her father had been a kind of control and she saw how her changing verse was a literal break with patriarchy.” Just as choosing freer forms was a rejection of her father, choosing unapologetic Jewishness was also a rejection of him—namely, a rejection of his shame and secrecy. In choosing a radical Jewishness much more interested in feminist-led social justice activism than in traditional conceptions of patriarchal order and power, Rich rejected not only her father’s shame but also his power. These formal and cultural breaks with Rich’s father and the patriarchy go hand in hand; as much as her poetics were inextricable from her feminism starting in the sixties, so too were her poetics inextricable from her embrace of her Jewish identity. And because Rich’s Jewishness was bifurcated—meaning, she had to choose between two or more branches that were all “Jewish” (patriarchal/feminist, Zionist/non-Zionist, traditional/progressive, spiritual/humanist, etc.)—the Jewishness that shows up in her poems often operates from a place of intellectual complexity, bifurcation, and even ambivalence. “Jewish” is much more than a simple adjective embedded in a list of adjectives describing Rich.

For as much as Rich’s Jewishness is overlooked in some of her work’s criticism, her representation of animals is virtually ignored. One reason this is probably true is that Rich does not depict animals that often in her writing, and her depictions, when present, often express ambivalence, much like the ambivalence inherent in her Jewish self-expression. But Rich’s animal ambivalence actually signals the ever-evolving feminist Jew within her—her justice-oriented drive to re-vision the world and its (creaturely) interrelationships.

Section 2: Romanticism, Jewishness, and Nonhuman Animals in Rich's Writing

In her poems, Rich excavates and explores the parts of herself, such as her Jewish identity, that she experiences ambivalently or as “split at the root,” and she likewise dives toward the wrecks of patriarchy and heteronormativity and other controlling myths of Western culture, but she mostly uses nonhuman animals reluctantly, and often shallowly, as metaphors. For the sake of contrast, Stern's opossum in “Behaving Like a Jew” is made visible by Stern's attentiveness to not only the animal's particular body on an actual road but also his attentiveness to the brotherhood he feels with the animal as well as to the grief the encounter arouses in him. Stern's opossum symbolizes realities not physically present, such as the lives lost in the Holocaust, but Stern also dignifies the opossum as an individual of the species by translating his observations of the opossum into poetic language that helps us see the creature as an individual too. In contrast, Rich's nonhuman animals typically function as metaphors for repressed truth, longing, or dream, which further distinguishes them from Stern's nonhuman animals, which are individuated and sometimes even voiced. Kumin's tenderly depicted nonhuman animals, discussed in chapter 4, also differ quite a bit in their vivid specificity. Read in light of Rich's evolutions as a Jewish American feminist, her progressions toward and away from using nonhuman animals in her writing can be read as evidence of her ongoing bifurcation or split between truth and appearance, identity and performance.

Nonhuman animals have been present in Rich's poetry since the beginning, but the way they have functioned in her poems has evolved from the neat metaphor of “Aunt Jennifer's Tigers” to the liminal space where concreteness meets abstraction in *The*

Dream of a Common Language to the gestural blur of the vixen in “Fox.” Over the half century mapped by this arc, Rich’s nonhuman animals hid in plain sight, mostly undiscussed in the prolific accrual of criticism on her work.

“Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”

The second poem in *A Change of World*, Rich’s first published book, remains one of her most anthologized: “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” contrasts the “mastered” domestic life in which Aunt Jennifer wears “[t]he massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band” with the freedom and pride of the wild tigers Aunt Jennifer embroiders (10, 8). Aunt Jennifer is mastered not only by her marriage and domestic “ordeals” but also by Rich’s intellectual and formal choices. As Claudia Rankine observes in her introduction to Rich’s *Collected Poems*, “Rich’s dialectical use of the tigers to contrast the paralysis intrinsic to Aunt Jennifer’s domestic life speaks gently to her early ‘absolutist approach to the universe,’ as she herself observed in a 1964 essay” (Rankine xli). In addition to displaying a bit of the young poet’s intellectual absolutism, the poem exerts control over its subject through formal mastery. Like the rest of Rich’s 1951 collection, “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” showcases Rich’s accomplishments as an early formalist of “dutiful meter and scrupulous rhymes,” as Margalit Fox notes (“Adrienne Rich”); the poem’s three quatrains of iambic hexameter are built upon a tidy double-couplet rhyme scheme comprised completely of full—or what some would call *masculine*—rhymes (*aabb ccdd eeff*).³⁶ While “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” can easily be read as an artifact of mastery and even rigidity in early

³⁶ McDaniel is less generous than Fox, noting of Rich’s early formal poems, “Like many of the women she described, these early poems seem nearly suffocated by self-control” (4).

Rich, reading the poem instead as an example of her Romantic impulse and her unease with poetically rendering nonhuman animals offers fresh insight into the poem and, by extension, Rich's animal poetics more broadly.

And the Romantic impulse overtly pulses through the poem. While "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" visibly asserts itself into Western tradition by way of its form, its assertion into a Romantic lineage in particular is found in its allusions to William Blake, John Keats, and Rainer Maria Rilke. Rich builds upon famous poems by her non-Jewish male Romantic forebears to create something new, the beginning of her journey of re-visioning the literary tradition.

The most obvious of these allusions is to Blake's "The Tyger," in which Blake's speaker wonders what god or creator would "dare" create such a terrifying creature: "What immortal hand or eye, / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" (23–24). Using six quatrains with the same double-couplet rhyme scheme Rich would later employ in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," Blake takes twice the space as Rich to ask a similar philosophical question: what is the actual nature of he—or she—who creates the "fearful" tiger? For both poets, the question cannot be fully answered, the mastered aunt as unknowable in her nervous act of creation as the Tyger's creator is. Rich echoes Blake's famous refrain when she describes the tigers as "Bright topaz" in line 2, as if to assure that yes, she is alluding to *that* poem. Both poets also emphasize the materiality and labor of creation. Blake does so through wondering about the creator's tools:

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp! (13–16)

Rich does the same when she describes,

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull. (5–6)

Rich thereby aligns the traditionally feminine art of needlework with the divine art of creation, quietly pointing to the feminism she would later embody and articulate.³⁷ And Rich recalls the “deadly terrors” in Blake’s poems in her final stanza, though for Aunt Jennifer the source of terror is not her embroidered tigers but her actual life:

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid. (9–12)

Aunt Jennifer’s tigers are “chivalric” foils to her anxiety-making domestic life, less terrifying than protective and aspirational. At first glance, she seems to tame Blake’s Tyger, bringing the creature into the world of “prancing” and “pac[ing]” (1, 4). I’d argue that what she does is more emancipative and empowering than that. When Blake asks his Tyger, “Did he who made the lamb make thee?” he questions the creator’s actual nature: could the same creator who made Jesus/the lamb in his own image possibly also see himself in a terrifying, wild cat? (Blake 20). The most obvious reading of Aunt Jennifer’s hands “Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by” is that wedding rings and handcuffs have much in common; I wonder, though, if Rich didn’t also mean to suggest that Aunt Jennifer had some tiger in her too, her hands ringed like tigers’ paws. In her embroidery, Aunt Jennifer’s repressed tiger-like nature “Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid” (12). Aunt Jennifer almost speaks back through time, encouraging Blake that he need not fear the Tyger inside God, or himself—or the art of his own making. Within this

³⁷ For a historically and metaphorically rich exploration of the relationship between textile work, femininity, feminism, and early rabbinic Judaism, see Miriam Peskowitz’s *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History*.

nod to her decidedly non-Jewish forefather here, Rich establishes what will become her career-long pattern with nonhuman animals in poems: the tigers symbolize the self that Aunt Jennifer does not get to assert as a 1950s-era housewife. Rich was young in her self-awareness as a Jew when this poem was written, but already she aligns nonhuman animals with the truer, repressed self, and places those animals in contrast to the performed identity—here, the performance of traditional gender roles and the deference to the patriarchal institution of marriage.

The other major Romantic influence in the poem is John Keats by way of his “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Aunt Jennifer’s tigers are placed in a tableau upon “the panel that she made,” pacing “in sleek chivalric certainty,” bringing to mind the young almost lovers and other “deities or mortals” on Keats’s admittedly wilder and rowdier urn tableau (Rich 11, 4; Keats 6). Rich’s “men beneath the tree” of whom the proud tigers are unafraid (Rich 3) allude to Keats’s “Fair youth, beneath the trees,” whom Keats addresses:

thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (Keats 15–20)

Keats is more concerned with the tableau’s frozenness and the incompleteness of the figures’ actions than is Rich, who places Aunt Jennifer’s tigers in motion and lets the allusion do her heavy lifting: of course her tigers’ prancing will be forever frozen mid-step. And like the urn’s figures, the tigers will “go on prancing, proud and unafraid,” beyond their creator’s death (Rich 12). The eternity of art against the backdrop of human mortality elevates Aunt Jennifer’s art—what many might dismissively call *craft*—to that

of a classic Grecian urn, again recalling Keats:

When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours(Keats 46–48)

Aunt Jennifer’s tigers, these metaphorical vehicles of the repressed tiger-like spirit that would have animated Aunt Jennifer’s life had she been born into other terms, another time,³⁸ or another gender, signify through these twin Blakean and Keatsian allusions that they are creations as worthy—and as lifeless in their gesture toward fuller life—as Blake’s tigers or Keats’s urn.

Rich was a senior in college when this poem appeared in *A Change of World*, and her literary education up until 1951 had been traditional, mostly represented by the white male poets whose gender and class privilege had afforded them space, time, and resources to develop their extraordinary talent and skill; James McCorkle traces Rich’s diction in “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” to more immediate, twentieth-century male influences: Eliot, Auden, and Lowell (90).³⁹ Rich knows her inheritance as a poet better than most, having been trained by her father and her father’s poetry-rich library, and her allusions to Blake, Keats, and Rilke—whose “The Panther” Claudia Rankine also suggests is a source of “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”—are surely intentional.⁴⁰ By conjuring up the passion, rebellion, and high art of these Romantic forebears, Rich is working on

³⁸ James McCorkle points to Aunt Jennifer’s generational limitations as also of being in important proximity to Rich’s: “Although Rich has imagined this woman as from a previous generation, they are close relatives: an imaginary aunt close enough for Rich to scrutinize—and to be glimpsed in the mirror” (McCorkle 90).

³⁹ Rich is also often linked to post-Romantic W.B. Yeats, whose iconography may also be an influence here.

⁴⁰ Rankine writes, “‘Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers’ projects freedom onto the image of the tigers the poem’s protagonist stitches into her needlework. This is in contrast to Rilke’s portrayal of the panther as imprisoned and behind bars. Rilke depicts the panther’s very will as having been paralyzed” (Rankine xli).

multiple levels: she is rebelliously elevating her subject's embroidery to the level of divine creation or ancient Greek art, she is announcing herself as part of a great (and almost completely male) poetic tradition, and she is gesturing toward the repressed visionary feminist, and Jew, within—her own tigers, apparently tamed but preparing to prove themselves rebellious (revolutionary even), proud, and unafraid.⁴¹ The tigers help her name something essential about herself—something she cannot yet name otherwise, perhaps not even to herself. This poem might appear, to quote Auden's preface to *A Change of World*, "neatly and modestly dressed," and the poem does indeed respect Rich's "elders," as Auden also praises, but the poem points to a young poet grappling with her own identity, and where it might fit in the literary canon.⁴²

⁴¹ In the second half of Rich's career, Rich's visionary status as a poet was fully established. In her review of *The Dream of a Common Language*, Alicia Ostriker notes that "[a] difference between major and minor poetry is that the former announces ideas, the latter fills in the blanks," which is why she calls the collection "major" poetry and Rich "visionary," locating Rich in a tradition that includes Blake, Whitman, Baudelaire, and Frost (Ostriker, "Her Cargo" 7–9). Nadine Gordimer has called Rich "the Blake of American letters," and James McCorkle sees in Rich a "Blakean junction of will, passion, politics, and poetry" (Yorke 3; McCorkle 92). As Rich herself claims in her speech-turned-essay "Poetry and Commitment," poetry helps

remind us of something we are forbidden to see. A forgotten future—a still-uncreated site whose moral architecture is founded not on ownership and dispossession, the subjugation of women, torture and bribes, outcast and tribe, but on the continuous redefining of freedom—that word now held under house arrest by the rhetoric of the "free market." [...] All over the world its paths are being rediscovered and reinvented: through collective action, through many kinds of art. (Rich, "Poetry" 36)

Poetry, as Rich engages it, is a commitment to radical change, to re-visioning, and justice.

⁴² W. H. Auden selected *A Change of World* for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award in 1951, thereby launching Rich's career ("Adrienne Rich").

The Bee and the Heron: Nonhuman Animal Representation in Rich's Essays

The connection between Rich's Jewishness and her animals is, at first glance, subtle, and that's a generous assessment when analyzed beside Stern. And yet Rich's Jewish animal paws from the corners of the poems she wrote after "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," begging reconsideration of its shadowy abstractions as a "beast," "animal," or "creature" she periodically hides in plain sight when exploring her authentic identities. To attend most effectively to the Jewish meanings of Rich's animal poems, one ought to start with the bumblebee and the heron, the treatment of whom in Rich's essays measures the outer edges of Rich's nonhuman animal continuum. On one end is nonhuman-animal-unapologetically-used-as-metaphor, represented by the tigers above or, even more relevant to Rich's Jewishness, the bumblebee in "Notes toward a Politics of Location." On the other end of the continuum is the heron, representing Rich's self-conscious resistance to the metaphorical use-value of nonhuman animals.

In "Notes toward a Politics of Location," Rich recounts her agitated attempts at writing and how she locates something of her struggle—as a white person, a woman, and a Jew, in that order—by reflecting on a bumblebee who has wandered into the house:

Beginning to write, then getting up. Stopped by the movements of a huge early bumblebee which has somehow gotten inside this house and is reeling, bumping, stunning itself against windowpanes and sills. I open the front door and speak to it, trying to attract it outside. It is looking for what it needs, just as I am, and, like me, it has gotten trapped in a place where it cannot fulfill its own life. I could open the jar of honey on the kitchen counter, and perhaps it would take honey from that jar; but its life process, its work, its mode of being cannot be fulfilled inside this house.

And I, too, have been bumping my way against glassy panes, falling half-stunned, gathering myself up and crawling, then again taking off, searching.

I don't hear the bumblebee any more, and I leave the front door. I sit down and pick up a secondhand, faintly annotated student copy of

Marx's *The German Ideology*, which "happens" to be lying on the table.
(211)

Rich's gesture of dialogic engagement with a nonhuman entity in this passage brings to mind her poem "Splittings," in which Rich imagines a conversation between her mind and her pain, personified. In the above passage, similar to "Splittings," Rich's dialogic gesture may personify but isn't enough alone to grant her interlocutor personhood as a distinct individual of the species. Rather, her personification maintains the other as a metaphorical vehicle rather than as an individual.⁴³ This objectifying of the nonhuman animal is what anti-Jewish propaganda relies upon when it caricatures the Jew as sinister wolf, dog, or rat. Whereas Stern undermines such propaganda with his dignifying animal poetics, Rich's animal poetics in this essay, and earlier in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," do not question the ethical problem of using nonhuman animals metaphorically *without*, as Stern does, also dignifying them as recognizably distinct individuals.

Rich's animal poetics are indistinct when she uses nonhuman animals as transparent metaphors, even if doing so puts her in good company in the Western literary tradition (Keats's nightingale flutters to mind); in this way, Rich's animal poetics in this mode are not unlike her early description of her Jewishness as "a cloud I can't quite see the outlines of, which feels to me to be without definition" (Rich, "Split" 100). That cloud metaphor, which appears in "Split at the Root," is immediately followed by another metaphor: "And yet I've been on the track of this longer than I think," Rich writes, subtly describing her Jewish identity as an animal she has been tracking through the landscapes

⁴³ I use the terms *vehicle* and *tenor* in their metaphorical sense—that is, to refer to the two essential halves of a metaphor. In the sentence, "Your eyes are waning suns," *waning suns* (vehicle) are meant to convey some of the eyes' (tenor) qualities. When Rich compares a bumblebee's experience to her own, the bumblebee's struggle is the vehicle that conveys poetic meaning about the poet's experience, which is the tenor.

of her life (“Split” 101). In “Notes toward a Politics of Location,” Rich’s bee isn’t rendered with the visual sensitivity that more readily identified animal poets, such as Marianne Moore or Mary Oliver, might grant it; we don’t know its coloring or size or whether its one leg is injured. Rich likewise does not anthropomorphize the bumblebee as Stern might, and the bee most certainly does not verbally answer Rich’s address. But, recalling Stern, Rich recognizes herself in the bee and the bee in herself. And though Rich objectifies the bee, much as she objectified Jewishness and her Jewish in-laws in the early stage of her marriage, she also represents the bee’s specific motions and reflects on its actual experience; as with her early embrace of “real” Judaism when she got married, she identifies with the bee even as she objectifies it. And finally, while the bumblebee interrupts Rich’s work, if anything, the bee also facilitates her work as a writer, helping her understand herself, her struggle, and how she might attempt to say something useful about the “politics” of her “location” as a white feminist. The bumblebee, albeit unknowingly, helps Rich perform her work as a writer. Rich’s acceptance, if not deep understanding, of the bee is important to her personhood as a poet, an essayist, and as a Jew trying to clearly articulate what is complex.

Rich sees the serendipitous presence of the bee as an opportunity to use it metaphorically: in the bee’s material struggle to get free of “a place where it cannot fulfill its own life,” Rich finds a way to describe her own frustration, her own “bumping [her] way against glassy panes, falling half-stunned, gathering [her]self up and crawling, then again taking off, searching” (“Notes” 211). Rich also finds the bee useful, later in the essay, for helping her name how being a white Jewish woman of relative privilege in the United States prevents her from fully stepping outside her “location” in order to theorize

a global feminism that empowers Black and brown women, whose economic, political, and social status is relatively disadvantaged compared with her own. Like the bee, she is at least temporarily trapped in her arbitrary location. Outside her walls, in that more capacious feminism, Rich could live, she believes, more authentically and usefully. The bee helps Rich out. The bee also, of course, represents Rich's literal struggle to write—in this case, a talk for the First Summer School of Semiotics's *Conference on Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980s*. Like the bee, Rich sees herself as a worker trying to survive and fulfill her purpose in the world, partly by finding an open door into writing her talk; whereas for the bee, the door is literal, for Rich, the escape from her narrow location and limitations seems to be through reading Marx.⁴⁴ The door “happens” to be open because Rich opened it; Marx “happens” to be on the table because Rich is an American white feminist who has, as she excavates in this essay, passively embraced that “real ideas” come from white people like Karl Marx or Simone de Beauvoir and that “white middle-class feminism can know for ‘all women’; that only when a white mind formulates it is the formulation to be taken seriously” (230). Rich's white feminist formulations fail to account theoretically for the African feminist tradition, for example, or Black American feminism, to say nothing of a Jewish American (mostly white) feminism; opening Marx's treatise on the revolutionary power of the working class doesn't necessarily lead her to the freedom she seeks, even if Marx shared an ethnic link to Jewish identity⁴⁵ and even if Marxist feminism is important to Rich's intellectual

⁴⁴ The “escape” here is partly ironic. *The German Ideology* is an attractive portal into theorizing radical feminist idealism at least partly because of the race, gender, and erudition of its author.

⁴⁵ Marx has also been critiqued by scholars, such as Hyam Maccoby and Robert Wistrich, as anti-Semitic, particularly in Marx's essay “On *The Jewish Question*.” Others, such as

life.⁴⁶ She picks up the book, but she suspects it may not free her. Likewise, the open door may have set the bee free, or the bee may have simply stunned itself silent and fallen dead.

As vehicles for self-revelation, Rich's animals are individually unknowable. In the same essay, Rich notes the difference between "the body" and "my body" in terms of abstraction versus particularity, and she recalls how "Lillian Smith, white anti-racist writer and activist, spoke of the 'deadly sameness' of abstraction" (215; Smith 189 referenced in Rich, "Notes" 221). While neither Smith nor Rich would likely categorize the symbolic objectification of nonhuman animals as "deadly," that threat seems plausible through the lens of twenty-first-century Jewish animal studies. The more abstract the animal (or Jew), the more easily exterminable it is. How a Jewish poet represents nonhuman animals post-Holocaust, when examined through a Jewish animal studies lens, is necessarily tied to whether that poet has internalized the Jew *as* animal as being an anti-Jewish dehumanization or a Sternian rejection of anti-Jewish propaganda. While Rich's metaphoric use of nonhuman animals in her writing is less consciously connected to her Jewishness, the breadcrumbs connecting the two are scattered throughout her work; indeed, her metaphoric use of animals in her poems is emblematic of the "split consciousness" she experiences between claiming and evading her own

David McLellan, argue that the essay is actually a defense of the Jews. Regardless, the Jewish question isn't immediately relevant to *The German Ideology*, even if it *is* relevant to the soon-to-come Nazi ideology. Marx's Jewishness is not mentioned in Rich's essay.⁴⁶ Adrienne Rich particularly admired the writings of Raya Dunayevskaya, the American founder of Marxist-Humanism in the United States and of *News and Letters*, a Marxist-Humanist newspaper. In 1986, Rich published an essay, "Living the Revolution," about her early encounters with Dunayevskaya's writings, and she later wrote the foreword to the (posthumous) second edition of Dunayevskaya's *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*. (Gratitude to Laura Levitt for directing me to these sources!)

Jewishness.

Even as Rich's nonhuman animals so often function like the bumblebee, offering personal insight by way metaphor, she later comes to believe that animals should not be used or viewed as symbols. In this way, her later animal poetics are informed by a Marxist understanding of nonhuman animals' "use-value" in literature, ironically suggesting that Marx belatedly *does* become an open door for Rich—an open door for her reconsideration of nonhuman animals, though, rather than an open door for her "Notes toward a Politics of Location." Rich most clearly articulates this ideal of not using animals metaphorically in her 1993 essay, "Woman and bird," which recounts her serendipitous encounter with a Great Blue Heron momentarily perched on her neighbor's roof—recalling Jewett's 1886 feminist (and ecologically minded) story, "A White Heron." Early in "Woman and bird," Rich muses on human threats to the natural environment surrounding her Northern California home, which inspires a rare specificity in her animal naming: "mockingbirds, finches, doves, Steller's jays, hummingbirds are drawn to come and feed on plums and ollalieberries, honeysuckle and fuchsia during the warm months of the year. There's almost always a gull or two far overhead. Somebody keeps chickens; a rooster crows at dawn" ("Woman and bird" 4). This observation sets the scene: Rich returns one day "from an errand," and there is the Great Blue Heron. Her description of the majestic bird strives against presupposing the animal has human characteristics: "Poised there on the peak of the roof, it looked immense, fastidious, apparently calm," and it "seemed to gaze as far into the blue air as the curve of the earth would allow" (4). Words like *apparently* and *seemed* interrupt Rich's human, poetic temptation toward anthropomorphism. But then, as she does with the bumblebee, Rich

addresses the heron, “speaking to it in a low voice.” She writes, “I told it that I thanked it for having come; that I wanted it to be safe”; then “[s]uddenly it was in air, had flapped out of sight” (4). Again, Rich does not record that she thanked the bird, which could suggest humanlike understanding on the bird’s part; she says she “told it that” she thanked it, another distancing syntactical gesture. In the same sentence that she distances herself from the heron, she also empathizes with its vulnerability: “I wanted it to be safe” (4).

As the essay continues, Rich rushes inside to an ornithology book to confirm that the bird was indeed a Great Blue Heron. She then contemplates how recognizing nonhuman life with its human-given names—such as *Great Blue Heron*—pulls her closer to the encounter, allows her “to stay with” the feeling the encounter stirs, and “draw[s] [her] into a state of piercing awareness” that she “associate[s] with reading and writing poems” (“Woman and bird” 4–5). Naming nonhuman animals specifically according to what they resemble, Rich says, makes them “unforgettable”—unlike the more specific but less “pictorial” scientific Latin names for genus and species that are harder to recall if one is not a zoologist. “Human eyes gazed at each of all of these forms of life and saw resemblance in difference, the core of metaphor, that which lies close to the core of poetry itself, the only hope for a humane civil life,” Rich says, relating the metaphorical intimacy of naming to the humaneness of humanity (6). And then again, she counters closeness with distance, revealing the intellectual forces that enforce this ambivalence:

The Great Blue Heron is not a symbol. Wandered inadvertently or purposefully inland, maybe drought-driven, to a back-yard habitat, it is a bird, *Ardea herodias*, whose form, dimensions, and habits have been described by ornithologists, yet whose intangible ways of being and knowing remain beyond my—or anyone’s—reach. If I spoke to it, it was

because I needed to acknowledge in words the rarity and signifying power of its appearance, not because I thought it had come to me. The tall, foot-poised creature had a life, a place of its own in the manifold, fragile system that is this coastline; a place of its own in the universe. Its place, and mine, I believe, are equal and interdependent. Neither of us—woman or bird—is a symbol, despite efforts to make us that. But I needed to acknowledge the heron with speech, and by confirming its name. To it I brought the kind of thing my kind of creature does. (7)

When contemplating her relationship to nonhuman animals, Rich wants the closeness of metaphor even as she recognizes that aspects of the nonhuman animal’s “ways of being and knowing” are beyond reach and therefore should not be spoken for (7). The heron’s “use” for Rich in this essay is not so the poet can make of it a metaphor but rather so that the poet can experience ecological interconnection between two “kind[s] of creature[s]” and express respect for the other creature. In this way, Rich joins Stern in wanting to perceive the animal as “equal” to her and the animal’s world as being “interdependent” with hers, but she does not follow him into anthropomorphism, and she does not follow her earlier self into the milder metaphorical use of the bumblebee. Naming and respecting nonhuman animals allows her to connect with them in both of these essays, to experience “sameness in difference.” But her encounter with the heron reminds her of her ethical commitment to leaving the heron as a heron.

One might argue that Rich’s animal poetics overall are aligned with her depiction of the heron, given the omission of nonhuman animals from most of her poems. This pattern of omission might seem proof enough that Rich doesn’t want to use animals for human, poetic gain. But animals *do* appear in several important Rich poems, and it is the rarity of their appearance (like the heron!) that is most intriguing. Why is there almost no nonhuman sea life in “Diving into the Wreck,” a poem whose zoologically rich oceanic

landscape Rich only gestures to vaguely, with the word *fish*? (“Diving” 60).⁴⁷ Rich did not *need* nonhuman animals in the poem’s meticulously built metaphor, which finds exquisite expression in its nonliving metaphors, such as the “dark knowledge [the water] represents,” as Roger Gilbert has argued; the speaker’s diving equipment and documenting tools; and the “book of myths / in which / our names do not appear” (“Diving” 92–94); as well as in its fantastical or imaginative metaphors, such as the androgynous mer-person who joins the other “tentative haunters” to study, carve into, and transcend the gender binary (and related human disasters). Nonhuman animals mostly appear when Rich’s need for a living metaphor seems to overwhelm her usual instincts of restraint; the later in her career, the more likely it is that traces appear of her ethical discomfort with using animals metaphorically when she references them, as we see in “Woman and bird.” What Rich allows when she allows herself the metaphorical use of animals is a holdover from Rich’s training as a young poet, as a young lesbian who for years was not able to name herself as such, and as a Jew who, at various times and to various degrees, denied or restrained her Jewishness.

The need for a nonhuman animal metaphor overwhelms Rich’s counter-instinct to articulate precisely because the tenor itself is fluid and hard to encapsulate, such as the tenor of her complicated Jewish identity—as she has implied, that identity is a creature being tracked, “beyond reach.” When these parts of Rich—the repressed woman, lesbian, or Jew—cannot find expression otherwise, a nonhuman creature appears in the poem like a cloud, a blur, or an abstract vehicle to let out some pressure. Or it buzzes in like the

⁴⁷ Before entering the water, the speaker says, “I crawl like an insect down the ladder” (“Diving” 30). Like *fish*, *insect* is neither specific, knowable, nor visualizable beyond the vague gesture.

bumblebee, concretizing a hard-to-pin-down experience by way of analogy. Indeed, in Rich's poems, nonhuman animals are rarely named as precisely as the heron or observed and described as closely. Likewise, when being used metaphorically, their tenors are rarely as clearly expressed as the bumblebee's tenor. Once we start to read Rich's poems for her animal ambivalence, we see it everywhere—much like how when we look for Rich's radical feminism in her earliest poems, we find hints buried in plain sight. Rich's metaphorical use of nonhuman animals in her poems conveys her animal ambivalence by toggling between distancing herself from the nonhuman animal (*the nonhuman animal is unknowable and separate from me*) and connecting with it (*I identify with the nonhuman animal and choose to name its species*). For each of the significant nonhuman animal appearances in Rich's poems, we can ask: is Rich indicating distance from or identification with this animal, and if its presence seems to function metaphorically, how knowable is its tenor? With these insights in hand, we can take a step back and further theorize the relationship between Rich's Jewishness and her nonhuman animals.

Poems from The Dream of a Common Language

A little over twenty-five years after *A Change of World* came Rich's groundbreaking and arguably most personal collection, *The Dream of a Common Language*. The 1978 collection brings Rich's ever bolder feminism into its most embodied form; most of the poems explore relationships between women and between women's bodies, so it makes sense that *The Dream of a Common Language* features more nonhuman animals than any of her other collections: the poems want to move in the physical, material, embodied world. Maybe also for this reason, these poems reveal

Rich's animal poetics at their most ambivalent. While the earlier *A Change of World* uses its nonhuman animals in metaphors as easily apprehended as the tigers in its most famous poem, Rich is more torn about how she wants to use nonhuman animals in *The Dream of a Common Language*.⁴⁸ And even though any nonhuman (or human!) animal appearing in literature is only a representation—not, of course, the animal itself—it is noteworthy that Rich's first major animal poem mediates its nonhuman animals to such an extreme: not only are Aunt Jennifer's tigers created in words, but those words describe them as created by thread in the hands of a fictional woman. Though their metaphorical power is focused and effective, Rich's tigers are extremely removed from the material world Rich wrote them within. The poem points to Rich's later discomfort with using recognizable nonhuman animals in the metaphor work of her poems. This discomfort is more fully palpable in *The Dream of a Common Language*.

The four poems in the book in which a nonhuman animal plays a significant role are "Origins and History of Consciousness," "The Lioness," "Twenty-One Love Poems" (which is really more a poem sequence than a single poem), and "Transcendental Etude"; the first, third, and fourth of these are so layered and complex that reading them with a primary focus on nonhuman animals is not only novel but also a bit strange. Still, doing so helps clarify the contours of Rich's developing ambivalence about how to use nonhuman animals poetically. One reason this collection marks a transition for Rich in terms of her nonhuman animals is that it also marks a turning point for her as a poet and person: this is Rich's first full-length collection in which her lesbianism is brought into

⁴⁸ While "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is the most obvious use of nonhuman animals in Rich's first book, the other more minor animal appearances, such as the fanged beast in "This Beast, This Angel" or the analogized snail in "From a Chapter on Literature," function similarly in terms of clear metaphors whose vehicles point to clear tenors.

the light. Just as coming out helped Rich more fully embrace an activist-oriented Jewishness, coming out also brings forth the nonhuman animals, who were previously repressed or meticulously contained in metaphor, more fully into her poems. But Rich hesitates over how to “use” these animals, and she struggles between whether to keep them blurry, abstract, and objectified, or, as in the case of “The Lioness” or the dog in “Twenty-One Love Poems,” whether to let an individual animal more distinctly and individually take up space in her poem. In this brave book of lesbian feminism and of Rich’s nascent dialogic poetics, she wrestles with what to do with nonhuman animals.

The Dream of a Common Language is divided into three sections, and “Origins and History of Consciousness” is the third poem in the first section; it is also the poem most expressive of Rich’s animal ambivalence. In her review of the collection, Olga Broumas notes that a poem sequence woven through the collection that Broumas thinks of as “poems to the loved one” starts with “Origins and History of Consciousness” (Broumas 324). It is the first poem in the collection not claiming to be about historical figures, and it is the first that seems autobiographical.⁴⁹ As Judith McDaniel notes, the poem brings us into “the space in which she [the poet] creates” and allows us to “share her process of analyzing and testing each idea that enters the poem” (McDaniel 21). A major visionary love poem whose title alludes to philosophy (specifically to Erich Neumann’s 1949 *The Origins and History of Consciousness*) and offers a counter treatise

⁴⁹ While the rush to defend a poem as not being confessional generally results from sexism, Judith McDaniel offers a thoughtful explanation for what prevents Rich’s apparently autobiographical poem from being labeled confessional: “The necessities of a larger world call the poet (and reader) out of the drama of the intensely personal—‘the drive / to connect’—to an integration of the personal and the larger political realities. It is this necessity, finally, that has brought Rich’s poetic voice beyond that range explored by the confessional poets” (22).

on the development of consciousness from a woman's perspective, the poem contemplates "the true nature of poetry. The drive / to connect. The dream of a common language" (12). A three-sectioned poem blending a natural, watery dreamscape with wakeful, urban life and comparing the love of women to the act and true nature of poetry, "Origins" asserts itself as an important feminist and lesbian poetic statement.

Because "Origins" is about loving and writing in dream and darkness, in secrecy and fear, it also conforms to Rich's pattern of using nonhuman animals to express what is repressed. The poem features a bird (neat metaphor), an amphibious animal (murkier metaphor), and in the poem's last line, "a dumb beast, head on her paws, in the corner" (murkiest metaphor). The latter two metaphors are technically similes, suggesting that Rich turns to the latter two nonhuman animals out of absolute necessity; the use of similes underscores their distance from her.

But the first nonhuman animal in "Origins" comes in lines 2–4:

Poems crucified on the wall,
dissected, their bird-wings severed
like trophies.

These poems are dead birds pinned on the wall like Eliot's Prufrock, impotent, inhibited though they were once free, celebrated "like trophies" though the poet sees them as disfigured, their wings "severed." Rich once again draws on a long tradition of white male Romantic poets using birds to represent the soul or poetry, a tradition including Keats's "Ode to the Nightingale" and Shelley's "To a Skylark," as well as perhaps Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush" and Frost's "The Oven Bird." Rich's dead birds are, we might suppose, poems Rich wrote out of this inherited male tradition, before knowing or allowing herself to seek "the true nature of poetry" as a poet—"The drive / to connect"—

and before dreaming “of a common language” between women and women poets. That these old, disconnected poems are crucified as the imagined lovers are crucified in line 14 suggests that they have been tortured and contorted so that they look like they are in flight (like freedom, like real poetry) while actually being quite the opposite; the link with the lovers also implies a connection between poetry that is alive (rather than mounted), lovers who can love freely (rather than in fear of social or actual death), and nonhuman animals. We don’t know what avian species Rich envisions, as “bird-wings” is her only hint; unlike the equally vague fish in “Diving into the Wreck,” though, the birds have a clear and resonant tenor.

Rich’s second nonhuman animal, appearing in stanza 3, is vaguer than her birds—a “warm amphibious animal” Rich compares herself to in dreams. She sets the scene:

I have dreamed of going to bed
as walking into clear water ringed by a snowy wood
white as cold sheets, thinking, *I’ll freeze in there.* (15–17)

This image echoes the book’s epigraph by H. D., suggesting that the “common language” between women is materializing in the dream.⁵⁰ The dream then shifts to its amphibious animal by way of simile:

My bare feet are numbed already by the snow
but the water
is mild, I sink and float
like a warm amphibious animal
that has broken the net, has run
through fields of snow leaving no print;
this water washes off the scent—
*You are clear now
of the hunter, the trapper
the wardens of the mind—* (18–27)

⁵⁰ The epigraph is from H. D.’s *The Flowering of the Rod*: “I go where I love and where I am loved, / into the snow; // I go to the things I love / with no thought of duty or pity[.]”

The bird standing in for true poetry and true love in the poem's first stanza is not unrelated to Rich's dream self. Amphibious, this nonhuman animal can breathe in the dream world, the womb-like pool of creative and sexual freedom, as well as in the dry and unsafe world of "*the hunter, the trapper / the wardens of the mind*" who would try to prevent the animal (Rich, the lesbian, the poet) from entering this dream. This amphibious animal recalls the truth-seeking androgynous diver in "Diving into the Wreck," implying that we (poets, feminists, lesbians, truth-seekers) must learn to breathe like amphibious animals, in multiple domains, to discover the repressed truth in dream or myth. In "Origins," Rich's amphibious animal dream self exists in contrast to her real-world human self, the self that is distracted from its true purpose to connect when awake in the modern, dangerous world. The animal "has run / through fields of snow leaving no print," perhaps because the snowy, cold ground the animal journeys over—patriarchal criticism or language? self-criticism? the unwelcoming, often violent waking world?—has no receptivity or language for this "true nature" of poetry, womanhood, or lesbian love. That this more ambiguous, creaturely version of Rich seeks safety in the dreamscape also seems to emphasize the unreality, or perhaps impossibility, of a poetry that can connect all women.⁵¹ Rich represents the self as a nonhuman amphibious animal so that she can imagine trading the unsafe modern world for an imagined better—or at

⁵¹ I don't mean to suggest that Rich negates her vision of commonality and connection by submerging the poem into a dreamscape; rather, the dreamscape—and the self's amphibiousness—allows Rich to hold two truths at once: she wants a poetry that can speak to and connect all women while also recognizing that like all utopias, the world in which such a poetry is possible does not exist. As she later wrestles with in "Notes toward a Politics of Location," the politics and limitations of her location, and vision, however broad and informed and inclusive she wishes them to be, mean that she cannot speak to, or for, all. Because the poem and collection suggest more than one meaning of *dream* and more than one meaning of *common*, the dreamscape is ultimately less about negation than complexity.

least truer and braver—one, in which fuller expression would seem, or be, more possible. In so doing, Rich also subtly aligns this truer, braver amphibious self who can live awake in the open and submerged in dream with her Jewish identity—another facet of herself she has tracked like an animal within. The metaphor here has a lot going on; the vehicles and tenors are apprehensible, but as with the amphibious animal itself, their contours are relatively cloudy.

The poem's dreamscape continues with Rich introducing love to the dream pool:

yet the warm animal dreams on
of another animal
swimming under the snow-flecked surface of the pool,
and wakes, and sleeps again. (28–31)

Rich demonstrates here more of what she means by the “drive to connect” and “the dream of a common language.” Women poets’ true purpose, this poet-animal enacts through her visionary dream, is to connect as women and *as animals*. By foregrounding the animal self, Rich also foregrounds the body, a move Ostriker has noted is common in women’s poetry: “Women tend to begin with their bodies and, moreover, to interpret external reality through the medium of the body” (Ostriker, *Stealing the Language* 11). Examples of modern or contemporary women poets who foreground embodied experience in their poems come readily to mind: May Swenson, Anne Sexton, Anne Marie Macari, Joan Larkin, Sharon Olds, Maxine Kumin, Aracelis Girmay, Ostriker, and beyond. Rich’s foregrounding of animal selves also suggests that the “common language” might in fact depend on physicality, on being together as our animal selves. With her amphibious animal, Rich gets to conceive of herself and the “other animal” as embodied lovers and as dreamy creatures of unknown species at the same time.

This dream is not enough, however, as the poem's last lines, and its least specific nonhuman animal, demonstrate. Writing to and about her female lover, Rich explains:

We did this. Conceived
of each other, conceived each other in a darkness
which I remember as drenched in light.

I want to call this, life.

But I can't call it life until we start to move
beyond this secret circle of fire
where our bodies are giant shadows flung on a wall
where the night becomes our inner darkness, and sleeps
like a dumb beast, head on her paws, in a corner. (63–71)

The womb-like dream pool, which allowed the lover-animals to both imagine (conceive of) and create (conceive) one another, was experienced in the darkness of sleep. These lovers (and these poems) conceived in darkness only know how to live safely in darkness, which does not afford them a fully lived life. They are in a version of Plato's cave, not out in the world of material, embodied experience. As Broumas observes of the poem, "For a poet who has held speech to be synonymous with existence, [...] the struggle to bring back the dream into the actual is a struggle with, a struggle against death" (Broumas 322). As long as the dream exists in external and internal darkness, "a dumb beast," the poet/woman is not truly alive. The animal self, the embodied lover-self, must be "drenched in light" for "this" existence/relationship/process to be called "life." This "dumb beast" that represents Rich's repressed self (or selves) and inner darkness "sleeps," relating it (and the "night") to the permanent sleep of the dead birds and the dream life of the amphibious animals. As far as what sort of nonhuman animal this beast is, all we know is that it has a head and paws. A pet dog, probably? A large cat? A bear cub? Rich wants the image to be murky, and though the metaphor's tenor ("the night")

that “becomes our inner darkness”) seems directly stated, it is actually devilishly hard to pin down due to its conditionality: the night only becomes the beast when the night is “our inner darkness”; does the beast disappear when the night becomes lit with honest life, or does the beast simply wake or move from the corner? If so, does it ever get to sleep again? And really, if the beast is a large dog, that’s quite different from a small housecat or, say, a brown bear. Maybe the beast is depicted murkily because it lives in murky darkness; or maybe Rich has illustrated in a single poem how ambivalent she is about describing nonhuman animals in her poems in specific terms.

Rich goes to the other extreme in “The Lioness,” offering a comparatively precise nonhuman animal (species *and* gender!). The poem is a thirty-five-line extended metaphor that focuses on a single nonhuman animal for the length of its four stanzas, making it an outlier in not just *The Dream of a Common Language* but in all of Rich—aside from Rich’s later vixen, who represents a greater freedom and power than this lioness does. There is also more sensory precision in this poem than in other poems featuring nonhuman animals, particularly an attention to scent: the synesthetic yet abstract “scent of her beauty” draws the speaker to the lioness, and Rich notes the unexplored territory that the lioness “sniffs toward” later in the poem (21). Additionally, Rich offers a little more visual information about the lioness herself than is her usual habit: the lioness paces, echoing Aunt Jennifer’s tigers; she has mirror-like eyes, and Rich details what landscape features are reflected therein; beneath “her haunches’ golden hide / flows an innate, half-abnegated power” (6, 8, 11–12). That latter slip into abstraction, however, dominates Rich’s descriptions: the lioness’s “eyes / are truthful,” “[h]er walk / is bounded,” and she has a “proud, vulnerable head” (7–8, 13–14, 20). In

the poem's second line, Rich writes, "The desert stretches, edge from edge," which is hard to visualize, and the whole conceit of the poem is confusing, especially when compared with the even more complex but also more accomplished "Origins and History of Consciousness": Rich's speaker is drawn to a lioness who is pacing back and forth in "three yards square"; just looking at the lioness, the speaker can trust the truthfulness of her eyes, can recognize the animal's "innate, half-abnegated power." A disembodied voice, presumably the speaker's, tries to encourage the lioness to explore the landscape further. Then she approaches closer and looks into the lioness's eyes, "entering the space behind her eyeballs, / leaving myself outside" (26–27). From within the lioness's eyes, the speaker discovers the lioness isn't just pacing an arbitrary space that she has chosen; instead, the speaker realizes by looking "through her [the lioness's] pupils" that the lioness is actually in

a pen that measures three yards square.
Lashed bars.
The cage.
The penance. (28, 32–25)

From outside, the speaker initially doesn't see the cage; she sees a choice that the lioness has made. By the end of the poem, the speaker and the lioness become one, and we are probably safe to wager that the speaker is Rich. She realizes that the lioness is not exploring beyond her small space because she is, or perceives herself to be, in "[t]he cage," perhaps at a zoo (35). Further, her current agitation, indicated by her pacing, has at times raged, causing her to lash against the bars with all her might to break free; the "lashed bars" also visually conjure eyelashes, as vision itself is behind bars in the poem. When the speaker and the lion merge into one in the poem's final lines, Rich suggests

that when her vision originates from within her animal, embodied truth—from within the lioness and from within the self-knowledge she has previously repressed or misunderstood—she, with her small “pen” and perceived or actual poetic limitations of vision and subject matter, can only see the outer world from within a cage she mostly denies she lives within, a cage she has fought against with all her might and within which she must pay penance (again, echoing the pun on *pen*). It’s an ambitious feminist poem that reveals how a mind (“head”) can be both proud and vulnerable: the vision centered in that head knows that to get to freedom, you first have to see the bars, imagined or real, that keep you penned. Further, the truth is accessible when we look through our animal wisdom.

“The Lioness” is a poem of frustration, and it is, in some ways, a frustrating poem. With all the space the lioness is given, we still can’t really see her; if her species weren’t given directly, all we would have would be the “golden hide.” The poem seems to ask what makes the lioness’s power (and the poet’s power) “half-abnegated,” and is the cage real or just a perception? As well, the poem wants to know whether the pen, and its penance, is real or just perception. For all its cleverness and intelligence, “The Lioness” risks over intellectualization at the expense of embodiment, and it lacks the precision of metaphor in “Diving into the Wreck” or in “Origins and History of Consciousness.” It is maybe more a poem pinned to the wall, wings severed, than it is an exploration of a lion or of the possibility of recognizing our animal selves as human beings. The vehicle and tenor again seem clearer at first glance than at second. Even so, this poem demonstrates Rich again turning to a nonhuman animal to understand her inner truth and to explore whether and how perceived restrictions or limitations can be

transcended. The caged animal echoes beyond the poem itself, gesturing toward true feminism, true poetry, true lesbianism, true Jewishness—even, if we stretch the associations into the contemplative space above the page, the caged animal gestures toward the American Jew who roots the meaning of her Jewishness partly in the suffering of the Holocaust.

In *The Dream of a Common Language*, Rich usually considers nonhuman animals in the context of romantic love, with “The Lioness” as somewhat of an outlier; a quick look at the nonhuman animals in “Twenty-One Love Poems” and “Transcendental Etude” offer a few echoes of “Origins” and “The Lioness” and a few new insights. “Twenty-One Love Poems” is the second section of *The Dream of a Common Language*, and it is where I believe we encounter the best version of Rich’s animal poetics. Some critics refer to “Twenty-One Love Poems” as one long poem, others as a poem sequence; there are cases to be made for each designation. Because it was first published as a standalone letterpress chapbook (1,000 copies, Effie’s Press) in which the numbered sections/poems were each printed on their own pages, and also because the title emphasizes it, I think of this section as a poem sequence, not unlike a crown of sonnets: each individual poem stands alone, but it stands quite a bit more impressively when in the context of its neighbors. Categorizing the project is appropriately difficult; in it, Rich is interested in correcting assumptions and complicating givens, starting with the meaning of “love poem.” “*Tristan und Isolde* is scarcely the story,” Rich writes in poem XVII. The poem sequence explores a lesbian love relationship between Rich and another woman. The relationship is built upon realistically and lovingly described intellectual and physical intimacy between two women, but the relationship does not survive; the poems

are initially addressed to the other woman, but ultimately the “lover” is also poetry itself and even the poet herself, who arrives at a place of self-empowerment, fully alone. The sequence is twenty-two poems long; poems I through XXI are numbered in roman numerals, and between poems XIV and XV is Rich’s erotic “(FLOATING POEM, UNNUMBERED).” The poems are roughly sonnet-shaped and sized, and most can be read as loose sonnets, complete with plausible voltas. There are occasional echoes between the last line of one poem and the first line of the next, another nod to the formal tradition with which the sequence breaks. The speaker in “Twenty-One Love Poems” is Rich, as she states directly in the last line of poem XVIII, and when the chapbook was initially released, Broumas recalls “one thousand of us [...] jealously owned” it—with the “us” in that phrase likely emphasizing the lesbian, and particularly lesbian poet, community (Broumas 324). The chapbook was essentially Rich’s literary coming out as a lesbian poet, and its poem sequence is the core of *The Dream of a Common Language*, right in the center of the book.

Poems VII and X notably address nonhuman animals. Poem VII brings back “the beast” from “Origins” and the notion of “penance” from “The Lioness,” when it opens:

What kind of beast would turn its life into words?
What atonement is this all about?
—and yet, writing words like these, I’m also living. (1–3)

From the start, Rich indicates that she self-identifies as a beast (of what kind, we don’t know) and that her inner animal may be writing autobiographically as an act of “atonement” “and yet [...] also living,” as if writing, or writing autobiographically, or atoning, were activities generally not associated with living.

She then asks, as if gesturing to the rest of “Twenty-One Love Poems” or perhaps to the rest of her life’s work,

Is all this close to the wolverines’ howled signals,
that modulated cantata of the wild?
or, when away from you I try to create you in words,
am I simply using you, like a river or a war? (4–7)

These lines bring to mind Rich’s “Woman and bird,” when she says of her attempt to speak to the Great White Heron, “But I needed to acknowledge the heron with speech, and by confirming its name. To it I brought the kind of thing my kind of creature does” (“Woman and bird” 7). In this earlier poem, though, Rich isn’t sure if her writing *is* close to the wolverines’ “howled signals,” that authentic animal speech-music: doing what her kind of creature does may be an expression of atonement, but it can also be seen as an expression of living and also of an animal speech-music (a human howl) if it is an expression of the poet’s animal truth—bringing to mind the amphibious animal, as well as the poet-lioness. The question Rich asks next is telling: is her poetry to her lover a form of essential animal expression, or is it “use” in the sense of abuse?⁵² Is her poetry authentic (close to the wolverines) or is it a manifestation of evil (industrial pollution, war) when she writes these poems? What kind of beast is she—good or bad?

In the remaining lines of the poem, Rich answers her own question at first rather directly and then, according to her pattern, more complexly:

And how have I used rivers, how have I used wars
to escape writing of the worst thing of all—
not the crimes of others, not even our own death,

⁵² Ostriker notes, “Rich’s fear lest she ‘use’ those she loves in the old way of sexual (or literary) exploitation is scarcely a traditional theme in love poetry; it might well become so. Both in the book’s central section of twenty-one love poems, and in the framing poems around them, one senses not simply the will to change but the accomplishment” (“Her Cargo” 9).

but the failure to want our freedom passionately enough
so that blighted elms, sick rivers, massacres would seem
mere emblems of that desecration of ourselves? (8–13)

She already knows that she has “used” the world around her and its resources, maybe partly like the wolverines’ signals but more as subject matter that has conveniently kept her from “writing the worst thing of all”—that she and her lover (and other women, and other writers) have not atoned for desecrating the self rather than pursuing freedom. Choosing self-desecration over freedom is even worse than desecrating the earth for Rich, because the latter results from the former. In these poems, Rich is trying to do better, to write herself free, thereby choosing the wolverines, the lion before she was caged, the bird before it was disfigured—so that her writing, going forward, can likewise be free, and freeing to herself and to others. Until the self is honored, and loved, and trusted, and expressed, the poet has “fail[ed]to want our freedom passionately enough” to write an emancipatory poetry, and she has failed to take responsibility for her atonement—in Jewish tradition, *teshuvah*. The wolverines and the beast in Poem VII are not metaphors. They are like the Great Blue Heron for Rich—reminders that we are all creatures on this earth living distinct but necessarily interconnected lives.

In poem X, Rich again tries to atone, this time for the presumption, depicted in “The Lioness,” that she can claim to deeply know or speak for nonhuman animals. The poem beings,

Your dog, tranquil and innocent, dozes through
our cries, our murmured dawn conspiracies
our telephone calls. She knows—what can she know?
If in my human arrogance I claim to read
her eyes, I find there only my own animal thoughts: (1–5)

Rich initially seems to muse about how much intimacy and human life her lover’s dog

has “trainquil[ly] and innocent[ly]” witnessed while dozing in the lovers’ presence. Her observation of tranquility and innocence suggests the beginning of her projection onto the canine, an act of “arrogance” that Rich begins to extend into the imaginative and anthropomorphic realm of poets like Stern before she stops herself with the em-dash, calling her own bluff. The question, “what can she know?” suggests a human-canine relationship quite at the other extreme from those empathetic relationships Stern explores; Rich seems to question the very notion of canine intelligence. But whether or not the dog is intelligent is not Rich’s concern here. In this poem, Rich addresses the version of herself who wrote “The Lioness.” While in “The Lioness” Rich clearly indicates that the lioness’s eyes are mirrors (and, once she has entered the space behind the lioness’s eyeballs, the lioness’s eyes become like windows), Rich depicts herself trying to have a conversation with the lioness about the outer world in that poem, presuming, perhaps arrogantly, that she understands the lioness’s choices. As a metaphor, this is how “The Lioness” gets away from Rich. So here, with the lover’s dog, Rich acknowledges that if she claims to read any meaning in the dog’s gaze, she is projecting her “own animal thoughts,” which are

that creatures must find each other for bodily comfort,
that voices of the psyche drive through the flesh
further than the dense brain could have foretold,
that the planetary nights are growing cold for those
on the same journey who want to touch
one creature-traveler clear to the end;
that without tenderness, we are in hell. (6–12)

In the clear light of Rich’s extended exploration of romantic love in “Twenty-One Love Poems,” Rich again realizes she does not need to use a nonhuman animal for metaphor or as the object of her projection. By writing a poem in which she deliberately chooses

otherwise, she can atone for previous choices. By appreciating the sameness in difference, that “creatures must find each other for bodily comfort,” she can also find her own way to transcend species boundaries, particularly between canines and humans. She can express embodied experience of “the psyche” without projecting onto a nonhuman animal, such as an amphibious animal or a dumb beast or a lioness, and she can recognize that she and the dog are both “creature-traveler[s]” living through various moments of aloneness and connection. With the last line of the poem, Rich points to an animal poetics more thoroughly explored by Stern and Kumin but expressed here on multiple levels: without tenderness between lovers, there is relationship hell; without tenderness between human beings and other animal species, we create ecological hell (and hellish lives for other species); without tenderness for life—our own lives and other creatures’—we don’t get true freedom or joy, in this life or in any lives to come.

The final poem in *The Dream of a Common Language* is a bookend to “Origins and History of Consciousness” as well as an answer to “Twenty-One Love Poems.” “Transcendental Etude” is ten stanzas long and dedicated to Michelle Cliff, Rich’s life partner. In it we encounter tenderness for nonhuman animals that does not rely primarily on metaphor or projection; looking back across the collection, Rich’s animal poetics as expressed in this poem mark an arrival of sorts and parallel Rich’s arrival into the love relationship and life in which she can fully choose, with a fellow creature-traveler, to live in the light. The title suggests the poem’s main metaphor of studies in music as attempts or studies in living, and the stanzas manage both to function as sketches of the life of the mind as it moves through pastoral, philosophical, and romantic themes, as well as to proceed, one to the next, in a kind of narrative arc. The poem arrives in its last stanza at a

metaphor of assemblage that Rich memorably uses to describe the interrelated projects of assembling a life and a poetics out of a dream of a common language.

The poem engages significantly with nonhuman animals four times: stanzas 1, 2, 7, and 10. Stanza 1 sets the scene: it's an "August Evening," and Rich is "driving / over backroads" when her car "startl[es] young deer in meadows" (1–3). Willard Spiegelman notes that the poem is structured "like a Romantic nature lyric, according to the classic formula of M. H. Abrams" because it "begins with a specific situation in time and place, moves to a long, meditative, and thoroughly didactic middle part concerning women's love, and ends with the catalogue as a trope appropriate to 'vision' and 'a whole new poetry'" (Spiegelman 387–388).⁵³ There's some dispute over to what extent Rich engages with Romanticism in the poem,⁵⁴ but the opening scene certainly brings to mind a modern pastoral. After startling the deer, she hears one give a

Hoarse intake of her breath and all
four fawns spring after her
into the dark maples. (4–6)

Rich then notes that in three months, in will be hunting season. In a passage Broumas thinks diminishes Rich's power due to its "prosy, overwritten" lines, Rich observes that "hit-and-run hunters," often drunk and destructive, sometimes are "so inept as to leave the shattered animal / stunned in her blood" (Broumas 327, Rich, "Transcendental" 8–12). Rich then notes that this summer evening, "the deer are still alive and free," and she

⁵³ Willard cites Abrams's formula in "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Nature Lyric."

⁵⁴ Charles Altieri alternates between enthusiastic praise and bizarre condescension of Rich; with regard to Rich's Romanticism in *The Dream of a Common Language*, particularly "Transcendental Etude," he writes, "Rich is to romanticism what Habermas is to Hegel: more restricted and more conceivably effective in leading to changes in our politics" (355). His observed restrictedness seems a fair assessment.

observes, in what Spiegelman calls an “implicit reworking” of Keats’s “To Autumn” and Stevens’s “Sunday Morning” (Spiegelman, Willard 388), the deer

nibbling apples from early-laden boughs
so weighted, so englobed
with already yellowing fruit
they seem eternal, Hesperidean
in the clear-tuned, cricked throbbing air. (“Transcendental Etude” 13–18)

Though stanza 1 ends in almost erotic reverie after Rich angrily reflects on the deer’s vulnerability in the approaching hunting season, she must know that her car, which startled the deer moments before, also makes them vulnerable. The section of *The Dream of a Common Language* that this poem appears in, concluding the book, is called “Not Somewhere Else, But Here.” The deer are welcomed into Rich’s poem with open arms, both as actual deer and as metonymic symbols of nature, but it is summer itself, not the deer, that is ultimately idealized.

Stanza 2 begins with “Later I stood in the dooryard,” a reference to Whitman, reinforcing Rich’s dialogue with Romanticism (19). She admits that she is taken with the “fragility” and “sweetness” of the real Vermont that “persists / stubbornly beyond the fake Vermont” of sentimental advertisements and of “antique barnboards glazed into discothèques” and “artificial snow,” itself grotesquely existing beside the poverty and deprivation of so many Vermont residents, which is also as real and true an image of Vermont as is the lush green of August (21–29). Rich depicts poverty as “gnashing its teeth like a blind cat at their lives,” which takes the real and true into the world of allegory or cartoon (29). Disappointing simile aside, Rich reflects on the human destruction of nature in Vermont, asserting her poem’s environmentalism before moving to the second stanza’s second moment of addressing nonhuman animals. Rich notes

observations she has made when having pulled off from the Vermont town's tourist area and parked down a dirt road, reminding us of her later wonder at the Great Blue Heron in the equally altered but still ecologically diverse landscape she would later live within in California:

I've sat on a stone fence above a great, soft, sloping field
of musing heifers, a farmstead
slanting its planes calmly in the calm light,
a dead elm raising bleached arms
above a green so dense with life,
minute, momentary life—slugs, moles, pheasants, gnats,
spiders, moths, hummingbirds, groundhogs, butterflies—
a lifetime is too narrow
to understand it all, beginning with the huge
rockshelves that underlie all that life. (“Transcendental Etude” 34–42)

Like the dog in “Twenty-One Love Poems” who Rich muses is “tranquil” and “innocent,” the heifers are “musing,” a light touch of anthropomorphism, maybe, but then, in a rare moment for Rich, she lists nonhuman animal examples of the “minute, momentary life” around her, noting “pheasants” instead of birds and “moths” and “butterflies” instead of insects; the animal ambivalence persists here too, though, as the species are offered as more laundry list than image. Too, Rich knows she can never “understand it all,” reminding herself of that same tranquil dog for whom she will not arrogantly claim she can speak. Then again the ambivalence: these creatures help form her poem's other major metaphor of assemblage.

After another blip of a swift simile in stanza 7, in which Rich compares a patriarchal “chorus,” which Rich says strips women of primary woman-to-woman relationships and wisdom at birth, to “midges” who “throb”—like the crickets in stanza 1—“at our ears,” is followed by the equally swift inclusion of an “insect” in a list of what

Rich considers to be the “clear tones of the world” (117–118, 139). Then Rich lands at the last stanza, and the last gestures to nonhuman animals, in the book. She turns to the final metaphor of the poem in which “a woman” leaves “the argument and jargon in a room” and sits “down in the kitchen,” where she begins “absently” moving about common objects of the domestic and natural worlds to create an assemblage: “bits of yarn, calico and velvet scraps” are laid out on the table alongside “small rainbow-colored shells,” “skeins of milkweed from the nearest meadow—original domestic silk,” and the “dry darkbrown lace of seaweed” (150–154, 156–157, 159); Rich skillfully weaves nature with the domestic as the woman adds to the seashell a few other relics of the nonhuman animal world:

not forgotten either, the shed silver
whisker of the cat,
the spiral of paper-wasp-nest curling
beside the finch’s yellow feather. (160–163)

With these lines’ reassurance that nonhuman animals are “not forgotten,” are also part of the woman’s—let us say the poet’s—assemblage, Rich creates a poem world in which the poet can use nonhuman animals for metaphor without harm or modeling harm. The listed animal materials are all things that can be gathered without startling or harming anything or anyone. Nonhuman animals too are the material of poems, Rich concedes, but her animal poetry offers a new post-Romantic (or what Willard Spiegelman calls Rich’s “Neo-Romantic”⁵⁵) animal poetics: that we can, and ought to, interrupt habits of projection and anthropomorphism and instead respect animals by emphasizing both their unknowability and their entitlement to our tenderness. Even the cat used to personify

⁵⁵ Spiegelman refers to the final stanza as a whole, not specifically to Rich’s nonhuman animals.

poverty earlier in the poem can be used responsibly, if the poet can be satisfied with a shed whisker. The metaphor continues from there, illustrating how the poet in her assemblage, which Terrence Des Pres refers to as “an emblem of womanly art” (Des Pres 367), creates a new “stone foundation” or “rockshelf”—a “whole new poetry,” as Rich writes in the previous stanza—upon which new life and possibilities can grow (“Transcendental Etude” 179, 146).

As the coda to the whole collection, the final metaphor as assemblage does seem to answer Rich’s earlier desire for a common language. Ostriker emphasizes that for Rich, the term *common*, as in the book’s title phrase, “means a faith that attempts to communicate can succeed, that we can connect, not as privileged persons or under special circumstances, but in ordinary dailiness” (“Her Cargo” 9). That ordinary dailiness means that the common—as in ordinary, as in shared—can be life-sustaining. For as much as I disagree with Altieri’s claim that Rich’s ideas in “Transcendental Etude” are “somewhat simplistic” (Altieri 347)—and I disagree very much—he offers insightful readings of Rich’s poetic moves in what he calls her “best assertive poem”: “Like Yeats in *The Tower* and Lowell in his later poetry, [...] [Rich’s] poems are intended to function as literal examples of living and writing within what history makes possible and necessary. So the greatness of such poems lies less in how they structure experience than in how they dramatize capacities to reflect on and within it” (357). In Rich’s dramatization of artmaking, which is synonymous for Rich with life-making, she offers literal examples of how to respectfully share the world (of poetry and of life) with nonhuman animals.

Jane Hedley notes in her article “Surviving to Speak New Language: Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich” that Rich’s new poetry, and her new common language, is not about

creating neologisms; rather, it is about carefully choosing language while conscious of its layered meanings. Hedley parses the etymology of *muse* in “Transcendental Etudes,” reminding us that “The English verb *muse* is derived from a verb that in Old French meant ‘sniff the air’ or ‘cast about for a scent,’ which derives in turn from the medieval Latin word for an animal's snout or muzzle” (56). The buried meaning in this case is the animal meaning: the basic and essential animal characteristic of looking for scent, also explored twice in “The Lioness,” is tied in “Transcendental Etude” to the thinking life: Rich writes that the woman making the assemblage is creating a composition that

has nothing to do with eternity,
the striving for greatness, brilliance—
only with the musing of a mind
one with her body (“Transcendental Etude” 164–167)

Hedley goes on to state that “words that have functioned in ‘the oppressor’s language’ to give world-building or ‘nomizing’ activities a generically masculine inflection are used in such a way [in this poem] that older meanings are recovered for them in the context of the traditionally female activity of world-maintenance and world-repair” (Hedley 57). In this sense, Rich’s common language is necessarily not only a feminist language but a deeply considered contextual language (Hedley 57); and context is not handed to us—we must assemble it like we must sometimes assemble a coherent picture of our identities. Rich’s engagement with the Romantics similarly contextualized her poetry as it departed from it.

Rich’s writing has become like the tigers, living on, in part because she embraced the Romantics’—and especially Blake’s—visionary qualities without conceding to the pressure of the patriarchal poetic tradition they stood for. It is only more recently that

literature instructors, and Norton anthologies, include Felicia Hemans, Charlotte Turner Smith, and the other women Romantic poets in their conceptions of Romanticism, and part of why they do so is because we have re-visioned the canon—a labor begun by Mary Wollstonecraft and enthusiastically picked up by literary feminists of the second wave, including Rich.⁵⁶ Part of the reason we now know about our Romantic foremothers, in other words, is because of Rich’s work to make us do so.

“Fox”

By crafting an assemblage out of materials on hand, Rich crafts not only a common language through which she can speak her authentic identities as a woman, a lesbian, and a Jew but also suggests a way to reference nonhuman animals without excessive projection or cloudiness. But sometimes, when a tenor’s need for expression overwhelms direct articulation and demands a nonhuman animal metaphorical vehicle, Rich gives in, as we have seen, to the seductions of metaphor. And nowhere is that need for nonhuman animal expression more potent or more affecting than in her fascinating title poem from 2001’s *Fox*. Published fifty years after “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers,” “Fox” represents Rich’s compromise between purist poles—keeping nonhuman animals so far from being “used” on the page that they often don’t make it to the page at all, on the one hand, or using them unfortunately, as a personification of poverty, for example, on the other hand. As the poem “Fox” itself suggests, Rich’s recurring use of the vixen in her

⁵⁶ For a mathematical account of how the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* and similar anthologies have increased the visibility of romantic women since the 1980s, see Michelle Levy and Mark Perry’s essay, “Distantly Reading the Romantic Canon: Quantifying Gender in Current Anthologies.”

work meets a “need,” and nowhere is that need more fully met than in this poem, which begins,

I needed fox Badly I needed
a vixen for the long time none had come near me (1–2)

Rich refers in line 2 to the previous vixen encounters that have been sprinkled in a few of her previous poems; when she encounters a fox along a road or elsewhere, she is drawn to it with an apparent longing that brings her to the page. A brief survey of these encounters starts with 1969’s *Leaflets*, a collection in which Rich writes herself a bridge between the nascent feminism in *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* and the sharp articulation of that feminism and its attendant politics in *Diving into the Wreck*. When she encounters foxes and vixens—Rich uses the terms interchangeably, usually to refer to females of the species—she tries to harvest those apparently sacred moments for poetic use, and the goal is always a version of Rich trying to understand something of her vital, repressed, deepest most animal self.

We first meet the fox in “5:30 A.M.” In the original printing, Rich uses *he* pronouns to refer to the fox, but she changes all her *he* pronouns to *she* in later printings of the poem, as discussed in her preface to *Poems: Selected and New, 1950–1974*: “Very rarely, I’ve altered a verb or a pronoun because I felt it had served as an evasion in the original version” (xv). With the fox, initial *he* pronouns might have helped her mask how close her identification was with the animal. The pronoun change makes explicit that Rich identifies with the fox as a kind of totem, as Cheryl Colby Langdell has argued in her chapter on *Fox* (Langdell 241). The first mention of the creature in “5:30 A.M.” is a description of fox embodiment that is partly surreal and thoroughly embracing of Rich’s

identification with this nonhuman animal's way of moving through and surviving in the world:

The fox, panting, fire-eyed,
gone to earth in my chest.
How beautiful we are,
she and I, with our auburn
pelts, our trails of blood,
our miracle escapes,
our whiplash panic flogging us on
to new miracles! [...]
No one tells us the truth about truth,
that it's what the fox
sees from her scuffled burrow:
dull-jawed, onrushing
killer, being that
inately single-minded
will have our skins at last. (3–10, 18–24)

There again is that “truth” Rich later sees in the lioness's eyes; this poem is one of her first attempts at locating truth, this time the truths of doggedness and mortality, in a nonhuman animal's body.

The fox also appears again a few poems later in *Leaflets*, in “Abnegation,” which Vendler diagnoses as a “rather weak poem,” partly because of what she calls Rich's “sentimental fantasy of being a purely animal vixen,” though I don't think Vendler is right that being “purely” anything, including a vixen, is Rich's desire (Vendler 308–309). I do agree, however, that it is rather “unfortunate” that Rich describes the vixen in the early lines of “Abnegation” as “wise-looking in a sexy way” (Vendler 308; Rich, “Abnegation” 3). Still, “Abnegation” offers useful additional context for Rich's interest in the fox, as the poem both anticipates the “innate, half-abnegated power” Rich more directly projects onto “The Lioness” a few years later as well as further develops the kinship she feels with the vixen, a kinship perhaps greater than what she experiences with

fellow humans. The “she” in the following lines refers to the vixen, as Rich notes how useless human creation, even creation about foxes, is to the fox:

what does she want
with the dreams of dead vixens,
the apotheosis of Reynard,
the literature of fox-hunting?
Only in her nerves the past
sings, a thrill of self-preservation. [...]
and she springs toward her den
every hair on her pelt alive
with tidings of the immaculate present. [...]
She has no archives,
no heirlooms, no future
except death
and I could be more
her sister than theirs
who chopped their way across these hills
—a chosen people (“Abnegation” 5–10, 15–18, 22–28)

For the vixen, history is embodied “in her nerves,” not written or archived or materially passed down, and her body lives in “the immaculate present”; Rich knows she cannot be the vixen, even when she dreams of her, but she too has history written in the nerves and muscles of the body (as we all do). As for the settlers who tore down the fox’s native forests, who thought themselves, like so many American explorers flushed with Manifest Destiny—and like Rich’s Jewish ancestors—“chosen,” Rich would rather have animal wisdom, embodied and experienced, than any other. The old myths, symbolized by the fables of Reynard the Fox and stories of the hunt, are only worthy of Rich’s abnegation.

One of these mid-1960s vixens Rich encountered—or maybe both encounters were the same encounter—appears again twenty years later in section 1 of Rich’s major poem “Sources,” from *Your Native Land, Your Life*. Rich remembers in the poem’s second stanza:

The vixen I met at twilight on Route 5
south of Willoughby: long dead. She was an omen
to me, surviving, herding her cubs
in the silvery bend of the road
in nineteen sixty-five. (“Sources” 8–12)

The poem explores what the title implies: the sources Rich identifies for who she is and how and what she writes. Implicitly, the vixen in *Leaflets* is one of Rich’s sources, an embodied knowledge that has been a touchstone of hers and, indeed, an “omen” encountered in Vermont, near Lake Willoughby, about an hour car ride away from the spot where her late husband died by suicide. From the vantage point of the mid-1980s, Rich can zoom quickly into why that vixen’s survival mattered so much to her as she tried to let her body lead her into new life as a feminist, lesbian, and activist Jew.

In 2001, fifteen years later, Rich is not just remembering that vixen in her poem “Fox” but remembering needing her, as it had been a “long time” since any “had come near” her (“Fox” 2). She remembers needing to get back to the source of that omen of survival. “Fox” continues:

I needed recognition from a
triangulated face burnt-yellow eyes
fronting the long body the fierce and sacrificial tail (“Fox” 3–5)

In her earlier work, she did not yet know what she knows in “Fox,” which is that her magnetic pull toward this nonhuman animal has been not only so that she could recognize herself in the fox but also that the fox could recognize Rich herself. The “triangulated” face is both representative in shape and also a quick reference to the fox’s ability to make survival-based calculations, its legendary cleverness; the “fierce and sacrificial tail” another nimble reference, this time to not only the vixen’s power but also the wounds its tail sustains as the vixen moves through life’s hazards. In a past tense not specifically

located in time, Rich needed to see in the fox the aspirational self-image from which Rich had drawn strength and comfort; she knows now that she also wanted the fox to recognize her kinship with Rich as a “fellow creature-traveler,” to recall poem X from “Twenty-One Love Poems.” The first stanza of “Fox” concludes, “I needed history of fox briars of legend it was said she had run through / I was in want of fox” (6–7). She expresses her need with shifting syntax as she recalls the history embedded in the vixen’s nerves in “Abnegation” as well as the storied histories of the vixen’s survivals.

In the poem’s second stanza, Rich remembers this need as a craving for physical connection with the fox:

And the truth of briars she had to have run through
I craved to feel on her pelt if my hands could even slide
past or her body slide between them sharp truth distressing surfaces of fur
lacerated skin calling legend to account
a vixen’s courage in vixen terms (8–12)

The knowledge or truth Rich has sought from nonhuman animals is one of wounds and survival, and nowhere does she get closer to expressing what the fox’s body could teach her than here.

Feeling the lacerated skin could help Rich embody, perhaps, her own pain—her ordinary human pains, of course, but also her lifelong struggle against severe rheumatoid arthritis, and her felt empathy with non-white activists with whom she had established deep sisterhood, particularly Black activists who carry centuries of pain, including, for those descended from slaves, the history of lacerated skin, and her self-knowledge as a Jew being so rooted in revelations about Jewish death in the Holocaust. These are leaps, but Rich’s oblique engagement with the fox—the poem’s jagged lines, inverted syntax, and lack of punctuation—allow for such leaps. Rich’s clear, uncluttered statements give

the sense that the language here is hard won, having emerged from a pre-verbal inner (animal) knowledge and longing. The vixen cannot speak as she might in a Stern poem. To read “a vixen’s courage in vixen terms” requires self-knowledge as a fellow animal. The longing for the fox’s body to slide through Rich’s hands is unlikely to be experienced while both creatures are still living; no living fox encountered by a highway is likely to welcome human proximity, let alone touch.

In the final stanza, Rich brings her verbs into the present, reflecting on what she now must concede about the need for fox:

For a human animal to call for help
on another animal
is the most riven the most revolted cry on earth
come a long way down
Go back far enough it means tearing and torn endless and sudden
back far enough it blurts
into the birth-yell of the yet-to-be human child
pushed out of a female the yet-to-be woman (13–20)

The truth of animal longing, of animals’ need for help from other animals, a need that has been present for all of human (and pre-human) history, is a truth about which Rich cannot resolve her ambivalence. The poem itself expresses a kind of “birth-yell” as Rich tries to leave behind her previous “riven” need for the fox and other nonhuman animals to validate her pain; is she revolted by the need, or is the revulsion outside her, rooted in misogyny? Probably the answer to both is yes.

Other nonhuman animals appear in Rich’s work after this—a gecko, a mockingbird, a kangaroo—but she does not return to the fox, and she does not again let herself express a felt, embodied need for a nonhuman animal in direct language.

Rich's ethics kept her from using nonhuman animals metaphorically most of the time, but she was on to something with those early tigers, with their proud prancing and their symbolism of emancipated womanhood, and I think she knew it by the time she got to "Fox." What had she come to understand? We can use nonhuman animals as metaphors, maybe, if doing so helps humanity's vision to grow: toward emancipated feminism, as in the tigers, or toward human embodiment, as in the fox. Rich's animal ambivalence is not laziness or a sign of her throwing her hands in the air. It is a sign of a visionary poet wrestling with how to be authentic to her animal truth, her deepest most embodied self, while also being cautious not to objectify animals of any species and, by extension, cautious not to do harm.

Section 3: Reading Rich's Nonhuman Animals Jewishly:

The Shekhinah, Dominion, and Atonement

As Olga Broumas observes of "truth" in Rich's essay "Women and Honor," truth "is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity" (Broumas 329). Rich does not have, like Stern or Kumin, a poem in which she lays out in direct terms a relationship between her interest in nonhuman animals and her Jewishness. Aside from the resonances already mentioned between Rich's repressed or essential selves, Jewishness, and nonhuman animals, to read Rich's nonhuman animals Jewishly is an experiment in interpretation that must strike out on new ground. In this sense, the task is not unlike feminist or revisionist midrash. And so, to embrace the experimental, I am going to allow myself a bit less formality, a bit more personal speech, and a bit more

imagination as I suggest three ways that reading Rich's nonhuman animals Jewishly offers new insight. But first, a word on midrash.

For many, Rich is sacred text—though hers is a poetry of the here and now, the material, and the human, the best of her poems hang in the air like revelation. They certainly do for me: “Song,” for example, or “Diving into the Wreck,” or “Twenty-One Love Poems.” Like all poets, she has written many a poem that does not rise to those same heights, and she has written poems and lines that make me cringe, but the poems I return to most by her are, for me and for many, scriptural. As a sometimes-participant in a feminist chavurah here in Philadelphia, I have witnessed High Holiday services in which Rich is read as prayer; to me, this feels spiritual, even as I share Rich's ambivalence/disinterest in the question of God. To interpret Rich beyond the scope of her self-presentation and beyond the scope of the great rabbis, by which I mean the great critics, is to approach the act of midrash. Rich felt that the role of the feminist critic was to re-vision literature from a feminist perspective. A similar “re-visioning” was gathering momentum in Jewish feminism right as Rich was most active within it, as feminist poets and scholars took to re-visioning the Torah to create feminist revisions and new interpretations that centered womanhood, feminine strength, and female voices; Alicia Ostriker's *The Nakedness of the Fathers* offers one example of this feminist revisionist midrash. In an article about Ostriker's midrashic poetry, as well as Marge Piercy's, Monica Osborne writes, “For the midrashist, fleshing out the stories of often muted biblical women inevitably culminates in an understanding of her competing identities and the ways in which they intertwine.” I extend these acts of re-visioning with my own explorations here, and like the feminist midrashists, I take these risks and leaps from a

place of deep respect for what Rich has written. Another way of saying this is that I am aware my reading requires some imagination, but just because there is imagination does not mean there isn't also substance.

First, the Shekhinah. From "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" through the animals of *The Dream of a Common Language* and up to "Fox," Rich has used nonhuman animals in her poems as metaphorical vehicles for an emancipated self—a braver or freer or wiser lover, lesbian, activist, or Jew. In certain progressive Jewish communities, the indwelling or feminine expression of the divine, generally referred to as the Shekhinah, a figure or principle borrowed from Jewish mysticism, appears in Jewish ritual and prayer as often or even more often than do the traditional patriarchal names for the divine: where the trained mind reaches for *Adonai*, the congregation substitutes *Shekhinah*, thereby retraining the mind to feminine power. For some, a divine mother is easier to embrace than a divine father, even if the divine remains a metaphor for something like "breath" or "life"—as is the case for many in Reform and Reconstructionist communities. If there is any way that Rich's thoroughly secular and humanist poetry could be read spiritually, this chapter has charted the path: nonhuman animals are the only beings in Rich's poetry that she approaches with the sometimes surrealistic, sometimes erotic, and often abstract or distant modes that other poets use to approach God. The easiest case for Rich longing for a womanly or transcendent "truth" that we might approximate with the Shekhinah is made using her poems about vixen encounters, with a glance at "The Lioness." She feels the fox in her chest, wants to feel its knowledge viscerally, and returns to it, searching for something she can't quite name, in each of the post-*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* phases of her career. Her arrogance that she could look through the lioness's eyes is

something she renounces repeatedly; the unknowability of the nonhuman animal is not unlike the unknowability of God.

Second, dominion. To summarize the biblical poles of human-nonhuman animal relationships, we have the directive to rule over and have dominion over nonhuman animals in Genesis 1:28 on the one hand, and we have the anti-animal-cruelty directive in Talmud, based on Exodus 23:5, on the other hand. To read Rich's nonhuman animal representation Jewishly is to acknowledge her ambivalence on the matter. If, as Rich insists in "Woman and bird," her place and the Great Blue Heron's place in the world are equal, then her understanding of the human-nonhuman animal relationship is non-hierarchical. We see this sense of equity and respect in "Fox" as well as in the moments when Rich turns away from projecting onto other nonhuman animals: seeing herself as a fellow "creature-traveler" suggests that her ideal, and one of her habits of thought, is to resist projecting onto or using nonhuman animals carelessly in her work. In fact, Rich clearly tries to reject a nature poetry that absorbs the nonhuman world as if it were a performance of the human; in this sense, she pushes against Stern's anthropomorphism and aligns herself with parts of the Bible that separate human from nonhuman animal (such as the creation narrative, dietary laws, and so on). She shares Stern's concern, empathy, and respect for nonhuman animals (the vulnerable deer in "Transcendental Etude" jump to mind), but she lands at a different response from Stern's. Rather than enter an imagined relationship between the poet's and the nonhuman animal's minds, Rich's first instinct is to keep the animal unconsumed, unabsorbed, and whole.

In contrast, if nonhuman animals represent repressed knowledge or truth, they are subsumed beneath what is visible, suggesting that they can be ignored or ruled over.

Further, when Rich objectifies an animal or renders it abstractly (“birds,” “fish”) or cloudily (“amphibious animal” “dumb beast”) she enacts a (seemingly unexamined) erasure, which is a form of invisible violence, against nonhuman animals. Objectifying and de-individuating nonhuman animals is a slippery slope for human animals: we strip nonhuman animals of individuation, thereby making them easier to use (in poems as well as elsewhere); creatures so readily used are more easily abused; the abuser of nonhuman animals has fewer moral objections to overcome on the road to abusing human animals; and on it goes. Rich’s poems and essays clearly express that her interest in nonhuman animals has nothing to do with harm, abuse, or misuse; that interest does not often prevent the nonhuman animals she writes about from being objectified, abstracted, or blurred.

The evolution of virtually every other aspect of Rich’s poetics could be described as emancipatory; an obvious example is how she freed herself from many inherited formal constraints over the course of her first several books, eventually developing a formal flexibility that could swing from her now easily recognizable fractured/caesura’d lines of free verse to prose sections of poems and to Rukeyser-like italicized insertions of unattributed voices. Margalit Fox refers to these formal evolutions as “the constant formal reinvention that kept her verse—often jagged and colloquial, sometimes purposefully shocking, always controlled in tone, diction and pacing—sounding like that of few other poets” (“Adrienne Rich”). By not evolving in her animal poetics as she evolved in virtually every other sphere of her poetics, Rich, despite her clear ecological priorities, leaves animal justice behind. Rich missed an opportunity to interrogate the tension between her animal poetics and her environmentalist values, as have critics like

William Ruekert and Rachel Stein who rightly read so much of Rich's work as ecologically minded or even as ecofeminist. An ecofeminist poetics whose primary action toward nonhuman animals is to avoid "using" and therefore featuring them is a poetics of omission more than of justice.

Third, and finally, the Jewish ritual of atonement, *teshuvah*. Given Rich's significant poem "Yom Kippur 1984," which directly engages the ideals of American nature poetry and features references to nonhuman animals, reading Rich's animal poetics in light of *teshuvah* is generative, as it is with Stern. And as with Stern, reading Rich through the lens of *teshuvah* brings to light Jewish poets' particular need for looking backward, reflecting, atoning, and committing to doing better; consider Rich's repeated attempts to get her vixen encounter right, or her self-interruption or self-denial when she begins to presume projection onto a nonhuman animal. And though the terms more readily reference Christianity, Rich's interest in the lioness's *penance* and her repetition of the word *crucifixion* in "Origins and History of Consciousness" relate too to atonement, in the sense that they acknowledge a relationship between animal suffering and sin, or wrongdoing. In the latter example, considering the crucified birds and lovers in "Origins and History of Consciousness" suggests they have suffered for others' sins: the sins of the fathers, maybe, or patriarchal society, or patriarchal traditions in poetry. In light of those unjust punishments, Rich offers a different way forward in the poem, in the book at large, and in most of her work. Though Rich never engages the archaic Jewish atonement rituals involving animal sacrifice, reading Rich's animal poetics through the lens of *teshuvah* demonstrates a visionary poet on the verge of re-visioning the relationship between nonhuman animals and atonement.

Referring to the Day of Atonement in its very title, Rich's "Yom Kippur 1984" directly engages with the idea and practice of *teshuvah*, albeit from a complex place. The poem, quite unusually for Rich, has two epigraphs. The first quotes Robinson Jeffers, "a poet for whose work I have a great deal of troubled and disturbed admiration," Rich writes in her companion essay, "The Genesis of 'Yom Kippur 1984'" (254). Jeffers was a self-declared "anti-humanist" nature poet, according to Rich, and the line Rich uses for her epigraph comes from his poem "Prelude": "I drew solitude over me, on the lone shore." The other epigraph is Leviticus 23:29, which Rich quotes as "For whoever does not afflict his soul throughout this day, shall be cut off from his people." In her companion essay, she offers the additional context that on Yom Kippur, "we attempt to make reconciliation first with our community because it is said that you cannot look to forgiveness from God before you have been forgiven by your people" ("The Genesis" 254). In these two different perspectives on isolation, or more romantically, solitude, we find the questions from which this poem emerged over the course of the year Rich spent writing it ("The Genesis" 252). The poem also addresses other nature writers, including Whitman ("something to bind me to this coast as lilacs in the dooryard once / bound me back there" [16–17]), Wordsworth ("If a cloud knew loneliness and fear, I would be that cloud" [53]), and less directly, but implicitly, Emerson and Thoreau, for their similar reverence for man's solitude in nature.⁵⁷

The poem's opening stanza asserts its core questions when read as a dialogue between Rich, Jeffers, and the Bible:

⁵⁷ For an extensive reading of this poem and others by Rich in light of Emersonian nature poetry in particular, see Rachel Stein, especially "'To Make the Visible World Your Conscience': Adrienne Rich as Revolutionary Nature Writer."

What is a Jew in solitude?
What would it mean not to feel lonely or afraid
far from your own or those you have called your own?
What is a woman in solitude: a queer woman or man?
In the empty street, on the empty beach, in the desert
what in this world as it is can solitude mean? (“Yom Kippur 1984” 1–6)

The poem effectively and at times graphically explores why while white heterosexually identified men might idealize solitude in nature, many Jews, Black people, women, and members of the queer community find ourselves quite vulnerable and viscerally afraid for our lives when alone in the woods, on a path, on a mountain—and as the poem illustrates, that fear is justified. It was justified in 1984 and remains so in 2020. Jeffers writes that he “drew solitude over” himself, like a blanket; to feel so at peace “on the lone shore” is a privilege reserved for the relatively few.

Add to this vulnerability the Leviticus verse in which separateness from others is a form of punishment, and Rich finds herself wondering if her desire for solitude—“I crave separateness,” she writes in the poem—is worthy of her own atonement: “do my people forgive me?” she asks, likely referring not only to her Jewish community but her other communities too (47, 52). In the last poem in “Twenty-One Love Poems,” Rich writes of “the mind / casting back to where her solitude, / shared, could be chosen without loneliness” (6–8); these questions have been with her for years. When she encounters in Jeffers his hate for Whitman’s beloved multitude (21–22), Rich defends the multitude as a beloved blur of individuals each with their own labor and their own “various dreams” (29), and this is where her animal poetics come in. In a trio of animal references—to a woman’s “attack dog” (12), a simile in which Rich compares solitude’s voice to Whitman’s “mockingbird’s / singing, *Yes, you are loved, why else this song?*”

(75–76), and a biblical allusion (if we allow that *leviathan* can also mean “whale”) that imagines a time “when leviathan is endangered and Jonah becomes revenger” (81)—Rich demonstrates the familiar animal ambivalence and the familiar blur, in these quick references to various familiar animal tropes. But it is remarkable, actually, that Rich lets the mockingbird sing to her and that she considers the Jonah myth explicitly from a place of animal endangerment. And that “guard dog,” though we don’t know the breed, is a specific dog living with specific purpose. Maybe, somehow, in this poem in dialogue with the Day of Atonement, Rich recognizes that the nonhuman animals in the multitude are individuals too, able to sing and allowed an agency that is not fully unknowable after all. A mockingbird, at least, Rich confesses, was outside her window as she wrote, singing “the most wonderful, wonderful series of songs, of poetic compositions” (“The Genesis” 256).

Rich’s grappling with atonement here and throughout her work reveals her desire to be and to do better as a human animal who shares this planet with other animals, but like so many of us who show up to Yom Kippur services ready to fast and recount and grieve and sing and pray and heal, she knows atonement is usually incomplete, especially where there is ambivalence. The very concept of an annual Day of Atonement is an admission that we will “get it wrong” again and again. In Rich’s repeated attempts to embrace the animal inside of herself and the animals outside of herself, Rich does not let herself or her readers fully see these creatures or her disconnected relationship to them—but when we list all our sins during the *Ashamnu* and *Al-Chet* prayers during Yom Kippur, we use the first-person plural regardless of whether or not each of us has individually committed each of the listed sins. Atonement is communal, and this ritual

reminds us that the failings of an individual are facilitated by the failings of the greater community. We all fail in our responsibilities to our fellow creatures.

To read Rich's animal poetics Jewishly, especially when considering her poetic attempts at *teshuvah* for "using" animals metaphorically, is to recognize that multiple truths exist simultaneously: Rich, as an ethically minded poet, wants to know better than to use nonhuman animals as metaphors, but she simultaneously longs for a vehicle capable of animating the visceral, embodied knowledge that exists beneath her bodily pain, within the animal she is. She is both an intellectual who has lit paths to re-visioned poetry, activism, and literary canons, as well as an animal who has needed fellow "creature-traveler[s]" to help her illustrate and vouch for the naturalness of the embodied truths in her very bones as a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist, and a woman. Ambivalence is not confusion so much as it is feeling pulled in opposing directions. Maybe the answer to "what atonement is this all about?" is that *this*—Rich's need to be the "kind of beast" who "would turn its life into words"—is both natural, because it is the intellectual labor that her "kind of creature does" as a human being, as well as "riven" and "revolted" because her specific kind of creature is meant to feel despised and vulnerable within Christian patriarchal poetry and society, as a woman, a lesbian, and a Jew. But writers like Rich have made the other creatures like her actually feel quite a bit less despised and alone, and when we look at her few but unforgettable nonhuman animal metaphors, we find tigers, lions, wolverines, and foxes: a reminder that the wilderness within us and among us can empower us to live honestly, freely, and justly, and is therefore worthy of profound respect.

CHAPTER 4

“THE MURDERER INSIDE ME”: CRUEL ANIMAL DEATHS AND THE HOLOCAUST IN MAXINE KUMIN’S POEMS

O one-two-three

the murderer inside me rose up hard

—Maxine Kumin, “Woodchucks”

Born four months after Gerald Stern and four years before Adrienne Rich, Maxine Kumin was a kindred spirit, meeting Stern’s empathy for animals and Rich’s feminism with her equally political but distinct brand of each—less ventriloquism than Stern, more irony than Rich. And while Rich hit literary fame in early adulthood, launched by Auden into poet stardom, and Stern started publishing comparatively late, in his forties, Kumin blossomed as a poet in her thirties, initially in the tall shadow of one of her best friends, Anne Sexton, with whom she collaborated so extensively that they reportedly kept a dedicated phone line open between them so that one could whistle for the other when in need of a critical, listening ear. Kumin eventually grew in stature and won multiple prizes, including the Pulitzer Prize and the poet laureateship of the United States, and in dozens of poems, essays, and her posthumously published memoir, *The Pawnbroker’s Daughter*, she frequently wrote of how important her Jewishness was to her identity.

More than any other identity, though, animal-devotee might be the most consistently highlighted in Kumin’s decades-long oeuvre.⁵⁸ In poems that seem to have

⁵⁸ In a 1974 interview with Virginia Elson and Beverly Hughes, Kumin recalls the first poem she ever wrote, at eight years old. Not surprisingly, it mourns the loss of a

nothing to do with nonhuman animals, she notices dogs being walked, livestock being fed, and insects riddling the garden. For Kumin, like Stern, nonhuman animals connect us to nature, each other, and our modern ecological and political contexts. Whereas Rich typically portrays repressed truth, longing, and dream when she refers to nonhuman animals, Kumin's focus in her animal poems is on nurture, adventure, wildness, and grief. The only "dumb beast[s]" in Kumin's work (to recall Rich's poem "On Origins of History and Consciousness") seem to be human beings who think themselves better than other animals. Likewise, Kumin does not use animal imagery to trade an unsafe reality for a better one, as Rich does; nonhuman animals are an undeniable part of Kumin's reality, safe or not. Furthermore, whereas Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language* is decidedly humanist in its vision, Kumin's own dream of a common language extends well beyond the human and holds as much weight in her poem "Sleeping with Animals," when she relates to her pregnant horse "in a wordless yet perfect / language of touch and tremor," as it does in "On Reading an Old Baedeker in Schloss Leopoldskron," when she seeks connection to her grandfather, looking "for some thin line of comfort / that binds us."⁵⁹ Indeed, the "warm amphibious animal" Rich abstractly refers to in her poetry is alive and well and more vividly realized in Kumin's, living in what most human beings would call two worlds but knowing them to be one.

Kumin's poetic engagement with nonhuman animals is so extensive that it may be what she is most remembered for. Like Stern and, to a lesser degree, Rich, Kumin

"newborn pup": "Here lies the runt of a litter of seven / Since he's not on man's earth he must be in dog heaven" (Kumin, *To Make 7*).

⁵⁹ Given the autobiographical nature of the majority of Kumin's work, I often conflate the speaker and the poet; this conflation does not assume that Kumin's poems are completely factual, journalistic reports, just that the poet is speaking as herself.

identifies with and cares deeply about nature and its creatures while also grieving and cursing her fellow human beings' gluttonous misuse of the natural world. Her anger at animal mistreatment is palpable in poems like "Bringing Back the Trumpeter Swan," "Repent," and "The Vealers," while she also recognizes in poems like "Custodian," "Catchment," and "Woodchucks" that murder is inherent in life. As Alicia Ostriker explains in *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*, "For Kumin there is no hierarchy: humans, animals, and plants uncannily resemble each other, are often metaphorically interchangeable, enjoy the same energies, and suffer the same downfalls" (117). This lack of hierarchy is clear in nearly all of Kumin's work, from her earlier poems, such as "The Retrieval System" and "Changing the Children," in which humans equal animals, or "A Mortal Day of No Surprises," in which a napping God is thrown into the plant-human-animal egalitarian mix, to some of her more recent published poems, such as "The Unfinished Story of Boomer" or "The Taste of Apple," in which Kumin's horses are as tenderly written about as children or lovers. The number and diversity of animal species she documents is staggering; here, for the sake of example, is a species list from her 1989 collection, *Nurture*, in which every single poem features a nonhuman animal (as long as we count plankton): kangaroo; sheep; deer; ferrets; caribou; emperor penguins; manatees; humans; Scotch Highland heifers, yaks, antelope, and generic bovines; killer whales; arctic foxes; Aleutian geese; Norway rats and Key Largo rats; frogs; English bull mastiffs, coydogs, and generic dogs; great blue herons; trumpeter swans, mute swans, and generic swans; snapping turtles; hens; ducks; wild turkeys and generic turkeys; black hogs and generic pigs; pheasants; hares; plankton; trout, carp, and generic fish; dusky seaside sparrows; caterpillars, beetles, ticks,

dragonflies, earwigs, leaf miners, and generic insects; blackflies, deerflies, and generic flies; Schaus swallowtails; Florida swamp crocodiles; cotton mice; black bears, grizzly bears, and generic bears; skunks; leopards; leeches; screwworms and cutworms; elks; goats; grouse; barn swallows; grosbeaks; juncos; weasels; squirrels; inland oysters and generic clams; flamingos; cougars; hoot owls; moose; and, of course, countless horses. And this is just one book.

Kumin, like Stern, joins Whitman in his famous declaration, “I think I could turn and live with animals.” In fact, she did live with animals, as several volumes of domestic and farm-based scenes featuring her real-life nonhuman animal companions (pets, rescues, and wild visitors alike) attest. Aside from her vocation as a celebrated poet and professor, Kumin was a horse farmer and animal rescuer, as well as an obsessive gardener, who documented her bucolic New England life and the life of her mind in nineteen books of poems, seven books of essays and short stories, two memoirs, five novels, and twenty-five children’s books, four of which she co-wrote with Anne Sexton. She was also of course an American Jew who, like Stern and Rich, claimed guilt for remaining safe as her relatives in Europe died in concentration camps. Kumin has been often been categorized too narrowly as a nature poet—“Roberta Frost”⁶⁰—or, often begrudgingly, as a political poet, especially after her poems on torture in *Still to Mow*, which has left her out of critical discussions of Jewish-American Holocaust poetry, an oversight that this chapter strives to remedy.⁶¹ In fact, many of Kumin’s most important

⁶⁰ Kumin reflects, “Over the years many of my poems were rooted in the rural landscape; this led to my receiving the jocular epithet Roberta Frost. I didn’t disavow this, but I did feel that it marginalized my work” (*The Pawnbroker’s Daughter* 86).

⁶¹ Critics generally preferred her to stay in her nature lane (as if nature and politics cannot coexist). While Margalit Fox’s *New York Times* obituary praises Kumin’s “style [that]

nature poems, those depicting the cruel lives and deaths of farm animals and aggressively hunted vermin, are clearly haunted by the Holocaust and suggest a bone-chilling parallel between human and nonhuman animal genocides. While PETA later would become notorious for its provocative but largely considered tone-deaf campaign comparing factory farming to the Holocaust, Kumin's precise poetic skill and her position as a Jew allowed her a more nuanced, and less provocative-for-the-sake-of-shock-and-awe, argument. Well-known Kumin poems, such as "Woodchucks" and, less obviously, "The Vealers," not only conjure this emblematic twentieth-century genocide in their extended metaphors but also, at the same time, raise hauntingly prophetic questions about contemporary animals' lives under a human rule that is often tyrannical (recalling the directive in Genesis 1:28 for humans to rule over "the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky,

defied tidy categorization," when it comes to Kumin's poems on "large political subjects," Fox admits, "reviewers" claim they "sometimes read better as prose than as poetry" ("Maxine Kumin"). These "reviewers" may include Megan Harlan, whose *New York Times Book Review* article on Kumin's *The Long Marriage* (2002) diagnoses that "[o]n some political subjects, Kumin's technically flawless poems rely too heavily on description, rather than delving for deeper innovations" (Harlan 33). In her 1986 review of Kumin's *The Long Approach*, Wendy Lesser mourns that "Kumin's poems on 'issues'—the Middle East situation, the Holocaust, the environment, world hunger—founder on their opinion-making." And in a too-scathing-not-to-be-personal review of *Jack and Other New Poems* (2005), D. H. Tracy sneers, "Kumin has attained an upper-middle-class pastoral idyll" that, though affording her "plenty of material," "cannot furnish any reason to write about it." He accuses Kumin of struggling to "give the collection some consequence," which he thinks results in her ill-advised decision to write political poems, one of which he bluntly calls a "train wreck." There are exceptions, such as Matt Schudel's *Washington Post* obituary ("Maxine Kumin"), which is more generous toward Kumin's political poems, or Mike Pride's balanced examination of Kumin's poetics, which he explains descend from Auden's, quoting Kumin's explanation that "[n]o one quite matches Auden's ability to combine metaphor with anguished political statement." But by and large, Kumin's political work is undervalued in both her obituaries and book reviews—all of which, aside from Tracy's, recognize in Kumin a poet of great significance and skill, at least when she writes about animals and farm life. See Victoria Brownworth and Robin Becker for ample praise of these poems and their "witness."

and all the living things that creep on earth” [*JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*]). Clearly, Kumin aligns herself more with the Talmudic teaching derived from Exodus 23:5, *tsa’ar ba’ale havim*, urging humans to avoid cruelty toward nonhuman animals. Out of this anti-cruelty commitment, and drawing inspiration from her beloved Romantic forebears, particularly Shelley (*A Vindication of Natural Diet*) and Byron (*Cain*), Kumin reveals in her empathetic attitude toward suffering animals a simultaneous call to anti-tyrannical Romantic action—her own Jewish-Romantic breed of animal activism. This chapter will demonstrate the importance and timeliness of a reading of Kumin’s work that takes seriously her call to activism on behalf of both domesticated and wild animals. It will also, like “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” suggest that if Stern risks taking animal representation too far by way of his anthropomorphism, and Rich’s animal representation misses opportunities to move beyond the abstract or symbolic, Kumin offers an animal poetics that honors nonhuman animals as complex sentient beings without presuming she has omniscient awareness of their minds; in other words, Kumin’s often activist-oriented animal poetics is “just right.” In Kumin we see what might be the ideal poetics of *teshuvah*—our best shot at a poetics of *tikkun olam* that flattens human-animal hierarchies, emotionally moves readers to connect with and advocate on behalf of animals, and prophesies stirringly against our age’s habitual encouragement of animal extinction.

The Romantic Jew

Over her more than five decades as a poet, Kumin was frequently drawn to the page to document and make sense of humanity’s dark capacity for cruelty, an interest that

no doubt owes some of its origins to Kumin's formative memories of her own Jewishness. Growing up in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, Kumin (then Winokur) was sensitive to the various meanings her Jewishness carried both for those outside her family as well as those within it. In her memoir *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*, Kumin writes of how it was "sometimes difficult" to be Jewish in what was then an upper-middle-class, mostly Protestant corner of Philadelphia, as "on bad days, older kids chased us downhill from school yelling *Christ-killer!* In class, a schoolmate might mutter *I don't want to sit next to a Jew*" (20). As the daughter of a pawnbroker whose financial success afforded the Kumins a "live-in cook and butler/chauffeur/handyman," a "once-a-week laundress," a "weekly gardener" and, for a time, a governess, Kumin learned at a young age to report her father Peter's occupation simply as "broker" to let the white lie of stock markets cover the "Shylockian stereotype" that shamed her mother Belle ("Doll") and, by extension, her (35, 23). Though Kumin's experience of familial and cultural ambivalence about her family's Jewishness was not as repressive as Arnold Rich's ambivalence had been on his daughter, it still left its mark. On the one hand, Kumin's mother was proudly German-Jewish but "felt she had married beneath herself," because Kumin's father "was a descendant of Russian Jews," and his mother, Kumin's paternal grandmother, "still kept a kosher house except when the grandchildren came to visit and milk magically appeared on the table next to the meat. She still spoke Yiddish, a forbidden tongue in our upwardly mobile household, although my father insouciantly peppered his speech with Yiddish expressions," Kumin writes (22). Kumin recalls her mother's admonishment: "'Don't talk with your hands!' she hissed. 'You look like an immigrant.' Until I was in my teens I believed only Jews used gestures or stood close

enough to breathe on each other as they conversed” (20). Kumin notes that her experience of this internalized ambivalence-bordering-on-anti-Jewishness “was not atypical for American Jews of my generation” and that other Jewish parents she knew also “made great efforts to assimilate into the suburban culture, but only up to a point” (23). The Winokur family may have trained their hands to stay calm during conversations, and it’s true that they sometimes erected a “somewhat hidden from view” Christmas tree, “complete with winking lights, tinsel, and ornaments” on their upstairs landing at Christmastime, but they actually kept a good amount of Jewish ritual and tradition in their daily lives, and Kumin’s understanding of her Jewishness was a lot richer, and also more complicated, than this portrait might suggest (34).

Markers of Jewishness were readily available to Kumin beyond her father and grandmother’s Yiddishisms or her grandmother’s mostly kosher kitchen. Kumin and her siblings attended weekly Sunday school at Rodeph Shalom, a Reform temple still operating on Broad Street in Philadelphia, where they received the “double message” that they ought to be “proud of our Jewish heritage,” as Kumin recalls, but were “enjoined savagely from Zionism. [...] As late as 1940, we were required to write an essay titled ‘America, Not Palestine, My National Homeland’” (*The Pawnbroker’s Daughter* 30). Her congregation taught her the Hebrew alphabet and, by rote, a few basic Hebrew prayers using the “old-style Ashkenazi” pronunciations, but like most Reform congregations of the day, Rodeph Shalom downplayed Jewish otherness, another sign of assimilationist behavior: “no chuppahs, no yarmulkes, certainly no stamping on glasses at weddings, which we were told was a leftover paganism,” Kumin writes (31). On the other hand, she and her siblings spent summers at Camp Watitoh in the Berkshires, which was

owned by Sephardic Jews who were “ardent Zionists,” collected coins from the children to plant trees in Palestine, and led the children in weekly outdoor Friday-night services.⁶² And “while we were not devout,” as Kumin remembers her family’s home life, “we did light candles every Friday night and say the Sabbath blessing in our house. We celebrated Hanukkah by lighting the eight candles of the old brass menorah supposedly carried across the Atlantic by my great-grandfather, we ate homemade hamentashen at Purim, and we held enormous Passover Seders [...]” (34). If Stern grew up fairly observant and Rich grew up fairly unaware, Kumin’s relationship to her Jewishness was somewhere in the middle: multiple rituals in her week and in her year reinforced her Jewish identity, which was far from the case for Rich, whose sense of self as a Jew didn’t start to really develop until late adolescence, due to familial obfuscation. But Stern’s parents never would have entrusted his education from kindergarten through second grade to a Catholic school, even if the Catholic school was, as was the case for Kumin, right next door. Her parents transferred her to public school once, as Kumin puts it, “the crucifixion became as much an issue for me as animal cruelty. No matter that I was told on our side of the hedge that the Romans had done that to Him. On the other side, quite matter-of-factly and without casting blame on my innocent state, it was the Jews who had fastened Him to the Cross” (20–21). Her fearful internalization of the image of the crucifixion, and her attendant guilt, however undeserved, convinced her parents that she ought to follow in her brothers’ footsteps and go to the slightly further away neighborhood public school.

As was the case with both Stern and Rich, Kumin’s Jewish identity took on astounding gravity as she came to understand the horrors of the Holocaust: “As the

⁶² Incidentally, the camp has changed owners twice since Kumin’s youth, and any past affiliation with Jewishness has been scrubbed from the camp’s website.

dreadful truths began leaking out of Nazi Germany, my father received a spate of letters from relatives, or relatives of relatives, in Poland, begging for assistance to emigrate” (*The Pawnbroker’s Daughter* 33). Kumin vividly recalls encountering her father in tears at the dining room table, head in hands. “They all will die,” he said of the letter writers. “This is the pogrom to end all pogroms” (33). Kumin then “began having horrendous nightmares of being pursued and captured by the Nazis,” and she sympathetically sat many an hour with her father to listen to the news broadcasts about the War. In multiple interviews, Kumin has discussed the “deep sense of guilt” she felt “for having been born a safe American Jew,” a guilt she said “haunted” her, echoing similar statements by Stern over his “guilt as an American Jew of a certain age who, I if I’d been in Europe, would probably have been dead” (Stern and Pacernick 41) and Rich’s guilt about being “a North American Jew, born and raised three thousand miles from the war in Europe” (“Notes” 216). “By an accident of fate,” Kumin writes. “I was to survive while millions went to labor camps—we did not quite know about the ovens yet” (33). World War II significantly shaped Kumin’s life in spite of her relative distance from it, not only because of her sorrow and guilt over the Holocaust but also because while at Radcliffe just a few years later, she met and fell in love with Victor Kumin, a Jewish soldier-scientist who was secretly stationed at the Los Alamos Laboratory under the direction of J. Robert Oppenheimer, “working to develop the atomic bomb” (44). Once married, in 1946, the Kumins settled in suburban Boston, where they raised three kids in a secular atheistic Judaism not uncommon after the War; eventually, Kumin’s restlessness with domestic life as a young mother led her to enroll in John Holmes’s poetry workshop at the Boston Center for Adult Education, where she met and befriended Anne Sexton and

steadily climbed into the next phase of her life as a publishing poet, college instructor, and gradually, award winning writer who would, once her kids reached adulthood, retreat fulltime with her engineer husband to PoBiz Farm, which had so far served solely as a weekend and holiday retreat for the family. Kumin's reflections on Jewish identity and the lives (and deaths) of nonhuman animals have been touchstones of her poems ever since her first book, *Halfway*.⁶³

Given Kumin's background and her later understanding that while she was having night sweats about Nazi pursuit, her "father's relatives were going into the ovens," it's not surprising that some of her most familiar poems about animal cruelty likewise engage the specter of the Holocaust (*To Make* 56). The genocide became a benchmark by which she made meaning of the ongoing depravity she witnessed around her, particularly against nonhuman animals, and at times she embraced those overlaps explicitly. For the duration of her career, all the way through her final posthumous volume of poems, *And Short the Season*, Kumin wrote consistently empathetic poems about nonhuman animals—poems playful and wrenching, violent and political. To understand the contours of the progressive, largely secular, and activist-oriented American Judaism that informs Kumin's drive to expose injustice, it helps to remember that Kumin is not just Jewish but, like Stern, a Jewish Romantic. And like both Stern and Rich, Kumin's Jewishness is left-leaning, feminist,⁶⁴ and a reason for solidarity with other groups of marginalized

⁶³ For a more thorough treatment of Kumin's biography, see my entry, "Kumin, Maxine," in *American National Biography*.

⁶⁴ "I've always been a feminist," Kumin said in her interview with Chard deNiord. "I feel in a way that it's my mission now to help young women writers when our paths cross" (43).

people.⁶⁵ Both the internal Jew and the internal Romantic inform Kumin's poetics and politics; these two sides of the same self show up for every poem. This chapter's argument is that Kumin's turns toward prophecy, *teshuvah*, and Holocaust memorialization in her animal poems are informed not only by her Jewishness but also by a deep Romantic predisposition toward empathy for animals and toward protesting tyranny in all its forms. Further, this facet of Kumin's politics is piercingly revealed in her Holocaust-haunted poems about the inhumane lives and deaths of animals, in particular those of factory-farm-raised animals and aggressively hunted vermin.

I should hasten to note that Kumin has already been adopted into the Romantic tradition by critics, but largely by way of her affinity for the early Romantics, especially William Wordsworth, and their work's shared interest in the relationship between nature and humankind—see, for example, Sandra M. Gilbert's reference to Kumin's "Wordsworthian lyricism," which Gilbert contrasts with Kumin's equally present "Frostian irony," in her review of Kumin's *The Long Marriage* ("Of First" 370). Kumin's affinity for the early Romantics is clear in poems like "Skinnydipping with William Wordsworth," "Coleridge's Laundry" and "A Brief History of English Romanticism," a brief history that leaves out the later poets. In her final collection, Kumin describes silently reciting "reams of Wordsworth's *Intimations*" while "[w]alking the fields" on her property and notes of Wordsworth,

⁶⁵ An illustrative example: In November 1998, Kumin and Carolyn Kizer, another white poet, stepped down as chancellors of the Academy of American Poets to protest the Academy's repeated refusal to invite Lucille Clifton, a prominent and widely respected black poet, to become a chancellor: "[T]wice we saw the vacancies go to white males. [...] [W]e resigned in protest, which ultimately led to the restructuring of the board: no longer could chancellors serve two consecutive twelve-year terms, and women and minorities achieved representation" ("Metamorphosis" 731).

Like Housman, Will composed in his head
humming his lines as long as his feet
could hold the rhythm on the path. (4, 1, 10–12)

Kumin's association with the pastoral poetry descended from Wordsworth in particular makes sense given her rural subjects and her frequent reference to him, but her poetry, including much of her animal poetry, extends far beyond the realm of pastoral landscapes, and her interest is less in nostalgia for nature's lost innocence and more in calling out human-caused atrocity against the land, its creatures, and other humans. In her interview with Kumin, Enid Shomer takes for granted that Kumin's interest in nature does not result from Kumin "suffer[ing] from the lost pastoral syndrome," as Kumin is not "without a landscape" in her rural New Hampshire (549). Earlier in her career, in 1979, Kumin admits that for her, "animals in general and horses in particular represent a kind of lost innocence in our technological society," placing her in sympathy with her early Romantic forebears (Kumin, *To Make* 101). Importantly, as Ostriker elucidates in her chapter on Kumin in *Telling the Barn Swallow*, a collection of essays on Kumin's work, the American tradition of nature writing that descends partly from the early British Romantics—think Thoreau, Whitman, Frost—typically views nature "from without," and we can feel, particularly in most of Frost's work, "the tacit remoteness of the observer or controller in nature" (Ostriker 82–83); Kumin, in contrast with these significant forebears, "accept[s] the identification of herself and/as nature and run[s], or rather gallop[s], with it while steadfastly refusing to recognize an order 'higher' than nature or 'beyond' nature or 'outside' nature" (81). Kumin speaks to nature from *within*, recognizing that she is also nature, and also animal, which is why she takes crimes against nature and nonhuman animals as personally as crimes against herself or her

fellow humans. Exploring the causes and implications of inhumane animal death has resulted in some of Kumin's best known and celebrated poems, poems at least as easily identified with late British Romanticism as with early British Romanticism (or American nature poetry). These poems, because they are anti-tyrannical and pro-animal-rights in the spirit of Byron and Shelley, can respond to the problem of inhumane animal death and to the catastrophe of the Holocaust with not only lyricism but also political rage.

“How we treat the animals in our keeping defines us as human beings,” Kumin writes in her essay, “Jicama, without Expectation,” and Kumin's love for animals certainly defined her and her work (106). By the time Kumin died on February 6, 2014, the last of her rescue dogs, Virgil, had predeceased her, as had her final broodmare, Boomer, closing out a long line of animals Kumin had raised or rescued over four-decades from puppy mills, shelters, race tracks, and other rough circumstances, gifting them with better lives on her 200-acre PoBiz Farm in Warner, New Hampshire.⁶⁶ For much of her tenure at PoBiz, Kumin also bred horses who grazed along the property's well-kept pastures. The pasture she facetiously named the “Elysian Field” became the final resting place of many of Kumin's beloved animals and is likewise where her ashes are now spread, bringing to mind Byron's (thwarted) wish to be buried in the same tomb as his beloved Newfoundland, Boatswain (“Byron and His Dogs”). Kumin is certainly remembered for her animal poems, as reflected in the majority of her obituaries (for examples, see Fox, “Maxine Kumin”; Schudel, “Maxine Kumin”), but as she insists to Chard deNiord in his 2010 interview with her, “[M]y so-called animal poems are truly

⁶⁶ The farm was named for what Kumin playfully called the poetry business—paid public readings, lectures, workshops, etc.—that helped fund the upkeep of the property and its creatures.

political,” a fact too often overlooked in these same tributes (39). Those politics take root in the same soil that raised up the late Romantics who came before Kumin, especially Byron and Shelley, whose empathy for animals and whose anti-tyrannical stances in their work anticipate Kumin’s own obsessions. Importantly, and a bit surprisingly, the linking of anti-tyrannical politics with animal rights in both these British forebears and in Kumin partly originates in anxiety over the problem of extinction.

While we might take for granted that social Darwinism, a theory at least loosely based on Charles Darwin’s actual theories, helped make the Holocaust possible, it might be less obvious that some of Darwin’s influences, namely Georges Cuvier and company, helped make Kumin’s thread of post-Holocaust animal poetry possible when they established the scientific fact of animal extinction in the late eighteenth century. Since then, our extinction anxiety—over not only the loss of species before and during our tenure on earth but also over our own eventual disappearance as a species—has found scientific justification.⁶⁷ Our anxiety over how the loss of mastodons, for example, forecasts the probable loss of human beings as a species has turned endangered animals, for some of us, into mirrors reflecting our own fragility as beings whose someday-extinct descendants will no longer be able to carry our memory or legacy forward.⁶⁸ Kumin’s interest in endangered animals is clear; in her 1989 volume, *Nurture*, for example, Kumin mourns the loss of animals endangered or extinct by human cause while, at times,

⁶⁷ And it has also permeated popular and political consciousness, thanks not only to the arts, such as Kumin’s poetry, but also to best-selling popular science books like Elizabeth Kolbert’s *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* and Kenneth Lacovara’s *Why Dinosaurs Matter*.

⁶⁸ In fact, mastodons in particular capture Kumin’s imagination; Kumin compares her horse and herself to two “lazy mastodons” in her poem “Riding in the Rain,” and one of her children’s books is entitled *From Mites to Mastodons*.

mocking our too-late and often collateral-damage-heavy attempts to save them in “Thoughts on Saving the Manatee,” “Homage to Binsey Poplars,” “Bringing Back the Trumpeter Swan,” and “Noted in *The New York Times*.”⁶⁹ For instance, in the latter poem Kumin impatiently responds to a *Times* article on June 16, 1987, in which she learns, “Death claimed the last pure dusky seaside sparrow / today” in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, as if human beings developing the Kennedy Space Center, covering the land in DDT for the sake of mosquito abatement, building Disney World, fumbling conservation efforts, and so on, had nothing to do with its extinction (Kumin, “Noted” 1–2; Walters). Later in the poem, she says with a simmering resignation,

Tomorrow we can put it on a stamp,
a first-day cover with Key Largo rat,
Schaus swallowtail, Florida swamp
crocodile, and fading cotton mouse.
How simply symbols replace habitat! (15–19)

In these lines listing other endangered species that, as of 2020, are not yet extinct, Kumin’s outrage is about the swallows, of course, but it is also about the indignity of a postage stamp (or, by extension, a tombstone) trying to stand in for a vacated life. What symbol will outlive humanity when our species is gone? Extinction casts a heavy shadow, and the knowledge that every sentient being will one day die, and further, that every species of sentient being—endangered or not—will one day vanish, adds poignancy to narratives of needless or cruel animal death.

⁶⁹ The interrelationship between human harm and animal suffering/endangerment/extinction was so important to Kumin that she left Viking, according to *The Pawnbroker’s Daughter*, “after the decision was made in 1989 to use the photo of a glossy Bambi-like fawn on the cover of *Nurture* instead of what I had lobbied for: a tiny kangaroo joey held against the immense scale of a human hand” (84).

As Elliott Sober makes clear in *Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism*, most ethical theories have not counted non-human animals' rights as significant (Sober 358).⁷⁰ Let us take for granted that most human beings rank the value of animals' lives beneath the value of our own. This apparently natural favoring of one's own species has facilitated human-caused atrocities not only against non-human animals but also against other human beings.⁷¹ Human history offers too many examples of one set of human beings successfully campaigning against the equal-species status of another set. What usually has enabled a set of human beings to be re-categorized as a sub-species or as subhuman has been some arbitrary difference in ethnicity, physical or mental ability, or place of origin; to perhaps oversimplify, bad science or mythology rushes in to defend such stances, and the dehumanization process proceeds from there. If the threshold for our ethical systems can usually be found somewhere in the gray area between human and non-human, then anytime one category of human beings is relegated to the subhuman, the individuals within that category are much more easily removed from ethical equations. An obvious twentieth-century example of this scenario is the Holocaust, a genocide that fully depended on one set of human beings accepting another set as subhuman. This was

⁷⁰ A notable exception is Michel de Montaigne, who compellingly posits in the late sixteenth century that animals possess a language, intelligence, and knowledge comparable to ours but also humanly unknowable, and further, that humans are just another species of animal who shouldn't necessarily be afforded superior status. Descartes's rejection of Montaigne seems to have won in the philosophical battle over animals' rights, however, given our ongoing large-scale oppression of non-human animals in modernity (Melehy). Further, Peter Singer, a contemporary ethical descendent of Montaigne, didn't publish *Animal Liberation*, his book insisting on the equal moral status of animals, until 1975, and it would be an understatement to say that it hasn't really caught on.

⁷¹ This philosophically slippery slope is what's at stake when poets (and others) represent nonhuman animals as symbols, abstractions, or lower beings. See chapter 3 on Adrienne Rich for further discussion.

accomplished through a combination of propaganda, failures of imagination, and historically entrenched attitudes that led to otherwise apparently rational non-Jews being able to treat Jews like cattle (or worse), cramming them into cattle cars to their deaths.⁷²

The Nazi regime's relegation of European Jews to subhuman status during the Holocaust haunts Kumin's poems about beleaguered animals, adding both poignancy and urgency to the political commentary these poems engage in. The Nazi regime, of course, in deciding that Jews (along with Gypsies, queers, individuals with disabilities, and others) were subhuman—or animals—was hoping to precipitate an extinction of the Jewish "species," if you will; the journey from extermination to extinction, after all, is typically rather direct (as was the case for the dusky seaside swallow), which helps explain Kumin's anxiety about human-caused animal death in her Holocaust/animal poems. Though Byron and Shelley lived over a century before the Holocaust, their anxiety about unnecessary and cruel human-caused animal death, as expressed in poems, plays, and other texts, invites the adoption of Kumin into a late-Romantic tradition that further makes her empathetic and political Holocaust/animal poems possible. Recognizing Kumin's intellectual inheritance from the late Romantics, paired with her Jewish attachment not only to Holocaust memorialization but also to prophecy and *teshuvah*, adds layers of meaning to Kumin's Holocaust-haunted animal poems.

⁷² An acknowledgment of the limitations of my terms: Using *subhuman* to refer to a category below or equivalent to non-human animals reinscribes the dominant hierarchy in which non-human animals are positioned lower than human beings. I mean to refer to rather than endorse that hierarchy. The word *humane* implies that treating a living being respectfully and without cruelty is synonymous with having human qualities, as if humans are by default humane, which is false. By *humane*, I mean benevolent, kind, respectful, and whatever else is the opposite of cruel.

The specter of the Holocaust especially haunts those Kumin poems concerned with inhumane animal deaths aided by human-made machines. In “The Vealers” and “Woodchucks,” the two poems this chapter focuses on in depth, Kumin’s highlighting of the machinery of factory farming and vermin-eradication signals the relationship of those animals’ deaths to the machinery of efficient mass killing made indelible by the Holocaust, especially the machinery of gas chambers and rifles. Palpable in these poems is Kumin’s anxiety about the ease with which humans can kill nonhumans in a culture in which the boundary between “person” and “less than person” can shift according to whatever political campaign has most recently won power. It has become almost cliché to cite Adorno’s claim that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric;⁷³ even so, what’s at stake in this chapter is that reading Kumin’s animal poems in light of the Holocaust reveals not only the appropriateness of including Kumin in American Holocaust studies but also the importance of writing poetry “after Auschwitz” if we believe, as I do, that art can interrupt, speak back to, or prevent tyranny—against other people, yes, and also against other animals. Since at least the late Romantics, this belief has persisted among most of our major lyric poets, including most Jewish American lyric poets like Kumin.⁷⁴

⁷³ Kumin’s answer to Adorno is most directly articulated in “Women and Horses,” a poem from *Jack and Other Poems* that takes Adorno’s famous quotation as its epigraph. The second stanza answers him with jouissance:

If there’s a lyre around, strike it! A body, stand back, give it air!
Let us have sparrows laying their eggs in bluebird boxes.
Let us have bluebirds insouciantly nesting elsewhere.
Lend us navel-bared teens, eyebrow- and nose-ringed prodigies
crumbling breakfast bagels over dogeared and jelly-smearred texts.
Allow the able-bodied among us to have steamy sex.

⁷⁴ It’s worth nothing that Kumin’s considerable distance geographically and experientially from the Holocaust enables her to name what her European counterparts, such as Paul Celan, would consider impossibly unnameable. Celan’s most explicit (and

Factory Farming, the Holocaust, and Prophecy: A Contemporary Romantic

Response

At PoBiz Farm, Kumin wrote, like the late Romantics before her, against various forms of tyranny; her subjects ranged from the tyranny of American soldiers over foreign-born political prisoners to that of veal-raisers over young calves. Late in life, she came to understand that “nearly sixty years” after she’d sold her first four lines of light verse to *The Christian Science Monitor* for five dollars in 1953, her work had gradually “metamorphosed into a *poetry of witness*,” Carolyn Forché’s term for poetry that shines a light on injustice (Kumin, “Metamorphosis” 725, 733–34, emphasis added).⁷⁵ In fact, in 1972, Kumin published the first of what we might now call her poems of witness, “Heaven as Anus.” When it was first published, she writes, the poem “was attacked as pornographic” by the writer-become-conspiracy theorist Dinesh Di Souza and applauded elsewhere; in the poem, she “seized on the U.S. government’s use of animals for experimentation” (Kumin, “Metamorphosis” 732; Interview with Chard deNiord 42). The poem opens with these lines:

In the Defense Department there is a shop
where scientists sew the eyelids of rabbits open
lest they blink in the scorch of a nuclear drop (1–3)

famous) Holocaust poem, “*Todesfugue*,” embarrassed him for its accessible metaphors (Felstiner 34).

⁷⁵ While Forché, who coined the term *poetry of witness* in her 1993 anthology *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*, originally meant it to refer to work by poets who themselves had suffered trauma or atrocity, the term has expanded to include poems, like Kumin’s, that bear witness by way of second-hand knowledge. Robyn Creswell, in a review of Forché’s follow-up to *Against Forgetting*, an anthology co-edited with Duncan Wu called *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English, 1500-2001*, notes that “[s]ome of the most powerful poetry of witness—Charles Reznikoff’s ‘Testimony,’ for example, or the pages devoted to the Armenian genocide in Les Murray’s ‘Fredy Neptune,’ neither of which appear in this volume—does not rely on having been present at the events in question” (Creswell).

and ends with these:

It all ends at the hole. No words may enter
the house of excrement. We will meet there
as the sphincter of the good Lord opens wide
and He takes us all inside. (20–24)

That Kumin's first overtly political poem of witness exposes animal cruelty is not surprising. And the poem's explicitness, though not pornographic, certainly rejects the same values of civility and good manners as Stern's own prophet-like poems of witness (and, for that matter, the poems of other Jewish American political poets too—Allen Ginsberg comes to mind). Like most Jewish prophets, Kumin understands that prophetic witness often requires the violation of social norms in order to startle readers or audiences from their complacency and set them on a course to change their ways.

Ten years later, in Kumin's poem "Lines Written in the Library of Congress after the Cleanth Brooks Lecture," Kumin quotes Auden's "Poetry / makes nothing happen" (line break hers) to reflect, as she says in her essay "Metamorphosis," on "the relationship between poetry and history" ("Metamorphosis" 732). Like Adorno, Auden had to suffer through of a few of his decontextualized declarations being turned into literary clichés: his line "Poetry makes nothing happen" is so often severed from the end of its stanza in "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" that many forget his landing point: poetry is "[a] way of happening, a mouth." Kumin claims Auden as her most significant poetic influence; she "probably attended a dozen readings he gave, in and around Boston, in his carpet slippers," she recalls, and she knew many of his poems by heart ("Interview with Enid

Shomer” 534).⁷⁶ That poetry is “[a] way of happening, a mouth” is reinforced by

Kumin’s poetry of witness, the stakes of which she explores using another Auden poem:

[W]e have to bear witness, hew to our personal compass, and stand up to be counted. To paraphrase Auden in his prescient poem “September 1, 1939,” all we have is a voice “to undo the folded lie.” Today we have literally thousands of poets raising their anguished voices, not just in English, but in Arabic, Russian, Farsi, and a hundred other tongues. Are our poems succinct, stunning, intensely moving? Of course we hope they are. Do they change the course of elections, undo death penalties, pardon political prisoners, expose fraud and corruption? These are rhetorical questions, but the poetry of witness at least provides a living archive, exposing the folded lies. (“Metamorphosis” 734)

Kumin’s use of the term “poetry of witness” rightfully places her in the context of other political poets of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, a context that her peers did not always afford her when they pegged her too narrowly as a nature poet or as a formalist. Kumin *should* be included in anthologies of poets of witness, as the term “poetry of witness” has currency and cachet. But the implied passivity of “witnessing” coupled with its doubly uncomfortable allusions to a courtroom and to a Christian revival make the term a bit like slightly too-tight shoes: they fit well enough for a family portrait, but the wearer will want to rip them off as soon as more comfortable ones can be found. Instead, or in addition, Kumin should be understood as a prophet—a Jewish, American, Romantic-descended prophet whose “living archive,” to bring back Auden, includes many an angry poem about the human mistreatment of nonhuman animals.

Kumin is a prophet not of God but instead, like Stern and Rich, of justice. With that said, Kumin’s anger about animal cruelty in her poems readily brings to mind the biblical prophet Jeremiah, whom Jeremiah Unterman notes, in his *Justice for All: How*

⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that Auden was so important to both Adrienne Rich (as an influence and a career-launcher) and Maxine Kumin (as a beloved influence), given both poets’ sense of responsibility to political poetry.

the Jewish Bible Revolutionized Ethics, “is primarily known as a prophet of doom, the prophet who foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile” (Unterman 176). In her book *Stealing the Language*, Ostriker discusses Kumin’s animal poems in terms of the same term, *doom*, and shares an excerpt of Kumin’s poem, “Thinking of Death and Dog Food,” to illustrate the complexity of Kumin’s vision:

Creatures surround [Kumin], she sees and touches them, she foresees their doom. At times she is their doom’s guilty agent, as when lambs must be slaughtered or woodchucks shot. At times she contemplates the use of horseflesh and human flesh, her mare and herself:

Amanda, you’ll be going
to Alpo or to Gaines
when you run out of luck;
the flesh flensed from your bones
your mammoth rib cage rowing
away to the renderer’s
a dry canoe on a truck

while I foresee my corpse
slid feet first into fire
light as the baker’s loaf
to make of me at least
a pint of potash spoor.
I’m something to sweeten the crops
when the clock hand stops. (Kumin qtd. in Ostriker 117)

For Kumin, animal doom is worthy of attention, whether the animal is human or not. More than Stern or Rich, Kumin brings readers right up to the window in her poems, so that we are forced to look closely at what we as a species permit to happen to nonhuman animals; windows essentially become mirrors when we get close enough to them, and Kumin writes with an embracing voice that polishes the glass just enough to reveal our reflections. As Sam Girgus notes in *The New Covenant: Jewish Writers and the American Idea*, many Jewish American writers “assume the burden of the jeremiad [...] with its concomitant psychology of moral anxiety and its ideology of consensus” as a means of

relating to and pushing others to fight for “the American idea,” Girgus’s term for “the set of values, beliefs, and traditions of freedom, democracy, equality, and republicanism that are known as the American Way and that give America a unique identity in history” (12, 4). Kumin is one such writer, challenging the United States to live up to (and beyond) its ideals as a land of decency and justice for all. Girgus further argues:

In the manner of Jeremiah, who describes the making of “a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (31:31–32), these Jewish thinkers in America often write with the vision and sensibility of prophets and judges who stand between the American Way and the people. In this sense, the Jews, who had been a model for the Puritans, become the “New Puritans,” and Jewish writers and thinkers function in the role of “New Jeremiahs” preaching to the people to understand the meaning of America. For these writers and thinkers, the New Covenant does not imply blind allegiance to national and cultural interests. It means, instead, a call in the rhetorical tradition of Jeremiah for both introspection and cultural renewal[.] (12)

Renewal might not be an obvious word to associate with the prophet of God’s vexation and burn-it-all-down curses, but Unterman joins Girgus in emphasizing the hope in Jeremiah, pointing out that 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 and Ezra 1:1–3 both “state that it was Jeremiah’s prophecy of redemption that is fulfilled with the restoration of the people to the land,” likely a reference to Jeremiah 29:10–14, the biblical prophet’s letter to the exile community in Babylon (Unterman 176).⁷⁷ The “seed of hope”—hope for a better future, and for redemption—in Jeremiah is what Unterman argues has enabled Jews to survive

⁷⁷ Jeremiah 29:10–14 reads as follows: “For thus said the Lord: When Babylon’s seventy years are over, I will take note of you, and I will fulfill to you My promise of favor—to bring you back to the place. For I am mindful of the plans I have made concerning you—declares the Lord—plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a hopeful future. When you call Me, and come and pray to me, I will give heed to you. You will search for Me and find Me, if only you seek Me wholeheartedly. I will be at hand for you—declares the Lord—and I will restore your fortunes. And I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places to which I have banished you—declares the Lord—and I will bring you back to the place from which I have exiled you.”

through so many exiles and hardships, and, especially given its adoption and reinterpretation into the basis for Christianity, that hope “has become one of the most important influences of the Jewish Bible on the history of western civilization” (176–177). What makes Kumin a Jeremiah-like prophet of doom may be more readily apprehended than what makes her a prophet of renewal, redemption, or hope, but that seed of hope is present from her first poem to her last. For Kumin, our redemption lies not in God but instead in nurture, in the maternal instinct, within and across species.

Kumin’s maternal instinct, an essential source of prophetic power in her work, transcends all kinds of boundaries. In her poem “The Envelope,” Kumin writes that after death, her daughters

will carry me about forever
inside them, an arrested fetus, even as I carry
the ghost of my mother under my navel. (4–6)

For Kumin, the ability to mother does not rely upon age or biological parentage or even species, for that matter. In her interview with Shomer, Kumin confirms that animals are her “tribe” as much as her human family is. “There’s no empty nest here,” she exclaims while on PoBiz Farm. “This nest gets fuller and fuller!” (545). In the same interview, Shomer explicitly ties Kumin’s mothering to redemption, noting the “very strong redeeming thread of maternal compassion” running through Kumin’s work; Kumin responds, “As the title poem of *Nurture* says, ‘I suffer, the critic proclaims, [/] from an overabundance of maternal genes” (554). That redemptive maternal “suffering” functions as a kind of anointment on Kumin’s prophetic animal poems.

Like any good prophet in the jeremiad tradition, Kumin identifies specific examples of the crimes she feels most called to rail against: crimes against the natural

order of maternal nurture. Throughout her poetry collections, she regularly critiques human interventions, such as those in agriculture, that interrupt creatures' ability to care for their young. While "Woodchucks" is Kumin's most explicitly Holocaust-informed animal poem, her poem "The Vealers," from her 1970 volume *The Nightmare Factory*, is useful for placing Kumin squarely in the traditions of Byron and Shelley, of Jeremiah, and of the line of maternal Jewish poet-prophets Kumin likewise descends from. Truly, few of Kumin's animal poems have brought the reader as painfully into anti-maternal and anti-nurturing aspect of the commercial food business as "The Vealers." In the poem, Kumin presents readers with a glimpse into the short and cruelly regulated lives of baby calves, from when "They come forth with all four legs folded in / like a dime-store card table" and are permitted to enjoy a single day "under the umbrella of their mothers' flanks" to when they are, twelve weeks later, "wrapped and labeled in a plastic sheet, / their perfect flesh unstreaked with blood / or muscle, and we will eat" (1-2, 10, 34-36).

Throughout the poem's six sextets, Kumin uses what she often wryly called the "oven mitts" of form (deNiord 43); her chosen formal constraints enable her to handle material that she would otherwise find too emotionally challenging to contain. Stanzas one and three use an *abcbac* rhyme scheme, while stanzas two and four bring the initial rhyme closer together with an *abcacb* scheme; here are stanzas three and four, which follow after the vealers are given their single day of direct nursing from their mothers:

Immediately thereafter each is penned
narrowly and well, like a Strasbourg goose.
Milk comes on schedule in a nipples pail.
It is never enough to set them loose
from that birthday dividend
of touch. Bleating racks the jail.

Across the barn the freshened cows
answer until they forget who is there.
Morning and night, machinery
empties their udders. Grazing allows
them to refill. The hungry
calves bawl and doze sucking air. (13–24)

The effect of having the *a* rhyme come at line 5, then at line 4, in alternating stanzas, creates a subtle sonic effect not unlike that of a milking machine, pulling back and closing in; this is an example of the “deftness of language, rhythm, and music” that critics often celebrate in Kumin, a deftness most clearly visible in poems bearing witness to creaturely suffering (Huston 123). The final two stanzas of the poem, acting like a stanzaic couplet or perhaps a sealed package, use another variation: *abacbc*. Against the neat machinery of this overall rhyme scheme, the irregular meter and line lengths buck—especially in the final stanza, which includes the poem’s shortest and longest lines, at two and ten words, respectively, visually underscoring the discomfort the lines describe. The form itself reinforces Kumin’s sense of our human responsibility for the inhumane treatment of these calves, just as her speaker does in the final line when she admits, “and we will eat.” This is what Ostriker means when she refers to Kumin sometimes being “doom’s guilty agent” (Ostriker 117); like all prophet-poets, Kumin is likewise flawed, and human.

Rhetorically “The Vealers” functions as a journey from the figurative language of stanzas one through three to the more direct reportage of stanzas four to six, a movement that allows Kumin’s readers an initial emotional foothold in the poem—like the milk the vealers are permitted to suck from their mothers on the day of their birth—before then forcing us from that comfort of comparison so that we must see the vealers’ fates as they

are. The poem becomes, then, like a narrow pen, holding us in its grip until we are likely too sick to be appetized by the vision of the plastic-wrapped meat in the final lines. When Kumin compares the vealers to cheap card tables in line 1, she invites us to visualize not only the folded up forms of the newly born calves but also just how quickly the animals will be made inanimate—first by narrow pens in which they can hardly move and then by their deaths at ten weeks old. The card tables also suggest how incidental and nearly valueless their lives are within the larger game of the commercial food business, while the subsequent metaphor that “[t]heir hides are watered silk” in line 3 insists on their beauty. In another simile later in the opening stanza, Kumin personifies the vealers, comparing them to children playing blindfolded tag:

As in blindman’s buff they rise, unable
to know except by touch, and begin
to root from side to side in search of milk. (4–6)

This again inspires our pathos, especially given how Kumin extends the image by weaving references to the vealers’ desire for their mothers’ milk throughout the poem. In the second stanza, the vealers are “sucking from those four fingers / they were called forth to fill,” reminding readers that factory farmers permit this brief mother-child bond less for the sake of nourishing the young calves—the industry has nutritionally sufficient milk replacers—than for the sake of ensuring the mothers’ udders are filled for the milking process that will then be exploited through hormones and regular machine milking (11–12).⁷⁸ The cruelty of the mother-child separation that ensues is further called forth by stanza three’s description of milk’s delivery “on schedule” in a “nipped pail,”

⁷⁸ These young cows then typically replace the older dairy cows, whose milk production slows down as they age; the older cows are then butchered for beef and/or leather. For more on milking, weaning, and veal raising, see John M. Smith and “Dairy Cows” in the works cited list.

stanza four's image of the calves "sucking air" while "the freshened cows / answer" their young's bleating "until they forget who is there," stanza five's reference to how the "sponges of [the calves'] muzzles pucker / and grow wet with nursing dreams," and stanza six's turned tables in which the calves are no longer alive to be hungry and it is now our turn to eat (15, 24, 19–20, 25–26, 36). Kumin's emphasis on milk throughout the poem underscores the suffering of what Wesley McNair calls "the female principle" in Kumin's nature poems, as in this poem "the female is under attack"—as are, obviously, her young (McNair 123). More to the point, the emphasis on the milk reinforces that these vealers are babies being denied an essential bodily connection with their mothers, being limited to their "birthday dividend / of touch" (17–18). This sin is in fact biblical: as Beth A. Berkowitz notes in her chapter on animal suffering, Leviticus 22:27 declares "the admonition to keep an ox, goat, or sheep with the mother for the first seven days of life" (Berkowitz 91). For Kumin as poet-prophet, this brutal separation of mother from child—after one day or beyond—is the heart of the doom.

To be a mother, one could argue, is to live and breathe a Jeremiah-like fusion of hope and doom; a mother's hopes for her child's life paired with her inevitable anxiety about the various ways a child could be doomed can give birth to (forgive me!) a powerful and prophetic poetics in the hands of an animal poet as formidable as Kumin. Whereas Rich *notes* in "Twenty-One Love Poems," "without tenderness, we are in hell," Kumin enacts this essential tenderness through poetic specificity and linguistically rendered sympathy for the situation of the young calves as calves instead of as metaphors for her own struggles. The tenderness Kumin evokes for these young calves distanced from the mothers and free movement they would otherwise take for granted is itself

redemptive: taking readers into the pens of these baby calves not only ignites sickness and sadness in us but also empathy and compassion for these creatures denied the ability to nurture and be nurtured maternally. As a prophecy-poem of factory-farming doom, “The Vealers” plants the seed of redemptive hope by softening readers to nonhuman animals; this tenderness is where the hope of ending factory farming lives.

This tenderness that defines Kumin’s Jeremiah-like seed of hope also evokes the Romantic poets Kumin descends from, particularly in this case, Byron, whose drama *Cain* and poem “Darkness” place him, like Jeremiah, in Kumin’s prophetic lineage. Consider Byron’s empathetic portrayal of the animals sacrificed by Abel in *Cain*: In Act III scene 1, Cain is incredulous with his brother for claiming that God would be pleased by Abel’s animal sacrifice. Cain exclaims, referring to God,

His pleasure! what was his high pleasure in
The fumes of scorching flesh and smoking blood,
To the pain of the bleating mothers, which
Still yearn for their dead offspring? or the pangs
Of the sad ignorant victims underneath
Thy pious knife? Give way! this bloody record
Shall not stand in the sun, to shame creation! (298–304)

Byron’s “bleating mothers” who “yearn for their dead offspring” anticipate Kumin’s “freshened cows” who answer their young’s “[b]leating” from “[a]cross the barn” “until they forget who is there.” Byron’s “scorching flesh and smoking blood” contrast with Kumin’s vealers wrapped in plastic, “their perfect flesh unstreaked with blood / or muscle”; however, both poets conjure these sacrificed animals as flesh-and-blood bodies not unlike our own. The exclamatory anger in Byron is more contained in Kumin’s steady diction, even if her pity for the “sad ignorant victims” is as compelling. Consider, too, the pathos in Byron’s apocalyptic poem, “Darkness,” when he describes the last

desperate acts of the world's creatures—"The meagre by the meagre were devour'd," he says (46)—and then singles out a loyal dog who

[...] was faithful to a corse, and kept
The birds and beasts and famish'd men at bay,
Till hunger clung them, or the dropping dead
Lur'd their lank jaws; himself sought out no food,
But with a piteous and perpetual moan,
And a quick desolate cry, licking the hand
Which answer'd not with a caress—he died. (48–54)

This "faithful" dog stands out in "Darkness" partly because of his singularity; throughout the poem, Byron generalizes creatures' experiences of the volcano that inspires his end-of-world vision by referring to animals and humans only in plural: "men," "kings," "wild birds," "wild brutes," "vipers," and so on. The strange honor of this single, doubtlessly starving dog keeping protective vigil at his dead master's side emphasizes the pathos of the dog more than virtually any other figure in the poem. In this singularity, Byron performs a gesture that Kumin will repeat when she writes about the single woodchuck eluding extermination in her later poem, "Woodchucks." The dog's apparently unnatural disinterest in food during this famine suggests that Byron, like Kumin after him, recognizes animals as feeling, loyal, even ethical, beings. Like Kumin, Byron's concern with animals comes from a deeply personal commitment, best illustrated by the risky intimacy with which Byron would wipe the foam from his dog Boatswain's mouth with his bare hand when Boatswain acquired rabies and was dying—and by his famous epitaph, which praises Boatswain for his "Beauty without Vanity, Strength without Insolence, Courage without Ferocity, and all the Virtues of Man without his Vices" (Moore, *The Life* 73; McElderry 553). While B. R. McElderry, Jr., points out that "the contrast of the perfect brute and imperfect man is one congenial to the misanthropic

philosophies of the period,” that doesn’t diminish the sincerity of Byron’s tribute (554). Kumin’s animal poetics, if not her maternal perspective, have much in common with Byron’s.

But, of course, Byron’s politics in *Cain* and “Darkness” do not only concern themselves with animals; like Kumin, Byron positions the innocent or abused animal in contrast to (and as victim to) tyranny—especially in *Cain*. In the same excerpt from *Cain* quoted above, for example, it is important to consider that Cain is not simply fuming over the treatment of animals but also, and perhaps mostly, over Abel’s interpretation of God’s wishes—an interpretation that leads Abel to be tyrannical over animals, breaking up animal families with sacrificial deaths that are, in Cain’s opinion, fully unnecessary. When Cain exclaims, “*His pleasure!* what was his high pleasure [...]?” he is incensed that Abel tries to please God by way of cruelty to animals rather than, like Cain, raising “a shrine without victim, / And altar without gore” (266–67). From Cain’s perspective, Abel is a senseless murderer out of a misguided piety, a misguided respect for authority—which is rather ironic, considering the fatal impact of Cain’s rage at Abel shortly thereafter. The stark contrast between the animals “yearn[ing] for their dead offspring” in *Cain* and the tyranny of Abel’s “pious” sacrifice is echoed in “Darkness,” when in the face of the apparent end of the world,

War, which for a moment was no more,
Did glut himself again: a meal was bought
With blood, and each sate suddenly apart
Gorging himself in gloom: no love was left; (38–41)

The fear and hunger caused by this apocalyptic darkness (inspired in Byron’s actual life by the sky-darkening volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora) spurs humans into cruelty

and lovelessness, a stark contrast to the loyal dog who stays by his owner's side until death. In these passages, Byron is clearly on the side of the innocent animal and of the rare human beings, like Cain before his act of fratricide, who believe life is possible without tyrannical behavior against animals or one another. Like Jeremiah and Kumin, Byron homes in on his seed of hope within a larger landscape of doom.

In "Darkness," scarcity—the threat of death, and by extension, extinction—is largely to blame for human beings' bad behavior, but *Cain*, too, according to Byron's preface, takes inspiration from Cuvier's discovery of extinction and his assertion of catastrophism as a cause for past extinctions, an influence apprehended most directly in Act II, when Cain travels to a realm filled with the spirits of strange, apparently extinct beasts. If we can concede that Byron's anxiety over extinction at least partly causes the tenderness his Cain expresses toward the sacrificed lamb and its mother and the tenderness with which he describes the loyal dog in "Darkness," then we should also permit the possibility that the extinction anxiety triggered by the Holocaust at least partly causes the tenderness Kumin expresses toward the vealers and their mothers in her poem. Rather than suggest *Cain* or "Darkness" as an intentional or self-conscious parent texts to "The Vealers," these remarkably similar elicitations of empathy for animal victims in the face of human tyranny suggest Byron and Kumin's shared concern for needless death in a post-extinction—and for Kumin, post-Holocaust—age.

Kumin's "The Vealers" is a Holocaust poem in addition to being an animal rights poem of maternal tenderness, but this meaning is only clear after closer investigation. On the surface, we might note the narrow pens' similarity to the cramped bunkhouses of concentration camps and the minimal providence of nutrition so that the bodies of the

calves will be muscleless to the slow starvation of the Jews awaiting their fate. While the vealers' pens and near starvation also call forth the narrow quarters and inhumane treatment to which mostly white slave traders once subjugated African captives, as well as jail cells more generically, Kumin has a habit of linking factory farming with Holocaust imagery elsewhere that tips us off that the Holocaust is, at the least, one of this image's sources. In one interview, for example, Kumin expresses her preference for a vegetarian diet and differentiates between the generally humane treatment of livestock on local small-scale farms with the cruelty of "agribusiness." She then momentarily assumes her position on a familiar soapbox: "The factory farming of animals is atrocious. What they do to chickens is just awful. Concentration-camp chicken" (Kumin, "Interview with Enid Shomer" 546). "The Vealers," by extension, presents us with concentration-camp veal. In the poem, Kumin accepts her complicity in the calves' suffering, as evidenced both by the last line's use of "we" and, less directly, by the form of the poem itself. Likewise, the Holocaust's success depended on the complicity of countless apparently innocent people who were not directly involved in the killing of Jews.

This poem's connection to the Holocaust is made even clearer by its inclusion in Kumin's *The Nightmare Factory*, a collection concerned in part with, as *Boston Globe* reviewer Marcia Nardi explains, Kumin's "European travels that arouse memories of the Nazi regime" (Nardi). It is also not a coincidence that Kumin compares the treatment of the vealers to those of Strasbourg geese in stanza 3. A Strasbourg goose is "a goose fattened so as to enlarge the liver for use in pâté de foie gras," as the dictionary reminds, but Kumin is a maven of double meanings, as evidenced by her use of *rack* later in the same stanza, a word that both describes the bleats' straining sounds and a particular cut of

prepared veal involving the neck and spine, reminding the reader of the vealers' ultimate fate on a dinner plate. Similarly, Strasbourg, an Alsatian city on the border of France, was annexed by Germany during WWII. Its Jews had mostly been evacuated to safety in the South of France early in the war, but close to 3,800 Jews in its metropolitan area were murdered, many after having been experimented on, and many of Strasbourg's Alsatian natives were forced into German SS service, something they complied with out of terror for their own and their families' lives (Warschawski). In other words, Strasbourg has a history of terror and compulsion, one that we might also extend back to the Strasbourg massacre of 1349, when hundreds of Jews were publicly burned as part of the Black Death persecutions and massacres that occurred between 1348 and 1350 (Kaplan 27). Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that Kumin's comparison of the vealers to the Strasbourg geese is, to extend the metaphor, a comparison of the vealers to the Jewish victims of European massacres and genocides.

This comparison is not, to be sure, incidental, even if it is, at first glance, subtle.⁷⁹ If we accept the moral stance implicit in Kumin's analogy between the vealers and the massacred Jews, as I do, we might argue that Kumin's subtext asserts that eating veal is not only morally reprehensible but also tyrannical. Here Kumin stands on the shoulders of her bolder Romantic forebear, Shelley, whose *A Vindication of Natural Diet* is a vegetarian manifesto of the most passionate—indeed, prophetic—order, apparently written after he and his wife had “lived on vegetables” for eight months (8). Shelley views humankind and its domesticated animals as physically and behaviorally diseased, the only solution for which is human beings' total “abstinence from animal food and

⁷⁹ Recall a similarly subtle maneuver in Stern's reference to Lindbergh in “Behaving Like a Jew.”

spirituous liquors” (2). To prove that eating meat (any meat, mind you—not only that attained through inhumane means) is “unnatural,” Shelley relies on comparative anatomy—Cuvier’s specialty—to insist that “man resembles frugivorous animals in every thing, and carnivorous in nothing” (2). He further reasons that since we require fire to enjoy meat, and fire is basically a Promethean blindfold to shield us from “the horrors” of our “shambles,” we suffer our “vitals [being] devoured by the vulture of disease” (2).

“Let the advocate for animal food,” Shelley taunts,

force himself to a decisive experiment on its fitness, and as Plutarch recommends, tear a living lamb with his teeth, and plunging his head into its vitals, slake his thirst with the steaming blood; when fresh from the deed of horror let him revert to the irresistible instincts of nature that would rise in judgment against it, and say, Nature formed me for such work as this. Then, and then only, would he be consistent. (2–3)

Shelley already knows the gruesome experiment will fail, so he spends the rest of his vindication asserting the healing properties that come with the “adoption of vegetable diet and pure water” and insisting upon this diet’s capacity for defying or even preventing tyranny, bigotry, and “odious and disgusting aristocracy” (4; 6). Shelley insists about Napoleon, for example,

It is impossible, had Buonaparte descended from a race of vegetable feeders, that he could have had either the inclination or the power to ascend the throne of the Bourbons. The desire of tyranny could scarcely be excited in the individual, the power to tyrannize would certainly not be delegated by a society, neither frenzied by inebriation, nor rendered impotent and irrational by disease [caused by eating meat or drinking unclean water or any “spirituous” liquors]. (6)

Shelley sees what he would call our “unnatural” diet, centered on animal products, as the root of tyranny and both bodily and social malaise; refraining from the unnecessary killing of animals for food, in other words, is an urgent political act for Shelley. Whereas Kumin uses irony and subtlety to encourage readers to think twice before ordering veal—

which is surely one of Kumin's hoped-for outcomes—Shelley uses gore, comparative anatomy, and impassioned reasoning. Both writers seem convinced that human tyranny correlates with our treatment of animals; for Shelley, our tyrannical behaviors are *caused* by our treatment of animals (our killing of them for consumption), while for Kumin our treatment of animals is indicative of our tyrannical behavior and of her belief that we are, as she asserted in an interview with Martha George Meek, “infinitely depraved, and brutish, and nasty” (318). Shelley's “Vindication” alludes to our depravity as well; he opens his piece with, “I hold that the depravity of the physical and moral nature of man originated in his unnatural habits of life,” referring to the diet he rails against (1). For both writers, along with Byron, our treatment of animals is linked to depravity and to tyranny; Kumin extends Shelley's argument into her modern moment when she writes about the cruel treatment of animals—for food or otherwise—as symptomatic of the same depravity that could cause an instance of genocide like the Holocaust. In so doing, Kumin assumes the voice of a prophet, joining not only the Romantics—who of course were educated to appreciate Judeo-Christian values rooted in Torah—but also the Hebrew prophets themselves in assuming the prophetic voice to move readers to detest and correct injustice. Kumin uses this prophetic voice to proclaim depravity and doom and use the suffering of innocent animals as a reminder that we can choose otherwise for our dinner plates and our stances on animal rights.

The tenderness Kumin evokes for these young animals distanced from their mothers is not only evocative of the biblical and Romantic poets Kumin descends from but also of the activist-oriented Jewish American poet-prophets who came before her and/or alongside her. Her Jewish American literary genealogy includes the same poets of

prophetic witness as Stern and Rich—Lazarus, Reznikoff, Rukeyser, Ginsberg, Ostriker, and so on—and, as is the case with both Stern and Rich, reading Kumin through the lens of the Jewish prophetic tradition magnifies the Jewishness of her activism and of her animal poems. In fact, in many of her poems and interviews, Kumin directly claims Jewish poet-prophets of witness in her lineage. During her interview with deNiord, for example, deNiord includes Kumin in a list of poets whose “confessional poems have also worked as public poems in many ways”; the only fellow Jew on his list is Rich. Without explicitly noting Jewishness, Kumin suggests adding Denise Levertov (who was raised Christian but was strongly influenced by her Hasidic father) and Muriel Rukeyser to the list. “The funny thing is when Denise was writing all of those poems about the Vietnam War, I was disappointed,” Kumin admits.

I thought she was going down the wrong track. I was afraid she would lose her lyricism in the process. And then of course, I’ve now done a similar thing in *Still to Mow*. So I understand much better. And Muriel Rukeyser too. I mean I secretly thought Muriel’s poetry was too prosy even while I had great admiration for her courage as a war resister and a protester against dictators of any stripe. Now I read her appreciatively, empathetically. She was a remarkable woman. (Interview with Chard deNiord 43)

The kinship Kumin experiences with Levertov and Rukeyser is also deeply present with her friend and peer, Alicia Ostriker, whose *The Mother/Child Papers* explicitly explores the relationship and tension between mothering and war. If we can imagine Levertov, Rukeyser, and Ostriker as perhaps Kumin’s poet-prophet cousins, we might propose Emma Lazarus, with whom the Jewish American prophetic mode in poetry starts, as a great-grandmother to them all. Kumin shares with Stern and Rich an affinity for Lazarus’s commitment to the American ideal of welcoming immigrants with open arms, but Kumin’s connection to Lazarus is more precisely an affinity with Lazarus’s “Mother

of Exiles” in “The New Colossus”; like Kumin, Lazarus emphasizes the mothering and nurturing role of the prophetic voice. Kumin memorably alludes to Lazarus in “Nurture,” a poem in which Kumin confesses her soft spot for “dramas of animal rescue” and encourages readers to direct any needy creatures to her door. This is where she admits, with a bit of irony and at least twice as much sincerity, that she suffers “from an overabundance of maternal genes” (6). Immediately after this admission (or boast), Kumin echoes Lazarus’s grandiosity in “The New Colossus”: “Bring me your fallen fledgling, your bumper lamb,” Kumin declares (6). “[L]ead the abused, the starvelings, into my barn. / Advise the hunted deer to leap into my corn” (7–8). These lines bring to mind Kumin’s tender pain for the vealers; those “abused” “starvelings” ignite a maternal care in Kumin that is abundant, nurturing, and eager for connection through whatever common language:

Think of the language we two, same and not-same
 might have constructed from sign,
 scratch, grimace, grunt, vowel:

Laughter our first noun, and our long verb, howl. (16–19)

Whereas Rich’s “dream of a common language” is a “drive to connect” between women, Kumin’s, eleven years after Rich’s *The Dream of a Common Language*, is a drive to connect across species boundaries. Bringing to mind Rich’s questioning of whether poetry is “close to the wolverines’ howled signals, / that modulated cantata of the wild,” Kumin imagines interspecies communication rooted in joy, nurturing, and wildness (Rich, “VII” 4–5). This idea of a familial, apparently egalitarian interspecies connection and communication recalls the biblical tension between the human-dominion-over-nonhuman-animals teaching in Genesis and the Exodus-derived anti-cruelty teaching,

tsha'ar ba'ale hayim, in Talmud. As discussed in previous chapters, embracing the tension between the dominion and anti-cruelty teachings is inherently Jewish. Interestingly, as Berkowitz notes in her chapter on animal suffering, an extension of *tsha'ar ba'ale hayim* in Torah is *shilu'ah ha-qen*, meaning “the sending of the nest,” a teaching derived from Deuteronomy 22:6–7 that requires one to send off a mother bird before seizing her eggs or chicks (Berkowitz 91–92); while Torah here protects the mother from suffering, Kumin imagines maternal love, even between species, to *overcome* suffering. Kumin’s anti-cruelty animal poems, like Stern’s, are deeply Jewish in their critique of human dominion over nonhuman animals because they assert a broad, nuanced and humane vision of human-animal relationships.

In Torah and in Jewish American poetry, the prophetic voice aims to move its audience to despise and correct injustice by evoking emotional responses; Kumin’s contemporary prophetic voice blends the doom and hope in Jeremiah with the animal poetics and politics of the late Romantics and the justice-oriented activism of her Jewish American poet-prophet forebears and peers. Kumin’s voice, thus blended and animated, uses maternal love and nurture as a way of countering the offensiveness of animal cruelty with a tenderness for nonhuman animals that, she hopes, will remind us of our interspecies kinship, our animal responsibility to one another, and our shared mandate to howl.

Teshuvah: Vermin, Nazism, and the Problem of Recognizing the Inner Murderer

The prophet’s howl of witness carries within it not only anger at injustice or tenderness for the abused among us but also lamentation. When we consider Kumin’s

poems about animal cruelty as not only prophetic witnesses of injustice but also as specifically late-twentieth-century Jewish American poems, inflected with the pain and horror of the Holocaust, these poems become a means of memorializing the human lives lost in Nazi Europe. In addition, they become a means of seeking *teshuvah*, or atonement, for human complicity in hateful acts of violence and murder.

Kumin's poems readily accept that murder is inherent in carnivorous animal life.

In her poem "Catchment," Kumin reflects on watching a nature documentary and asks,

When the she-leopard stalks
an infant antelope, which one
am I rooting for? The newborn

I saw slip, moments ago, free
from the birth canal, struggle to its feet,
stagger against its mother's teat

and begin to nurse, both nervously
twitching tail stubs in the heat
and flies of the equator

or the big cat, in whose camouflaged lair
three helpless youngsters wait
so starved for meat that she dares

venture out to hunt by daylight? (1-13)

Kumin's identification with the maternal impulse to nurture is complicated when exploring, in poems like this one, how carnivorous animal mothers must murder other mothers' children for their own children to survive. Whereas in "The Vealers," the cruel mistreatment of long-suffering baby calves seems unjust, especially considering veal's status as an inessential delicacy, in "Catchment," Kumin acknowledges that there is no perfect justice in the wild, especially when both hunter and hunted have survival at stake. Later in "Catchment," Kumin notes that her friend's "bull / mastiff pup," a human-cared-

for puppy who is surely adequately fed, “leapt up last month to snatch / a newborn doe kid” from Kumin’s friend’s arms “and snapped its neck with one good shake” (17–18, 21–22). Even in the nonhuman animal kingdom, the poem’s ending acknowledges, creatures kill one another senselessly, unrelated to the necessities of survival or hunger.

But just because murder is inherent in carnivorous life does not mean it is inevitable for all meat-eaters, which is the grounds for Kumin’s implicit argument for not just repentance but for reparation, or *teshuvah*. To linger another moment in the nonhuman realm, the bullmastiff cited in “Catchment,” like all dogs, is after all an omnivore, not reliant on animal flesh for survival. But given that the bullmastiff is just a pup, the dog has not yet learned that its interconnectedness with a caretaker member of the human species ensures it won’t need to kill other animals; or, maybe the doe’s neck-snapping is just the result of a young dog at play, learning the power of its jump and jaws. Regardless, it’s fair to say that for Kumin, the puppy is as innocent and faultless as the she-leopard. Interestingly, in another poem from this same section of *Nurture*, Kumin finds a nonhuman model for cruelty-free interspecies connection in another canine. In her poem “Custodian,” Kumin writes of her own “spotted dog,” whom she characterizes as “an old pensioner” who stalks “the perimeter” of Kumin’s “mucky pond” for newly metamorphosed frogs (6–12). Kumin observes,

Once every ten or so pounces
he succeeds, carries his captive north
in his soft mouth, uncorks him on the grass,
and then sits, head cocked, watching the slightly
dazed amphibian hop back to sanctuary.

Over the years the pond’s inhabitants
seem to have grown accustomed
to this ritual of capture and release.

They ride untroubled in the wet pocket
of the dog's mouth, disembark in the meadow
like hitchhikers, and strike out again for home. (14–24)

And while Kumin has seen other dogs “kill / and swallow their [frog] catch,” human children “corner polliwogs” and “squeeze / the life out of them in their small fists,” and the “great blue heron swoop in” and “carry / frogs back to the fledglings in the rookery,” her old canine pensioner has found a way to engage with the frogs murderlessly, enacting a strange but peaceful interspecies play (25–26, 27–30, 31, 32–33). Kumin's tone conveys fondness for the frogs' aged canine custodian, explicitly connecting his gentle catch-and-release behavior to her own (and by extension our own) interspecies caretaking in the poem's final lines: “and we too, taking and letting go, / that same story” (40–41). We animals can enact interspecies connection that tries, and often succeeds, to do no harm—especially if our, or our children's, survival does not depend on otherwise. We can choose to do no harm in spite of our murderous capabilities.

Given Kumin's poet-prophet propensity for doom, it's not surprising that her poems appreciate the human capability to do no harm about one tenth as much as they condemn the human capability for cruelty. Just as Kumin's animal poems enact a maternal, late Romantic-inflected prophetic voice, they also enact *teshuvah*, the Jewish practice of admitting wrongdoing and seeking the opportunity for atonement. Examples abound of Kumin's belief that humanity has sinned, or missed the mark, quite a bit when it comes to our interspecies responsibilities and behaviors; one example is her aptly titled poem “Repent,” in which Kumin bemoans the treatment of killer whales in aquarium theme parks and implores, in her final lines,

Stu-
pidity, said

Immanuel Kant,
is caused by a wicked
heart. Repent. (21–25)

Our wickedness—our propensity for senseless cruelty—leads to our stupid belief that we can “pen” these killer whales “in a little jail,” as Kumin writes of the aquarium, teaching them “tricks / to do for fishy snacks” without consequence, rather than letting them “cruise a hundred miles a day / when free,” as they would prefer to do (12, 13–14, 17–18). Repentance is not enough; it is only the beginning of atonement. In revealing how cruelly the human captors and trainers have treated these sea creatures, Kumin’s implicit case in the poem is not that the reader should feel regret and move on; rather, we should hold our fellow humans accountable. As is the case in “The Vealers” when Kumin includes herself in the “we” that has eaten veal, “Repent” reminds that we should personally do better (not give our money to Sea World, say) and demand better of others of our species (demand freeing killer whales back to their lives in the ocean). We should, collectively, atone. We should enact *teshuvah*.

Kumin’s interest in the relationship between individual and collective atonement is clearest when we place her animal poems in the shadow of the Holocaust, and no poem more perfectly marries Kumin’s animal poetics, her grief over the Holocaust, and her belief in the need for personal and collective *teshuvah* in response to humanity’s cruelty and wickedness than her poem “Woodchucks.” While “The Vealers” is a Holocaust poem only after careful consideration (and, perhaps, only with a sympathetic imagination) the link between the human depravity of the Holocaust and Kumin’s inhumane-animal-death poems is much more readily recognizable in her poem “Woodchucks,” which was first published in 1972’s Pulitzer-Prize winning *Up Country*. From the first line to the last, the

analogy between the killing of woodchucks and the killing of Jews is explicit, but this time the tyrant isn't a factory farm, as it was in "The Vealers"; it's the poet herself. From line 1, the poem offers a grim self-assessment through its sharply ironic voice:

Gassing the woodchucks didn't turn out right.
The knockout bomb from the Feed and Grain Exchange
was featured as merciful, quick at the bone
and the case we had against them was airtight,
both exits shoehorned shut with puddingstone,
but they had a sub-sub-basement out of range. (1-6)

Kumin details the next day's woodchuck shenanigans: the chucks seem unstoppable in their destruction of "the vegetable patch" (11). In stanza 3, Kumin continues her unflattering self-examination:

The food from our mouths, I said, righteously thrilling
to the feel of the .22, the bullets' neat noses.
I, a lapsed pacifist fallen from grace
puffed with Darwinian pieties for killing,
now drew a bead on the little woodchuck's face.
He died down in the everbearing roses.

Ten minutes later I dropped the mother. She
flipfopped in the air and fell, her needle teeth
still hooked in a leaf of early Swiss chard.
Another baby next. O one-two-three
the murderer inside me rose up hard,
the hawkeye killer came on stage forthwith. (13-24)

The poem's final stanza brings Kumin's extended metaphor to a gruesomely tidy conclusion:

There's one chuck left. Old wily fellow, he keeps
me cocked and ready day after day after day.
All night I hunt his humped-up form. I dream
I sight along the barrel in my sleep.
If only they'd all consented to die unseen
gassed underground the quiet Nazi way. (25-30)

Kumin's irony in "Woodchucks" thoroughly permeates its prosody and content. In five sestets of hexameter, a noble meter inherited from Greek epic poems, Kumin uses a stanzaic rhyme scheme of *abcacb*, the same scheme as stanzas two, four, and six of "The Vealers." Again Kumin has on her oven mitts, but this time form is not merely a manageable container but a tool to mock her speaker's murderous self-righteousness—a mockery reminiscent of Jeremiah and so many other biblical prophets, but here, the mockery is self-directed. Her self-directed mockery is underscored by her description of herself as "on stage," as if she becomes some kind of idealized (or ridiculous) character in her performance of cold-blooded killing. Not only does the meter recall ancient Greek epics, but the rhyme is nearly perfect throughout—most tellingly in stanza three. That Kumin's "killing" has become "thrilling" is the very problem that seems to have inspired this poem. The three exceptions to the perfect rhyme sonically underscore the ironic discomfort inherent in the poem's project, especially the deflated slant rhyme of "teeth" and "forthwith" in stanza four; while the woodchuck mother's "needle teeth / still hooked in a leaf" represent her will to live, Kumin's description of herself as a "hawkeye killer" who comes "on stage forthwith" adopts an archaic diction that deflates her into a kind of militant caricature, subtly indicating that Kumin is as "off" as her rhyme is and has lost touch with reality and has certainly lost touch with maternal harmony. This ironic self-mockery is further emphasized in the same stanza when Kumin declares "O one-two-three / the murderer inside me rose up hard," echoing the *O* of a Romantic ode (consider Shelley's "O wild West Wind" or Keats's "O, for a draught of vintage!"), a traditional form of praise that stands in stark ironic distance from Kumin's poem about carnage; this irony simultaneously foregrounds and mocks the earnestness of the killer's campaign

against the woodchucks. Like Byron's Abel, Kumin depicts herself as a senseless murderer out of misguided piety ("Darwinian pieties for killing"); she thinks she is being wronged ("The food from our mouths"!) but has ridiculously and spectacularly "fallen from grace." Her diagnosis of her own wickedness is merciless, linking her murderousness, as she does, to that of the Nazis.

Kumin may depict herself ironically, as a caricature worthy of mockery, but the murderer inside her is truly no laughing matter, as the extended metaphor of the poem makes clear. Kumin's complicity in human cruelty toward nonhuman animals is not always obvious, as is the case with "Repent." Her complicity is quiet in "The Vealers," a subtle assertion to the reader that she counts herself part of the problem of the calves' cruel lives and deaths. In "Woodchucks," Kumin's role as murderer and "hawkeye killer" is largely the point of the poem; while some detective work was required to demonstrate the Holocaust connection in "The Vealers," Kumin starts her first and final lines in "Woodchucks" with direct references to gassing, with the allusion to Nazi gas chambers glaringly clear in the second instance. The extended metaphor—that the poet's efforts to eradicate woodchucks is analogous to the Nazis' efforts to eradicate Jews—is apparent. Reading the poem doubly, which is what Kumin requires, lifts many layers to the surface. "[T]he case we had against them was airtight," line 4 insists, literally meaning that the tunnels were sealed with "puddingstone" to trap the woodchucks in their gas chambers. Kumin also means, of course, that she felt justified in killing these vermin who she claims were stealing "[t]he food from our mouths," as if Kumin would starve if the chucks persisted. Kumin also alludes to the Nazi case against the Jews, which was apparently "airtight," given how fatally convincing it became during the Second World

War. But like the Jews, the chucks persisted to live their lives despite this philosophical case against them and the resulting chase; where a chuck was merely eating and minding his own business, his oppressor claimed he was “beheading the carrots.” And the harder Kumin tried to rid her garden of his kind, the more cleverly they hid, as the Jews did, so that they could not be fully eradicated: “they had a sub-sub-basement out of range.” For any reader familiar with Kumin’s early work, this line recalls “The Amsterdam Poem” from *The Nightmare Factory*, in which Kumin reflects on the fate of Anne Frank: “There must have been / a few good years for Anne, / years of being a healthy animal / mooning along the estuaries ...”⁸⁰ Like Frank, most of the woodchucks in Kumin’s poem don’t make it, as Kumin recalls that she “drew a bead on the little woodchuck’s face” and then, later, “dropped the mother”—a description of mother/child suffering with much less pathos than what we expect from Kumin and what we encountered in “The Vealers,” to be sure. By the end of the poem, Kumin closes in on her extended metaphor, emphasizing its intention: when she muses, “If only they’d all consented to die unseen / gassed underground the quiet Nazi way,” Kumin spits in the face of the too-often retold story of Jews marching to their deaths like lambs to the slaughter (as if lambs, too, would

⁸⁰ “The Amsterdam Poem” links the fates of animals to the Holocaust directly, approaching terrain related to but beyond the scope of this chapter. Consider these lines about Amsterdam’s pigeons from section three of the poem. The poet watches a crowd save a pigeon that had fallen into a canal and then reflects,

In 1941, there wasn’t a pigeon here
and the Dutch had begun to eat rats.
What can’t I forgive? The rebirth of pigeons?
Of caring? Of live and let live? The carillons
in the Westerkirk on the corner ring out.
An old woman hawks eels from a pushcart.
For suffering there is no quantum. What heals
the city, its citizens, I know nothing about.

Tomorrow KLM can fly us out. (89–97)

willingly march to their deaths). Further, Kumin's use of "all" in this line suggests a reading of the Holocaust in which all the Jews really *did* die; if we accept that reading as plausible, Kumin, herself a Jew, also spits in the face of the ideals of eugenics. Kumin the speaker is tired of the chase and would greatly prefer a more hands-off method of killing, as surely the Nazis preferred when they helped convey Jews to death camps; Kumin the poet, however, is celebrating the survivor woodchuck whose perseverance keeps her up at night as both hunter and relative of the hunted.⁸¹ To be sure, that a Jewish poet who has taken readers on a heartbreaking tour of post-Holocaust Amsterdam in "The Amsterdam Poem" can discover that she is not only a "lapsed pacifist" but that she also contains an inner Nazi makes "Woodchucks" deeply ironic and horrifying. Kumin's recognition of the murderer inside her brings to mind Stern's "The Jew and the Rooster Are One," in which Stern reflects on how the "Jew" (Soutine, but also Stern himself) is not only analogous to the bedraggled rooster but also to the passive armchair that holds the butchered rooster's body as well as with the butcher himself.⁸² Like Stern, Kumin signals the complexity of the Jewish-animal analogy in her poetry and emphasizes the dignity and intelligence of nonhuman animals. In so doing, Kumin, like Stern, is enacting a form of *teshuvah* in her poem, offering a corrective perspective on vermin eradication. And also like Stern, Kumin's ironic self-portrayal (less pitiful and more monstrous than Stern's self-portrayal in poems like "The Dog") creates the distance within which she can

⁸¹ "Although I lived in a safe America my father's relatives were going into the ovens. I was a natural candidate for nightmares [...]" (Kumin, *To Make* 9).

⁸² A similar chilling irony is asserted in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* when Art and Françoise muse on the atrocities of Auschwitz while Art uses bug spray to kill bugs who are biting him—and their dead bodies fall out of the panel, drawing our eyes to them (Spiegelman, *Maus* II, 74).

make a case for the empathetic worthiness of nonhuman animals, while simultaneously grieving her species' capacity for elaborate genocide.

One of this dissertation's arguments is that *teshuvah* offers readers of Jewish American poetry a means of understanding some of these poets' enduring poetic interest in nonhuman animals Jewishly. Kumin's poems embrace the need for recognizing our shared guilt and our depravity and wickedness when it comes to our mistreatment of nonhuman animals, and they ask us, sometimes directly, to repent. "Woodchucks" itself can be read as an act of repentance in its clear recognition that the poet has sinned—not against God, of course, as Kumin, like Rich and Stern, is atheist, but against her fellow creatures. The poem, in its self-mockery and self-criticism, performs, like "The Vealers," an admission of guilt akin to the spine-straightening shofar blast of Yom Kippur. It simultaneously suggests a turning away from cruel behavior toward nonhuman animals, imploring through its meticulous analysis of Kumin's (and our) internal murderer, that we can and ought to avoid indulging the part of ourselves that can be seduced by "Darwinian pieties for killing." Reading "Woodchucks" as *teshuvah* for wrongdoing makes legible its inherent activism on behalf of not only nonhuman animals but also on behalf of those humans whose bastardization of the dominion teaching in Genesis has led to supposedly subhuman classes of people—and, by extension, has led to those humans perceiving fellow humans as exterminable vermin.

If the lens of *teshuvah* helps us read Kumin's animal poems Jewishly, it also helps us understand animal rights (including human rights) from a Jewish anti-cruelty perspective. Kumin's fixation on the last woodchuck left, the "[o]ld wily fellow" with a "humped-up form," permits him a level of Sternian humanity, if you will, suggesting that

this is not only a Holocaust poem but also, despite its surface narrative, an animal rights poem. While I don't know Kumin's specific impetus for the poem, we could imagine a plausible backstory: the poet-farmer is at wit's end over woodchucks destroying her garden, and rage has possessed her to the point that she enacts—or at least imagines enacting—the kinds of drama depicted. In the process, she suddenly connects the gas of the “knockout bomb” with Zyklon B and similar gasses used in the concentration camps in Europe. The poet in her startles at the repercussions of this parallel she has drawn, that in her battle against the chucks, she is a Nazi and the animals are Jews. As a Jew, she is forced to recognize herself in the last “wily fellow,” as well as in the unnumbered kindred woodchucks she'd killed (or imagined killing) before him. In that recognition is empathy. Here she is, reluctant to share the same garden with these undesirables when she herself, if she had been less lucky during the Second World War, would have been one of those hunted undesirables. One could imagine, then, the poet flipping from red-faced frustration to sickened grief, humiliation, and shame. That “Darwinian piet[y] for killing” she refers to in stanza three casts her not only as the social Darwinist trying to purge the land of unwanted beings but also as the shrewd animal-rights poet calling out those who would kill—such as the speaker in her poem—in the name of some apparently “righteous” striving toward perfection in the garden, the land, or the race. The poem, then, is about the surviving woodchuck, the surviving Jew: it is about the struggle to be good in this world when all of us, Jew and non-Jew alike, are capable, because of that “infinite depravity” Kumin ascribes to us, of giving free rein to the murderers inside us. In its use of irony, careful prosody and diction, and extended metaphor, “Woodchucks” is

a poem of repentance, implicitly directing the self and the reader to turn from the tyranny and murder within us. In this way, the poem enacts and inspires *teshuvah*.

Memorializing the Slaughtered: Visual Culture and the Jewish Animal

Kumin's lyric-narrative poems invoke factory-farmed vealers and maniacally hunted woodchucks with crisp images that linger after the eye lifts from the page: the killed mother woodchuck's "needled teeth / still hooked in a leaf of early Swiss chard" and the baby calves folded like "dimestore card table[s]" require but a few words of description to imprint on the mind. One of the clichés of trauma, and certainly of the Holocaust, is that it is unspeakable. And one of the clichés of images is that they're worth a thousand words. Images in poems are language at its most efficient: they open the imagination's aperture just enough to create a visual record of something not pictorially represented on the page. Stern's opossum is rendered in memorable detail, and more obliquely, so is Rich's vixen. While Kumin's emphasis on the relationship between human tyranny and pervasive animal slaughter takes up the prophetic voice of her late-Romantic forebears' political righteousness and enacts *teshuvah* through its painful analogies and self-reflection, her specific focus on the machinery of animal death (factory farming, gassing woodchucks) and, in other poems, on animal extinction, invite comparison with her post-Holocaust Jewish contemporaries working in visual art. A powerful example is photographer Madame d'Ora, of Austria and France, who "professed [a] love for animals" (Silverman 14); d'Ora took to photographing haunting and gruesome scenes of "dead animals, bloody animal parts, and entrails, while visiting Parisian slaughterhouses roughly between 1949 and 1965" after her beloved sister died in

the Holocaust, and their shared Austrian house, which had been seized by Nazis during the war, was returned to her (14). Lisa Silverman argues that d'Ora's slaughterhouse series generates "a visual rhetoric of loss" that both "addresses the limits of effecting restorative justice"—the justice of receiving d'Ora's house back from the Nazis—and "acknowledging the inability of images to represent the Holocaust" (2). Property seizures in d'Ora's Austria were one way that the Nazi regime tried to strip "Jews of their identities not only as Austrians but also as human beings" (6). D'Ora's photographs, which depict "animal carcasses lying in glistening pools of blood, shapeless heavy masses of skin and fat, rough hides, and severed heads," meditate on the human capacity for cruelty, evoke the animality of dehumanization, memorialize those lost in the Holocaust, and trap viewers in the discomfort of the photographs' "aesthetically pleasing" compositions (14). In these ways, d'Ora's compelling photographs suggest human complicity in not only the fact of dehumanization and death but also the *pleasure* of it. Importantly, Silverman further argues, "d'Ora's slaughterhouse photographs do not dull our senses with visual pleasure. They shock precisely because their images cannot be reduced to icons of ethics or moral standards. Instead of negating horror, they highlight and intensify disgust by foregrounding the perverse nature of our aesthetic pleasure through their deliberate arrangement and lighting" (16). In so doing, d'Ora anticipates Kumin's focus on the perverse nature of the human appetite for veal as well as the perversity of misplaced pieties and self-righteousness when seized by the thrill of the kill in "Woodchucks." When considering Kumin's Holocaust-haunted animal poems in light of d'Ora's Holocaust-haunted slaughterhouse photographs, a continuum of almost

unspeakable grief and memorialization is revealed, both raising awareness of non-human animal suffering and commemorating the very human suffering of the Holocaust.⁸³

If we broaden the lens to include visual art by non-Jewish artists, we can contextualize the specific metaphors of Kumin's Holocaust-informed animals poems within an even broader post-Holocaust effort to memorialize the Jewish (and other) dead through painful representations of animal suffering and animal slaughter. Damien Hirst's *Holocaust* comprises an uncountable number of dead flies stuck to a 54-x-40-inch canvas using resin. Anselm Kiefer's extensive exploration of Holocaust grief (frequently in conversation with Paul C elan's Holocaust poem "Todesfugue") includes the 1981 painting *Margarethe*, in which straw is embedded within the oil paint, topped with orange flumes that evoke both the fire of concentration camp ovens and of birds' heads. Kiefer's 1983 woodcut *Br nhilde/Grane* depicts a burning Grane, the horse, according to one of the Met's curators, that Br nhilde rode "when she sacrificed herself on Siegfried's funeral pyre at the close of Wagner's opera *G tterd mmerung* (Twilight of the Gods)." The allusion is complex, but Kiefer's ongoing processing of his grief over Germans'

⁸³ Kumin's treatment of the Holocaust vis- -vis the animal suffering in her poems can be clearly linked to visual art that represents animal suffering, but it is harder to find visual parallels to Rich's poetic approach. As an illustration of this point, artist Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*, a living artwork of photographs and sketches that the artist has been collecting since the 1960s, has been compared to Adrienne Rich's *An Atlas of the Difficult World*. In it is a section of juxtapositions between pornographic photographs and photographs from the Holocaust. Joshua Jacobs states that "both Rich and Richter connect the Holocaust to seemingly unrelated aspects of culture" (Jacobs 112). It is through indirect juxtaposition that operates, in part, through the distance of comparison (this is *like* this, but is not and can never *be* this), that both Richter and Rich attempt to understand the unspeakable nature of the Holocaust. In contrast, Kumin's poetry and the visual art that can be compared to it, operate with a more direct approach. For Kumin, if the Holocaust is unspeakable, it is the job of the poet to speak it as clearly as possible.

behavior during the Holocaust surely informs the starkness of Grane's skeletal representation.

Non-Jewish visual culture doesn't always handle as skillfully the Holocaust-memorializing power of represented animal suffering. Painter Jo Frederiks, for example, is much more interested in nonhuman animal rights than, it seems, memorializing the Holocaust; her 2016 exhibition, *The Animal Holocaust*, which was partially a fundraiser to support animal rescue efforts, features a Nazi symbol on a factory farm building but is mostly concerned with nonhuman animal suffering. Animal rights organization PETA similarly sponsored a traveling public exhibition in 2004 entitled *Holocaust on Your Plate*, which placed large images of concentration camps beside large images of animal mistreatment. The Holocaust is used to shock humans into avoiding animal products and advocating for the better treatment of animals, but as with Frederiks, the effect, however noble its aims, comes off as more gimmick than memorialization.

Kumin is far from alone in representing the parallels between animal cruelty and human genocide in the Holocaust,⁸⁴ but what sets her apart from most of these visual artists, aside from her medium, is her ability to not only place animal cruelty on a continuum that includes the Holocaust but to simultaneously grieve both, memorialize

⁸⁴ Another famous Jewish literary example is Isaac Bashevis Singer's story "The Letter Writer"; in his reading of the story, Jay Geller notes that the protagonist, Hermann Gombiner, "passes judgment upon humanity's other than humane treatment of nonhuman animals" when Gombiner laments:

What do they know—all those scholars, all those philosophers, all the leaders of the world—about such as you? They have convinced themselves that man, the worst transgressor of all the species, is the crown of creation. All other creatures were created merely to provide him with food, pelts, to be tormented, exterminated. In relation to them all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka. (Singer 233 qtd in Geller 225)

both, and invite readers to join her in atoning for our species' complicity in all of these manifestations of human dominion and human depravity.

Implications: The Contemporary Animal Landscape

Early in this chapter, I allude to the complicated combination of propaganda, failures of imagination, and historically entrenched attitudes that led otherwise apparently rational non-Jews to become what Daniel Goldhagen calls “willing executioners,” enabling them to cram Jews into cattle cars to their deaths—or to stand by and support Hitler’s totalitarian government as it enacted these procedures. Maxine Kumin’s poems, because of their embrace of Jewish trauma and because of their Jewish Romantic anti-tyrannical bent, are acts against propaganda and historically entrenched attitudes that would enable tyrannical behavior; if her poems hope to propagate or entrench something in readers, that *something* is the importance of imagination in creating counter-narratives, opening space for empathy, and exposing the complexities within us that enable our complicity in atrocities for which we might otherwise not feel responsible. It is through imaginative work—bringing us, as readers, into the vealers’ stalls, creating a conceit that aligns animal with Jew and human with Nazi—that Kumin encourages readers to not only empathize with nonhuman animals (and with each other) but also to see ourselves and our decisions as complicated and worthy of examination, especially in the face of the ever-lengthening list of animal extinctions human beings have directly or indirectly caused. In this call to both empathy and to reason, Kumin extends Shelley’s gesture in “A Vindication of Natural Diet,” but with less manifesto and more metaphor. Likewise, Kumin brings us right up to the capitalist altar upon which agribusiness sacrifices baby

calves in the same spirit that Byron brings us to the religious altar upon which, according to the Genesis story, the first humans initiate our longstanding commitment to needless animal killing.

Because Kumin writes in a contemporary, post-Holocaust moment and casts the specter of the Holocaust over her descriptions of animal cruelty in “The Vealers” and “Woodchucks,” she encourages contemporary readers to do some particularly uncomfortable work. These poems challenge readers to ask ourselves: How have we been blinded to the tyranny of factory farming and other forms of animal cruelty in the twenty-first century? What propaganda have we bought into? And how are our historically entrenched attitudes about animals enabling us to turn the other way as animals are abused? While fully reckoning with these questions would be untenable here, we might consider, for example, factory-farm corporations, such as Perdue, a gross abuser of the chickens it raises for slaughter, which has celebrated itself as “humane” despite evidence to the extreme contrary (“Humanely Raised?”; “Settlement Reached”). Or we might consider the persistence of claims that human beings require animal protein, or even milk, for good health despite significant evidence to the contrary (“Protein”; “Protein in Diet”; Rosenberg). Because, as Elliott Sober reminds us, we don’t tend to include animals in our ethical equations (and, of course, because politicians often put their ambitions for power before those ethical equations), Chris Christie, when he was governor of New Jersey, vetoed a bipartisan bill that would have given pregnant pigs a bit more moving room by eliminating the horrific and clearly inhumane gestation bins they await their deaths within (Friedersdorf; Newell). When CoVID-19 struck the United States in early 2020, farmers began executing and even gassing their livestock, another failure of

collective imagination; we could find no other solution to supply chain interruption than sudden mass killing? The list goes on. These are among the urgent issues Kumin's animal-based Holocaust poems turn her readers toward in our contemporary moment.

Kumin's poems do not only speak back to the mythologies and horrors of the Holocaust; they ask readers how we have been like Nazis in our casting of animals as subhuman, as expendable, or, like the woodchucks, as vermin.⁸⁵ Additionally, Kumin's poems do not just tell stories about animals to prevent animal cruelty and suffering; while they implore people to treat animals better, they do so *at the same time* as they express Jewish identity and/or memorialize the Holocaust. For Kumin, Jewish suffering and animal suffering are inextricably linked, and both have a lot to teach us about how we treat our fellow creatures. Furthermore, Kumin's poems demonstrate an ideal poetics of *teshuvah*, pointing to true a poetics of *tikkun olam*, or healing the world, by challenging hierarchies of species domination, moving readers emotionally, and prophesying stirringly against humanity's habitual animal cruelty, needless animal death, and our encouragement of animal extinction. They ask us to consider the ways we have been fooled into becoming willing executioners of beings who are intelligent and clearly suffer both emotionally and physically beneath human tyranny. And they ask us what further extinctions our ongoing anti-animal behavior will lead to. What's important is not only that Kumin be recognized as a Holocaust poet because of these and other important poems written in direct response to that genocide but that, more significantly, we recognize in her poems a reflection of our own "eternal depravity," our own capability

⁸⁵ Incidentally, Kumin's woodchucks and vealers aren't the only animals she relates to Jews in her poems. In "The Highwaymen," for example, she calls the redpolls "charming in their little red yarmulkas."

for unchecked cruelty, and our own inner tyrants. What we do after that recognition is up to us, but it should not be nothing.

CONCLUSION

Humans have embraced human-elevating hierarchies for probably as long as we have existed. In Genesis, God directs humankind to rule over the earth and its creatures, laying out the basic order of things: first comes God, then come human beings, and then comes the rest of animal life. Aristotle, Plato, and other ancient philosophers visualized this order into *Scala Naturae*, also known as the Great Chain of Being, adding angels between humankind and God and differentiating sentient animal life from lower-order plant life and, at the bottom, minerals. This order has been a given in Western culture through medieval times, Neoplatonism, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and into our contemporary moment, even when God and angels are quietly removed from the ladder. One danger of this order's assumptions is that when nonhuman animals are considered lower-order beings, human beings can create intraspecies hierarchies by relegating—through analogy, rumor, or propaganda—some humans to a lower rung, thereby dehumanizing and devaluing them. As a long-surviving but oft-despised people group, those descendants of the Hebrew tribes of antiquity, the Jewish people, are a clear example of a group that has suffered cruelly for having been pejoratively associated with nonhuman animals. The modern epitome of this startlingly effective maneuver against Jewish people was the Holocaust, resulting at least partly from long histories of Jews being associated with wolves, weasels, rats, dogs, and so on. Piled into cattle cars and gassed like surplus livestock, European Jews *had* to be understood as less than human—as *animal*—for otherwise “decent” people to assist, or ignore, so much cruelty and death.

Through examining the animal poetics of Gerald Stern, Adrienne Rich, and Maxine Kumin, this dissertation has argued that the way forward from human depravity is not only found in the plea of the marginalized that we be granted full humanity. It is not only, or even mostly, found in the efforts of the marginalized to try to “pass” as a certain, more powerful type of human—a white, Christian, able-bodied young man, say. It does not require much cynicism to arrive at the conclusion that some people will never pass as what they attempt to pass as, and some people will never recognize the full humanity of those humans they consider beneath them. What these post-Holocaust Jewish American poets offer is a different approach: elevate nonhuman animals to the same hierarchal position as human animals, and treat nonhuman animals with the empathy, tenderness, respect, and nurturing that you would show a fellow beloved human of your tribe, and the analogy of Jews to dogs or wolves, for example, need not be fatal. As my study of Stern, Rich, and Kumin’s animal representations reveal, the analogy could even be considered a compliment.

The implications of this study for other ethnic American literatures, or literature more broadly, is found in the simple truth that Jews are not the only marginalized people group to have been animalized. Black Americans, for example, have suffered acutely from racist animalization, and Black authors have reflected this reality in their works; a famous example is Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, in which Bigger is described in animalistic terms nine times in a span of five pages—“black ape” or “half-human black ape” or “bestial monstrosity” (408); “black mad dog” (409); “wooly head of this black lizard” (409); “subhuman” (409); “hardened black thing” (410); “this beast” 411; and “maddened ape” (412). An investigation of virtually any marginalized community will

find gestures of dehumanization that rely on animalization, especially if the marginalized have been enslaved or are perceived as threatening to those (usually white) in power. Like Kumin's "Woodchucks," which imaginatively responds to the failure of imagination that aligns Jews with vermin and deems them both exterminable, there is no question that Wright uses pejorative animal associations in his novel to underscore the failures of imagination endemic to white racism, and there is no question that in this country, the United States, no marginalized community has had to endure more hardship, violence, murder, and lynching as a result of accusations and assumptions of "animality" than have Black Americans.

To own one's animality when one has known oneself to be more expendable or more murderable because of that accusation of animality is admittedly a tall order, which, from a distance, looks nothing short of foolish. However, in the case of Stern, Rich, and Kumin, we see Jewish American writers owning animality as a kind of essential wisdom. Stern shows that the dog's way is wiser and more empathetic than the human way, Rich shows that animal knowledge holds deep, necessary truth, and Kumin shows how all animals can extend maternal nurture across species boundaries. The humanity within us is capable of supreme evil (see Stern's "The Jew and the Rooster Are One," Rich's "The Lioness," and Kumin's "Woodchucks") and the animal within us is capable of supreme wisdom and goodness (see Stern's "The Dog," Rich's "Fox," and Kumin's "Nurture"). It must be acknowledged that these three poets, spared the direct experience of the depravity in Nazi Europe, have enough distance from cattle cars and tattooed brands to explore a Jewish animality that can be equalizing, redemptive, and focused on environmentalism.

In contrast, not all minority populations in the United States have as much distance from the harm of pejorative animal associations: the pejorative animalization of disabled populations, the trans community, indigenous tribal nations, immigrant populations, Latinx communities, and Asian American communities are all dissertation-worthy topics. To conclude my work in this project, however, I would like to briefly focus on the Black American experience as it relates to animalization because of its cultural timeliness and because it is an example of one American minority group whose most enduring and damaging cultural trauma took part, first, on American soil. Indeed, the threat of murder is more immediate for Black Americans, and the animalization that enabled American slavery, the slave trade itself, and centuries of lynching and disenfranchisement still resonates through the systemic racism pervading our institutions, policing practices, and just about every domain of American modern life, from health care to education to real estate. While these Jewish poets' representations of nonhuman animals are importantly and specifically influenced by their Jewishness at least as much as they are influenced by their Americanness, Black American poets have likewise represented nonhuman animals in ways that are importantly and specifically tied to their Blackness, and an examination of that legacy since, say, Juneteenth yields a wealth of material to discuss. For example, Countee Cullen's autobiography of his cat, *My Lives and How I Lost Them*, may playfully allude to Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno* (Cullen's cat is named Christopher in the book) just as it, in its very title, suggests its author's identification with catlike resiliency through multiple life-threatening and heartbreaking dangers that Black Americans have been forced to navigate on this land since 1619. Cullen also authored *The Lost Zoo*, a collection of poems concerning the

animals who did not make it onto Noah's Ark, a premise possibly haunted by slave ships and the many lives lost to the "flood" of white racism and violence. Camille Dungy's edited volume, *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*, makes a case for a conception of ecopoetry that understands Black contributions to the field as foundational to American ideas about "nature." The volume includes a chapter called "Talk of the Animals" that compiles animal poems by Jean Toomer and Paul Laurence Dunbar all the way through Harryette Mullen, Toi Derricotte, and Afaa Michael Weaver to examine, as Dungy writes, "the ways in which the animal world in particular operates separately from or in relationship to African Americans or humanity in general" in order to "expand the boundaries of our communities to remind us that we exist in relationship to communities and environments much larger than ourselves" (Dungy xxxii-xxxiii).

Dungy's approach takes for granted that Black poets are writing from both a culturally specific as well as a more universal ("humanity in general") perspective. Aracelis Girmay's poetry collection *Kingdom Animalia* imagines everything in our world as being animal, including inanimate objects like jukeboxes and dirt. Ross Gay's beautiful essay, "Some Thoughts on Mercy," uses a central metaphor of a bee hive to reflect upon the power of not only the failures of imagination that make Black men so much more likely to be hassled or made to feel afraid in transit between work and home, but also the power of imagination to afford generosity, kindness, or mercy where a lazier mind might more readily leap to fear or violence. This is to say an obvious and critically important truth: we have a lot to learn from multiple ethnic American literary traditions about how our relationships with animals, and with our own animality, can offer solace, wisdom, and freedom. Using a culturally specific lens to read animal poems affords us increased

precision and enriches the insights we can articulate, but every Jewish, or Black, animal poem is always, by its very nature, also a human poem.

In other words, Jews don't have the only response or valid answer to animalization rooted in hatred. Because of our specific and millennia-long history with animalization, we likewise have unique insights to bring to the table. We have had an especially long time to consider whether the accusation of animality might be worked out in our favor. What if Jews are really no better than animals? Might that be a key to our survival? To our ability to laugh through great suffering? To practice a religion of the body, in which we have blessings even for bowel movements? We might say a Jewish interpretation of "God" (breath, metaphor, Shekhinah) is wisdom personified or animated. That wisdom, as expressed through Judaism and refined through post-Holocaust Jewish American poets, is grounded in the knowledge that we must care for one another with empathy (Stern) and with our nurture instinct (Kumin). In other words, we must love one another like animals—as, to quote Rich, "Without tenderness, we are in hell." The "we" in this paragraph is specifically Jewish and simultaneously inclusive of "humanity in general." What if *all* people are really no better than animals? What if we all owe our scrappy survival as a species, our resiliency in the face of repeated traumas caused by our fellow humans, to the innate animal knowledge that helps keeps us safe, attuned to the world around us, and breathing—as long as we can manage it? Fellow human animals can appreciate what is distinctive about Jewish experience while also finding themselves reflected in Jewish responses to living within others' pejorative ideas of Jewish animality: As this dissertation has demonstrated, one way to behave like a Jewish animal is to take responsibility for what inside of us could cause harm and figure

out how to atone for it and how to (try to) overcome it. Behaving like a Jewish animal is also to behave like a woodchuck: creatively, resiliently. It is to close one's eyes and see a fox, long for fox fur rushing through one's hands. It is to stoop down by a dead dog and recognize the self, weeping, pencil in hand. These acts are not solely Jewish acts, but their full meanings in Jewish poems are most legible when they are read Jewishly.

As with any literary study, there is still, and always, more to be said. A broader reading of Jewish animal representation, either via genre (enabling a more robust discussion of Art Spiegelman, for example) or by time and nation (enabling exploration of not only Talmudic but also medieval and post-medieval Jewish representations of animals and animal suffering outside the Germanophone world) would enrich the field of Jewish literary studies, and I hope to contribute to those efforts. Reconsidering Jewish novels, plays, films, or works of nonfiction through a culturally specific lens, such as *teshuvah*, would further test how such lenses reveal new cultural meanings or layers in Jewish American texts. Beyond expanding this study to include a few more Jewish American poets, I also hope to study in future projects other ethnic or minority American literary representations of nonhuman animals in the context of their own experiences of pejorative animal association. A comparative approach to ethnic American literary studies often enables new paths toward empathy and solidarity; I expect that a comparative exploration of these animal and animalization traditions would yield similar results and could perhaps offer seed and soil for future syllabi on the ethnic American animal.

My most immediate hope for this particular project is that it will inform future scholarship on Gerald Stern, Adrienne Rich, and Maxine Kumin, enriching our

understandings of their work. And I further hope that this labor of love will help secure their legacies as significant ecological poets whose concern with the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' environmental emergencies will be read and understood through their representations of animals and through their distinctive expressions of Jewishness.

REFERENCES CITED

- Abrams, M. H. "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Nature Lyric." *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, edited by Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom, Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 527–560.
- Adams, Carol J. and Lori Gruen. *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.
- Adams, Jill Petersen. "Acts of Irreconcilable Mourning: Post-Holocaust Witness and Testimony." *Culture, Theory and Critique*, vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 228–244. DOI: 10.1080/14735784.2014.913987.
- Adorno, Theodor W. "On Lyric Poetry and Society." Edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Shierry Weber NicholSEN. Vol. 1. Columbia University Press, 1991, pp. 37–54.
- "Adrienne Rich." *Contemporary Authors Online*. Gale Group, 2013. Accessed 13 September 2013.
- Alpert, Rebecca T. "Jewish Feminist Justice Work: Focus on Israel/Palestine." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2013, pp. 164–169. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jfemistudreli.29.2.164. Accessed 17 July 2020.
- Alpert, Rebecca T. and Laura Levitt, eds. "Jewish Feminists and Our Fathers: Reflections across Gender and Generations." Special edition of *Bridges: A Feminist Jewish Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, April 2009.
- Altieri, Charles. "Self-Reflection as Action: The Recent Work of Adrienne Rich." *Self*

and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry, Cambridge University Press, 1984. Reprinted in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 342–357.

Auden, W. H. Foreword to *A Change of World* by Adrienne Rich. Yale University Press, 1951. Reprinted in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 277–279.

———. “In Memory of W. B. Yeats.” *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, <https://poets.org/poem/memory-w-b-yeats>. Accessed 18 October 2020.

———. “September 1, 1939.” *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, poets.org/poem/september-1-1939. Accessed 18 October 2020.

Baigell, Matthew. *American Artists, Jewish Images*. Syracuse University Press, 2006.

Bancroft, Collette. “Poet Adrienne Rich, Who Died at 82, Inspired Generations of Students.” *Tampa Bay Times*, 7 April 2012, www.tampabay.com/features/poet-adrienne-rich-who-died-at-82-inspired-generations-of-students/1223235/. Accessed 22 July 2020.

Bate, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth*. Harvard University Press, 2000.

Becker, Robin. “Activist and Gardener: On Maxine Kumin’s Torture Poems.” *5 AM*, republished in *Poetry Daily Prose Feature*, Poetry Daily, 2006, http://poems.com/special_features/prose/essay_becker.php.

Bellow, Saul. *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*. Viking: 1969.

Bercovitz, Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1978.

- Berkowitz, Beth A. *Animals and Animality in the Babylonian Talmud*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Bernstein, Charles. *A Poetics*. Harvard University Press. 1992.
- . “Radical Jewish Culture / Secular Jewish Practice.” *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*. Ed. Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris. University of Alabama Press, 2009, pp. 12–17.
- Blake, William. “The Tyger.” *Poetry Foundation: Poems*. Poetry Foundation. www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43687/the-tyger. Accessed 8 May 2020.
- Bridges: A Jewish Feminist Journal*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2011. *Project Muse*. Accessed 22 July 2020.
- Broumas, Olga. “Review of *The Dream of a Common Language*.” *Chrysalis*, vol. 6, 1978. Reprinted in *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 322–329.
- Brownworth, Victoria. “In the Garden of Life: A Tribute to Maxine Kumin.” *Lambda Literary*, Lambdaliterary.org, 10 Feb. 2014, <https://www.lambdaliterary.org/2014/02/in-the-garden-of-life-a-tribute-to-maxine-kumin/>. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- Bryson, J. Scott, ed. *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*. University of Utah Press, 2002.
- Bulkin, Elly. “Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends.” *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. Jewish Women’s Archive. Jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/bridges-journal-for-jewish-feminists-and-our-friends. Accessed 12 July 2020.

“Byron and His Dogs: In Pictures.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 3 Dec. 2013, www.theguardian.com/books/gallery/2013/dec/03/byron-dogs-pictures.

Accessed 18 October 2020.

Byron, George Gordon, Lord. *Cain*. Edited by Peter Cochran. PDF file.

<https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/cain1.pdf>

———. “Darkness.” *Poetry Foundation*. Poetry Foundation, 05 Dec. 2014,

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43825/darkness-56d222aeeee1b>.

Accessed 18 October 2020.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Houghton Mifflin, 1972.

Celan, Paul. “Deathfugue.” *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*. Translated by John Felstiner. Norton, 2001, pp. 31–33.

Chrysalis, vol 1, no. 1, 1977.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” *Selected Poems*:

Coleridge, edited by R. C. Bald. AHM Publishing Corporation, 1956, 12–31.

Creswell, Robyn. “Poetry in Extremis.” *The New Yorker*, 12 Feb. 2014,

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/poetry-in-extremis>. Accessed 18 October 2020.

Cullen, Countee. *My Lives and How I Lost Them*. Follett Publishing, 1971.

———. *The Lost Zoo*. Silver Burdett Press, 1992.

“Dairy Cows.” *Animal Rights International*. Animal Rights International, n.d. Web. 13 Dec. 2014.

Dean, Michelle. “Adrienne Rich’s Feminist Awakening.” *The New Republic*, 3 April

2016. newrepublic.com/article/132117/adrienne-richs-feminist-awakening.

Accessed 19 July 2020.

Des Pres, Terrence. "Adrienne Rich, North America East." *Praises and Dispraises:*

Poetry and Politics, The 20th Century, Viking, 1988. Reprinted in *Adrienne Rich's*

Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition, edited by Barbara Charlesworth

Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 357–369.

Dickinson, Emily. "254." *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H.

Johnson. Little, Brown, 1961, 116.

"Dog." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dog.

Accessed 15 October 2018.

Donovan, Josephine and Carol Adams, eds. Adams's *The Feminist Care Tradition in*

Animal Ethics. Columbia University Press, 2007.

"Dr. Alfred H. Conrad, City College Professor, Dies." *The New York Times*, 20 October

1970, www.nytimes.com/1970/10/20/archives/dralfred-h-conrad-city-college-professor-dies.html.

Accessed 19 July 2020.

Dungy, Camille T. *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*.

University of Georgia Press, 2009.

Ewert, Jeanne C. "Reading Visual Narrative: Art Spiegelman's *Maus*." *Narrative*, vol. 8,

no. 1, Jan. 2000, pp. 87–103. *JSTOR*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20107202>.

Accessed 2 October 2020.

Felstiner, John. *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1995.

Fisher-Wirth, Ann and Laura-Gray Street, eds. *The Ecopoetry Anthology*. Trinity

University Press, 2013.

Forché, Carolyn. *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness*. Norton, 1993.

- Fox, Margalit. "Adrienne Rich, Influential Feminist Poet, Dies at 82." *The New York Times*, 28 March 2012. www.nytimes.com/2012/03/29/books/adrienne-rich-feminist-poet-and-author-dies-at-82.html?_r=0. Accessed 19 July 2020.
- . "Maxine Kumin, Pulitzer-Winning Poet with A Naturalist's Precision, Dies At 88." *New York Times*. 7 Feb. 2014.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/08/books/maxine-kumin-pulitzer-winning-poet-dies-at-88.html>. Accessed 10 Dec. 2014.
- Freedman, Jonathan. *The Temple of Culture: Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in Literary Anglo-America*. Revised edition. Oxford University Press: 2002.
- Friedersdorf, Conor. "Chris Christie's Pig Problem." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 12 Nov. 2014.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/11/chris-christies-pig-problem/382654/>. Accessed 13 Dec. 2014.
- Frost, Robert. "The Oven Bird." *Poetry Foundation*.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44269/the-oven-bird>. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- Gay, Ross. "Some Thoughts on Mercy." *The Sun Magazine*. July 2013.
<https://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/451/some-thoughts-on-mercy>. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- Geller, Jay. *Bestiarium Judaicum: Unnatural Histories of the Jews*. Fordham University Press, 2018.
- Gilbert, Roger. "Framing Water: Historical Knowledge in Elizabeth Bishop and Adrienne Rich." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 43, no. 2, 1997, pp. 144+. Gale

Academic OneFile, link-gale-

com.libproxy.temple.edu/apps/doc/A20563359/AONE?u=temple_main&sid=AO

NE&xid=bb02f6b1. Accessed 27 Apr. 2020.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "Of First, Last, and Midst." Review of *Black Series: Poems* by Laurie Sheck; *Waterborne: Poems* by Linda Gregerson; *Antebellum Dream Book* by Elizabeth Alexander; *The Other Life: Poems* by Andrea Hollander Budy; *The Long Marriage: Poems* by Maxine Kumin; and *In the Next Galaxy* by Ruth Stone. *Poetry* Sept. 2003: 356–375. *JSTOR*.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/i20606269>. Accessed 10 Dec. 2014.

Ginsberg, Allen. "Howl." *Howl and Other Poems*. 1957. City Lights Books, 1959, pp. 9–26.

———. "Kaddish." *Kaddish and Other Poems 1958–1960*. City Light Books, 1961, pp. 7–36.

———. "Sunflower Sutra." *Howl and Other Poems*. 1957. City Lights Books, 1959, pp. 35–38.

Girgus, Sam. *The New Covenant: Jewish Writers and the American Idea*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Girmay, Aracelis. *Kingdom Animalia*. BOA Editions, 2011.

Gold, Michael. *Jews without Money*. 1930. Introduction by Alfred Kazin. Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1996.

Gorman, Steve. "Pioneering feminist poet Adrienne Rich dead at 82." *Reuters*, 29 March, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-rich-obit/pioneering-feminist-poet-adrienne-rich-dead-at-82-idUSBRE82S04720120329>. Accessed 22 July 2020.

- Greenberg, Yadidya. "Disturbed by Inhumane Kosher Slaughter? Here Are Four Things You Can Do." *The Jewish Forward: News That Matters to American Jews*, forward.com. 4 November 2016. <https://forward.com/subscribe/353459/disturbed-by-inhumane-kosher-slaughter-here-are-four-things-you-can-do/>. Accessed 29 September 2020.
- Gross, Aaron. *The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implications*. Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Hammer, Reuven. "Kapparot, Swinging a Chicken over One's Head: A Yom Kippur Folk Custom." *My Jewish Learning*. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/kaparot/>. Accessed 18 September 2020.
- Hardy, Thomas. "The Darkling Thrush." *Poetry Foundation*. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44325/the-darkling-thrush>. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- Harlan, Megan. Review of *The Long Marriage: Poems* by Maxine Kumin. *New York Times Book Review*. 9 Dec. 2001. <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/09/books/books-in-brief-fiction-poetry-430072.html>. Accessed 2 May 2014.
- Hass, Robert, et al. "'How Poetry Helps People to Live Their Lives': APR's 25th Anniversary Celebration." *American Poetry Review*, vol. 28, no. 5, Sept. 1999, pp. 21–27. EBSCOhost, [ssearch.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=1999057801&site=ehost-live&scope=site&authtype=uid&user=ebony&password=lewis](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=1999057801&site=ehost-live&scope=site&authtype=uid&user=ebony&password=lewis). Accessed 1

October 2020.

Hedley, Jane. "Surviving to Speak New Language: Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich."

Hypatia, vol. 7, no. 2, April 1992, pp.40–62.

Himeles, Darla. "Kingdom Animalia." *Insane Devotion: On the Writing of Gerald Stern*.

Trinity University Press, 2015, pp. 118–132.

———. "Kumin, Maxine (6 June 1925–6 Feb. 2014), Poet, Essayist, and Fiction Writer for Children and Adults." *American National Biography*. May 24, 2018. Oxford University Press.

<https://www.anb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-00629>. Accessed 26 May 2020.

Hirsch, Edward. "A Tribute to Gerald Stern." *Antioch Review*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2009, pp.

88–89. EBSCOhost,

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2010382962&site=ehost-live&scope=site&authtype=uid&user=ebony&password=lewis. 1 Oct. 2020.

"Humanely Raised? Challenging Perdue's Claims: The Humane Society of the United

States." RSS. The Humane Society of the United States, 29 Nov. 2010. Accessed 13 Dec. 2014.

Huston, Karla. "Kumin, Maxine. *And Short the Season*." *Library Journal* 15 Mar. 2014:

123. *Academic OneFile*. Accessed 27 Apr. 2014.

Iijima, Brenda, ed. *eco language reader*. Nightboat Books, 2010.

Jewett, Sarah Orne. "A White Heron." *A White Heron and Other Stories*. Houghton,

Mifflin, and Company, 1886.

JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. The Jewish Publication Society, 2003.

- Kafka, Franz. *Investigations of a Dog*. 1931. Translated by Michael Hofmann. Penguin Random House, 2018.
- Keats, John. "Ode on a Grecian Urn." *Poetry Foundation*.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44477/ode-on-a-grecian-urn>. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- . "Ode to a Nightingale." *Poetry Foundation*.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44479/ode-to-a-nightingale>. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- Kaplan, Debra. *Beyond Expulsion: Jews, Christians, and Reformation Strasbourg*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011. *Google Book Search*. Accessed 12 Dec. 2014.
- Kolbert, Elizabeth. "The Lost World: The Mastodons Molars." *New Yorker* 13 Dec. 2013: n. pag. *The New Yorker*. Condé Nast. Accessed 5 Dec. 2014.
- . *The Sixth Extinction*. Henry Holt and Company, 2014.
- Kolmar, Gertrud. *Dark Soliloquy: The Selected Poems of Gertrud Kolmar*, translated by Henry A. Smith. The Seabury Press, 1975.
- Kumin, Maxine. "A Mortal Day of No Surprises." *The Retrieval System*. Penguin, 1975, 68–69.
- . "Bringing Back the Trumpeter Swan." *Nurture*. Penguin, 1989, pp. 15–16.
- . "Catchment." *Nurture*. Penguin, 1989, pp. 23–24.
- . "Changing the Children." *The Retrieval System*. Penguin, 1975, pp. 30–31.
- . "Custodian." *Nurture*. Penguin, 1989, p. 13.
- . *Halfway*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961.

- . “Heaven as Anus.” *House, Bridge, Fountain, Gate*. Viking, 1971, pp. 66–67.
- . Interview with Martha George Meek. *Massachusetts Review* Spring 1975: 317–327. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.
- . Interview with Enid Shomer. *Massachusetts Review* Winter 1996: 531–55. *JSTOR*. Accessed 11 Nov. 2014.
- . Interview with Chard deNiord. *American Poetry Review* January/February 2010: 39–45. *JSTOR*. Accessed 10 Dec. 2014.
- . “Jicama, without Expectation.” *Women, Animals, & Vegetables: Essays & Stories*. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994, pp. 89–113.
- . “Metamorphosis: From Light Verse to Poetry of Witness.” *The Georgia Review*, vol. 66, no. 4, Winter 2012, pp. 724–734.
- . “Noted in *The New York Times*.” *Nurture*, Penguin, 1989, p. 19.
- . “Nurture.” *Nurture*. Penguin, 1989, p. 3.
- . “On Reading an Old Baedeker in Schloss Leopoldskron.” *Nurture*, 1989, pp. 27–28.
- . “Repent.” *Nurture*. Penguin, 1989, p. 10.
- . “Riding in the Rain.” *The Nightmare Factory*. Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 15–16.
- . “Sleeping with Animals.” *Nurture*. Penguin, 1989, pp. 20–21.
- . *Still to Mow*. Norton, 2007.
- . *To Make a Prairie: Essays on Poets, Poetry, and Country Living*. The University of Michigan Press, 1979.
- . “The Envelope.” *The Retrieval System*. Penguin, 1975, p. 40.
- . “The Highwaymen.” *Jack and Other Poems*. Norton, 2005, p. 13.

- . “The Path, The Chair.” *And Short the Season*. Norton, 2014, pp. 20–23.
- . *The Pawnbroker’s Daughter: A Memoir*. Norton, 2015.
- . “The Retrieval System.” *The Retrieval System*. Penguin, 1975, pp. 1–2.
- . “The Taste of Apple.” *Where I Live: New & Selected Poems 1990-2010*. Norton, 2010, pp. 20–21.
- . “The Unfinished Story of Boomer.” *Where I Live: New & Selected Poems 1990-2010*. Norton, 2010, pp. 17–19.
- . “The Vealers.” *The Nightmare Factory*. Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 7–8.
- . “Women and Horses.” *Jack and Other Poems*. Norton, 2005, p. 55.
- . “Woodchucks.” *Selected Poems: 1960–1990*. Norton, 1997, pp. 80–81.
- Lacovara, Kenneth. *Why Dinosaurs Matter*. Simon & Schuster, 2017.
- Langdell, Cheryl Colby. *Adrienne Rich: The Moment of Change*. Praeger, 2004.
- Lazarus, Emma. “The New Colossus.” Poetry Foundation, 23 Nov. 2018, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46550/the-new-colossus>.
- Lesser, Wendy. “Poetic Sense and Sensibility.” *The Washington Post (1974-Current file)*: 1. Feb 02 1986. *ProQuest*. Web. 6 May 2014.
- Levi, Primo. “Useless Violence.” *The Drowned and the Saved*, translated by Raymond Rosenthal. Vintage International, 1989, pp. 105–126.
- Levinas, Emanuel. “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights.” *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Séan Hand. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, pp. 151–153.
- Levitt, Laura. *American Jewish Loss after the Holocaust*. New York University Press, 2007.

- Levy, Michelle and Mark Perry. "Distantly Reading the Romantic Canon: Quantifying Gender in Current Anthologies." *Women's Writing*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2015, pp. 132–155. *Taylor & Francis Online*. DOI: 10.1080/09699082.2015.1011836. Accessed 15 August 2020.
- Lober, Brooke. "Adrienne Rich's 'Politics of Location,' US Jewish Feminism, and Question of Palestine." *Women's Studies*, vol. 46, no. 7, 27 December 2017, pp. 663–683. *Taylor & Francis Online*. doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2017.1337430. Accessed 14 July 2020.
- Maccoby, Hyam. *Antisemitism and Modernity: Innovation and Continuity*. Routledge, 2006, pp. 64–66.
- Maimonides, Moses. *Mishneh Torah: Repentance*. Translated by Simon Glazer. 1927. Sefaria, 24 November 2018, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Repentance.1?lang=en.
- Marx, Karl. "On The Jewish Question." *On The Jewish Question by Karl Marx, First Published February, 1844 in Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Marxists Internet Archive, 2009, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/.
- McCorkle, James. *The Still Performance: Writing, Self, and the Interconnection in Five Postmodern American Poets*. The University Press of Virginia, 1989.
- McDaniel, Judith. "'Reconstituting the World': The Poetry and Vision of Adrienne Rich." *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951–1981*. The University of Michigan Press, 1984, pp. 3–29.
- McNair, Wesley. "Kumin's Animal Confederates." *Telling the Barn Swallow: Poets on the Poetry of Maxine Kumin*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England,

1997. Print. 122–134.

Melehy, Hassan. “Silencing the Animals: Montaigne, Descartes, and the Hyperbole of Reason.” *Symplokē*, vol. 13, no. 1/2, 2005, pp. 263–282. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40550630. Accessed 18 Oct. 2020.

Miller, Stephen Paul and Daniel Morris, eds. *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*. University of Alabama Press: 2010.

Mishnah Yoma. The Open Mishnah Project. Sefaria, 16 October 2020, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Yoma.8.9?lang=bi&with=Modern%20Commentary&lang2=en.

Moe, Aaron. *Zoopoetics*. Lexington Books, 2014.

Monroe, Jonathan. “Third Worlds: The Poetry of Gerald Stern.” *Northwest Review*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1979, pp. 41–47.

Moore, Marianne. “Poetry.” *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, 24 July 2015, www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/poetry.

Moore, Thomas. *The Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1866. *Google Book Search*. Web. 12 Dec. 2014.

Morris, Daniel. *After Weegee: Essays on Contemporary Jewish American Photographers*. Syracuse University Press: 2011.

Nardi, Marcia. “Two New Volumes of Poetry.” *Boston Globe (1960–1982)*: 37. 5 Aug. 1970. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

Nepon, Ezra Berkley. “Jewish Feminist Taskforce.” *New Jewish Agenda: A People’s History*, newjewishagenda.net/about/national-taskforces/jewish-feminist-taskforce/. Accessed 21 July 2020.

Neumann, Erich. *The Origins and History of Consciousness*. 1949. Translated by R.F.C. Hull. Princeton University Press, 2014.

Neusner, Jacob. "Saying You're Sorry: Mishnah Yoma 8:9." *Learn Talmud*. Behrman House, 1979, pp. 124–128.

Newell, Jim. "Chris Christie's Pig Play: Why His Iowa Hopes Are Officially a Fantasy." *Salon.com RSS*. Salon Media Group, 2 Dec. 2014. Web. 13 Dec. 2014.

Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" *Woman, Culture, and Society*, edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, Stanford University Press, 1974, pp. 67–88.

Osborne, Monica. "'And What If I Say the Purposes Have Not Yet Been All Revealed?' Searching for Psyche and Reimagining God in the Poetry of Alicia Ostriker and Marge Piercy." *Studies in Jewish Literature*, vol. 25: Contemporary Jewish American Writers Respond to Judaism, 2006, pp. 77–84. *JSTOR*. www.jstor.com/stable/41206050. Accessed 27 July 2020.

Ostriker, Alicia Suskin. "Her Cargo: Adrienne Rich and the Common Language." *The American Poetry Review* 8.4 (July/August 1979): pp. 6–10. *JSTOR*. Accessed 13 September 2013.

———. "Making the Connection: The Nature Poetry of Maxine Kumin." *Telling the Barn Swallow: Poets on the Poetry of Maxine Kumin*. University Press of New England, 1997, p.p. 74-91.

———. "Secular and Sacred: Returning (to) the Repressed." *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*. Ed. Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris. University of Alabama Press, 2009, 184–198.

- . *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*. Beacon Press, 1986.
- . *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions*. Rutgers University Press, 1984.
- . "Who's Minding the Story? Gerald Stern as Jewish Poet and Tragic Comedian." *American Poetry Review*, vol. 43, no. 3, May 2014, pp. 19–20. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2014382402&site=ehost-live&scope=site&authtype=uid&user=ebony&password=lewis.
- Ozick, Cynthia. "The Pagan Rabbi." *The Hudson Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1966, pp. 425–454. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3849259>. Accessed 2 October 2020.
- Peskowitz, Miriam. "Meeting Joesphus Head On and Humanly, a Historian's Transgression." *AJS Perspectives: The Magazine of the Association for Jewish Studies*. Transgression issue, spring 2017, <http://perspectives.ajsnet.org/transgression-issue/meeting-josephus-head-on-and-humanly-a-historians-transgression/>. Accessed 16 October 2020.
- . *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History*. University of California Press, 1997.
- Pinsker, Sanford. *Conversations with Contemporary American Writers*. Rodopi NV, 1985.
- . "Weeping and Wailing: The Jewish Songs of Gerald Stern." *Studies in American Jewish Literature (1981–)*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1990, pp. 186–196. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41206361. Accessed 14 October 2020.
- Pirkei Avot. The Open Mishnah Project. Sefaria, 24 November 2018,

https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.2.16?lang=en&with=Notes&lang2=en.

Popova, Maria. "Why Adrienne Rich Became the Only Person to Decline the National Medal of Arts." *Brain Pickings*. <http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/05/16/adrienne-rich-national-medal-of-arts-letter/>. Accessed 12 July 2020.

"Protein." *The Nutrition Source*. Harvard School of Public Health, 2014. Web. 11 Dec. 2014.

"Protein in Diet: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia." *U.S. National Library of Medicine*. U.S. National Library of Medicine, 30 Apr. 2013. Web. 11 Dec. 2014.

Rackin, Ethel and Elaine Terranova. "Galaxy Watch: *Galaxy Love* and *Death Watch* by Gerald Stern." *American Poetry Review*, vol. 47, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 41–42.

EBSCOhost,

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2018380501&site=ehost-live&scope=site&authtype=uid&user=ebony&password=lewis.

Rankine, Claudia. Introduction. *Collected Poems: 1950–2012* by Adrienne Rich, W. W. Norton, 2016, pp. xxxvii–xlvii.

Raphael, Simcha Paull. *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, 2nd edition. Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2009.

Reilly, Evelyn. *Styrofoam*. Roof Books, 2009.

Rhoads, David. "Reading the New Testament in an Environmental Age." *Currents in Theology and Mission*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1997, pp. 259–266.

Rich, Adrienne. "5:30 A.M." *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 33–34.

- . “Abnegation.” *Collected Poems: 1950–2012*. W. W. Norton, 2016, pp. 254–255.
- . *A Change of World*. Yale University Press, 1951.
- . “Adrienne Rich: An Interview with David Montenegro (1991).” *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 258–272.
- . “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers.” *Collected Poems: 1950–2012*. W. W. Norton, 2016, p. 4.
- . *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985*. W. W. Norton, 1986.
- . “Eastern War Time.” *Collected Poems: 1950–2012*. W. W. Norton, 2016, pp. 736–742.
- . Foreword. *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution*, 2nd edition. University of Illinois Press, 1991, pp. xi–xx.
- . “Fox.” *Fox*. W. W. Norton, 2001, p. 25.
- . “Living the Revolutions.” *Women’s Review of Books*, vol. 3, no. 12, September 1986, pp. 1–5.
- . “Notes toward a Politics of Location.” *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985*. W. W. Norton, 1986, pp. 210–231.
- . *Poetry and Commitment*. W. W. Norton, 2011.
- . “Readings of History.” *Collected Poems: 1950–2012*. W. W. Norton, 2016, pp. 130–134.
- . “Sources.” *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 101–114.

- . “Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity.” *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985*. W. W. Norton, 1986, pp. 100–123.
- . “Splittings.” *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974–1977*. W. W. Norton, 1978, pp. 10–11.
- . “The Lioness.” *The Dream of a Common Language*. W. W. Norton, 1978, p. 21–22.
- . “Transcendental Etude.” *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974–1977*. W. W. Norton, 1978, pp. 72–77.
- . “The Genesis of ‘Yom Kippur 1984.’” *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 252–258.
- . “Twenty-One Love Poems.” *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974–1977*. W. W. Norton, 1978, pp. 25–36.
- . “Waking in the Dark.” *Diving into the Wreck*. Reprinted in *Collected Poems: 1950–2012*. W. W. Norton, 2016, pp. 358–362.
- . “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision (1971).” *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978*. W. W. Norton, 1979, pp. 33–49.
- . “Woman and bird.” *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*. W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 3–8.
- . “Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying.” *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978*. W. W. Norton, 1979, pp. 185–194.
- Riley, Jeannette E. *Understanding Adrienne Rich*. The University of South Carolina Press, 2016.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria. "The Panther." *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Bilingual Edition. Translated by Stephen Mitchell. Vintage, 1989. E-book. N.p.
- Rosenberg, Martha. "Most of What You Think You Know About Milk Is Probably Dairy Industry Lies." *Alternet*. Independent Media Institute, 19 Mar. 2014. Web. 13 Dec. 2014.
- Rudy, Kathy. *Loving Animals: Toward a New Animal Advocacy*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Rueckert, William. "Into and out of the Void: Two Essays." *The Iowa Review*, vol 9, no. 1, Winter, 1978, pp. 62–86. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20158874. Accessed 5 June 2020.
- Rukeyser, Muriel. "Akiba." *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser*. Edited by Janet E. Kaufman and Anne F. Herzog with Jan Heller Levi. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005, pp. 454–460.
- . "All the Little Animals." *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser*. Edited by Janet E. Kaufman and Anne F. Herzog with Jan Heller Levi. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005, p. 489.
- . *The Book of the Dead*. 1938. West Virginia University Press, 2018.
- . *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser*. Edited by Janet E. Kaufman and Anne F. Herzog with Jan Heller Levi. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005.
- . *The Life of Poetry*. 1949. Paris Press, 1996.
- . "The Speed of Darkness." *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser*. Edited by Janet E. Kaufman and Anne F. Herzog with Jan Heller Levi. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005, 465–468.

- Sadoff, Ira. "Gerald Stern's Encounters with the Sublime." *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2014, pp. 146–163. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/24242233.
- Schudel, Matt, and *The Washington Post*. "Adrienne Rich, Poet, Essayist, Feminist, Provocateur." *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 March 2012, www.baltimoresun.com/obituaries/bs-md-ob-adrienne-rich-20120328-story.html. Accessed 22 July 2020.
- Schudel, Matt. "Maxine Kumin, Pulitzer Prize-winning Poet, Dies at 88." *Washington Post*. 10 Feb. 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.
- "Settlement Reached in Lawsuit Concerning Perdue Chicken Labeling." RSS. The Humane Society of the United States, 13 Oct. 2014. Web. 13 Dec. 2014.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Vindication of Natural Diet*. London: 1813. *The Animal Rights Library*. Pablo Stafforini. Web. 13 Nov. 2014.
- . "To a Skylark." *Poetry Foundation*. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45146/to-a-skylark>. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- Shoptaw, John. "Why Eco-poetry? There's No Planet B." *Poetry*, Poetry Foundation, 4 Jan. 2016, www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/70299/why-ecopoetry.
- Silverman, Lisa. "Art of Loss: Madame d'Ora, Photography, and the Restitution of Haus Doranna." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* (2015): pp. 1–18. *Oxford University Press*. Accessed on 15 May 2015. DOI: 10.1093/leobaeck/ybv003.
- Simpson, Louis. "Facts and Poetry." *Gettysburg Review* 1 (1)(1988): 156–165.

- Singer, Isaac Bashevis. "The Letter Writer." *The Séance*, translated by Alizah Shevrin and Elizabeth Shub. Bard/Avon, 1969, pp. 206–239.
- Skinner, Jonathan. "Poetry Animal." *Boundary 2*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2009, pp. 97–103.
- Smart, Christopher. *Jubilate Agno*. Excerpt, *Poetry Foundation*.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45173/jubilate-agno>. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- Smith, David Livingstone. *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2012.
- Smith, John M. "Raising Dairy Veal, AS-0007-00." *Ohio State University Fact Sheet: Animal Sciences*. Ohio State University, n.d. Web. 13 Dec. 2014.
- Smith, Lillian. "Autobiography as a Dialogue between King and Corpse." *The Winner Names the Age*, edited by Michelle Cliff, W. W. Norton, 1978, p. 189.
- Sober, Elliott. "[From] *Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism*." Ed. Lori Gruen and Dale Jamieson. *Reflecting on Nature: Readings in Environmental Philosophy*. Oxford UP, 1994, pp. 345–62.
- Somerville, Jane. "Gerald Stern among the Poets: The Speaker As Meaning." *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 17, no. 6, 1988, pp. 11–19. *JSTOR*, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27779578.
- Snyder, Gary. *Turtle Island*. New Directions, 1974.
- Spiegelman, Art. *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. Penguin, 2003.
- Spiegelman, Willard. "'Driving to the Limits of the City of Words': The Poetry of Adrienne Rich." *The Didactic Muse*, Princeton University Press, 1989. Reprinted in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by

- Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 369–396.
- Stein, Rachel. “‘To Make the Visible World Your Conscience’: Adrienne Rich as Revolutionary Nature Writer.” *Reading under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism*, edited by John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington, University of Utah Press, 2000, 198–207.
- . “‘The Place, Promised, That Has Not Yet Been’: The Nature of Dislocation and Desire in Adrienne Rich’s *Your Native Land/Your Life* and Minnie Bruce Pratt’s *Crime against Nature*.” *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, edited by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, Indiana University Press, 2010, pp. 285–308. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gzhnz.14. Accessed 24 August 2019.
- Stern, Gerald. “A Conversation with Gerald Stern.” Interview with Sue William Silverman. *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2004, pp. 109–15. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2007870213&site=ehost-live&scope=site&authtype=uid&user=ebony&password=lewis.
- . “A Poet of the Mind: An Interview with Gerald Stern.” Interview with Elizabeth Knight. *Poetry East* 26 (Fall 1988): 32–49.
- . “An Interview by Gary Pacernick.” Interview with Gary Pacernick. *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1998, pp. 41–47. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27782755.
- . “An Interview with Gerald Stern.” Interview with David Hamilton. *Iowa Review*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1989, pp. 32–65. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20152848>.

- . “Albatross 1.” *Everything Is Burning*. W. W. Norton, 2005, p. 25.
- . “Baby Rat.” *Blessed as We Were: Late Selected and New Poems: 2000–2018*. W. W. Norton, 2020, p. 233.
- . “Behaving Like a Jew.” *This Time*. W. W. Norton, 1998, p. 31.
- . “Bollingen Ezra Pound, 1949.” *Galaxy Love*. W. W. Norton, 2017, p. 45.
- . “Burying an Animal on the Way to New York.” *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 3, no. 5, 1974, p. 16. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27774766. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- . “The Dancing.” *This Time*. W. W. Norton, 1998, p. 113.
- . “The Dog.” *This Time*. W. W. Norton, 1998, pp. 169–170.
- . Foreword. *Ghosts of the Holocaust: An Anthology of Poetry by the Second Generation*, edited by Stewart J. Florsheim. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989, pp. 15–17.
- . “Gelato.” *Galaxy Love: Poems*. W. W. Norton, 2018, pp. 102–103.
- . “I Called the Wolf Josephus.” *The Naming of Beasts*. Cummington Press with Abattoir Editions, 1973, p. 40.
- . “I Remember Galileo.” *This Time*. W. W. Norton, 1998, p. 80.
- . “The Jew and the Rooster Are One.” *This Time*. W. W. Norton, 1998, pp. 256–257.
- . Interview with Elizabeth Farnsworth. *NewsHour*. PBS. November 23, 1998.
- . “May Frick Be Damned.” *Everything Is Burning*. W. W. Norton, 2005, p. 43.
- . “Merwin.” *Galaxy Love: Poems*. W. W. Norton, 2018, p. 46.

- . “Orson.” *Galaxy Love*. W. W. Norton, 2017, pp. 98–99.
- . “Route 29.” *Galaxy Love*. W. W. Norton, 2017, pp. 48–49.
- . “Soap.” *This Time*. W. W. Norton, 1998, pp. 141–143.
- . “Today It’s Easter.” *Galaxy Love*. W. W. Norton, 2017, p. 33.
- . Personal interview. 9 Sept. 2018.
- . *Rejoicings*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1973.
- . “What Is the Sabbath?” *American Poetry Review*. Vol. 13, no.1 (Jan.-Feb. 1984), pp. 17-19.
- “Strasbourg Goose.” *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.
- Torrey, E. Fuller. *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of St. Elizabeths*. Harcourt, 1984.
- Tracy, D. H. Review of *Jack and Other New Poems* by Maxine Kumin. *Poetry*, vol. 186, no. 3, Jun. 2005, pp. 262–63. *JSTOR*. Accessed on 27 Apr. 2014.
- Unterman, Jeremiah. *Justice for All: How the Jewish Bible Revolutionized Ethics*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2017.
- Vecchione, Patrice. “The Interview That Adrienne Rich Never Wanted Published: Patrice Vecchione on Talking with Rich about Spirituality.” *Literary Hub*, June 2, 2020. <https://lithub.com/the-interview-that-adrienne-rich-never-wanted-to-publish/>. Accessed 19 July 2020.
- Vendler, Helen. “Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds.” *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, Fall–Winter 1973. Reprinted in excerpted form in *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, W. W. Norton, 1993, pp. 299–310.

- Walters, Mark Jerome. *A Shadow and a Song: The Struggle to Save an Endangered Species*. Putnam, 1992.
- Warschawski, Max. "Histoire des Juifs de Strasbourg." *Histoire des Juifs de Strasbourg*.
<http://judaisme.sdv.fr/histoire/villes/strasbrg/hist/index.htm>. Accessed 28 Nov. 2014.
- Wheatley, Edward. "Murderous Sows in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and Late Fourteenth-Century France." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 44.2, 2009, pp. 224–226.
- Whitman, Walt. *The Complete Poems*. Ed. Francis Murphy. New York: Penguin, 2004.
- Wistrich, Robert S. "The Marxist Concern with Judaism." *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 1–6.
- Wordsworth, William. *The Prelude*. Excerpt. *Poetry Foundation*.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45542/the-prelude-book-1-childhood-and-school-time>. Accessed 18 October 2020.
- . "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798." *Poetry Foundation*.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45527/lines-composed-a-few-miles-above-tintern-abbey-on-revisiting-the-banks-of-the-wye-during-a-tour-july-13-1798>
- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. Perennial Classics, 1989.
- Yorke, Liz. *Adrienne Rich: Passion, Politics, and the Body*. Sage, 1991.