

AN EXAMINATION OF THE DEATH AND DYING OF COMPANION ANIMALS

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by
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ABSTRACT

“An Examination of the Death and Dying of Companion Animals” explores the human-animal relationship as enacted in the home by becoming interspecies families. In particular, these relationships are considered when companion animals are dying and in need of special care and attention. This work provides historical and cultural context for how humans attend to animals in death and dying through the history of pet keeping and a complex literature review to explore the intersections of death and dying and religion, and human-animal studies. Specifically, models for companion animal end-of-life care replicate those services for humans by providing palliative care and a myriad of other treatments to attend to the suffering of aging and terminal pets. In addition to examining the creation of companion animal hospice and how it has quickly grown since the early 2000s, this work also confronts questions of euthanasia as a burdensome decision-making process. The decision to euthanize a loved one is fraught with ambiguity, uncertainty, and, at times, guilt. These experiences are idiosyncratic and by creating a discourse and popular platform through which to share these instances of death and dying, this project contributes to the newly established death positivity movement in drawing attention to caring for dead bodies in the home. This project ends by exploring after-death-care for companion animals. Burial and cremation are still, for the most part, how human families dispose of companion animal bodies. In addition to these more traditional forms of disposition, companion humans are also starting to preserve their companion animal bodies through taxidermy and freeze-drying. Though still considered grotesque by many companion humans, companion animal body preservation is just one example of new and reimagined mourning rituals. It is through these rituals and the recognition of this particular grief that the human-animal relationship in the home is seen in a new, complicated, ambiguous and intimate light.

This dissertation is dedicate to
Macey and Maple, the (nonhuman) loves of my life,
and Jeremy and Danielle,
who have been with me, supported me, and loved me for the past 12 years.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Macey died four and half year ago. She was euthanized. I was with her when it happened, holding her head against my chest. I remember thinking, don't squeeze too tight, even though I never wanted to let go. My partner and I were sharing a sterile veterinary office room with staff who were providing Macey with a peaceful death. It was intimate and deeply troubling. After four and half years, I am still mourning the loss of this particular dog and still recognize her death as significant, devastating and informative. Her ashes are in my living room, next to the ashes of humans. Her pictures hang in the home we once shared. My home has always been multi-species and today, I share it with another companion animal. As I write, Maple interrupts, begging for walks and treats (to the point that I have kept a jar of organic dog biscuits within reach, to persuade away). Maple has been good think and write with; her expressive face seems to be talking back. I own and acknowledge the responsibility of care and attention.

I start with this vignette as a way to situate myself in the conversations that follows. When I began this research, Macey was dying and I was attempting to reconcile my deep desire to do anything for my companion canine with my seemingly deeper lack of financial stability as a second year graduate student. This particular death of this particular dog inspired this current work and helped inform the kinds of question I ask.

This dissertation project is about living with animals, the ones who might share our beds, car rides, meals, holidays, and birthdays; the ones that seem to love us unconditionally. This love, care, and attention are no more felt than when a companion animal is aging, sick, and dying. And for those of us who have experienced the death and dying of many companion animals, the feelings become familiar, though still deprived of support, often unaccepted in public space, and at times, ignored. But in unexpected ways, humans and their companion animals have learned to live and die together, to create daily rituals of feeding, walking, playing, and sleeping. When these rituals are severed by death, humans have found ways to create and reimagine more rituals to mourn and memorialize. This project argues that the death and dying of

companion animals is important and worthy of attention and critical consideration but have largely gone unnoticed by scholars in death and dying studies and to some extent, within the study of human-animal relationships.

In addition to this introduction, which covers the language and definitions I use throughout the project, this work includes four chapters on the history of pet keeping, end-of-life care and euthanasia, after-death-care, body disposition, mourning, and memorialization, and a literature review which contextualizes these inquiries. Before offering definitions and notes on the language I employ to understand the relationship between humans and companion animals, it is important to understand the goals of the project. First and foremost, this project takes up the call to take the relationship between human and companion animal more seriously, to understand how humans have cared for companion animals over time and how this care had changed. One of the most significant changes to this care has been at the end of a companion animal's life. In addition, this project works to document and understand end-of-life care for companion animals, provided primarily by humans in the home, with the assistance and advice of veterinary professionals. Further, this project intends to critically examine questions of euthanasia as an end of suffering and cause of death for millions of companion animals every year. The decision-making process, to come to the decision to euthanize a loved one, is a difficult one to make and this project works to understand how humans come to make this seemingly impossible choice. In addition to end-of-life care and euthanasia, this project also explores how companion animal bodies are mourned and memorialized through the creation and reimagination of rituals, preserved through taxidermy and freeze-drying, buried in cemeteries and backyards, or cremated with ashes returned to the human to keep or spread.

More broadly, this project contributes to the interdisciplinary field of death and dying studies which, to date, has presented no scholarly work examining the death and dying of companion animals. While there are a few articles about the ways in which companion animals are employed to comfort and aid humans at the end of their lives, particularly while humans are in hospice care, no attention has been paid to nonhuman death and dying. With this focus, the deaths of companion animals become visible, acknowledged, and significant. Subsequently, this project brings critical awareness to the relationship between human and companion animal, recognizing it as inherently valuable, outside of how much money humans spend on their nonhuman family members (though they will spend a lot). These lines of inquiry and research are methodologically examined through the use of print materials - such as scholarly and analytical work in HAS and death and dying studies, as well as archival newspaper articles featuring pet obituaries and magazine promotions for pet necessities. In addition, this work employs online searches which focus on personal and business social media accounts and specific posts, as well as pet-related and animal service businesses. While this work does not present in-person interviews with pet owners about their familial, interspecies relationships, it does use anecdotal evidence from personal social media accounts, as those curated on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and other online forums such as the comment sections of pet care service websites.

By examining the death and dying of companion animals, this project intends to show that the relationship between them and their human companions is ambiguous, complex, emotionally complicated, and informative. It is familial and intimate, but also strenuous and challenging. In addition to nonhuman considerations within death and dying studies, this project,

for the first time, registers in an academic setting a new perspective of death awareness in the death positivity movement. The movement has been mostly engaged through social media by which their members raise awareness about the pitfalls of the modern funeral industry, and promote environmentally friendly body disposition options such as mushroom suit burial and aquamation. In exploring the death positivity movement, that has worked to include companion animals death and dying and other forms of disenfranchised grief, this project recognizes mourning as an important part of societal rituals and, most importantly, the unique and emerging role of companion animals in society as a whole and within the family in particular.

Defining the Terms

The language of companion animal death and dying is seemingly quite simple. Traditionally, a pet is “put down” when sick or euthanized to relieve suffering. There is little agonizing over decision-making. In recent years, this is no longer the case. As the relationship between humans and companion animals became more complex (or, more accurately, as humans have just recently begun to recognize the complexity of their relationship with companion animals and nonhuman animals in general), so too did the language. Like human death and dying, the terms employed here to understand and frame questions of ethics, aging, sickness, terminal illness, euthanasia, and body care, are complex and ambiguous but work to rethink how companion animals are attended to and cared for at the end of life. As I define terms such pet, companion animal, family, religion, hospice, and euthanasia, I would argue that we do not currently have the the most adequate vocabulary for understanding this relationship. For example, many pet owners describe their companion animals as children or “furr-babies,” especially if there are no human children in the family. This language, however, often proves

unable to represent the relationship as the characteristics of that relationship can take a variety of forms. By defining and employing these terms throughout my research, this work argues the need for a new, more comprehensive vocabulary that is inclusive of interspecies and human-animal relationships, particularly in legal settings as briefly explored in the conclusion.

Pet

The term “pet” is a simultaneously simple yet complicated concept. According to anthropologist Keith Thomas, pets are defined by three designations: 1) they are assigned individual, personal names (often human names),¹ 2) they are allowed in the human home; and 3) they are not eaten. The last is perhaps the most important, particularly in the United States. For the last few years, for example, there has been public outrage from animal advocacy groups, celebrities and individuals in response to the Yulin Lychee and Dog Meat Festival, an annual ten-day festival in the Guangxi province of China where thousands of dogs and cats are slaughtered and eaten.² The outrage is based both on the eating of potential companion animals as well as the ways in which the dogs and cats are slaughtered. Activists, both in and outside of China, claim that animals are slaughtered in numerous inhumane ways, such as using clubs, boiling and skinning. Other concerns include the ways in which animals are transported to the festival, in

¹ According to rover.com, a popular animal care website specializing in pairing interspecies families with pet care services such as pet-sitting, dog-walking, and any of the other myriad of needs a pet might have, the most popular dog names of 2017 for both male and female dogs were human names. The top three for male dogs were Max, Charlie, and Cooper while for female dogs were Bella, Lucy, and Daisy. Though not as explicitly, cat names have taken a similar trajectory according to meowingtons.com, a catchall site for all things cat-related including cat-themed products and a community, online forum for those who share the founder’s unconditional love for cats. The top three male cat names were Oliver, Loki, and Milo. The top three names for female cats were Luna, Bella, and Lucy. The trend of giving traditionally human names to animals has been a steady shift since the 1960s; prior to WWII, pet names resembled physical descriptors, such as Fluffy, Whiskers, and Brownie. While these names still exist, they no longer mark the top of the list. Human names for companion animals is just one piece of the puzzle in understanding how animals become part of the family.

² Christine Overall, ed. *Pets and People: The Ethics of Our Relationships with Companion Animals*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), xviii.

cramped, stuffed cages with no access to food or water and some advocacy groups report witnessing animals with collars, arguing that some of the animals are stolen pets. This public outrage, often presented through social media, has not been similarly exhibited or sustained for the slaughter of pigs and cows in the United States (besides the continuous campaigns from animal rights advocacy groups), even though keeping traditional livestock as pets is becoming more popular³ and issues of transportation and humane slaughter are also concerns in the United States. For philosopher Christine Overall, “pets are, uniquely and virtually by definition, not *consumable* items *because we do not eat family members*, the beings who share our homes and lives.”⁴

“Pet” has multiple meanings, including “an indulged, spoiled, or favorite child, a person who is indulged, spoiled, or treated as a favorite, [especially] in a way that others regard with disapproval, and an animal (typically one which is domestic or tame) kept for pleasure or companionship.”⁵ By definition, “pet” is both a term of endearment and a form of condescension. It connotes possession, domination, power, and yet, the relationship is usually defined by loving, caring, and attending to animals in the home. Because of these hierarchal connotations, I prefer to use the term “companion animals.” However, “pet” is familiar, simple and obvious and thus I use it throughout this work as a synonym for companion animals. While I prefer “companion animal” and use it more regularly throughout the work because it more

³ See Esther the Wonder Pig: <https://www.estherthewonderpig.com/> Esther was purchased by her “dads” under the impression that she was a “micro pig” but grew to be 500 pounds in just two years. Esther lives inside, has her own bed, and is part of an interspecies family that includes dogs, cats, turkeys, and other animals.

⁴ Overall. *Pets and People*, xix.

⁵ “Pet.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.temple.edu/view/Entry/141782?rskey=6zq8bb&result=8#firstMatch>

accurately recognizes some kind of mutual kinship connection between a particular animal and particular human, many of the scholarly voices present in this project use “pet;” and because of their engaged with these terms, I also use “pet” and “pet owner.” The reader, nevertheless, should always be aware of the multiple and, at times, contradictory meanings of the term.

Companion Animal

While I choose to use “companion animal” over “pet,” this too remains complicated. “Companion animal” refers to any nonhuman animal that lives with or could potentially live with humans, sharing a home or the same living space. While this includes pampered pets and animals that are “kept,” as well as physical and emotional assistance animals, “companion animals” also includes *potential* pets, such as domesticated animals living on city streets, like feral cats, animals surrendered to shelters because their humans may not have cared enough, and the approximately three million who are “euthanized” in the shelters every year. Importantly, and quite recently, animals traditionally considered livestock such as pigs, chickens, cows, horses, goats, and sheep are now taking on the role as “companion animals.” Many of these animals do not live in the home but share the same property, in temperature-controlled and technologically advanced barns, and receive the same care, such as high-end food, veterinary care, and accessories, as more traditional pets, like dogs and cats.

A companion is defined as “a person who often spends time with another; a person one chooses to socialize or associate with, a friend.”⁶ I prefer “companion animal” over “pet” because as we begin to rethink the human-animal relationship within the home, using “companion animal” assists in this process and more accurately reflect the human-animal bond,

⁶ “Companion.” *Oxford English Dictionary*. <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.temple.edu/view/Entry/37402?rskey=2uL92s&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>

defined by the American Veterinary Medical Association as “a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well-being of both.”⁷ Companion animals are engaging partners with individual personalities, even within their own species. They have a place in the family and at times, help to create a sense of family, especially for individuals without children.

Family and Interspecies Families

Defining “family” is difficult as the family unit varies widely across cultures and geographical locations. However, according to many scholars in the psychological fields of family health and marriage and family counseling, families are often described as the basic unit of societies, emphasizing “common identity, coresidence, economic cooperation, reproduction, emotional connectedness, care work, and domestic labor.”⁸ Living alone and not having children does not exclude one from family membership as family units can provide emotional and financial support as well as intimacy to both more traditional nuclear members and fictive kin, or “an individual or group [that] is accorded the status of a family member in the absence of biological or legal relationship.” Fictive kin usually join already existing family units though “there are reports of groups of unrelated individuals who self-identify as family.”⁹

⁷ “Human-Animal Bond.” American Veterinary Medical <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/human-animal-bond/Pages/Human-Animal-Bond-AVMA.aspx>

⁸ Linda McKie and Samantha Callan. “Families: the Basic Unit of Societies.” In *Encyclopedia of Family Health*. Martha Craft-Rosenberg and Shelley-Rae Pehler, eds. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011), 430. See also: Shawn N. Mendez and Samuel H. Allen. “Hegemonic Heteronormativity: Toward a New Era of Queer Family Theory.” *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 10 (March 2018), 70-86.

⁹ Constance Dallas. “Fictive Kin Relationships.” *Encyclopedia of Family Health*. Martha Craft-Rosenberg and Shelley-Rae Pehler, eds. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011), 507

The concept of fictive kinship provides space and opportunity to incorporate companion animals into the family unit as a family member, while family and marriage psychology has yet to fully confront the challenges and motivations of including companion animals more fully into the family. An individual becomes fictive kin with “prolonged physical proximity to a family member in order to develop a relationship that is both interdependent and mutually beneficial.”¹⁰ Fictive kinship relationships are reciprocal, emotionally supportive and dependent: “this pattern of reciprocal sharing over time leads to a sense of confidence in each [individual] that the other will consistently be available to assist with emotional or material needs as they arise.”¹¹ Since companion animals do not pay rent or help clean, companion animals can offer emotional support and physical and healthy living motivations for the family.

Families are also defined by what they *do* and how they *practice* “talking and thinking of themselves as a family.”¹² For example, how families practice being a family include having meals together, planning long-term living situations, going on vacation, and sharing and keeping domestic space. In addition,

special events are critical for family practices and include religious and public festivals, weddings, christenings and funerals, birthdays and holidays. Further, the notion of displaying families, namely, where forms of direct social interaction are used to convey the meaning that there is a family-like relationship, recognizes the relevance of illustrating and illuminating family links and relationships.¹³

¹⁰ Constance Dallas. “Fictive Kin Relationships,” 507.

¹¹ Ibid., 507.

¹² McKie and Callan, “Families: the Basic Unit of Societies,” 435.

¹³ Ibid, 435.

One prominent example of displaying families is often seen with the family portrait or holiday card. Both images represent who counts as family and both images usually include the family pet or companion animals. Companion animals, as fictive kin, help shape how families *practice* by bringing routine, comfort, and “as both cause and consequence of the familiarity and intimacy that develop, people talk ‘to’ their pets and speak ‘for’ them.”¹⁴ The veterinary office is perhaps the most apparent public space within which humans talk to and for their companion animals;¹⁵ as both veterinarian staff and humans speak to their animals,¹⁶ they also always make decisions and speak for their companion animals in regards to care and veterinary medical decisions. In this work, interspecies family is characterized by at least two different species, cohabiting in the same domestic space, who are emotionally connected and physically cared for in some way, and in this way, enact varying ideas of family and home. Like other members of the family, companion animals become part of the routine of care; walking, eating, playing, snuggling and sleeping. Companion animals participate in enacting and imagining family. Enacting this interspecies family takes place almost entirely in homes and households across the United States as more public spaces are becoming acceptable spaces to be an interspecies family, such as restaurants including interspecies dining and cat cafes. Whether on a farm, in a studio apartment, a suburban townhouse, or somewhere in between, the home is the site of interspecies living.

¹⁴ Leslie Irvine and Laurent Cilia. “More-than-human families: Pets, people, and practices in multispecies households.” *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 2 (2017), 4.

¹⁵ This is not by any means the only public (or private) space which humans talk to and for their animals. Dog parks and hiking trails, humans are constantly talking to their dogs, to stay close, to stay away from the deer carcass rotting deeper into the woods.

¹⁶ As in “How are you feeling?”, “Are you okay? What hurts?” - this sort of speech often takes on the sounds of baby talk, though not always.

Religion and Animals in Religion

In Aaron Gross' *The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implications*, he argues that the study of religion has largely ignored the presence and importance of animals in sacred texts, rituals, and religious communities. While Christian theology was characterized by questions about the divine, Gross argues that “religious studies [or the nontheological/comparative study of religion] approaches religion by privileging questions about the human.”¹⁷

Kimberly Patton, a scholar of the comparative and historical study of religion, locates the beginning of the association of animals and the human religious experience in the Chauvet Cave in Southern France. These cave paintings “represent the oldest collection of created animal images in the world, with most of the paintings radiocarbon-dated to 31,000 BCE.”¹⁸ While archeologists, anthropologists, and religion scholars can never really know the intentions and beliefs behind the drawings of “lions, bears, horses, rhinos, aurochs, woolly mammoths and even an owl,” the ancient images “testify to an extraordinarily complex relationship between animals and human beings.”¹⁹ As an educator, activist, and scholar at the intersection of animal studies, ethics and religion, Paul Waldau argues in “Seeing the Terrain We Walk: Features of the

¹⁷ Aaron Gross. *The Question of the Animal and religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implication*. New York: Columbia University Press (2015), 10. Aaron Gross is a professor of theology and religious studies at the University of San Diego, founder of the nonprofit organization Farm Forward and coeditor of *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*.

¹⁸ Kimberly Patton. “‘Caught with Ourselves in the Net of Life and Time:’ Traditional Views of Animals in Religion.” In *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*. Paul Waldeau and Kimberly Patton, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 29.

¹⁹ Kimberly Patton. “Caught with Ourselves,” 29.

Contemporary Landscape of ‘Religion and Animals’” that it has been primarily through religious traditions, practices and beliefs that

the status of nonhuman animals was evaluated by not only believers, but also entire cultures and institutions. This evaluative role has been taken over in crucial respects, of course, by scientific and political traditions; but the importance of religious traditions as continuing mediators of views and values regarding nonhuman animals remains one of the most obvious features of humans’ contemporary assessment of their relationship to the rest of life on this earth.²⁰

For most religion scholars, their definitions usually exclude animals and often characterize “religion” as “that aspect of the human that is not shared with the animal.”²¹ I would agree with Gross in that “religion is popularly imagined as something that has little to do with animals.” For example, Emile Durkheim, in making the distinction between the sacred and profane in all aspects of social, political, and cultural life, set humans apart from and in opposition to animals and animality: “the human form is divine or in the image of the divine; animal forms are not.”²²

Gross and other scholars of religion,²³ who focus on finding the presence of animals in sacred text, spiritual communities and religious rituals, suggest that religion (and all of its lived complexity and intricacy) can actually work to examine the importance of human-animal

²⁰ Paul Waldau, “Seeing the Terrain We Walk: Features of the Contemporary Landscape of ‘Religion and Animals,’” 42.

²¹ Aaron Gross. *The Question of the Animal and Religion*, 90.

²² *Ibid.*, 63.

²³ Donovan Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Duke University, 2015). Barbara Ambrose, *Bones of Contention* (University of Hawaii Press, 2012). David Clough, *Animals as Religious Subjects: Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (T&T Clark, 2014).

relationships. Death and dying studies within the study of religion is fruitful space for new (or modifications to traditional) rituals and ceremonies where both humans and animals participate “[allowing] people to express sentiments non-verbally that may be difficult to articulate, sentiments such as love and commitment.”²⁴ To this, I would add death and dying rituals and ceremonies of bereavement.

Hospice and Palliative Care for Companion Animals

Hospice is both a philosophy and system of care at the end-of-life by which palliative treatments (rather than curative) are administered to relieve suffering, provide physical and mental comforts, and address the spiritual and emotional needs of both patients and families. Hospice and palliative care are intertwined at the end-of-life for both humans and animals. Like human hospice, animal hospice is founded on four key concepts: 1) dying is a meaningful experience, 2) caring for the dying individual is to offer support to the family and that “dying takes place within a system of interrelationships and network of shared meanings,” 3) providing hospice is to take an “expansive and holistic view of the nature and relief of suffering,” and 4) that it is through hospice that patients maintain integrity “to live in ways that honor what they find most valuable and meaningful in their lives.”²⁵

With the development of animal hospice, “pet owners and veterinarians are challenging what they see as unnecessarily stark choices: allow an animal to suffer or euthanize; provide

²⁴ Norine Dresser. “The horse *bar mitzvah*: a celebratory exploration of the human-animal bond.” In *Companion Animals and Us: Exploring the Relationships Between People and Pets*. Anthony L. Podberscek, Elizabeth S. Paul, James A. Serpell, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 104.

²⁵ Jessica Pierce. “Introduction.” In *Hospice and Palliative Care for Companion Animals: Principles and Practice*. Amir Shanan, Jessica Pierce, and Tamara Shearer, eds. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 2-3. Pierce is a bioethicist and scholar of religion focusing on human-animal studies. She is currently a faculty affiliate at the Center for Bioethics and Humanities at the University of Denver.

aggressive curative treatment or do nothing.”²⁶ When reexamining euthanasia for animals, hospice care for companion animals is not without controversy. On the one hand, “hospice seeks to allow hospice-assisted natural death...and that euthanasia is a last resort option that should always be available for extreme cases.”²⁷ On the other hand, many veterinarians and animal studies scholars still argue that “the ideal outcome is for the pet to die at home in a painless and peaceful state, using veterinary supervision that includes proper pain control and home euthanasia services.” Furthermore, proponents of “natural death amounts to caring for an emaciated, dehydrated, depressed, terminal patient that must endure further deterioration, pointless pain, and suffering until liberated by death.”²⁸ Hospice-assisted natural death and euthanasia are both accepted by the International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care (IAAHPC) which was founded in 2009 and left up to the patient-advocate team, which includes the human companion and (ideally) a multidisciplinary team of veterinary staff.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia is illegal in the United States and is never a possibility for a dying human. Defined as “a gentle and easy death” or “the means of bringing about a gentle and easy death,” euthanasia in this context refers to the purposeful hastening of death through lethal means. Euthanasia for companion animals, however, is available, accessible, and traditionally encouraged for terminal companion animals. It is also used too frequently to describe the millions of deaths that still occur in animal shelters every year. In many ways, the language of

²⁶ Ibid., 2.

²⁷ Kathryn Marocchino. “In the Shadow of a Rainbow: A History of Animal Hospice.” *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* 41, issue 3 (May 2011), 491.

²⁸ Alice Villalobos. “Assessment and Treatment of Nonpain Conditions in Life-limiting Disease.” *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* 41, issue 3 (May 2011), 525.

the death and dying of companion animals is inadequate and we are in need of a more accurate discourse.

Frames and Threads for Exploring Companion Animal Death and Dying

To understand how these terms play out in the field of death and dying studies and animal studies, and how humans can use this framework to examine the death and dying of companion animals, the following chapters highlight 1) the scholarship which frames and contextualizes this conversation in death and dying studies, animal studies, and religion, 2) the history of pet keeping in America and the development of interspecies families, 3) end-of-life care for companion animals and human decisions of euthanasia, and 4) after-death-care for companion animal bodies and human bereavement after the loss of a companion animal.

Chapter two begins to understand the multidisciplinary nature of this conversation by exploring the connections between death and dying studies, religion, and animal studies. This project primarily locates itself within death and dying studies and spends most time engaging with the shifts of death awareness in the United States, starting in the 19th century when people died at home, into the early 20th century with the development of medical technology, and then into the mid-20th century with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' *On Death and Dying* which helped create the contemporary public discourse of death and dying. This literature review also examines, for the first time in an academic setting, a new "death positive" movement which works to make death an engaged part of life, especially through social media, to encourage people to recognize and embrace their being/bodies as a "future corpse."²⁹ Like other death awareness movements, death positivity is led by women, who have connected multidisciplinary scholars from art to

²⁹ The "future corpse" T-shirt: <https://www.etsy.com/listing/508700533/order-of-the-good-death-future-corpse>

literature to science and technology with funeral directors and other death care workers through death salons, or the reimagining of intellectual circles in the 17th and 18th centuries. One primary difference is the inclusion of animals both in and outside the home. It is through death and dying studies that I explore new religious inquiries such as the creation of new religious and spiritual rituals that include animals as religious subjects.

In similar ways, this project contributes to the field of human-animal studies and animal studies in general in similar ways by recognizing animals, particularly companion animals, as subjects in mutual and engaging relationships. By no means exhaustive, I tackle the multidisciplinary field, by exploring the work of anthropologist E.E. Evans Pritchard who noted how cattle were engaged contributors to the Nuer nilotic communities and the research in the cognitive ethology of Marc Bekoff. It will not last long, but these works act as bookends to the literary landscape of human-animal studies. As I begin to explore the parameters of animals studies, the focus is mostly on the human-animal relationship explored through sociological and philosophical queries, such as how companion animals live with humans and how cohabiting brings a whole host of new questions about the human-animal boundary.

Underlying these investigations of interspecies relationships are feminist theoretical threads defined by the work of Donna Haraway, who importantly intersects feminist theory with animal studies, as well as disciplines in the natural sciences, technology and culture. Haraway's figurative creatures, the cyborg and companion species, create a new framework by which to construct and understand companion animals as both animal and family. Haraway's work has helped to define the multi- and inter-disciplinary field of human-animal studies while questioning the boundaries of both. To further explore these boundaries of interspecies families, I

use Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks to explore the shifting and reshaping the concept of “home,” and domestic space.

Chapter three documents the history of pet keeping in the United States starting with Victorian England, and focusing on the ways in which humans have shared and continue to share their homes with animals. Sixty-eight percent of households in America have at least one pet and the majority of those pet owners or guardians consider their companion animal a family member. How did we get to this point? The history I provide comes from scholars who have looked to fragments of material history such as manuals and instructional guidebooks for raising and breeding companion animals, newspaper articles, and advertisements; products and promotional materials, such as for toys and pet food, and obituaries and tombstones in pet cemeteries. One prominent gap in the human-animal studies scholarship is any serious focus on the significance of social media in the lives of humans and animals. This work is just the beginning, I believe, in exploring this platform to understand the role of social media plays in the human-animal relationship and interspecies families and how those relationships and families are enacted on and through social media (as if to provide legitimacy and form communities).

Chapter four is perhaps the most heart-wrenching (especially if you have ever cared for or lived with an animal). By exploring the contemporary and emerging themes in veterinary medicine and death and dying studies, I examine ways in which families and individual humans attend to companion animals at the end of their lives. Like humans, elder companion animals is a growing population and the need to create and sustain ways of caring is poignant. Before exploring end-of-life resources for humans and their companion animals, this chapter

acknowledges the plight of potential companion animals, particularly the millions of animals living in shelters across the United States.

As an assimilation of human hospice, companion animal hospice focuses on the multidisciplinary treatment of terminally ill companion animals and their human guardians. Ideally, treatment is provided by a team of veterinary staff, nutritionists, physical therapists, perhaps animal oncologists, pet care providers such as dog walkers, and, of course, human individuals and families. It is important to note the financial cost of all of this, which greatly limits who has access to these treatments. Even more so than human medical care, veterinary care is paid for out of pocket and can be very expensive; electing to do any end-of-life care or palliative treatments can greatly depend on the human's financial situation and can determine veterinary care. Financial situations tend to have less of an effect on decisions in human end-of-life care. Unlike human hospice, companion animal hospice still (usually) ends in euthanizing the companion animal to relieve suffering, and thus, this chapter also explores the decision-making process of euthanasia.

Chapter five examines the current possibilities of after-death-care for companion animals bodies and how human companions mourn and memorialize the lives they lost. Starting with the establishment of the first pet cemetery in the United States, this chapter traces the significance of companion animals through the ways in which humans dispose of their bodies. Burial has the most storied and public history with tombstones and obituaries dating back to the mid-19th century. Cremation is currently the most popular form of animal body disposal which gives humans the opportunity to bring the cremains back into the home (or, for example, scatter in the animal's favorite outdoor spot); a paw print or hair clippings usually accompany the ashes. In

addition to more traditional modes of disposition, methods of preservation have become popular for pet guardians such as taxidermy and freeze-drying. While these methods are still new and seem off-putting to many companion humans, others find comfort in stuffed and posed animal bodies, especially in the face of unrecognized mourning.

In addition to body disposition, I also explore the ways humans mourn and memorialize the lives of companion animals. Creating rituals, writing obituaries, hosting memorials and funerary services, and participating in support groups and grief counseling are just a few of the ways companion humans mourn the loss of significant others. Most prominently, social media plays an invaluable role in the memorialization of animals (both companion and wild).³⁰

³⁰ See also: Associated Press. “Harambe lives: Killed zoo gorilla gets a second life online.” <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/harambe-lives-killed-zoo-gorilla-gets-a-second-life-online/> (August 22, 2016). | Katie Rogers. “American Hunter Killed Cecil, Beloved Lion Who Was Lured Out of His Sanctuary. *New York Times*. (July 28, 2015). <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/world/africa/american-hunter-is-accused-of-killing-cecil-a-beloved-lion-in-zimbabwe.html>

CHAPTER 2

DEATH AND DYING STUDIES AND HUMAN-ANIMAL STUDIES IN THE HOME

(LITERATURE REVIEW)

To understand the complexities of the death and dying of companion animals in the United States is to weave together multiple academic disciplines as an intersection for diverse pathways and perspectives. To consider or attend to the death and dying of companion animals is important; the lives and deaths of non-human animals matter. With this seemingly simple recognition, this work situates itself within **death and dying studies**, as it acknowledges that animals have been neglected within the field of death and dying studies. Similar to those human concerns and criticisms within death and dying studies, this work will attend to the dying process for companion animals by considering end-of-life care and choices, options for body disposition, human bereavement and mourning, as well as beliefs about the afterlife. It is through this intersectional trajectory, that this work begins to look at the death and dying of companion animals, of nonhuman “significant others” within the family.

In addition to death and dying studies within American popular religion, this work finds itself squarely in the continually burgeoning realm of **human-animal studies** (HAS) as it explores the boundaries and bonds between humans and non-human companion animals. While human-animal studies is also called “animal studies” and animality studies, each term seems to be employed in slightly different ways. Because this work examines the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals, I prefer to use human-animal studies. Many scholars locate the rough origins of the discipline to the 1970s publications of Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* and Tom Regan’s *The Case for Animal Rights*. These critical and provocative texts, which many

human-animal studies scholars have since begun to revisit, inspired an entire multidisciplinary academic field, much like those scholarly disciplines that paralleled the civil rights, women's rights, and environmental movements. While this work looks to human-animals studies in conjunction with comparative religious studies, and other philosophical and sociological trends, there is a distinction between HAS and critical animal studies which has been defined primarily by scholars' advocacy work aligned with animal rights, animal liberation, and environmentalism. This does not, however, mean that the conversations within human-animals studies, and discussions within this project, cannot speak to those in critical animal studies and vice versa. I am simply focusing my work within human-animals studies as a way to narrow my scope, lay the groundwork, and offer context to changing social, cultural, and religious trends in the United States that have and may continue to lead to local, familial, legislative, and policy changes for animals. Within human-animal studies, this work confronts the limits of the human-animal relationship while working to imagine new directions and perspectives for this consequential relationship. Furthermore, to understand the implications of reimagining the human-animal relationship, and how this is exemplified when humans consider and attend to the death and dying of companion animals, this work defines and examines interspecies homes and kinship.

Death and Dying Studies

First and foremost, this work is about death and dying. Inspired by a particular animal death, this project recognizes and reconciles the lack of attention on nonhuman death in the study of death and dying. To date there has been no comprehensive examination of companion animals within the study of death and dying studies in the United States. Particularly, this project focuses on death and dying in the 20th century United States and contributes to the growing scholarship

on death and dying in America during the nineteenth, twentieth, and into the twenty-first centuries. Distinguished historically, religiously, and culturally, many scholars note significant shifts in how Americans generally perceived and handled death and dying between the 19th and 20th centuries, including the place/location of the deathbed scene (or where Americans die), advances in medical and scientific technology (or how Americans die), and the change in the relationship between patient and physician (or who makes decisions in dying), particularly with the publication of Kubler-Ross' *On Death and Dying* in 1969. End-of-life care, the ways in which medical technology and advancements have prolonged life (and dying), and how caregivers, medical professionals, and loved ones attend to the dying individual is further layered by religious identity, spiritual practice, and beliefs in the afterlife. To date, these lines of inquiry have only applied to human death and dying. However, to properly lay the foundation of how companion animals might speak to, fit in, transcend, or disrupt these categories and shifts, it is important to offer context by first exploring the scholarship on human death and dying.

In addition to these shifts between centuries, scholarship in death and dying studies overwhelmingly recognizes the death awareness and right-to-die movements of the 20th century as critical to understanding how Americans attend to and cope with death and dying, while providing a language by which to discuss death and dying so “as to overcome in part an earlier era’s silence and denial.”³¹ Prior to the 20th century, most Americans died at home, surrounded by family, a physician at times, and a religious professional. In *The Modern Art of Dying*, Shai J. Lavi argues that in Protestant Christian historical narratives, the deathbed scene was a work of art, a spectacle, even, something to be a part of and to share in. Methodists particularly have

³¹ Lucy Bregman. *Beyond Silence and Denial: Death and Dying Reconsidered*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 1.

helped to shape the way in which American die. Having read 17th century English bishop Jeremy Taylor, who brought death “from the outer limit of life to the condition under which life itself takes place,” John Wesley argued that death was a solution to evil, “since to die is to flee from the shadowy existence of evil in this world to a better world. In other words, the suffering of this world is made bearable in light of the happiness of the world to come.” Paradoxically, Wesley stated that while death meant a reprieve from the evil of the world, it also manifested evil: “death is not only the last moment of life but also the essence of being alive.”³² For Methodists in mid-19th century America, the occasion of death was the culminating moment of life with the possibility of salvation prior to encountering the afterlife. Because of this important moment, the deathbed was a public event for both the dying individual and other community members and family. To account for the transition from the domestic deathbed to the alienating hospital bed, Lavi argues that “the powerlessness of the modern death bed to present the fullness of a life world has led to the prevalent attitude toward dying, which might be characterized less as denial and more as forgetting, a fading away of the traditional art of dying.”³³ The physician at the deathbed was part of the spectacle, though more to guide the dying individual to a “good death,” hopefully without suffering.

The shift in both where Americans die and the relationship between patient and physician corresponds in large part to the cultural change within American hospitals at the turn of the 20th century. Rather than primarily offering medical services to the poor, hospitals transformed into teaching institutions, dedicated to identifying, studying and curing disease and illness. For Lavi,

³² Shai J. Lavi. *The Modern Art of Dying: A History of Euthanasia in the United States*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 21-23.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10

this shift marked a focus on technique, rather than art. With the rise of medical technologies, death became a potentially prolonged process as physicians attempted to combat ultimate disease. Ian Dowbiggin, in *A Merciful End: The Euthanasia Movement in Modern America*, notes the change in location of death along with the founding of the Euthanasia Society of America (ESA) in 1938. While the main goal of the organization was to create legislation, Dowbiggin considers their founding as a pivotal moment in the right-to-die and death awareness movements of the 20th century. The first piece of legislation developed by the ESA was similar to the Death with Dignity acts passed more recently in Oregon, Washington, and California and included requirements such as being 21 years or old, of sound mind, suffering from severe physical pain caused by an incurable disease. While these early attempts at legislation were ultimately unsuccessful, it laid the groundwork for the dramatic cultural and societal shifts of the 1960s and 1970s.

Dowbiggin argues that “new attitudes, ideas, and medical technology [combined] in the 1960s to alter the cultural landscape fundamentally. Disease, death, and dying quickly [became] some of the most consistently discussed and debated subjects in American public life,” culminating with the publication of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ *On Death and Dying* in 1969.³⁴ With this seminal text, Kubler-Ross codified the term “death and dying” giving scholars and the public a chance to speak about the multiplicity of issues ranging from psychological and spiritual concerns of the dying to bereavement to critiques of the post-industrial, medicalized ways of dying to how to care for the dying through public acceptance of hospice and palliative care. Kubler-Ross, in structuring the dying process in stages, disrupted a cultural barrier, giving

³⁴ Ian Dowbiggin. *A Merciful End: the Euthanasia Movement in Modern America*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 96.

language to a taboo topic for the ordinary person. As Lucy Bregman states in *Beyond Silence and Denial: Death and Dying Reconsidered*, “discussion of death and dying burst the bounds of a scientific research area and became a ‘movement,’ with a language adapted to the needs of the nonresearcher. Death is something all can speak of, including those in the practical professions, medical patients, and the general public.”³⁵ Kubler-Ross paved the way for an alternative narrative of death and dying, a nonscientific one which valued the personal and subjective experience of dying. It is worth noting — primarily because it has implications for how companion animals are attended to and cared for at the end of life — that while Kubler-Ross shined a light on the personal experiences of those dying in hospitals, she simultaneously assigned “universal” stages, which many have critiqued as being too limiting in their scope in understanding the inter-articulating physical, spiritual, and emotional experiences of dying. As Bregman argues in *First Person Mortal: Personal Narratives of Illness, Dying and Grief*, the general “denial of death” in American society did not disappear with this sudden movement. This dictum continued to parallel the new “talkativeness about death” which mounted while at the same time detaching death from religion or spirituality.

Ann Bradshaw argues in “The Spiritual Dimension of Hospice: The Secularization of an Ideal” that the Christian foundation of hospice was vitally important. Cicely Saunders, a British nurse and social worker credited with developing hospice philosophy in Britain in 1968 as is practiced today, “was motivated by a Christian calling to look at the scientific foundations for care of the dying. She saw this as complementary not contradictory.”³⁶ According to Saunders,

³⁵ Bregman, *Beyond Silence and Denial*, 58

³⁶ Ann Bradshaw. “The Spiritual Dimension of Hospice: The Secularization of an Ideal.” *Social Science Medicine* 43, Issue 3 (August 1996), 412.

“the Sermon on the Mount and Christian teaching provided both the impetus and the manner and direction of the work. Medical skill provided the path for achieving these goals.”³⁷ The goals or principles of Saunder’s hospice care were that each person must give their own unique contribution; that dying people “must find peace and be found by God, quietly, in their own way, without being in any way subjected to pressure from others, however well-meant;” that love will provide strength through “care, skill, thoughtfulness, prayer and silence;” that providing end-of-life care requires a multidisciplinary team; and that hospice provides security: through faith in God, through Christ’s victory over pain and death, through mutual fellowship and the spirit of prayer, radiating out from the Chapel into every party of the corporate life.”³⁸

The first modern hospice in the United States was founded in 1974 in New Haven, Connecticut by Florence Wald, a nursing professor at Yale University who had been inspired by Saunders after she visited in 1967. The hospice movement was driven by nurses to the point where by 1978 there were recognizable “models” of hospice and palliative care:

“1) a free-standing open system with home care; 2) a home health agency offering both home and inpatient care; 3) a hospital-based interdisciplinary team providing day care in both hospital and home; and 4) an inpatient unit based on Canada’s Royal Victoria Model, using volunteers and nurses from the Visiting Nurse Association.”³⁹ By the following year, the National Hospice Organization had established standards of care and, by that point, hospice benefits had been added to the Federal Medicare Program. Not much has changed since this time in regards to the

³⁷ Ibid., 412.

³⁸ Ibid., 412.

³⁹ Michelle Winslow and Marcia Meldrum. “A history of hospice and palliative medicine” in *Radiation Oncology in Palliative Cancer Care*, Stephen Lutz, Edward Chow, and Peter Hoskin, eds. (John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2013), 63.

benefit qualifications; patients are still only eligible for hospice when there is a prognosis of six months or less. Ira Byock, a leading palliative care physician and public advocate for improving end-of-life care, argues that cultural perceptions of aging and dying need to change to radically shift the plight of terminal patients. American society, which views death as a burden, and for physicians a failure, Byock sees hospice and palliative care as a way to change the cultural perceptions about aging, death, and dying. Without getting too deep into a discussion about the pervasive cultural taboos about death and how this has inhibited engaging and productive conversation for change on end-of-life care, which have been covered extensively by other scholars,⁴⁰ there are still obstacles to overcome. According to the 2017 report on Facts and Figures of Hospice in America from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), less than half of “Medicare decedents received one day or more of hospice care and were enrolled in hospice at the time of death.”⁴¹ Characteristics of Medicare beneficiaries who received hospice care included 58.6% women and 86.5% Caucasian. In his seminal work, *Dying Well: Peace and Possibilities at the End of Life*, Byock noted that “in America, you have a greater chance of dying in pain if you don’t speak English, and if you are black, [Latino], poor, elderly, or a woman.”⁴² According to these recent statistics, Byock is still correct; while the gender make-up of these medicare beneficiaries has shifted since the 1980s, hospice patients are overwhelmingly white. Similarly, hospice and palliative care services for companion animals are

⁴⁰ Jessica Mitford. *The American Way of Death* (1963); Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*; Marilyn Webb. *The Good Death: The New American Search to Reshape the End of Life* (1997); Lucy Bregman. *Beyond Silence and Denial: Death and Dying Reconsidered* (2003).

⁴¹ “Facts and Figures: Hospice Care in America, 2017 Edition.” National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (Revised April 2018), 4. https://www.nhpco.org/sites/default/files/public/Statistics_Research/2017_Facts_Figures.pdf

⁴² Ira Byock. *Dying Well: Peace and Possibilities at the End of Life*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), 242.

largely limited to white, economically stable, companion humans who have the resources to pay, out of pocket, for such services.

In addition to some concerted energy behind policy and legislative changes at the state level,⁴³ there has been some popular efforts since the mid-2000s toward “death positivity,” primarily expressed through social media platforms. Death professionals, artists, scholars, medical practitioners, and the general public use these new mediums to educate, create, and propose new ways of examining and thinking through death and dying. The movement seems to promote education and awareness, continuing to lend attention and creating more language to talk about the process of dying, new techniques in body disposal, choices in end-of-life care, and ritual services. Central to this new movement, or another wave to the death awareness movement,⁴⁴ are groups such as The Order of the Good Death which includes funeral professionals, scholars, and artists and is “about making death a part of your life. That means committing to staring down your death fears - whether it be your own death, the death of those you love, the pain of dying, the afterlife (or lack thereof), grief, corpses, bodily decomposition, or all of the above. Accepting that death itself is natural, but the death anxiety and terror of modern culture are not.”⁴⁵ According to Caitlin Doughty, founder of The Order, “we are experiencing the next natural shift in how we cope with death as a society.”⁴⁶

⁴³ These legislative changes and advocacy have been only on the state level and have primarily considered assisted dying, such as in California (2015), Colorado (2016), District of Columbia (2016/2017), Hawaii (2018/2019), Oregon (1994/1997), Vermont (2013), and Washington (2008). Montana does not have a “death with dignity” law on the books, but does honor a Montana Supreme Court statute from 2009 that states “nothin in state law [prohibits] a physician from honoring a terminally ill, mentally competent patient’s request by prescribing medication to hasten the patient’s death.” (Current Death with Dignity Laws, DeathwithDignity.org)

⁴⁴ Natalie Harrison. “Positive death: third wave.” *The Lancet Oncology* 16, no. 6 (June 2015), 616.

⁴⁵ Caitlyn Doughty. “About,” *The Order of the Good Death*. <http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/about>

⁴⁶ Harrison, “Positive Death: Third Wave,” 616.

While there is no scholarly work on this new manifestation of death awareness, this project will contribute to the rethinking of death and dying to not only consider animals but the ways in which we attend to their deaths as an important opportunity for creativity in mourning practices and after-death care. In addition to believing that “a good death is more likely to be achieved by talking about it early on,” members of the death positivity movement posit an intimacy with death, bringing it home, as well as thinking critically and creatively about rituals, bereavement, and spirituality. For example, one of the most powerful themes of the death positivity movement is caring for the recently deceased, for the bodies of loved ones, in the home, primarily in response to what many see as the funeral industry’s exploitation of loss.⁴⁷ Social media accounts of some of the movement’s most prominent members, including Caitlyn Doughty and her company, UndertakingLA, have introduced educational programming about federal and state laws governing after-death care, particularly dispelling common misconceptions about what absolutely needs to happen with bodies after death and promoting home funerals. The chapter on after-death care and mourning will address these issues in more detail: how are the bodies of companion animals cared for after death? What happens to the body? What new rituals have been created for mourning the companion animal? How are they specific to the ritual’s home location?

In this work, I draw connections between the death awareness movement, the death and dying of companion animals living in the home, and end-of-life care for both humans and

⁴⁷ Louise Tickle. “The new death industry: funeral businesses that won’t exploit grief.” *The Guardian*. (January 8, 2018): <https://www.theguardian.com/business-to-business/2018/jan/08/the-new-death-industry-funeral-businesses-that-wont-exploit-grief>; “Great news for the dead: the funeral industry is being disrupted.” *The Economist* (April 4, 2018): <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/04/14/great-news-for-the-dead-the-funeral-industry-is-being-disrupted>

animals to feminist theories, particularly in regards to women's roles and participation in the death awareness and death positivity movements, as caretakers for both humans and animals, and how these interspecies relationships become intimate and familial. The tradition of women as caretakers and nurturers has a complicated history that reaches beyond the scope of this project but it is very much pertinent to the death awareness and death positivity movements as they have flourished in the United States because of women's participation. In this new interpretation of death and dying as "death positivity" in American society through the use of social media, women are at the forefront.

While there is no comprehensive scholarship on issues of gender and sexuality in the death awareness movement, Bregman offers some reflections on how women have acted as both caretakers and innovators within the death awareness movement. Though there has been no published argument to suggest that *On Death and Dying* is a feminist text, or that it dedicates more time to women's experiences, Kubler-Ross did create the opportunity to speak about death and dying openly, and thus shining light on the industry and on patients and caretakers, giving all people the chance to speak "beyond silence and denial."

Women have traditionally and still remain primary caretakers for the sick, elderly, and dying. Whether in the home or the hospital, the history of women in these roles can be traced to 19th century American "cult of domesticity," in which women were associated with piety, domesticity, and sensitivity. In *Death and Dying, Spirituality and Religions: A Study of the Death Awareness Movement*, Bregman suggests that the cult of domesticity or Christian domestic piety did not deny death, but rather provided "an underground well from which the contemporary

death awareness movement draws some of its living water.”⁴⁸ Having traditionally been the primary, if not the sole, caretaker of children, women are perhaps seen as more prepared to deal with the messiness of aging and dying bodies. And while everyone is equally embodied in the face of illness and dying, women have shaped the ways in which death awareness has fostered new, creative, and critical ways of perceiving and treating death and dying. Women’s central role in the treatment of death and dying can also be traced to Spiritualism in the mid-19th century in which young, largely uneducated women led Spiritualism’s central ritual, speaking to the dead. The seance ritual was performed in both the home and public forms. In *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America*, Molly McGarry argues that the boundaries between public and private were as permeable as between women’s bodies and ghosts. Ever since the publication of Ann Braude’s *Radical Spirits* in 1991, there has been a general consensus that Spiritualism broadened women’s social and public opportunities, while also setting the precedent for women’s active roles in religious leadership.

Feminist Theoretical Threads

This project is not necessarily theoretical. Admittedly, I do not spend proportional time on what I see as the theoretical, philosophical, or ethical foundations of a practical and historical examination of companion animal death and dying. The feminist theoretical threads that underly this project are largely defined by the work of Donna Haraway, who has changed the ways in which to think, respond, and critique dominant hegemonic systems. Haraway has admittedly written the same article over and over again: “Sometimes, re-reading the essays...I feel that I have written the same paper twenty times. All of these papers take up one or another aspect of

⁴⁸ Lucy Bregman. *Death and Dying, Spirituality and Religions: A Study of the Death Awareness Movement*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003), 107.

inherited dualisms that run deep in Western culture.”⁴⁹ These theoretical threads, from Haraway and others, are just that, pulled and woven together to help inform new ways of connecting animals to humans. From the “Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” to the *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Haraway uses both figurations, symbolic and experienced, of the cyborg and the companion species as they work together to engage with, challenge and disrupt ways of thinking in and outside dominant dualisms of nature/culture, human/animal.

Though this project does not contend with Haraway’s cyborg, it is important to understand how Haraway worked with the cyborg to come to live with companion species. The “Cyborg Manifesto” was born out of post-World War II technology and communications, science fiction, and military industrial complexes that were felt, embodied and embedded in both real places and research apparatuses. Haraway states, in a recent conversation with posthumanities scholar Cary Wolfe, that “I was personally shaped by the embedded institutional and political apparatuses of these complex formations of capitalism, militarism, imperialism and more.”⁵⁰ Profoundly in love with biology, and building an “ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism,” Haraway’s first manifesto is a lesson in interdisciplinarity, intertwining intellectual and political movements which make up identity. Considering all of this, Haraway brings readers to historically situated knowledges of particular political, social, and religious systems and how those systemic apparatuses make one more aware of how humans interpret and know the world within which we inhabit. Taken up by so many scholars since, a

⁴⁹ Donna Haraway. *The Haraway Reader*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

⁵⁰ Donna Haraway. *Manifestly Haraway*. (Minneapolis and Long: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 203.

cyborg is defined as a “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.”⁵¹ Through the use of the cyborg figuration, as a creature of both reality and science fiction, Haraway signals three categorical binary breakdowns that allow for the cyborg to take shape and become palpable: the boundaries between human and animal, organism and machine, and the physical and nonphysical. This work will explore, in its own ways, all three, with particular focus on the human/animal and physical/nonphysical. In regards to the first, Haraway states that as “the last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted, if not turned into amusement parks - language, tool use, social behavior, mental events...nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal.”⁵² Regarding the distinction between organism and machine, Haraway argues the differences between the two have become largely ambiguous as “our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert.”⁵³ The third distinction between the physical and nonphysical is perhaps a subset of the organism/machine as “modern machines are quintessentially microelectronic devices: they are everywhere and they are invisible. Modern machinery is an irreverent upstart god, mocking the Father’s ubiquity and spirituality.”⁵⁴ The disruption of the last distinction can perhaps be traced to the mostly simultaneous development of the telegraph, electricity, and Spiritualism in the mid-nineteenth century United States.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 8

⁵² *Ibid.*, 10

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12

⁵⁵ To examine these connections: Jerusha Hull McCormack. “Domesticating Delphi: Emily Dickinson and the Electro-Magnetic Telegraph.” *American Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (December 2003), 569-601.

From cyborg to companion species, Haraway continues to twist the boundaries set up by dualistic paradigms in her 2003 publication, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Haraway has said that this manifesto came at a point where she was no longer able to write or think without asking, “Who are we here? What are we? Who and what are ‘we’ that is not only human? What is it to be companion species at this historical conjuncture?” Furthering her feminist work, Haraway’s goal is to understand how things work, “how worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently.”⁵⁶ Haraway’s work confronts all types of species and is a powerful argument for treating the nonhuman environment with respect and always less violently. This project, which addresses, the human-companion animal bond almost exclusively, works within Haraway’s complex fabric of being, living and dying together. Haraway recognizes “significant otherness” as a way to employ emergent practices, “in vulnerable, on-the-ground work that cobbles together non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures.”⁵⁷ The “vulnerable, on-the-ground work” is living with companion animals in all its messiness. Consider an interspecies family that includes a rescue cat and dog; their exact histories are unknown but can be imagined and nevertheless, must be attended to by human companions. In becoming an interspecies family, both human and companion animal are recognized as acting agents in the relationship, and

⁵⁶ Donna Haraway. *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

despite inevitable tensions and contradictions (in power and language), humans and companion animals imagine and create entangled futures together.⁵⁸

Just as the cyborg worked to disrupt the boundaries of human/animal, organism, machine, physical/non-physical, the companion species has work of its own, in addition to carrying on or aiding in the work of the cyborg. Haraway suggests that “living with animals, inhabiting their/our stories, trying to tell the truth about relationship, co-habiting an active history: this is the work of companion species... Inverting meanings; transposing the body of communication; remolding; remodeling; swervings that tell the truth: I tell stories about stories, all the way down. Woof.”⁵⁹ As a symbolic figuration, companion species (of which companion animals are a part) helps to create new histories, in and outside the home, that recognize the idiosyncratic nature of the human-companion animal relationship. Each story is different and powerful.

While many have read “The Cyborg Manifesto” as an act of rage, *The Companion Species Manifesto* is indeed more personal for Haraway, growing out of an “act of love;” it would seem that more of herself was written into the stories of dogs, humans, and otherness. The second manifesto is familial, close and intimate. For this reason, Haraway has stated that her slogan these days is “Make Kin Not Babies!” She warns, however, that companion species are “way more than my dog and me playing, *and*, simultaneously, it is me playing with my dog and

⁵⁸ I should note that for Haraway, companion animals are just one kind of companion species, which is broader category that denotes a much larger and much more intricate webbing of being with other (nonhuman) species. This could include the spiders and other insects that live in the corners and crevices of your home. Companion species could include the sunflower living in my front yard, grown and cared for by my partner. (The sunflower does not have a name, but maybe it should.) To define companion species, Haraway insists on four tones that simultaneously resonate in the term: 1) tones of the history of evolutionary biology, 2) tones of generic philosophical kind rooted in defining difference, 3) tones of the material and semiotic, and 4) tones of “species” itself, reminiscent of “filthy lucre, specie, gold, shit, filth, wealth.” This second manifesto is thus about “the implosion of nature and culture in the relentlessly historical specific, joint lives of dogs and people, who are bonded in significant otherness.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

being undone and redone by that.”⁶⁰ I employ Haraway’s tropes to point to the significant ways the human-animal relationship, especially within the home, is redefined by creating interspecies families. These relationships and the interspecies family are both contradictory and intimate, arduous and precious.

Haraway argues that the relationship between humans and animals is taken for granted as simple, static, and inflexible. Her theory of companion species gives these relationships, particularly those within the home, a more complex meaning and importance. Haraway uses the relationship between people and dogs as a metaphor and example of the potentialities in living, thinking, and communicating with animals and in fully recognizing how other species affect and co-constitute humans’ relation to the world around them. The intimacy humans feel with their companion animals can inform the ways human move through the world and their environment. Perhaps this interspecies companionship experienced within the domestic space can inform other interspecies relationships. Haraway’s companion species provides this present project with a foundation when considering companion animals and how humans attend to their death and dying; it is a new lens with which to view how humans attend to companion animals at the end of life and after death. The particular histories and stories that are created within the interspecies family does not end with dying and death - it is through both that these relationships are fully enacted and realized by maintaining communion with the dead in reimagined rituals.

Haraway also locates this important work within the home. Traditionally, the home is seen as domestic, private, feminine, and hidden from the public, political, and social world. With Haraway’s companion species and my interspecies family, the home becomes a site of

⁶⁰ Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway*, 216.

complexity and possibility, a place to build new relationships and meaning. It is an intimate space for family, kinship, and messiness. While the home is local and particular, it is also complex, contradictory, and part of a much larger, diverse cultural system.

Other feminist scholars, such as Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, have redefined the home as a revolutionary and creative space, in response to its historical designation as a place of confinement, “from which [women] must be emancipated in order for her to gain access to a world outside that is masculine but only contingently so, and which offers possibilities of personal and social achievement that are not available within its limited space.”⁶¹ In addition to Haraway, Rich, Lorde and hooks recognize the value of domestic space as a multi-purpose site of resistance, competing and multiple identities, ambiguity and hauntings, contention and power, rather than adhering to the traditional feminist interpretations of the domestic as completely limiting women’s ability to achieve “true selfhood,” and maintaining the public/private dichotomy meant to keep women powerless.⁶²

Shown in the personal, poetic, and theoretical narratives of Rich, Lorde, and hooks, home and domestication (as both a symbolic and literal place) work to provide the space with which to disrupt the binaries that keep domestic happenings down and out. From these oftentimes comfy, yet complex and powerful sites of potentiality, these writers, who all employ the first person

⁶¹ Rachel Bowlby. “Domestication.” In *Feminism Beside Itself*, eds. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 71.

⁶² Admittedly, I omit numerous relevant feminist scholars in this conversation including (but not limited to) Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Laura Levitt. Martin and Mohanty, in “Feminist Politics: What’s Home Got to Do with It?”, suggest that the concept of “home” is a hard-working term and denotes the significance of creating specific narrative histories and how those histories speak to the personal as political. Pratt is the subject of Mohanty and Martin’s work and works with two contentious modalities, of being home and not being home. In being home, the individual is safe, intimate, and familiar. Home, as secure and protected from the outside, and as the fortress by which the individuals in the home are protected, is rendered illusory. Similarly, in Levitt’s *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search for Home*, home is on shaking ground, perhaps even vacant to any sense of power.

narrative, recognize the domestic, the homeplace, the place of location as residing in particularities, through multiple and layers of identity and power. These theories and interpretations of domestication do not attempt to move away from home, to transcend it, but to fully recognize the importance of new meaning-making and the chance to play with the binaries that inhabit it, private/public, feminine/masculine, and human/animal.

These alternative interpretations of the domestic sphere/home/domestication are knotted together by a few underlining themes and methods, primarily in that each employs the first person to speak from specificity, while using this to reimagine home and domestication in ways that do not conform to Friedan's domestic prison or de Beauvoir's endless and despairing repetition of domesticity. These writers find meaning at home, in closets and garages, in backyards and basements, in kitchens and on couches.⁶³ Rich, Lorde, and hooks provide the space, though perhaps a messy one, within which to explore the importance of the human-animal relationship. For Adrienne Rich, in "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," home is what is geographically most intimate, *her body*. She not only attempts to locate herself within her house within the state, nation, hemisphere, planet, universe, all the way down, she also associates her particular body as the starting point. Her body is home to complex histories. For this project, human and companion animal bodies are important starting points for attending to and caring for nonhuman family members at the end of life and in death. For Lorde and hooks, home was a site

⁶³ Poet and women's studies scholar, Irena Klepfisz, writes in "Words and Radiators" that "nothing is quite as satisfying as sitting with friends around a kitchen table or in a coffee shop and dissecting the exact implications of a political position or theory." This roving world of contradiction and assumption is played out in the home and through companion-animal relationships. Klepfisz sees this everyday world, of kitchens and couches and backyards, as a space where "ideas and theories matter, because with each dirty dish that I wash as I talk and listen, I experience how they affect my life." In this way, dirty dishes are an opportunity for learning, just as the everyday interactions with companion animals (walking and playing) create a fluid space for awareness, closeness and interspecies knowledge.

of resistance, for tension, contradiction, and conflict. Lorde's essay, "Poetry is not a Luxury" challenges the dualistic structure of public/private, theory/poetry. The latter was never meant to serve as the other: "The white father told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us - the poet - whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free."⁶⁴ Just as poetry provides for Lorde the "sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring ideas," hooks reimagines the concept of domesticity, or home, as a "public act of resistance" for black women who considered home in contradiction, both in servitude to more powerful white families and appreciating her own as a place of power, freedom and creativity: "domestic space has been a crucial site for organizing, for forming political solidarity."⁶⁵

Once thought to be a place of exile, these feminist scholars have messed with and subverted the categorical binaries that usually work to keep them away from the world. The material reality of women's lives, of all human lives, includes animals — and though it has always included nonhuman animals, it is just recently that their presence has been considered meaningful for producing new relationships and rituals. Haraway provides the theoretical foundation by which the human/animal binary is disrupted while Rich, Lorde, and hooks offer a path to reinterpret the home as a site of power and knowledge. What does it mean to live with animals? How does this relationship bring about power to both humans and animals? In *Pets in America: A History*, Katherine Grier suggests that animals moved into the home (and not just in the barn or tied up in the yard) around the 1830s. There was the belief among many Protestant communities that the household, domestic space was the "the Eden of Home," or a "microcosm

⁶⁴ Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider*. (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1984), 38.

⁶⁵ bell hooks. "Homeplace: a site of resistance." *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. (Chicago: South Bend Press, 1990), 388.

of heaven on earth.”⁶⁶ As animals had fallen beside Adam and Eve, it was believed that they were important to restoring “kind relations between humans and animals was a [vital] step toward rebuilding paradise.”⁶⁷

Human-animal studies

Cary Wolfe, in his 2009 article, “Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities” states that attempting to present a comprehensive summary of the new and flourishing field of animal studies is “a bit like herding cats... ‘the animal,’ when you think about it, is everywhere (including in the metaphors, similes, proverbs, and narratives we have relied on for centuries - millennia, even).”⁶⁸ Wolfe’s sentiments echo those of Kenneth Shapiro, over ten years before in *Society and Animals*, one of the first academic journals dedicated to human-animal studies:

When we pause and reflect on it, the continued broad scope, pervasiveness and varied form of animals in our lives is surprising. The dominant image of the modern world is a human-centered and technologically dense landscape. The baying of horses in the streets has long been drowned out by the whirring of motors. Yet our world is still replete with animals in the street, home, nursing home, consulting room, at the ‘feeder,’ in the city alley and city park, in the lab on the farm, in the stream, in the wild...⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Katherine Grier. *Pets in American: A History*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 171.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶⁸ Cary Wolfe. "Human, All Too Human: "Animal Studies" and the Humanities." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 124, no. 2 (March 2009), 564.

⁶⁹ Kenneth J. Shapiro. “Editor Introduction.” *Society and Animals* 1, Issue 1 (1993), 1.

Human-animal studies, at times called animal studies or animality studies, is quite simply the study of the relationship between human and nonhuman species. Many HAS scholars situate the rough origins of the discipline with Peter Singer's *Animals Liberation* and Tom Regan's *A Case for Animal Rights*, both published in the 1970s. Others have traced the origins back further with the work of E. E. Evans-Pritchard whose seminal work on the Nuer nilotic communities included animals, particularly cattle, as engaging contributors to the community's cultural and religious structures. Since the 1970s, but particularly in the last 25 years, scholars from around the world and within many academic disciplines, have engaged with and confronted 'the question of the animal,' or the literal and symbolic animal who, despite its perpetual presence, remains neglected and illusive in the study of religion, art, history, politics, and society, among others.

Like the new ways in which individuals are connecting and engaging with death through social media, it would seem that HAS has been propelled and sustained by a sincere popular interest and attention to animals, in a multiplicity of ways. Education and advocacy are reaching new platforms and are being transmitted through new ways of global communication, particularly through social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Despite the recent public and popular energy for issues such as factory farming, dog meat festivals, whaling, and captivity, Wolfe argues that the landmark publication for HAS was Donna Haraway's 1991 *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*: "with remarkable interdisciplinary synthesis that in effect defined a new, resolutely cultural studies era in which would come to called animal studies."⁷⁰ With *Primate Visions*, Haraway broke through disciplinary boundaries, between natural and social sciences, between humanities and

⁷⁰ Cary Wolfe. "Human, All Too Human," 565.

posthumanities, and between human and animal, a division that has persisted since Aristotle. Haraway argues that the disciplines within the humanities and social sciences had something meaningful to contribute regarding the ways in which animals are examined, sorted, and treated within natural and life science discourses.

Fittingly, *Primate Visions* explored the lives of apes and monkeys, which Haraway interpreted as occupying a border zone between human and almost. Haraway argues that “primates existing at the boundaries of so many hopes and interests are wonderful subjects with whom to explore the permeability of walls, the reconstitution of boundaries, the distaste of endless socially enforced dualisms.”⁷¹ Haraway’s powerful words simultaneously critique a long tradition of scientific discourse while also encouraging the disruption of categorical and dialectic dualism. Throughout this project, I argue that companion animals occupy this liminal space between human and not, as they have become part of the family, though never human.

James Serpell’s *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships*, published in 1986 inspired a disproportionate number of quantitative studies in sociology and psychology on human-companion relationships in the mid-1990s. The humanities, including philosophy which posed the question in the first place, joined the conversation in greater numbers, some under the rubric of posthumanities. The natural sciences have tagged along as well, now specifically asking questions about human-animal relationships and animal intersubjectivity and cognition, such as Marc Bekoff’s explorations of cognitive ethology and the innovations in animal behavior science by Temple Grandin. In 1997, Jacques Derrida published *The Animal That Therefore I Am* based on a seminar called, “The Autobiographical Animals.”

⁷¹ Donna Haraway. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge, 1989), 3.

Derrida was seemingly haunted by the question English philosopher Jeremy Bentham asked in 1781: it is not, can they reason? But can they suffer? From Aristotle to Heidegger, from Descartes to Kant, from Levinas to Lacan, “the animal” has been neglected and deprived of whatever is presumed to be ‘proper’ for a human: “speech or reason, the *logos*, history, laughing, mourning, burial, the gift, and so on.”⁷² Derrida further suggests that the exploitation and degradation of nonhuman animals begins with the categorical and linguistic distinction of “the animal.” By using the word in the singular, *all* animals are put into one category, radically opposed to the human world.⁷³ Broadly speaking, this distinction is important, particularly when discussing companion animals. While I broadly discuss “companion animals” as a category and part of interspecies families, one should not assume that companion animals are in anyway a homogeneous group. Living with dogs is different from living with cats or pigs. Individual dogs differ in living together with conspecifics and humans. In addition to questioning the ways in which we talk about the proverbial animal, Derrida also discusses actual animals, particularly his female cat that stares at him as he walked naked around his apartment: “he understood that actual animals look back at actual human beings.”⁷⁴

For Kari Weil, feminist and HAS scholar and literary critic, in *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?*, it was Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s 1987 publication, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that took a counter-linguistic turn with “an effort to lay claim to what lies outside language or to destroy language and the meaningful relations it

⁷² Jacques Derrida. *The Animal that Therefore I am (More to Follow)*. David Wills, trans. *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (Winter, 2002), 373.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁷⁴ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 19.

enables.”⁷⁵ It would seem that language is too limited to understand the human-animal relationship; and with this, Deleuze and Guattari create “becoming-animal” as a sublime experience, rather than what Haraway would refer to as the ordinary, mundane muddiness of co-constitutive entanglements, or the ways in which humans and animals arise in corresponding motion. Unlike Deleuze and Guattari, Vicki Hearne, an animal trainer, poet, and philosopher, claimed in the 1980s that it was actually through and by language, the language of training, that an interspecies community of humans and animals could be created and maintained, with the recognition that this could only occur for “trainable” species.

Whether scholars transcend or employ language, the questions of interspecies communication and knowability remains a site of contention and uncertainty. One particular contentious site is the issue of anthropomorphism, or the attribution of human characteristics, emotions, and/or behavior to nonhuman animals (or gods, or objects). Anthropomorphism has been viewed as “bad science” for the professional researcher and no more than “sentimentalism” for those living with animals, primarily “pet owners.” Sociologists Janet and Steven Alger suggest that this traditional and entrenched perspective actually “serves powerful interests in limiting our knowledge of the natural and well-documented empathy between species.”⁷⁶ They further argue completely that discarding anthropomorphism actually promotes the use (and exploitation) of animals without the moral and ethical considerations that come with communicative and empathetic relationships.

⁷⁵ Kari Weil. “A Report on the Animal Turn.” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2010), 12

⁷⁶ Janet Alger and Steven Alger. “Cat Culture, Human Culture: An Ethnographic Study of a Cat Shelter.” *Society and Animals* 7, no. 3., (1999), 203.

Perspectives on anthropomorphism vary among HAS scholars. There has, however, been a significant rethinking about the anthropomorphized interspecies relationship, in both humanities and scientist scholarship. In attempting to bridge the gap between perspectives, Marc Bekoff introduces *Minding Animals* with his own dog:

Jethro is a dog of few barks, but when he speaks it behooves me and others to listen well, for his messages are drenched with deep insights into, among others, human nature. I let him speak freely, for I am ultimately (and other animals') voice in matters concerning his life and I want to know what he has to say. His language his richer and deeper than words.⁷⁷

The projection of human characteristics onto animals is perhaps a site and path to deeper meaning and knowledge. This is important to keep in mind as this work explores the intimate and familial relationship between humans and animals in the home.

Within the past fifteen years, anthropologists have also begun to significantly reevaluate and reassess basic assumptions about human-animal relationships. In “Animals and Anthropology,” Molly Mullins argues that one major change was the consideration of the human-animal relationship as topic of worthy study in and of itself: “Animals are less often perceived as a vehicle with which to explore a particular social formation or process, as might have seemed the case in ethnographic classics,” such as Geertz’s *The Interpretation of Culture* (1973) and Evans Pritchard’s *The Neur: A Description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people* (1950). Moving away from this tradition of recognizing animals for only their use, recent anthropological works, such as that of Tim Ingold, emphasize that the

⁷⁷ Marc Bekoff. *Minding Animals: Awareness, Emotion and Heart*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), xv.

traditional separations between nature and culture, human and animal are neither static nor universal categories. In his important article, “Hunting and Gathering as Ways of Perceiving the Environment,” Ingold states that “...apprehending the world is not a matter of construction but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view *of* the world but of taking up a view *in* it.”⁷⁸

Disrupting the human/animal binary has become a hallmark of both human-animal studies and posthumanism. Further within anthropological and sociological inquiries, Ingold’s work has inspired “multispecies ethnography” by which “ethnographic research and writing [are] attuned to life’s emergence within a shifting assemblage of agentive beings. By ‘beings’ we are suggesting both biophysical entities as well as the magical ways object animate life itself.”⁷⁹

While this project does not include fieldwork (beyond the author searching and gathering information via social media), it lays a theoretical and researched foundation for future fieldwork and surveying of human-companion animal relationships in the home, particularly in regards to how humans attend to and treat companion animals at the end of life and in death. This future fieldwork could potentially provide further understanding of what the human-companion animal relationship looks like in the home.

Animals and Religion

In *The Question of the Animal and Religion*, Aaron Gross theorizes animals and religion while pointing to and examining a particular instance of animal abuse at AgriProcessors, one the

⁷⁸ Tim Ingold. “Hunting and Gathering as Ways of Perceiving the Environment.” *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 35.

⁷⁹ Laura A. Ogden, et al. “Animals, Plants, People, and Things: A Review of Multispecies Ethnography.” *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 4 (2013), p. 6

largest religiously-identified and kosher slaughterhouses in the world. Gross' text moves to engage with animals studies "to both expose the absent presence of animals in the history of the study of religion and clear space for their future - inside and outside the academy."⁸⁰ By "absent presence," Gross acknowledges the presence of animals in religious doctrine, discourse, and practice but calls for further engagement and critical attention to the meaningful presence of animals in the study of religion. Inspired by similar "forgotten ancestors," religion scholars have looked to the literary works of J.M Coetzee, Franz Kafka and Walter Benjamin, the anthropological works of Claude Levi-Strauss (who argued that animals are "good to think with") and Tim Ingold, as well as the theoretical works of Donna Haraway and Derrida. While these ancestors have imagined and reimagined "the animal," contemporary religion scholars are beginning to entangle themselves in interpreting symbolic and real animals mentioned in canonical texts while also critically inquiring as to how religious and spiritual traditions treat, engage, kill, love, eat, and *attend* to actual animals.⁸¹

These exploratory threads bring about questions of ethics: is it ethical to keep pets? While numerous scholars work on animal ethics (within advocacy, policy, and philosophy), two have taken on this specific question: bioethicist Jessica Pierce and sociologist Leslie Irvine. The latter, in "Pampered or Enslaved? The Moral Dilemmas of Pets," makes the case that "the relationship between humans and animals have depended on how any given society defines animals and what

⁸⁰ Aaron Gross. *The Question of the Animal and Religion*. Columbia University Press, New York: 2015, 7

⁸¹ The study of animals in religion (particularly of animals as objects of rituals and religious slaughter and animals as subjected to the whims and power of humans) is quite new. However, there is already a myriad of texts that focus on animals in religious thought. These includes Paul Waldau's *The Specter of Speciesism: Buddhist and Christian Views of Animals* (2012), Charles Patterson's *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (2002), and Ingvild Saelid Gilhus' *Animals, Gods, and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman, and Early Christian Ideas* (2006).

it means to associate with them. In the end,” Irvine argues, “the same must apply today: what we currently know about animals demands wrestling with the moral implications of keeping them as pets.”⁸² Keith Thomas, in *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*, notes that pet-keeping “reflects the tendency [of people] to withdraw into their own small family unit for their greatest emotional satisfactions.”⁸³ With urbanization, companion animals were often left without outdoor space and contact with other animals, and according to Thomas, “the pet is a creature of its owner’s way of life.”⁸⁴ Irvine raises the question of whether, given what we know about animals, particularly about their cognitive capacity and capabilities, what kind of obligations do humans have to them? In response, she posits two possible positions, both acknowledging animals as self-aware, “which at the most basic level, means that they can feel pain.”⁸⁵ The first position is simply about not suffering; this position recognizes that animals have an interest in not suffering but they are not concerned about what plans their human companion has laid out for them. While this position “seems to accommodate pet keeping nicely,” it does not go far enough for Irvine; there is more to living with an animal. Irvine’s second position “agrees that animals have the ability to feel pain and, presumably, pleasure. However, it contends that they can feel *for some reason* beyond just having the sensations as ends in themselves.”⁸⁶ This perspective sees animals not as things, but as subjects, interested in

⁸² Leslie Irvine. “Pampered or Enslaved? The Moral Dilemmas of Pets.” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 24, issue 9 (2004), 6.

⁸³ Keith Thomas. *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*. (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1983), 119.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

their own living. Irvine argues that if we recognize that animals should not be treated as things and that they have intrinsic value, outside of their relationship with humans, it is unethical to keep them as pets.

While this project will contribute to the field of animal ethics, it will offer an alternative argument. What if animals were not treated as things? What if their intrinsic value was expressed in mutually positive and beneficial ways? What if companion animals were considered fully-fledged family members? What if animals could be incorporated as religious subjects into ethical practice? As Irvine mentions, no matter how much pets are pampered, they are still considered property under the law. But perhaps the new ways in which to consider companion animals could rethink certain policies. This project asserts that by attending to animals at the end of life and in death, humans can genuinely exhibit awareness of an animal's inherent value. Perhaps including companion animals in familial and religious rituals, as part of the family, and attending to their bodies and spirits at the end-of-life could work further to change cultural perceptions of animals.

Gross' work carries on these goals and those of animal and religion scholars in the mid-2000s, to see the world, particularly animals and the environment, as a "communion of subjects," rather than a "collection of objects."⁸⁷ *A Communion of Subjects*, the edited collection by Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton published only twelve years ago in 2006, began to define the parameters of the study of animals and religion. In addition to understanding the religious or spiritual implications of animal subjectivities, this text also recognized that "a very different set of complexities arises from the fact that the living beings outside our own species

⁸⁷ Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton. *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 11.

can be startlingly different from one another.”⁸⁸ Both within religious studies and other disciplines, it is important to understand the dangers of generalizing and simplifying other species. In addition to recognizing the diversity and multiplicity of species and personality within nonhuman animals, Waldau and Patton note that “most religious traditions include the insight that actions speak louder about what one really believes than do spoken or written words. Accordingly, what religious traditions truly ‘think’ about other animals is, at least in part, represented by believers’ treatment ‘on the ground,’ as it were, of other living beings.”⁸⁹

These diverse realms of inquiry provide a sound footing by which to explore the death and dying of companion animals. The work done by scholars of death and dying studies and the nature of the death awareness and hospice movements that have come to define death and dying in the 20th century United States, offer the opportunity for comparison and innovation as to how these issues may include and attend to companion animals. While the work of Donna Haraway and other feminist and HAS scholars have already begun to rethink the connections and distinctions between human and animals, scholarship in religion provides space for consideration and inclusion of animals, as part of humans’ religious realities, in ritual and spiritual practice. For the first time, a project within the study of religion and death and dying will confront the significance of companion animals.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 13

⁸⁹ Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton, *A Communion of Subjects*, 15

CHAPTER 3

AMERICAN COMPANION ANIMALS: A HISTORY

Just in the past 20 years, there has been a concerted and powerful effort across disciplines to historically situate and locate “the animal” within the social, political, and economic fabric of human society and culture.⁹⁰ To embark on a comprehensive and evolutionary history of companion animals is an enormous task, one that lies outside the scope of this particular study. However, these works, highlighted in what follows, provide a foundation for this chapter on the history of pet keeping in America. Focusing particularly on the ways in which humans shared their homes and domestic space with animals, this chapter traces the path of pets, or companion animals, in 20th and 21st century America by looking backwards to 18th and 19th century Victorian England and Protestant America and moving forward to understand the contemporary place and relationship of companion animals in 21st century American interspecies families. To explore the path of American companion animals, from outside to inside the home, I rely heavily on historians, economists, and animal studies scholars who focus on the human-animal relationship as both intimate and profitable. In addition to tracking the rise of the pet industry, to support the new role of companion animals in the family, I also use pet ownership statistics from a variety of market research organizations, such as the American Pet Product Association.

⁹⁰ In no particular order, these are just a few of the publications that have documented thousands of years of human-animal relationships. Margaret DeMello. *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. Aubrey Manning and James Serpell, eds. *Animals and Human Society: Changing perspectives*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994. Richard W. Bulliet. *Hunters, herders, and hamburgers: the past and future of human-animal relationships*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

In their 2017-2018 Pet Ownership survey, the American Pet Products Association (APPA) found that 68% (around 84.6 million) of American households have a pet.⁹¹ While this survey specifically includes dogs, cats, bird, salt and freshwater fish, reptiles, small animals such as rabbits and hamsters, and horses, studies have shown that human caregivers can form a meaningful and intimate relationship with a wide variety of species including animals most often categorized as livestock. Even an introductory search through Instagram, a well-established social media platform now being used to bring attention to animal lives, will show unique interspecies relationships, between humans and chickens, cows, and even alpacas.⁹² According to this survey, individuals born between 1980 and 1994 (Generation Y, as the survey notes, though also known as “millennials”) have now replaced Baby Boomers (individuals born between 1946 and 1964) as the largest group of pet owners. Animals are being brought into the home like never before and the amount of money spent on food, preventative and emergency medical care, toys, beds, and countless other accessories meant to provide a good home, signals a rapidly changing family. In fact, in a recent survey, 81% of pet owners consider their companion animals to be family members. Beside the significant rise in pet insurance for medical care, there are other indicators of the depth of familial positioning that humans have bestowed on certain animals. The APPA survey notes that 78% of dog owners and 67% of cat owners present their pets with gifts, particularly during holidays such as Christmas and Chanukah, as well as for the animal’s

⁹¹ This appears to be the most comprehensive collected data we have on pet ownership, or interspecies families or households.

⁹² <https://www.instagram.com/codyalpaca/?hl=en> | <https://www.instagram.com/estherthewonderpig/?hl=en> | <https://www.instagram.com/thedodo/?hl=en>

birthday.⁹³ There have been numerous popular studies done that note the potential benefits of owning a pet,⁹⁴ such as the physical health benefits of walking and exercise, lower stress levels, and related cardiac issues and the mental/emotional health benefits of affection, companionship, love, community, and belonging. And while dog and reptile owners were most likely to see no drawbacks in welcoming a companion animal into the home, many human caregivers, for animals across species, recognize “sadness when they die” as a significant drawback.

How did companion animals come to be “part of the family”? How did companion animals come to potentially replace human children for many young millennials? How did companion animals come to be such a significant part of 21st century human families social and cultural fabric? Why are they now included in family, religious, and social gatherings? How and why do we mourn their deaths and offer careful attention to their dying? Why do we celebrate their birthdays and “gotcha-days”? While these questions help drive this chapter, they also create a framework for further investigation of companion animal death and dying in the following chapters.

Pet keeping in Victorian England

Harriet Ritvo argues in *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*, it was the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, that both “the deity who had created the world for human convenience” and “the unbridgeable gulf

⁹³ This is also a noticeable trend on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Personal, familial and intimate comments, videos, and photos are shared with social media communities celebrating animal birthday.

⁹⁴ Paul Cherniack and Ariella Cherniack. 2015. “Assessing the Benefits and Risks of Owning a Pet.” *Canadian Medical Journal Association Journal*. Vol. 185, no. 2, pp. 715-6. Bruce Headey. 1999. “Health Benefits and Health Cost Savings Due to Pets: Preliminary Estimates from an Australian National Survey.” *Social Indicators Research*. Vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 233-243.

that divided reasoning human being from [the] irrational brute” were eliminated, or at the very least, called into serious question: “*On the Origin of Species* itself dethroned both God and humankind almost implicitly.”⁹⁵ While these statements should not be taken literally (considering God did not disappear from cultural life in Europe or the United States in 19th and into the 20th and 21st centuries), the sentiment was powerful; Darwin’s work had publicly argued that humans were not in fact the most important and central godly creation. Seemingly expanding on Linnaean taxonomy, Darwin’s work reinforced human intellectual domination while simultaneously signifying humans as animals, or humans as part of and descent from nonhuman species. While there are multiple avenues through which to explore animals in Victorian England, and how human relationships with animals were informed by Victorian norms - such as public animal slaughter in the market place, animals for entertainment in circuses, and wild animals explored through amateur and academic natural history - this chapter will focus primarily on domestic pet keeping and the intimate companionship formed between humans and animals within the home. And while the home was not necessarily a new site of animal habitat,⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Harriet Ritvo. *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 39.

⁹⁶ In addition to farmers sharing a roof with their livestock, during the 16th century witch trials in England, “familiar” were often used as evidence, pointing to the guilt of a woman accused of being a witch. According to James Serpell in “Guardians Spirits of Demonic Pets: The Concept of the Witch’s Familiar in Early Modern England, 1530-1712,” familiars, such as cats, dogs, ferrets, rats, or toads, were “represented as a relatively autonomous being whose function was to serve as the witch’s magical agent or emissary in the performance of acts of *maleficium*; that is, harming other people, their livestock, or property by supernatural means.” The relationship between these women and their familiars was not, however, one-sided. Witches attended to their familiars, providing shelter in wool-lined pots and food, usually the scraps of her own food. Serpell states that this “particularly English belief” in the importance of familiars is dubious. In his 1933 publication, *Witchcraft and Demonism*, C. L’Estrange Ewen argued that familiars were significantly identified in “the pet-keeping habits of socially isolated women,” as they made companions out of animals more readily and easily than their neighbors. Keith Thomas as well, in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, also argued that familiars were probably just companion animals of lonely women, “the only friends these lonely old women possessed.” Serpell concludes something different - that witches’ relationship with animals can be found in their shamanistic belief of shapeshifting into animals forms by which to secretly travel, particularly to their ritual space, and the spiritual representations of demons as animals.

the home in Victorian England became a site of moral, ethical, and spiritual education and practice.

According to Ritvo, pets, particularly dogs, were kept by the British “from the beginning of recorded history” but the attention and care given to animals used for breeding, “companionship and amusement, was rather new, especially outside the highest social ranks” in Victorian England. Prior to the 17th century, pets were kept by royalty and those within privileged religious orders, and while dogs were present during the Renaissance as working animals (herding sheep, pulling carts), “pet dogs remained the province of the upper classes particularly of their female members.”⁹⁷ However, Keith Thomas suggests, in *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*, that up until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, humans often shared their domestic space with many species domesticated animals, such as cows, mules, sheep, dogs, cats, and horses, and would even use the same entrance into the ‘long house’ that included both human house and byre. Rural residents often considered these animals individuals, with recognizable faces, the ability to communicate, and as Thomas notes, “were often treated as morally responsible,” particularly horses and dogs, having been trained through a complex system of reward and punishment, “developing an individual ‘character’ in the process.” Thus animals themselves were put on trial (literally, in some cases) for crimes against the community, particularly bestiality and homicide.⁹⁸ According to Thomas, animals were in many ways “subsidiary members of the human community, bound by mutual

⁹⁷ Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, 85.

⁹⁸ Keith Thomas. *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*. (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1983), 97.

self-interest to their owners, who were dependent on their fertility and wellbeing.”⁹⁹ Thomas locates the origins of pet keeping further back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when “pets seemed to have really established themselves as a normal feature of the middle-class household, especially in the towns, where animals were less likely to be functional necessities.”¹⁰⁰ Pet keeping, to some extent, crossed economic boundaries during this time, from poor farmers’ working dogs to aristocratic lapdogs. However, no matter the type of animal, keeping pets was a privilege, something that families had to afford, and these were “favored” animals. It was not until the late 18th and into the 19th century that animals took a more defined role within the ordinary family. Ritvo and others have noted that “by the middle of the nineteenth century, what has been called the Victorian cult of pets was firmly established.”¹⁰¹ The move toward domestic pet keeping, in the home, was driven by a multitude of factors, including the development of technologies that allowed humans to rely less on animals for labor. It was not necessarily for the love of animals, which to some extent was consider foolish.¹⁰²

In her chapter on “Prize Pets,” Ritvo focuses on animal fanciers (of specifically dogs and cats) in which a class of men grew to become connoisseurs of animal breeding. What started as an upper class and royal endeavor became an economic outlet for middle-class individuals and by the late 19th century was institutionalized through dog shows; the first was held in 1859. As dog shows continued to develop, there were attempts to categorize the growing variety of breeds,

⁹⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 110.

¹⁰¹ Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, 86.

¹⁰² Ibid, 86.

particularly into two classes, sporting and nonsporting, which was later adopted by the Kennel Club when it formed in 1873 as a way to combat “behind-the-scene” fraud at dog shows, such as ear clipping and hair-dyeing. While Ritvo focused on breeding as a way for middle-class urbanites to enter a traditionally royal and masculine venture, Sarah Amato in *Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture*, argues that “pet keeping became a mass consumerist enterprise by the end of the nineteenth century” while simultaneously driven by “imperatives of love, companionship, moral enhancement, utility, discipline, abuse, investment, and profit.”¹⁰³

Amato’s *Beastly Possessions* acts as a continuation of Ritvo’s 1987 work by examining the ways in which animals, particularly those considered pets, were made into mass commodities in Victorian urban spaces. Amato, however, focuses more on the social lives of the animals themselves rather than on the social and economic status animals gave to their human counterparts as “no well-to-do woman was complete with a pet” on her lap. Amato argues that when animals became residents of the home, the latter was “already imbued with symbolic and moral meaning. Pets were special possessions, contributing to the atmosphere of the home and signaling to outsiders the domestic harmony of its inhabitants.”¹⁰⁴

Amato recognizes that “victorian relationship to animals were fraught with tensions and offered a means of exploring ideas about human kinship with animals, at a time when this was a pressing issue and a subject of widespread interest, made increasingly prescient by Darwinian

¹⁰³ Sarah Amato. *Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 22-3.

¹⁰⁴ Amato, *Beastly Possessions*, 7.

science.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, Victorians were simultaneously given affirmation of their “affinities and affections” toward animals while attempting to reconcile the similarities and finer boundary between them.

Like other scholars investigating the history of pet keeping, Amato looks to a variety of sources including “newspaper reports, social investigations, manuals, guidebooks, printed ephemera, lithographic images, and photographs...novels, museum collections of advertisements, postcards, toys, art, ornaments, and taxidermy.”¹⁰⁶ These ordinary items, as Amato and Katherine Grier argue, give us the most genuine glimpse into the social, cultural and everyday lives of animals throughout the 18th, 19th, and into the 20th centuries. The Victorian era, with its rich material culture, in regards to both animals and death practices, sets the stage for a more thorough look at the social lives of companion animals in the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century.

Amato defines “pet” as any animal designated as such, an unassuming but powerful definition also employed by this study. This designation was not simple, however, and simultaneously enacted both “rituals of possession” and familial intimacy that seemed to changed the domestic space, enrolling both human and animal in consumer culture.”¹⁰⁷ According to Thomas, pets during this period were defined by three particular features: they cohabited with humans in the domestic space, they were given personal names, and they were

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 8. “Darwin provided Victorians with a narrative about human evolution that was both liberating and unsettling.” Within fifteen years, Darwin had published *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal* (1872).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 15

¹⁰⁷ Amato, *Beastly Possessions*, 23.

never eaten. During the Victorian period, Amato argues, “pet keeping was a multifaceted endeavor; there were so many ways of being a pet and pet keeper that Victorians were divided on these matters, and these divisions were often manifested across class lines.”¹⁰⁸ For example, Amato points to the ways in which the urban poor were more often affiliated with keeping birds and small rodents, as they were less expensive to maintain than dogs. The variety of animals kept as pets in Victorian England largely resemble the ones kept in 21st century United States, with some deviation, such as small monkeys (which were more plentiful for ordinary people in the 17th and 18th centuries) and reptiles (which seem to be more abundant, or more acceptable today). Acquiring a pet in the Victorian era was relatively easy; one could obtain any variety of animals from a street vendor, a classified advertisement, or within the more rural environments if one was searching for squirrels, toads, and rabbits. Amato suggests that Victorian advertising for pets inspire particular questions regarding the apparent lack of emotional attachment humans had to their pets during this time period. For example, one ad states “Charming Persian kittens, old china. Want winter dress material. Ditto for handsome mantle, long cloth, for cape or cash.”¹⁰⁹ Animals were a commodity.

Actually keeping pets in Victorian England, similar to 21st century United States, involved different products of love, affection, obedience and captivity such as cages, collars, chains, and muzzles. “As a pet, the animal could become a companion, food stuff, and fancy animal, as well as a source of status, profit, moral righteousness, and social mobility, but animals were not always obedient, their status as pets had to be continually reaffirmed through ongoing

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 16

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 36

discipline.”¹¹⁰ By the end of the 19th century, brands of pet food, particularly dog and cat food, as well as bird seed, were being marketed to Victorian English households. And by the beginning of the 20th century, department stores in England had dedicated entire sections to pet accessories. The first commercial dog food was Spratt’s Patent, Limited, originating in England and moving to the United States by the late 19th century. According to Grier, Spratt’s was the a relentless advertiser, “recognizing that it had to create demand for a product that no dog owners felt they needed.”¹¹¹ By the 1950s, the pet food industry was booming, with specific and individual food products for dogs, cats, birds, and exotic animals, and “large enough to spawn its own lobbying and public information arm, the Pet Food Institute,” which today covers 98% of the pet food and treat industry and is worth over \$29 billion.¹¹²

During the mid-19th century, there was an explosion of publications — books, magazine, guidebooks, manuals — about the etiquette and norms of pet keeping. While Amato states that “the existence of these print materials suggests the extent to which pet keeping became a profitable and consumerist enterprise,”¹¹³ Grier argues that the rise in pet keeping publications was in response to the number of families welcoming pets into their domestic spaces, into their homes. Either way, readers of these publications soon began to engage through these media and platforms, seeking advice, and forming communities of pet keepers. This history and imprint of engaging and building a community of interspecies families is important to keep in mind as the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 39

¹¹¹ Grier, *Pets in America*, 368.

¹¹² Ibid., 379. Also see: “A National Pawprint: Economic Impact of U.S. Pet Food and Treat Makers.” Pet Food Institute, 2017. <https://www.petfoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Pet-Food-By-the-Numbers.pdf>

¹¹³ Amato, *Beastly Possessions*, 37

history of this relationship moves through the 20th and into the 21st century. Walking down any contemporary urban city street, particularly in the direction of the local dog park, one will undoubtedly find a community of companion animals and their humans. Oftentimes resembling a playground, dog parks have become sites of communities of interspecies family.

With the large repertoire of Victorian guidebooks and manuals on pet keeping came the analogy to child rearing which, according to Amato, “was not coincidental: pets were trained, much like children, to adopt habits of cleanliness, politeness, and dependency. The point of such efforts was to make pets dutiful, compliant, and moral members of the household.”¹¹⁴ Grier argues that through the domestic ethic of kindness, animals were invited into the domestic sphere to act as ethical guides for children in an effort to teach morality, kindness, and responsibility. With pet keeping also came the managing of pets through obedience training, at times through cruelty, which is still very much present in pet training of the 21st century. Amato states that when it came to unmanageable pets, cruelty was condoned and could manifest in multiple ways, such as “the killing of unwanted offspring to cropping, painting, and dyeing for sale or the show circuit, and to various forms of neglect” and physical abuse.¹¹⁵ We know of Victorian mistreatment because by 1910, pet keeping periodicals were publishing the do’s and don’ts for “pet lovers” such as “don’t hang your canary in the broiling sun” or “don’t make your dog run for miles after your bicycle” or “don’t punish your pet because you lose your temper.”¹¹⁶ This was not to say that animals were not attended to and treated with kindness; many authors of pet

¹¹⁴ Amato, *Beastly Possessions*, 44.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹⁶ Amato, *Beastly Possessions*, 46.

keeping guides found that kindness to animals was a way to cultivate one's own loving kindness toward other humans. Children, especially, were encouraged to learn through pet keeping, particularly in developing moral character. There were also significant changes in how humans viewed animals as sentient beings, with the ability to love and feel pain; animals, like children, were seen as innocent.

Similar to 21st century practices, Victorian companion humans demonstrated the power of their relationships with animals "by the lengths to which they would go to ensure the health and comfort of their animals." By the end of the nineteenth century, "pet care was increasingly big business, and treatments for various ailments could be purchased alongside pet food and medicine for people. Many treatments were similar to the patent medicines and remedies that were available to humans."¹¹⁷ Companion animal care in general began to mirror the treatment of humans, particularly children.

Into the 21st century, much of what is known about the human-animal relationship within the home is seen through the lens of consumerism. The National Pet Owners Survey, which claims to aid in helping manufacturers and pet service providers make market decisions, has been surveying pet owner attitudes and practices since 1983. Amato concludes her discussion of pet keeping as a mass consumer enterprise with the same complexities that she notes layer Victorian pet keeping; mainly, that Victorian pet keeping was not a universal trend, taking only one shape, with only particular types of animals. With a variety of animals and a multitude of ways to obtain pets (including straight from the "natural world"), Victorians of all walks of life - "from poor to rich and young to old" - were able to keep pets. Unlike other scholars, who mostly

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 48.

argue that pet keeping in Victorian England was a bourgeois endeavor, Amato argues for a larger scale consumer pet keeping market giving more people the opportunity to keep pets. Despite being an “object of exchange,” pets in Victorian England, “from the moment [it] was designated a pet through to its death...served its owner by providing loyalty, companionship, instruction, utility, revenue, food, and fame. Pet keeping was potentially emotionally satisfying, lucrative, and prestigious for all participants. Victorians were passionate about their pets.”¹¹⁸

Teresa Mangum, in “Animal Angst: Victorians Memorialize their Pets,” continuously returns to an important contradiction in the ways in which Victorians attended to and treated animals: there was, simultaneously, both the “devaluing of most animal life, on one hand, and the heightened attachment to *pets*, on the other.”¹¹⁹ Despite these opposing views, Mangum argues that “pet owners attempted to signify the value of an animal through our species’ practices of mourning and memorialization.”¹²⁰ Mourning and memorialization of a companion animal seemingly obscured the reality of the animal as property. Whatever the contradiction, Victorian pet owners were hit with deep emotions upon their animals’ death and Mangum argues that to reconcile this paradox, Victorians had to believe that animals could love in return and that the relationship and their life deserved to be mourned. While further details of Victorian mourning practices will be explored in another chapter, it is important to acknowledge how this deep and intimate relationship developed. In exploring mourning practices in America, this study will

¹¹⁸ Amato, *Beastly Possessions*, 55.

¹¹⁹ Teresa Mangum. “Animal Angst: Victorians Memorialize their Pets.” In *Victorian Animal Dreams*. eds. Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 18.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

situate how the features of these practices can be found in the history of Victorian mourning protocol and how American human companions are working to imagine and create new rituals.

Animal Welfare in Victorian England and America

Part of understanding the contemporary situation of companion animals in American homes is to look back to the rise of the animal welfare and antivivisection movements of the mid-nineteenth century. While these organization would eventually develop into strains of the animals rights and animal advocacy movements, the concern for animal welfare, and particularly efforts against vivisection, created a new way of seeing and attending to animal lives. In Victorian England, one of the first examples of such critical attention to welfare, and thus the development of a sustained consideration of animal suffering, was the working horse. In Kathryn Miele's "Horse-Sense: Understanding the Working Horse in Victorian London," she argues that "several important studies of animals in Victorian Britain have considered the ways that animals served as surrogates for the discussion of human relationships" but few have considered the ways in which Victorian humans related to/identified with animals as animals. Noting the significance of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, "humans were now animals; the theological line that had separated humanity from animals as a distinct creation was no longer tenable."¹²¹ Working primarily from anecdotal evidence, such as periodicals, Miele examines the ways in which these authors "communicate their understanding of the experiences of working horses in order to advance the reform of the care and treatment of such horses."¹²² By noticing the response of horses to environmental changes, by physically touching the horse, by empathizing with the

¹²¹ Kathryn Miele. "Horse-Sense: Understanding the Working Horse in Victorian London." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37, no. 1 (2009), 129.

¹²² Kathryn Miele, "Horse-Sense," 130.

distress and toil of a horse's daily life, by recognizing a moral and communicative potential in horses, and by asking the reader to consider the horse's time spent not working, authors of these periodicals asked readers to consider the perspectives of the horse, which until the development of automobiles was a deeply connected animal to multiple aspects of human life through work, travel, food, and agriculture.

While many scientists and scholars opposed the use of any "anecdotal methodology," while attempts to gain knowledge through the collection of subjective human experiences, Miele argues that "this was the way ordinary people tried to make sense of the animal mind" and provided support to the "development of an ethical discourse based on empathy."¹²³ Miele further suggests that "it was not necessarily easy to see (or to touch, or to feel) the sufferings of the working horse in Victorian London, whether because of the barriers that existed as impediments to understanding, or because it was too painful to allow oneself to develop an awareness of such suffering. The experience of the horse was both persistently visible and invisible (especially as pain is invisible): seen and felt, and yet ultimately inaccessible."¹²⁴

Another early stage of animal welfare advocacy was the development of the antivivisection movement. In "Women and Antivivisection in Late Nineteenth-Century America," Craig Buettinger argues that the beginnings of the American antivivisection movement was made up of multiple social groups, but particularly clergy and middle class women: "Antivivisectionists comprised influential contingents inside the nation's anti-cruelty societies (SPCAs) and they had their own organizations, notably the American Antivivisection

¹²³ Ibid., 130.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 138.

Society (AAVS), founded in Philadelphia in 1883” during a meeting called by the Women’s Branch of the Pennsylvania SPCA.¹²⁵ The antivivisection movement began in the 1860s in Britain and America as “humane leaders reacted quickly to the appearance of the first animal experimentation laboratories.”¹²⁶ One of the first of these laboratories was at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. While early women leaders made a concerted effort to include clergymen and physicians in the antivivisection movement, AAVS was “quickly converted, however, into a woman’s movement.”¹²⁷ This was mainly due to a call, in 1887, to abolish all animal experimentation, and not just regulate vivisection and other animal experiments: “from the 1860s to the 1880s antivivisectionists had made the case that experiments were cruel, lacked utility, and morally brutalized the vivisectors themselves, three arguments still in force when AV became a women’s movement in the 1890s.”¹²⁸

While men held officer positions in the AAVS, it was its women members who led the movement through legislation and policy. Antivivisectionist leader Mary F. Lovell of Philadelphia, in addressing the National Council of Women (NCW) in March 1895, called out to her fellow NCW members: “O sister women, I appeal to you. Will you, with the chivalry which belongs to good and true womanhood, side with the suffering and the helpless? This wrong will never be righted until women do their part.” And Caroline E. White, Lovell’s fellow AAVS

¹²⁵ Craig Beuttlinger, “Women and Antivivisection in Late Nineteenth-Century America.” *Journal of Social History*. Issue 30, No. 4. Summer, 1997: p. 857.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 858.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 858.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 862.

member, “admonished her audience” in the same NCW meeting stating, “Remember your moral accountability.”¹²⁹

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) also took up the issue of vivisection in the 1890s and the women of AAVS gained a firm national footing. In Philadelphia, Mary Lovell was a member of the Pennsylvania WCTU and lobbied the organization to form the Department of Mercy which “endeavored to teach the ways of mercy to the young, especially through kindness to animals, and objected to particular vivisection in the schools.”¹³⁰ In her 1895 National Women’s Council speech, Lovell “enthusiastically [reported] that, thanks to WCTU efforts, the legislature in Washington state had just prohibited vivisection in all schools other than medical colleges on the grounds that it hardened the hearts of the young.”¹³¹

Lovell and White equated antivivisection causes with those of every Christian woman and mother: “In Lovell’s and White’s orations to the NCW and in the AV literature of the day, children could not be raised right nor America long remain a Christian nation if women did not do something about experiments on animals.”¹³² Recasting AV as a woman’s issue, American antivivisectionists in 1890s “proceeded first and foremost as Christian women” invoking Christian teachings of mercy, innocence and sinfulness of undo cruelty.¹³³ As hell became the metaphor for the laboratory, Lovell called for others to recognize that “we do not need to make

¹²⁹ Craig Beutinger, “Women and Antivivisection,” 857.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 860.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 860.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 862.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 863.

this earth a hell to God's innocent creatures."¹³⁴ By connecting antivivisection to motherhood, domestic life, and the ethical and spiritual upbringing of children, women made the last decade of the 19th century "the great age of AV legislation."¹³⁵

These anti-vivisection issues were founded on the Victorian sense of motherly obligation for the advancement of Christianity and "the molding of the young." Anti-vivisectionists truly believed "that animal experimentation threatened these sacred trusts. They agreed with Lovell that antivivisection was a cause for good and true women, and accepted White's counsel that women were morally accountable for what transpired in the labs."¹³⁶

Twenty years prior to the founding of Lovell and White's AAVS, Henry Bergh founded the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in 1866 New York in response to what he saw as the horrendous plight of cart horses. Today, the ASPCA is a national organization that supports other state and local, public and private agencies, that work to attend to the lives and deaths of animals in the United States. The ASPCA has focused its attention on animal rescue (such as those needed in a natural disaster,¹³⁷ animal fighting rings, and puppy mills), cruelty intervention (such as in cases of animal hoarding and domestic abuse), animal

¹³⁴ Ibid., 863.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 866.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 868.

¹³⁷ As I write this, Hurricane Harvey has dropped almost 40 inches of water on the city of Houston and surrounding areas. Like never before, I am witnessing families being evacuated, rescued from rising waters. These families are interspecies and include dogs on leashes, cats in crates and backpacks. Animal shelters in the area are reaching out on social media for help, echoing the same calls going unanswered by an overwhelmed 9-1-1 system. Unlike other disasters, animals are largely being welcomed on to rescue boats with their humans. (Perhaps this could be due to the private citizen fleets that have complemented the federal, state and local first responders and who do not necessarily have to abide by institutional restrictions.)

placements and pet population control, as well as lobbying for animal advocacy and legislative changes.

History of Pet keeping in America

To date, Katherine Grier's *Pets in America: A History* is the most comprehensive study of American pet keeping. Like Grier, the hope of this study is to imagine new perspectives about our households, our families, and our homes. Grier, and others working within animals studies, argues that when we recognize animal histories, we begin to understand how (companion) animals are deeply entwined in "human history," in everyday, mundane human life. Her work relies on a variety of information sources since there is little data about the exact pet population of 19th century America. Essays and instructional books, children's literature, pet portraits and photography, trade catalogs, advertisements for pet products, among other avenues of research recreate "the routine behavior of pet keepers" in the 19th century. Grier argues that during the decades prior to the Civil War, middle class American households "began to rethink their relationships with the animals living in and around" the home.¹³⁸

In 1851, a local Massachusetts farmer eulogized his beloved dog with a sentimental poem: "The faithful Dog which I have loved, / I have followed him to his last abode, / The booming gun, the mourning sob, / Have said to him their last farewell! / For him, far hence his Master will sigh, / And fancy comforts yet to come. / He'll never caress his 'Faithful Dog', / He'll only hear the booming gun."¹³⁹ The farmer buried his faithful dog under a weeping willow tree, a common symbol of death, with tears rolling down his cheeks, "like rain." According to

¹³⁸ Grier, Katherine. *Pets in America: A History*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 18.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

Grier, funerals for companion animals begin appearing in the historical record as early as 1800. However, it is not until 1830 that families begin to significantly mark the deaths of animals that lived in the home. Grier notes that in addition to creating funerary practices for animals (that will be discussed fully in another chapter), obituaries were published and mourning practices for animals reflected/resembled those held for humans.

In her “Childhood Socialization and Companion Animals: United States, 1820-1870,” Grier argues that “the practice of pet keeping, where children became stewards of companion animals who were then able to teach young humans such virtues as gratitude and fidelity, became a socially meaningful act.”¹⁴⁰ During the mid-nineteenth century, American families began to recognize that the relationship between animals and children was valuable in developing the life skills and character of children, primarily through a “new domestic ethic of kindness.”¹⁴¹ Incorporating animals into the family transfigured pet keeping from “personal indulgence” to “a morally purposive act.”¹⁴² These views reflected Victorian values in which “the home was the locus of religiosity.”¹⁴³ The domestic sphere became a haven, shielding the family from a heartless world, imagined and created as heaven, and “as the extension of the woman’s sphere.”¹⁴⁴ The domestic ethic of kindness was based on the idea that cruelty to animals “was one outward expression of inward moral collapse” and that animals deserved kind attention as

¹⁴⁰ Grier, Katherine. “Childhood Socialization and Companion Animals: United States, 1820-1870.” *Society and Animals* 7, no. 2 (1999), 95.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁴³ Braude, Ann. *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 24.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

“animals themselves were both emotional and moral beings occupying recognizable social roles.”¹⁴⁵

In “The Eden of Home: Changing Understandings of Cruelty and Kindness to Animals in Middle-Class American Households, 1820-1900,” Grier situates the domestic ethic of kindness the flourishing “self-conscious and energetic bourgeois culture” of 1820s and 1830s middle-class America, who had begun to “rethink their relationships to the nonhuman animals living in and around their households.”¹⁴⁶ Throughout Grier’s work, the domestic ethic of kindness is defined by three intersecting factors that also shaped Victorian culture in America: evangelical Protestantism, which is complex and multifaceted, gentility, and domesticity. The Second Great Awakening of the early and mid-19th century valued emotion and subjective experience as “the wellspring of belief” while focusing on the perfection of individual will and social progress. With gentility as the pursuit of personal and moral excellence, the history of human and animal companionship in America has been and continues to be defined by “the powerful 19th century cultural construct” of domesticity which simultaneously transformed the domestic sphere into “the primary medium for creating self-disciplined adults, a refuge from the masculine world of economic competition, and a model of the world as it should be, where the threat of naked power was supplanted by moral influence and feminine love.”¹⁴⁷ In *Preaching Death: The Transformation of Christian Funeral Sermons*, Lucy Bregman notes that during the early 19th

¹⁴⁵ Grier, *Pets in America*, 164.

¹⁴⁶ Katherine Grier. “‘The Eden of Home:’ Changing Understandings of Cruelty and Kindness to Animals in Middle Class American Households, 1820-1900.” In *Animals in Human Histories: The Mirror of Nature and Culture*. Ed. Mary J. Henninger-Voss. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 316.

¹⁴⁷ Grier, “The Eden of Home,” 318.

century, the home or domestic sphere was “especially linked to religious hopes.”¹⁴⁸ In *The Feminization of American Culture*, Ann Douglas argues that domestic piety, and the separation of labor and commerce from the domestic space, brought about the transformation of the home into a sacred space. And as Bregman explains, the home became “a site of consumption and culture, altogether a ‘haven’ from the heartless world of business competition.”¹⁴⁹ With the new role of the home and family in the religious lives of Protestant Americans, “childhood too became a special, crucial site of spiritual significance...[children] were to be trained, educated, and disciplined” and it was the woman’s role to lead. Companion animals as well were expected to be obedient and disciplined. Throughout Grier’s pet keeping histories, the primary role of animals in the household was to aid in the ethical and spiritual character development of children, particularly addressing issues of cruelty with young boys. The home was a site of empathetic education and relationships with animals helped to cultivate an ethic of kindness that would be spread outside the home.

Between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, “all the elements of the modern pet industry gradually came into being, from specialized producers and manufacturers to dedicated retail outlets and service providers.”¹⁵⁰ Like Amato, who described pet keeping in Victorian England as a sentimental commodification, Grier notes a similar tension in the United States. By the 1890s, modern pet shops began to develop on urban street corners; pets themselves were not, however, the most profitable product: “equipment and supplies were the products that capitalized

¹⁴⁸ Lucy Bregman, *Preaching Death: The Transformation of Christian Funeral Sermons*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 52.

¹⁴⁹ Lucy Bregman, *Preaching Death*, 52

¹⁵⁰ Grier, *Pets in America*, 301.

on the desire of customers to care well for the animals they purchased.”¹⁵¹ In between 1840 and 1940, pets had become consumers, through their owners. For example, dry dog food became a staple of interspecies families by the early 20th century, usually developing through already established livestock feed manufacturers. Marketed largely to women, dog food was promoted as a convenient way to care for the companion animals living the home, particularly during the early to mid-20th century as household routines and domestic duties were simplified. It was also during this time that veterinary medicine developed markedly and “pet store doctors” offered over the counter remedies for the nonhuman family member. And according to Grier, “by the 1920s, enterprising pet dealers were suggesting that pets themselves receive Christmas presents.”¹⁵²

While Grier argues that contemporary American pet keeping still reflects its early Victorian emanations, she also notes that pet keeping has drastically changed in the last 30 years. In addition to the growth in animal accessibility, physically through breeders, pet stores, and rescues and digitally through social media, companion animals have inundated mass media, “in magazines and newspapers, [in] the numbers of books devoted to pets, [in] the abundant advertising for pet products, and [in] the presence of cable television channels dedicated largely to programming about pet animals.”¹⁵³ Grier’s *Pets in America* is already over ten years old and one could argue that the pet keeping landscape has since, and once again, changed dramatically. For one thing, “pet owners” are now more apt to calling the animals that live in the home “furr-

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 353.

¹⁵² Grier, *Pets in America*, 408.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 412.

babies" or "furry children."¹⁵⁴ Perhaps more than ever before, humans are incorporating nonhuman animals into the family and into the intimate, social, cultural and spiritual lives within the household. In her qualitative study, "It's a Dog's Life: Elevating Status from Pet to "Fur Baby" at Yappy Hour," Jessica Greenbaum found that dog lovers who attended a happy-hour-like event at Fido's Barkery (a nontraditional bakery that sells interspecies treats that both human and dog can enjoy) in Hartford, Connecticut were more likely to consider their companion animals as "integrated family members who are treated like children."¹⁵⁵ While Fido's Barkery looks to make money from hosting events like Yappy Hour, dogs and humans alike come together to form a community of interspecies families.

Since 1988, the American Pet Product Association has been gathering data on pet ownership, animal care practices, consumer behavior in regards to pet products and accessories, and pet-related services. Conducted every other year, the APPA National Pet Owner Survey is one of the few sources of census-like data one can find on companion animals and the attitudes of their humans. The most recent report, like those that came before, was created in two parts as an initial screener followed by a pet owner questionnaire.¹⁵⁶ Once categorized as a pet owner, eight different module questionnaires were distributed to over 12,500 respondents corresponding to the type of companion animal. The survey accounts for the following animals: dog, cat, freshwater fish, saltwater fish, bird, small animal, reptile and horse.

¹⁵⁴ Jessica Greenbaum. "It's a dog's life: elevating from pet to fur-baby at yappy hour." *Society and Animals* 12, no. 2 (2004), 117-135.

¹⁵⁵ Jessica Greenbaum, "It's a dog's life," 122.

¹⁵⁶ For the 2017-2018 survey, 22,202 respondents completed the screener. Of these respondents, 12,581 were pet owners.

In 2017, an estimated 84 million households (68% of all U.S. households) will spend close to \$70 billion in total pet industry expenditures, including veterinary care, food, grooming, boarding, and more; this is a significant increase from the previous year.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps for the first time, the generational makeup of human companions is beginning to shift. According to the most recent National Pet Owners Survey, millennials (individuals born between 1980 and 1994) have become the largest group of companion humans, replacing Baby Boomers. The last time the survey was conducted, in 2014, Baby Boomers owned 37% of all pets; in just two years, that number has dropped to 32%. While particular species are more likely to live with one group over another, such as millennials and reptiles, companion humans are, in general, getting younger.

Reflecting the Victorian ideals of purity and reminiscent of Ritvo's dog fanciers, 21st century pet owners still rely on animal breeders for their nonhuman companions. However, it should be noted, that the number of people obtaining companion animals through rescue groups, animal shelters and humane societies is growing significantly and is currently at over 40%. The reasons for this could be the rise in animal presence on social media and the use of the platform as a sounding board for animal welfare and advocacy. There are a few new items on the 2017 survey, including questions about calming products, electronic tracking devices, and health insurance, vitamins, and herbal remedies. It is estimated that companion humans will spend more than ever before on veterinary care for their nonhuman kin. Of particular interest to this study, the 2017 survey asked pet owners specifically about gifts and family celebrations, including religious rituals such as Easter, Christmas, and Hanukkah: 48% of dog owners purchase gifts for their canine companions for Christmas, while 67% of all cat owners will purchase a gift for their

¹⁵⁷ http://www.americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp

cat at some point in the relationship. The fact that this question was included in the most recent survey, and that human companions actually purchase gifts in celebrations of holidays, milestones, and family traditions, suggests that companion animals are working their way further into the family unit as a valued and irreplaceable member. Between 2014 and 2016, there was a three point increase in the number of dog owners celebrating a companions birthday; 11% of dog owners currently celebrate, usually with special cakes, treats, and snacks made at the local pet bakery (or human bakery that has adapted to offer pet products, like so many other industries).¹⁵⁸ Another way the pet industry is changing is to consider the use of social media and the internet as both platforms for advertising and knowledge gathering, as well as space for building community and advocacy. Over the past ten years, as documented by the gradual statistical incline in the survey, the internet has grown significantly as the most available and accessible source of knowledge on companion animals.

Eighty-one percent of dog owners and 83% of cat owners say that one of the benefits of living with a companion animal is companionship, love, company and affection. Fifty-nine percent of dog owners and fifty-six percent of cat owners consider their companion animals to be like a child or family member. Eleven percent of pet owners bring their companion animal to the workplace, up from 8% in 2014. Eighty percent of all pet owners derive happiness and emotional support from their companion animal, while over 50% of pet owners report stress relief and lower anxiety or depression. Since the mid-1990s, psychological and clinical studies have been conducted to understand the possible health benefits of living with an animals. In addition to

¹⁵⁸ I will examine this in other chapters, I think, such as medical insurance, funeral industry, entertainment and restaurant industry, etc.

emotional support and stress relief, studies have shown that companion animals can potentially have powerful benefits for humans' mental and physical well-being.

Another new question on the survey asked about provisions for a companion animal upon the death of the human; almost half of the respondents said that they would either leave financial support or a trusted guardian for their nonhuman companion. Yet another new shift from prior years, the survey expanded the question about animal after-death care to include options for a casket, urn for ashes, headstone, memorial stone for the home/yard, grief book or kit, and cemetery plot. While urns are still the most popular for dogs, signifying the prevalence of cremation in companion animals after-death care, memorial stones on one's own property is popular for bird, small animal, and reptile owners. While this survey does not specifically list taxidermy as an option, social media platforms have fostered a growing community of companion humans who opt to keep the body of their beloved companion animals.¹⁵⁹

In 2017, animals have worked their way into the domestic space of the family household as child substitutes, companions, friends, emotional support, and as moral and ethical teachers. The Victorian ideals of the 19th and early 20th centuries have continued in many ways into the 21st century: these intimate interspecies relationships still flourish largely within the home. While there are still serious issues with cruelty and neglect (which could be argued is due to lack of education), the majority of companion humans recognize the animals that share their home as experiencing everyday family realities and as playing a significant and meaningful role within the family unit. The feminist analysis of home and domestication in the previous chapter could

¹⁵⁹ This will be further explored in the chapter on body disposal but deserves mention here as a significant development in the "history of pet keeping" as Americans continue to imagine and create new ways to celebrate and recognize the lives and deaths of companion animals.

reimagine and redefine the home as a site of new becomings, into interspecies families that challenge who counts as family. As the rest of this study will continue to explore, this inclusion is particularly poignant and powerful in the ways in which humans attend to and care for their dying companion animals.

CHAPTER 4

END-OF-LIFE CARE AND EUTHANASIA FOR COMPANION ANIMALS

This chapter will focus on the dying companion animals, specifically the loved family pet diagnosed with a degenerative or terminal illness and the unfortunate ones that suffer a tragic accident. It will examine the ways in which human companions have begun to provide end-of-life (EOL) care for their nonhuman family members and the forms of EOL treatments being offered. In addition, the chapter confronts the difficulties of euthanasia, for both veterinarians and human family members, while also confronting the psychological effects of animal shelter workers whose job it is to euthanize would-be companion animals, who may be too sick, have too many behavioral issues or who spend too much time waiting to be adopted. By living together, human caregivers come to find how and what makes their animal charges happy and healthy. The terrain is less solid when considering end-of-life care, including animal hospice and palliative care, and the decision to euthanize, the most common cause of death for companion animals. By exploring some of the similarities and differences between human and companion animal hospice care, this chapter will highlight how humans are beginning to attend to companion animals at the end of life and how end-of-care may grow and expand.

While the 2017-2018 APPA Pet Ownership survey included new questions regarding death and dying — pet provisions in the owner's will, what human companions might buy after the pet's death, such as urns or memento jewelry (which will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter), and how soon after the death of a pet the owner will get another - these survey questions and inquiries do not address important nuances of the death and dying of companion animals, keeping mainly to consumer trends and only really recognizing human and companion

animal relationships as a profitable market. One would expect the APPA survey to continue to evolve, to incorporate more specific questions about animal death in future surveys, particularly regarding costs of end-of-care, curative and palliative treatments, life-sustaining surgeries, and just how much money a human companion will spend. Before moving forward to discuss these burgeoning issues of end-of-life care and euthanasia for companion animals, it is important to recognize and spend some time and attention on the forms of dying this project does not examine in depth, particularly, the millions of animal in shelters, zoos, sanctuaries, and other captive spaces, in the wild and in factory farms that find their life's end in slaughterhouses. While we have statistics on pet ownership in the United States (only through the lens of the consumer), bioethicist and freelance writer Jessica Pierce points out that “it is impossible to say how many [companion] animals die each year in the United States since no one keeps a registry, as we do for human deaths.”¹⁶⁰

“Other” Significant Animal Deaths

For slaughterhouses, the number of deaths are almost unimaginable at approximately 9 billion, not including aquatic species. The ways in which animals are killed for consumption include captive bolt gun, gas chambers, and electrocution. These techniques have been critically scrutinized and are regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); famed animal scientist Temple Grandin worked with the USDA to change the ways in which animals were slaughtered by considering the perspectives of cows and pigs and more in-depth awareness

¹⁶⁰ Jessica Pierce. *The Last Walk: Reflections on Our Pets at the End of Their Lives*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7.

of animal cognition, pain, suffering, and trauma.¹⁶¹ These methods have been deemed humane and have, at times, been called “euthanasia.” This project ardently argues against using the term “euthanasia” to describe slaughter or the killing that takes place in animal shelters across the United States.

In zoos and animal sanctuaries, animals are often cared for into old age. For animals living in these captive spaces, euthanasia is the leading cause of death particularly for mammals. David Jessup and Cheryl Scott in “Hospice in a Zoologic Medicine Setting” argue that “by necessity, zoos have been dealing with problems such as aggressive pain management and triage, and [that] simple end of life care has been incorporated into zoologic medical practice.”¹⁶² However, there are no set guidelines, even for a particular species, for either euthanasia or hospice and palliative care, largely relying on caretakers and veterinarians’ personal judgement.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of the Cruelty of Animals, 6.5 million animals enter shelters every year and 1.5 million are euthanized.¹⁶³ These deaths, their dying, should not be forgotten when considering the dying of companion animals. If anything, this project and its trajectory should move the conversation toward shelter animals who, at times, just seem unlucky. Despite honing the skills needed to euthanize animals on a regular basis, there are still significant criticisms of how animals are euthanized in shelters, how the actual euthanasia process emotionally and mentally affects shelter workers, and how many animals are

¹⁶¹ Temple Grandin. “Progress and challenges in animal handling and slaughter in the U.S.” *Applied Animal Behavior Science* 100 (2006), 129-139.

¹⁶² David Jessup and Cheryl Scott. “Hospice in a Zoologic Medicine Setting.” *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine* 42, no. 2 (2011), 197. Jessup, at the time of the article, was affiliated with fish and wildlife industry and Scott is research investigator in the medical field.

¹⁶³ These numbers are estimates as there is no national, or in most cases, state regulatory institution to monitor and maintain this information. <https://www.aspc.org/animal-homelessness/shelter-intake-and-surrender/pet-statistics>

ethanized. And despite the continual decline of shelter animal euthanasia, through spay/neuter education programs and a dramatic increase in the use of social media to raise awareness and offer opportunities for adoption, there are still over one million animals (mainly dogs and cats) humanely euthanized, “put to sleep,” intentionally killed every year because shelters are unable to find appropriate homes. While this chapter will only spend a limited time examining these complex deaths, it is important to recognize their deaths as both important and related to the ways in which loved companion animal family members are treated at the end of life.

In a 1978 article for the *Humane Society News*, an animal rights advocate working for the Humane Society argued that “[we] know that death, humanely administered, is not evil, but a blessing to animals who are of no comfort to themselves or to the world because they are unwanted.”¹⁶⁴ In “Death without Dignity: The Misnomer of Euthanasia in the State Animal Shelter System and a Call for a No-Kill Florida” legal scholar Katherine Sloan argues that this was the beginning of the concept of “pet overpopulation” and the idea that kill shelters (in which unwanted and sick companion animals are killed) could solve the problem. The article suggested that without a human home, an animal was worthless, and that “putting them to sleep” was a spiritual and routine process and was owed to them after a grueling life on the streets.

Since the 1970s, millions of animals have been “euthanized” each year in animal shelters. Today, there are concerted efforts both in and outside the shelter to drastically reduce the number of animals being killed. In addition to the no-kill movement, which began in the late 1980s and spread just as rapidly as concerns of overpopulation and created a philosophical debate between shelters that do and do not kill, there are also growing concerns with euthanasia-related stress

¹⁶⁴ Katherine Sloan. “Death without Dignity: The Misnomer of Euthanasia in the State Animal Shelter System and a Call for a No-Kill Florida.” *Journal of Land Use* 261, (2016), 263.

and depression among shelter workers. Sociologist Arnold Arluke, in “Managing Emotions in an Animal Shelter,” called it the “caring-killing paradox” by which shelter workers were, at times, called to kill the same animals they were caring for.¹⁶⁵ Many shelter staff are drawn to the job in the first place because of their love for animals. According to anthrozoologists Keith Anderson et al., there are currently a number of policies and programs to help manage “the stress experienced by staff who perform euthanasia.”¹⁶⁶ The most common were training and education, staff rotation, informal peer support, and breaking following euthanasia tasks.¹⁶⁷ There is still room to grow: shelter management did not offer traditional counseling, either in-person or online (the latter is becoming an important platform for animal loss awareness and could be an invaluable avenue of support).

Outside the shelter, there has been a concentrated effort to decrease the number of unwanted animals by focusing on return-to-field and trap-neuter-return programs that work to support stray and feral animal communities, primarily in urban environments, and especially for cats. Numerous studies have shown that these programs drastically reduce the number of unwanted animals, thus reducing the number of animals killed.

Old Animals

The companion animal population in the United States has continued to grow; since the mid-1980s, there has been a consistent incline in the number of households welcoming a nonhuman animal into the home. There has also been a steady pitch in the amount of money

¹⁶⁵ Arnold Arluke. “Managing Emotions in an Animal Shelter,” in *Animals and Society: Changing Perspectives*. Aubrey Manning and James Serpell, eds. (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁶⁶ Keith Anderson, Jennifer Brandt, Linda Lord and Elizabeth Miles. “Euthanasia in Animal Shelters: Management’s Perspective on Staff Reactions and Support Programs.” *Anthrozoos* 26, no. 4 (2013), 575.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 575-6.

spent on food, training accessories such as leashes, collars, and crates, and perhaps most importantly, an increase in the scope and accessibility of veterinary medical care and the amount of money spent on these treatments. Of the \$69 billion dollars in pet expenditures in 2017, Americans spent approximately \$17 billion dollars on veterinary care; this number is expected to rise to over \$18 billion in 2018.

With medical and technological developments in chemotherapy, surgery, and palliative care for degenerative diseases, elderly pets now make up the fastest growing category of companion animals.¹⁶⁸ And like humans, companion animals are living longer bringing about more medical and holistic treatments, everything from invasive surgeries to hydrotherapy to acupuncture. There has been little scholarly interest in the lives of elder animals in the wild, particularly due to climate change, habitat destruction, and pollution shortening the lives of many species. This is turning out not to be the case for aging and elderly pets.¹⁶⁹ Aging in companion animals often parallels that in humans; with aging comes changes to skin and hair, vision and hearing, brain and bones. Common degenerative diseases wreak havoc on companion animal bodies in the form of arthritis, osteoporosis, and neuropathy. In addition to physical changes, animals go through behavioral changes as they age, such changes in temperament and anxiety levels.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, cats and small to medium-sized dogs are considered “senior” at the age of seven. Larger dog breeds have shorter lifespans

¹⁶⁸ “Biologists and ethologists categorize and study animals based on their age, recognizing that each life stage is physiologically and behaviorally unique. They study neonates, infants, juveniles, and adults.” Technically, “there is no category for the aged, even though many animals, even in the wild, do live to be elderly and go through distinct physical and behavioral changes as they move beyond adulthood.” (Pierce, 2012, p. 9)

¹⁶⁹ The opposite effect is happening in the wild. Due to climate change, habitat destruction and pollution, the rate of dying in the wild is increasing while animal lifespans are decreasing.

and can be considered “senior” as early as five or six years of age. Guidelines suggest that veterinarians treat animals as geriatric patients when they have lived 75% of their lives. Older companion animals are susceptible to heart, kidney and liver diseases and “cancer accounts for almost half of the deaths of pets over ten years of age. Dogs get cancer at roughly the same rate as humans, while cats have a somewhat lower rate.”¹⁷⁰ Other common conditions exhibited by aging and elderly companion animals include hypertension, renal disease and urinary tract infection, cognitive dysfunction, dental disease, deafness, blindness, and any kind of cancer. However, “factors such as genetic background, environment, nutritional history and medical history will influence the emergence of age-related conditions.”¹⁷¹ Substantial preventive veterinary medical care screenings such as urinalysis, fecal analysis, complete blood count, and blood pressure are very common procedures at any veterinary clinic - most of these tests start early in an animal’s life, becoming more frequent in old age. More invasive preventive care can involve radiography, ultrasonography, and biopsy.

There are now sustainable and accessible methods by which companion animals can age well, or at least better than they have in the past. For example, animals with mobility issues from injury, degenerative disease, or neurological disorder, can now have mobility assistance tools. When human caregivers find their companion animal struggling to stand up from nap, when they have difficulty squatting to relieve themselves, or when the animal can no longer make it up the flight of stairs to bed, humans can turn to specialty organizations and companies,¹⁷² which offer

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/Senior-Pets.aspx>

¹⁷¹ Jessup and Scott, “Hospice in Zoologic Medicine Setting,” 199-200.

¹⁷² www.handicappets.com is a popular example.

slings, harnesses, prosthetics, and wheelchairs. Made and fitted to the individual animal, these contraptions offer humans a way to assist their animal in aging.¹⁷³

In addition to physical assistance, there has been some movement in animal eldercare (and hospice care) for animals that encourages modification to the home/domestic space to accommodate an aging animal. For example, human families may modify floor surfaces to allow a better grip for a dog suffering from arthritis (yoga mats work well for this); hard corners can be cushioned or texture can be added to the route outside for an animal losing vision capacity; ramps and steps up to the bed, couch, or the animal's favorite comfy spot can also be built to relieve issues of mobility and stability. These small, and relatively inexpensive, changes usually supplement veterinary care plans. All of these methods signify a more nuanced engagement with elder animals as a way to create and sustain a more comfortable end of life. The growing popularity of these methods perhaps show a more attentive human family but also signify the importance of the companion animal as a fully integrated family member.

Companion animal hospice care

In addition to these negotiations, animal hospice has been steadily developing over the past decade. Inspired by human hospice and palliative care, considerations for companion animal end-of-life care have developed within the last decade. Since the early 2000s, there has been a significant increase in the amount of hospice and palliative care services for companion animals, provided by veterinary clinics, in-home specialists, and families themselves. Pierce argues that “the emergence of the pet hospice movement is certainly, in part, an assimilation of human

¹⁷³ There are, however, associated and significant costs for mobility assistance, especially for equipment that is made specifically for one particular animal. When Macey was in need of mobility assistance due to a degenerative spinal condition, a specialized harness cost around \$250. The harness was made with a handle that laid on the back of the dog, to relieve weight from the back legs and to help with squatting and going up and down stairs.

hospice. It is also a manifestation of changing attitudes toward animals: increased sensitivity to their cognitive and emotional complexity translates into a stronger sense of responsibility toward them and, in particular, more careful attention to the manner of their death and treatment of their pain.”¹⁷⁴ It would also seem that the positionality of animals with the household is more centrally located. In other words, for many human companions, animals are part of the family, they are kin. And as such, families want to treat them just as they would any family member in a similar situation.

Hospice care has become a way to provide companion animals with a more comfortable aging process, a “higher quality of life in animals with life-limiting disease,” and a supported dying process. Despite the developments in veterinary hospice care — the AVMA issued guidelines for hospice care in 2001 — awareness and availability of services and information for both caregivers and veterinarians remain limited. A study published in 2017 found that only 26% of pet-owning respondents knew about veterinary hospice as an option for end-of-life care, even though a large majority of respondents considered their companion animal to be a family member. Despite almost two decades of steady growth, animal hospice and quality-of-life assessment tools are still relatively unknown to human companions as viable options for handling a dying companion animal and as ways to inform the decision of if and when to euthanize. Part of the goal of this project is to bring awareness to these available services, to bring attention to the knowledge that already exists about how humans can comfort their dying companion, and how we might be able to build on these services.

¹⁷⁴ Pierce, *The Last Walk*, 130.

According to the American Animal Hospital Association and the International Association for Animal Hospice and Palliative Care, animal hospice is “a philosophy or program of care that addresses the physical, emotional, and social needs of animals in the advanced stages of a progressive, life-limiting illness, or disability.”¹⁷⁵ Like human hospice, animal hospice seeks to treat the whole being and body, with special consideration for quality-of-life. Animal hospice is not a curative path but largely palliative, focusing on pain and symptom management. Importantly, animal hospice considers both human and animal companions. In addition to treating the animal’s physical and mental symptoms, animal hospice also attempts to address the “emotional, social, and spiritual needs of the human caregiver in preparation for the death of the animal and the grief experienced.”¹⁷⁶ While similar to human hospice in that there is consideration for family support but for animal hospice, there is a striking difference: the companion animal is never able to make end-of-life decisions. The relationships more parallel that of a dying nonverbal child or an unconscious patient. Animal hospice care is most successful when carried out by an interdisciplinary team, which can include the human caregiver or family, primary care veterinarian, animal nutritionist, physical therapist, and pet care providers such as dog walkers. At this point, this is wishful thinking for many interspecies families and access to these services would depend almost completely on the human’s financial capacity. This sort of around-the-clock care cost thousands of dollars a month. As knowledge of end-of-life care options grows among veterinarians and companion humans, there is no doubt money will be

¹⁷⁵ Gail Bishop, Kathleen Cooney, et al. “2016 AAHA/IAAHPC End-of-life Care Guidelines.” American Animal Hospital Association and the International Association for Animal Hospice and Palliative Care. *Journal of American Animal Hospital Association* (2016): 341.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 342.

spent on these services. Modeled on modern human hospices, the first of which was founded in the United States in 1974 by Florence Wald, a nursing professor at Yale who had been inspired by Cicely Saunders' work in the United Kingdom a decade earlier, animal hospice "seeks to maximize comfort and minimize suffering for the patient," while also attending to the needs of the caregiver.

There are, however, significant differences between human and animal hospice. According to the AAHA/IAAHPC End of Life Guidelines, "legally, and in terms of our social norms, the acceptance of pet euthanasia is in sharp contrast to what is acceptable in human hospice care."¹⁷⁷ While the guiding philosophy of human hospice is to neither unnecessarily prolong life nor hasten

death, euthanasia is a medically, legally and socially acceptable option for the relief of suffering in animal hospice:

Animal hospice

accepts that it is

the pet owner's

ethical and legal right and responsibility to decide whether the terminally ill

animal will die by euthanasia or by hospice-supported natural death. Animal



FIGURE 1 *Animal Hospice Care Pyramid. Veterinary hospice care can be segmented into a hierarchy of three components, each of which must be satisfactorily addressed to provide optimum end-of-life (EOL) care. The base of the pyramid consists of physical care, the traditional acute and chronic care services provided by veterinarians. The midlevel consists of the patient's social wellbeing, centering on interaction with other pets and humans. The apex of the pyramid consists of the patient's emotional wellbeing, including satisfaction of the individual animal's unique set of needs and a meaningful engagement with her or his surroundings.* Illustration Design: Shea Cox, DVM

¹⁷⁷ Gail Bishop, "2016 AAHA/IAAHPC End-of-life Care Guidelines," 343.

hospice does not accept a pet owner's decision to allow a pet to die without euthanasia unless effective measures are in place to alleviate discomfort under the care of a licensed veterinarian. Such practices are considered unethical and inhumane.¹⁷⁸

Animal hospice does not currently have the web of resources that encompasses human hospice, such as financial assistance through Medicare and other providers, interdisciplinary medical teams, and options for around-the-clock care. There are currently no in-patient animal hospice facilities and more often than not, companion humans are left to pay out of pocket for all end-of-life care. Pet insurance is rapidly growing but is still only used by 10% of dog owners and 5% of cat owners. (It is also worth noting that pet insurance is almost exclusively structured on a reimbursement system whereby human families pay expenses out of pocket and then reimbursed.)

In *The Last Walk: Reflections on Our Pets at the End of Their Lives* Jessica Pierce opens her chapter on Animal Hospice with a poignant point: "Those of us in the grip of canine love do what we can to make our dogs healthy and happy. We tend to them from puppyhood on, training, feeding, walking, creating daily rituals of greeting, play, eating, and sleep. And then we hit a point where it is no longer clear what loving our animal demands of us."¹⁷⁹ While Pierce's book is specifically about her relationship with her aging dog, Ody, the sentiment can and has been employed and felt for other species. Pierce points to a particular problem with our relationship with animals in the home: despite the language barrier, humans and animals have successfully

¹⁷⁸ Gail Bishop, "2016 AAHA/IAAHPC End-of-life Care Guidelines," 343.

¹⁷⁹ Jessica Pierce. *The Last Walk*, 129.

managed to live together within the domestic space. Humans have been able to attend to the needs of animals in very particular ways, in caring for their physical and emotional health through training, intuition, and love. However, when aging begins and the bodies of animals begin to decline, deteriorate and even die, Pierce argues that “in bits and pieces over time, we find ourselves less confident” in knowing or intuiting what they might need or want.¹⁸⁰

Just briefly, it is important to recognize how companion animals have been involved in human hospice and how the trend is growing across hospice care in the United States. Anna Chur-Hansen, Sofia Zambrano, and Gregory Crawford in “Furry and Feathered Family Members - A Critical Review of Their Role in Palliative Care” ask, if human hospice and palliative care includes supporting and integrating family members into the patient’s care, and if companion animals are considered family members by the majority of people who have them, how can and should companion animals be part of human hospice services? And are there hospice and palliative care benefits, such companionship and reduced stress and anxiety, for the human patient?¹⁸¹

There are practically no empirical studies on the affects of animals on hospice patients. There are, however, numerous anecdotal studies showing that the presence and engagement with companion animals in hospice care, has positive effects on both patients and staff. For example, Oscar was a fluffy, intuitive cat; he lived in an advanced dementia unit at a Rhode Island nursing home. “A Day in the Life of Oscar the Cat” creatively chronicled Oscar as he travelled hallways,

¹⁸⁰ Jessica Pierce, *The Last Walk*, 129.

¹⁸¹ Anna Chur-Hansen, Sofia C. Zambrano, and Gregory B. Crawford. “Furry Feathered Family Members - A Critical Review of Their Role in Palliative Care.” *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine* 31, no. 6 (September 2014), 672-677.

l lounged on nurses' desks, and quietly jumped from one nap to another, one patient's bed to the next. The dementia unit staff believe Oscar knew when someone would die. The staff depended on Oscar and when they noticed his extended presence on a patient's bed, it was a sign to call the family and let them know, "it's time." Oscar was adopted by the staff as a kitten and at the time of this report, Oscar had "presided" over 25 deaths: "his mere presence at the bedside [was] viewed by physicians and nursing home staff as an almost absolute indicator of impending death."¹⁸² In addition to Oscar's ability to detect when death was close, he also "provided companionship to those who would otherwise have died alone" and to the nursing staff, doctors, and visitors from whom he received many loving rubs. Indeed, Suzanne Engelman's study on "Palliative Care and Use of Animal-Assisted Therapy" found that all the patients included in the study reported decreased pain and reduced stress and as an unexpected outcome, staff reported that the therapy animals provided doctors, nurses, and hospital administrators a much needed break, "to be soothed and sometimes amused by the therapy dogs in the midst of an otherwise serious, stressed, and fast-paced setting."¹⁸³ All of the anecdotal studies (which only date back to the early 2000s) made calls for further research on this particular human-animal relationship.

Returning to companion animals in hospice care themselves, the time will usually come when the human companion must make the difficult decision to euthanize their nonhuman family member. The decision is fraught with ambiguity, discomfort and often intense feelings of guilt, anger, and sadness.

¹⁸² David Dosa. "A Day in the Life of Oscar." *The New England Journal of Medicine* 357, no. 4 (July 6, 2007), 329.

¹⁸³ Suzanne Engelman. "Palliative Care and Use of Animal-Assisted Therapy." *Omega* 67, no. 1-2 (2013), 66.

Euthanizing a loved one

The 2013 American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines on Euthanasia is the most recent and eighth edition of the guidelines since 1963. The Panel on Euthanasia within the AVMA was created to “evaluate methods and potential methods of euthanasia for the purpose of creating guidelines for veterinarians who carry out or oversee the euthanasia of animals.”¹⁸⁴ While the scope of the 1963 version was limited to cats and dogs primarily, the panel’s scope continued to grow, adding laboratory animals, livestock, aquatic, fur-bearing, and other wildlife animal populations in addition to companion animals. Unlike early versions of the guidelines (primarily before the 1990s), the 2013 edition “[acknowledges] that euthanasia is a process involving more than just what happens to an animal at the time of death;” the guidelines also include advice on sedation, animal handling, and post-death body disposition. The Guidelines on Euthanasia were designed to give veterinarians the ability to provide a “good death” for animals, “to prevent and/or relieve the pain and suffering of animals that are to be euthanized.”¹⁸⁵ While there has been considerable philosophical debate about whether “euthanasia” can be, or should be, applied to the intentional killing of animals in shelter or in slaughter, the AVMA guidelines advise humane disposition and humane techniques in every instance of intentional killing. Humane disposition, in regards to euthanasia of a companion animal, refers to death as a “welcome event and continued existence is not an attractive option for the animal as perceived by the owner and veterinarian.” Once the decision has been made to euthanize the companion animal, the AVMA guidelines suggest humane methods in which veterinarians make every

¹⁸⁴ Steven Leary, et al. “AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2013 Edition.” Schaumburg, IL: American Veterinary Medical Association (2013), 5

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 6

attempt “to ensure an animal’s life is [taken] with the highest degree of respect, and with an emphasis on making the death as painless and distress free as possible.”¹⁸⁶

Acceptable methods of euthanasia include both noninhaled agents, such as intravenous injection of pentobarbital and inhaled agents, such as carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide. The latter inhaled agents are not preferable for veterinary clinics servicing family pets due to the cost of maintaining equipment and the possibility of an animal’s recovery; intravenous methods are more accurate and effective. Inhaled methods of euthanasia should only be used by organizations and institutions that are capable of maintaining the necessary equipment or for instances of large scale disease outbreak. The AVMA euthanasia protocol does not recommend inhaled methods of euthanasia for small animal veterinary settings.

The most acceptable methods, and most often used for cats, dogs and other family pets, are non inhaled agents, administered intravenously. Pentobarbital or pentobarbital combination can either be administered as a singular step or as a second step after general anesthesia or sedation. For larger companion animals, such as large dogs, when intravenous administration is not deemed effective due to the amount of barbiturate needed to bring about death, or if intravenous injection is not achievable, intra-organ injection, primarily in the heart can be used after general anesthesia or sedation.¹⁸⁷

For Pierce, the conversation surrounding human bioethics “suffers from too much complex vocabulary, [while] animal bioethics suffers from too little.”¹⁸⁸ In regards to animals,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁸⁷ Steven Leary, et al. “AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2013 Edition,” 44-45.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 166.

the term “euthanasia” has become an ubiquitous category applying to many ethically and morally diverse types of killing. Pierce suggests modifying terms for euthanasia, such as “convenience euthanasia” or “premature euthanasia.” Besides the possibility of changing the terminology by which we describe the intentional killing of animals, Pierce argues that we should not use “euthanasia” to describe the killing of unwanted animals in shelters, primarily because these killings, the deaths of these animals, serve “human purposes and is not in the best interests of the animals themselves.”¹⁸⁹ Pierce further argues that the variety of deaths occurring in shelters categorized as “euthanasia,” or a good death, would require an expanded and perhaps flawed locution. While most would argue that shelter euthanasia should be done by injection, many states still allow the use of gas chambers, “despite ample evidence that these deaths can be terrifying, painful, and protracted,” sometimes taking as long as 30 minutes for animals to die. Another significant issue regarding the intentional killing of animals in shelters is who is carrying out the euthanasia. In many shelters, euthanasia is often not carried out by veterinarians but by shelter workers with little to no veterinary training; and “in some states, shelter workers who perform euthanasia are required to attend several hours of training to become a Certified Euthanasia Technician.”¹⁹⁰

While animal hospice and palliative care “does a great service by encouraging us not to end life abruptly... a good death can take many forms [and] we should embrace the possibilities.”¹⁹¹ Coming to the decision to euthanize a companion animal can be one of the most

¹⁸⁹ Steven Leary, et al. “AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2013 Edition,” 166.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 185.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 165.

difficult decisions during the course of the interspecies relationship. The decision to euthanize is usually made within the mutual context of the veterinary clinic, between doctor and human companion, while considering the best interests of the companion animal. According to the AVMA guidelines, “veterinarians who are committed to a broad understanding of the ‘do no harm’ principle may have to determine whether an animal’s life is worth living, especially when there is no consensus on when it is appropriate to let that life go.”¹⁹²

Despite the emotional struggle in making this decision, humans that bring animals into the home and treat them as part of the family are morally responsible, perhaps even obligated, to make this end-of-life decision in the face of animal suffering and dying. This responsibility falls within the purview of other obligations of care throughout their life, including but not limited to making sure they are fed, cared for, sheltered, and even loved. Based on the need to make this decision, how do human companions actually end up making the fatal decision?

The decision to euthanize should always be made in cooperation with a veterinary professional, and with consideration of both the animal’s patient history and prognosis.

Anecdotal evidence would suggest that companion humans assume that “they will tell you when its time” or “you will know when it is time.”¹⁹³ However, this is rarely the case and no matter what, the decision-making process and the decision itself can be excruciatingly painful. To help make this decision, quality of life indexes or scales have been created. A variety of institutions have designed their own but most follow a similar trajectory of questions relating to perceptions of pain, hunger, hydration, hygiene, happiness, mobility, and “more good days than bad.” Even

¹⁹² Steven Leary, et al. “AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2013 Edition,” 8.

¹⁹³ Jessica Pierce, *The Last Walk*, 168.

with these guidelines, however, human companions are faced with questions they, at times, cannot answer. Pierce argues that “we need to set aside the notion that there is a Right Time - some moral target that we need to hit precisely.” Rather, human companions should “find a golden mean between too soon and too late, between premature and overdue.”¹⁹⁴ Pierce rejects the idea that the animal “will let us know” because “this places responsibility on the animal and removes responsibility from us.”¹⁹⁵ Animals can, of course, exhibit signs of pain and suffering. But, it is up to the human companion to read, interpret, and make decisions based on those signs. The goal, adopted by veterinary professionals and now those specializing in companion animal death and dying and the treatment of chronic pain and illness, is for humans to be in tune with their companion animals’ behaviors and personalities to become more fully aware of what makes animals “happy” and what discomfort, pain and suffering look like.

For some companion animals at the end of life, there is a moment or series of instances that shift the balance, when an animal crosses some invisible boundary into suffering and into a realm of ‘anytime now would be good.’¹⁹⁶ While it might seem difficult to imagine setting a date for death, this is often what many companion humans do for their companion animals. (Macey’s death was scheduled week ahead of time, for 8:00pm on November 11, 2013.) What happens after a companion animal’s death will be explored in further chapters, particularly body care and disposition as well as the human feelings associated with guilt and grief.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 168.

¹⁹⁵ Jessica Pierce, *The Last Walk*, 169.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 169. (For Macey, it was when she lost control of her bowel movements. The muscles in her back legs had already noticeably atrophied to the point where she needed assistance to stand, walk, and squat but the invisible line in the sand was when this incapacity disabled her to the point where she was left in her own urine and excrement, if we were not around.)

In *Blue Juice: Euthanasia in Veterinary Medicine*, Patricia Morris argues, based on numerous interviews with small animal veterinarians and veterinary technicians, that veterinary staff act “much in the same way as funeral staff.”¹⁹⁷ Small animal veterinarians and especially veterinarian technicians who assist in many medical procedures, take great care to “create a good euthanasia experience for their animal patients and human clients.”¹⁹⁸ Talking quietly, giving families time with the body, dedicating a quiet and comfortable space in the clinic for the procedure, treating and attending to animal remains gently and respectfully all point to the creation, or “dramaturgy,” of a good death. Many of the veterinarians shadowed by Morris believed that as the last memory of the companion animal and the last experience of human and animal together, the euthanasia experience should be peaceful, personal, and intimate. “From the veterinarian’s perspective, the goal of a good client-witnessed euthanasia is a gentle slipping into death, which looks like an animal is quietly and painlessly falling asleep.”¹⁹⁹

Many companion humans still assume that when choosing to euthanize a companion animal, this must mean a trip to the veterinary clinic to a sterile environment that often causes anxiety and stress, for both human and animal. Authors of a recent study in the *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, found that companion humans or pet owners have “limited awareness of the availability of in-home euthanasia.”²⁰⁰ Specifically, the survey determined that human caregivers thoughts in-home euthanasia was preferable to a veterinary clinical setting, but

¹⁹⁷ Patricia Morris. *Blue Juice: Euthanasia in Veterinary Medicine*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 49.

¹⁹⁸ Patricia Morris, *Blue Juice*, 49

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51

²⁰⁰ Roschelle A. Heuberger and Jessica Pierce. “Companion-Animal Caregiver Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs Regarding End-of-Life Care.” *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 20, no. 4 (2017), 320.

only about half were actually aware that in-home euthanasia services were available.

Organizations such as Lap of Love are attempting to change this.²⁰¹ Lap of Love is a national network of veterinarians that bring end-of-life care and euthanasia, or as they call it, “the final gift,” into the home, usually considered the best location. Humans and animals alike often experience stress and anxiety during veterinary clinic visits - loud noises, a variety of smells, and more animals than usually encountered. Layering this stress and anxiety with the expectation of extreme loss can add significant pain and suffering to the experience. In-home euthanasia provides a comfortable, familiar and intimate setting for a painful moment. It also provides space for family, friends and other companion animals in the household to be present. Based on the study by Heuberger and Pierce, “attitudes toward euthanasia appeared to be influenced by religion, but whether or not these differences were artifacts in the data is unknown. Further research into how religion influences attitudes toward animal euthanasia would likely be of interest.”²⁰² Furthermore, they note that “the extent to which people apply a religious framework for understanding human death to companion animal death is unknown.”²⁰³ An older study found that “interestingly, none of the participants...felt that euthanasia raised any religious issues... Even those whose religion explicitly forbids killing animals saw no problem with euthanasia.”²⁰⁴ I found no specific religious teachings on how practitioners should care for their companion animal at the end of life. This is not at all surprising, considering the history of pet keeping

²⁰¹ <https://www.lapoflove.com/>

²⁰² Roschelle A. Heuberger and Jessica Pierce. “Companion-Animal Caregiver Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs Regarding End-of-Life Care,” 321.

²⁰³ Helen Davis, Peter Irwin, Michelle Richardson and Angela O’Brien-Malone. 2003. “When a pet dies: Religious Issues, Euthanasia, and Strategies for Coping with Bereavement.” *Anthrozoos*. 16, no. 1 (2003): 61.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

examined in the first chapter and that animal history is perhaps “the most unnoticed of all.”²⁰⁵ However, as companion humans seek to bring their animals further into the depths of familial partnership and community, humans will begin to apply religious beliefs and practices to their companion animals, perhaps creating new rituals specifically intended to offer comfort in the face of companion animal death and dying, such as what religion scholar Laura Hobgood-Oster does in her *The Friends We Keep: Unleashing Christianity’s Compassion for Animals*. While she offers a “How to Help” section for communities and congregations with ideas for activism, liturgical resources such as prayers, blessings, scripture readings, and hymns, there is only one small passage entitled, “Memorial Services for Pets” and it does little assist with care and decision-making prior to death.²⁰⁶

This chapter has confronted difficult questions for human caregivers in attending to the end-of-life needs of companion animals. While animal hospice and palliative care services have significantly developed and become more accessible since the early 2000s, based on recent surveys, knowledge of these services are still limited. While veterinarians are working to create expanded end-of-life options through hospice consultation, in-home euthanasia, and intimate deathbed experiences, social media platforms and online communities will continue to play a significant role in expanding this knowledge; at this point, human companions are turning to these outlets for information, support, and interspecies community engagement.

²⁰⁵ Erica Fudge, ed. *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 4.

²⁰⁶ Laura Hobgood-Oster. *The Friends We Keep: Unleashing Christianity’s Compassion for Animals*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 190.

CHAPTER 5
COMPANION ANIMAL AFTER-DEATH-CARE, MOURNING AND
MEMORIALIZATION

In backyards, on mantles and shelves, under trees and organized on hillsides, animal bodies have been artfully and purposefully placed in a myriad of locations after death in the United States. Macey's ashes sit on a bookshelf in my home office, taking the shape of a simple wooden box, bearing only her name on the top. She sits amongst books and trinkets, and beside the ashes of my father-in-law in a similar wooden box. While the last chapter analyzed how humans are treating and attending to their companion at the end of life, providing hospice and palliative care to their dying family member, this chapter addresses how humans are providing significant, creative, and at times expensive, after-death-care. By "after-death-care," I refer primarily to the ways in which companion animal bodies are disposed or preserved, mourned and memorialized. The latter will be explored by surveying the literature on pet loss and bereavement (how humans grieve the loss of a companion animal), pointing both to the importance of companion animal loss in the lives of children and the movement toward actually legitimizing the grief felt after the death of a companion animal. This chapter will also examine the ways in which a companion animal's physical body is treated after death, particularly focusing on burial, cremation, and taxidermy. While burial and cremation are seen as traditional and perhaps practical forms of animal body disposal, taxidermy and other forms of bodily preservation are becoming accessible, alternative avenues of remembrance and mourning.

Body Disposition

Whether at home or in a veterinary office, whether on their own bed or a blanketed stainless steel table, the death of a companion animal is usually met with multiple options for how to dispose or preserve the body and how to memorialize and mourn the animal life. Up until the late 1980s and early 1990s, options for attentive after-death-care were few and far between. Prior to the late 19th century, families who provided after-death-care to their animal cohabitants primarily dug graves on their own land. Even today, rural families use their own property for companion animal burials, perhaps near a garden, at the edge of a pasture, or under an established tree. However, since 1896, Hartsdale Pet Cemetery, also known as the Peaceable Kingdom, located just south of Sleepy Hollow, New York, has provided a sacred space for human companions to lovingly and respectfully bury companion animals. Hartsdale began out of an act of kindness from its founder, a wealthy veterinarian from New York City, and continues to enact and exemplify the deep, intimate, and complex bond between human and animal. According to anthropologist Stanley Brandes in “The Meaning of American Pet Cemetery Gravestones,” the act of “burying their animals in a public cemetery, pet owners not only demonstrate extraordinary devotion to these animals, but also attribute to the creatures a degree of sacredness not accorded to other beasts.”²⁰⁷

One day in 1896, Dr. Samuel Johnson met with a friend who had just lost her beloved companion animal, a small dog who deserved a proper burial. Not knowing of any dedicated space, Dr. Johnson offered a spot on his apple orchard outside New York City. After the burial of his friend’s dog, Dr. Johnson casually spoke to a reporter friend about the incident and

²⁰⁷ Stanley Brandes. “The Meaning of American Pet Cemetery Gravestones.” *Ethnology* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2009), 101.

eventually, Dr. Johnson's veterinary office was overwhelmed with calls inquiring about burial plots. After hundreds of burials, Hartsdale was fully incorporated in 1913 and has been operated by the same family since the mid-20th century. Today Hartsdale is the final resting place to more than 80,000 animals according to the cemetery's website and history. The cemetery buried almost 10,000 animals in the last 10 years. While exact numbers are not provided, the difference in a decade, as compared to the first 100 years, speaks volumes to the rapid change taking place in the pet funeral industry, the ways in which we consider and attend to animals who live in the home, and how humans provide for companion animals in death.²⁰⁸

According to photographer Liza Wallis Margulies, "the stones at [Hartsdale] tell stories of love, laughter, and companionship and pay tribute to the personalities, behaviors, quirks, and memorable misdeeds of the pets buried there."²⁰⁹ In contrast to many human cemeteries, Hartsdale resists the type of uniformity and categorization that define human cemeteries. In some areas of the cemetery, gravestones are unaligned with ones on either side and other areas appear cluttered.

While one can point to the development and significant growth in the sheer number of pet cemeteries across the United States as evidence of the deepening relationship between humans and their companion animals, Brandes argues that the gravestone inscriptions have changed overtime and demonstrate three major trajectories that explicitly speak to how humans attend to

²⁰⁸ For a more comprehensive history of dog burial in particular, which stretches back thousand of years, see Laura Hobgood-Oster, *A Dog's History of the World: canines and the domestication of humans* (2014), particularly the chapter on "The Journey to the Afterlife."

²⁰⁹ Liza Wallis Margulies. "Hartsdale Pet Cemetery," in *Mourning Animals: Rituals and Practices Surrounding Animal Death*, ed. Margo DeMello. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 39.

and consider companion animals after death. These inscriptive themes, as identified by Brandes, are naming patterns, kinship and familial affiliation, and religious and ethnic identity.²¹⁰

Regarding naming patterns, Brandes argues that naming trends were significantly different pre- and post-WWII. The early 20th century was marked by names such as Fluffy, Brownie, Laddie, Rags, Dicksie, Snap and Punch. Some of the earliest graves had no names at all and inscribed only “pet” or “my pet” with the dates of birth and death. After WWII, the inscribed names on companion animal gravestones became recognizably human names. Not only did they become a more prominent feature on the headstone itself, as in it took up more space and were now larger than the surname, the names of the animal laying beneath the ground reflected some popular human names during that time. “Pet names, from the 1960s through the 1980s, include Rico, Ginny, Rivka, Francois, Samantha, Daniel and Venus. The pattern continues into the 1990s and 2000s, with a growing number of human names like Maggie, Rebecca, Estrellita, Jasper, Chelsea, Jacob, Ronnie, Fred, Alex, Marcello, Oliver, Lucas, Max, and Timothy.”²¹¹ While the names inscribed after WWII usually denoted the sex and species of the animal, earlier graves did not. Brandes simultaneously points to both anthropomorphizing companion animals in the postwar period and bestowing a more distinct identity as seen in the

²¹⁰ Pet cemeteries and funeral services for animals is not exclusive to the United States. For studies and stories on other geographical locations, see: Barbara Ambrose, *Bones of Contention: Animals and Religion in Contemporary Japan*. University of Hawaii Press, 2012; Hannah Beech. “Pet Cremation: Seeking ‘Good Afterlife’ for Bangkok’s Pampered Dogs.” *New York Times* (July 28, 2018); Justin McCurry. “Japan: robot dogs get solemn Buddhist send-off at funerals.” *The Guardian* (May 3, 2018). Tiffy Thompson. “Inside the World of Pet Funerals.” *VICE Canada*. (September 26, 2017).

²¹¹ Stanley Brandes. “The Meaning of American Pet Cemetery Gravestones,” 105.

inclusion of memorial photographs expressing how pet owners “[considered] companion animals to be actual members of their human family.”²¹²

Brandes argues that in addition to recognizably human names, gravestones also began to include more specific language of the family and kinship. Many of the gravestone include “Love Mommy and Daddy” or “Our Little Baby” signifying “a degree of emotional and social proximity between animal and human far beyond devotion or friendship.”²¹³ Family surnames also took on a more notable role in the last half of the 20th century and “[provided] important cues to feelings of family or kinship.”²¹⁴ By gaining the surname of the human family, companion animals become like blood relatives. And to some, “companion animals have become not just child substitutes, but actual sons and daughters — the real thing.”²¹⁵ Based on the expansive presence of millennial interspecies families online, particularly on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the idea that companion animals are not only part of the family but are child-like figures within that family is more noticeable now than ever before.²¹⁶ This is significantly reinforced by pet marketing campaigns that focus on the needs of millennial companion humans, who are more likely to purchase natural and organic foods, animal clothing, and items often seen as extravagant to prior generations, such as monographed collars and leashes and memory foam beds. Millennials are having dogs and cats

²¹² Ibid, 105

²¹³ Ibid, 106

²¹⁴ Ibid, 107

²¹⁵ Ibid, 108

²¹⁶ Nathan Richter, “The Millennial Pet Owner.” *Wakefield Research*, 2014. <http://www.pijac.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2014T2TpptRichter.pdf> From their website: “Wakefield is a full-service quantitative, qualitative and hybrid market research firm. We have developed our own methodologies, informing product design, communications and customer targeting for brands the world over.”

rather than children.²¹⁷ As pet cemeteries become more prevalent, particularly in urban cities, these inscriptions will only become more distinctive, focusing on how companion animals are truly positioned within the interspecies family.

The third change Brandes notes in Hartsdale, and is now represented in pet cemeteries across the country, “especially since the 1980s, is the inclusion of religious sentiments and sectarian symbols. Just as pets have become defined increasingly as family members, they have simultaneously acquired a religious or spiritual identity, which implies for them a life after death.”²¹⁸ Many of the gravestones bear a simple or ornate cross, the Star of David, or religious language to denote the spiritual identity of the companion human and animal, as well as perhaps belief in an afterlife. Some gravestones include phrases that send companion animals into an afterlife, a heavenly waiting area where human and animal will eventually reunite, perhaps by crossing a Rainbow Bridge.²¹⁹ In a recent 2016 study, approximately 73% of those who said they believed in a human afterlife also said they believed animals experience an afterlife. Focusing on demographic variables, the authors found that the groups most likely to believe that animals experience an afterlife include females, Buddhists, Black/African Americans and perhaps obviously, pet owners.²²⁰ Especially since the 1990s, companion humans have ascribed religious

²¹⁷ Sami Main. “44% of Millennials See Their Pets as Starter Children, and That’s a Big Opportunity for Brands.” *Adweek*. August 16, 2017. <http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/44-of-millennials-see-their-pets-as-starter-children-and-thats-a-big-opportunity-for-brands/>

²¹⁸ Stanley Brandes. “The Meaning of American Pet Cemetery Gravestones,” 108

²¹⁹ While this chapter does not discuss the “rainbow bridge” in detail as it is a very well known and very popular among veterinary organizations wanting to expressed sentiment following the death of companion animals. This is not to say that the rainbow bridge is without interest or in need of further research.

²²⁰ Kenneth D. Royal, April A. Kedrowicz, and Amy M. Snyder. “Do All Dogs Go to Heaven? Investigating the Association between Demographics Characteristics and Beliefs about Animal Afterlife.” *Anthrozoos* 29, no. 3 (2016), 413.

and spiritual identity (though it is difficult to determine to what degree) to their companion animal, most visibly in death. Brandes and others argue that the religious symbolism on the gravestones speaks to both a belief in the afterlife for human and animal as well as the expectation that they will be reunited. Another recent study found that “a sizable percentage of the participants incorporated their deceased pets into their religious beliefs, prayers, and positive expressions of religion coping to deal with their loss.”²²¹

While burial in a pet cemetery is one of the options for companion humans, particularly those living in urban environments who may lack a large property or in cities and towns that prohibit the burial of certain animals, cremation is currently the most popular and well-known method for animal body disposal, to the point where it is largely known to be a powerful new market industry, mirroring the expenses of human cremations, funerals, and burials, the latter costing anywhere from \$500 to \$3000. In addition to the burgeoning market, veterinary clinics have developed unique relationships with crematoria who specialize in animal cremation. Clinics usually provide transport to and from the crematorium and clinic where companion humans usually collect the cremains. Companion animal cremains are often presented in a simple, wooden box with a monographed name plate. Some veterinarians even include a clay paw print. The return of cremains is limited to individual cremation. While this question is never raised in the context of human cremation, companion animals can be cremated individually or communally. A communal cremation occurs when more than one animal is cremated at the same time — multiple bodies becoming ash, indistinguishable from each other. Communal cremations are usually less expensive, under \$150. Most veterinarians and crematoria assure clients that

²²¹ Sherman A. Lee. “Religion and Pet Loss: afterlife beliefs, religious coping, prayer and their associations with sorrow.” *British Journal of Guidance and Counseling* 44, no. 1 (2016), 126.

even communal ashes will be spread at the nearest animal cemetery and not in the trash. And, quite often, pet cemeteries have monuments or memorials for those who died communally, unnamed and without an inscription.²²²

Individual cremations are meant to assure the ashes returned belong only to a particular companion animal, and they cost significantly more, varying from approximately \$300 to \$600. If an animal is being cremated, the amount of time until the ashes are returned to the companion human is between two and three weeks, sometimes accompanied by a certificate of authenticity from the crematorium and a sympathy card from the veterinary clinic staff. What happens after the ashes of the companion animal are returned to the family varies. While there has been no study done to investigate how and where families keep ashes of deceased companion animals, there is a significant amount of anecdotal evidence, exemplified in online message boards. In many homes, the ashes of companion animals line a mantle or bookshelf, perhaps with an old collar or leash. A picture of the companion animals is usually close by.

There are currently more than 700 pet cemeteries and crematories in the United States.

The International Association of Pet Cemeteries and Crematories (IAOPCC) admittedly does not know the exact number. In addition to pet cemeteries (like Hartsdale in New York or Abbey Glen

²²² It was not until 2017 that there was a dedicated campaign, or any real attention, to create a *Monument to Animals We Do Not Mourn*, “the first public monument in the United States honoring animals that are generally overlooked and rarely regarded as grievable.” (As of this writing, the monument has not been built and the project appears to be stalled due to a lack of financing.) The monument, promoted by the International Association of Pet Cemeteries and Crematories in their 2017 *News and Views* following their annual conference, is to be built at Hartsdale Pet Cemetery and dedicated to all animals, especially chickens, cattle, turkeys, pigs, sheep and others considered livestock and not typically grieved. Within Hartsdale, the monument will be close by the War Dog Memorial, also the first of its kind. The *Monument for Animals We Do Not Mourn*, according to its crowdfunding site, “is a memorial to the unmourned, a public art installation, and a powerful historical statement. It is an expression of the views of many people in the United States who believe these animals deserve to be remembered.” (<https://www.generosity.com/animal-pet-fundraising/monument-to-animals-we-do-not-mourn--2>) While not explicitly stating as such, *The Monument for Animals We Do Not Mourn* would also represent those animals lost to poaching, extinction, environmental change, and urban development. This proposed monument elicits deep and complex questions of *who* or *what* is worth mourning.

Memorial Park in Quakertown, Pennsylvania that specifically inters only nonhuman animals), human cemeteries have developed and implemented services for animal family members. West Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia, one of the oldest human cemeteries in the country, opened The Laurels, Pet Center, Cemetery and Crematory in 2017 as a way to offer a “private serene sanctuary; a perfect resting place for you special family member.”²²³ Human cemeteries are not only getting into the pet business based on its attractive market capital, they are answering the calls of its customers. These traditionally human-only cemeteries are responding to the needs of interspecies families, some who wish to be buried together, or at least close by. In 2017, New York passed a state law allowing human cremains to be buried in pet cemeteries giving human companions the opportunity to be interred with their companion animal.

The popularity of animal cremation is perhaps most poignant when considering companies and organizations that have developed “alternatives to the standard pet cremation.” Despite the growth of cremation for both humans and animals, the process can be taxing on the environment, emitting carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, and sulfur oxide. Often believed to be the more environmentally friendly method of body disposal — and cremation does avoid burial space, toxic leakage of formaldehyde, and the environmental impact of casket and headstone creation — cremation is critically reviewing its own methods, just as new methods of disposal like mushroom suits have been recently developed.²²⁴ The mushroom suit, created by

²²³ <http://westlaurelhill.com/services/pets>

²²⁴ <http://coeio.com/coeio-story/>

Jae Rhim Lee, a young graduate student and artist at MIT, is now available for pets and offers an ecologically conscious burial option.²²⁵

In addition to ecological burial, Resting Waters in Seattle, Washington specializes in aquamation or water cremation which responds to the call for both eco-friendly ways of disposal and respectful and purposeful treatment of the bodies of companion animal in death. The company is said to take “true compassion and care for your departed companion through a gentle and environmentally responsible water process.” Resting Water’s website describes the process as a “natural decomposition” with the use of “gentle water flow, temperature and alkalinity to accelerate our ecosystem’s natural method of breaking down and decomposing organic matter.”²²⁶ The aquamation of bio-cremation process leaves almost nothing but solid bone pieces which is pulverized into ash. Cremains are returned in the same fashion as a traditional fire cremation.

Burial and cremation act as both a traditional and “rational” form of animal body disposal while also creating ways of remembering and memorializing a particular companion animal. Whether buried in a backyard or cemetery, or sitting amongst books as ashes, burial and cremation provide sites of mourning and avenues for processing grief. Perhaps beyond the margins of what many would deem “normal grief,” modern taxidermy and other forms of contemporary pet preservation have been available since the 1980s, just recently becoming more noticeable, mainly due to its representation on social media platforms. However, taxidermy particularly as pet memorials have been around since the Victorian period. The mid- to late-

²²⁵ <http://theforeverspot.com/>

²²⁶ <http://www.restingwaters.com/aquamation>

nineteenth century witnessed the development of multiple forms of animal preservation such as animals exhibited in scientific or museum displays, hunting trophies (in both backyard and big game hunting), craft or utility taxidermy in which animal parts are made into usable tools, novelty taxidermy through which taxidermists create chimeric creatures (and often contribute to the “bad taxidermy”²²⁷), fashion taxidermy (which has had a long and perhaps prehistoric trajectory), decor taxidermy which functions and is present in the home, and nostalgia taxidermy which includes companion animal preservation.²²⁸

While this chapter will only engage with the ways in which humans physically preserve their companion animals, taxidermy is an art on the margins of both craft and creativity. Its history is complex and somewhat mysterious. While some scholars date taxidermy to forms of preservation (such as mummification) in ancient Egypt, “true taxidermy attempts to capture forms, expressions, and animal attitudes in a lifelike manner.” Unlike mummification, which was born from religious questions of the afterlife, modern taxidermy was “developed from a curiosity about nature.”²²⁹ There are a few 16th century references to taxidermy, particularly regarding natural history collections but it was not until the 17th and into the 18th century that handbooks were written and methods, techniques, and forms were developed for preserving all species of plants and animals. According to Amandine Piquegnot, the history of taxidermy can be

²²⁷ Christina M. Colvin. “Freeze-Drying Fido: The Uncanny Aesthetics of Modern Taxidermy.” Margo DeMello, ed. *Mourning Animals: Rituals and Practices Surrounding Animal Death*. Michigan State University Press, East Lansing: 2016, p. 65.

²²⁸ Clifton D. Bryant and Donald J. Shoemaker. “Dead Zoo Chic: Some Conceptual Notes on Taxidermy in American Social Life.” Clifton D. Bryant, ed. *Handbook of Death and Dying*. SAGE Publications, Inc., 2003.

²²⁹ Amandine Pequignot. “The History of Taxidermy: Clues for Preservation.” *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals* 2, no. 3 (February 2006), 245.

found in the specimens themselves, “considered as a historical witness for taxidermy, and a source for better understanding of the techniques.”²³⁰

In *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Culture of Longing*, taxidermist and comparative literature scholar Rachel Poliquin notes that contemporarily, there are numerous genres of taxidermy, similar to those denoted by sociologists Clifton Bryant and Donald Shoemaker in the “Dead Zoo Chic,” published in the late 1980s. Poliquin’s categories are “hunting trophies, natural history specimens, wonders of nature (albino, two-headed, etc.), extinct species, preserved pets, fraudulent creatures, anthropomorphic taxidermy (toads on swings), and animal parts used in fashion and household decor.” Poliquin argues that “all taxidermy is deeply marked by human longing.”²³¹

Like Poliquin, environmental humanities scholar Christina M. Colvin argues that in both most prominent forms of taxidermy - natural history museum specimens and hunting trophies - they point to complex relationships between human and nonhuman animal. On one hand, taxidermy suggests “human dominance over animals. In the natural history museum, perfectly reconstructed, idealized animal bodies imply scientific knowledge and a mastery of forms, and in the trophy room, animal mounts hung on walls commemorate the power of the hunter to pursue, outwit, and ‘take’ his quarry.”²³² On the other hand, contemporary natural history museums and pet preservationists create taxidermy expressions that show genuine respect for the animals they

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 250

²³¹ Rachel Poliquin. *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Culture of Longing*. (College Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 6.

²³² Christina M. Colvin. “Freeze-Drying Fido: The Uncanny Aesthetics of Modern Taxidermy,” in *Mourning Animals: Rituals and Practices Surrounding Animal Death*. edited by Margo DeMello (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 65.

display. While the sources of taxidermy specimens in museums may be changing as curators become more knowledgeable on the role hunting and poaching have on particular species, especially ones on the brink of extinction, hunting trophies still line the walls of rural American homes.²³³ Donna Haraway notes, in “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,” that taxidermy was meant to be realistic, to maintain and present the *essence* of the animal specimen. It was simultaneously based on the “notion of perfection,” as a paramount example of the species.²³⁴

Colvin argues that modern forms of taxidermy, including and specifically pet preservation, have the potential to

show humans *with* animals, engaged in the taxidermic process as a way to work through and even critique several of the paradigms through which humans typically engage with animals. Rather than forget or efface the lives of animals, then, modern taxidermy can facilitate the work of memory by emphasizing an animal’s death and the particularity of the animal who died. Further, by revealing the particular rather than the representative animal, taxidermy has the potential to establish animals as subjects of grief.²³⁵

²³³ Growing up in south central Pennsylvania, the homes of my friends were often crowded with mounted animals, everything from bears, ducks, deer, rabbits, raccoons, and hawks. The local school district would close on the first day of hunting season; almost everyone hunted. The animals hanging from walls were sources of pride, marks of a successful hunting trip, of man dominating nature.

²³⁴ Donna Haraway. “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936.” *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 40. More often than not, the perfect example of a species was male.

²³⁵ Colvin, “Freeze-Drying Fido,” 65

The reasons for wanting to physically preserve a companion animal are varied and multifaceted. The desire or longing to preserve some sense of the relationship [Poliquin] is exemplified in the photo gallery and comment sections of business websites such as Perpetual Pets, where one can find “the perfect plan for the perfect pet.”²³⁶ A couple from West Virginia who had the pet preservation company attend to their small dog, Foxy, said, “If it were not for you, I would never have seen her again. Now I am with her everyday.” A woman from Pittsburgh said of her small pup, “I am so happy to have Mandy home. She looks so peaceful and content in her own bed. Thanks so much for the work that you did with her and thanks for providing such a wonderful alternative to animal burial.”²³⁷

Perpetual Pets specializes in freeze-drying, a modern form of taxidermy, in which moisture is removed from body tissue while leaving the bodily form in tact; “through a process of extremely low temperatures and the application of vacuum over a long period of time, the tissues are dried out and protected from decay.”²³⁸ This method attempts to preserve an animal in “as natural a state as possible.” Second Life Freeze-Dry, a Pennsylvania company specializing in pet preservation, states that freeze-drying is the “only preservation process that retains all of your pet’s natural features for a truly realistic look.”²³⁹ The entire process takes a significant period of time, depending on the weight of the animal and requires purposeful planning prior to the death of the companion animal. Both Perpetual Pets and Second Life Freeze-Dry provide instructions

²³⁶ <http://www.perpetualpet.net/Gallery/>

²³⁷ <http://www.perpetualpet.net/Gallery/>

²³⁸ <https://www.secondlifefreezedry.com/freeze-dry-process/>

²³⁹ <https://www.secondlifefreezedry.com/freeze-dry-process/>

for preparing a companion animal. Both sites stress the importance of planning ahead and upon death, offer a few simple steps, though both note the emotional difficulty: “1) Make sure the animal’s body is reasonably dry. 2) Wrap the body tightly in plastic to seal out all air. Do not use any additional padding such as paper or blankets inside the plastic. 3) Place the wrapped body in a freezer.”²⁴⁰ While it is preferable to personally deliver the frozen animal to these taxidermy businesses, shipping is also an option. Once the animal is in the hands of the taxidermist, freeze-drying can take three to four months for a small cat or dog and six months to a year for larger animals, such as large-breed dogs.²⁴¹

Throughout the freeze-drying process, most taxidermists will insist on being engaged and communicative with the human client. Along with the body, taxidermists ask for pictures of the companion animal and will work with the client in considering what mounted form will be created. Perpetual Pets recommends a sleeping pose, “which looks most natural in the absence of movement. However, we will work with you to accommodate any other pose or special considerations you would like.”²⁴² Pricing for freeze-dried preservation differs, depending primarily on the weight of the animal. Mac’s Taxidermy and Freeze-Drying shop in south central Pennsylvania quotes \$2100 for a 40-pound dog. Second Life Freeze-Dry does not list prices for

²⁴⁰ <https://www.secondlifefreezedry.com/freeze-dry-process/>

²⁴¹ Why not go with traditional taxidermy? Many companion humans do not like the idea of separating parts of the body, particularly the skinning and cleaning process of taxidermy. Traditional taxidermy, which involved removing organs, muscle, and tissue, is seen by some companion humans as too invasive. Freeze-drying, which can also appear grotesque, is a less volatile technique. No matter the body, bodily integrity is a mark of respect in American cultural traditions.

Colvin skims over the agency of animals in the taxidermy process. If companion animals are family members, and considered to have a personality and considered when making family decisions, should they not have a say in what happens to their body after their death? And if we have been unable to explicitly crack the communication barriers between species, how does the human companion truly know what their companion animals wants? How can we be sure what kind of body disposal the animal would want?

²⁴² <http://www.perpetualpet.net/PetPresInfo/>

those above 25 pounds, and there is an additional cost of \$250 for a sitting pose. While access to pet preservation services are not necessarily limited based on geographic region, due to the ability to ship frozen animals, they are limited to those with the funds to pay for such services.

Many of the businesses offering “alternative pet aftercare”²⁴³ seem to have added these services to their traditional taxidermy business model. Shops like Mac’s Taxidermy and Freeze-Drying were founded on the idea of serving sportsmen’s taxidermy needs in the late 1970s. The shop only added pet preservation services in the late 1990s when customers began requesting it. Since then, Mac’s Taxidermy has offered this complementary service and sustained steady pet preservation business. While many traditional taxidermists have added these services to their repertoire, many have not. One well-known taxidermist in Philadelphia, Diamond Tooth Taxidermy, has significantly limited the number of full mount pet memorial preservations they take on, noting both the emotional toll on the taxidermist and the deep relationship between the human client and the animal being preserved that in many ways puts too much pressure on the taxidermist for perfection, to recreate the liveliness of the animal.²⁴⁴ However, Diamond Tooth Taxidermy does take on more artistic commissions when working with companion animal bodies. For example, a client approached the shop in hopes of commissioning a pet memorial, but without preserving the entire physical body of a cat. Diamond Tooth Taxidermy created a cotton pillow, wrapping the soft, preserved tail of the cat around the pillow. On the back of the pillow, the taxidermist created a small pocket. Inside the pocket, inside the cotton pillow, the taxidermist had placed the cats ears, preserved and easily accessible to the grieving companion

²⁴³ <http://www.preciouscreaturetaxidermy.com/pet/>

²⁴⁴ Conversation with author, 2017.

human, who was too distraught to see the recently deceased cat fully mounted but longed to preserve pieces, to have the options to always feel the softness of the cat's hair.

Mourning and Memorialization

Since the early 2000s there has been a significant aggregate of scholarship established on the effects, particularly psychological, of pet loss and the grief felt after the death of a companion animal. Prior to the turn of the 21st century, resources for pet loss and grief support were almost nonexistent, though Hallmark has been respectfully making sympathy cards for pet death since 1984.²⁴⁵ Since the mid-1980s, bereavement for the loss of a companion animal has been largely recognized as disenfranchised; in other words, humans have “not [been] accorded a ‘right to grieve.’ That right to grieve may not be accorded for many reasons, such as the ways a person grieves, the nature of the loss, or the nature of the relationship. So, although the person experiences grief, that grief is not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly observed.”²⁴⁶ The grief experienced after the loss of a companion animal has been on the margins of normalized expressions of grief and, to some extent, it is still is, particularly for interspecies families that include only one human and at least one companion animal. There is still the sentiments of “it’s *just* a dog. You can get another one.” Most employers do not offer bereavement time for the death of a companion animal. However, there is more of an understanding and acceptance; much more support and resources. While this conversation will not dive too deeply into the psychological scholarship on grief as numerous studies, over the past

²⁴⁵ David Redmalm. “So Sorry for the Loss of Your Little Friend: Pets’ Grievability in Condolence Cards for Humans Mourning Animals.” In *Mourning Animals: Rituals and Practices Surrounding Animal Death*. ed. Margo DeMello, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 101-108.

²⁴⁶ Kenneth J. Doka. “Introduction.” In *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice*. ed. Kenneth J. Doka, (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2002), 5.

25 years, have convincingly showed that the this particular grief is very similar, if not at the same intensity, as that experienced after the loss of a human family member or beloved friend.²⁴⁷

Particularly for children, the death of a companion animal can be a complicated and unique experience. For many children, a companion animal is more than “just an animal.”²⁴⁸ According to Joshua Russell, many children consider their companion animals as siblings or best friends, building and maintaining strong, emotional connections.²⁴⁹ While many psychologists and grief counselors promote honesty and communication with children upon the death of a companion animal, following the child’s lead when asking questions about death, Abigail Marks, a clinical psychologist specializing in childhood grief, recommends “goodbye rituals.” In a recent *New York Times* story on the subject, Marks suggests that “rituals around death are some of the most meaningful ways we have of recognizing someone’s life, but these ceremonies aren’t societally defined for pet death.”²⁵⁰

Building from this foundation, the present discussion will focus primarily on the new ways humans enact and represent their grief through ritual and memorialization. Despite the general knowledge of the effects of pet death, there is very little work documenting the unique

²⁴⁷ John Archer and Gillian Winchester. “Bereavement following death of a pet.” *British Journal of Psychology* 85, (1994), 259-271; Cindy L. Adams, Brenda N. Bonnett, Alan H. Meek. “Owner response to companion animal death: development of a theory and practical implications.” *The Canadian Veterinary Journal* 40 (January 1999), 35-39; Thomas A. Wrobel and Amanda L. Dye. “Grieving Pet Death: Normative, Gender, and Attachment Issues.” *Omega* 47, no. 4 (2003) 385-393.

²⁴⁸ Juli Fraga. “When a Pet Dies, Helping Children Through the ‘Worst Day of Their Lives.’” *New York Times*. June 8, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/well/family/when-a-pet-dies-helping-children-through-the-worst-day-of-their-lives.html>

²⁴⁹ Joshua Russell. “‘Everything has to die one day:’ children’s explorations of the meanings of death in human-animal-nature relationships.” *Environmental Education Research* 23, no. 1 (2017), 75-90.

²⁵⁰ Quoted in Juli Fraga. “When a Pet Dies, Helping Children Through the ‘Worst Day of Their Lives.’” *New York Times*. June 8, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/well/family/when-a-pet-dies-helping-children-through-the-worst-day-of-their-lives.html>

ways in which companion humans have learned to grieve for their companion animals, especially in the face of disenfranchised grief. There has also been no comprehensive scholarship done in the realm of comparative religious studies. How does religious practice, ritual and community affect the ways in which humans grieve for companion animals? How might established religious rituals help legitimize this particular type of grief?

Since 2006, there have been numerous studies that document the importance of religious belief and spirituality in regards to human bereavement and grief experienced after the loss of a companion animal. In “Pastoral concern in relation to the psychology stress caused by the death of an animal companion,” Kenneth Brown argues that “given the important roles that companion animals play in the lives of so many individuals, and given the potential impact which the death of a much-loved family pet may cause, ministers/priest, and pastoral counsellors have, it is suggested, under-appreciated the weight of loss and grief experienced.”²⁵¹ As these individuals are poised to offer support and resources during tragic life events, Brown notes points of comparison with the experience of grief in relation to both miscarriage and stillbirth, particularly as it seems to include a lack of understanding of the depth of grief on the part of support professionals. These types of losses have also been included when considering disenfranchised grief.²⁵² For some interspecies families, particularly those that include multiple humans (and children), when a companion animals dies, it effects the entire family. As a unit, family members

²⁵¹ Kenneth Brown. “Pastoral concern in relation to the psychology stress caused by the death of an animal companion.” *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 9, no. 5 (2006), 414.

²⁵² A. Kolker and B.M. Burke. “Grieving the unwanted child: Ramifications of abortion after prenatal diagnosis of abnormality.” *Health Care for Women International* 14 (1993), 513-526; J. E. Puddifoot and M. P. Johnson. “The legitimacy of grieving: the partner’s experience at miscarriage.” *Social Science and Medicine* 45 (1997), 837-845; M. C. Freda, K. S. Devine, and C. B. S. Semelsberger. “The lived experience of miscarriage after infertility.” *American Journal of Maternal Child Nursing* 28 (2003), 16-23.

are emotionally connected. With companion animals, each family member has created an individual and unique relationship and when the companion animals dies, each family member is affected differently, while sharing the burdens of grief.²⁵³

Perhaps one of the newest and most popular forms of grief support for bereaved companion humans are pet loss and grief support groups. While these groups have existed since the early 2000s, they have begun to spring up across the United States. There is no way to garner an accurate number of groups, but many large, urban veterinary clinics, such as University of Pennsylvania's Ryan Veterinary Hospital, offer their own support group. The Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement keeps a running roster of support groups across the country; according to their website, only 26 states offer at least one support group. However, upon further internet searches, particularly through social media platforms such as Facebook, one can find a support group in most states, though not listed on the APLB's site. Many of the support groups are run by individuals, not associated with a veterinary clinic or larger institution, created out of either an intense personal interest or some professional expertise in social work or psychological counseling.

Many grieving human companions feel isolated in their mourning with few outlets of resources and support. In a recent study, a significant sample of individuals noted a complete lack of knowledge of support services.²⁵⁴ For decades, founded on the traditional ways humans have perceived animals as inferior, human companions "struggled with the contradiction between how they felt after their pet had died and the perceived absence of support for their

²⁵³ <http://thebowencenter.org/theory/>

²⁵⁴ Liam W. Remillard, Michael P. Meehan, David F. Kelton, and Jason B. Coe. "Exploring the Grief Experience Among Callers to a Pet Loss Support Hotline." *Anthrozoos* 30, no. 1 (2017), 149-161.

feelings from others, or society in general.”²⁵⁵ Support groups offer a safe space to both express feelings of grief and explore how to work through the contradictions of societal norms and deep emotional responses. Many walk through the doors of support groups hesitantly, often opening with “I feel silly being here.”

Pet loss and grief support groups also act as education arenas by providing information on counseling and grief services, such as individual counseling, support hotlines, workshops and online support groups, as well as cemetery, cremation, and other body disposition businesses. Support groups can also help address and explore issues and options in end-of-life care; participants learn from each other as well as one companion animal just died, another is in hospice and requires constant attention. Eileen McKeon Pesek argues in “The Role of Support Groups in Disenfranchised Grief” that while support groups do not work for everyone, “they are especially critical...for disenfranchised grief.” Even more than traditional grievers, those experiencing the loss of a companion animal “need this kind of supportive atmosphere because of the isolation, loneliness, shame, and guilt they may experience.”²⁵⁶ Hearing personal narratives of similar loss allows participants to identify with each other, which can be particularly meaningful for those who do not have a familial or friend-based support system.²⁵⁷ These personal narratives, and the existence of the support group in general, help to legitimize the emotional responses of grief, including crying, depression, regret, guilt, shock, numbness,

²⁵⁵ Cindy L. Adams, et al. “Owner response to companion animal death, 36

²⁵⁶ Eileen McKeon Pesek. “The Role of Support Groups in Disenfranchised Grief.” In *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice*. ed. Kenneth J. Doka. (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2002) 132.

²⁵⁷ In numerous conversations with the author, companion humans have discussed how their support systems became unhelpful and even detrimental to the grieving process when considering the death of an animal. With the best intentions, they were unable to communicate the depth of mourning and extreme emotional response.

sorrow, and loneliness.²⁵⁸ While many studies have suggested that the grief experienced from the loss of companion animal and beloved human are similar, mourning processes and practices are not.

Pet loss and grief support groups and the development of other bereavement services²⁵⁹ through rituals and memorialization are extremely important in the face of the current “cultural milieu of pet death.”²⁶⁰ According to veterinarian and professor Cindy Adams and others, “pet death does not have a system of rituals and protocols” that help to ease the pains of mourning the loss of a companion animal. Human death in the United States, though different and nuanced by cultural and religious norms, is defined by certain rituals (e.g. funerals and memorials) and specific locations (e.g. cemeteries). Without these establishments, attending to the death of a companion animal can be directionless and without meaningful outlets for public mourning, feelings of grief can be overwhelming. Even today, in 2018, there is no standardization across veterinary medical practices in regards to what veterinarians know, or should know, about after-death care. Standardization in end-of-life care, as described in the previous chapter, is just recently seeing significant standing in veterinary care and support services, as well as in veterinary medical school classrooms. After-death is slowly following suit but in new ways and through unique communities. After-death care and grief support moves beyond the veterinary clinic and into the homes of grieving companion humans and new death industry professionals.

²⁵⁸ Thomas A. Wrobel and Amanda L. Dye. “Grieving Pet Death: Normative, Gender, and Attachment Issues.” *Omega* 47, no. 4 (2003) 386.

²⁵⁹ In addition to pet loss and grief support groups, grieving companion humans also turn to online support groups, hotlines, and workshops.

²⁶⁰ Cindy L. Adams, et al. “Owner response to companion animal death, 36.

Hosting memorial and funerary services, creating commemorative alters, and writing obituaries are just some of the ways companion humans mourn and memorialize their companion animals. Though grieving families have more options today, many of these mourning practices are by and large conducted in the home. The lifespan of many companion animals is considerably shorter than their human companions and as such, many families may end up experiencing the deaths of multiple companion animals. For families who cremate the bodies of their companion animals, the cremains often form sacred spaces or altars to the lost lives. These spaces are not usually front and center within the living space but tend to occupy corners or window sills in offices, living rooms, and dining rooms. In addition to an animal's ashes, altars can include collars and name tags, baby teeth, locks of hair, pictures, and paw prints. As families age, altars to companion animals become quite cluttered. Images of these altars can be found primarily through social media platforms, though not nearly as prominent as obituaries.²⁶¹

Companion animal obituaries are quickly becoming one of the most popular forms of public mourning for recently deceased pets and according to a recent study, "online companion animals obituaries [can] be a useful source of information on the human-animal bond."²⁶² Companion animal obituaries appear primarily on social media platforms, particularly Facebook and more recently Instagram. Without the usual obituary outlets, online platforms such as Facebook and Instagram provide grieving companion humans space to write and share a personalized obituary or eulogy with their online communities. Companion animal obituaries

²⁶¹ Numerous images were also shared with the author from friends, family, and acquaintances.

²⁶² Jill R. D. MacKay, Janice Moore, and Felicity Huntingford. "Characterizing the Data in Online Companion-dog obituaries to Assess Their Usefulness as a Source of Information about Human-Animal Bond." *Anthrozoos* 29, no. 3 (2016), 438.

take a similar shape to those of humans. Noting the dates of birth and death (or for rescue animals, the “gotcha” date), companion animal obituaries have many similar component as human obituaries including, but not limited to, mentions of family member left behind, how they died, and endearing characteristics. Unlike many human obituaries, those for companion animals are often funny such as the one for a tortoise named Julius, who “rumbled his stately way through our lives, head butting furniture, eating dandelions and repeatedly trying to mate with our shoes.”²⁶³ Or for Brian, who “quickly became a dog legends are made of... In his spare time, Brian dreamt violently, thrashing his legs, presumably chasing dastardly felines or squirrels who dared entered his dreams.”²⁶⁴ Companion animal obituaries, published on the personal social media accounts, can be deeply personal and usually evokes an outpouring of support (at least in the comment sections of obituary posts) from the individual’s social media community.²⁶⁵

Animal obituaries are not always met with such support however. According to Jane Desmond in “Animal Deaths and the Written Record of History: The Politics of Pet Obituaries,” companion animal obituaries “articulate an extended notion of kinship obligations and recognition by publicly recognizing this bond with nonhuman animals.”²⁶⁶ Obituaries, as part of

²⁶³ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/jul/11/readers-pet-obituaries-here-lies-fluffy-rip>

²⁶⁴ Sara Chorney. “A Dog Legends Are Made Of: Read a Pet Parent's Heartbreaking, Hilarious Obit to Her Beloved Pup.” *People Magazine* (July 20, 2017). <http://people.com/pets/touching-dog-obit/>

²⁶⁵ In a recent study on “companion animals in obituaries,” in which the authors looked to human obituaries that mention companion animals. Examining over 11,000 unduplicated obituaries, published over a three month period, the study found that 260 obituaries “listed pet survivors and/or asked that donations be sent to animal charities.” Of these 260, 57% listed a companion animal survivor and 50% listed options for donations to animal charities. (There was also some overlap.) The study concludes that by listing a companion animal as a survivor in a human obituary, companion animals are thus “elevated to the level of kinship.” Cindy Wilson, F. Ellen Netting, Dennis Turner, and Cara Olsen. “Companion Animals in Obituaries: An Exploratory Study.” *Anthrozoos* 26, no. 2 (2013), 227-236.

²⁶⁶ Jane Desmond. “Animal Deaths and the Written Record of History: The Politics of Pet Obituaries.” Linda Kalof and Georgina Montgomery, eds. *Making Animal Meaning*. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011) 100.

the historical record, particularly in newspapers, not only recognize but validate and commemorate a life. Most major newspapers prohibit the publication of obituaries for companion animals, except in the classified section, for this particular reason. In 2003, an obituary for a dog named Bear was published in the *Iowa City Press* alongside the usual human obituaries. It was titled similarly, with the name and age and included a picture of the black Labrador Retriever. The obituary read: “Bear was known widely in the Iowa City community for his gentle humor and his tendency to nap on the streets. An inveterate lover of humankind, and particularly of the ladies, he was at home wherever there was an out-stretched hand, and cherished to those most whose offerings were most dependable. Bear passed away in his sleep on the morning of April 14, at 13 years old.”²⁶⁷ The response was varied but exemplifies the complications and contradictions in the public mourning of animals. Families of the deceased whose obituaries were included next to Bear’s were furious, calling the inclusion of a dog’s obituary “distasteful and disrespectful” and called for the newspaper to issue an apology. These families were deeply hurt and believed that by publishing the dog’s obituary, their loved ones’ obituaries were less worthy, diminished.

While there has been significant and meaningful moves to create and offer services for companion animal body disposition, cremation and burial are still the most popular forms. The pet death industry is flourishing and is proving to be a worthwhile market, particularly as human companions continue to attend to their animals after death as they do in life. However, despite these advances in after-death-care options for companion animals, many of the rituals and mourning practices are performed in the home. This is in part due to the continued

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 99 (Source: *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, April 15, 2003)

disenfranchisement of the grief experiences of companion humans, the lack of support they may feel after the death of a companion animal, and because the death of a companion animal is the death of a family member. The death positivity movement, with its enthusiasm for home funerals and family engagement with the dead, provides the space to create new rituals to honor companion animals, considering that besides the “blessing of the animals,” there is no codified religious rituals for or that includes companion animals.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Animals are everywhere. In the home, their hair sheds and collects on dark floors, in corners, and on plushy couches in the shape of their sleeping bodies. Companion animals offer innumerable benefits, engaging yet uncertain relationships, to human individuals or households, thus creating an interspecies family. This work has shown how complicated and ambiguous, yet significant and worthy of study the relationships between humans and companion animals can be. Through the exploration of pertinent scholarly work and literature in chapter two, the history of pet keeping in America in chapter three, the ways in which humans attend to companion animals at the end-of-life in chapter four, and how animal bodies are disposed, mourned and memorialized in chapter five, this work has seriously considered the the overall relationship between humans and companion animals in the home as a contribution to human-animal studies. With companion animals as engaged relationship partners, I hope to have solidified companion animal death and dying as a significant topic of scholarly research within death and dying studies, as the field continues to see shifts in death awareness and death positivity. Overall, this work has provided a historical context by which to situate our current relationships with companion animals in the home, particularly when companion animals come to the end-of-life.

There are two glaring points of tension in this work that deserve further scholarly attention. First, going back to the introduction in which I define interspecies family, this work does not meticulously confront the legality of family, but rather the ideal of multi-species inclusion. Pets are still property under the law and while they may become objects of contention when a couple divorces or separates, they are still only considered as such, though there is some

scholarly movement to argue otherwise. Legal scholar Christopher Rhodes suggests, in “Who Gets the Dog When the Marriage Gets ‘Ruff’: Complications Arising from the Classification of Family Pets as Traditional Property,” that companion animals “do not fit neatly into the mold of traditional property principles” and thus, we should begin to rethink their legal status as traditional property to something more, primarily because “pets are unique in the fact that pets think, feel and love. This applies to no other form of property.”²⁶⁸

Founded in the examination of what conceptually counts as family, this project calls for an examination of legislative policies (primarily on local and regional levels) to create laws that best reflect interspecies communities. This is already taking place in poignant ways, such as provisions enacted in a new Pennsylvania law; Libre’s Law was established in 2017 to improve tethering conditions for dogs, add protection for horses by realigning penalties for cruelty with those against dogs and cats, and increasing penalties for animal abuse.²⁶⁹ In addition to legislative changes to the ways in which humans care for companion animals, there is a growing list of cities (and one state) that have codified “pet guardian” as preferred language for “pet owner.” Boulder, Colorado, San Francisco, Berkeley and West Hollywood in California, Sherwood, Arizona, Amherst, Massachusetts, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin and the state of Rhode Island have all implemented the use of pet guardian, which many argue “promotes greater responsibility and respect for pets without granting them additional protections or changing their legal status.” By using guardian, these legislatures have legitimized “what many pet owners

²⁶⁸ Christopher G. Rhodes. “Who Gets the Dog When the Marriage Gets ‘Ruff’: Complications Arising from the Classification of Family Pets as Traditional Property.” *Estate Planning and Community Property Law Journal* 9, issue 2 (2017), 295-6.

²⁶⁹ Press release. “Governor Wolf Celebrates Landmark Animal Protection Legislation Becoming Law Today.” August 28, 2017. Office of the Governor. <https://www.governor.pa.gov/governor-wolf-celebrates-landmark-animal-protection-legislation-becoming-law-today/>

already believe to be true about their relationship with their furry friends. What's more, they consider the measure a nonbinding means of educating the public and promoting animal welfare."²⁷⁰

In addition to the conceptual and legal frameworks that define family in the United States, this work also proposes a standard of care for companion animals at the end of life (and veterinary care in general) which includes critical and intuitive attention to the suffering of companion animals as they age and die, much like humans do for other human family members. Even with veterinary medical care insurance, pet owners pay for veterinary care out-of-pocket and often become inaccessible to many pet owners, especially to low income interspecies families.²⁷¹ Small steps are being taken to consider low-income interspecies families, by providing pet food at local food banks, for example,²⁷² but further research is needed to understand how to bridge the gap between valuing the human-animal relationship as a consumer relationship and one that is familial and intimate.

The literature review offers both historical and theoretical frameworks by which to draw attention to and study the death and dying of companion animals. It is, however, by no means exhaustive. There are innumerable works that could have been included and could have shaped the conversation differently, such as Barbara King's *Evolving God: Provocative View on the*

²⁷⁰ R. Scott Nolen. "Pet owners in San Francisco become 'pet guardians.'" *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. (March 1, 2003). <https://www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/030301d.aspx>

²⁷¹ "North American pet ownership demographics shifting." *Pet Food Industry* (March 2017), 28-36. <http://www.petfoodindustry-digital.com/201803/index.php#/42> According to a recent survey, 70% of Caucasians, 69% of Hispanics, 44% of African Americans and 43% of Asians own pets. 71% of men own dogs, while 48% own cats. 62% of women own dogs, and 35% own cats.

²⁷² Mary Elizabeth Rautkis, et al. "Their Pets are Loved Members of Their Family: Animal Ownership, Food Insecurity, and the Value of Having Pet Food Available in Food Banks." *Anthrozoos* 30, issue 4 (2017), 581-593.

Origins of Religion, which questions the evolution of religious experience through observation and analysis of primate behavior, and Andrew Linzey's *Why Animal Suffering Matters: Philosophy, Theology and Practical Ethics*, which argues that animals, as morally innocent and relatively defenseless in the face of human power, should be afforded a special moral status that like infants and children deserve attention, care and protection. This literature review could have also included the myriad of popular texts on living with, learning from and loving companion animals such as, *You Had Me at Woof: How Dogs Taught Me the Secrets of Happiness* by Julie Klam, *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know* by Alexander Horowitz, and *Fetch: How a Bad Dog Brought Me Home*, a graphic novel by Nicole Georges about her life with a rescue dog. Animal studies, as a multidisciplinary academic discipline and as seen through popular reflection and attention on the lives, bodies, and deaths of companion animals, is growing rapidly and it was difficult to determine what to include. But by exploring scholars at the intersections of death and dying studies and religion and human-animal studies, this review has provided the foundation by which to comparatively explore the death and dying of companion animals.

To do this, the literature review notes the shifts in American cultural perceptions of death and dying in the early 20th century that saw a move from death at home to dying in the hospital. Kubler-Ross' *On Death and Dying* constructed a path and public, nonscientific discourse to engage issues of death and dying. Chapter one also traces the development of human hospice and palliative care as part of the death awareness movement and as a way to respond to mechanization of dying in hospitals, where physicians saw death as a failure. Today, there is a new wave of the death awareness movement, death positivity, which is led and sustained by

women in academia, the arts, and technical death professions. Death positivity aims to bring death home by encouraging intimate care for the dying, particularly in regards to after-death body care. These perceptual shifts in death and dying combined with feminist theoretical discussions of “home” as a site of intimate becoming with companion animals into interspecies families sets up the discussion of the death and dying of companion animals.

The history of pet keeping in chapter two traces the path of animals from outside to inside the family home. With over 157 million cats, dogs, horses, and birds as companion animals in the United States,²⁷³ this project focuses on the ambiguous human-animal relationship as one defined by both consumerism and familial intimacy. Between 1840 and 1940, the pet industry grew exponentially, marketing primarily to women as domestic caregivers, and developing into a 70 billion industry that includes food, supplies and over-the-counter medicine, veterinary care, and pet services like grooming and boarding.²⁷⁴ The fact that most “pet ownership statistics” are provided by the American Pet Products Association, which seeks to advance consumer confidence in the pet industry, indicates the importance of the human-animal relationship as a profitable market. As chapter two shows, however, these statistics also point to the shifts in companion animal care and intimacy such as an increase in companion animal inclusion in family and religious events. For example, 48% of dog owners will purchase a Christmas or Hanukkah gift for their dogs, while 67% of cat owners will purchase a gift for their cat at some

²⁷³ “U.S. Pet Ownership Statistics.” American Veterinary Medical Association, 2012. <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Statistics/Pages/Market-research-statistics-US-pet-ownership.aspx>

²⁷⁴ “Pet Industry Market Size and Ownership Statistics.” American Pet Products Association, 2018. https://www.americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp

point in the relationship. The inclusion of companion animals in celebratory and religious practices demonstrates a meaningful change for how families become interspecies.

Human members of interspecies families are now offering hospice and palliative care to their companion animals in ways that reflect and at times, replicate, human end-of-life care. As chapter three documents, companion animals are living longer and requiring more intensive veterinary care. There have been, however, significant developments in the ways in which humans can care for aging companion animals, from everything to major surgeries and prosthetics, palliative treatments such as hydrotherapy, and everyday modifications to the home. One of the major developments is animal hospice which largely mirrors human hospice by providing palliative (spiritual and emotional) care for both animal patients and human companions. One of the main differences between human and animal hospice is that animal hospice usually ends in euthanasia. Small animal veterinarians have taken on dual roles, as both physicians treating a patient and funeral directors creating a “good death” as they help to guide humans in making this difficult decision. While there is now some discussion within veterinary medicine and animal ethics scholarship on whether euthanasia is always the ethical choice, it remains the leading cause of death²⁷⁵ for companion animals, in both the shelter and veterinary clinics.

Following the death of a companion animals, studies have shown that the grief felt by human family members is similar, if not the same, as that felt after the loss of a human loved one. Chapter four shows how humans are creatively enacting rituals of mourning and

²⁷⁵ As mentioned earlier in this project, there is no documentation or record-keeping of animal death in the United States. While cancer remains the most deadly medical condition for cats and dogs, euthanasia (as the intentional hastening of death, in hopes of creating a peaceful end) seems to remain the leading cause of death for companion animals when considering family pets and potential pets living in shelters.

memorialization for their companion animals through traditionally (human-like) after-death practices such as burial and cremation, but also through body preservation such as taxidermy and freeze-drying. While often seen as grotesque, preserving companion animal bodies has become an available option for memorializing companion animals. Fraught with ambiguity and tension - as there is a significant conversation on how taxidermy seems to only serve the interests of the human - traditional taxidermy businesses have taken on pet preservation services.

In addition to attending to the animal body after death, companion humans have created ways to perform and represent their grief in unique ways. This type of grief, while often still diminished or ignored, finds legitimization and support through psychological counseling, pet loss and grief support groups (both online and locally), hosting memorial and funerary services, creating commemorative shrines, and writing obituaries. While these methods are not unique when applied to human death, they become idiosyncratic to human individuals and interspecies families.

By bringing together the history of pet keeping, issues of end-of-life care, euthanasia, and after-death-care for companion animals, as well as human experiences of grief after the loss of a beloved animal, this work makes a call for further research in veterinary medicine and death and dying studies, in general, and perhaps within psychological frameworks for the study of family and family relations. Further reflection is needed within veterinary medical school curriculums that continue to evolve to meet the needs of animal and human clients, to develop a standard of care. As human hospice and palliative care has become a dedicated subfield within human medicine, so too should more focus be placed on end-of-life care for companion animals. Many human clients are still unaware of the possible end-of-life care options for their companion

animals and this could be due, in part, to the lack of educational attention given to talking about death in veterinary schools. Veterinarians and veterinary staff need to know how to talk about death and dying with human clients; they need to be fully aware of how decisions in end-of-life care are made and be sensitive to the ways in which interspecies families cultivate and foster these relationships. Specifically, veterinarians should be able to discuss families' financial situations, religious and spiritual beliefs, and ask about the capabilities of pet guardians to provide hospice and palliative care in the home, as it is largely left up to human caregivers to supply such care. Whether we see a hospice wing of a veterinary hospital remains to be seen; though based on the economic significance of the human-animal relationship, I would not be surprised. Like the human death industry, it would seem there is money to be made in animal end-of-life care.

More broadly, there are some major differences between companion animal and human death and dying that deserves further scholarly attention, primarily the "patient perspective" and an ethic of autonomy in the face of medical decisions, both of which have become critical to human healthcare. Unfortunately, companion animals cannot write wills or determine which member of their interspecies family will get their most beloved toy or their secret stash of bones and human socks. They cannot determine advanced directives or sign do-not-resuscitate orders. What has developed, however, is a continually expanding and intricate network of care and attention at the end of life.

Local veterinary clinics and pet service providers, such as dog walking companies, could provide much needed services by learning what kind of hospice and palliative care options are available and adaptable to the family's home life, while also understanding body disposal options

as many human companions have no idea what is locally available or even legal in their regional and state ordinances. In this way, animal services providers, whether in medicine or everyday care, can assist in helping humans create death and mourning rituals for companion animals while also giving human companions the opportunity to grieve, recognizing that grief as legitimate and real. Similarly, marriage and family therapists should understand that a pet in the family is actually *part of* the family and if death occurs, it is similarly felt and experienced by humans as if they had lost another loved (human) family member.

Within death and dying studies, this work calls on scholars to fully include nonhuman death and dying in their discipline. Starting with companion animals is a way to push the boundaries between humans and other nonhuman species. It is a way to jumpstart the attention needed for other nonhuman death and dying such as animals in shelters, at zoos and sanctuaries, the death and dying of wild animals in fragile habitats, and even the death and dying of non-animal species such as entire geographical environments that are under threat of climate change and human destruction. In addition, as a new wave of death awareness is gaining popularity through social media in multiple versions of death positivity, further scholarship in death and dying studies must document this shift and how it works to include both women as leader and animals as engaged relationship partners.

Further scholarship on animals and religion should continue to explore the ways religious institutions and spiritual communities are opening their doors to companion animals and to encourage more critical and in depth relationships with all animals. What can religious institutions do to support members who see their companion animals as part of the family? How are these family members legitimately seen within the religious community? While there has

been some significant scholarship on how animals appear in religious text and dogma, there is still little knowledge of how these textual and symbolic relationships play out within the family and at home. How do we include animals in religious and spiritual ritual, belief and community without uncritically ascribing religious identity?

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West Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia, PA: <http://westlaurelhill.com/services/pets>