Introduction
Beasts in the Republic of Letters

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On May 25, 2016, Channel 4 aired a one-off documentary entitled *The Secret Life of Human Pups*. Directed by Guy Simmonds, the program tells the story of several British men who have chosen in their personal lives to adopt the identity of dogs, men whose decision to live as such defines a growing international community committed to the practice called "puppy play."[1] The documentary's principal figure, a theatrical sound and lighting technician named Tom, spends his free time in a £4,000 custom-made latex Dalmatian suit (Figure I.1), an outfit that he claims allows him to emerge from the darkness of his backstage theatrical vocation and take a turn as "the center of attention."[2] And indeed, Tom's exploration of his canine persona, Zentai Spot, has led in short order to a startling form of celebrity: not only has he appeared on television, but he has also attained the title of Mr. Puppy UK 2015, a distinction further enhanced by securing the bronze medal for second runner-up at the first Mr. Puppy Europe competition, held in Antwerp on February 20–1, 2016.[3]

Puppy play originated within the cosplay and leather communities, the Mr. Puppy Europe competition having itself evolved as a subsidiary venture of the annual Leatherpride Belgium festival. As a result, puppy play may most easily be understood as an erotic undertaking marked by the dynamics of dominance and submission typical of BDSM culture as a whole. But taken in any sense, it can hardly be called new. In fact, the antecedents of puppy play can be traced back through centuries of literary figuration. The English national poet offers as good a starting-point as any when, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*c*.1596), Helena notoriously exclaims, "I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,/ The more you beat me, I will fawn on you."[4] But there is much more. To confine oneself to early modern examples alone, there is George Turberville (*c*.1575), who complains,

> Indeed (my dear) you wrong my dog in this
> And show yourself to be of crabbed kind,

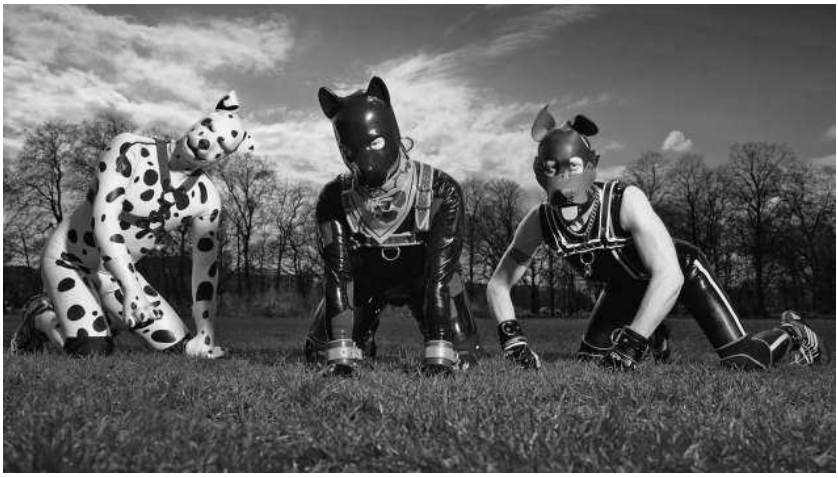

Figure I.1 Still from *The Secret Life of Human Pups*. *Source*: Courtesy Channel 4.

> That will not let my fawning whelp to kiss
> You first, that fain would show his master's mind.[5]

There is the Spanish exile Antonio Pérez, sometimes proposed as a model for Shakespeare's Don Armado in *Love's Labours Lost*, who protests to Lady Penelope Rich in 1595 that

> I have been so troubled not to have at hand the dog's skin gloves your Ladyship desires that … I have resolved to … flay a piece of my own skin from the most tender part of my body … to make gloves … The gloves, my Lady, are made of dog's skin, though they are mine; for I hold myself a dog and beg your ladyship to keep me in your service upon the honour and love of a faithful dog.[6]

There are the celebrated love letters between King James I and George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, in which, among many other endearments, the latter celebrates "the time which I shall never forget at Farnham, where the bed's head could not be found between the master and his dog."[7] There are the thirty-five so-called "Little Beagle Letters," in which King James addresses his principal secretary, Sir Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury, with sundry variations of this nickname, to which Cecil responds accordingly.[8] Yet despite its often overtly prurient character, this language cannot always or entirely be understood as a product of the erotic imagination. In well-attested Renaissance fashion, Pérez's letters to Penelope Rich (and Buckingham's to King James) conflate the vocabularies

of sexual service and patronage. James' letters to Cecil, not remotely sexual in nature, locate themselves somewhere within the province of disability studies. And modern puppy players, too, describe their actions as resisting confinement to the erotic sphere. Zentai Spot's alter ego, Tom, considers his canine role-play (which undid his engagement to his ex-fiancé Rachel) as "escapism," while Guy Simmonds, director of *The Secret Life of Human Pups*, characterizes the puppy-play community as "a broad church of people from all walks of life," including "gay, straight, transsexual, [and] asexual pups."[9] One searches for a theory of behavior that can fully account for the resonances of such discourse, just as one searches for a theory of the literary that explains its recurrence in poems, plays, letters, television documentaries, websites, and leather bars.

It is around such subject matter that the scholarly discipline of animal studies has coalesced over the past quarter-century or so. Answering the perceived need for a field of organized inquiry that addresses the theory and practice of species difference, animal studies has sought, among other things, to understand the intense and perdurable imaginative pull that draws human beings to identify with nonhuman life. In the present case, thus, we might begin by noting the inadequacy of conventional psychotherapeutic terms such as "paraphilia," which have been rejected by many therapists themselves for reducing behavior to the sexual dimension, for speciously associating it with various kinds of trauma, and for imposing discredited standards of heteronormativity in the process, but that nonetheless enjoy a zombie afterlife in the popular press, where they are still invoked to explain practices like puppy play.[10] We might glimpse a way forward through Bakhtinian notions of carnival inversion – in which "the 'top' attempts to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover … that the top *includes* that low symbolically, as a primary eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life" – while noting that although Bakhtin helps decenter the heteronormative, he replaces this with the aridity of the late twentieth-century subversion-containment debate.[11] Judith Butler's notion of gender as performance,[12] in turn, seems especially well suited to the histrionic element in puppy play, and Tom/Zentai Spot's professional identity as a theater worker only enhances the fit. Still, Butler's specific focus on gender raises questions here, as does the notion of performance through which she understands it.

To begin with, we might wonder just what is being performed in puppy play. The practice may arise from the culture of queer gender dissidence, but it just as clearly extends beyond the enactment of gender to that of species. By this measure it recalls various sorts of symbiosis

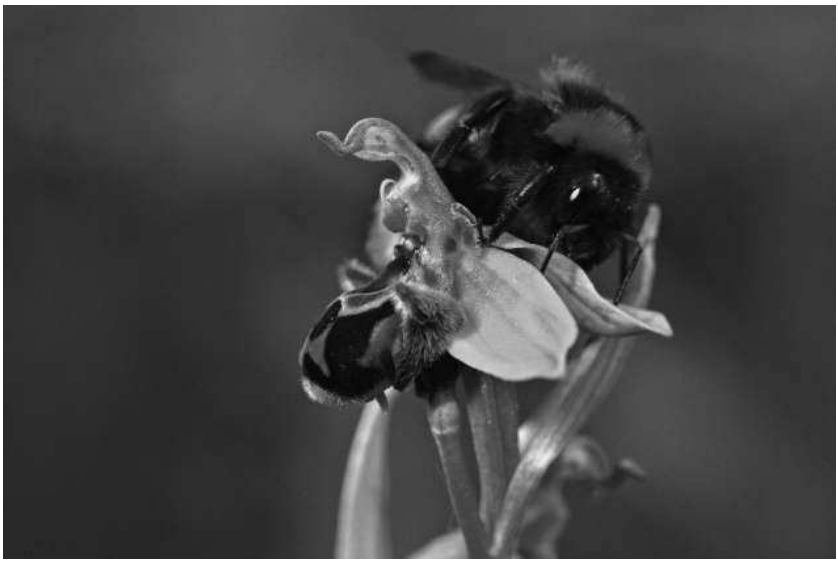

Figure I.2 Interspecies pseudocopulation between a bumblebee and an orchid of the genus *Ophrys*.
Source: Courtesy FLPA/Alamy.

and mimicry to be found in the nonhuman world, perhaps most notably the kinds of interspecies pseudocopulation associated with orchids of the genus *Ophrys* – the so-called bee orchids (Figure I.2). But this parallel, suggestive as it may be, proves inexact. The bee orchid copies another species in order to interact with individuals of that species, essentially the same thing done by Ovid's Pasiphaë when she "with unnatural passion deceived [a] savage bull by [a] shape of wood and bore a hybrid offspring in her womb."[13] Puppy players, by contrast, copy another species in order to interact with individuals of their own, thus embodying a mode of species imitation distinct from the bestiality exemplified by Pasiphaë and documented at length by scholars like Marjorie Garber and Midas Dekkers.[14]

By the same token, we need to consider just what it means, in the case of puppy play, to *perform* gender, or species, or gender/species relations. "I am your spaniel," Helena tells Demetrius, thus activating the resources of metaphor, the paradigmatic figurative mode that insists on the identity of unlike things, but under erasure, with the tacit expectation that the hearer will understand "I am your spaniel" to mean "I am your spaniel, and yet am not one." Theatrical performance, in turn, takes shape as metaphor

embodied, put into action – a relation complicated in Helena's case by the fact that we witness a boy performing the identity of a girl asserting the identity of a dog. But what of *non*-theatrical performance (if we may use this concept without placing it, too, under erasure)? Is there a point at which Tom actually turns into Zentai Spot? Tom himself seems to think so. "You go so deep into the headspace that you just don't stop to look and you don't stop to think. You crave it, you want it, you wish for it," he declares.[15] To what extent, we might ask, do we find ourselves here beyond the space of imitation and beyond even that of identification – in the zone of affective contagion that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called "becoming-animal"?[16]

In any case, at the time and place of this writing (London, June 2016), puppy play seems to be having a moment. Not only is there the recent TV documentary, the new UK Mr. Puppy competition, and its European counterpart across the Channel in Antwerp. A major Soho sex shop on Old Compton Street features puppy-play gear in its front window display (Figure I.3). And half a mile north in Fitzrovia, a Warren Street café called Coffee, Cake, & Kisses has begun hosting monthly "Wagging Tails, Wet Noses" events "for folks who get turned on by role-playing as pets and their owners."[17] Puppy play, it would seem, is an idea whose time has come.

By Cary Wolfe's account, "Animal studies … would probably not exist … in its current form" if not for two major scholarly developments of the late twentieth century: "the work done in field ecology and cognitive ethology over the last twenty years" and "the emergence of the animal rights movement in the 1970s [through] that movement's foundational philosophical works, Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* and, later, Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights*."[18] From this immediate connection, one could argue, animal studies has developed in one sense as the historical consciousness of the animal-liberation movement, tasked with uncovering its pre-history and intellectual precursors so as in turn to enable a revised version of history in the broader sense. In theory, this project should be inherently progressive, allied to Kenneth Burke's understanding of "society as a function of education":[19] as activism influences scholarship, changing social standards of cross-species behavior elicit a new historical understanding that should, in the most optimistic formulation, clear the way in the classroom for still more social change.

As for the new history thus produced, it contains much the same figures and events as the history it aims to supplement, but with differing emphases as required by the differing perspective. In classical studies, for

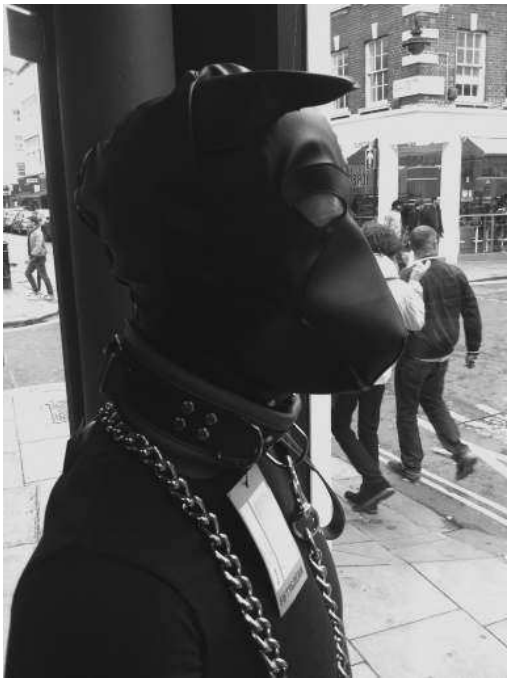

Figure I.3 Puppy-play window display, 50 & Dean, Dean and Old Compton Streets, London, June 10, 2016.
Source: Photo by Bruce Boehrer.

instance, new interest attaches to the Pythagorean school of philosophy (sixth century BCE), not so much for its proto-Socratic focus on mathematics as for its belief in the transmigration of souls and its vegetarianism.[20] Plutarch, too, solicits renewed attention, not for his *Lives* but instead for the two brief dialogues inserted in his *Moralia* (first–second centuries CE) that argue in favor of the reasoning capacities of nonhuman animals.[21] In the Middle Ages, interest accrues to Saint Francis of Assisi's *Fioretti* (late fourteenth century), where the saint's sermon to his "Sisters the birds" and negotiations with "Brother Wolf" gather the beasts into the collective body of Christ and into a kind of social compact with human beings.[22] This gesture, in turn, seems consistent with the body of surviving medieval case law in which animals are accused, tried, and sometimes convicted of criminal misconduct – case law that, by interpellating these beasts within the justice system, coincidentally invests them with legal personhood and rights.[23]

Continuing into the Renaissance, we encounter Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535), sundered from his customary occult connections and now in the company of northern Europe's leading humanists, Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), and Michel de Montaigne (1533–92), as the four deliver a scornful collective indictment of hunting and other forms of animal abuse.[24] Thence the way leads, via English Puritanism's fierce opposition to blood sport, to Enlightenment figures like Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), whose utilitarian advocacy of animal rights will later inspire Singer's arguments in *Animal Liberation*.[25] By this stage of events, institutional action has begun to catch up with debate: the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is founded in 1824, coming under royal patronage sixteen years later; the British Cruelty to Animals Act of 1835 is ratified to prohibit blood sports like bear-baiting and cock-fighting; and the Vegetarian Society is founded in 1847.

With the dawn of the twentieth century, similar organizational and legislative initiatives continue globally, while on the literary level, the ethical treatment of animals becomes a feature of Fabian socialism à la G. B. Shaw and Henry Salt.[26] By this point, the indigenous (and increasingly Anglo-centric) Western tradition of theriophily begins to merge with more exotic, post-imperial influences as well. Mohandas Ghandi first travels to London in 1887, bringing with him his Hindu/Jain vow of vegetarianism, and by 1927 he declares in his autobiography that "the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being."[27] Nor is this encounter with Asian spirituality a one-off affair. Some forty years later, the Beatles embrace South Asian vegetarianism with varying degrees of success during their much-publicized meditation retreat in Rishikesh.[28] Meanwhile, Gary Snyder spends the mid-1950s translating the selected Chan poetry of Han Shan (seventh–eighth centuries CE) – in which vegetarianism comprises "perhaps the single most frequently recurring moral issue" – while Jack Kerouac dedicates *The Dharma Bums* (1958) to their author.[29]

As even a thumbnail history like this confirms, there exists a 2,500-year tradition of Western literary activity in support of the various propositions and commitments informing the modern animal rights movement: vegetarianism; belief in the rational capacities of animals; opposition to hunting, blood sport, and other forms of animal cruelty; conservationism; and the conviction that human and nonhuman animals belong within the same biological, spiritual, and ethical community. One purpose of the present volume is to explore and clarify this history.

Such clarification becomes necessary for a number of reasons. For one thing, surviving records are not always reliable or consistent. In the case of

Pythagoras, for instance, ancient sources contradict each other as to why and how fully he promoted vegetarianism. Iamblichus reports that Pythagoras enjoined the diet upon philosophers and legislators and practiced it himself, while allowing others "whose life was not entirely pure and holy and philosophic … to eat some animal food."[30] Diogenes Laertius relates both that the philosopher "forbade even the killing, let alone the eating, of animals which share with us the privilege of having a soul" and, to the contrary, that he was "the first to diet athletes on meat," then reconciles these tales by claiming that Pythagoras actually urged vegetarianism not to respect our spiritual kinship with animals but rather "to accustom [people] to simplicity of life."[31] However, more decisive testimony comes from the younger Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), who recounts his own experience of adopting a vegetarian diet at the direction of his Pythagorean tutor, Sotion: "Pythagoras … held that all beings are interrelated, and that there was a system of exchange between souls which transmigrated from one bodily shape to another[, so that] it is a mark of purity to refrain from eating flesh."[32] This account, grounded in personal history, also agrees broadly with the summary of Pythagorean beliefs presented in Porphyry's *On Abstinence from Animal Food* (late third century CE), the most substantial classical treatment of its subject to survive.[33]

More confusing than such gaps and contradictions in the record, there is also the problem of anachronism. Although the key elements of the contemporary animal rights platform have had past advocates, these advocates do not as a rule present their views in anything like the configuration typical of modern animal-rights discourse, with the result that one may almost effortlessly exaggerate the currency of past pronouncements on the subject. In some cases, early proponents of animal-friendly policies have also espoused superficially unrelated practices of a discreditable nature, which need to be considered as part of their legacy. For instance, Sir Thomas More's dislike of hunting and butchery loses luster when set alongside his record of tormenting Protestants.[34] In other cases, the early exponents of kindness to animals seem not to have thought through the implications of their own views. Thus "Saint Francis's love for birds and oxen seems not to have led him to cease eating them; and when he drew up the rules for the conduct of the friars in the order he founded, he gave no instruction that they were to abstain from meat, except on certain fast days."[35] In still other cases, early practices now associated with compassion for animals were originally instituted for rather different reasons. The Chan vegetarianism of Han Shan, for instance, "does not reflect an animal rights perspective that

explicitly focuses on humane treatment" – at least not on the surface – nor do Beats like Snyder and Kerouac adopt it in any rigorous way.[36]

This last point opens onto the more specialized problem presented by anachronism as it appears under the aspect of ideological and ethical presentism. Since our species' perception of moral growth is itself a function of the present moment's relation to the past, it is easy to dismiss the work of past generations as inadequate. On this view, the Beats' failure to adopt perfectly the dietary regimen of their own role model can seem to evince lack of seriousness at best, and at worst hypocrisy. But this verdict ignores the Beats' importance as cultural catalysts, introducing Western letters to alternative ethical traditions, modeling (however imperfectly) forms of oppositional thought and political action, and preparing the ground, often in the face of withering detraction, for the social, philosophical, and literary movements – many of these animal friendly – that have carried on their legacy. Much the same things could be said of the Beatles' trip to Rishikesh as well. An analogous problem (one more troublesome to modern animal-rights sensibilities) occurs in the case of figures like King James I of England and President Theodore Roosevelt of the United States: avid sportsmen whose fondness for the hunt paradoxically translated into strenuous efforts at wildlife conservation and habitat protection.[37] Again, the reflex may be to dismiss such figures as hypocrites who did more harm than good. James, for his part, helped forge a durable and embarrassing bond of association between wildlife conservation and patrician privilege, while Roosevelt embodied "a pugilistic form of masculine self-fashioning" that underwrote his posture of aggressive nationalism by depicting the natural world as an object of conquest and domination.[38] But the documentary record leaves no doubt about the sincerity of these figures' attachment to the natural world, and their broader ideological commitments were in both cases normative for their historical moment. To denigrate their efforts without acknowledging these facts is to indulge in a distinctly self-privileging form of anachronism.

All this being said, and despite the failings of specific individuals, one further feature of the Western theriophile tradition remains worthy of note: its repeated appearance in the company of related social-justice causes. Pythagoras not only advocated ethical vegetarianism; his school's "carefully guarded conditions of membership … nevertheless allowed (for the first time in history, so far as is known) the admission of women as members."[39] The same Renaissance humanist educational theories that discouraged corporal punishment in the classroom discouraged it in the *manège* as well.[40] By the eighteenth century, "the concern for animal welfare was part

of a much wider movement which involved … the abolition of slavery, flogging and public executions [and] the reform of schools, prisons, and the poor law."[41] The Humanitarian League was founded in 1891 specifically to coordinate efforts on a wide range of related social issues: to promote animal welfare, to encourage vegetarianism, to oppose vivisection, to prohibit child labor, to improve prison conditions, to abolish torture, and so forth.[42] This conjunction of causes does not relieve the advocates of animal rights from the need to make their own case on its own terms. But the common logic tying these various causes together does provide one's moral compass with a reassuring directional register.

On one level, the present volume thus studies the history of literary engagement with animals in the West, particularly as that engagement unfolds against the background of a developing animal-rights sensibility. On a separate but related level, our work also explores the logic of species difference – the theory – underlying this history. To glance back once more to Cary Wolfe's derivation of animal studies from animal-rights philosophy and animal science, it is here, on the theoretical side of things, that the science makes its presence most manifest.

From classical times to the seventeenth century, the dominant Western theoretical model for the difference between human and nonhuman animals could be found in Aristotle's treatise *On the Soul* (mid-fourth century BCE) and his related works on natural history. There the philosopher offers a proof for the soul's existence by arguing back from "the derived properties of [the] substance … (as in mathematics it is useful for the understanding of the property of the equality of the interior angles of a triangle to two right angles to know the essential nature of the straight and the curved or the line and the plane)."[43] In this manner – reasoning back from effects to causes – Aristotle establishes that "what has soul in it differs from what has not in that the former displays life," then divides soul itself into five constituent properties: "the nutritive, the appetitive, the sensory, the locomotive, and the power of thinking."[44] Proceeding thence to the question, "What is the soul of plant, animal, man?" the philosopher stipulates that the souls of plants have none of the foregoing properties "but the first, the nutritive," whereas those of different animal species possess the powers of appetition, sensation, and locomotion in varying measure, while that of "man and possibly another order like man or superior to him" (gods? angels?) is also capable of higher reason.[45]

Over 1,500 years later, this same triage reappears as Saint Thomas Aquinas' distinction (*c.*1265) between the vegetative, sensitive, and rational