

The Sport of Spectatorship: Exploring the Agency of Animals through Literature

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## ABSTRACT

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In recent years, there has been an undeniable shift in how we think about nonhuman animals. A growing philosophical literature on animal rights has encouraged a deep consideration of the moral status of animals, while scientific research has simultaneously confirmed the fact that many animals have complex cognitive, emotional, and social capacities that strongly mirror our own. Although there is still disagreement about what all this implies in terms of our responsibilities to animals, the idea that animals can experience physical or emotional pain or pleasure is the starting point and not the conclusion of the present inquiry. Many species of animals are sentient beings who possess a viewpoint from which they experience and act in the world around them – and hence may be said to be agential.

My dissertation explores what it means for us to extend, conceptually and morally, agency to animals. I address this “extension of agency” predominantly from an aesthetic perspective, although in doing so I in no way intend to limit the range of related philosophical concerns. On the contrary; to extend agency to animals, I argue, calls for a revised understanding of our habitual spectatorial stances—how we *look* at animals. To grasp these stances, I investigate how animals have been looked at in literary works of art. Does the literature show our spectatorship to extend agency to animals or do we objectify them so as to deny their capacities as agents altogether? My dissertation focuses on excerpts from three significant works of literature—works by Nathanael West, Ernest

Hemingway, and Leo Tolstoy—each of which stages a specifically athletic engagement involving animals, in this way bringing focus to the issue of our spectatorship. Each excerpt serves as philosophically illuminating material and as an exemplary case regarding humanity’s willingness or refusal to extend agency to animals.

I am particularly interested in the role of animals in human-engineered sports, and in how extending agency to animals in sports changes or ought to change the way we watch sports that involve animals. Within the philosophy of sport, the accepted approach has been to liken animals to sporting equipment or tools, and thus to make no substantive distinction between animal and non-animal sports. This, I argue, reflects a refusal to extend agency to animals, which has led also to an oversimplification and mischaracterization of sports involving animals in the first place.

Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust* takes up cockfighting, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* centers around bullfighting, and Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* includes a memorable, emotionally stirring, steeplechase episode. In addition to investigating what I refer to as the “extension of agency” to animals in these literary works, I revise some of the basic assumptions that have recently guided the burgeoning subfield of the philosophy of sports. I argue that we must acknowledge that there exists a fundamental difference between the modes of spectatorship that accompany sports that only involve humans, and those that involve animals. For to extend agency is to extend the moral domain to that or those who are “other” than ourselves.

Once animals are introduced into a sport, they imbue the sport with all the aesthetic complexities that come with looking at an animal outside of sport: the unique exotic beauty of the animal body and its fitness to function, but also its vitality, wild

autonomy, expressiveness, and reciprocity of gaze. This means that our interactions with animals, even in the case of organized sport or performance, are not purely aesthetic in a formal artistic sense; they are also expressive and communicative. The concept of the formal aesthetic that many employ when talking about art – the formal qualities that we attribute to the arts – is not sufficient to accommodate sports that involve animals and a spectatorship of animals. Animals are expressive, and this expressiveness is fundamental to correctly understanding our spectatorship of them. Animals are far more than our equipment. The aesthetic of animal sports must, I conclude, accordingly incorporate expressiveness and empathy, such that we see animals in fellowship with us as participants in sports. Extending agency to animals is the core concept of a morally inflected aesthetic of inter-subjectivity

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the philosophy of sports. While the majority of philosophers who have expressed an interest in sports have written about it from the point of view of ontology or ethics, some have adopted an aesthetic approach to sport, interested in how we engage with sports as spectators. What do we find fascinating? What do we find beautiful? How do sports differ in their aesthetic character and complexity? What is happening in a given sport – what is built into its particular structure, or what are its distinctive features – that makes it intriguing to spectators? What amounts to a cultivated, or expert, spectatorship of sports? Questions like these are presently guiding the burgeoning philosophical subfield of the aesthetics of sports.

In this dissertation, I identify and address what I take to be a puzzling problem within the aesthetics of sports – and therefore a problem for the philosophy of sports more generally. Despite the fact that many sports involve nonhuman animals, in philosophical discussions about the aesthetic features of sports and sports spectatorship, animals are largely left out of the account. There is no distinction drawn between sports that involve animals and those that do not. And hence, there has been no consideration of the fact that there might be special issues to address in the case of “animal sports” (as I will hereafter refer to them). When, on occasion, animals are acknowledged in the accounts, they tend to be likened to inanimate sports equipment and objectified – reduced to tools that simply enable the human body to accomplish feats it otherwise wouldn’t be able to. There is little attention paid to the role of an animal in a sport or to the possibility that animal sports might pose a special case for the aesthetics of sports.

My dissertation argues that a complete philosophy of sport must distinguish between animal sports and non-animal sports on two grounds: first, because animals are bearers of aesthetic interest, and second, because they are also bearers of ethical interest. In my view, we cannot understand sports involving animals without an appreciation of these two claims -- claims that I regard as deeply interconnected.

Let me immediately clarify how I am using the term “aesthetic.” Most people’s first association with it is beauty, specifically in art. This is sometimes taken to be a matter purely of the sensory; beautiful artworks give people pleasure to look at, listen to, touch, etc. My use of the term aesthetic is much broader than that which pertains solely to art.

When I say that animals are bearers of aesthetic interest, I am referring to the fact that we have a preexisting aesthetic relationship to animals independent of sports. There is an important sense in which animals are, to humans, objects of aesthetic intrigue. Even with no relation to performance or sport, animals are very often objects of aesthetic fascination for the viewer. Consider zoos, aquariums, safaris etc. – massive industries are built around providing humans with opportunities to look at animals. Consider the extent to which animals are taken up by the arts, specifically the visual arts of painting, sculpture, and photography. And take the prevalence and popularity of animal Internet memes; animals star in a large majority of the online visual content that goes “viral.” Looking at animals is, we might say, a universal aesthetic experience for humans. There is a sense in which looking at animals, or the presence of animal beauty, is something rewarding in its own right for us. We have a freestanding aesthetic fascination with animals, which I believe is a function of their physical appearance, movement, and

expressiveness, but also their exoticism and “otherness.” I contend that animals are a special source of aesthetic value and that this makes them bearers of aesthetic interest -- and that this fact injects a unique complicating factor that must be considered in a philosophical analysis of animal sports.

I draw on a notion of the aesthetic that already has moral implications built into it. The aesthetic – by virtue of being all about the nature of looking at and engaging with things – is continuous with the ethical and inextricable from it. When we engage with aesthetic objects and make value judgments about them, we are also by definition engaging with these objects in an ethical sense. The aesthetic and the ethical work in tandem to form our value judgments. Some philosophers have considered animal sports from the point of view of the strictly ethical; I see expanding the inquiry around animal sports into the domain of the aesthetic as just that – an expansion, as the aesthetic itself has moral implications.

In addition, I maintain that, in order to understand animal sports, we must recognize that animals are bearers of ethical interest as well. The general claim that animals are bearers of ethical interest strikes me as relatively noncontroversial. Regardless of whether one goes as far as to take the position that animals have rights, to deny that we have more ethical interest in an animal than in a piece of sporting equipment – more ethical interest in a horse than in a racecar, or in a pair of skis -- would be an extreme position to take. By virtue of being animate as opposed to inanimate, by virtue of being alive, an animal can be said to be a bearer of ethical interest in the sense that, unlike a piece of sports equipment, it can die. Wherever one lands in the debate over whether we have an obligation not to kill animals, the very fact that animals can die and,

like us, are corporeally bound and subject to mortality, is, in my view, enough for them to count as bearers of ethical interest in a way that sports equipment cannot be.

There is ample evidence to suggest that animals ought to be viewed as bearers of ethical interest in a much more robust and meaningful sense than this. The growing philosophical field of animal ethics has encouraged us to consider the moral status of animals. Scientific research has simultaneously demonstrated the fact that many species of animals – in particular primates, cetaceans, many other mammals, and some species of birds -- have complex cognitive, emotional, and social capacities, which often tend to closely resemble our own.<sup>1</sup> While there are still those who think attributing psychological states to animals amounts to anthropomorphism, more and more researchers and thinkers are concluding that at least some species of animals have the capacity to experience not only physical pleasure and pain, but emotional pleasure and pain as well. Animals of many species are increasingly considered to be sentient beings that possess viewpoints from which they experience and take part in the world around them. In fact, some thinkers are suggesting that it is appropriate to extend agency – the capacity of an individual to act intentionally in the world -- to some species of animals on the grounds of a cognitive architecture, intellectual capability, and self-awareness, among other things. Given this idea that there are cases where we have reason to go as far as to extend agency to certain species of animals, it seems unreasonable to refuse to count these animals as bearers of ethical interest. And to presume that the presence of an animal in a

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<sup>1</sup> See Marino 2002, Broom 2010, Edgar et. al., 2012, and Bond et. al., 2013.

sport would not introduce complexities that are a function of the animal's agential capacities seems wrong-headed.<sup>2</sup>

My claim is that, only once we appreciate that animals are bearers of both aesthetic and ethical interest can we identify aesthetic complexities of animal sports that weren't clear before, and be in a position to understand these sports more completely -- both to characterize them as well as *judge* them correctly from an aesthetic point of view. It is my view that any complete philosophy of sport must identify animals as bearers of both aesthetic and ethical interest. Otherwise, it risks both objectifying animals by failing to distinguish them from equipment, as well as misunderstanding and mischaracterizing these sports -- which can result in wrongly ascribing beauty or failing to recognize beauty within the sports.

In support of my argument, I make use of three well-known literary texts, each of which stages an animal sport: Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* takes up cockfighting, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* centers around bullfighting, and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* includes a memorable steeplechase episode. Each literary work selected serves to provide the reader with a vivid, compelling depiction of a sport with which we are specifically concerned. This brings each sport to life and enables my discussion of each sport to be clearer and more focused. I hope to illustrate, through analysis of the literary texts, that when we liken animals to equipment, we not only

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<sup>2</sup> There is, of course, much difficulty in approaching the scientific experiments that claim to produce evidence for animal cognition, and emotional and social capability. We cannot simply assume that experiments prove what we want them to prove. In this project, I have not engaged a careful analysis of the experiments. Instead, I have assumed that the experiments show, at least to some extent, that animals have the sort of agency that would make them bearers of respect. In some ways, I ask that the burden of proof be given to those who deny animals such respect.

objectify them, but we miss out on a great deal of aesthetic nuance that comes with involving an animal in sport.

With a special interest in the question of whether or to what extent the authors of these texts, as well as we as readers, extend a sense of agency to the animals featured, I suggest that, when we do extend agency, we can see aesthetic features emerge, different for each sport, that are a function of seeing animals as agents. I am calling them “proxy-agency” in cockfighting, the standing in for man by animal, “approaching of agencies” in bullfighting, the deadly dance between man and bull, and “joint agency” in steeplechase, the corporeal communication present in the moments when a harmony between horse and rider is achieved. Through the literature discussed, the first two – proxy-agency and approaching of agencies – will emerge as distinctive, though not beautiful, features of the sports in question. I submit that these sports employ an animal’s agential capacities to create an aesthetic effect, but simultaneously deny the animal agency by objectifying it; in other words, these sports take advantage of an animal’s agential capacities only insofar as the action of the sport demands, but ultimately objectify the animal. The third feature I identify, “joint agency,” also emerges as a distinctive feature of steeplechase, and would certainly be missed if we were not recognizing the horse as a bearer of aesthetic and ethical interest. While steeplechase employs a horse’s agency to create the aesthetic effect of joint agency, it can also be said, unlike in the case of cockfighting or bullfighting, to extend agency to the animal in a genuine way.

I argue that we cannot fully understand sports involving animals and identify the above hallmarks without acknowledging that the animal participants are bearers of aesthetic and ethical interest, and examining, on a sport by sport basis, how this informs

spectatorship of these sports. I conclude that failure to view the animal in a sport as a bearer of aesthetic and ethical interest can lead to mischaracterizing the sport aesthetically (i.e. missing out on certain complexities like proxy-agency, approaching of agencies, and joint agency) and that failure on the spectator's part to engage with the animal in a sport as an agent can lead to misjudging the sport aesthetically (i.e. finding cockfighting or bullfighting beautiful, or failing to find beauty in harmonized horseback riding).

In the remainder of my introduction, I seek to clarify some points of possible confusion with the scope and terms of my argument. In the first place, I need to make clear to what exactly I am referring when I use the word "animal." In addition, I need to enlarge on what I mean when I say that the individuals that make up the class of animals with which I am concerned are "bearers of ethical interest." I do so by identifying a cluster of related characteristics of these animals that requires that we see them as participants, as opposed to equipment, in sports. In doing this, I anticipate and address the worry that attributing psychological states to animals amounts to naïve anthropomorphism. Finally, I explain why I have chosen to conduct my philosophical inquiry in large part through literary works.

When I say "animals," I have in mind, of course, nonhuman animals, but not the entire animal kingdom. I am instead referring only to those species that science has shown to be sophisticated<sup>3</sup> in their cognitive, emotional, and social capacities. The most obvious members of this class will be primates and cetaceans (chimpanzees and dolphins

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<sup>3</sup> My use of the word "sophisticated" is meant to be relative; it is not in any way meant to suggest that these animals are as sophisticated as human beings, but to suggest that they are sophisticated relative to other species of animals.

are famously intelligent and sensitive), but it is not limited to these species. Increasingly, more and more species are being observed as exhibiting traits consistent with high intelligence, emotional sensitivity, and social sophistication. Our cats and dogs, but also farm animals like pigs, sheep, cows, and chickens, as well as many species of birds, and bees, are emerging as beings who, at least in some sense, have emotional and social lives, and who possess cognitive abilities that make it nearly impossible to view them as operating only according to instinct.

In some ways, this definition of “animals” that I am employing is conservative. Arguably, as I mentioned above, just by virtue of being alive, an individual belonging to any species in the animal kingdom – not just the sophisticated class I am focused on – when introduced into a sport, would not properly be deemed equipment. The capacity for sensory suffering alone distinguishes any member of the animal kingdom from inanimate sports equipment in a profound way; even if there were to be a sport that involved, say, beetles, we still wouldn’t be able to liken them to equipment. But the sports in which I am interested – and virtually all spectator sports that involve animals – make use of relatively sophisticated animals, likely in large part *because* of their sophistication. Sophisticated animals are often more expressive, and therefore more interesting to watch. And sophisticated animals possess qualities that enable them to participate in a sport in an active, and therefore dynamic, way. They are reactive, responsive, trainable, and can develop differing levels of skill. This class of animals – cognitively, emotionally, and socially sophisticated – is the one that tends to show up in sports activities.

At this point, I want to further explore the idea that the individuals that make up the class of animals with which I am concerned are “bearers of ethical interest.” What



does this mean and why are at least some animals deserving of this status? What makes animals – in contrast to sports equipment -- a topic of ethical discussion? The simplest answer is that animals are sentient – that is, that they have sensory structures that enable them to experience pleasure and pain. Animals process painful stimuli in much the same way that humans do; without question, they experience pleasure and pain. The idea that “animals don’t feel pain” is an increasingly untenable one. The question of whether animals are sentient is not, in any meaningful sense, up for debate.

But there is still disagreement as to whether sentience is enough to confer moral status on animals. Peter Singer holds perhaps the best-known view that argues for a moral standing for animals on the grounds of sentience. According to Singer (whose view builds on Utilitarian intuitions dating back to Jeremy Bentham’s work), because animals can suffer, we have a moral obligation to avoid causing that suffering, and, in many cases, to actively work to minimize it. In Singer’s view, an animal’s status as an object of ethical concern is linked to its capacity for pleasure and pain.

In “The Moral Life of Animals,” Michael Bradie emphasizes the importance of sentience. He writes: “It cannot be denied that animals, for the most part, are sentient. That in itself should be sufficient to give them moral standing. That is, as sentient beings they are deserving of some moral consideration, the scope of which remains to be determined” (Bradie, 559). Bradie shares Singer’s intuition that sentience ought to be a central factor in conversations about the moral status of animals, but implicitly recognizes that, without accepting the Utilitarian view that emphasizes suffering, we cannot automatically assert that sentience is enough to confer moral standing. He does maintain, however, that sentient beings “are deserving of some moral consideration” --

that they raise questions for ethics, that they are ethically relevant. This shares the spirit of what I mean when I call animals “bearers of ethical interest.” Regardless of whether one is willing to confer moral standing to animals on the grounds of sentience (or on other grounds, which we will explore momentarily), to say that animals are deserving of absolutely no moral consideration – that they are ethically irrelevant – is a very extreme position, and one that automatically locates animals in the same category as inanimate objects (on which, I think, we can much more comfortably say that we need not confer moral standing).

While sentience is arguably enough to mean that animals are “bearers of ethical interest,” there is more evidence that is relevant to the question of the moral status of animals. According to Bradie, there are three lines of empirical investigation that we can consult in thinking about which characteristics we have reason to attribute to animals, and to what extent these attributions serve to confer a moral standing (Bradie, 548). The three areas are: Darwinian or evolutionary considerations, neuroscientific data, and findings in the field of cognitive ethology (Bradie, 548). Beyond sentience, these three lines of evidence speak to the question of whether animals can be said to have subjective, internal experiences -- whether they are conscious and have a “mental life” (Bradie, 547).

In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin writes: “The difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind. We have seen that the sense and intuitions, the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention, curiosity, imitation, reason, &c., of which man boasts, may be found in an incipient, or even sometimes in a well-developed condition, in the lower animals” (Darwin, 105). Darwin’s observations regarding the capacities of other animals point to

the continuum between humans and non-human animals. To Darwin, the clearly observable similarities between humans and animals are both consistent with, and evidence of, the correctness of evolutionary theory. He regards the differences between humans and other animals as a matter of degree rather than kind. This continuity argument compels us to take seriously, as opposed to try to explain away, similarities between humans and animals. These similarities, identified through behavioral observation and anecdotal evidence, speak to a continuum of mental capacity common to both. According to Bradie, Darwin identifies animals not only as sharing sensory capacity with humans, but also emotions, as well as “the ability to imitate, remember, and use imagination” (Bradie, 551). The observed similarities have a sound scientific explanation – in shared ancestry.

Neuroscientific findings confirm this shared ancestry and shared emotional and mental capacity. In the latter half of the twentieth century, scientific advances allowed researchers to produce neurological evidence that “points to deep structural similarities between ancient brain systems that we share with other animals. In particular, the ancient structures are the neural source of basic qualitative *feels* or *affects*” (Bradie, 554). Humans and some animals share the neural architecture necessary for feeling, or emotion, and those animals with brain structures that are similar to that of humans “react in ways that make them appear to have qualitative experiences similar to those of humans when the homologous brain structures are stimulated” (Bradie, 554). This leads neuroscientists to believe that animals are not only responding to stimuli similarly to the way humans would, but are also actually “having inner experiences similar to those that humans experience under similar circumstances” (Bradie, 555). Neuroscientific findings, by

identifying shared brain structures in humans and some animals, suggest that these animals can be said to have qualitative, subjective experiences, and the ability to feel not only sensation, but also emotion.

Finally, there is a growing body of evidence from the field of cognitive ethology that confirms the existence of animal emotion. In *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, Mark Bekoff argues that, based on Darwin's ideas about evolutionary continuity, along with neuroscientific evidence, many animals have "the neuroanatomical structures and neurochemical pathways that are important for feelings" (Bekoff, xix). He points out, for example, that several species of whales have more spindle cells, which are linked to processing of emotions, than do humans (Bekoff, xix). His book is a collection of evidence for animal emotion. He writes in his preface: "Research has shown that mice are empathetic rodents, but it turns out they're fun-loving as well. We will also hear stories of pleasure-seeking iguanas, a horse with a sense of humor, amorous whales, elephants who suffer from psychological flashbacks and posttraumatic stress disorder, a grieving otter, a bereaved donkey, pissed-off baboons, sentient fish, and a sighted dog who served as a "seeing-eye dog" for his canine buddy" (Bekoff, xix).

In another one of his books, *Wild Justice*, Bekoff and his co-author Jessica Pierce argue that, not only do many animals have complex emotional capacities, but they have complex social capacities as well. Bradie sees the observations offered in *Wild Justice* as the third empirical ground – after evolutionary evidence and neuroscientific findings – for conferring animals moral status. Bekoff and Pierce convincingly show that many animals exhibit deeply cooperative behavior. Animals exhibit behaviors "that are best interpreted as manifestations of empathy, cooperation, and a sense of fairness" (Bradie, 555). The

authors go as far as to posit that some animals have morality, where morality is understood as “a suite of interrelated other-regarding behaviors that cultivate and regulate complex interactions within social groups” (Bekoff and Pierce, 7). While their main focus is on social mammals, they point to “a widening body of evidence that suggests that some birds have the wherewithal to constitute a moral community, in the sense of relevant emotions, cooperation, and the like” (Bradie, 555-556). The implication is that cognitive ethology offers a third kind of evidence for the morally relevant shared capacities between humans and other animals.

Evolution, neuroscience, and cognitive ethology all offer convincing evidence that humans and at least some animals (mammals, but also many birds) share the capacity for subjective experience and emotion. Bradie writes: “To the extent that animals are sentient, experience affect, have a mental life, and are capable of solving problems posed by their environments and their circumstances they have interests. Having interests means that the animals have states, for example, feelings of pleasure and absence of pain, and activities, for example, successfully finding food, shelter, mates, and companions, that are good for them and are such that a failure to realize them results in a diminished quality of life” (Bradie, 560). We have seen that sentience alone is arguably enough to confer moral status on animals – or, at the very least, to regard them as “bearers of ethical interest.” If we can attribute psychological states to animals – and we have examined three sources of evidence for why we ought to – then it is hard to see how animals would fail to be ethically relevant. As Bradie says, given all this, animals “are entities toward which at least some moral consideration is due. They are at least moral patients” (Bradie,

559). And perhaps this can be understood as meaning that they are appropriate recipients of empathy.<sup>4</sup>

Many researchers and thinkers are starting to consider what all of this recent evidence means for the topic of agency. Agency, which, strictly speaking, refers to the capacity of an individual to act in the world, is a term being increasingly applied to animals; indeed, there is an emerging movement to extend agency to some animals. But before exploring the concept of animal agency, we should be aware that these are muddy waters. Agency is a loaded term in philosophy, and there is a great deal of disagreement about what it means even when applied to humans. Furthermore, animal agency is a new area of interest in philosophy and, given all the debate and discussion related to agency generally, is not fully worked out. Therefore, keep in mind that my use of the term “agency” will be employed in relation to a cluster of other related terms: sentience, subjectivity, cognitive capability, intentional action, and self-awareness.

In “Animals, Agency and Resistance,” Bob Carter and Nickie Charles point out that there is “increasing recognition that animals are not simply passive victims of human depredations but active participants in human-animal relations” (Carter and Charles, 323). In other words, animals are participating actors in their environment; they are not passive beings whose behaviors can be fully explained by instinct. They interact with and relate to their environment and those around them – be it other animals or humans. Carter and Charles make the case that animals are agents in that “they act and their actions have

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<sup>4</sup> There are clearly immense complications associated with the concept of empathy. We might worry that, in order to extend empathy, we have first to understand intellectually what it means to think one’s way into another perspective, that is, to walk a mile in another’s shoes. I have, however, prioritized not the intellectual relation but the emotional relation of empathy, assuming that, given an aesthetical and ethical care, we feel our way into another’s perspective from the get-go.

consequences, they also resist conditions which they do not like and, in some circumstances, are able to change the conditions of their agency” (Carter and Charles, 322). They have “the capacity for self-willed action,” and in this sense can be considered agential (Carter and Charles, 324).

Carter and Charles point to three examples where animals can be said to exercise agency. Two pigs known as “The Tamworth Two” arguably did so when they escaped from an abattoir while being unloaded, and negotiated terrain including a fence and a river to find their way into “dense undergrowth,” where they hid for a week (Carter and Charles, 325). Their escape was thought to be “cunning,” “devious,” and “well-planned,” which not only attributed basic agency to the pigs, but premeditation and planning as well (Carter and Charles, 326). Carter and Charles also think it’s fair to attribute agency to lab rats, who often avoid being grabbed by their handlers and move to the back of their cages as a result – but then are more willing to be handled if they are fed or petted, instead of immediately grabbed (Carter and Charles, 326). Finally, Carter and Charles reference a Welsh terrier who appears to dislike when her owners fight, and intervenes by barking and growling (Carter and Charles, 327). According to Carter and Charles, “the ability to act – to run away, to become refractory to handling or to intervene in domestic conflict – is regarded as evidence that a being has agency” (Carter and Charles, 328). According to this view, the fact that animals have the ability “to choose between options (however limited they may be) and to act on the choices made” is enough to extend them agency (Carter and Charles, 328).

In *Animals and Agency: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger also gesture towards a theory of animal agency. In their introductory

chapter, “Approaching the Agency of Other Animals,” the authors consider the possibility that animals qualify as agents. Their approach is not unlike that of Carter and Charles; they draw our attention to specific cases of animals behaving in ways we generally think only humans are capable of. A parrot, Alex, communicates with her human companion, proving “convincingly that interspecies communication using verbal language is possible,” and that “even an animal with a brain the size of a pecan can think and use higher-level cognitive abilities” (McFarland and Hediger, 1, 2). Similarly, dogs “can understand that a symbol represents a real thing and that the sounds humans make when talking can represent items in the world” (McFarland and Hediger, 2). A border collie named Rico, for example, can identify over 200 objects by name, can “fast-map” – i.e. infer that a new word corresponds to a new object – and can remember a new word and its matching object after a month with no access to it (McFarland and Hediger, 2). And in 2007, upon being taunted by a man outside her enclosure, a tiger named Tatiana escaped her enclosure and killed him. According to McFarland and Hediger, it’s possible that Tatiana “may have mindfully decided to leap over her enclosure wall...she may have acted with awareness” (McFarland and Hediger, 2). For them, the use of language, the ability to “fast-map,” and mindful action (in this case, escape and aggression), all point to agential capacities.

In “Animal Mentality: Its Character, Extent, and Moral Significance,” Peter Carruthers supports the idea that animals act intentionally – but his strategy is to appeal to empirical scientific findings as opposed to anecdotal observations. According to Carruthers,

“The dominant position in both philosophy and psychology throughout much of the twentieth century was that animals aren’t capable of genuine thought (although they



can be interpreted as such, anthropomorphically). Animal behavior was believed to be the product of conditioning, resulting from learned associations among stimuli, and between stimuli and behavioral responses. Anyone espousing such a view has a ready-made reason for denying moral standing to animals, if attitude-possession is a necessary condition for such standing. But the adequacy of the account has been crumbling rapidly since at least the 1980s. Animals engage in many forms of learning that cannot be accounted for in associationist terms” (Carruthers, 378).

Carruthers points out that, while in the past there was a strong reluctance to attribute psychological states to animals, there is now ample reason to believe that animals do, in fact, possess attitudes, and that their behavior is not simply the product of conditioning. And, in his view, possessing attitudes and acting on those attitudes – that is, having a “perception/belief/desire cognitive architecture” – is consistent with intentional action (Carruthers, 380).

Carruthers points to three relevant experiments. First, he draws our attention to that fact that animals in conditioning experiments who are asked to respond to rates of reward that are changing at a random rate “are able to track changes in the rate of reward about as closely as it is theoretically possible to do so” (Carruthers, 379). Carruthers concludes that these animals are genuinely reasoning here, and points out that mammals and birds -- rats and pigeons -- have both been shown to be able to do this. In addition, mice have actually out-performed humans in experiments testing “swift and intuitive assessments of risk” (Carruthers, 379). Second, he points to the fact that, in experiments that are meant to condition an animal to exhibit a learned behavior, unreinforced trials (where the reward is not received) do not affect the results. In other words, the addition of unreinforced trials does not serve to undo the learning from the reinforced trials, which would be the case in instances of conditioning. According to Carruthers, this suggests that there is more going on here than just an association. Finally, he points to instances of

complex learning in animals, in which “new information can interact with a variety of different goals to guide the animal’s behavior, just as can our own beliefs” (Carruthers, 380). A pertinent example is the fact that chimpanzees can gather information about properties of their environment, and then use this information to help them with their “foraging goals” (Carruthers, 380). They can use the information they have collected about their environment to help them seek out a fruit that they “predict to be ripening rather than another,” for example (Carruthers, 380). According to Carruthers, “the animals are therefore engaging in a form of practical reasoning, accessing their beliefs to achieve the satisfaction of a current goal” (Carruthers, 380).

These empirical findings lead Carruthers to conclude that “mammals and birds, at least, share a perception/belief/desire cognitive architecture much like our own” (Carruthers, 380). In fact, Carruthers goes on to argue that navigating invertebrates (bees, wasps, and spiders) share this kind of mental architecture as well (Carruthers, 380). He asserts that to attribute a perception/belief/desire cognitive structure that is necessary for intentional action is not just to offer a redescription of animal behavior. He writes: “On the contrary, it is to ascribe real underlying states to them as the *causes* of their behavior, doing so on the basis of an inference to the best explanation” (Carruthers, 380). Because of this causal capacity, it is appropriate to say that, where we can attribute a perception/belief/desire cognitive architecture to an animal, we can be said to be attributing agency. In Carruthers’s view, many animals have this psychological structure, and can be said to have goals that can be frustrated – and thus these animals can be regarded as agents.

While the evidence discussed above warrants the extension of agency to animals, we might point out that some species have been found to have even more sophisticated agential capacities than a perception/belief/desire cognitive architecture. Members of some species, like the parrot – Alex -- mentioned anecdotally by McFarland and Hediger, have been found to have aspects of language.<sup>5</sup> Many species engage in tool use<sup>6</sup>, which suggests high-level cognition and intentionality. Some scientists, like Bekoff and Pierce, believe that there are species that possess a sense of morality.<sup>7</sup> Elephants exhibit empathy;<sup>8</sup> cetaceans mourn their dead<sup>9</sup>. Science has shown us that many of the traits once thought to belong exclusively to humans actually cross species boundaries. By systematically blurring the distinction between humans and animals, scientific research continues to validate the ideas of philosophers wrestling with how we conceive of animals. Advances in the fields of genetics, neuroscience, physiology, linguistics, and psychology have shown the complex nature of animals’ cognitive, emotional, and social capacities – demonstrating a broad range of similarities between humans and animals when it comes to these capacities.

In fact, there exists an emerging legal movement known as the “nonhuman personhood movement,” which aims to characterize at least some animals as “legal persons” as opposed to “legal things” – as beings as opposed to property—under the law.

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<sup>5</sup> See Balter 2010, Rendall 2009, and Savage-Rumbaugh and Brakke 1996.

<sup>6</sup> See Chappell 2006, Levey 2004, Seed and Byrne 2010, Smith and Bentley-Condit 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Also see Broom 2006.

<sup>8</sup> See Byrne et. al., 2008, Plotnik et. al., 2010, and Plotnik et. al., 2011.

<sup>9</sup> See Pierce 2013.

Steven Wise, founder of the Nonhuman Personhood Project, is leading the effort to gain legal personhood status for chimpanzees as a first step – hoping that, if he is successful, cetaceans and elephants will eventually be awarded personhood status as well. One ground for personhood that he and others leading the charge to recognize the personhood of some nonhuman animals cite is the trait of self-consciousness. Apes, dolphins, and elephants have all passed the “mirror test.”<sup>10</sup> This means that they have been shown to be able to recognize themselves – the implication of self-recognition being self-awareness. The fact that these species have passed the mirror test has led some scientists to believe that, by exhibiting self-recognition, they have a concept of self, and therefore not only ought to be extended agency, but also personhood.

In speaking of the “extension of agency” to animals, I do not aim to suggest that animals are agents to the same degree that humans are. As I have mentioned, working out exactly what animal agency looks like, and how it varies according to species, is an enormous undertaking for science and philosophy that is just beginning – as human agency is itself a concept that continues to be refined. Providing a definitive account of animal agency, then, is not the focus or aim of my dissertation. Nevertheless, from this

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<sup>10</sup> In “Beyond Anthropomorphism: Attributing Psychological Properties To Animals,” Kristen Andrews explains Gordon Gallup’s mirror test that he used to test for self-recognition capabilities in chimpanzees. She writes: “He exposed four juvenile chimpanzees to a mirror for eighty hours, during which time the chimpanzees first responded socially to the mirror before they began using the mirror to explore their own bodies. Chimpanzees would examine their teeth and other parts of their body that are not accessible without the aid of a mirror. After this initial exposure, Gallup gave the chimpanzees the mark test by placing red marks on their faces while the animals were anesthetized. After they woke from the anesthesia, the chimpanzees were observed for some time and then exposed to a mirror. Gallup found that chimpanzees began to touch the marks on their face after being given the mirror, and that they touched the mark significantly more often in the presence of a mirror than when no mirror was present” (Andrews, 480-481).

point on, I will be taking for granted that the animals involved in the sports that I am discussing are agents – in at least the sense that they are subjects who have experiences, interests, needs, and satisfactions, and whose behavioral activity originates from them. To borrow a phrase from McFarland and Hediger, to extend agency to an animal is to admit that an animal’s actions are “experientially meaningful and actively authored” (McFarland and Hediger, 3). This seems to me to require the kind of perception/belief/desire cognitive structure that Carruthers laid out, as well as the basic structures in place for emotion and sociality – but not necessarily self-awareness or morality. In other words, I take it that we can still extend agency to animals that we deny are moral subjects, or to whom we cannot extend personhood.

Within the literature regarding the attribution of psychological states to animals, the most common question that arises is related to anthropomorphism, which refers to the attribution of *uniquely* human characteristics to animals. Some thinkers worry that we cannot attribute psychological capacities to animals without being guilty of anthropomorphism. They are concerned that any attribution of psychological states to animals amount to naïve and sentimental anthropomorphism, and sometimes contend that, when we attribute psychological states to animals, we are simply projecting. (Perhaps the most well known charge of anthropomorphism was leveled against Jane Goodall towards the beginning of her career; she was accused of anthropomorphism for giving names to the chimpanzees she was observing.) In “Beyond Anthropomorphism: Attributing Psychological Properties to Animals,” Kristen Andrews references this kind of worry. She points out that people have worried that is it anthropomorphic to attribute to animals “states such as beliefs and desires, personality traits such as confidence or

timidity, emotions such as happiness or anger, social organizational properties such as culture or friendship, [and] moral behavior such as punishment or rape” (Andrews, 470). She points out that some critics think it is incorrect to attribute “feeling, purpose, intentionality, consciousness, and even cognition” to animals (Andrews, 470).

But as we have seen, and as Andrews points out here, “all of these [capacities] are being shown to exist within certain species” (Andrews, 470). So it seems that those who are still preoccupied by anthropomorphic worries – and, we should note, this is a position that has been “crumbling rapidly since the 1980s” – are unconvinced by all the available scientific evidence that speaks to the mental capacities of animals, from evolutionary biology, to neuroscience, to cognitive ethology (Carruthers, 378). Perhaps the explanation for this is that these critics think we cannot study the psychological properties of animals at all. Perhaps they think we cannot access animal minds even if they exist – so to say they exist is to assume, and therefore to anthropomorphize.

Bradie articulates what troubles such critics: “One might object to the projection of mental attitudes onto animals that lack the linguistic ability to make their feelings, intentions, and beliefs, if any, known to us. The other-minds problem for animals can be viewed as an extension of the other-minds problem for humans...we have no direct access to the feelings or emotions of other human beings” (Bradie, 555). People who deny animals mentality sometimes do so on the grounds that we have no access to animals' minds because they don't communicate linguistically (except in a few rare cases). In other words, how can we know what animals are thinking or feeling if they can't tell us? But, as Bradie points out, this line of thinking is problematic, as we also have “no direct access” to the thoughts and feelings of other people.

Andrews bolsters this view that human psychology presents some of the same challenges as animal psychology, and proposes that, because we can study the psychological properties of prelinguistic children, we can study the psychological properties of animals. She points out that, while some people worry that language is necessary for psychological properties/thought, this is flawed reasoning because we comfortably engage in psychological research with prelinguistic infants all the time. Scientists don't often worry about attributing psychological properties – emotions, beliefs, desires -- to human children, and take them to be communicating, even if not linguistically (Andrews, 475). As for the objection that these cases are not analogous because children will eventually develop language -- Andrews draws our attention to the fact that not all children develop language, but that this does not give us pause at attributing psychological states to them. In addition, language is not the only behavior that we can use to infer mental states (Andrews, 472).

We might think of the anthropomorphism issue as a worry that we are getting “false positives” when we attribute mental states to animals (Andrew, 473). In other words, when, in the field of animal cognition, we explain a given behavior as a function of thought rather than instinct, we may be showing anthropomorphic tendencies. Those who worry that attributing psychological states to animals amounts to anthropomorphism would rather explain animal behavior from the point of view of instinct as opposed to conscious thought wherever possible. But some have argued that if “anthropomorphism” references false positives in animal cognition, we should have a name for the false negatives as well. For example, Frans de Waal calls this kind of false negative error “anthropodenial,” and Maxine Sheets-Johnson calls it “reverse anthropomorphism”

(Andrews, 473). The idea here is that perhaps the burden of proof should be on those who automatically reject the attribution of cognitive and emotional states to animals in favor of instinct (Beauchamp, 19). Given that humans and animals have a shared evolutionary history, identifying commonalities between humans and animals does not automatically amount to anthropomorphism and concluding that animals are likely to share traits with humans is not far-fetched.<sup>11</sup>

All the evidence above supports my position that the animals about whom I am writing can be considered agential creatures – at least in the sense that they operate using a perception/belief/desire cognitive architecture. When I refer to an animal’s “agential capacities,” I am not suggesting that the animal is capable of the same level of experience as a human being. But many animals – many species of mammals and birds specifically – can be said to have agential capacities in that that they operate using a perception/belief/desire cognitive architecture, have interests that can be frustrated, can in some sense experience emotional pleasure and pain, can interact socially with other members of their species, and can suffer. I am understanding these capacities to be related cluster concepts that all contribute to what I am calling “agential capacities” or

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<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that some people take the position that what one might call anthropomorphism can actually be an actively positive thing in some cases. Anthropomorphic tendencies – such as, for example, taking seriously the idea that dogs might have some kind of self-awareness – can be said to foster empathy. After all, the structure of empathy is such that, when one empathizes, one puts oneself in another’s shoes, so to speak. To take up the position – tentatively – that animals share as-yet-unproven traits with us need not be anthropomorphism in the derogatory sense, but perhaps maximally empathetic and maximally charitable. So long as we do this tentatively and do not take this to be saying anything scientific, we are arguably simply remaining open to the possibility of unknown commonalities between a given species and ourselves.



“agency.” To extend agency to an animal is to acknowledge that the animal possesses these kinds of capacities.

In my view, sentience alone is enough to confer moral standing; adding emotional capacity and agency to the mix only serves to strengthen the case for moral status for these animals. But I should point out that, because I am primarily interested in identifying the aesthetic complexities that emerge from animal sports once we view animals as having agential capacities, the scope of my argument is not limited to the ethical. On the contrary, the aesthetic is my primary focus and therefore even those readers who do not believe that sentience or agential capacity is enough to confer moral standing on animals are not necessarily at cross purposes with the overall line of inquiry. The main idea is: when we watch sports involving animals correctly and with complete comprehension, we take into account the animals’ agential capacities and how these are integral to the sport. And this enables us to see in what way each of these sports is aesthetically unique, as well as crucially different from sports that do not involve animals.

We should acknowledge that, once we re-orient ourselves to think of animals as a group to which agency ought to be extended, we will of course have to factor this into all of our dealings with animals. If animals are agents to whom we can meaningfully relate – and, presumably, in a way that is importantly different from the way we relate to humans – this will inevitably change our understanding of human/animal interaction across the board. My dissertation can be thought of as an exploration of how this “extension of agency” to animals serves to revise the way in which we think about aesthetic issues in relation to animals. Because so much of how we relate to animals is related to our sensory experience of them – how they look, what they sound like – I am interested in

how extending agency to animals changes and enhances the way we experience them aesthetically, the way we *look* at them and *hear* them. Generally speaking, we don't communicate verbally with animals the way we do with other humans, and so the tendency is to understand our aesthetic experience of animals as something more like an artistic experience – where we are focused on the formal qualities of animals as opposed to factoring in their expressive and communicative capacities when we characterize our aesthetic experience of animals.

I have chosen to explore the “extension of agency” to animals in the field of aesthetics through readings of key scenes in significant works of literature that have staged engagements with animals. I explore what these texts reveal about the way we conceive of animals, and argue that, when we extend agency to animals, we experience them and, in the case of literature, *read* them differently. As I have said, I am specifically interested in the way we look at animals in sports activities – since there exists in the philosophy of sports a conflation of animals and sports equipment that motivated this project. Once we extend agency to animals, how does this change the way we watch sports that involve animals? In what ways does the “extension of agency” to animals affect spectatorship of these sports?

Perhaps it is useful for me to briefly explain why I have chosen to conduct my philosophical exploration in large part through literary works. First, literary examples serve to bring out the aesthetic dimension of sport. Sports are aesthetic activities that have their own dramatic elements built in; because of this, they are easily taken up by, and well captured in, literature. Second, with a novel, there can be said to be two layers of spectatorship. By this I mean that we, as readers, are spectators of the sport that is

featured in the novel, but we are also spectators of spectatorship. Because of this structure, we as readers have an opportunity to study the nature of spectatorship by looking at the fictional spectators of the sport within the novel.

Third, literature has long concerned itself with animal sports, whereas philosophy, for the most part, has not. Since there is a scarcity of philosophical literature on the subject of animals in sports, I have used literary works to help illuminate the issues that animal sports raise that are relevant to philosophy. By identifying particularly rich depictions of animal sports in literature, and reading these scenes with attention to philosophical implications and issues, we can create sources for our discussion and offer a new way to understand the literary examples we are working with. Positioning the literary texts we are working with as philosophical texts – and their authors as philosophers – will allow us to extract philosophical material from our literary examples.

Fourth, and finally, as Tzachi Zamir suggests in “Literary Works and Animal Ethics,” many moral philosophers are turning to literature as a source of deep insight when it comes to how we conceive of animals and our relationships to them. Zamir favors a literary-oriented approach to animal ethics because, by mirroring our attitudes and practices, literature “is capable of touching dimensions of thought and action that are *unique* to our dealings with animals” (Zamir, 933). The idea is that literature, by virtue of having “less to do with disclosing facts, and more to do with experiencing anew familiar facts” is in a position to defamiliarize practices (Zamir, 937). Literature puts readers in a position to reacquaint themselves with subject matter in a new way.

My aim is to use the literature chosen to present philosophical issues related to animal sports in an unfamiliar way, to jolt us into seeing aspects of the sports that we

normally put aside as tangential. At the same time, I will approach my chosen texts as vehicles for philosophically relevant thought regarding animals and their roles in human-engineered sport. It is my contention that each of the literary examples chosen has something important to say about the animal sport it takes on; I will unpack each sport as it is presented in the literature with a view toward understanding the aesthetic character of the activity, and will supplement this analysis with anthropological, sociological, and philosophical works, where they are available.

I will be utilizing what is known as “animal-standpoint criticism,” a mode of literary criticism that, in Josephine Donovan’s words in her essay “Tolstoy’s Animals,” “seeks to examine works of literature from the point of view of how animals are treated in them, often looking to reconstruct the standpoint of the animals in question” (Donovan, 38). Animal-standpoint criticism is a kind of literary study that makes the animal a priority, focusing on analyzing a text for “the tracks of animals” (Donovan, 39). According to animal-standpoint theorists, an animal-centric mode of literary criticism provides a valuable opportunity for meditation on animal experience and subjectivity. And while other art forms such as painting and sculpture can certainly be appreciated with a sensitivity to animal issues, animal-standpoint theorists tend to agree with Bakhtin’s literary theory that “the prose fiction – the novel especially, but also the short story – is the literary mode best suited for realizing the particular story of an individual creature,” be it human or non-human (Donovan, 41). My proposed mode of reading allows the selected fictional texts to emerge as offering meditations on animal sports, the nature of human/animal relationships in and around sports, and what it means for humans to make use of animals in sports.

Moreover, I have chosen to set out the philosophical framework I am working with through an exploration of contemporary, as opposed to historical, literature. I do so because both animal studies and the philosophy of sports – in particular the aesthetics of sports – have gained ground recently. My aim is to be part of the current conversation and to attempt to contribute to both these areas, in part by asking that each acknowledges the other.

The remainder of my dissertation will be structured as follows: In Chapter 1, I introduce the philosophy of sport, focusing on work done in the aesthetics of sports, which is concerned with questions like: To what extent is watching sports an aesthetic activity? Are some sports more aesthetic than others? In particular, I offer an overview of Hans Gumbrecht's account of athletic beauty, arguably the most comprehensive contribution to the aesthetics of sports to date, and address the limitations in its treatment of sports involving animals. The remainder of Chapter 1 explores our aesthetic experience of animals generally, with a focus on the idea that animals are bearers of aesthetic interest – and with an eye towards ultimately arguing that there are special aesthetic features of sports that involve animals. Finally, I adopt and develop a system of categorizing animal sports from William Morgan and Klaus Meier's anthology *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, wherein these sports are divided into three paradigms, each with its own formal structure. These paradigms are: *Animal versus Animal* sports (e.g. cockfighting), *Animal versus Human* sports (e.g. bullfighting), and *Human/Animal Combination* Sports, in which human and animal compete together “as a team” (e.g. steeplechase). Chapters 2 through 4 function as case studies of specific sports—cockfighting, bullfighting, and steeplechase, respectively. Each sport is presented and

analyzed through a literary text in which the sport in question receives exemplary literary expression. In keeping with the paradigm in which it fits, each sport stages a different relationship between the animals employed and the humans engineering the sport, and therefore offers its own way of thinking about the animal in animal sports.

Through readings of the literary texts, I will address in what way and whether the authors portray animals as bearers of aesthetic interest and/or bearers of ethical interest. I will show that failure to view the animal in a sport as both a bearer of aesthetic and ethical interest leads to mischaracterization and misjudgment of the sport on the part of the spectator. To fail to view the cock in a cockfight as a bearer of aesthetic and ethical interest is to miss out on what I posit to be the sport's aesthetic hallmark: proxy-agency. In addition, without this complete perspective, one is left in a position to deem the sport beautiful despite the harm it causes to the cocks involved. Similarly, to fail to view the bull in a bullfight as a bearer of aesthetic and ethical interest is to miss out on what I call the approaching of agencies – and puts one at risk of identifying formal beauty in a blood sport while being blind to the ethical aspect. Finally, to fail to view the horse in a steeplechase as a bearer of aesthetic and ethical interest is to fail to identify joint-agency, as well as to fail to perceive or appreciate the beauty of harmonized horseback riding.

If we see animals as agents, we can see aesthetic features emerge that are a function of this fact: proxy-agency in cockfighting, approaching of agencies in bullfighting, and joint agency in harmonized horseback riding. Through the literature, the first two – proxy-agency and approaching of agencies – will emerge as distinctive aesthetic features of the sports in question. But these features, albeit distinctive, cannot be counted as beautiful because these sports employ animal agency to create an aesthetic

effect, but deny the animals agency from an ethical point of view. The last – joint agency – will emerge as the distinctive aesthetic feature of harmonized horseback riding, a feature that would be missed by viewing animals as equipment as opposed to bearers of aesthetic and ethical interest (we will see in Chapter 1 that a large part of the reason we find animals beautiful to look at stems from their agency, a fact which further entwines the aesthetic and the ethical here). It will emerge as a distinctive and beautiful feature because, while horseback riding can be said to employ a horse’s agency to create this aesthetic effect, it also extends agency to the animal in a meaningful way.

The literary sources that I make use of in my dissertation should not be understood as examples illustrating a pre-established theory, but as the vehicles through which I give nuance and detail to my philosophical argument. The texts will serve to illuminate and amplify the claims I have made here and will continue to lay out in Chapter 1. I hope and intend that, when readers reach the end of the dissertation, they will have seen, and experienced through the literary readings, the degree to which, once we view animals in sports as bearers of aesthetic and ethical interest, we must reassess our characterizations of those sports accordingly.

Perhaps I should also acknowledge the fact that there exists an uneasy tension or “fork” in my approach: on one hand, my dissertation is about animal welfare; on the other hand, about the aesthetics of sports. Am I using the animal welfare issue to say something about sports or using animal sports to say something about animal welfare? Certainly the former, since, in my view, given that our relationships with animals are inherently moral, this factor informs our every interaction with them. But also the latter given that only those sports that are built to maximize an animal’s flourishing as opposed to suffering are

ethically tenable. The conclusion of my argument is not therefore that we should get rid of all sports that involve animals, but that we reform those sports in which animals are mistreated even to the point of getting rid of some sports altogether. My argument is thus two-sided: both descriptive/explanatory—what goes on in animals sports--and normative given what ought to go on in animals sports. In the matter of extending agency, the conclusion may then also be pushed back into the larger domain of human sports, suggesting that humans, too, ought be treated with respect when subjected to the rules of the games.



CHAPTER ONE:  
Proposing an Aesthetic Analysis of Animal Sports

In this chapter, I introduce the philosophy of sport, focusing in particular on what it means to take an aesthetic approach to sports. After introducing this notion of an aesthetic analysis of sports, I look at Hans Gumbrecht’s account of athletic beauty offered in his book *In Praise Of Athletic Beauty*, and point out two fundamental, closely related, problems with it: that his account likens animals to inanimate sports equipment, and also fails to draw a distinction between sports that involve animals and those that don’t – therefore failing to capture the aesthetic features unique to interspecies sports. After raising these issues with Gumbrecht’s account, I argue that one such unique feature relates to the fact that we have a freestanding aesthetic fascination with animals in any context. Animals are aesthetically intriguing to us, even outside of athletic performance. In arguing that our preexisting aesthetic fascination with animals serves as a unique complicating factor that must be considered in an analysis of sports that involve animals, I consider what it means for animals to be aesthetically intriguing. What are the sources of aesthetic value that make us intrigued by animals? Finally, I introduce and explain the system of categorizing animal sports I am using – a system that will structure the remainder of my dissertation. This system divides sports that involve animals into three conceptual paradigms: *Animal versus Animal* sports (e.g. cockfighting), *Animal versus Human* sports (e.g. bullfighting), and *Human/Animal Combination Sports*, in which human and animal compete together “as a team” (e.g. steeplechase).

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Recently, there has been a growing interest in the philosophy of sports. Most philosophers who have taken an interest in sport have approached it from the perspectives of ontology or ethics. Those interested in the ontology of sports have sought to answer questions regarding the nature of sport, play, and games; philosophers interested in the ethics of sports have considered topics like fair play, teamwork, and performance enhancement. At the same time, some philosophers have adopted an aesthetic approach to sports,<sup>12</sup> engaged in articulating the relationship between aesthetics and sports. One way of approaching sport from an aesthetic perspective is to look at the ways that sports have been represented in the arts – painting, literature, opera, etc.

Another method that thinkers interested in the aesthetics of sports have employed is to pose and take up germane questions like: To what extent is watching sports an aesthetic activity? Are some sports more aesthetic than others? Although these kinds of questions have gained prominence only recently, they are natural questions to ask about sports. After all, many sports spectators watch sports with a focus on aesthetic elements. In *Watching Sport: Aesthetics, Ethics and Emotion*, Stephen Mumford points out that there are two kinds of sports spectators, partisans and purists. Partisans root for a particular team, and watch sports because they want to see their team win. Purists, in contrast, are fans of the sport itself and care more about seeing the game played well than about who wins or loses. A purist tends to be most excited by beautiful passes or plays, for example; she appreciates the appearance of sport, the perceptual experience it offers her. A purist adopts an aesthetic attitude towards sport, inherently taking sports seriously as aesthetic objects.

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<sup>12</sup> A portion of this chapter appears in the 2014 edition of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* under the entry entitled “Sports.”

A purist does not need to be convinced that sports warrant aesthetic analysis. One way to convince a partisan that sports are appropriate objects of aesthetic consideration is to point out the readily apparent analogy between sports and performance art. Some sports, like gymnastics, can be said to share important features with dance. Both showcase the range of the body's movement, offering delight to spectators by pushing the limits of human flexibility and grace. Other sports, like football,<sup>13</sup> are easily comparable to drama; watching a football game is, in many ways, a similar activity to watching a dramatic production. The football field and the stage are both formal exhibition spaces that place participants in action before an assembled audience; both spaces place performers carrying out some kind of narrative in front of spectators who are generally expected to have some sort of affective relationship to the action. The overall structure of sports like football shares features with drama, and, in addition, both sport and drama contain dramatic content. There are moments of athletic triumph and defeat within every game, just as characters within a drama are seen as experiencing moments of success and failure. There are unexpected moments in sport, like injuries, interference, or weather changes, not unlike the plot twists in a drama. Spectators do not know what the result of the game, or the end of the drama, will be, and watch the outcome develop over the course of plays or scenes. It is interesting to note that this analogy is historically grounded. As David Larmour points out in his book *Stage and Stadium: Drama and Athletics in Ancient Greece*, many festivals and arena events of antiquity did not even distinguish between drama and athletic contests; more often than not, drama and athletics were performed side by side. The aesthetics of sports can be thought to grow out of this

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<sup>13</sup> I am using "football" to refer to American football, but there is no reason why this line of argument could not also apply to what Americans call "soccer."

kind of analogy; sports, like plays, can be seen as providers of aesthetic experiences. Adopting an aesthetic approach to sport amounts to locating the viewing of athletic contests within the realm of aesthetic experience, and seeking to analyze sports practices using aesthetic concepts. To address the aesthetics of sports is to address the aesthetic nature and value of sports practices.

In an effort to analyze the aesthetic features of sport, philosophers have attempted to categorize sports based on how intimately they are tied up with a sense of the aesthetic. In “Art and Sport,” David Best draws a distinction between purposive and aesthetic sports. Purposive sports make up the majority of sports; football, hockey, track and field, baseball, and tennis are all purposive. The defining element of this kind of sport is that “its purpose can be specified independently of the manner of achieving it, as long as it conforms to the rules or norms – for example, scoring a goal and clearing the bar” (Best 1980, 70). The objective in a purposive sport is to score the goal or clear the bar, to win the race or hit a homerun. Whether this objective is met in a way that is aesthetically pleasing does not change who wins or loses. A runner with beautiful form might still lose the race to a runner with ugly form. In this sense, the aesthetic is not definitive of the activity in the case of purposive sports.

Aesthetic sports make up a smaller category; examples of aesthetic sports are gymnastics, diving, figure skating, and synchronized swimming. These sports differ from purposive sports in that “an aesthetic sport is one in which the purpose can be specified *only* in terms of the aesthetic manner of achieving it” (Best 1980, 71). While in purposive sports, the goal is to carry out a particular action regardless of form, in aesthetic sports, the stylistic mode in which an action is carried out determines the winner. In gymnastics,

a vaulter must not only get from one side of the vault to the other, but she must perform that action in a particular aesthetic manner. She wins or loses based on the aesthetic quality of her action; the higher the aesthetic quality, the higher the marks from judges. A beautiful “look” to the movement is not incidental here, but definitive of the activity. To vault poorly is to vault in an ugly way; to play football poorly is to fail to score touchdowns. The manner in which an action is performed is intrinsic to aesthetic sports, whereas it can be said to be incidental in purposive sports. In this way, the aesthetic element is of greater importance in aesthetic sports than in purposive sports.

In “Sport – The Body Electric,” Joseph Kupfer offers us a different schema. He delineates three categories of sports: quantitative/linear, qualitative/formal, and competitive sports. Quantitative/linear sports, dependent on measurement, are those sports that include quantification of space or time. The winner traverses the greatest distance, or achieves the given activity in the smallest amount of time. Examples include shot put, javelin, long jump, and foot or swimming races. Qualitative/formal sports are those “whose excellence is equivalent to beauty of movement” (Kupfer, 393). In these sports, such as gymnastics and figure skating, the concern is not the space traversed or the time elapsed, but the aesthetic quality of the movement. Distance and time do not determine winners here; instead, experts use their aesthetic judgment to evaluate the performances offered by these sports. Competitive sports, like football or basketball, differ from the first two categories in that they are “essentially social”; opposition from others is intrinsic to their performance (Kupfer, 393). In these sports, an athlete does not perform alone, or alongside others, but her performance itself is defined by her interaction with her opponent. By definition, athletes in a competitive sport could never

perform one after the other as they do in gymnastics, or as they might technically do in a race if each runner were timed individually and then the times were compared.

Competitive sports are contests between individuals; their outcomes are essentially tied to oppositional interplay. In a competitive sport, one must play defensively as well as offensively.

While Kupfer amends Best's picture by dividing purposive sports into two distinct categories—quantitative/linear sports and competitive sports—both accounts categorize sports in terms of their formal character, and take the position that aesthetic considerations and judgment are more at the forefront in some sports than in others. But this is not to suggest that all sports, even quantitative or competitive or purposive ones, are not in some sense aesthetic. Kupfer points out that quantitative sports are aesthetically pleasing when movements are smooth, repetitious, and uniform, suggesting a sense of effortlessness. Spectators take pleasure in the formal opposition between athlete and space/time. Competitive sports are aesthetic as well; even though they are not judged according to aesthetic standards, the “social drama” inherent in these sports allows for varied aesthetic possibilities, requiring athletes to improvise in order to react to their opponents.

Similarly, Best, who thinks that purposive sports are not inherently aesthetic, does not deny that we can nevertheless consider them from an aesthetic point of view. One tennis player can certainly have a more beautiful stroke than another, and this might very well contribute to the quality of the athletic performance and a spectator's enjoyment of a match. Furthermore, we might point out that there are cases in which there exists a link between form and success. A proper follow-through is often said to be necessary to a

fluid and consistent swing in tennis and golf, for example. Similarly, in *Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name*, Vicki Hearne suggests that, while equestrian Grand Prix show jumping is not technically judged based on aesthetic considerations, it cannot be executed well without polished equitation, that is, aesthetic correctness.

Some philosophers who take an aesthetic approach to sport go as far as to argue that sport can in some cases be regarded as art. In "Sport, the Aesthetic and Art: Further Thoughts," Peter Arnold runs through four methods that philosophers have employed to try to establish sport as art. They are: the aesthetic approach, the analogous approach, the intentionalist approach, and the institutionalist approach. The aesthetic approach, as its name suggests, is appealed to when philosophers argue that, by virtue of being of aesthetic interest, sports can be said to be artistic. For example, a philosopher who argues that, because aesthetic sports (on Best's schema) emphasize form more than do purposive sports, they have a more legitimate claim to artistic status. Writers who take the analogous approach assume the analogy between sport and performance art to be reason to assert that sport can in some cases be regarded as art. The analogous approach argues that, because we can draw a fruitful analogy between art and sport "in terms of skills, intrinsic satisfaction, aesthetic possibility as well as the fact that both can be creative and can be watched as well as participated in," there is reason to deem sport an artistic activity (Arnold, 169).

The intentionalist approach refers to the idea that an athletic performance counts as art if the athlete's intentions are artistic. In "Sport and the Artistic," S.K. Wertz uses this approach to argue that figure skating is artistic. Appealing to Olympic figure skater Toller Cranston's own description of his sport, Wertz points out that figure skating is

highly creative, committed to the creation of new routines, and interested in artistic considerations when it comes to music, style and choreography (Wertz, 393). This kind of argument likens the body to an artistic medium, and argues that, because an athlete's "manipulation" of her medium can improve her performance aesthetically, this manipulation is artistic rather than merely athletic (Wertz, 393). The fourth kind of approach, the institutionalist approach, argues that sport is art when artistic status is conferred on sport. This approach, of course, depends on having adopted an institutional approach to art in general. On this view, sport's status as art has less to do with the aesthetic experience it might offer, and more to do with whether a person acting on behalf of the art world has deemed it art. Mumford points out that this has yet to happen, but that "there is no reason in principle" why the status of art could not be bestowed upon sport in the future (Wertz, 40).

According to Arnold, however, all four of these approaches are flawed. The institutional approach is "empty," as it is not interested in the material differences between art and non-art, and only in the bestowal of artistic status (Arnold, 171). Intentionalist arguments that sport is art make the mistake of assuming that an athlete's artistic intention is sufficient to make the athletic performance an artistic one. The analogous approach is unsuccessful because, while there are similarities between sport and art, this does not mean that sport is art. In addition, it requires us to have a fully worked out account of what art is; we cannot meaningfully liken sport to art in an effort to define sport as art unless we are clear about the definition of art. Finally, the aesthetic approach fails to properly distinguish between the aesthetic and the artistic. Just because sport is aesthetically rewarding does not mean that it is art.



In “Sport is Not Art: Professor Wertz’s Aunt Sally,” Best argues that sports, even aesthetic sports, are not art for two main reasons. In the first place, “sport could be the subject of art, but art could not be the subject of sport. Indeed, the very notion of a subject of sports makes no sense” (Best 1986, 97). According to Best, it is easy to picture a painting of a soccer game, but a soccer game representing a painting makes no sense; a soccer game cannot represent anything. Art, unlike sport, allows for the expression of “life-issues,” whether they be sociological, religious, or ethical. Second, in art, the audience responds to an “imagined object” (Best 1986, 96). Audience members react to Othello dying at the end of the play, not to the death of the actor who plays him. The affective response is to a character, an object that is a function of imagination. There are no imagined objects in sport; a soccer player is not playing an imagined role in this way.

The imagined object portion of Best’s argument is very convincing. The structure of our affective response to art importantly differs from our affective response to sport. But, as Arnold points out, the treatment of “life issues” is not an essential feature of all arts – abstract art, architecture, and music, for example (Arnold, 173). Furthermore, we might disagree with Best and think that it is in some cases appropriate to think of sport as having a subject. Perhaps a game could represent a famous battle, for example.

According to Mumford, sport offers a distinctive kind of aesthetic experience, one that suggests that sport can be said to have a subject. He writes: “Sport provides aesthetic experience, it has been argued, but it can be argued that it provides a distinctive kind of aesthetic experience...it provides an aesthetic insight into the nature of our embodied existence and the extent of our capabilities. Dance may serve a similar function but not always with the addition of improvisation and testing of capacities, which competition

specifically encourages. Sport adds something to the human form that cannot be found even in dance” (Mumford, 140). On Mumford’s view, then, sport serves as a meditation on embodied existence and the extent of our capabilities; in other words, the subject of sport is the nature of embodiment and corporeal capability. This, says Mumford, is also the subject of dance, but sport has the extra ingredient of competition—encouraged improvisation – and this ingredient is responsible for distinguishing the aesthetic experiences offered by dance and sport. While Mumford’s account does not seek to present sport as artistic, it does encourage us to think about sports as something that can properly be said to have a subject. Perhaps it is not inappropriate to identify more specific subjects that belong to particular sports, or particular kinds of sports. Take, for example, “glissade” sports, such as surfing, windsurfing, and hang-gliding. According to Steven Connor (echoing Gilles Deleuze) in his 2011 book *A Philosophy of Sports*, these sports have a unique character: they emphasize motions like “skating, soaring, gliding, floating, hovering,” and require that the human body enter into an already “existing wave” or “column of rising air” (Connor, 209-210). The formal structure of glissade sports is such that human movement is seen reacting to and trying to adjust to rhythms of the natural world. Perhaps, due to the unique formal character of glissade sports, we can characterize the subject of these sports more specifically than the nature of embodied existence; glissade sports can be thought of as a meditation on the body’s relationship to rhythms of the natural elements like waves and wind. In this sense, then, these sports are concerned with the body’s relationship to the elements, and the limits of its capabilities in the presence of said elements.

Within the literature on the aesthetics of sports, accounts of athletic beauty locate athletics—the viewing of and/or participation in – within the realm of aesthetic experience, and seek to analyze sports practices using aesthetic concepts. While the concept of athletic beauty has received more attention in recent years, in her essay “Athletic Beauty in Classical Greece: A Philosophical View,” Heather Reid emphasizes its ancient roots. She offers an account of athletic beauty in Classical Greece, arguing that the Greeks had a concept of athletic beauty that shows itself in their athletic nude sculptures, particularly those of pentathletes. These statues showcase the ideal musculature and proportion of the athletic build, but, more importantly, depict the athletic face as serene. The athlete’s form, artistically rendered, was beautiful to the Greeks not only because it represented the values of physical education and excellence, but because it portrayed a harmonious expression that expressed “a desired state of soul” (Reid, 285). For the Greeks, athletic beauty symbolized the triumph of the soul over the body, the spiritual over the appetitive (Reid, 287).

Hans Gumbrecht offers us the most comprehensive philosophical discussion of athletic beauty to date. In his 2006 book *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, Gumbrecht seeks to unpack the aesthetic nature and value of sports, exploring the question of whether there is anything intrinsically unique about athletic performance as an object of aesthetic experience; he is interested in whether athletic performance produces a specific kind of aesthetic effect. In other words, his project makes a case for a uniquely athletic aesthetic, and consequently, a uniquely athletic brand of beauty. His philosophical approach is, as his title suggests, to analyze the athletic beauty of different sports that people tend to enjoy watching by “lay[ing] open how complex on many different layers individual

[sports] are and how their function and effect depends on such complexity” (Gumbrecht, 36). According to Gumbrecht, this kind of analysis is what is offered by the “best critical appreciations of the visual arts, literature, and music;” because his enterprise is an aesthetic one, borrowing this method from the visual arts “will oblige [him] to stay focused on all forms of athletic beauty in all their complexity” (Gumbrecht, 35- 36).

Gumbrecht proposes a definition of athletics based on three components: first, whatever we call sports is a form of performance; second, among the many phenomena that qualify as performance, the forms of athletic performance are specific because they are permeated by the values of agon (competition) and arête (striving for excellence); finally, sports appear to be at a distance from the interests and strategies that make up the everyday world (Gumbrecht, 86). He posits seven sports fascinations to explain what it is that fascinates sports spectators beyond wins, losses, and broken records. They are: bodies, suffering, grace, tools, forms, plays, and timing. The idea is that one specific fascination is often decisive in our enjoyment of a specific event; for example, gymnastics is about embodying a set of forms. However, several fascinations can, and usually do, come together as we watch individual sports. “Bodies” refers to our fascination with the sculpting of bodies; “suffering” refers to our fascination with suffering in the face of death, or stoicism at the moment before death; “grace” denotes an appearance of effortless in the athlete, and an enjoyable inability in the spectator to process the athlete’s body movements as a result of her thoughts (think of a sprinter whose legs appear to be propelled not by the athlete herself but by an outside force); “tools” are things—sports equipment, machines, or animals—that enhance the human body’s potential in some way, generally with respect to speed or force; “forms” refers to

the fascination with the difficulty associated with an athlete fashioning her body in the right way at the right time; “plays” are an “epiphany”-esque convergence of several athletes’ bodies in time and space that is often perceived as being the product of strategy; and good “timing” denotes a spectator’s fascination with an athlete’s intuitive capacity to be at the right place at the right time (Gumbrecht, 150-201).

While Gumbrecht’s picture is for the most part appreciative of the complex nature of athletic beauty, he misses, in my view, an opportunity to draw a common sense, but nevertheless philosophically significant, distinction between two importantly different *categories* of sport: sports practices, or athletic contests, that involve non-human animals and those that do not (“animal sports” and “non-animal sports,” respectively).

Throughout his meditation on the nature of athletic beauty, Gumbrecht makes passing reference to several animal sports. Specifically, in his discussion of the historical development of sports practices, he mentions the involvement of animals in sports in ancient Greece and Rome, in the Middle Ages, in the Enlightenment period, and in modern culture. He describes the Olympic festival in ancient Greece as having “featured horse races, [and] chariot races (including chariots drawn by mules)”; in addition, he references the chariot races that took place in the Coliseum or Circus Maximus in the first century A.D., as well as the frequent “simulated hunts for exotic animals” (Gumbrecht, 93, 102). He draws our attention to the knightly tournaments of medieval culture, specifically the jousts between knights on horseback, presenting them as athletic activities that came out of a tradition of military field practice (Gumbrecht, 111). Gumbrecht mentions the popularity of horse racing and its associated “betting fever,” as well as the fact that the modern Olympic movement included (and still includes)

horseback riding, including dressage competitions (Gumbrecht, 125, 131). Finally, Gumbrecht makes reference to bullfighting and polo; the former he compares to boxing, while the latter he includes in a list of “ballgames” (Gumbrecht, 139).

Gumbrecht’s mentions of animal-related sports do not, and are not meant to, amount to a comprehensive list. Chariot (horse-drawn or mule-drawn) racing, hunting (technically “simulated,” or staged, hunting), jousting, horse racing, equestrian sports (dressage, show jumping, eventing, vaulting), polo, and bullfighting are not the only practices involving animals that fall under the rubric of sports. Drawing on a long and rich history, one may well also include, among many others: fishing, trapping, chariot racing, steeplechase, rodeo sports, dogsled racing, greyhound racing, cockfighting, dog fighting, falconry, and canine agility training.<sup>14</sup>

It is neither surprising nor problematic that Gumbrecht does not make reference to every activity on this list. It is not his aim to provide a complete list of every sports practice, animal related or not; neither is his project meant to provide each and every sport with its own individual application of his concept of athletic beauty. After all, most of the sports he mentions are mentioned very briefly; the animal-related activities that *do* receive special attention from Gumbrecht are equestrian sports (mounted sports, specifically horse racing and dressage, not carriage sports), and, more briefly, bullfighting.

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that some of these practices have fallen out of favor for ethical reasons; nevertheless they are often still conceived of as “sports” in some sense. I want to emphasize the fact that this list is “common-sense” rather than philosophical, meaning that it reflects the way we tend to think about things in practice, rather than the way we ought to think about things. The question of which of these activities *ought* to count as sports is not the focus here.

When Gumbrecht discusses horse racing and dressage, he does not make a point of distinguishing them in any significant way from “non-animal” sports. On the contrary, he explicitly draws a parallel between equestrian sports practices and a non-animal sport: racecar driving. In his discussion of “tools” as one of the seven sports fascinations, Gumbrecht likens equestrian competitions to NASCAR and Formula One races. According to Gumbrecht, these events are importantly similar in that they “require a pronounced involvement of the human body with an accessory or tool...the fascination of sports involving animals and machines relies on the sense that these nonhuman elements are somehow coupled to the human body” (Gumbrecht, 174). Gumbrecht’s idea is this: in both equestrian sports and car racing, the human’s body is seen as joint to – or perhaps in a kind of symbiotic relationship with – its animal or machine. For Gumbrecht, horses and cars are crucially different from other kinds of athletic equipment – a discus, a baseball glove, a pair of skis – equipment to which the body is not “coupled” or fused (Gumbrecht, 174). When I ski, for example, my skis are, unlike horses or cars, “just objects whose handling demonstrates the strength and skill of the body that handles them” (Gumbrecht, 174). Gumbrecht suggests that sports involving “tools” like horses or cars (and he suggests that firearms belong in this group too) fascinate spectators in two particular ways by virtue of serving as “extensions of or as complexifications of the human body” (Gumbrecht, 174). First, horses and cars make it possible for humans to “go beyond the limits of an exclusively human performance”; horses and cars both allow the human body to travel at a faster speed than it would otherwise be able to, for example (Gumbrecht, 174). Second, in the case of horseback riding and car racing, a human will excel insofar as he is able to “adapt his body to the form, movements, or function of the

tool” (Gumbrecht, 175). Gumbrecht compares a jockey who lets his own body movements be shaped by his horse’s stride to a racecar driver with the “mechanical know-how and body-based intuition” to fine-tune his car with a nearly perfect “set-up”<sup>15</sup> (Gumbrecht, 176). For Gumbrecht, a firearm, a racecar, and a horse all have something crucial in common: a kind of “animal or mechanical force” that is absent in mere athletic equipment like a discus or a snowboard (Gumbrecht, 179).

Surely, there is a sense in which animals and machines each have a kind of intrinsic force or power that is not found in something like a pair of skis. At the same time, however, the way Gumbrecht chooses to present this point – by aligning “animal” and “mechanical” forces – is puzzling. While a “tool’s” intrinsic force or power is one way to categorize it, it seems that a great deal is likely to be lost by mechanizing the animal force, or animalizing the mechanical force. While equestrian sports and racecar driving might share some features, this is not necessarily to say that they ought to be grouped together in one’s aesthetic analysis of sports; after all, an engine’s horsepower is certainly not the same kind of thing as an actual horse’s power.

There is also a very real sense in which a horse race is more uncertain than a car race; a racecar does not have “a mind of its own” in the way that a horse does. A horse has a much wider and more unpredictable range of behaviors than does a car; a horse might get tired and slow down, or get spooked and stop short, or buck or throw its rider, for example. The range of possibilities of a horse race is much larger than that of a car

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<sup>15</sup> “Set-up” is a term used to connote a kind of “mutual understanding” in racecar driving. Gumbrecht writes: “Depending on the shape of the race track, the competition, weather conditions, and the pit crew, drivers invest several days in finetuning their cars to maximize specific strengths and neutralize weaknesses under the given circumstances. A track with many turns demands a different set-up from a track with long straightaways” (Gumbrecht, 176).



race. Granted, a car's tire can collapse or its engine can overheat – but these are matters of mechanical malfunction. There is a possibility of *animal* malfunction, so to speak – I prefer to call it “behavioral unpredictability” – that is only present when there is an animate object present. Whatever we want to say about the question of animal agency, at the very least we can agree that a living thing's behavior is less predictable than that of a machine. Consequently, the aesthetic tension that gives rise to a feeling of suspense in the spectator is of a different sort – or of a different degree, or both—when an animal life is present.

We might think that a comparison to partner or team sports – in which two humans partner, as in doubles tennis, for example – might be an appropriate comparison here. Certainly, it is true that doubles partners must communicate closely and coordinate their actions in order to achieve success. This presents a coordination problem that individual sports don't have. But animal sports in which a human and an animal form a partnership or a team involves a much deeper coordination challenge, as the cross-species character of animal sports makes for more challenging communication, and as a result, has the potential for more coordination problems. Because of this, the unpredictability I am pointing to in animal sports is more prevalent, more pronounced, and more profound than the unpredictability that might arise in a doubles tennis match.

In addition to missing out on the idea of behavioral unpredictability and its aesthetic consequences, Gumbrecht also ignores the animal/human *relationship* altogether. Presumably, a spectator of a horserace is in part fascinated by the interaction of animal and human. Consider the distinctive aesthetic fusing of the animal and human body that takes place in equestrian sports; Equestrian sports bring about the creation of

hybrid bodies. Not only does the centaur-like image of the horse and rider aesthetically preserve myth, as well as condense and translate ancient cultural memory into modern images, but its production transfigures the human body into part-animal, and transfigures the animal body into part-human. Furthermore, the human-animal hybrid body created in equestrian sports throws into question whether a joining of bodies is tantamount to a joining of agencies. In other words, when it comes to the aesthetics of sport, should we think of horse and rider as a human athlete and an animal, as two athletes, or as one athletic individual?

When Gumbrecht more briefly draws our attention to bullfighting, his approach is similar; he compares bullfighting to (the non-animal sport of) boxing. He claims that, in the case of both sports, we are “fascinated” not by the “tools” used, but by the suffering involved. The main attraction of boxing, says Gumbrecht, is the fact that it has the potential to put a fighter in close proximity to death: “it is about suffering to the point of near-death and then, if possible, returning from the near-death experience to decisive physical dominance” (Gumbrecht, 163). Both boxing and bullfighting stage a duel between two competitors, and “celebrate [an athlete’s] brush with death” (Gumbrecht, 164). The fascination, then, is with a particular moment of suspense – the moment of being on the verge of death or destruction.

It seems to me that we need to press Gumbrecht on two issues here. First, we should immediately note that our fascination with the suffering of a human will undoubtedly be different from our fascination with the suffering of an animal; after all, one’s aesthetic experience of an object is not easily separated from one’s ethical and/or emotional attitudes toward that object. Our ethical and affective attitudes towards animals

are different than those towards other humans; it seems intuitively odd to assume that our aesthetic attitudes towards animals versus humans in sport wouldn't similarly differ. It seems that bearing witness to an animal's suffering or death in the sporting arena would be a different sort of aesthetic experience than bearing witness to the suffering of a human competitor.

Second, while Gumbrecht is careful to portray our fascination with these two violent activities as tied up with a particular moment of suspense, he does not consider the possibility that there might be two different *kinds* of suspense present in boxing and bullfighting. First of all, in the case of bullfighting, at stake in the game from the outset is death. Either the bull or the toreador will die before the event is finished; having said that, however, it is extremely rare, statistically speaking, that the bull kills the toreador. Boxing is not a "blood sport" in the same way; as far as non-animal sports go, boxing is one of the more violent ones, but, for a boxer to die during the match, something would have to go horribly wrong. Death is not built into the match's narrative as it is in bullfighting; to be sure, a death in the boxing ring would be a horrifying anomaly. On one hand, because death of the bull in the bullfighting arena is almost certain, we might think that it is *less* suspenseful than a boxing match. On the other hand, however, the *kind* of suspense involved in a bullfight is undoubtedly a higher-stakes kind of suspense; spectators might know what is going to happen in the end, but they don't know what exactly will bring about the bull's death. And, perhaps, in some cases, they don't know *how* they will feel at the moment of death.

We might also think that a bullfight involves a different kind of suspense than a boxing match simply because it showcases an *animal* "competitor." In modern civil

society, it would be illegal as well as morally unthinkable for two men to fight to the death before an assembled audience. The notion that one man would kill another in a boxing match does not belong to the spectator's realm of realistic possibility; someone would intervene before this transpired. A man can be reasoned with; a bull cannot. So while it is virtually always the case that the bull, and not the toreador, will die, the perceived irrational, "wild" nature of the bull keeps alive the frightening, albeit remote, possibility in the mind of the spectator (as well as the toreador himself). The animal has not agreed to any of the rules of the game, and, in this sense, nothing is completely certain.

We can see at this point that at least four of Gumbrecht's fascinations require amendment when we think more deeply about the nature of animal sports, these being tools, suffering, bodies, and plays. We have already spoken about why "tools" and "suffering" are incomplete on his account. I want to quickly suggest why I take "bodies" and "plays" to be insufficient as well. Gumbrecht's "bodies" fascination is limited to a focus on the aesthetics of the *human* body; he doesn't mention any animal body as being specifically fascinating to the spectator apart from its function as a "tool" (Gumbrecht, 153-157). As we saw in his discussion of equestrian sports, the horse's body is only referred to insofar as it is an extension of the human body, or can push the limits of human ability. In his account of bullfighting, Gumbrecht does not draw our attention to the movements of the bull's body, either in sport or in suffering and death. Gumbrecht writes: "Spectators prefer to watch athletes as they test and push the absolute limits of *human* performance," and points out that in many sports today, it happens to be the case that the "top athletes have [in fact] reached a level close to the physical limit of *human*

performance” (italics added, Gumbrecht, 148, 73). Gumbrecht’s primary concern is with the *human* athlete – his body, his capacity, and his performance. Because of this, he doesn’t count the fusing of animal and human bodies in equestrian sports as an aesthetic “fascination,” and he doesn’t consider the fact that – to a human spectator – an animal is a different sort of aesthetic object than is another human.

Also, recall from above that in his section on “plays” as one of the seven sports fascinations, Gumbrecht implies that there is an aesthetic appreciation in the spectator for an athletic movement or series of movements that is somehow beautifully *planned* and *executed* by an athlete. It seems that a kind of intentionality thought to be lacking in animals is required in an athlete able to plan and execute a beautiful play in a sporting event. So what is our aesthetic experience of a beautiful play in an animal sporting event? Do we experience it in the same way that we experience a beautiful play in a game like basketball, for instance, or do our attitudes regarding an animal’s agency and questionable “athlete” status complicate the notion of “plays” as fascinating here?

It seems strange that Gumbrecht’s account does not explicitly acknowledge the possibility that the presence of an *animal life* in a sports activity might raise special questions for athletic beauty. Clearly, Gumbrecht’s reference to horses as “tools” is itself a kind of denial of equine animality, a mechanization of the animal life. This is further, and even more explicitly, emphasized by his horse/car comparison; the result is that his treatment of equestrian sports mechanizes animality. Similarly, by comparing bullfighting to boxing, Gumbrecht’s account does not distinguish between humanity and animality: after all, a boxing match is a face-off between two humans (of comparable

physical build); a bullfight is between a man<sup>16</sup> and a bull. Therefore, Gumbrecht's parallel between boxing and bullfighting is, in one sense, meant to raise the animal, the bull, to the status of dueler. In doing so, however, it denies the animal his animality; horses and bulls are likened to machines or men. On this account, they are not viewed as part of a non-human, but nevertheless animate, class of agents. By drawing analogies between horse racing and car racing and between bullfighting and boxing, and by likening animals in sports to athletic equipment, Gumbrecht fails to consider the question of what makes animal sports importantly different from non-animal sports. Because of his reluctance to philosophically take seriously the intuitive distinction between animal sports and non-animal sports, Gumbrecht's picture does not acknowledge the importance of the *animal life* presence in horseracing or bullfighting, and therefore does not consider its consequences for the aesthetic analysis of these activities.

Because Gumbrecht characterizes animals as part of the "tools" fascination, he does not consider the ways in which his other "fascinations" – bodies, suffering, and plays – specifically apply to animal sports. That these fascinations require amendment in the case of an animal sport speaks to the fact that Gumbrecht has not only conflated animals and tools, but has also failed to consider the transformative effect that an animal brings to sport. When we think seriously about an animal's inclusion in sport, we can see that the methods we might use to analyze other sports require amendment when it comes to animal sports. "Bodies" has to speak to the appeal of animal bodies; "suffering" has to consider animal suffering versus human suffering; and "plays" has to consider animal agency, and the human fascination with watching animals behave as though intentionally.

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<sup>16</sup> As we will see, more precisely, a bullfight is between men (some on horseback) and a bull.

Gumbrecht's presentation of animals as "tools" leads him to align animal and mechanical forces, animating the machine, and mechanizing the animal life. By presenting animals as tools, he fails to consider the difference between mechanical and animal malfunction, or "behavioral unpredictability." Because of this, he is not in a position to correctly consider the nature of suspense in sports that involve animals. In addition, because Gumbrecht does not consider the relational capabilities of animals (as opposed to machines), he does not perceive the human/animal relationship as introducing complexity into animal sports. Finally, Gumbrecht's likening of animals to tools does not allow for the possibility that animals themselves might in some sense be athletes (with a will to win). By likening animals to tools – and failing to extend agency to animals— Gumbrecht fails to account for the fact that animals introduce complexities into sports, complexities that an account of athletic beauty must be sensitive to.

We have seen through our analysis of Gumbrecht's picture that sports involving animals raise special issues that require consideration in accounts of athletic beauty. By virtue of being alive, having agential properties, being reactive and being able to be related to, animals introduce complex elements to sport that mechanical "tools" like cars and firearms do not. The factors that separate an animal from a machine are what account for the character and appeal of animal sports – and, in my view, make for a unique kind of fascination with athletic activity. Gumbrecht's inclusion of animals into the "tools" fascination is ultimately misleading and results in a failure to capture the unique philosophical issues raised by sports that involve an animal. Animality, or animal life, needs a separate place in a comprehensive account of the aesthetics of sports. The introduction of an animal into a sport is transformative to a sport's aesthetic character. It

is not sufficient to group animals with “tools” like firearms and racecars; instead, animals require their own separate treatment within the aesthetics of sports that allows room to take seriously the complexities that animals bring to sport.

At this point, we need to further explore why animal sports call for a philosophical analysis that carves out a space for them as separate from other sports. Animal sports are importantly distinct from other sports in part due to the fact that humans have a preexisting aesthetic relationship to animals independent of sports – that animals are bearers of aesthetic interest. Before we can begin to understand how to characterize our aesthetic experience of animal sports, we have to consider the aesthetic experience humans have of animals in general – not limited to sport. As I mentioned in my Introduction, there is an important sense in which animals are, to humans, spectacles in themselves, or objects of aesthetic intrigue. In the remainder of this chapter, I argue that looking at animals is a universal aesthetic experience<sup>17</sup> for humans in that people derive aesthetic pleasure from any combination of an animal’s formal appearance, fitness to function (functional beauty), vitality, exoticism, wild autonomy, and expressiveness. We have a freestanding aesthetic fascination with animals – even outside of performance or sport -- and this fact serves as a unique complicating factor that must be considered in an analysis of animal sports. In order to understand the aesthetic complexities that

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<sup>17</sup> Perhaps one might worry that looking at animals is not inherently aesthetic. Consider the objection: “Sometimes it seems that people are mostly interested in surprising features of animals and their behavior. Need that be aesthetic?” I would argue that, because our relationships to animals are so deeply sensory in nature, any fascination we have with them can be understood as being in part aesthetic. Even where they are not connected to formal beauty, it would be hard to identify a case of fascination with an animal that cannot be linked to any of the following: fitness to function (functional beauty), vitality, exoticism, wild autonomy, or expressiveness.



animals bring to sports, we need to unpack what it means for animals to be aesthetically intriguing.

In his 2007 paper “The Aesthetic Value of Animals,” Glenn Parsons is interested in exploring our aesthetic appreciation of animals. He presents animals as “commonplace objects of aesthetic appreciation,” but wonders why the aesthetic experience of animals is so rarely discussed (Parsons, 1). He cites the way we relate to pets as a familiar example of animals being appreciated aesthetically: “We enjoy the cuteness of our kittens, the regal bearing of our bulldogs, and the bright colour of our budgies. Indeed, some pets seem to be kept exclusively for their aesthetic value, such as tropical fish, which are unaffectionate and difficult to maintain” (Parsons, 1). According to Parsons, wild animals are also often objects of aesthetic delight. He writes: “Some [wild animals], such as the lion and the eagle, have become paradigms of aesthetic excellence in Western culture. Indeed, the aesthetic value of wild animals is sometimes cited as a reason for reducing human impact on the environment, since such impact may lead to the diminishment or extinction of these animals. Nor is this aesthetic fuss over animals an entirely informal or idiosyncratic affair: dog and cat shows are highly institutionalized events, involving arcane conventions and critical controversies that would rival those of any art show. And yet, despite all this, contemporary aesthetic theory is practically silent on the topic” (Parsons, 1-2).

Animals are commonplace objects of aesthetic appreciation, and Parsons seeks to understand why this is the case—that is, what it is about observing animals that fascinates humans. What do we tend to find aesthetically intriguing about animals? He approaches this by trying to understand what it is that makes an animal most beautiful, or most

fascinating, to an onlooker. According to Parsons, one way of accounting for human fascination with animals is to point to the formal qualities of animals, “an appreciation based solely on enjoyment of their interesting and appealing shape, colour and pattern” (Parsons, 12). This formalist approach is concerned with the “‘sensuous surface’ of animals (their shape, colour and so forth)” – the idea being that “some animals simply present patterns or motions that we find visually pleasing” (Parsons, 12). Parsons illustrates this formalist approach by drawing our attention to the example of a horse’s body. Parsons points out that art critic Kenneth Clark praises the curves of a horse’s body as being “without question the most satisfying piece of formal relationship in nature” (Parsons, 12).

Another approach to appreciating animals is Parsons’s own suggestion: “that we understand the aesthetic value of animals along the lines of the notion of ‘functional beauty’” (Parsons, 14). The idea behind this notion is that the function of a thing is involved in its beauty, such that its beauty somehow ‘arises out of’ its function” (Parsons, 14). According to Parsons, we deem an animal beautiful when it “displays a visible fitness for its function” (Parsons, 14). An example of this can be found in the cheetah, whose body strikes us as having been “built for speed” (Parsons, 15). Parsons writes: “Virtually every feature or part of the cheetah is manifestly geared to that end: its long legs bespeak a formidable stride, its non-retractable claws reveal its gripping and steering ability, its narrow body and small head bespeak an aerodynamic movement, and so forth. This manifest fitness gives the cheetah’s appearance a certain pleasing visual quality: it ‘looks fit’” (Parsons, 15). The cheetah is valued as beautiful because it appears “designed” for its function. And this can apply to all different species; Parsons asks us to

consider the fit-for-speed dimensions of a racehorse, or “the broad wingspan of a gliding raptor” or “the dexterous lankiness of a tree frog’s toes” (Parsons, 14-15). But while fitness to function is often a source of aesthetic value when it comes to animals, it is not necessarily always sufficient. Consider the case of a cow’s digestive system: it’s adapted for the cow’s diet, but likely not beautiful to many people. The point here is that, while fitness to function has been identified as one way of understanding the aesthetic value of animals, it is not always enough on its own.

For Parsons, a third way of accounting for human aesthetic fascination with animals is to point to vitality. The idea here is that “the beauty of living things varies with their level of vitality” – the more powerful, the quicker, the more vital an animal appears to be, the more aesthetically satisfying the experience of watching it (Parsons, 9). Parsons notes two senses in which this might be the case. First, it may be purely aesthetic: “one might argue that quick and lively animals simply appear more pleasing to the eye” (this is in keeping with Hegel’s remark that “the sloth displeases [aesthetically] because of its drowsy activity; it drags itself painfully along and its whole manner of life displays its incapacity for quick movement and activity” (Parsons, 9-10). Second, animals that appear more vital might be more appealing in moral terms, as vitality can be considered “as an indicator of some laudable disposition” (Parsons, 9). Animals with stronger, quicker movements display vitality, a feature that we value greatly in people – and a feature that is definitive of humanity generally.

A fourth ground for the appreciation of animals is exoticism – the more exotic an animal, the more aesthetically fascinating. Parsons writes that, “in its most basic form, this kind of appreciation involves simply putting on display an animal that the audience

would never have occasion to see, as when the Ringling-Barnum circus showed nineteenth-century Midwestern Americans a sea elephant by towing it around a circus field on a platform” (Parsons, 9). Exoticism – “a feature manifest in the long traditions of the menagerie, the travelling circus, and the safari” – adds aesthetic richness through strangeness (Parsons, 9). Our aesthetic experience of an exotic animal is characterized by conflicting feelings of otherness and sameness; the sea elephant is strange and alien, but nevertheless – like humans—alive and embodied.

Just as we are in some cases fascinated by the exoticism of animals, in other cases we are attracted to animals that are most human-like. In this sense, there can be said to be an approach to explaining the aesthetic appreciation of animals that involves anthropomorphizing animals to yield aesthetic appreciation. According to Parsons, “one basic way involves exploiting certain visual features of animals that act as cues for emotional responses” (Parsons, 10). Parsons points out that animals with features like short limbs and large heads—I would add to this human-like hands and feet, small noses, and large eyes—tend to produce emotional responses in humans because of their similarity to human infants.<sup>18</sup> These kinds of features “produce an automatic response of sympathy and nurturing” (Parsons, 10). The more human-like – specifically childlike—an animal appears, the more positive our attitude towards the animal (Parsons, 11). Parsons, then, claims that when we find animals to be aesthetically intriguing, we are reacting to some combination of their formal beauty, functional beauty, vitality, exoticism, or likeness to humans.

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<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this calls to mind S.J. Gould’s essay “A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse,” which discusses Mickey Mouse’s evolution to appear cuter.

In his paper “Beauty and the Beast: Aesthetic Experience of Wildlife,” Holmes Rolston III also considers our aesthetic relationship to animals, and what it means for animals to be aesthetically intriguing. Rolston discusses the aesthetic value of wildlife specifically, drawing our attention to features of human aesthetic experience of wild animals that distinguish it from other forms of aesthetic experience. In his view, because animals have the ability to move, our aesthetic experience of wildlife is “one of spontaneous form in motion” (Rolston, 187). There is a spontaneity present in wildlife that makes it importantly different from other forms of aesthetic experience: in the museum, art does not move. At the theater or the symphony, the movement that occurs is rehearsed and controlled. In nature, plants and trees move, but they “are moved” rather than originating the motion themselves (Rolston, 187). Rolston writes that “the wild life is organic form in locomotion, on the loose, without designs on the human beholder, indifferent to if not desiring to avoid persons. The animal does not care to come near, sit still, stay long, or please” (Rolston, 187). In contrast to the lack of motion, or the scripted motion that characterizes our aesthetic experiences of art as well as other elements in nature besides animals, it is this very unrehearsed, unpredictable, organic movement – he calls it “wild autonomy” – that moves us when we look at wildlife (Rolston, 187).

There are two components of wild autonomy: first, there is the fact that the motion originates from the animal itself; Rolston writes that “wild lives move themselves, and they move us” (Rolston, 188). In this sense, the movement of wildlife is autonomous; their bodily movements originate from within them, implicitly encouraging onlookers to think about (if subconsciously) the nature of animal agency. According to Rolston, “human emotions are attracted by animal bodily motions and drawn through

these into animal emotions” (Rolston, 188). The autonomous movement of wildlife is an outward expression of animal consciousness. The second component of wild autonomy is the fact that the movement that originates from the animal itself is, to our eye, spontaneous and unpredictable. This element of surprise – when will the animal move, and how will it move? – is, for Rolston, a large part of what attracts us to looking at wildlife. For this reason, says Rolston, “even the potential for motion, when the animal is motionless, perched, resting...has as much aesthetic value as does actual motion” (Rolston, 188). It is the potential for motion, and the aesthetic suspense associated with waiting to see what the animal will do, that distinguishes the experience of wildlife from other forms of aesthetic experience. Rolston goes so far as to say that we even experience wildlife when they are hidden: “They do not have to be seen; there is a thrill in knowing they are present and hiding” (Rolston, 189). The thrill in the potential for a hiding animal to burst out of the bushes is part of the aesthetic experience of wildlife.

Perhaps wild autonomy and exoticism might help us explain the case of bird watching, in which very often birdwatchers are not drawn to the most beautiful birds. Often they are more interested in rarity – birds that are uncommon, elusive, difficult to spot. On one hand, we might think that these birders don’t derive aesthetic satisfaction from the birds they watch, and are more interested in “collecting rarities,” the way a stamp collector might be. On the other hand, however, while the birders might not be first and foremost deriving aesthetic satisfaction from the birds’ formal beauty, it is perhaps a combination of other factors – exoticism, wild autonomy – that makes getting a chance to see them a source of aesthetic pleasure. Even though, in the case of bird watching, birders

often seek out birds for other reasons than their formal beauty, this is not to say that they derive no aesthetic satisfaction from beholding these birds.

Rolston takes his discussion of wild autonomy a step further when he transitions from discussing animal movement to discussing aesthetic evidence of animal subjectivity. He writes: “Not only do wildlife move, but they have eyes. They call. In higher animal life, unlike vegetable life, somebody is there behind the fur and feathers, a center of experience amid the moved excitement” (Rolston, 189). As we do when we look at other people, we take their movements, their expressions, and their utterings to connote a center of experience, or a subjectivity. In this sense, experiencing animals – seeing their eyes, hearing their calls – encourages us to see their locomotion as connected to perception (Rolston, 189). According to Rolston, with this connection “comes the appreciation and challenge of kindred and alien life” (Rolston, 190). While “the mountains and rivers are objects...the squirrels and antelope are subjects...I see them; they also see me” (Rolston, 190). Because of animal subjectivity, there is a sense of reciprocity: we see animals, and they see us. We react to wildlife, and it reacts to us. Rolston maintains that “there is a window into which we can look and from which someone looks out,” and that this reciprocity, the fact that both humans and wildlife have points of view, makes looking at animals as a unique aesthetic experience (Rolston, 190). Rolston’s account, though not incompatible with Parsons’s, is less formalist in nature; Rolston’s picture is not just about the appearance of animals, but also about the fact that our aesthetic experience of an animal suggests to us that animals are beings with a center of consciousness from which motion originates. The spontaneous motion or wild autonomy that we find intriguing in animals is intriguing in part because it is an outward

expression of animal consciousness, and the eyes, voice, and expressive qualities of an animal fascinate us in part because they are aesthetic evidence of animal subjectivity.

In her paper, “Aesthetic Appreciation of Expressive Qualities in Animals,” Emily Brady echoes this point, arguing that, in considering the aesthetic appreciation of animals, it is imperative to consider an animal’s “expressive qualities as a significant source of aesthetic value” (Brady, 1). Expressiveness of animals, according to Brady, reveals itself in a number of ways. In the first place, “animals have eyes and facial expressions; they use familiar gestures and move in ways that we recognize” (Brady, 4). We should immediately note that Brady, like me, is not focused on the entire animal kingdom, but on a smaller class of animals within it; after all, many animals cannot be said to have facial expressions or eyes with which we can share a gaze. In particular, on Brady’s view, animals “in flight, in pursuit, attack, swimming, play or sleep” can display a rich expressiveness that an account such as Parsons’s “functional beauty” picture cannot accommodate (Brady, 4). Brady’s contention, then, is that our aesthetic experience/appreciation of animals is by definition also expressive; in other words, our aesthetic interactions with animals are actually “aesthetic-expressive interactions,” and should be understood as such (Brady, 12). Re-understanding human aesthetic experience of animals as tied to the expressive capability of animals is not only crucial to correctly characterizing aesthetic appreciation of animals, but also serves to “support a form of valuing...nature that considers remarkable affinities and meeting points between human and non-human natures and cultures” (Brady, 12).

An inherent part of experiencing animals, then, involves trying to understand an animal’s point of view. Sometimes, as Rolston points out, it is easy to make sense of: the



bear eats because it is hungry. The deer drinks because it is thirsty. The duck sleeps because it is tired (Rolston, 190). Because humans can relate to these states – because humans “know analogues for these experiences” – our aesthetic experience of wildlife can involve a feeling of “kinship that cannot arise with aesthetic contemplation of flowers or scenery” (Rolston, 190). This is a feeling of intimacy, but one tempered by anxiety about the animal’s “otherness.” Even if we can relate to the sleepiness of a duck, for example, “there is never identity, and humans can only imagine what it must be like to be a duck, a chipmunk, an elk...there is alien subjectivity that stands against human subjectivity, mysterious others with differences both of degree and kind” (Rolston, 190). This combination of intimacy and otherness, of kinship and alienation, is a distinctive, central feature of human aesthetic experience of animals. When we look at animals, we are faced with fellow subjects with consciousnesses we cannot fully access, beings with whom we cannot fully empathize. Their spontaneity is “beyond human management,” and their sentience “beyond complete human sympathy;” we are faced with another form of life, creatures that require us to exercise emotional imagination when interacting with them (Rolston, 190). Looking at wild animals challenges us to understand them, and to access their ultimately not fully accessible subjectivity to the best of our ability; according to Rolston, “this transvaluing brings aesthetic richness and creativity” (Rolston, 190). A defining factor of our aesthetic experience of wildlife is this confrontation with another form of life; looking at animals is always intimately and inextricably tied to making sense of animal subjectivity. In this sense, intrinsic to the aesthetic experience of animals is the emotional, intellectual – and ultimately ethical – experience of striving to imagine an animal’s point of view. When we are aesthetically

intrigued by animals, we are in large part responding to an animal's appearance as an expression of – or as offering partial access to – her subjectivity. Animals are intriguing to us not just because of their formal features, but because of the ways in which their formal features serve as evidence for their agency. Human aesthetic experience of animals is marked by a distinctive kind of bonding to animal by human: a (sometimes subconscious) wish to gain access to animal subjectivity, and an inevitable frustration to the fulfillment of that wish.

This distinctive bonding is beautifully captured by John Berger in “Why Look at Animals?” (a chapter from his 1980 book *About Looking*). He describes an animal and a man locking eyes in a passage so moving that it cannot be paraphrased:

“The animal scrutinizes [the man] across a narrow abyss of noncomprehension. This is why the man can surprise the animals. Yet the animal – even if domesticated – can also surprise the man. The man too is looking across a similar, but not identical, abyss of noncomprehension. And this is so wherever he looks. He is always looking across ignorance and fear. And so, when he is *being seen* by the animal, he is being seen as his surroundings are seen by him. His recognition of this is what makes the look of the animal familiar. And yet the animal is distinct, and can never be confused with man. Thus, a power is ascribed to the animal, comparable with human power but never coinciding with it. The animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas, are specifically addressed to man” (Berger in Kalof and Fitzgerald, 252).

Berger's concept of the reciprocal gaze captures the fact that part of what intrigues us about looking at animals is their ability to look back – their point of view, their subjectivity. When we talk about our aesthetic experience of animals and we fail to take this crucial piece into account, we run the risk of objectifying animals as Gumbrecht does when he likens them to machines. Not only does an appreciation for an animal's subjectivity factor into our experience of looking at them, and helps to explain what intrigues us about animals – but extending agency to animals when we appreciate them as

aesthetic objects is morally necessary. To put an animal's agency, and relational capacities out of our mind to allow for a purely formal, aesthetically "pure," experience is to objectify animals – and to miss out on understanding the unique aesthetic value an animal offers precisely as a function of being an agent. When we look at animals as Berger does, with a willingness to extend agency to animals, we are able to see them in a way that is consistent with science, avoid objectifying animals while still being able to analyze our aesthetic experience of animals, and leave ourselves open to seeing that animals are aesthetically intriguing in large part *because* they are agents. Therefore, though I am interested in our aesthetic experience of animals, my approach does not run the risk of objectifying animals.

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We have seen from Gumbrecht's account that problems arise when we characterize the animal as tool and fail to distinguish between our aesthetic experience of animal sports and sports that do not involve the use of animals. We have also considered our aesthetic experience of animals in general, and we have seen that we have a complicated preexisting aesthetic relationship to some animals even outside of sports—as objects of distinctly animal beauty, as expressive, wild, and unpredictable beings, with whom we can share a reciprocal gaze.

In the chapters that follow, my aim is to offer a characterization of human aesthetic experience of animals in sport specifically. Now that we have an understanding of our aesthetic relationship to animals, and have looked at different ways of accounting for the aesthetic value of animals, my aim is to apply this to the special case of sports. How will the element of performance affect the picture? How should we characterize and

understand our aesthetic experience of watching animals perform athletically in human-engineered sport? In other words, how will the element of sport affect the picture of human aesthetic experience of animals we have presented up to this point? My project is concerned with exploring answers to these questions through readings of exemplary literary texts that have staged animal sports scenes.<sup>19</sup>

So far, I have suggested that a comprehensive aesthetics of sports must take seriously the distinction between animal and non-animal sports. Animal sports call for separate philosophical consideration from non-animal sports; the inclusion of an animal in a sport is transformative to the activity, introducing new aesthetic considerations – related to preexisting animal beauty, behavioral unpredictability, and the distinctive nature of human/animal bonding —that must be taken up by any complete philosophy of sport. I also want to point out that there is philosophical value in distinguishing not just between animal sports and non-animal sports, but also between different specific animal sports. For instance, horseracing and bullfighting, though both animal sports, are crucially different enough to merit separate aesthetic treatments. Horseracing stages a predominately cooperative relationship between human and animal, while bullfighting

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<sup>19</sup> Animal performance takes place in sports stadiums, but it also, of course, takes place elsewhere. For example, Inuit dogsled races take place across very expansive tracts of wilderness. Another example is the circus; a related project might therefore examine the aesthetic nature of the circus, for example, and how extending agency to circus animals revises our aesthetic experience of them performing in the circus. While there are certainly implications for animal performance of any kind when we talk about how we experience animals aesthetically, my focus is on sport, and aims to contribute to the philosophy of sport.

stages a predominantly oppositional relationship between human and animal.<sup>20</sup> I contend that, because Gumbrecht conflates animal sports and non-animal sports, he is not in a position to compare one animal sport to another in any meaningful way. In this sense, he is unable to meet his central aim of “laying open how complex on many different layers individual sports are and how their function and effect depends on such complexity” when it comes to sports that involve the use of animals (Gumbrecht, 36).

One way to preliminarily categorize the activities involving animals that are referred to as sports practices is offered by William Morgan and Klaus Meier in the first edition of their anthology *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*. According to Morgan and Meier, there are three categories of “animal sports”:

1. Sports in which animals are pitted against other animals either in contests of deadly combat or in contests to assess superior animal athletic prowess (cock fighting, dog racing)
2. Sports in which humans pit themselves against animals in tests of athletic skill (hunting, fishing, bull fighting)
3. Sports in which humans use animals in the pursuit of athletic excellence (equestrian events, horse racing, polo, certain rodeo events) (Morgan and Meier, 373)

Although this schema is presented in an anthology on the philosophy of sport, it is more a common-sense schema than one based on philosophical reasoning. It seems that most people, if asked to divide sports involving animals into categories, would create this schema, or some variation on it. For instance, I prefer to slightly reframe Morgan and Meier’s schema in the following way, largely because I find the wording of their third category vague; after all, a fisherman or a racer of dogs could describe his activities as “sports in which humans use animals in the pursuit of excellence.” My proposed reframing is as follows:

1. *Animal versus animal* sports (e.g. cockfighting)
2. *Animal versus human* sports (e.g. bullfighting)
3. *Human/animal combination* sports, in which human and animal compete together “as a team” (e.g. steeplechase)

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<sup>20</sup> The central relationship staged by each sport determines which paradigm it falls under; having said this, it becomes clear in the chapters that follow that these relationships prove more complicated than simply cooperative or oppositional.

While there is bound to be disagreement regarding which activities belong in each category, this kind of rough schema seems intuitively sound.<sup>21</sup> In the chapters that follow, I will argue that these three paradigms reflect three importantly distinct kinds of cases of complicated staging within the animal sports arena, and will explore the ways in which each aesthetic paradigm – and animal sports generally—speaks to issues related to our aesthetic experience of animals, animal agency, human/animal relationships, and human identity in the face of animality. My aim is to gesture towards an Animal Sports Aesthetic, a theory of spectatorship that is sensitive to the host of aesthetic particularities and complexities that are introduced when we involve an animal in human sport.

It should be clear that my project is in some sense a descendent of Gumbrecht's; but whereas he describes the purpose of his project as “laying open how complex on many different layers individual sports are and how their function and effect depends on such complexity,” I want to offer a picture that “lays open how complex on many different layers individual [ANIMAL] sports are and how their function and effect depends on such complexity” (Gumbrecht, 36). In Chapter 2, I will explore cockfighting, an *Animal versus animal* sport, through a reading of Nathanael West's novel *The Day Of The Locust*. In Chapter 3, I will consider a sport that falls under the *Animal versus human* paradigm by looking at bullfighting in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Chapter 4 will take on steeplechase, a *combination* sport, through Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

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<sup>21</sup> Perhaps a similar reframing might be:

1. “Pitting Against” sports activities
2. “Mastering” sports activities
3. “Human/Animal Team” sports activities



CHAPTER TWO:  
Animal versus Animal Paradigm: Cockfighting In Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*

This chapter considers the first paradigm in our three-part schema, the *Animal versus Animal* paradigm. I explore this paradigm by focusing on one sport that belongs to it – cockfighting. I present and analyze cockfighting through a reading of Nathanael West's novel *The Day of the Locust*, in which cockfighting receives exemplary literary expression. I address an issue in the aesthetics of sports – namely, what I take to be the problematic treatment of animal sports – and therefore am locating cockfighting within the aesthetic arena. As Gumbrecht does, I understand cockfighting as an aesthetic activity insofar as all sports can be understood from an aesthetic point of view, and examine the aesthetic structure of cockfighting. In addition, I seek to understand its aesthetic appeal – what do those who find this sport beautiful or fascinating identify beauty or fascination in? The point of this exercise is to lay open what the aesthetic features of cockfighting are, and ultimately, to point out unique considerations that make Gumbrecht's "tools" explanation unsatisfactory. Through West's text, I argue that fighting cocks are bearers of aesthetic interest as well as moral interest, and identify what I take to be the hallmark of cockfighting – proxy-agency, a standing in for man by bird. Proxy-agency is a unique feature of *Animal versus Animal* sports, making cockfighting distinct not only from non-animal sports, but also from the animal sports belonging to the other two paradigms in my schema. An account of cockfighting that sees cocks as tools will undoubtedly not account for proxy-agency as (as the term suggests) it requires that we admit that the structure of cockfighting relies on a bird's agential capacities. After all, a cockfight takes



its shape thanks to a cock's ability to recognize and overcome threats, the cognitive capacities that allow him to be trained to fight, and his capacity for suffering.

As should be clear from my introduction, when I refer to an animal's "agential capacities," I am not suggesting that the animal is capable of the same level of experience as a human being. I am suggesting that many animals – many species of birds included – can be said to have agential capacities in that that they operate using a perception/belief/desire cognitive architecture, have interests that can be frustrated, can in some sense experience emotional pleasure and pain, can interact socially with other members of their species, and can suffer. I am understanding these capacities to be related cluster concepts that all contribute to what I am calling "agential capacities" or "agency." To extend agency to an animal is to acknowledge that the animal can be said to have these kinds of capacities.

Through an animal standpoint reading of West's text – one that takes cocks seriously as having the kinds of agential capacities mentioned above -- I hope to show that, when we extend agency to animals, it changes the whole way we relate to and experience them – and in particular, the way we experience animal sports. In fact, I argue that it is only by extending agency to animals that we are able to appreciate the degree to which animal sports are complex, and deserving of their own designated space in any complete philosophy of sports. Those who find cockfighting beautiful are only taking into consideration the fact that cocks are bearers of aesthetic interest, while ignoring that cocks are bearers of ethical interest as well. For this reason, these spectators are having an incomplete spectatorial experience of cockfighting, which results in misappropriation of beauty. An account of athletic beauty that sees cocks as tools, and cockfighting as

beautiful, fails to expand the aesthetic from the strictly formal to a richer concept that views spectatorship as a relational – and therefore morally infused – activity.

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An exemplary and powerful literary depiction of cockfighting<sup>22</sup> is found in a well-known scene from Nathanael West's 1939 novel *The Day of the Locust*. In this scene, West describes an illegal, informal, backyard cockfight that takes place in California in the 1930's. Miguel, the owner of the cocks, had been set to pit one of his birds against another man's, but when that man does not show up, one of the spectators, Abe, insists that they stage a fight anyway. Although it is very unusual for a man to pit two of his own birds against each other, Miguel sells one of his cocks to Abe, who takes on the role of handler for his recently purchased bird. The fight is between Juju, handled by Miguel, and "Big Red" handled by Abe. Before the fight begins, the birds are outfitted with weaponry, metal gaffs that attach to the animal's natural spurs, specifically chosen to maximize each bird's ability to wound the other. Miguel selects his weapon of choice carefully based on the fact that Juju is shorter in stature than Big Red. Miguel "began to

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<sup>22</sup> Some of the particularities of cockfighting differ by culture, but the overall structure of the activity is the same across all regions and eras – as is the fact that intense betting is always present, regardless of when or where a cockfight is taking place. A cockfight works like this: Two birds, matched according to weight (usually within no more than two ounces of each other) are pitted against each other by human handlers, who are almost without exception male. In most countries, sharp metal spurs or "gaffs" are attached to the birds' legs as weaponry, designed to make blows more lethal. First, the birds are "billed" when the handlers thrust them towards each other to incite them. Then, the fight itself is fought over a number of rounds. At the start of each round, the handlers "pit" the birds, letting them free to fight each other until one is wounded by the other. At this point, the fight is halted and the handlers retreat to a corner of the ring with their bird to clean the bird's wounds etc. Next, the birds are pitted against each other in a second round, and so on. The bird who kills the other first is the victor; if at any time a bird runs away, refusing to fight, he is immediately declared the loser and is often killed.

look over the gaffs in the box. They were all the same length, three inches, but some had more pronounced curves than the others. He selected a pair and explained his strategy. 'He's going to do most of his fighting on his back. This pair'll hit right that way. If he could get over the other bird, I wouldn't use them.' He got down on his knees and honed the gaffs on the cement floor until they were like needles" (West, 80). Then Miguel arms Juju: "First he wiped the short stubs on the cock's legs to make sure they were clean and then placed a leather square over one of them so that the stub came through the whole. He then fitted a gaff over it and fastened it with a bit of the soft string, wrapping very carefully. He did the same to the other leg" (West, 80).

Once Juju and Big Red are armed with gaffs, West describes the birds being "billed," a convention in cockfighting, at the start of the fight: Abe and Miguel "stood at arm's length and thrust their birds together to anger them. Juju caught the big red by the comb and held on viciously until Miguel jerked him away. The red, who had been rather apathetic, came to life and the dwarf had trouble holding him. The two men thrust their birds together again, and again Juju caught the red's comb. The big cock became frantic with rage and struggled to get at the smaller bird" (West, 81).

After the billing, which is successful in that it angers even the apparently apathetic Big Red, the fight takes place over the course of several rounds, until one of the birds is dead or close enough to death that he cannot fight any longer. West writes that, in the first round, Abe and Miguel "climbed into the pit and set their birds down on the short lines so that they faced each other. They held them by the tails and waited for [the acting referee] Earle to give the signal to let go. 'Pit them,' he ordered. [Abe] had been watching Earle's lips and he had his bird off first, but Juju rose straight in the air and

sank one spur in the red's breast. It went through the feathers into the flesh. The red turned with the gaff still stuck in him and pecked twice at his opponents head" (West, 81).

Because Juju's gaff is stuck in Big Red's breast, the handlers are told to separate the birds so that they can continue to fight. After Miguel and Abe separate the birds, they pit them for a second round. West writes: "Again Juju got above the other bird, but this time he missed with his spurs. The red tried to get above him, but couldn't. He was too clumsy and heavy to fight in the air. Juju climbed again, cutting and hitting so rapidly that his legs were a golden blur. The red met him by going back on his tail and hooking upward like a cat.<sup>23</sup> Juju landed again and again. He broke one of the red's wings, then practically severed a leg" (West, 81).

Big Red is severely injured, and Earle orders Miguel and Abe to handle their birds. When Abe picks Big Red up in his arms, the bird's "neck had begun to droop and it was a mass of blood and matted feathers. The little man moaned over the bird, then set to work. He spit into its gaping beak and took the comb between his lips and sucked the blood back into it. The red began to regain its fury, but not its strength. Its beak closed and its neck straightened. The dwarf smoothed and shaped its plumage. He could do nothing to help the broken wing or the dangling leg" (West, 81).

West goes on to say that, when the birds are pitted for another round, Abe

"insisted that the birds be put down beak to beak on the center line, so that the red would not have to move to get at his opponent. Miguel agreed. The red was very gallant. When Abe let go of its tail, it made a great effort to get off the ground and meet Juju in the air, but it could only thrust with one leg and fell over on its side. Juju sailed above it, half turned and came down on its back, driving in both spurs.

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<sup>23</sup> Comparison of one animal's movement to another shows up a great deal in Tolstoy's description of Vronsky's steeplechase (See Chapter 4).

The red twisted free, throwing Juju, and made a terrific effort to hook with its good leg, but fell sideways again. Before Juju could get into the air, the red managed to drive a hard blow with its beak to Juju's head. This slowed the smaller bird down and he fought on the ground. In the pecking match, the red's greater weight and strength evened up for his lack of a leg and a wing. He managed to give as good as he got. But suddenly his cracked beak broke off, leaving only the lower half. A large bubble of blood rose where the beak had been. The red didn't retreat an inch, but made a great effort to get into the air once more. Using its one leg skillfully, it managed to rise six or seven inches from the ground, not enough, however, to get its spurs into play. Juju went up with him and got well above, then drove both gaffs into the red's breast. Again one of the needles stuck" (West, 82).

Once again, Miguel and Abe are told to handle the birds: "Miguel freed his bird and gave the other back to the dwarf. Abe, moaning softly, smoothed its feathers and licked its eyes clean, then took its whole head in his mouth. The red was finished, however. It couldn't even hold its neck straight. The dwarf blew away the feathers from under its tail and pressed the lips of its vent together hard. When that didn't seem to help, he inserted his little finger and scratched the bird's testicles. It fluttered and made a gallant effort to strengthen its neck" (West, 82).

In the final round of the fight, "Once more the red tried to rise with Juju, pushing hard with its remaining leg, but it only spun crazily. Juju rose, but missed. The red thrust weakly with its broken bill. Juju went into the air again and this time drove a gaff through one of the red's eyes into its brain. The red fell over stone dead" (West, 82). Having risen and missed, having tried and failed, Big Red incurs a horrible last blow through his eye and, with his death, the fight is concluded.

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This scene, the clear climax of the novel, and by far its most well-known episode, is generally understood metaphorically. First, it is read as emblematic of two of the novel's central themes: performance and violence. The novel, first and foremost a

“Hollywood” story, has the notion of performance at its core; acting, theatricality, and film figure into the novel prominently. It is also preoccupied with violence, particularly the idea of an appetite for violence. West is explicitly fascinated with the notion of the violent mob, whose members not only create violence but also seek it out as spectators. He famously writes: “Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies” (West, 101). Second, and more tangibly, the cockfight scene is often read as prefiguring a fight that takes place between the central characters in the novel just pages later – the participants in the fight the same as those that participated in the cockfight.. Shortly after the cockfight, the handlers stage a fight of their own, replicating the behavior of the animals pitted against each other in the previous scene. This reading seems to emphasize that West uses the cockfighting scene to show that the humans, engaged in violence, are channeling their animal natures.<sup>24</sup>

While these readings are not incorrect, in my view, there is another valuable way to read this scene. Rather than taking the cockfight to be symbolic of something else, there is ample reason to take seriously the scene’s presentation of its literal animal subject and read it as a meditation on the nature of cockfighting. The readings that fail to do this are not misguided in themselves. The cockfight does, in fact, run parallel to the handler’s fight, and it also combines performance and violence, two of the novel’s major themes. Nevertheless, these common interpretations also figure into and support another reading of *The Day of the Locust* -- as a novel that is preoccupied with animal life. Though the novel is not generally regarded as having an explicit focus on animals, a close reading suggests that, at least within the confines of *The Day of the Locust*, animals are the

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<sup>24</sup> See Light 1960 and Pisk 1967.

subject of immense interest, and perhaps even a preoccupation, for West. If we read *The Day of the Locust* as an animal-centric novel, we are compelled to read the cockfight *as cockfight*. This reading allows the scene to emerge as a meditation on the cockfight, the nature of human/animal relationships in and around cockfighting, and what it means for humans to make use of animals in cockfighting. If we read the novel with a focus on its presentation of animal life, we are in a position to read and understand the cockfight correctly – as an activity that emerges as aesthetically unique when we extend agency to the animals involved.

In my view, there is overwhelming evidence to justify reading *The Day of the Locust* with a focus on tracing “the tracks of animals.” The novel is absolutely littered with references to animals; in addition to the cockfighting scene, we also see many other scenes centered around animals, as well as animal-centric word choices and analogies, many references to human violence towards animals, references to the practice of meat-eating, and references to animal sports -- in particular, animal distress in athletic situations. Notice immediately that even the novel’s title contains the word “locust” -- an obvious reference to plague, but also, literally, an animal reference. In fact, *The Day of the Locust* opens with a reference to animals – in particular, the use of animals by humans. The book’s second sentence reads: “The groan of leather mingled with the jangle of iron and over all beat the tattoo of a thousand hooves” (West, 3). The novel starts out with a mingling of human and animal, and remains consistently committed to featuring and provoking thought about animals.

In addition to the cockfight, there are a number of scenes that not only mention animals but are centered around them. There is an episode that involves a hummingbird

chasing a blue jay that prefigures the cockfight; there is a very long description of the novel's protagonist Homer watching a lizard hunt flies in his backyard; there is a long passage regarding Homer's intense hatred of a black hen that Miguel provides to "service" his gamecocks; and there is a very strange episode that involves a decorative rubber horse corpse displayed at the bottom of a swimming pool. We will return to these episodes later in the chapter to aid in our analysis of the cockfight; for now, we can count them as evidence of an ongoing animal theme present in the novel.

West's word choices and literary devices are also animal-centric. Throughout the novel, West frequently employs animal analogies and language. These animal references run the gamut from figures of speech to explicit moral commentary regarding the treatment of animals by humans. A few language-based references to animals include lines like: "Bring the gin, you enormous cow" (West, 25); "I don't believe it. I can tell from the beast in your voices" (West, 12); and "'So what!' she barked, slamming the door" (West, 6). And, following the cockfight scene, West describes Faye as "peacock[ing] for them all" (West, 84). West also relies heavily on animal similes and analogies.<sup>25</sup> Some may escape our conscious notice unless we are actively reading the novel for the "tracks of animals." For example, West describes a character performing in a barroom and doing the off-stage noises: "twittering like birds...and yelping like a pack

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<sup>25</sup> Regarding animal analogies: the pervasiveness of this literary device is an interesting phenomenon to think about; what is happening when we liken humans to animals? Why do we use them so often as points of comparison, etc.? The answer is likely twofold: in the first place, animals are visually interesting to humans – so it is natural that we would employ them to bring visual interest to writing and speech. In the second place, comparing ourselves to animals serves as a way to sort out human identity vis à vis animal identity – to wrestle with the notion of what it means to be human in the face of creatures who are in some ways so similar, yet at the same time so accessible, to us.



of bloodhounds” (West, 52). He writes of a character deliberating: “After waiting a little while he shook his head no, slowly, heavily, like a dog with a foxtail in its ear” (West, 92). He describes a waiter at a restaurant as “fly-like” and writes that “Tod waved him away with a gesture more often used on flies” (West, 98).

There are many more of these types of animal references, some perhaps stranger, and less conventional and intuitive; there is a sense in which West is not just relying on often-used animal language, but actively seeking out ways to evoke animals in his writing. For example: “They played with [Abe] like one does with a growling puppy, staving off his mad rushes and then baiting him to rush again” (West, 9); Homer “cried softly at first, then harder. The sound he made was like that of a dog lapping gruel” (West, 22); “When the basin was full, [Homer] plunged his hands in up to the wrists. They lay quietly on the bottom like a pair of strange aquatic animals. When they were thoroughly chilled and began to crawl about, he lifted them out and hid them in a towel” (West, 22); Homer “somehow knew that his only defense [from Faye] was chastity, that it served him, like the shell of a tortoise, as both spine and armor” (West, 38); “The dwarf started to get off the trunk, but Tod caught him by the collar. He didn’t try to get loose but leaned forward against his coat, like a terrier in a harness, and wagged his great head from side to side” (West, 78); and, “Every once in a while the child would jerk the string, making the purse hop like a sluggish toad. Its torn lining hung from its iron mouth like a furry tongue and a few uncertain flies hovered over it” (West, 102).

More significantly, West uses loaded, explicitly moral animal analogies as well. He writes of Faye: “She would look like a deer on the edge of the road when a truck comes unexpectedly around a bend” (West, 98); a more weighty reference to animals

than we have seen so far, this analogy speaks to an animal's fear in the face of an "unnatural" danger posed by humans. He describes a large crowd of people as having "tolerated the police, just as a bull elephant does when he allows a small boy to drive him with a light stick" (West, 100). He compares Homer to a poignant, chronically abused dog, writing: "His servility was that of a cringing, clumsy dog, who is always anticipating a blow, welcoming it even, and in a way that makes overwhelming the desire to strike him" (West, 71). And in describing the fight that follows the cockfighting scene, West again references violence towards animals: "Miguel shifted his grip to his ankles and dashed him against the wall, like a man killing a rabbit against a tree" (West, 90).

West often conjures images of violence done towards animals. In a particularly chilling instance, he provides the reader with a vivid description of Earle poaching five caged birds to prepare for dinner. He writes:

"When Earle was satisfied that no one was there to spy on his poaching, he went to the trap. It was a wire basket about the size of a washtub with a small door in the top. He stood over and began to fumble with the door. Five birds ran wildly along the inner edge and threw themselves at the wire. One of them, a cock, had a dainty plume on his head that curled forward almost to his beak. Earle caught the birds one at a time and pulled their heads off before dropping them into his sack. Then he started back. As he walked along, he held the sack under his left arm. He lifted the birds out with his right hand and plucked them one at a time. Their feathers fell to the ground, point first, weighed down by the tiny drop of blood that trembled on the tips of their quills" (West, 48-49).

The trapped birds think they are going to be released – they are panicked, running around and throwing themselves against the walls trying to get out. Although expecting to be set free by the human approaching, they are murdered -- violently, systematically, identically, and anonymously -- and then plucked of their beauty. West draws our attention to the plumage specifically, and then describes the birds being plucked, their bloody feathers discarded in a trail along the ground. This dismemberment continues

after the plucking of the feathers. West writes that Earle “gutted the birds, then began cutting them into quarters with a pair of heavy tin shears. Faye held her hands over her ears in order not to hear the soft click made by the blades as they cut through flesh and bone” (West, 49).<sup>26</sup> We should also note that West calls our attention to animal distress in *sports* situations in more places than the cockfighting scene. Describing a group of performers, he likens them to fish, caught and harmed by humans, writing: They “spin crazily and leap into the air with twisted backs like hooked trout” (West, 5).<sup>27</sup> When Tod draws a portrait of Faye, depicting her running from imminent danger, being chased by a group of people, of whom one is about to throw a rock at her, he compares her to a terrified game bird escaping from a hunter. West provides the following description of the drawing: “[Faye] is running with her eyes closed and a strange half-smile on her lips. Despite the dreamy repose of her face, her body is straining to hurl her along at top speed. The only explanation for this contrast is that she is enjoying the release that wild flight gives in much the same way that a game bird must when, after hiding for several tense minutes, it bursts from cover in complete, unthinking panic” (West, 43).

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<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, this is not the only moment in the novel when West draws our attention to the practice of eating meat. He includes the following dialogue: "I'm a raw-foodist, myself," she said. "Dr. Pierce is our leader. You must have seen his ads--'Know-All Pierce-All.'" "Oh, yes," Tod said, "you're vegetarians." She laughed at his ignorance. "Far from it. We're much stricter. Vegetarians eat cooked vegetables. We eat only raw ones. Death comes from eating dead things." In addition, Homer expresses disgust with one of Miguel's chickens – a hen – for eating meat; he finds her foul because she eats meat, while the rest of the chickens eat grain.

<sup>27</sup> West even includes a line that explicitly compares fishing and tennis, presenting the idea that fishing is practical and tennis is pointless: “How silly, batting an inoffensive ball across something that ought to be used to catch fish on account of millions are starving for a bite of herring” (West, 11).

The animal sports references are not limited to fishing, hunting,<sup>28</sup> and cockfighting – West draws our attention to equestrian sports as well.<sup>29</sup> When we meet Abe, he is carrying a copy of the *Daily Running Horse*, and a conversation ensues about horseracing and betting on horses.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Earle, who sometimes works on horse operas, spends the majority of his time working in a saddlery store. West describes the window display of the store as follows: “In the window of this store was an enormous Mexican saddle covered with carved silver, and around it was arranged a large collection of torture instruments. Among other things there were fancy, braided quirts, spurs with great spiked wheels, and double bits that looked as though they could break a horse’s jaw without trouble” (West, 43). Rather than just drawing his reader’s attention to the riding equipment on display -- bits, spurs, and crops – West makes a point of presenting them as instruments of torture, sports equipment designed to cause pain and harm to horses. This

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<sup>28</sup> Another reference to animal sports comes in this passage, which features a hunting dog: “[Tod could hear Faye] on the hill a little way ahead of him. He shouted to her, a deep, agonized bellow, like that a hound makes when it strikes a fresh line after hours of cold trailing” (West, 50).

<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to take note of two more explicit references to athletics/athletes in the novel. In describing Homer, West writes: “For all his size and shape, he looked neither strong nor fertile. He was like one of Picasso’s great sterile athletes, who brood hopelessly on pink sand, staring at veined marble waves” (West, 22). Perhaps more relevant, West draws a comparison between dance and tennis: “Tod stood watching the dancers from the doorway for a moment, then went to a little table on which the whiskey bottle was. Carrying the glass, he went over to Claude and the others. They paid no attention to him; their heads moved only to follow the dancers, like the gallery at a tennis match” (West, 88). In this passage, West likens the body movements of dancers to those of spectators of a game of tennis, playfully blurring the lines between performer and spectator, and art and sport.

<sup>30</sup> The racehorse discussed is named “Tragopan,” referring to another kind of animal, a kind of pheasant. This animal cross-referencing further emphasizes the preoccupation with animals in the novel. Also, directly after horseracing is brought up, Abe says, referring to a prostitute: “I can get her leg broke for twenty bucks” (West, 7). It is interesting to note that broken legs are a frequent, and fatal, result of horseracing.

description and the analogies above that concern animals enduring human abuse and violence all speak to animal pain, and gesture toward a picture of the animal as a creature that suffers – often by human design.

West's repeated references to animals and specifically to violence done toward animals systematically foreshadow the cockfighting scene, but also serve to present a picture of animal life that considers the animal's standpoint – the animal's subjectivity. West refers to animals being abused, murdered, and dismembered, and, in doing this, asks that we consider the animal's point of view. He rereads everyday sports equipment – bits, spurs, and crops – from an animal's perspective as instruments of torture. In the scene prior to Earle's poaching of the birds, West includes a long meditation on birdsong. West describes birds singing on the walk to the trap: "A mocking bird was singing near by. Its song was like pebbles being dropped one by one from a height into a pool of water. Then a quail began to call, using two soft guttural notes. Another quail answered and the birds talked back and forth. Their call was not like the cheerful whistle of the Eastern bobwhite. It was full of melancholy and weariness, yet marvelously sweet. Still another quail joined the duet. This one called from near the center of the field. It was a trapped bird, but the sound it made had no anxiety in it, only sadness, impersonal and without hope" (West, 48). In this passage, to which we will return later in the chapter, West describes a conversation between birds, free birds and one trapped bird, whose song is sad and impersonal, so devoid of hope that it's entirely free of anxiety; the trapped bird has no hope for itself, and therefore no anxiety about its future. The description of the birdsong, full of varied emotion, lends these birds individual voices and points of view, as well as a mode of communication with each other. West hammers home this idea of

the animal standpoint in perhaps the most important line leading up to the cockfight. He writes: “The dwarf eyed the bird and the bird eyed him” (West, 79). Here, Abe looks at Big Red and Big Red looks back at Abe. Looking at each other, man and bird each has a point of view here, and one is not given privilege over the other.

West’s novel is preoccupied with animals, and takes seriously animal sentience and subjectivity. It is also, separately from the cockfighting scene, extremely concerned with violence done to animals by humans, specifically violence done in sports activities; in this way, the cockfighting scene is a fitting climax for the animal-standpoint thread of the novel. When we adopt this animal-standpoint reading of the novel, it becomes clear that to read the cockfight correctly is to be disgusted and horrified by it. By drawing our attention, time and time again, to animals as sentient beings – and, furthermore, drawing our attention to animals suffering on account of humans, particularly in sport, West’s novel offers an aesthetic portrait of cockfighting that is also an ethical commentary on the sport. However, rather than interject and moralize during the scene, as he does at other moments in the novel, West interestingly expresses no explicit judgment regarding the ethical nature of the cockfight during the scene itself. Crops and spurs might require a reorienting to impress as torture instruments, but the cockfight’s bloodiness speaks for itself. The cockfighting scene, vivid and extremely violent, simply communicates the actual events of the fight. West constructs this scene with little to no editorializing; he is just relaying the visual events, similar to the way a radio announcer might describe the play by play of a boxing match, for example. Everything described by West is sensory and matter of fact, all things that the spectator would be able to witness herself were she present at the fight. Perhaps his description can be said, to the extent that literature is

able, to approximate the experience of spectatorship. The experience of the reader seems designed to be the same that she would have if she were watching the cockfight herself. It is as though West positions his reader as an observer of the cockfight, removing himself as mediator. In the scene itself, he does not explicitly process the event for his reader, but allows her the space to experience it unmediated. He takes on the role of cameraman rather than author, turning his camera lens to capture the cockfight, but keeping a biased authorial stance at bay. Turning his readers into spectators at a cockfight, West presents the cockfight in an unmediated style, allowing room for us and encouraging us to think about the activity from an aesthetic perspective as well as from an ethical one. West's presentation of the cockfight highlights it as aesthetic activity, and draws our attention to the aesthetic nature and features of cockfighting. West encourages us to think about what the nature of the cockfight is, and what it means to be a spectator at a cockfight. In other words, he puts us in a position to *be* spectators, as well as to *study* spectatorship – by observing the characters that participate in and spectate the cockfight, and by observing ourselves as spectators of the fight. There are two levels of spectatorship here – we are ourselves spectators of the fight, and we are also spectators of spectatorship.

West's description of the cockfight, uncharacteristically lengthy and detailed compared to other scenes in the novel, does a great deal in terms of highlighting many of the aesthetic qualities of the sport. First of all, it deliberately presents the cockfight as having an undeniably dramatic shape. The fight, suspenseful and varying in momentum at different points, unfolds over several rounds that resemble the scenes or acts in a play. Furthermore, West draws our attention to the fact that the fight takes place in a designated performance space, the pit – in this case, the garage floor. He writes: "Most of

the garage floor had been converted into a pit, an oval space about nine feet long and seven or eight feet wide. It was floored with an old carpet and walled by a low, ragged fence made of odd pieces of lath and wire. [A spectator's] coupe stood in the driveway, placed so that its headlights flooded the arena" (West, 77). Referring to the makeshift pit as an "arena," complete with the headlights of a car standing in as stage lights, West presents the pit as a theater, and the cockfight as theatrical performance. We should note that a pit (or gallodrome, or gallera) can range from a circle drawn in the dirt to a pit enclosed by walls to cockfighting stadiums with professional lighting, permanent seating, and refreshments for spectators. In her 1989 anthropological essay "The Gauchos Cockfight in Porto Alegre, Brazil," Ondina Fachel Leal describes one of these purpose-built cockfighting arenas: "The magnificence of the space, the arrangement of the chairs and illuminated spots give the impression of a Greek theatre or, perhaps, a coliseum, since stage and seats are entire circles. The posted rules, padded seats, the cleanliness of the place, the attention of the audience, every detail to the drama of the pit conveys the understanding that we are watching a play" (Leal in Dundes, 218). The cockfight is presented as a play at a roundabout theater might be, with a designated, specially lit space for the performers, and an emphasis on providing the spectator with a good view and a comfortable experience. While it may be easier to appreciate the similarities between watching a cockfight and watching a play when the stadium is grander and more official, West's description of his makeshift pit, with "headlights flood[ing] the arena," as well as his detailed account of the entire length of the fight, encourages us to focus on the cockfight in terms of its aesthetic properties.



Emphasizing the cockfight as aesthetic activity, West focuses heavily on the gamecock's appearance, and explicitly highlights the degree to which a gamecock is, even separate from its participating in a cockfight, an object of aesthetic intrigue. When Miguel introduces his birds, Juju is singled out and praised as the most striking. West writes: "The cock's plumage was green, bronze and copper. Its beak was lemon and its legs orange. 'He's beautiful,' Tod said. 'I'll say,'" said Miguel (West, 48). Later, West revisits Juju's appearance: "The bird had short, oval wings and a heart-shaped tail that stood at right angles to its body. It had a triangular head, like a snake's, terminating in a slightly curved beak, thick at the base and fine at the point. All its feathers were so tight and hard that they looked as though they had been varnished. They had been thinned out for fighting and the lines of its body, which was like a truncated wedge, stood out plainly. From between Miguel's fingers dangled its long, bright orange legs and its slightly darker feet with their horn nails" (West, 79). Juju is striking: his feathers, legs, and beak are all brightly colored, and he is shorn to be tight and aerodynamic. He is compact and athletic, marked by sharp, dramatic angles and a distinctly un-birdlike – in fact, snake-like – appearance. As reptilian as he is bird-like, Juju is a fine figure of a gamecock in that he does not look like an ordinary rooster.

Gamecocks are bred, selected, and valued for their physical beauty, and there is an expectation that gamecocks will be striking in their physical appearance; a gamecock is somehow not a true gamecock if he is not physically striking. West shows Miguel offering to sell one of his cocks to Abe so that they can stage a fight: Miguel "came back carrying a large rooster that had a silver shawl. He looked like an ordinary barnyard fowl. When [Abe] saw him, he became indignant. 'What do you call that, a goose?'" (West,

79). Abe expects the gamecock he is about to purchase to look different from an ordinary bird; he feels shortchanged when Big Red looks more like a “goose” than like the exotic and colorful Juju. There is a sense in which Big Red, not beautiful and brightly colored like Juju, does not even count as a gamecock; he does not strike Abe as being worthy of belonging to the gamecock species. Clearly, the cock’s appearance contributes largely to the “look” of the fight – to the aesthetic character of the cockfight. More beautiful birds make for a more impressive spectacle. The exotic appearance of the birds elevates roosters to gamecocks; and instead of a barnyard brawl, we are presented with birds that appear costumed in bright, elaborate robes, engaging in skillful, dynamic battles.

Virtually any piece of writing on cockfighting, be it anthropological or literary, tends to reference, and often describe in detail, the physical appearance of the birds. In a particularly detailed and vivid description, excerpted from the *Book of Sports*, Pierce Egan describes a gamecock:

“He was a red and black bird – slim, masculine, trimmed – yet with feathers glossy as though the sun shone only upon his nervous wings. His neck arose out of the bag, snakelike, - terrible – as if it would stretch upward to the ceiling; his body followed, compact, strong, and beautiful, and his long dark-blue sinewy legs came forth, clean, - handsome, - shapely, determined, - ironlike! The silver spur was on each heel, of an inch and a half in length – tied on in the most delicate and neat manner. His large vigorous beak showed aquiline, -- eagle-like; and his black dilating eyes took in all around him, and shone so intensely brilliant, that they looked like jewels. Their light was that of thoughtful, sedate, and savage courage! His comb was cut close – his neck trimmed – his wings clipped, pointed, and strong. The feathers on his back were of the very glossiest red, and appeared to be the only ones which were left untouched; for the tail was docked triangularwise like a hunter’s” (Egan in Dundes, 22-23 or Egan, approx. 152).

The gamecock, even when he is not in the pit engaged in a fight, is an object of aesthetic fascination. He is aesthetically intriguing to us regardless of whether he is exercising his fighting capabilities; we are attracted to and struck by the appearance of a gamecock

separate from his athletic performance. The gamecock is an aesthetic object – he is gazed at, displayed, and his physical beauty is made much of and maintained conscientiously.

He is valued for his appearance; his body is a spectacle in itself.

Recall that the notion of the body being a source of fascination in sports is mentioned in Gumbrecht's account of athletic beauty. "Bodies," one of seven sports fascinations that Gumbrecht posits to try to explain what it is that fascinates sports spectators beyond wins, losses, and record-breaking, refers to our fascination with the sculpting of bodies – the transformation of bodies based on daily athletic routines. These routines culminate in the image of the sculpted body that impresses us as spectators; the look of the sculpted body, and its being emblematic of training, is what this refers to, separate from what the body is actually able to achieve in performance. Recall also that, while Gumbrecht does not explicitly limit this category to human bodies, his only examples used to illuminate the "Bodies" fascination are human bodies. In cockfighting, however, the bodies of gamecocks are clearly subjects of aesthetic fascination separate from their performance as fighters. Furthermore, fascination with animal bodies in sports is more complex than fascination with human bodies. As we saw in Chapter 1, animal bodies are aesthetically intriguing to humans to begin with – because of their formal qualities, exoticism, expressiveness, etc. Human fascination with animals is, as we have seen, a complex aesthetic phenomenon, one that cannot be discounted by any complete account of athletic beauty. Gumbrecht's picture does not account for fascination with *animal* bodies. I contend that "animal bodies" should, at the very least, qualify as its own sports fascination on Gumbrecht's model. Animal bodies are intriguing even outside of athletic performance for all the reasons named in Chapter 1. In cockfighting, due to the complex selective breeding of gamecocks, these animal bodies are also in a sense "man-made" to possess a certain appearance. Thus when we react to the beautiful appearance of a gamecock, we are reacting both to nature and to the "artistic" outcome of selective breeding. In this sense, the animal is technically more of an "aesthetic object" or "art object" in a formal sense than is another human's body – but no less alive and sentient.

In highlighting the importance of the physical beauty of a gamecock, West draws our attention to the larger, crucial premise that we discussed in Chapter 1, which must be considered in a discussion about the aesthetic character of cockfighting (or any sport that involves an animal): that there is an important sense in which animals are, to humans, spectacles in themselves, or objects of aesthetic intrigue, a notion to which West seems to committed throughout *The Day of the Locust*. Recall that the novel's second sentence reads: "The groan of leather mingled with the jangle of iron and over all beat the tattoo of a thousand hooves" (West, 3). West begins the novel with a combination of human and

animal sounds; the natural beating of hooves combined with the sounds of tack, man-made instruments that enable humans to use horses for riding and work. This opening scene describes horses being used on the set of a movie, and there are several more references in the novel to the use of animals in film. There are references to “horse-operas”; West also includes a second reference, in addition to the opening sequence, to a group of riders on a movie set. He writes: “A platoon of cuirassiers, big men mounted on gigantic horses, went by. He knew that they must be headed for the same set and followed them. They broke into a gallop and he was soon outdistanced” (West, 61). He also includes the following description of a movie set, almost comical in its menagerie quality: “From there [Tod] could see a jungle compound with a water buffalo tethered to the side of a conical grass hut. Every few seconds the animal groaned musically. Suddenly an Arab charged by on a white stallion. . . . A little while later he saw a truck with a load of snow and several malamute dogs. . . . next he came to a pond of large celluloid swans” (West, 61, 62). In these passages, West draws our attention to the use of animals in cinema as objects of entertainment. Explicitly referring to the water buffalo’s groan as “musical” – not to mention the “jangle” and “beat” of the horses in the opening scene – West points to one of the central ways that we experience animals: aesthetically. When we consider this, it becomes clear why we so often use them to enhance our own aesthetic projects like films.

West builds on this idea that animals are objects of aesthetic fascination for humans with the inclusion of two episodes in which humans actively watch animals in nature. In the first, a brief episode, West describes a humming bird chasing a blue jay. He writes: “They stopped to watch a humming bird chase a blue jay. The jay flashed by

squawking with its tiny enemy on its tail like a ruby bullet. The gaudy birds burst the colored air into a thousand glittering particles like metal confetti” (West, 47). This passage, highly visually stimulating to the reader, captures an aesthetically striking moment in nature. The hummingbird and the blue jay – and the chase they are engaged in – are objects of aesthetic intrigue for the characters in the novel, so much so that they “stop to watch” the natural drama unfold. Furthermore, this moment very clearly foreshadows the cockfight that will take place later in the novel; note that it comes directly before we are introduced to the gamecocks for the first time. Both chases or “fights” between “squawking,” “gaudy,” “enem[ies],” this scene and the cockfight scene picture two birds “burst[ing]” towards each other, thrusting their colorful bodies in a dynamic, violent display – with a group of humans looking on (recall that the cockfight is described as a “golden blur” (West, 81)). But at the same time that it prefigures the cockfight, this brief scene also serves as its foil. Though a fight between birds, this is a natural fight, found by chance in nature rather than created in a gallodrome. There is no human presence in the chase, no human intervention. These birds, and their activity, is natural: in fact, the mention of the hummingbird and the blue jay is bookended by vivid descriptions of nature. Directly before mentioning the birds, West writes: “It was full spring. The path ran along the bottom of a narrow canyon and wherever weeds could get a purchase in its steep banks they flowered in purple, blue and yellow. Orange poppies bordered the path. Their petals were wrinkled like crepe and their leaves were heavy with talcum-like dust. They climbed until they reached another canyon. This one was sterile, but its bare ground and jagged rocks were even more brilliantly colored than the flowers of the first. The path was silver, grained with streaks of rose-gray, and the walls of the

canyon were turquoise, mauve, chocolate and lavender. The air itself was vibrant pink” (West, 47). Directly after he references the birds, West writes: “When they came out of this canyon, they saw below them a little green valley thick with trees, mostly eucalyptus, with here and there a poplar and one enormous black live-oak. Sliding and stumbling down a dry wash, they made for the valley” (West, 47). These descriptions of the exquisite natural surroundings, detailed and vividly colorful, set an almost watercolor-like backdrop for the hummingbird and blue jay. The birds are (literally) embedded in a larger natural scene, a natural drama on a natural stage. In contrast, the cocks we meet just sentences following this are found in cages in a campsite carved out in a clearing in the woods. West describes the camp as “consist[ing] of little more than a ramshackle hut patched with tin signs that had been stolen from the highway and a stove without legs or bottom set on some rocks. Near the hut was a row of chicken coops” (West, 48). The makeshift camp that houses the gamecocks is dilapidated, colorless, and demoralizing, a place where the beautiful, natural environment has literally been cleared away.

In a second episode in which humans are shown actively watching animals in nature, Homer watches a lizard hunt flies in his backyard. This lizard “lived in a hole near the base of this plant. It was about five inches long and had a wedge-shaped head from which darted a fine, forked tongue. It earned a hard living catching the flies that strayed over to the cactus from the pile of cans” (West, 27). Homer grows very fond of watching the lizard, becoming familiar with the animal’s patterns of behavior. He is particularly intrigued by watching it stalk its prey, and seeks this out as an amusing activity. West provides a detailed description of what Homer observes: “The lizard was self-conscious and irritable, and Homer found it very amusing to watch. Whenever one of its elaborate

stalks were foiled, it would shift about uneasily on its short legs and puff out its throat. Its coloring matched the cactus perfectly, but when it moved over to the cans where the flies were thick, it stood out very plainly. It would sit on the cactus by the hour without moving, then become impatient and start for the cans. The flies would spot it immediately and after several misses, it would sneak back sheepishly to its original post” (West, 27).

What is a “hard living” for the lizard is a fascinating spectator sport for Homer; he is visually fascinated by the dramatic nature of the hunt, and watches it in the mode of sports spectatorship. Furthermore, he finds himself emotionally invested in its outcome. Supporting the underdog, “Homer was on the side of the flies,” and roots against the lizard (West, 27). West writes that “Whenever one of [the flies], swinging too widely, would pass the cactus, [Homer] prayed silently for it to keep going or turn back. If it lighted, he watched the lizard begin its stalk and held his breath until it had killed, hoping all the while that something would warn the fly. But no matter how much he wanted the fly to escape, he never thought of interfering, and was careful not to budge or make the slightest noise. Occasionally the lizard would miscalculate. When that happened Homer would laugh happily” (West, 27). Homer, though he “pray[s] silently” for the flies to escape, and “laugh[s] happily” at the lizard’s miscalculations, is a pure spectator; he is careful never to interfere with the hunt. Despite his emotional investment, Homer recognizes that the hunt he is bearing witness to belongs to nature, and is ultimately not his business. The only appropriate relationship he can have to the hunt is an aesthetic one. Thus this episode presents animals as objects of aesthetic intrigue, and highlights the degree to which our relationship to animals is deeply aesthetic. At the same time, not unlike the hummingbird/blue jay episode, it is concerned with animals battling in nature;

it presents a natural duel between animals, as opposed to a human-engineered duel like cockfighting.

West also highlights our aesthetic fascination with animals – in this case, auditory fascination – by paying special attention to birdsong. Towards the very end of the novel, West writes: “Whatever that bird was that sang at night in California would be bursting its heart in theatrical runs and quavers” (West, 98). Recall that earlier, West includes a somewhat uncharacteristically sentimental meditation on birdsong. In the scene that follows the first time the reader meets the gamecocks, Earle takes Tod to go steal birds from a trap for their dinner. West describes birdsong they hear on their walk to the trap: “A mocking bird was singing near by. Its song was like pebbles being dropped one by one from a height into a pool of water. Then a quail began to call, using two soft guttural notes. Another quail answered and the birds talked back and forth. Their call was not like the cheerful whistle of the Eastern bobwhite. It was full of melancholy and weariness, yet marvelously sweet. Still another quail joined the duet. This one called from near the center of the field. It was a trapped bird, but the sound it made had no anxiety in it, only sadness, impersonal and without hope” (West, 48). In this moving passage, West explicitly presents birds as singers, describing their song as consonant – even beautiful – and emotive. West presents birdsong as aesthetically fascinating, beautiful, and moving.<sup>31</sup> The birdsong is sweet but sad, his description of it touching and somehow heartbreaking. The song has an almost funereal quality, perhaps a foreshadowing of the deaths to come when Earle steals and kills several birds for dinner in the scene that follows this one.

These are not the only mentions of birdsong in the novel. In another passage,

West explicitly links birdsong to art created by humans. He writes: “Somewhere farther up the hill a bird began to sing. [Tod] listened.<sup>32</sup> At first the low rich music sounded like water dripping on something hollow, the bottom of a silver pot perhaps, then like a stick dragged slowly over the strings of a harp. He lay quietly, listening.” (West, 50). The song of the birds no longer sounds like water dripping on something hollow, or pebbles being dropped one by one from a height into a pool of water, but now calls to mind the sound of a harp (albeit one played with a stick). Although a natural sound, it is now connected to a

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<sup>31</sup> Just one page later, West juxtaposes this scene with a song sung by the men and Faye around the campfire where they are cooking the birds stolen by Earle.

<sup>32</sup> Notice that Tod *actively* listens to the birdsong; it is not just “background music,” so to speak.



man-made musical instrument. Furthermore, when the bird stops singing for a moment, Tod “began to think about the series of cartoons<sup>33</sup> he was making” (West, 51). The bird’s song inspires Tod, an artist himself, to think about his own art.

But just as a bird can be an object of aesthetic pleasure because of her song or her beautiful appearance, animals also can be objects of aesthetic disgust. West emphasizes this in a long passage regarding Homer’s intense hatred of a black hen that Miguel provides to “service” his gamecocks. As delighted as Homer is by watching the lizard in his backyard, he is equally disgusted by this hen. He says of her: “You never saw such a disgusting thing, the way it squats and turns its head. The roosters have torn all the feathers off its neck and made its comb all bloody and it has scabby feet covered with warts and it cackles so nasty when they drop it into the pen” (West, 75).

Uncharacteristically vitriolic in tone, Homer obsesses about the hen’s ugliness, referring to it in an intense, perseverating, fashion. In part of a larger rant, he insists: “I wouldn’t touch that thing for all the money in the world. She’s all over scabs and almost naked. She looks like a buzzard” (West, 75). As opposed to the “roosters,” who he “do[es]n’t mind” because “they’re pretty,” Homer despises the hen, who “shakes her dirty feathers each time and clucks so nasty” (West, 75). Repelled by the hen from both visual and auditory perspectives, Homer is preoccupied with his disgust towards her.

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<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that the cartoon this birdsong inspires Tod to think about is “his canvas of Los Angeles on fire. He was going to show the city burning at high noon, so that the flames would have to compete with the desert sun and thereby appear less fearful, more like bright flags flying from roofs and windows than a terrible holocaust. He wanted the city to have quite a gala air as it burned, to appear almost gay. And the people who set it on fire would be a holiday crowd” (West, 51). This scene directly follows the killing and cooking of the stolen birds around a campfire, during which Faye, Earle, and Miguel sing and dance, taking on the air of a “holiday crowd.”

Once we recognize the presentation of animals as objects of aesthetic interest – whether it be delight or disgust -- as an important theme in *The Day of the Locust*, the strangest scene in the novel becomes more easily understandable and digestible. In the episode I have in mind – which strikes the reader as undeniably odd, even jarring – Tod attends a backyard party, where he is encouraged by the party’s hostess to look at the pool. At first, Tod sees “on the bottom, near the deep end...a heavy, black mass of some kind,” but cannot quite make out what it is (West, 12). In order to make the black mass more easily visible, the hostess “kick[s] a switch that was hidden at the base of a shrub and a row of submerged floodlights illuminated the green water. The thing was a dead horse, or, rather, a life-size, realistic reproduction of one. Its legs stuck up stiff and straight and it had an enormous, distended belly. Its hammerhead lay twisted to one side and from its mouth, which was set in an agonized grin, hung a heavy, black tongue” (West, 12). The initially unidentifiable black mass, once illuminated, shows itself to be a rubber horse corpse displayed at the bottom of the swimming pool; the pool serves as the display case, or stage, for the decorative object, and the floodlights act as a spotlight. Tongue hanging, expression agonized, stomach distended, neck twisted, and limbs marked by rigor mortis, the fake carcass is, ironically, life-like, that is to say “real,” so much so that West corrects his own description of it in mid-sentence: the mass is a dead horse, “or, rather” a reproduction of one. It is Tod’s initial perception of the animal as real rather than fake that explains the intensity of his reaction. The “decorative” object, grotesque and jarring to Tod, does not quite compute. “Why?” he asks the hostess (as the reader invariably wonders the same) (West, 12). “To amuse. We were looking at the pool one day and somebody said that it needed a dead horse on the bottom, so Alice got one.

Don't you think it looks cute?" (West,13). She goes on to say how wonderful it is to "show it to people and listen to their merriment and their oh's and ah's of unconfined delight" (West, 13). Neither amusing nor cute, the stylized faux carcass fails to inspire merriment or delight in Tod or the reader. On the contrary, it is alarming and grotesque, and leaves Tod and the reader more disgusted than delighted (both at the vision itself as well as the hostess's laughably misguided expectations regarding Tod's aesthetic and emotional reactions to it). The episode reflects the novel's preoccupation with animals. It presents a replica of an animal body as a purposefully aesthetically intriguing object; the animal body is literally injected into the pool to create visual interest. Due to the scene's strange and alarming quality – and the fact that it features an ad absurdum presentation of the animal as aesthetic object - it grabs the reader's attention, serving as the most explicit request on West's part that she take seriously our aesthetic relationship to animals, and the aesthetic responses that they create in us.

The swimming pool scene, in addition to amplifying the theme of aesthetic fascination with the animal form, serves another important purpose: it provides an aestheticization of an animal's death – the likeness of a horse's dead body is literally decoration -- setting the stage for the aestheticization of death that is invariably at work in a cockfight. The death of one of the birds marks the completion of a cockfight: it is the show's finale, the end result of the injuries the bird has incurred over the course of the fight. The *point* of a cockfight is for one of the birds to die,<sup>34</sup> death is the objective and

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<sup>34</sup> When asked if he thinks Big Red has a chance of winning, Abe says: "You can't ever tell. He feels almost like a dead bird" (West, 80). This statement carries two meanings: first, Abe does not have a great deal of faith that Big Red, the underdog going into the fight, will prevail. Second, and more subtle, Big Red feels like a "dead bird" because he is doomed; even if he does not die in this particular fight, it is likely that he will

the aesthetic climax. Injury is a central part of the cockfighting aesthetic. Certain kinds of blows are more dramatic and aesthetically striking, and some injuries contribute more to the aesthetic character of the fight. There are even special terms that refer to these kinds of injuries. Some correspond to visible injury: According to Hal Herzog, in his book *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat*, “When a cock flops around with spinal cord damage, it is said to be ‘uncoupled’” (Herzog, 58). Some terms correspond to injuries that handlers and spectators perceive through sound: “A rooster that has had its lungs punctured emits a creepy rasping sound called the “rattles”” (Herzog, 158). Whether we perceive the injuries through sight or sound, they are themselves part of the spectator’s aesthetic experience of the fight. Furthermore, as the birds incur injuries, their fighting styles and ability change; they cannot use their bodies in the same way. A bird that is usually a “flyer” can no longer fly if his wing has been broken; Big Red can no longer defend himself by pecking his enemy once, in a horrific image, his beak is snapped off.

It is striking, and ironic, to consider the degree to which physical beauty is valued in gamecocks when we think about the fact that this beauty is invariably damaged or destroyed over the course of a fight by injury. In a cockfight, some combination of the following injuries is likely to befall each bird: his beautiful feathers are ripped out and soaked with blood, his body slashed, his stomach slit, his colorful beak snapped, his legs and wings broken, his chest punctured, his eyes gouged out. By the end of a cockfight, at least one, but usually both, of the birds have visible, traumatic injuries. A cock begins a fight perfectly groomed, perfectly conditioned, beautiful, confident, and upright and, even in the event that he wins, ends the fight disheveled, bloodied, and disabled, with dangling limbs and wings, and missing eyes and beak. A cockfight involves the transfiguration of the losing gamecock from alive to destroyed, and often the transfiguration of both the victor and the loser from elite athlete to cripple, from strong to

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eventually die in the pit. All gamecocks are in some sense dead birds; death is the inevitable conclusion of a gamecock’s career.

maimed, from beautiful to monstrous.<sup>35</sup> The aesthetic arc of the cockfight runs from beautiful to bloodied, from athleticism to death or near-death. This “bloodification” of beauty is a unique aesthetic feature of cockfighting. The more beautiful the birds, the better; but also, the bloodier the fight, the better. Cockfighting aims for the most dramatic and largest degree of aesthetic destruction possible.

Bloodied beauty is the culmination and object of a cockfight, and the path that leads there is marked by the generation of unique images and a distinctive rhythm. A striking element of the cockfight is that it alternates between quiet and frenzy. Juju and Big Red are at times still and calm -- Big Red is even described as apathetic – and at other times unhinged. West’s scene captures the tempo of cockfighting, described by Gary Marvin in his 1984 essay “The Cockfight in Andalusia, Spain: Images of the Truly Male” in the following passage: “The fight tends to go in crescendos of activity; there is a frenzy when the birds first meet, the feathers on the neck are raised, the neck is stretched out towards the opponent and the first attack is launched. This frenzy then dies down as the birds move around each other, pecking at the head and chest and looking for an advantage, and it rises again as they begin to use their spurs. The main damage is done with the spurs; the bird leaps into the air, uses its wings for balance and slashes forward with its legs. The pecking at the head and chest contributes to the general attrition of the opponent. One can tell which bird is doing well by looking at the color of its spurs; if they are red, this is from the blood of the opponent and means that its attacks are successful” (Marvin in Dundes, 179). The cockfight, usually unfolding as a series of “crescendos of activity” – as it does in West’s scene -- alternates between frenzy and relative calmness. The birds circle each other, each pecking at the other, then one exacts a blow, following which, the fight returns to a steadier rhythm (sometimes the fighting even comes to a stop if the birds require handling). This rise and fall of activity, the gaining and loss of momentum as a result of a three-part cycle – preparing for attack, attack, recovering from attack – lends the cockfight a cyclical, rhythmic, musical quality. This musicality of the fight is a result of what Leal calls the “dialectical moves” of the cocks in a cockfight. According to Leal, “The fight is a succession of alternate bows, gestures, and movements on the part of each cock as they use subordinate and dominant body positions to achieve victory” (Leal in Dundes, 212). A rhythm is created by a physical conversation between the cocks, alternating between subordination and dominance, retreating and attacking.

Generally speaking, there are three ways in which one cock can attack another.

He can use one of three weapons: his beak, his spurs, and sometimes his fan-shaped tail, each of which inflicts a different kind of injury to his opponent. Depending on the build

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<sup>35</sup> The arena itself undergoes a parallel transformation of its own. The sand in the pit becomes soaked with blood over the course of a round of fights, changing color. By the end of a night of cockfighting, blood dyes large spots in the pit a dark shade of red. Leal describes the walls of the cockpit: “The walls of the pit, padded with a synthetic material, become blood soaked. At some intervals, the janitor carefully washes the pit walls with a sponge and water or alcohol” (Leal in Dundes, 221).

of the bird and the way he has been trained, he might rely more heavily on his beak or his spurs (these deliver larger blows than does the fan-shaped tail). The idea is that cocks, like boxers, for example, employ different fighting styles. Some are more offensive and deliver deliberate, lethal blows with their sharp spurs; others are more defensive, and run quickly sideways to avoid being hit. Some fight mostly on the ground, others mostly in the air. Recall, for example, that Miguel selects a particular kind of gaff because he knows that Big Red will do “most of his fighting on his back.” Juju, on the other hand, is described throughout the scene as dealing blows while in flight. This scene illustrates that individual birds have different fighting qualities and styles. According to Francis Affergan, in his essay 1896 “Zooanthropology of the Cockfight in Martinique,” these differences correspond to combative criteria. Fighting cocks can be divided into two subgroups: 1) “cocks called *flyers*, which attack or flee by flying. They have a narrow stomach, thin thighs and long tails called “rudder tails”” and 2) “cocks called *walkers* or “Indian”; they attack or flee by walking; their stomach is large, their thighs are strong, and their tail is short and therefore cannot be used as a “chopper”” (Affergan in Dundes, 193). Juju is a flyer, while Bid Red is a walker. A cock’s fighting style has a direct effect on the rhythm and momentum of the fight, and different combinations of these styles result in a different kind of fight. A flyer creates a distinct image when it attacks, as its wings burst and beat outwards into space. A fight between two fliers, for example, has the special aesthetic feature of taking place mostly in the air. A fight between two walkers is likely to be easier to follow clearly, as there is less wing-beating to obscure the view, but it is less dynamic than a fight involving flight.

Some fighting styles are more desirable than others. Aficionados can explain quite readily what they look for in a good fight. Styles of fighting that are aesthetically pleasing are regarded as honorable styles. Ideally, a bird should hold its head up well, attack forward with its beak and, when it is able to, with its spurs as well. Defensive styles are not regarded as aesthetically pleasing. A bird that fights with its head down and its chest covered so that the other bird cannot get a stroke in, or gets itself under its opponent's wing so that it cannot be attacked as it makes slashing, under-cutting strokes, or uses the technique of fleeing so that its pursuer follows and then suddenly turns on it with its spurs, is not admired. Despite the fact that these styles often win fights, they are referred to as *feo*, which means “ugly” and also “inappropriate,” “unseemly,” and, by implication, “shameful” (Marvin in Dundes, 186).” Offensive styles, with upright posture and forward attacks, are preferred. The most admired fighters are confident and forthright, pursuant and combative.

Gamecocks are therefore bred to maximize an offensive, aggressive fighting style. Herzog sums up what cockers focus on when breeding gamecocks: “When breeding their battle cocks, rooster fighters are looking for the perfect combination of three traits. The first is cutting – the ability of a cock to deliver accurate strikes to its opponent's body, to puncture the lungs or heart. The second is the ability to put power behind the blows. But by far the most important trait, the one that gets breeders misty-eyed, is what they call true grit, or more commonly, gameness” (Herzog, 155). Cutting and power are physical abilities that can be strengthened by training and conditioning. But gameness, or grit, is the aggressive attitude necessary for any great fighter.

Gameness, as opposed to cutting and power, is not a strictly physical attribute. Herzog quotes a third-generation cocker whose words capture the concept of gameness: “Gameness is their heart. Their desire to fight to the death. Your barnyard rooster is cowardly. It can’t take the steel off the gaff. Gameness is the drive to beat the opponent. It is so instilled in the true game rooster that he is going to give everything he has, to his last breath” (Herzog, 155-156). Gameness is, unlike cutting and power, not so much fighting ability but the apparent *desire* to fight. If a cock is “game,” he aims to kill his opponent no matter what injuries he endures. Herzog writes: “Above all, cockers value a gamecock’s drive to fight no matter if its lungs are punctured, its spine shattered, or its vision growing dim” (Herzog, 157).

West captures gameness in his description of the cockfight. Juju is both a skilled fighter and relentlessly aggressive. We see him pulverizing Big Red; puncturing his flesh, breaking his wing, severing his beak and leg, and ultimately, delivering the final blow of the fight through Big Red’s eye and into his brain. Even once Big Red has died, Juju continues to peck at his corpse, until Abe shouts for someone to “take off that stinking cannibal” (West, 82)! Juju lives up to his reputation; Miguel first introduces him as his “champ...A murderer is what the guy is. Speedy and how” (West, 48)! In describing him as a “murderer,” Miguel emphasizes the importance of aggressive fighting: the grittier a cockfight, the better. But while Juju is the victor, in some ways, Big Red is an even better example of gameness. Though a less experienced and well-trained fighter than Juju, he refuses to give up. Twice described as “gallant” during the cockfight, Big Red continues fighting despite his debilitating injuries. We, as readers, even as we are ethically disgusted by the cockfight, find ourselves emotionally invested; we root for Big Red,



admiring him for his perseverance. In this way, West elicits a stunning inconsistency in the reader: we are morally repelled by the cockfight, but we are nevertheless aesthetically intrigued by it.

The concept of gameness calls to mind one of Gumbrecht's fascinations: "suffering." On Gumbrecht's account, "suffering" refers to our fascination with suffering in the face of death, or stoicism at the moment before death. Were he to offer an analysis of cockfighting, he would certainly invoke this fascination as crucial to the aesthetic character of the sport. Gumbrecht describes suffering as "the devastating consequences of unbridled violence for both athletes and spectators" (Gumbrecht, 158). Sports that involve suffering as a primary fascination tend to stage an athlete's "confrontation with potential death," and the closer the athlete comes to confronting death, the closer he comes to "the dramatic situation of facing personal physical destruction," the more likely he is to "win the admiration and love of the crowd" (Gumbrecht, 158-159). According to Gumbrecht, suffering of this kind can transfigure an athlete into a hero; even if he technically loses, he earns hero status in the minds of the spectators (Gumbrecht, 161). This is potentially true, says Gumbrecht, in "all sports that feature a direct confrontation between two opponents – a duel in the most literal sense," since sports with this formal structure "stage a scene where composure in the face of gestures of destruction is the highpoint of the production" (Gumbrecht, 164).

Though Gumbrecht does not mention cockfighting specifically, his picture of suffering is extremely close to the notion of gameness central to cockfighting. What his picture does not consider, however, is how this fascination applies to a sport that employs nonhuman participants. To accept the idea that an animal can display composure, or

gallantry (as Big Red does), in the face of destruction and death requires that we assign the animal a kind of moral virtue that is usually reserved for humans. If we judge a bird to be “game,” we admire him for his desire and willingness to keep fighting even while gravely injured; this, of course, rests on ascribing to him a capacity for desire, and the kind of independent agency consistent with willful, even courageous, action.

This is not to say that I think it is necessarily appropriate to talk about “gameness” as genuine courage in the cocks. Gameness could very well be understood as the product of selective breeding and training. We might think that, while we do want to extend some agential capacities to birds, extending “gameness” in the sense of competitive spirit, gallantry, or moral virtue is inappropriate. I do not mean to suggest that these birds are displaying genuine courage. Instead, I mean to show that those spectators who value cockfighting, who find it beautiful to watch, often point to gameness as a crucial source of beauty in a cockfight. In this sense, there is a paradox in play; a cocker identifies moral virtue in a cock, and resulting beauty in a cockfight, while refusing to truly view cocks as bearers of ethical interest and deserving of empathy.

In fact, a gamecock’s fighting spirit is seen as a virtue that seems to go above and beyond that which a human combatant would exhibit. Quoting a spectator who describes what fascinates him about cockfighting, Herzog writes: “It’s the way that this animal would keep going until he has nothing left to give. How many people would do that? This bird will give you everything he’s got until he’s got no more and then he keeps giving it. It’s what you call gameness or heart. That’s what’s kept me interested in it” (Herzog, 164). Gameness in gamecocks approximates and even exceeds human virtue; cockfights that exhibit gameness maximize Gumbrecht’s suffering fascination, and make for more

aesthetically satisfying duels than would those between people. Cockfighting delights in animals displaying moral virtue; in this sense, the “best” examples of cockfights are the ones in which a gamecock is transfigured into a human-like, or even superhuman, combatant, by virtue of a display of courage. The bird that acts the most human lives/wins in the end.<sup>36</sup> The winner appears more human-like than the loser, exhibiting the “human” trait of gallantry. This is of course not to say that the winner is actually closer to humanity than the loser; it is only to point out the degree to which the “human-like” capacity of gameness is implicitly valued by engaged spectators.

People like to watch gamecocks that are skilled, stylistic fighters; skill and style are concepts associated with expertise and individuality -- things we associate with humans. The quality that is most desired in a gamecock is “gameness;” gameness – which amounts to fighting spirit, heart, gallantry, composure etc. – is a moral virtue. Good cockfights can be understood as those that best showcase cocks exhibiting “human” traits. Ironically and disturbingly, however, cockfighting asks that animals display “human-like” qualities but treats them “like animals”; cockfighting asks cocks to exhibit moral virtue, but refuses to afford them moral regard.

The cockfight showcases our contradictory attitudes towards animals. Handlers and engaged spectators are fascinated to see the birds act as though human, but resist the idea of treating them humanely – and, furthermore, resist the idea of sincerely extending the “human” attribute of agency to them. They want to see them *act* like agents, but if they actually viewed them as agents, they would not actively cause harm to them for the

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<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note that the bird that is a coward is *also* acting like a human – cowardness is an undesirable moral quality – but must die because it is showcasing the worst part of humanity, while the “game” bird is showcasing the best part of humanity.

purposes of aesthetic delight or entertainment. Cockfighting stages a scenario in which we are supposed to want the birds to behave like agents so that we can ultimately *own* their agency: after all, humans have bred them, trained them, and conditioned them. No matter how much the birds might appear to be agents, their handlers are still in control of them. It is as though cockfighting stages a controlled extension of agency to animals in the ring as a way of emphasizing the following: even if an animal approaches the condition of agency, and therefore humanity, he is still at our mercy – we still oversee the pit.

Recall from West's description of the cockfight that the treatment of injuries plays a very large role in the cockfight. After each round of fighting, Abe and Miguel are told to "handle" their birds, which entails treating whatever injuries they have sustained. For every round of fighting, there is also a time allotted for handling. A cockfight is not all fighting – a large portion of it is devoted to these handling periods. A cockfight is an alternation between fighting and handling, exertion and rest, violence and calm. Fighting offers one aesthetic experience, handling another; and the combination of the two makes up the complete aesthetic experience of the cockfight. In his depiction of the cockfight, West describes Abe handling Big Red: "The little man moaned over the bird, then set to work...He spit into its gaping beak and took the comb between his lips and sucked the blood back into it," he "smoothed and shaped its plumage" (West, 81). Later, Abe "moaning softly," "smoothed [Big Red's] feathers and licked its eyes clean, then took its whole head in his mouth" (West, 82). Abe attends to Big Red's wounds and tidies his appearance – smooths and shapes his feathers, cleans his eyes, and does his best to treat

the “gaping” beak wound. He even takes Big Red’s whole head in his mouth, performing what might be called “beak-to-mouth resuscitation” (Smith and Daniels, 86).

Abe’s treatment of Big Red in these passages is relatively standard handling. During handling, as opposed to during the actual fighting, a handler interfaces and physically interacts with his bird, often in very intimate ways. Some of the images created during handling are quite striking; it is not uncommon for handlers to massage their birds, or to lick and suck their wounds, doing whatever can be done to treat them. When he is told by the referee or judge to “handle,” a handler removes his cock from the fighting situation, sometimes literally disentangling him from his opponent and often wrapping him in a towel and carrying him to the edge of the ring. The handler temporarily “saves” the bird from the violent situation, and from further injury. Holding the bird close to his body, often cradling him, a handler encourages his bird to stay alive. The image is a powerful one: a man holds an injured, even dying, chicken like a human baby, and desperately, frantically, tries to revive him.

It is true that handling is, formally speaking, a departure from the violence of the fighting rounds. But it is not limited to the treatment of injuries; a handler also seeks to rev his bird up for the next round of fighting. At the same time as he cradles and caresses his bird, he uses strategies to incite the cock, getting him ready for the next portion of the fight. West writes that Abe “blew away the feathers from under its tail and pressed the lips of its vent together hard. When that didn’t seem to help, he inserted his little finger and scratched the bird’s testicles. It fluttered and made a gallant effort to strengthen its neck” (West, 82). Abe blows under Big Red’s tail and presses on his genitals, eventually inserting his finger and scratching his testicles. A common practice for handlers, genital

stimulation is designed to provoke a bird into “regain[ing] its fury” – it is thought to reignite the will to fight in what is very often a gravely injured bird (West, 81). Because a handler cannot always fix his bird’s injuries – indeed, Abe “could do nothing to help the broken wing or the dangling leg” – he often provokes his bird enough to reignite his fighting spirit for the next installment of the fight (West, 81).

Handling is a bifurcated activity: on one hand, the handler’s actions appear to be those of a caretaking, perhaps even a loving, owner who wants to save his beloved pet’s life. On the other hand, his actions are concerned only with continuing and winning the fight; if the bird dies or is too weak to fight, he loses. Recall that West describes Abe twice as “moaning” or “moaning softly” while handling Big Red. Perhaps one of the times, or in one sense, he moans for Big Red’s suffering; perhaps the other time, or in another sense, he moans because he is losing the fight. It is not entirely clear, either from West’s description, or from the dual nature of handling, what a handler bemoans at a given point – losing, or grief for his injured or dying bird.

The bifurcated structure of handling is representative of a gamecock’s status in relation to his handler. When a handler strokes and tries to comfort his bird, he is exhibiting care, treating him as an individual who is experiencing suffering, a fellow being. When Big Red dies at the end of the fight, his corpse is handled “gently and with respect” (West, 82). But when a handler provokes and incites a bird to encourage him to keep fighting, he treats the bird as equipmental; the injured bird is a piece of broken or malfunctioning sports equipment that requires mending to continue the game. West highlights this bifurcated, inherently hypocritical relationship that exists between a handler and his gamecock. When tending to wounds, a handler treats his bird as a sentient individual. When provoking and inciting his bird to fight, a handler treats his bird as equipmental – and as lacking sentiency. At one point, West explicitly presents Juju as equipmental, likening him to a basketball. He writes: “Miguel held the cock firmly with both hands, somewhat in the manner that a basketball is held, for an underhand toss. (West, 79). In this description, the bird is transformed into a piece of sports equipment, a passive, inanimate object. The bird, satisfying an equipmental role, is not endowed with the ability to fly but, lacking volition, appears as though it is about to be “toss[ed].” In this moment, then, the gamecock joins the ranks of other sporting equipment that West has made a

point of drawing our attention to in the novel: tack and harnesses, bits, crops, and spurs, as well as tennis rackets and fishing nets.

We should note the fact that West describes Juju as being “tossed” by Miguel a second time. He writes: “Mig tossed the bird back into the coop and they went back to join the others at the fire” (West, 48). Interestingly, this moment comes at the end of a scene that emphasizes the excellent care that Miguel provides for his gamecocks. Before he tosses Juju back in the cage like a basketball player might toss his ball in a storage bin, he introduces Tod to the birds, clearly proud of them and committed to their care. West describes the coop where the chickens are housed: “Tod went over to look at the chickens. There was one old hen and a half dozen gamecocks. A great deal of pains had been taken in making the coops, which were of grooved boards, carefully matched and joined. Their floors were freshly spread with peat moss” (West, 48). In addition to providing them with pristine housing, Miguel is extremely proud of his birds. He shows Tod the birds one by one, introducing them by name, lineage, and enumerating their accomplishments. West writes: “[Miguel] came over and began to talk about the cocks. He was very proud of them. ‘That’s Hermano, five times winner. He’s one of Street’s Butcher Boys. Pepe and El Negro are still stags. I fight them next week in San Pedro. That’s Villa, he’s a blinker, but still good. And that one’s Zapata, twice winner, a Tassel Dom he is. And that’s Jujutla. My champ’” (West, 48). In a later scene, Miguel compares Juju and Big Red. He says proudly of Big Red “‘That’s a bird with lot of cojones. He’s won plenty fights. He don’t look fast maybe, but he’s fast all right and he packs an awful wallop’” (West, 79-80). Regarding Juju, he says: “Juju was bred by John R. Bowles of Lindale, Texas. He’s a six times winner. I give fifty dollars and a shotgun for him” (West, 79). This kind of pride in one’s gamecocks is common; in fact, it is very much a part of the sport. Most cockers, whether or not they are breeders themselves, know a considerable amount about breeding and bloodlines, and identify and praise their birds based on their lineage. Herzog alludes to the fact that cockers are generally “obsessed” with bloodlines: “They talk endlessly about the merits of crossbreeding, linebreeding, and inbreeding. They can tell you about F1 and F2 generations...They kn[o]w who sired whom and which hens produced good shufflers and cutters” (Herzog, 155). Often, breeding information goes back decades; records are sometimes even kept on computerized databases.

In addition to taking great pride in the bloodlines of their gamecocks, cockers commit a great deal of time and energy to conditioning their cocks. Cockers design conditioning regimens to develop and reinforce fighting prowess, using drills that seek to enhance strength, endurance, and agility. Herzog describes one cocker’s regime in detail: “He would work his birds in the morning and then again in the afternoon. He had a padded exercise bench where he would put them on their backs so they would learn to right themselves quickly, and he would practice ‘flirts’ by flipping them backward to

develop their wing and back muscles. . . his roosters had an exercise for each muscle group, and he kept track of each rooster's daily reps as he put it through its paces. In the weeks before a big derby, he would spend six hours a day conditioning his animals" (Herzog, 156). A cocker is a fitness coach/personal trainer for his birds, developing and reinforcing their fighting skills through physical conditioning. To complement their strength training, gamecocks are fed strict diets. Weeks before a fight, cockers put their birds on a prefight diet known as "the keep." In his essay "Cock or Bull: Cockfighting, Social Structure, and Political Commentary in the Philippines," Scott Guggenheim writes of the elaborate prefight diet common in the Philippines: by the time a cock enters a big-time cockpit, he has been heavily doped with steroids, hormones, vitamins, stimulants, and coagulants, conditioned on a carefully designed daily exercise program, and fed a diet containing exactly twenty-three per cent grain protein supplemented by eggs, liver, lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, buttermilk, and assorted secret ingredients" (Guggenheim in Dundes, 144). Of course the specifics of the diet vary from region to region and from cocker to cocker, but the main idea is the same everywhere – to maximize strength and energy, and to ensure the highest level of performance possible. Cockers also carefully groom their birds to improve fighting ability. Plucked to their bellies, a line is sheared down a gamecock's back to help with ventilation and to prevent overheating. Affergan describes a method of cutting the plumage to help maximize fighting accuracy: the length of the feathers is planned in such a way that they reach the shoulders, allowing the cock to protect itself from the enemy by bristling them up in front of its face like armor. The feathers of the legs and back are trimmed up to the crop. The wings, most of the time,



remain as they are. The feathers of the tail are trimmed in an aerodynamic fashion so as to facilitate the take-off” (Affergan in Dundes, 195-196).

Across the board, cockers take meticulous care of their birds, often spending the majority of their time and money on their care. This is, of course, surprising given the fact that, every time a cocker pits one of his gamecocks against another, he is risking its life. The relationship between a cocker and his bird is a complicated one, and several anthropologists have been interested in trying to investigate and unpack it. In “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” certainly the most famous essay written about cockfighting, Clifford Geertz observes that Balinese cockers “spend an enormous amount of time with their favorites, grooming them, feeding them, discussing them, trying them out against one another, or just gazing at them with a mixture of rapt admiration and dreamy self-absorption” (Geertz in Dundes, 100). Affergan describes similar behavior in Martinique: “The cock is a real object of loving passion for his master, who caresses, fondles, embraces it, and addresses it with words of love” (Affergan in Dundes, 201). Leal, writing about cockfighting in Brazil, refers to the fact that “Man’s intimacy with the cock is intense; caring for a cock implies affection and the exchanges of bodily fluids from man to cock and cock to man” (Leal in Dundes, 223). Cockers form intimate, intense relationships to their birds; they touch them and speak to them lovingly, admire them, obsess over them, and show them off. Different anthropological accounts highlight different facets of this relationship. For example, Geertz takes the Balinese cockfight to be symbolic of status hierarchies in the community; the cockfight is “fundamentally a dramatization of status concerns” (Geertz in Dundes, 113). According to Geertz, the Balinese cockfight is “or more exactly, deliberately is made to be – a simulation of the

social matrix, the involved system of crosscutting, overlapping, highly corporate groups, in which the devotees live,” or, simply put, “a status bloodbath” (Geertz in Dundes, 112). In contrast, Alan Dundes, in his essay “Gallus as Phallus: A Psychoanalytic Cross-Cultural Consideration of the Cockfight as Fowl Play,” argues instead that “the cockfight is a thinly disguised symbolic homoerotic masturbatory phallic duel, with the winner emasculating the loser through castration or feminization” (Dundes, 251). For Dundes, the cockfight is first and foremost concerned with masculinity, not social status, and serves as a “sublimated form of public masturbation...grown men [symbolically] playing with their own cocks in public” (Dundes, 269, 270).

Regardless of whether these anthropological hypotheses are true, the overarching point we can take away from them is the fact that men deeply identify with their gamecocks to a much greater degree than a boxing coach identifies with his student. A cocker is psychologically involved with his cock to a profound degree; the cock is inextricably tied to him. The cock is a representative, a proxy, an animal symbol of the cocker. This is emphasized and amplified in *The Day of the Locust*. Juju and Big Red are easily identifiable with their handlers. Juju, like Miguel, is handsome, flashy, slick, and exotic. Big Red, like Abe, is ordinary looking, a bit awkward, and clumsy -- but more likable for being the underdog (And West ironically, playfully makes Big Red big, or large, while Abe is a dwarf). Furthermore, in the scene following the cockfight when Miguel and Abe get into a fight of their own, the outcome of their altercation mirrors that of their birds. West writes: “Miguel grabbed Abe by the throat. The dwarf let go his hold and Earle sank to the floor. Lifting the little man free, Miguel shifted his grip to his ankles and dashed him against the wall, like a man killing a rabbit against a tree. He

swung the dwarf back to slam him again, but Tod caught his arm...[Abe] was unconscious. They carried him into the kitchen and held him under the cold water. He came to quickly and began to curse.” (West, 90). Miguel, a more violent, skilled fighter than Abe, is able to pick him up and throw him around like a man could with a rabbit, eventually knocking him unconscious. When Abe is brought into the kitchen and held under cold water, he comes to cursing – not unlike when Big Red is handled and arrives to the next round of fighting incited.

As I mentioned earlier, West’s cockfight scene is generally read as running parallel to, or prefiguring this scene between the handlers. It also, however, serves to bolster the animal-standpoint reading of the novel. It is interesting to note that, even in this very short scene in which the handlers engage in a physical fight, West employs animal language in his description three times. As we have already seen, he likens Miguel’s hurling of Abe to a “man killing a rabbit against a tree” (West, 90). West also compares Abe to both a goat and a ram in this sequence. He writes: “The dwarf lowered his head like a goat and tried to push between them” as well as “The dwarf struggled to his feet and stood with his head lowered like a tiny ram” (West, 89). Furthermore, by identifying this fight with the cockfight, this scene highlights the identification of cock and man in cockfighting.

Central to the cockfighting dynamic is the distinctive identification of a cocker with his gamecock: the cock is a representative, an animal symbol, a stand-in for the cocker – the cocker’s proxy. And more specifically, as we have seen, depending on differing cultures, a cock might represent a cocker’s masculinity, his social status, etc. We see this identification of man with bird in West’s description of the handlers, who very clearly resemble their birds. It lends cockfighting a unique character that makes it different from other sports, even other sports that involve animals. The cockfight has at its core what I am calling proxy-agency at work, a standing in for man by bird. A cocker deputizes his gamecock to act on his behalf in the ring. Likewise, spectators of cockfights also see this proxy-agency at work, and accept it implicitly as fundamental to the proceedings. The degree to which a cocker identifies with his cock is fully evident from watching a cockfight. A bird’s win is a cocker’s source of pride; a bird’s loss is a cocker’s humiliation. Cockers communicate verbally with their birds during combat, often losing their voices from shouting commands, and growing visibly exhausted alongside their birds over the course of a fight (Affergan in Dundes, 199).

Proxy-agency, a standing in for man by animal, is the single most distinct feature of cockfighting -- and one that Gumbrecht’s picture does not account for. Though cockfighting is ostensibly a fight between animals, the animals are proxies for the

humans engineering the activity. Such proxy-agency is not present in sports that do not involve animals. Granted, there is a sense in which a remote control car race, for example, is an activity in which humans employ and control machines as their proxies. But remote control cars are, of course, equipmental. Cockfighting is a sport that is staged in such a way that an animal, as opposed to a machine, or piece of equipment, stands in for a human. And this is what changes the discussion from one about proxy to one about proxy-agency. A standing in for man by equipment is not parallel, aesthetically or ethically, to a standing in for man by animal. Unlike equipment, an animal has agency, and so when a cocker participates in cockfighting and therefore requires that a bird be his proxy, he is relying on the bird's agential capacities. If a bird were not an agent, he could not put on a good show, or display stylistic fighting, expertise, individuality, and, most importantly, gameness. In order to be a successful fighter, a cock must exercise agency, and showcase his agential nature. But while proxy-agency is the defining feature of cockfighting, this does not mean that the cockers, or the spectators, are actually extending agency to animals. Though they require the birds to behave as agents, they treat them as equipment. Once we actively extend agency to animals, however, as West asks us to do through his presentation of animals throughout his novel, we read the cockfight scene as educated spectators. Cockfighting is a deeply paradoxical activity; it requires that the birds involved be as beautiful as possible, but also that their beauty be destroyed to the greatest degree possible; it requires that the human handlers both nurture and harm their birds; and it rewards birds that act like agents, but the enjoyment of the activity precludes actually viewing animals as agents. Once we view animals correctly as subjective beings capable of individual experience and suffering, we can see the degree to which

cockfighting does not, as Gumbrecht's picture implies, aesthetically resemble equipmental sports. What makes cockfighting specifically – and animal sports generally – a unique aesthetic category of sport is the fact that the “equipment” employed are fellow agents. Because of this, the relationship between a cocker and his bird, inside and outside of the ring, figures into the aesthetic character of the sport. When we watch, we watch a human relate to another creature, and we, as spectators, relate to that creature as well – and are intrigued by him aesthetically for all the reasons catalogued in Chapter 1 and expanded on above. An appreciation of the aesthetic complexity of cockfighting – and with those features that make it worthy of its own philosophical treatment – goes hand in hand with an ethical distaste for it. To really see and read a cockfight correctly is to understand that the aesthetic features that set it apart are beautiful only to a viewer who sees the birds as equipment and not as fellow beings.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### Animal versus Human Paradigm: Bullfighting in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

The philosophy of sports has paid little attention to interspecies sports – and has failed to consider animal sports as a special category of sports that requires separate philosophical examination. A way to rectify this situation and to take up the complicated matter of animal sports in a meaningful way is to approach them through literature. In Chapter 2, I approached cockfighting through Nathanael West's novel *The Day of The Locust*, using West's presentation of cockfighting -- as well as that of animals more generally – to raise philosophical issues related to the activity, and to characterize it from within the philosophical framework of the aesthetics of sports.

In this chapter, I consider our second paradigm, *Animal versus Human*, through Ernest Hemingway's presentation of bullfighting in his novel *The Sun Also Rises*. In the last chapter, I argued that West should be read as extending the relevant agential capacities to the cocks such that cockfighting emerges as a sport that can be properly understood only once we view the animals involved as bearers of aesthetic and ethical interest. Complete spectatorship of an animal sport requires that we acknowledge both the aesthetic and ethical complexities that an animal introduces into a sport. Hemingway, as opposed to West, does not view animals as bearers of ethical interest. He is uninterested in their suffering or in their capacity for subjective experience. He does view animals as objects of aesthetic interest, but his fascination with them is formal; he does not find beauty in those aesthetic features of animals that are implicitly associated with the moral – vitality, wild autonomy, gaze, and expressiveness. He does not attribute psychological states to animals, nor does he recognize the importance of their suffering. He resists any kind of human/non-human animal ethical continuity, identifying no common ground between the sentience and agential capacities of a bull and a man. Because of this, his account of bullfighting is purely aesthetic – where “aesthetic” is employed in a formal artistic sense as opposed to an expanded notion that operates alongside the ethical. His account sees bullfighting as an art form, where the bull is closer to artistic material than participant, closer to tool than agent. Hemingway's presentation of the beauty of the bullfight conforms to an equipmental view of animals, where the spectator engages the animal as an object as opposed to as a sentient being with agential capacities.

Hemingway's picture ignores the fact that engaging with animals – particularly sentient animals with emotional and cognitive sophistication – and therefore the spectatorship of animals in sports, are always ethically infused activities. His failure to recognize the animals in bullfights as bearers of ethical interest leads him to offer an oversimplified account of the sport. Ironically, while his entire project is to emphasize the aesthetic power of bullfighting, his strict focus on its formal aspects leads him to miss the most distinctive feature of bullfighting, what I am calling approaching of agencies. This feature, though distinctive and unaccounted for by an account of the aesthetics of sports that likens animals to tools, cannot, however, be counted as beautiful. Bullfighting employs a bull's agential capacities to create aesthetic power, but, by discounting his suffering, does not take those capacities to be grounds for empathy – and therefore cannot be said to extend agency to the animal in a meaningful way.

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When I use the term “bullfighting,” I am referring specifically to the style of bullfighting that Hemingway takes up – that is, Spanish-style bullfighting. In a Spanish-style bullfight, a specially bred “fighting bull” is placed in an arena where he is baited and invited to charge by men who are either on horseback or on foot. When the bull, upon being provoked, charges, he is “punished” by blade wounds. Often, the blades are purposefully placed and left in positions such that the bull cannot dislodge them, and they serve to weigh him down and affect his neck carriage so that the bullfighter can achieve a single, clean, final blow between the shoulder blades. Various tactics are employed: picadors, men on horseback, bait the bull by inviting him to charge at the horses they are mounted on, and then pierce the bull's neck with long sharp pics. Banderillas (who are not discussed much by Hemingway) plant small colorful “flags” in the bull's shoulders,

which are left there and encourage a loss of blood. Finally, in the last stage of a bullfight, a bullfighter enters the ring alone and baits the bull with a red cape, or *muleta*. The cape is used to provoke the bull into performing a series of “passes,” where the bullfighter invites the bull to get very close to his own body. Ultimately, these passes, along with the exhaustion and weakened state brought about by the wounds endured by the bull leading up to this point, allow the bullfighter to rise over the shoulders of the bull and exact a final, lethal blow.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike in the case of *The Day of the Locust*, in which only one scene is dedicated to cockfighting, *The Sun Also Rises* contains many bullfighting scenes; in fact, the majority of the novel’s action is located in and around the bullring of the Spanish village of Pamplona during the Festival of San Fermin. Bullfighting is the central theme of the novel, the symbolic meaning of which has been written about a great deal.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond employing it as a central focus as a way of speaking to overarching themes of culture, masculinity, violence, and beauty, Hemingway centers his novel around bullfighting because he had a strong personal interest in and fascination with the activity. Hemingway spent a great deal of time in Spain attending bullfights, befriending bullfighters, familiarizing himself with all aspects of the activity, and ultimately, developing a deep passion – *afición* – for it. In addition to *The Sun Also Rises*, he wrote two subsequent books about bullfighting – *Death In The Afternoon*,<sup>39</sup> a lengthy, non-

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<sup>37</sup> This style of bullfighting still occurs, though nowadays picador horses are padded and blindfolded. It has been argued, however, that the padding actually allows for a greater amount of suffering to be inflicted on the picador horses. This is because, when padded horses are gored, they are not killed; their injuries are often treated by inserting sawdust into the wounds, readying the horses for another trip to the bullring, without really helping their injuries. In addition, the psychic stress on the horses that time and time again must return to the bullring can, of course, not be overstated.

<sup>38</sup> See Schwartz 1984, Strychacz 1989, Elliott 1995, Forter 2001, and Savola 2006.

<sup>39</sup> I reach from *Death in the Afternoon* later in this chapter, but I am primarily concerned with reconstructing a portrait from the text of *The Sun Also Rises*. This way, I stay focused on the literary work itself, and on offering a reading of it that takes the issue of animal sports seriously, as well as stay consistent with my other chapters. It is important

fiction “encyclopedia” of bullfighting, and *The Dangerous Summer*, which is more of a memoir.

While there are many scenes dedicated to bullfighting in *The Sun Also Rises*, one particular series of passages represents the novel’s most vivid and detailed description of the sport. In this series, Pedro Romero, the star bullfighter of the fiesta, enters the ring for a fight, accompanied by a picador. Hemingway writes:

“The picador, his hat down over his eyes, the shaft of his pic angling sharply toward the bull, kicked in the spurs and held them and with the reins in his left hand walked the horse forward toward the bull. The bull was watching. Seemingly he watched the white horse, but really he watched the triangular steel point of the pic. Romero, watching, saw the bull start to turn his head. He did not want to charge. Romero flicked his cape so the color caught the bull’s eye. The bull charged with the reflex, charged, and found not the flash of color but a white horse, and a man [the picador] leaned far over the horse, shot the steel point of the long hickory shaft into the hump of muscle on the bull’s shoulder, and pulled his horse sideways as he pivoted on the pic, making a wound, enforcing the iron into the bull’s shoulder, making him bleed... The bull did not insist under the iron. He did not really want to get at the horse. He turned and the group broke apart... [Romero], standing squarely in front of the bull, offered him the cape. The bull’s tail went up and he charged, and Romero moved his arms ahead of the bull, wheeling, his feet firmed. The dampened, mud-weighted cape swung open and full as a sail fills, and Romero pivoted with it just ahead of the bull. At the end of the pass they were facing each other again. Romero smiled. The bull wanted it again, and Romero’s cape filled again, this time on the other side. Each time he let the bull pass so close that the man and the bull and the cape that filled and pivoted ahead of the bull were all one sharply etched mass. It was all so slow and so controlled. It was as though he were rocking the bull to sleep...” (Hemingway 2006, 220-221).

The majority of this scene focuses on the picador portion of the bullfight. Here we see a man on horseback baiting the bull – that is, running his horse straight towards the bull to provoke him to charge. When the bull does charge, aiming for the horse, he is met by a

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that I first and foremost focus on the fictional account, as my project is to raise philosophical issues through literature.



sharp pic, lodged into his shoulders. The bull often successfully “gores” the horse, puncturing the horse’s side with its horns and lifting it clear off the ground, before setting the horse back down and dislodging its horns. In most cases, the horse collapses and is left to die in the arena, covered by a tarp that grows redder as the horse bleeds out over the course of the rest of the festivities. Generally speaking, the bull, a protective, territorial animal, retreats back to his *querencia* - the section of the arena he has claimed, often with the picador’s pic hanging from his shoulder muscles. Though mostly focused on the picador phase, the end of this passage describes Romero performing some cape-work, when bullfighter and bull are alone in the ring together. This is the phase of the bullfight that comes to mind for most people when they think about bullfighting. Romero and the bull are presented as dueling, transitioning between facing each other squarely and circling each other, passing so closely that they appear as one mass. Romero, with deliberate, controlled, slow movements, tires the bull out with each pass, almost appearing to be lulling him to sleep.

Hemingway does not offer a detailed description of the remainder of this particular bullfight, but he does pick up where he left off, so to speak, in a different scene. He describes the last phase of another fight that occurs directly after the one described above, when Romero faces his second bull of the afternoon – as, more often than not, a bullfighter faces multiple bulls in the course of a bullfight. Offering a description of Romero’s confrontation with the second bull, Hemingway writes:

“Out in the centre of the ring, all alone, Romero was going on with the same thing, getting so close that the bull could see him plainly, offering the body, offering it again a little closer, the bull watching dully, then so close that the bull thought he had him, offering again and finally drawing the charge and then, just before the horns came, giving the bull the red cloth to follow with that little, almost imperceptible, jerk...Out in the

centre of the ring Romero profiled in front of the bull, drew the sword out from the folds of the muleta, rose on his toes, and sighted along the blade. The bull charged as Romero charged. Romero's left hand dropped the muleta over the bull's muzzle to blind him, his left shoulder went forward between the horns and the sword went in, and for just an instant he and the bull were one, Romero way out over the bull, the right arm extended high up to where the hilt of the sword had gone in between the bull's shoulders. Then the figure was broken. There was a little jolt as Romero came clear, and then he was standing, one hand up, facing the bull, his shirt ripped out from under his sleeve, the white blowing in the wind, and the bull, the red sword hilt tight between his shoulders, his head going down and his legs settling...Romero was close enough so the bull could see him. His hand still up, he spoke to the bull. The bull gathered himself, then his head went forward and he went over very slowly, then all over, suddenly, four feet in the air" (Hemingway 2006, 222-223).

Here, Hemingway more fully describes Romero's highly skilled cape-work. Romero, alone in the ring with the bull, serves as bait for the bull – already injured by the pics, exhausted by the provoked charges, and increasingly territorial over the safe space in the ring that he has staked out as his own. Having lured the bull to gather his strength and attempt an attack, Romero tricks him, moving his body out of the way just in time, and sinks the whole of his blade in between the bull's shoulders. For a moment, when Romero's body is extended over that of the bull, the lodged blade connecting them, Hemingway describes "an instant he and the bull were one." But then this instant of "oneness" is interrupted – "the figure [is] broken" – by the bull's final descent into death.

In a second, equally powerful and chilling passage that describes the final, climactic moment of the bullfight -- the kill itself -- Hemingway writes:

"[Romero] profiled directly in front of the bull, drew the sword out of the folds of the muleta and sighted along the blade. The bull watched him. Romero spoke to the bull and tapped one of his feet. The bull charged and Romero waited for the charge, the muleta held low, sighting along the blade, his feet firm. Then without taking a step forward, he became one with the bull, the sword was in high between the shoulders, and bull had followed the low-slung flannel, the disappeared as Romero lurched clear to the left, and it was over. The bull tried to go forward, his legs

commenced to settle, he swung from side to side, hesitated, then went down on his knees, and Romero's older brother leaned forward behind him and drove a short knife into the bull's neck at the base of the horns. The first time he missed. He drove the knife in again, and the bull went over, twitching and rigid. Romero's brother, holding the bull's horn in one hand, the knife in the other, looked up at the President's box. Handkerchiefs were waving all over the bull-ring. The President looked down from the box and waved his handkerchief. The brother cut the notched black ear from the dead bull and trotted over with it to Romero. The bull lay heavy and black on the sand, his tongue out. Boys were running toward him from all parts of the arena, making a little circle around him. They were starting to dance around the bull" (Hemingway 2006, 224).

The passages above hardly exhaust those that describe bullfighting in the novel.

However, they do paint a powerful, colorful, sufficiently complete portrait of a bullfight to which we can refer when analyzing Hemingway's presentation of the activity. These passages immediately draw our attention to several striking aspects of the bullfight: the picador horse, who serves as bait for the bull, and for whom Hemingway claims to feel some kind of sympathy at other points in the novel (to which we will return later); the complicated confrontation between man and bull, which changes shape over the course of the fight as the bull loses strength, sometimes appearing oppositional, sometimes cooperative; the bullfighter's cape-work, which he uses to tire out the bull in a death-defying, intricate dance; the unique rhythm created by the alternation of the bull's apparently unmitigated aggression – charging – and his being lulled into a state of calmness, almost a trance, by the bullfighter; the moment of death when -- with the bullfighter's sword buried up to the hilt, deep inside the bull – just for an instant, the bullfighter and the bull “are one;” and the finale, when this “figure of oneness” is broken – the bull falls down dead before the cheering crowd, while the man stands victorious.

While our analysis of Hemingway's bullfight -- and its philosophical implications -- will be focused on all the elements named above, we should begin by appreciating the degree to which Hemingway explicitly presents the bullfight as aesthetic activity. It is clear, even from reading just a few passages from the novel, that Hemingway wishes to capture what he takes to be the aesthetic nature, and beauty, of bullfighting -- and is determined to communicate this beauty to his readers. Through his presentation of bullfighting, Hemingway seeks to unpack and enumerate the aesthetic features that are unique to bullfighting -- and therefore communicate how bullfighting offers a unique aesthetic experience for spectators.

Before we reconstruct and analyze Hemingway's aesthetic portrait of the bullfight, it is relevant to note that the bull is not the only animal involved in the bullfight. Unlike in the case of cockfighting, more than one species of non-human animal is used in a bullfight. Though the bull is certainly the central animal player, picador horses also play a large role. And, while Hemingway does not explicitly acknowledge that the bull's death might be upsetting to witness,<sup>40</sup> he does acknowledge that witnessing the goring of the picador horses is, for many people, difficult to bear. The novel's protagonist, Jake Barnes, explains to Lady Brett Ashley, who has never seen a bullfight before, how to watch so that she will not be upset by the "rather awful things [that] happen" to the horses (Hemingway 2006, 137). Jake says: "Don't look at the horses, after the bull hits them. Watch the charge and see the picador try and keep the bull off, but then don't look again until the horse is dead if it's been hit...there's nothing but that

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<sup>40</sup> Hemingway would surely think that a spectator who was upset by the bull's death was overly sensitive -- and was not watching in the right way. As becomes clear, if a spectator watches in what Hemingway views as the "right" way, the bull's death is deemed beautiful.

horse part that will bother you, and they're only in it for a few minutes with each bull. Just don't watch when it's bad" (Hemingway 2006, 165-166). Here, Jake advises that if a spectator focuses on the actions of the main players – the bull's charge, the man's placing of the pic – and tries to ignore the suffering of the horses, it will be more pleasant to watch. The horses' injuries or deaths are presented as upsetting to watch, but superfluous to the main action – a viewer must just get through them and arrive at the next phase of the fight. They are collateral damage, and not a central part of the performance; the implication is that Lady Brett will not be missing out on the power of the bullfight if she avoids looking at the horses. In fact, Hemingway goes as far as to place these words into the mouth of his character Bill: "[The horses are] not important...After a while you never notice anything disgusting" (Hemingway 2006,170). The horses (and "the spilling open of horses") are not central to the action and can be easily dismissed (Hemingway 2006, 169). For Hemingway, the horses, and their suffering, is a small, perhaps shameful, but easy to ignore piece of the bullfight. The suffering of the horses does not matter to Hemingway – in fact, he recommends that spectators actively ignore it.

Note that there are two groups of spectators here: the fictional spectators within the novel – Jake, Lady Brett, etc. – and the readers reading the novel. We, as readers, are therefore participating in a kind of double spectatorship. We are spectators of the bullfight in the novel, but we are also spectators of the fictional spectators of the bullfight. As such, we as readers have an opportunity to meditate on the nature of spectatorship by looking at the fictional spectators of the sport within the confines of the novel. We as readers can both have our own spectatorship experience of the sport featured and study the spectatorship of the fictional characters. There is also a sense in

which we as readers identify with the fictional characters, and therefore can be said to have the opportunity to spectate the sport from their standpoint.

In addition to the picador horses, Hemingway describes the use of steers as well as mules in the course of the bullfight. Before a bullfight begins, steers (castrated bulls) are used to receive the bulls into the ring. Hemingway includes an explanation of the use of steers in bullfighting: The bulls are let “out of the cages one at a time, and they have steers in the corral to receive them and keep them from fighting, and the bulls tear in at the steers and the steers run around like old maids trying to quiet them down” (Hemingway 2006, 138). The steers, non-aggressive, are there to pacify the bulls, serving as bait; the bulls chase and often gore the steers rather than goring one another, or charging the walls of the ring and breaking their horns.<sup>41</sup> Hemingway describes one such scene:

“At the other ends of the corral a gate opened and two steers came in, swaying their heads and trotting, their lean flanks swinging. They stood together at the far end, their heads toward the gate where the bull would enter... Some one rapped on the cage with an iron bar. Inside something seemed to explode. The bull, striking into the wood from side to side with his horns, made a great noise. Then I saw a dark muzzle and a shadow of horns, and then, with a clattering on the wood in the hollow box, the bull charged and came out into the corral, skidding with his forefeet in the straw as he stopped, his head up, the great hump of muscle on his neck swollen tight, his body muscles quivering as he looked up at the crowd on the stone walls. The two steers backed away against the wall, their heads sunken, their eyes watching the bull. The bull saw them and charged” (Hemingway 2006, 143).

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<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting that there is a very clear parallel between the novel’s protagonist Jake and the steers. Because of a war injury, Jake, like the steers, is impotent -- and emasculated. In addition, he often plays the role of mediator in the novel, and almost as often ends up injured in some way by those he was attempting to pacify. While our project is one of reading the novel as a philosophical meditation on bullfighting, we would be remiss not to acknowledge that aspects of the bullfight serve metaphorical or symbolic roles in the novel as well.

The steers, whose only purpose in the bullfight is to calm the bull (Hemingway describes them as just "want[ing] to make friends"), often pay with their lives. (Hemingway 2006, 143). In this scene, after the bull charges, Romero gores one of the steers, whose death is described here: "The steer was down now, his neck stretched out, his head twisted, he lay the way he had fallen"(Hemingway 2006, 144). As with the picador horses, Hemingway entertains the idea that there is something sad, or perhaps even shameful, about the steers' role in the fight. Brett, serving as the mouthpiece for every skeptical reader here, says of the steers: "They don't look happy" (Hemingway 2006, 143). And Robert Cohn, also acknowledging the suffering of the steers, asserts plainly: "It's no life being a steer" (Hemingway 2006, 145). But while Hemingway draws our attention to the steers, and the question of their welfare and the quality of their lives, he abandons it almost immediately. His interest in, and concern for, the steers is fleeting, since their role in the bullfight, like the picador horses', is not central. They are not even technically part of the bullfight; they are only involved in the unloading of the bulls. And for this reason, their role, and the suffering that is built into it, is of no real importance to Hemingway.

The bullfight, with fighting bulls, horses, and steers, shapes up to be a veritable circus – and there are also mules present in the ring at the start and end of each fight. Mules serve as porters within the fights, hauling the caged bulls into the ring, and ultimately dragging the bull's dead body out of the ring as well. Hemingway writes: "A single mule was hitched to one of the cages and dragged it up against the gate in the corral wall," the cages described as "big, gray painted cages with the bulls in them. There was one bull in each travelling-box" (Hemingway 2006, 143, 142). At the end of the fight, when the bull lies dead in the ring, mules carry out the dead bull, just as they

carried in the live bull earlier. Hemingway writes: “They had hitched the mules to the dead bull and then the whips cracked, the men ran, and the mules, straining forward, their legs pushing, broke into a gallop, and the bull, one horn up, his head on its side, swept a swath smoothly across the sand out of the red gate” (Hemingway 2006, 172). The images created here are striking. First, a single mule, a gentle, working creature, asked to drag in an enormously heavy cage that holds captive a creature that would presumably destroy its porter if given the opportunity; and second, animal pallbearers, hitched up by humans to a fellow animal’s carcass, whipped as they strain to drag it out of the ring so that the next fight can begin.

At this point, let us return to the task of reconstructing and analyzing Hemingway’s aesthetic portrait of bullfighting, which, as we have seen, takes the concept of interspecies sport to a new level by involving several species – although, for my purposes, it conforms to the second paradigm in my schema, *Animal versus human*. In my view, we can see Hemingway’s aesthetic interest in bullfighting from the degree to which he highlights aesthetic concepts in his presentation of the bullfight – performative nature, formal structure, and audience engagement. He is also at pains to explicitly define correct participation and correct spectatorship within the fight. Hemingway appears to be consciously, purposefully understanding and presenting the bullfight as aesthetic activity in the novel.

One way he does this is by paying special descriptive attention to the bullring. From the outset, the bullring is presented as a sacred performance space, set apart from the rest of the town. The first time we are presented with the bullring, it is described as “high and white and concrete-looking in the sun” (Hemingway 2006, 100). High and hard



– out of reach and vaguely impenetrable – the bullring is illuminated by the sun, just as stage lights illuminate a theater. Inside the high, white walls, the reader gets a glimpse of the empty ring. Hemingway (in Jake Barnes’ voice) writes: “Directly below us was the callejon, the passageway between the stands and the red fence of the barrera. Behind us the concrete stands filled solidly. Out in front, beyond the red fence, the sand of the ring was smooth-rolled and yellow. It looked a little heavy from the rain, but it was dry in the sun and firm and smooth” (Hemingway 2006, 215). The bullring, smooth-rolled, firm, dry, and generally pristine, calls out to be used and performed on – like an empty stage in a theater.

And as the bullring fills for the fights, there is a clear effort on Hemingway’s part to emphasize the degree to which it is the focal point of the town. He writes: “There were many people walking to go and see the bulls...All along the old walls and ramparts people were standing. The three lines of fortifications made three black lines of people. Above the walls there were heads in the windows of the houses. At the far end of the plateau boys had climbed into the trees” (Hemingway 2006, 142, 143). Everyone in the town watches the bullfights, whether from inside the actual bullring, or from outside. The whole town is taken over by the bullfight -- those who are not participants are automatically spectators. In this sense, the entire population of the town can be seen as transforming into an audience.

The reader, a spectator as well, identifies with the townspeople in their spectatorial capacity. As the audience files in, Hemingway vividly introduces the participants in the bullfight. He writes of the sword-handlers and bullring servants: “[They] came down the callejon carrying on their shoulders the wicker baskets of

fighting capes and muletas. They were bloodstained and compactly folded and packed in the baskets. The sword-handlers opened the heavy leather sword-cases so the red wrapped hilts of the sheaf of swords showed as the leather case leaned against the fence. They unfolded the dark-stained red flannel of the muletas and fixed batons in them to spread the stuff and give the matador something to hold” (Hemingway 2006, 215). Here, the sword-handlers and bullring servants are set apart, belonging to the domain of the ring, or stage, rather than to the domain of the audience. Hemingway creates a distance between spectator and participant; the participants here, deliberate and organized, as opposed to the audience -- disorderly, scattered, some even perched in trees to get a view – proceed with an exactness, handling the equipment, likely somewhat unfamiliar to the reader, with methodical ease. Before the bullfight begins, he draws a clear line between those who participate in and contribute to the ceremony and spectacle, and those who watch it. Just from his description of the setting up of the equipment to be used, Hemingway accomplishes two things: he presents the bullring as stage and the goings-on in the bullring as performance, and he creates a formal distance between performer and spectator of the bullfight.

Certainly, Hemingway’s depiction of the opening of the bullfight, when all the participants enter – the bullfighters, banderillas, picadors, bull-ring servants etc. – immediately emphasizes the performative, dramatic nature of the event. Hemingway writes of the procession: “Looking straight ahead, their heads back, their free arms swinging, the three matadors walked out. Behind them came all the procession, opening out, all striding in step, all the capes furled, everybody with free arms swinging, and behind rode the picadors, their pics rising like lances. Behind all came the two trains of

mules and the bull-ring servants” (Hemingway 2006, 216). The processional enters the ring in a ceremonial, theatrical manner. “All striding in step,” the entrance is grand, rhythmic, rehearsed, and designed to capture the audience’s attention. A parade comprised of men and animals, the processional sets the tone for the bullfight from the outset – intense, stylized, and theatrical.

In addition to presenting the bullring as formal performance space, and the participants of the bullfight as, in some sense, actors, Hemingway also emphasizes the formal structure of the bullfight itself. Though the novel includes multiple descriptions of bullfights, they all share an important feature: the bullfight as presented by Hemingway has three parts, or acts. In the first of these parts, or Act One, the picadors and banderillas work to wear down the bull for the bullfighting by lodging pics or flags into the bull’s shoulder muscles. In Act Two, the bullfighter engages the bull one-on-one, inviting him to charge at a red cape over and over again, and working the bull in tight circles and pivots in a stylized, dance-like fashion, to tire him out. In Act Three, the bullfighter, having sufficiently tired and slowed the bull, kills the bull with his sword. As we have seen, he does this by driving the sword in between the bull’s shoulders until it is buried all the way up to the hilt; this is the instant of death, and the climax of the bullfight. When this connection is broken and the bull falls to the ground, this is the finale – the bullfight is finished.

There is, of course, a progression built into this structure. Unlike a tennis match, for example, where the game is broken down into sets, but each set is the same, each act in the bullfight makes the next act possible. In order for the bullfighter to engage one-on-one with the bull, the bull must be sufficiently weakened and exhausted – this is

accomplished by the picadors and banderillas. Similarly, in order for the bullfighter to be in a position where he can deal the final blow and kill the bull, the bull must be even more exhausted. This is accomplished by the bullfighter's cape work, which lures the already faltering bull to further tire himself out by running in tight circles with frequent changes of direction. Also, by the end of the fight, the pics and flags lodged into the bull's shoulder muscle have had time to drag down his neck carriage, placing it in a position that makes it possible for the bullfighter to sink his sword in between the animal's shoulder blades. In this way, the bullfight works like a progressive narrative; the second act is only made possible by the first and, likewise, the third act is only made possible by the second – and therefore by the first as well.<sup>42</sup>

Hemingway's aesthetic interest in bullfighting is made especially explicit in *The Sun Also Rises* by his emphasis on correct participation and correct spectatorship – that is, on what makes for an excellent bullfight, and the correct way to appreciate bullfighting as a spectator. Hemingway's discussion of correct participation, or exemplary bullfighting, centers in large part around Pedro Romero. The first time we meet Romero, Hemingway writes (Jake Barnes narrates): “The boy stood very straight and unsmiling in his bull-fighting clothes. His jacket hung over the back of a chair. They were just finishing winding his sash. His black hair shone under the electric light. He wore a white linen shirt and the sword-handler finished his sash...He was the best looking boy I have ever seen” (Hemingway 2006, 166-167). Immediately, Romero is presented as a combination of professionalism and beauty. Upright, serious, and uniformed, Romero gives off an air of confidence and readiness. Handsome, elegant, and

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<sup>42</sup> Note that the formal features that Hemingway presents as theatrical here could just as easily be applied to gladiatorial combat as they can be to bullfighting.

shining “under the electric light,” Romero is himself – even apart from the bullfight – a spectacle, warranting aesthetic attention and appreciation.

And in the bullring, this is only intensified. Hemingway describes Romero’s admirable style in the ring, contrasting it with those belonging to lesser bullfighters:

“Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. The others twisted themselves like cork-screws, their elbows raised, and leaned against the flanks of the bull after his horns had passed, to give a faked look of danger. Afterward, all that was faked turned bad and gave an unpleasant feeling. Romero’s bull-fighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time. He did not have to emphasize their closeness. Brett saw how something that was beautiful done close to the bull was ridiculous if it were done a little way off. I told her how since the death of [a bull-fighter], all the bull-fighters had been developing a technic [sic] that simulated this appearance of danger in order to give a fake emotional feeling, while the bull-fighter was really safe. Romero had the old thing, the holding of his purity of line through the maximum of exposure, while he dominated the bull by making him realize he was unattainable, while he prepared him for the killing” (Hemingway 2006, 172).

Here, Hemingway describes Romero’s bullfighting style in a way that echoes his description of him outside the ring. Romero’s style is smooth, straight, natural, and nearly effortless looking. His method is pure, calm, quiet, and deliberate; he works the bull with an elegance that communicates confidence. Hemingway compares Romero to “the others” – other, less talented, bullfighters – whose movements in the ring are nowhere nearly as fluid; the others, lacking Romero’s crispness and effortlessness, twist their bodies “like cork-screw[s],” appearing contorted and strained. Romero is presented as reminiscent of a Greek statue. He is a specimen of a beautiful human being, and calls to mind Kant’s account of the beautiful. According to Kant, “It is *man*, alone among all the objects in the world, who admits of an ideal of *beauty*” (Kant, §17, 233). Romero embodies the ideal of beauty – his style and movements a “bodily expression” of both

“fortitude” and “serenity” (Kant, §17, 236). Romero’s style, in addition to being more beautiful, is also more sincere. He lets the horns of the bull pass him closely, while the others give a “faked look of danger” by not letting the horns pass as closely, but then leaning into the flanks of the bull after the horns have passed to give an appearance of closeness. Romero’s style allows for maximum exposure, while the others simulate the appearance of danger. The result is that Romero’s style comes from and inspires “real emotion,” while the others’ gives “a fake emotional feeling.” The ability and willingness to put one’s body as close as possible to the horns while still maintaining a smooth, elegant style of movement in the face of that danger is what defines an excellent bullfighter for Hemingway – and the aesthetic experience of the dynamically sublime for Kant. According to Kant, we consider nature dynamically sublime (as opposed to mathematically sublime) when we experience it “as a might that has no dominance over us” (Kant, §28, 260). We deem something in nature to be dynamically sublime when we recognize its might but know ourselves to be safe from danger – and “the sight... becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, provided we are in a safe place” (Kant, §28, 261). The idea is that, from this standpoint, “though the irresistibility of nature’s might makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical impotence, it reveals in us at the same time an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us a superiority over nature” (Kant, §28. 261). Because, from a safe distance, we are able to use our rational capacity (which nature lacks) to conceive of the magnitude of nature’s might and our physical powerlessness in its presence, we experience a kind of delight in the strength of our own rationality.

In his role as bullfighter, Romeo, the embodiment of Kant's notion of ideal beauty, must directly confront and overcome an uncontrolled force of nature (the bull). There is a sense in which one might think of Hemingway's bullfight as a transition from the Kantian beautiful to the Kantian sublime. The beautiful is transfigured into the sublime when bullfighter has to overcome the seemingly insurmountable strength of the bull. The coming face-to-face with, and the overcoming of, the bull's strength can be understood as, for Hemingway, providing an experience of the dynamically sublime for onlookers. And the spectators look on from a safe distance where they can delight in this boundlessness of force.

When the spectator experiences this moment when the statuesque beauty of the bullfighter transitions to the sublime, he himself is safe from danger – in a position from which to experience the bull's might as sublime. What is more, because the bullfight is structured such that the bull will ultimately die, there is a formal sense in which human "reason" is recognizing the might of nature, and then designing an activity in which reason inevitably conquers that might. A moment arises in this transition from the beautiful to the sublime that introduces what I am calling the Aesthetics of Proximity. In this "danger zone," the human agent comes almost to the point of death due to bodily proximity, but then ultimately, either in evasion or conquest, resists death.<sup>43</sup> Maintaining

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<sup>43</sup> This pattern of alternation is, in fact, similar to the way Kant describes the "agitated" state of the mind when it is presented with the sublime in nature: "This agitation can be compared with a vibration, i.e., with a rapid alternation of repulsion from, and attraction to, one and the same object. If a [thing] is excessive for the imagination (and the imagination is driven to [such excess] as it apprehends [the thing] in intuition), then [the thing] is, as it were, an abyss in which the imagination is afraid to lose itself. Yet, at the same time, for reason's idea of the supersensible [this same thing] is not excessive but conforms to reason's law to give rise to such striving by the imagination. Hence [the

composure and statuesque beauty in the face of death – in the face of this proximity -- is what defines aesthetic excellence for Hemingway.

In addition to Romero, Hemingway (through Jake) makes reference to another admirable bullfighter called Belmonte. He writes: “Belmonte’s great attraction is working close to the bull. In bull-fighting they speak of the terrain of the bull and the terrain of the bull-fighter. As long as a bull-fighter stays in his own terrain he is comparatively safe. Each time he enters into the terrain of the bull he is in great danger. Belmonte, in his best days, worked always in the terrain of the bull. This way he gave the sensation of coming tragedy. People went to the corrida to see Belmonte, to be given tragic sensation, and perhaps to see the death of Belmonte” (Hemingway 2006, 218). Just as Romero does when he lets the horns of the bull pass him closely, Belmonte – in his best moments – works exclusively in the terrain of the bull. In doing this, Belmonte puts himself at greater risk than if he were to stay in his own terrain, and thereby heightens the nervous energy and excitement of the audience. Later in his career, however, Belmonte slips away from this bold, risky, style of bullfighting and begins to resort to exaggerating the level of danger present, giving the sensation of tragedy to the spectators when it is not there. He eventually even insists on hand-picking for himself the least threatening, safest bulls from the herd at the bull-breeder’s ranch (Hemingway 2006, 219). In doing this, he ensures that his bulls are small and have horns that are not too dangerous (Hemingway 2006, 218). Belmonte, then, later in his career, both by selecting his bulls to be comparatively unthreatening, and adopting a formal style that relies on inflating the risk present, is guilty of employing what Hemingway calls the “false aesthetics of the bull-fighters of the

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thing] is now attractive to the same degree to which [formerly] it was repulsive” (Kant, §27, 258).



decadent period” (Hemingway 2006, 219). According to Hemingway, a good bullfight creates real, as opposed to exaggerated, suspense. Suspense comes from uncertainty, and uncertainty in a bullfight comes from the convincing appearance of real danger.

This suspense is more easily created if the bull in a bullfight is imposing – large, with sizeable horns, and possessing a combination of athleticism and an aggressiveness of spirit that leads him to charge willingly and often. Hemingway writes approvingly of a bull chosen for one of Romero’s fights: “a good bull, and a big bull, and with horns, and it turned and recharged easily and surely. He was what Romero wanted in bulls” (Hemingway 2006, 223). An ideal bull for bullfighting, then, is one that will allow the bullfighter to give the best performance – imposing enough in stature and attitude to create a sense of danger, but simultaneously sufficiently “cooperative” to allow for consistent, straight charges and expected responses to passes. In order for a bullfight to be good, both the bullfighter *and* the bull have to be good. In the novel, Romero says: “I like it very much that you like my work, but you haven’t seen it yet. To-morrow, if I get a good bull, I will try and show it to you” (Hemingway 2006, 178). Just as a professional dancer cannot give his best performance with an unskilled partner, Romero can only perform to the best of his ability if he is paired with a bull that is up to his standard. A bullfighter and bull must be well matched to offer an extraordinary performance.

In addition to correct participation, Hemingway also draws our attention to the issue of correct spectatorship, that is, the correct way to watch and appreciate bullfighting. Of course, it is crucial to note that proper spectatorship is intimately related to proper participation: the key to proper spectatorship is to be able to understand and recognize proper participation, while the key to proper participation is to create a

performance that is aesthetically fulfilling for a properly trained spectator. Correct spectatorship is, first and foremost, being able to look for and recognize the degree to which correct participation is taking place. For Hemingway, proper spectatorship therefore involves identifying proper form and style and distinguishing between decadent “false aesthetics” and sincere risk-taking on the part of the bullfighter.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway addresses the question of spectatorship both in regard to a first-time viewer of a bullfight, and to a seasoned spectator -- or aficionado -- of bullfighting. Jake teaches Brett, who has never before attended a bullfight, how to watch:

“I sat beside Brett and explained to Brett what it was all about. I told her about watching the bull, not the horse, when the bulls charged the picadors, and got her to watching the picador place the point of his pic so that she saw what it was all about, so that it became more something that was going on with a definite end, and less of a spectacle of unexplained horrors. I had her watch how Romero took the bull away from a fallen horse with his cape, and how he held him with the cape and turned him, smoothly and suavely, never wasting the bull” (Hemingway 2006, 171).

In this passage, Jake teaches Brett the correct way to watch a bullfight. He explains that, in the phase that involves the picadors, she should watch the bull, not the horse. When the bull charges the horses, Brett should watch the picador placing the pic rather than the goring of the horse – this, according to Jake, will enable her to see “what it [i]s all about.” Looking the right way, and focusing on one element rather than another, will make a spectator see the bullfight as “something that [i]s going on with a definite end” – that is, something with a goal, an objective, a point – as opposed to “a spectacle of unexplained horrors.” If Brett is able to focus on the skill involved – the placing of the pic, the smooth cape work that leads the bull away from a dying picador horse – she will enjoy the bullfight rather than be horrified by it.

Hemingway uses Brett as a stand-in for his readers; when Jake teaches Brett how to watch the bullfight, Hemingway is teaching his readers how to read his descriptions of the bullfight. For Hemingway, Brett represents the inexperienced, uneducated, reluctant viewer of the bullfight; if Brett can learn how to watch properly and appreciate the bullfight, so too can the reader. When a bull drives into one of the steers -- “The steer was down now, his neck stretched out, his head twisted, he lay the way he had fallen” -- Brett is not disgusted or horrified, but instead, “fascinated” (Hemingway 2006, 144). Rather than focus on the bull’s victims – in this case, not a picador horse, but a steer – Brett follows Jake’s advice and keeps her attention on the bull. She says: “I saw it, I saw him shift from his left to his right horn” (Hemingway 2006, 144). Advised by Jake that proper spectatorship involves actively ignoring, or somehow not taking seriously, the gruesome injuries to the steers and horses, Brett keeps her attention on the aggressor and his offensive plays – in this moment, the bull.

It is important to note that what fascinates Brett is what we might call the bull’s offensive technique – the fact that he shifts from his left to his right horn when goring the steer -- a tactic we might expect to see in a human fighter. This is something deeply fascinating to her – fascinating enough to eclipse the upsetting, violent death of the steer – about the bull behaving as though intentionally, as though making decisions and employing strategy. Also interesting to note is the fact that Jake is not concerned that Brett will feel troubled by the injuries sustained by the bull; he expects her to be somewhat upset by the steers, but mostly by the goring of the horses. The bull – though he is stabbed repeatedly with pics and flags, many of which stay lodged in his body,

weighing him down, and though he is ultimately killed with a dramatic final blow – is not presented as being likely to inspire feelings of anxiety or sympathy in the spectator.

While Brett represents the first-time viewer of a bullfight, Hemingway also presents us with a model of seasoned, educated, spectatorship in Jake – an aficionado of bullfighting. Hemingway offers an explicit definition of *afición*: “*Afición* means passion. An aficionado is one who is passionate about the bull-fights.” (Hemingway 2006, 136). Aficionados – Jake is one, the owner of the inn, Montaya, is another – have a passion for bullfighting, one that comes from a deep understanding and appreciation of the activity. Someone with *afición* has a combination of knowledge of and taste for bullfighting. This appreciation – this passion – is an aesthetic passion; someone with *afición* has, over the course of exposure and taste education, developed a nuanced and intricate way of watching. An aficionado is a trained, expert spectator for whom bullfighting is an important source of personal pleasure – we even see Jake “pray[ing] that the bull-fights would be good” (Hemingway 2006, 103). And Montaya is described as “smil[ing] as though bull-fighting were a very special secret between [Jake and him]; a rather shocking but really very deep secret that [they] knew about. He always smiled as though there were something lewd about the secret to outsiders, but that is was something that we understood. It would not do to expose it to people who would not understand” (Hemingway 2006, 136). The implication here is that aficionados of bullfighting have a special way of watching and understanding the bullfight that untrained spectators do not have. Just as only some spectators possess *afición*, not all bullfighters have *afición* either. Hemingway writes: “Montaya could forgive anything of a bull-fighter who has *afición*. He could forgive attacks of nerves, panic, bad unexplainable actions, all sorts of lapses.

For one who had *afición* he could forgive anything” (Hemingway 2006, 137).

Presumably, a bullfighter whose priority it is to offer the kind of performance that an *aficionado* would appreciate – one that demands exactness and elegance in the face of truly dangerous encounters – is one who can be said to have *afición*.

Hemingway is Jake, so to speak: both are *afionados* teaching others how to watch the bullfight properly; Jake is teaching Brett, Hemingway is teaching his readers. Jake undertakes teaching Brett “what [the bullfight] is all about,” which calls to mind Arthur Danto on “aboutness.”<sup>44</sup> Hemingway’s presentation speaks to the process of selecting or re-focusing one’s attention on certain aspects of the bullfight – as Danto introduces this idea through a discussion of art. In this way, Hemingway’s presentation of *afición* is very much like the aesthetic concept of connoisseurship or expertise. Jake (Hemingway) can be said to be acting like an art critic. This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that, years later, Hemingway wrote *Death In The Afternoon*, which explicitly presents bullfighting as an art form. But it is of course crucial to note that *aficionados* – Jake, and Hemingway – are actually *misunderstanding* what the bullfight is all about. Jake makes Brett, and Hemingway asks his readers, to focus on an “aboutness” that is incomplete, as it only engages the bull as a bearer of aesthetic interest. For Hemingway, the correct way to watch a bullfight involves ignoring the suffering of the animals involved. Furthermore, he recommends that spectators focus on and delight in the bull’s aggressive movements that often appear skillful. While he focuses on and takes pleasure in moments when the bull appears to act as though intentionally, he does not in any genuine way extend agency to animals. The “aboutness” that Hemingway asks us to focus on is wrong; our focus

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<sup>44</sup> See Danto 1974.

should be on the fact that, by virtue of exhibiting the agential characteristics that Hemingway himself observes, the participating animals show themselves to be fellow beings whose suffering is not ignorable, and is definitely not exhilarating.<sup>45</sup>

We should also take a moment to look at the instances in the novel when Hemingway draws the reader's attention to emotional reactions to the bullfights. Hemingway writes: "Bill was very tired after the bull-fight. So was [Jake]. [They] both took a bull-fight very hard" and references "that disturbed emotional feeling that always comes after a bull-fight, and the feeling of elation that comes after a good bull-fight" (Hemingway 2006, 225, 168). According to Hemingway, a bullfight is tiring for aficionados and non-aficionados alike. Bill, not an aficionado and Jake, very much one, both take a bullfight "very hard," and are, as a result, both exhausted following the fight. Hemingway acknowledges that the bullfight has an emotional effect on its spectators – a disturbed feeling always follows a bullfight – but he does not explain what this feeling is or where it comes from. Certainly, for him, it cannot be related to the grisly deaths of the steers or horses, which he urges new spectators to ignore, nor to the injuries inflicted upon or death of the bull, whose suffering he does not acknowledge. More likely, for Hemingway, this disturbed feeling is a combination of two things: built up anxiety for the bullfighter, for whose safety spectators worry throughout the duration of the fight, and aesthetic disappointment at the fact that the bullfight is never perfect. A "feeling of

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<sup>45</sup> Perhaps it is useful to think about watching bullfights as a parable of reading. And just as you can read a novel wrong, you can watch a bullfight wrong by focusing on the wrong elements, by fixating on the wrong "aboutness." Understanding the animal as subject requires that we reorient and refocus our attention on the sport in a new way. Therefore, we might think that the aficionados or "connoisseurs" of bullfighting – like Hemingway – are "reading" the activity wrong.

elation” is intermixed with this disturbed feeling after a good bullfight; but the disturbed feeling is always present because, even when a bullfight is good, it has failed to reach its ideal form. It is always, in some sense, a disappointment. And Hemingway points out in his text that, because of this strong emotional effect of bullfighting, there is really no reason to bet on bullfights. When Jake is asked whether you can bet on the fight, he responds that you could, but that it’s not at all necessary. He says: “It would be like betting on the war... You don’t need any economic interest” (Hemingway 2006, 104). The stakes are already so high in bullfighting – a man is risking his life – that there is no need to create interest by betting.<sup>46</sup>

At this point, we have devoted a substantial amount of time to reconstructing Hemingway’s portrait of bullfighting in *The Sun Also Rises*. We have seen that, through his descriptions of bullfighting, and his inclusion of conversations between spectators of the bullfight, Hemingway provides his reader with a meditation on the aesthetic nature of the sport. He explicitly highlights the aesthetic character of bullfighting by presenting the bullring as performance space, referencing the transformation of the town’s residents into spectators, and sharply distinguishing between spectators and participants to highlight two modes of engagement. He affirms the dramatic nature of the bullfight by referencing its processional, theatrical quality, and by presenting its participants as actors. He explores the formal structure of the bullfight by emphasizing its progressive three-part structure, wherein each part makes the next possible, and cites the “figure of oneness” as the distinctive aesthetic moment in the bullfight. He draws our attention to the aesthetic

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<sup>46</sup> Compare this with the degree to which betting is such an integral part of cockfighting. In cockfighting, only the lives of the birds are at risk, so betting creates drama and attaches importance to the lives of animals otherwise viewed as non-valuable and interchangeable.

concepts of audience engagement, correct participation, and correct spectatorship of the bullfight as he sees it.

Hemingway's portrayal of bullfighting emphasizes the fact that, for a bullfight to be of high quality, it has to offer genuine, as opposed to exaggerated, suspense, smooth and elegant movement, and crisp, fluid passes that appear cooperative. The audience experiences the bullfighter as an exemplary specimen of human beauty, and this experience of the beautiful is transfigured into an experience of the sublime through the activity of the bullfight. The extreme proximity of the beauty of the bullfighter – his appearance, his movement, his composure – to the overwhelming force that is embodied by the bull creates a sense of sublimity; the bullfighter is again and again almost overtaken and enveloped by the bull, but ultimately resists death and restores in conquest himself as victor when the final “figure of oneness” is broken.

We should note that the bullfight, for Hemingway, is a mixture of cooperation and opposition; the bull and bullfighter are of course fighting against each other, but the fight can only take proper shape if the bull is cooperative. That is to say, the bull must charge when lured, must follow the cape, must change direction according to the cape's movement, and must travel closely enough to the man's body to make for an exciting performance. Though the bullfight is first and foremost defined by opposition – and is therefore an obvious choice to represent our *Animal versus Human* paradigm – there is an important sense in which, for Hemingway, it inherently incorporates a distinctive kind of cooperation between bullfighter and bull. Paradoxically, in an activity that is defined by opposition, the more cooperative the performance appears to be, the more aesthetically successful it is. According to Hemingway, an aesthetically unsuccessful bullfight would



lack this appearance of cooperation; the beautiful demands cooperation – assonance, harmony, symmetry -- as opposed to opposition, and a bullfight is more beautiful to Hemingway if it showcases this “cooperation” between man and bull.

Hemingway’s presentation of the most crucial moment of the bullfight – the bull’s death – amplifies this point. For Hemingway, the moment when the bull is killed – the moment we would expect to be the bullfight’s most oppositional and violent – is instead a moment of cooperation, even communion. Recall that, when Hemingway describes this climactic moment -- this moment when the bullfighter’s sword is buried up to the hilt in between the bull’s shoulders -- he explicitly refers to the fact that for an instant the man and bull “are one,” that they create a “figure of oneness.” And, in a second instance, Hemingway refers to Romero “bec[om]ing one with the bull” in the moment of the killing. During the cape-work portion of the fight, the bullfighter and bull almost make contact over and over, when the bull’s body nearly brushes the man during close passes; in the moment of death, this contact is actually made. But it is fleeting -- the communion only lasts for an instant. When the bull falls down, dying, this “figure of oneness” is broken; bull and man are once again two separate bodies, the bull’s body lifeless on the ground, the bullfighter’s body erect and triumphant. In this moment, the bullfighter has reaffirmed himself as separate from, and superior to, the bull – and therefore to death.

Now that we have reconstructed Hemingway’s portrayal of the aesthetic nature of bullfighting in *The Sun Also Rises*, let us revisit the way that Gumbrecht characterizes bullfighting in his book *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*. Recall that Gumbrecht’s discussion of bullfighting centers around the ways in which it is similar to boxing. In both sports, says Gumbrecht, spectators are fascinated first and foremost by the suffering present. The

main attraction of boxing – and bullfighting – is the degree to which it brings a participant to the brink of death: “it is about suffering to the point of near-death and then, if possible, returning from the near-death experience to decisive physical dominance” (Gumbrecht, 163). Both sports are appealing to audiences because they “celebrate [an athlete’s] brush with death” (Gumbrecht, 164).

Though Hemingway does not use the term “suffering,” his portrait of bullfighting shares Gumbrecht’s focus on an athlete’s brush with death; as we have seen, Hemingway insists that a bullfight is good if and only if there is a feeling that the bullfighter is risking his safety for the performance. For Hemingway, an aesthetically satisfying bullfight – as opposed to an overwrought, exaggerated, “decadent” era bullfight – does, as Gumbrecht says, actually bring a participant to the brink of death, as every pass is a brush with death. With each invitation to charge, and with each pass, the bullfighter invites the bull to kill him, but then avoids danger. For Hemingway, the bullfight is a series of many brushes with death. This alternation – between near-death and relative safety for the bullfighter – is what lends the bullfight its structure and rhythm. While the survival of each charge or each pass might be considered an instance of “returning from the near-death experience to decisive physical dominance,” the final blow, and the moment when the “figure of oneness” is broken and the man stands victorious, is, of course, the most dramatic moment of this kind – and the one that presumably most fascinates lovers of bullfighting.

Gumbrecht and Hemingway’s pictures both identify a bullfighter’s brushes with death – and particularly the moment when he once and for all achieves decisive physical dominance – as distinctive features that define an aesthetically fulfilling bullfight. Both also consider this only in relation to the bullfighter, forgetting the bull. Gumbrecht –

though he uses the word “suffering,” which clearly applies to the bull, who endures countless wounds and is literally weighed down by flags and pics lodged into his muscles – does not directly reference the suffering of the bull. Instead, it seems reasonable to think that the suffering to which he refers belongs only to the bullfighter – the bull, after all, does not return from the brink of the near-death experience to decisive physical dominance. In defining bullfighting as a sport that celebrates a brush with death, Gumbrecht is defining it according to the bullfighter’s involvement, and on the bullfighter’s terms. After all, the bull cannot be said to have brushes with death: each pic or flag wound cannot kill him, the only thing that can kill him is the final blow between the shoulder blades. There is no brush with death for the bull – there are only wounds inflicted, and then, ultimately, actual death.

Hemingway, like Gumbrecht, does not appear to be fascinated by, or concerned with, the bull’s suffering. He never alludes to the bull’s discomfort or pain, and certainly does not present the bull as having brushes with death that inspire any feeling at all in the spectators, or in the participating bullfighter. The bull’s suffering is not an object of fascination – it is not even an object of observation; it is simply a necessity in order for the dramatic arc to take form. In order for the picadors to place their pics skillfully, they must have something into which to place them. In order for the banderillas to show their bravery, they must have a charging bull in which to plant their flags. In order for the bullfighter to showcase his cape-work, he must have an already tired, ailing bull whose body he can manipulate. And in order to exact the perfect lethal blow and create the distinctive figure of oneness that Hemingway finds so beautiful, the bullfighter must be working with a slowed bull that can no longer hold his neck up. The bull’s suffering is

never actually referenced – it is simply a morally irrelevant fact, necessary for what Hemingway considers the actually fascinating parts of the bullfight to take place.

The degree to which Hemingway and Gumbrecht are aligned on their characterizations of suspense in a bullfight is perhaps a slightly more complicated matter. According to Hemingway, a good bullfight creates real, as opposed to over-exaggerated, suspense. At the same time, however, this suspense is of course limited when we consider the fact that all bullfights (with a few extremely rare exceptions) end the same way – with the bull’s death. Gumbrecht is very much aware of this fact. Recall that he points out: “There is no uncertainty about how the bullfight will end. The animal will be killed” (Gumbrecht, 164). Hemingway and Gumbrecht seem to agree that, though a bullfight always ends with the bull’s death, the quality of the performance is in part determined by the degree of ostensibly genuine suspense created. As we have seen, Gumbrecht fails to account for what I call behavioral unpredictability: the fact that animals – unlike people, and unlike machines – possess an impenetrability, an “alien” wildness that make their behavior hard for us to understand, and hard for us to predict. The fact is that, even in cases like bullfighting, where the activity is designed so that the animal is being led to act in a certain way, there is a profound sense that animal behavior is not fully knowable. The animal nature of the bull therefore keeps alive a frightening – though remote – possibility in the mind of the spectators and participants alike; at any moment, the bull could behave unpredictably. He might gore the human participants; or he might refuse to charge altogether. Though the bullfight is mapped out, the bull, as well as the other animals that are used in a bullfight, nevertheless lend a sense of unpredictability to the action. This wildness, this uniquely animal “autonomy,” contributes to human fascination

with sports involving animals. Although Hemingway does not explicitly draw our attention to this matter, he is not guilty of Gumbrecht's biggest misstep -- likening bullfighting to boxing. Because he structures his discussion of bullfighting through an analogy to boxing, Gumbrecht does not allow room for behavioral unpredictability. If boxing and bullfighting fascinate spectators for the same reasons, then clearly behavioral unpredictability -- a concept that attaches to animals -- is excluded from his discussion.

While Hemingway does not explicitly speak to the issue of behavioral unpredictability, he does touch on the related idea that part of what interests spectators about bullfighting is watching an animal behave as though intentionally. Recall that Brett is delighted when she sees the bull switch from one horn to the other, exhibiting an apparent offensive strategy. In addition, recall the first two passages we cited in this chapter, in which Hemingway offers detailed descriptions of the bullfight. Buried in these passages are allusions to the bull's state of mind. Hemingway writes: "The bull was watching. Seemingly he watched the white horse, but really he watched the triangular steel point of the pic. Romero, watching, saw the bull start to turn his head. He did not want to charge... The bull did not insist under the iron. He did not really want to get at the horse... The bull wanted it again, and Romero's cape filled again, this time on the other side" and describes Romero, "offering the body, offering it again a little closer, the bull watching dully, then so close that the bull thought he had him" (Hemingway 2006, 220-223). In these moments, Hemingway references the bull "watching," "not insist"ing, "want"ing, "not want"ing, and thinking. While this does not amount to considering the animal's standpoint in any meaningful way -- after all, he never so much as mentions the bull's suffering -- it does speak to an important point; that spectators of bullfighting, in

watching, might attribute some degree of intentionality to the bull. Hemingway, more so than Gumbrecht, is sensitive to the idea that part of watching a bullfight is to ascribe intentions, thoughts, and feelings to the bull. However, in Hemingway's limited and distorted picture, this does not extend to any kind of empathy for the bull.

Hemingway's picture departs from Gumbrecht's in another way as well. While Gumbrecht's whole presentation of bullfighting centers around its being analogous to boxing – which serves to put an animal sport in the same category as a non-animal sport - Hemingway differentiates bullfighting from non-animal sports in *The Sun Also Rises*.<sup>47</sup> In the first place, Hemingway distinguishes between bullfighting and boxing by having an inexperienced spectator of the bullfight draw an analogy between the two activities. As we have seen, Brett points out that the bull shifts from one horn to the other, the way a boxer might throw alternating punches. Hemingway writes, explicitly drawing this comparison: “Look how he knows how to use his horns. He's got a left and a right just like a boxer” (Hemingway 2006, 144). A true aficionado would never make such a comparison. For Hemingway, boxing is a much less aesthetically compelling, much lower class, activity than is bullfighting.

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<sup>47</sup> We might point out that all sports – regardless of whether they involve animals – are presented by Hemingway as in some sense aesthetic. The bullfight is, of course, by far the most beautiful to Hemingway, but he is appreciative of the general notion introduced in Chapter 1 – that sports are aesthetic activities. In a brief mention of tennis, he writes: Robert Cohn was “nice to watch on the tennis court, he had a good body, and he kept it in shape,” taking into account the idea that a tennis player can be “nice to watch,” both in terms of his form and the degree to which his body impresses as athletic (Hemingway 2006, 52). In addition, Hemingway presents boxing as at least in some sense theatrical: “There had been a grand theatrical season and a whole crop of great young light heavyweights” (Hemingway 2006, 75).

Hemingway presents boxing throughout the novel as somehow silly and lacking in elegance and profundity, and boxers as weaker, less beautiful, and less honorable than bullfighters. In a subtle, but telling, moment, Hemingway describes Jake seeing a pair of toy boxers on the street. He writes: “[Jake] stepped aside to avoid walking into the thread with which his girl assistant manipulated the boxers. She was standing looking away, the thread in her folded hands” (Hemingway 2006, 43). The boxers, controlled by a thread, are trinkets. They are toys – flimsy, manipulable, even silly – and there is by definition nothing real at stake in their “fight.” Hemingway’s contempt for boxing is embodied, in *The Sun Also Rises*, in the form of a character – Robert Cohn. Cohn is the former boxing champion of Princeton. He is presented as a downtrodden, sad, weak man. He is also physically marred, with a deformed nose from an old boxing injury. What is more, the narrator does not take him seriously, and, though perhaps playfully, questions his integrity. Hemingway writes, as Jake: “I always had a suspicion that perhaps Robert Cohn had never been middleweight boxing champion, and that perhaps a horse had stepped on his face” (Hemingway 2006, 12). Compare the image of Cohn – the boxer – with the image of Romero, the bullfighter. Cohn is weak, pitiful, and deformed, while Romero is the picture of youth, strength, beauty, and honor. We should also note the fact that Jake suspects that Cohn’s injury was inflicted by a horse. In the novel, horses are presented as entirely non-aggressive; in fact, they are presented as defenseless victims -- we need only recall the picador horses to see this. To be injured by a horse, then, lacks the drama, and honor, that would come with being injured while fighting a bull.

This sharp differentiation between boxer and bullfighter is further emphasized when Cohn and Romero face off in a fistfight. Romero exhibits a far more aggressive

fighting spirit than does the sensitive, damaged, Cohn. Cohn is described as shaking and crying during the fight – and offers Romero a hand when he is ailing. Romero, on the other hand, is unwavering; he never loses composure, and even attacks Cohn when he offers to help him. Ultimately, although they are both injured over the course of the fight, Romero “ruin[s] Cohn” (Hemingway 2006, 206). One of the novel’s characters, Mike, reacts to the fight by saying: “You know I don’t think Cohn will ever want to knock people out again” (Hemingway 2006, 206). In addition to the fact that Romero, despite not being a boxer, is presented as a more ruthless fighter than is Cohn, the fight itself has a very different feel than do the bullfights described in the novel. Though Hemingway’s description is admiring of Romero’s intensity and fierceness, the fight – like that between the toy boxers – is presented as scrappy, inelegant, and generally pointless. The description of the “boxing match” includes none of the beauty, or profundity, that Hemingway evokes when he describes the bullfights.

Boxing is not the only sport that receives a negative portrayal in the novel; when Hemingway discusses bicycle racing, his tone is outright mocking. Very near the end of the novel, directly following a description of a bullfight that is, characteristically, meant to inspire a sense of awe and admiration for the activity, Hemingway references a group of bicycle riders. He writes: “They did not take the race seriously except among themselves. They had raced among themselves so often that it did not make much difference who won” (Hemingway 2006, 240). Like boxing, for Hemingway, cycling is not something to be taken seriously. In fact, the competitors themselves recognize that the outcome is really of no importance; it does not make much difference who wins any given race. Unlike in his presentation of bullfighting – but similar to his treatment of



boxing – Hemingway emphasizes that there is not much at stake here. In addition, Hemingway’s description of the cyclists presents them as physically unappealing. Hemingway writes: “The man who had a matter of two minutes lead in the race had an attack of boils, which were very painful. He sat on the small of his back. His neck was very red and the blond hairs were sunburned” (Hemingway 2006, 240). Unlike Romero, the picture of health and attractiveness, the lead cyclist is physically marred and bordering on grotesque. And when Jake finds himself conversing with the team manager of one of the big bicycle manufacturers, the sport of cycling is further parodied. The team manager -- a silly, blowhard, know-it-all type – insists naively that “bicycle road-racing [i]s the only sport in the world...The Tour de France [i]s the greatest sporting event in the world” and that France is “the most *sportif* country in the world. It was bicycle road-racing did it” (Hemingway 2006, 240). None of this is meant to be taken seriously. Clearly, cycling is not the only sport in the world. The Tour de France is not the greatest sporting event in the world, and bicycle road-racing will not make France the most *sportif* country in the world. All of this is designed to come off as absurd to Jake and the reader, both of whom have spent the whole novel extolling the Spanish bullfights.

In addition to cycling and boxing, Hemingway also offers a description of fishing. He references fishing often, particularly trout fishing in the Irati River, and presents fishing trips as dreamy, sentimental, romantic adventures. When Jake and Bill take a fishing trip, for which there is a great deal of build up and excitement, Cohn regrets that he is unable to go since he has “been looking forward to this fishing all winter” (Hemingway 2006, 106). As he does in his description of bullfighting, Hemingway draws our attention to the equipment involved in fishing. He refers to “two or three rods with

reels, and lines, and some flies,” “a pretty good rod cheap, and two-landing nets,” a  
““tackle-bag, the nets, and the rod-case,” and writes that Jake and Bill “jointed up the  
rods, put on the reels, tied on leaders, and got ready to fish” (Hemingway 2006, 88, 96,  
118, 123). Hemingway’s description (Jake’s narration) of fishing shares the detailed,  
vibrant quality of his bullfighting passages. He writes:

“As I baited up, a trout shot up out of the white water into the falls and  
was carried down. Before I could finish baiting, another trout jumped at  
the falls, making the same lovely arc and disappearing into the water that  
was thundering down... When I started to pull up I felt that I had one and  
brought him, fighting and bending the rod almost double, out of the  
boiling water at the foot of the falls, and swung him up and onto the dam.  
He was a good trout, and I banged his head against the timber so that he  
quivered out straight, and then slipped him into my bag” (Hemingway  
2006, 124).

The description, unlike that of boxing – Hemingway does not even dignify cycling with a  
description – depicts fishing as dramatic and beautiful. He references one trout shooting  
up out of white water, another jumping into a waterfall, making a “lovely arc” and  
vanishing into thundering water. Jake’s battle with the trout that he is able to hook is  
intense – the trout fights and bends the rod almost double, offering enough resistance that  
Jake has to swing the fish up out of the water, which is vividly described as appearing to  
boil over. The trout that Jake catches – a “good trout,” which immediately calls to mind  
the notion of “good bulls” – shares the same fate as a bull in a bullfight; after putting up a  
good fight, he is killed. The killing – the fish’s head is banged “against the timber so that  
he quivered out straight” – is described vividly, and there is a sense that the death is  
meant to be elegant, or even beautiful. In fact, when Jake is finished fishing for the day,  
he comments on the beauty of the fish in death: “I laid them out, side by side, all their  
heads pointing the same way, and looked at them. They were beautifully colored and firm

and hard from the cold water” (Hemingway 2006, 124). He packs the beautiful bodies, covering them with ferns and points out that “They looked nice in the ferns” (Hemingway 2006, 124). Hemingway’s description of fishing, then, shares the admiring and appreciative tone he employs in his discussions of bullfighting. Both activities are presented as beautiful, and have attached to them a mood of sentimentality and significance.

Hemingway sees fishing and bullfighting – sports that involve animals – as superior in beauty and profundity to boxing and cycling, which do not involve animals. There is therefore an important sense in which his picture differs from Gumbrecht’s; Hemingway would likely find the analogy between bullfighting and boxing, and probably an analogy between an animal sport and a non-animal sport, inappropriate. But, even though fishing is described in a manner similar to bullfighting – a manner that is extremely different from that used to discuss boxing and cycling – fishing is likely not as profound an activity for Hemingway as bullfighting. This is because fishing, like hunting, does not present a sense of danger for the participant in the way that bullfighting does. In a very fleeting reference to hunting, Mike says: “I never liked to hunt, you know. There was always the danger of having a horse fall on you.” (Hemingway 2006, 196). This statement – which immediately strikes the reader as an odd concern – makes clear that hunting is not a dangerous confrontation between man and animal. Mike’s fear in hunting is not of the animal he confronts/hunts, but rather of his own horse falling on him. Fishing, like hunting, does not present danger to the fisherman and, for this reason – though it is superior to the likes of boxing and cycling in Hemingway’s view – does not hold the same status as bullfighting.

Hemingway's picture has something that Gumbrecht's lacks: an appreciation of the idea that there is a sense in which bullfighting and other sports involving animals are importantly different from, and warrant separate treatment from, sports like cycling and boxing. Despite this, ultimately Hemingway's understanding of bullfighting shares what is the greatest flaw of Gumbrecht's view: a failure to take seriously and appreciate the animal life in one's aesthetic analysis of a sport – a failure to extend agency to animals. Recall that Gumbrecht, both in mechanizing the animal by likening him to equipment, and failing to consider the animal by likening him to a human through his comparison of bullfighting and boxing, denies animals agency, and, furthermore, denies the animal life. Hemingway's account of bullfighting denies the animal life as well, but in a completely different way. Hemingway does not deny animal life by turning animals into machines or men – instead, he denies the animal life by only valuing animals in death or when doomed to die. By only taking interest in animals as dead – in deadness, there can be no sentiency or agency – Hemingway refuses to extend agency to animals, as extending agency to an animal requires acknowledgement of its unique life. And because he does not see animals as agents, he can therefore find beauty in the bullfight.

A close reading of *The Sun Also Rises* finds the narrative absolutely littered with references to animal death. In addition to the dead picador horses and bulls we encounter in the bullfighting scenes, Hemingway presents us with several other episodes that feature dead animals, most of which are strange, and come across as somehow gratuitous. One such episode is an extended conversation between Jake and Bill in which Bill refers to the fact that he used to be a taxidermist, and discusses his admiration for taxidermy. Walking down the street, Bill says: "Here's a taxidermist's...want to buy anything? Nice

stuffed dog?” (Hemingway 2006, 78). When Jake expresses little interest in buying a stuffed dog, Bill is insistent. He says: “Pretty nice stuffed dogs...certainly brighten up your flat...Just one stuffed dog. I can tem ‘em or leave ‘em alone. But listen, Jake. Just one stuffed dog...Mean everything in the world to you after you bought it. Simple exchange of values. You give them money. They give you a stuffed dog...Road to hell paved with unbought stuffed dogs” (Hemingway 2006, 79). Jake, seemingly as confused as the reader as to why Bill is so fixated on this, asks: “How’d you feel that way about dogs so sudden?” To this, Bill responds: “Always felt that way about dogs. Always been a great lover of stuffed animals” (Hemingway 2006, 79). The references continue; Bill proposes sending a pair of taxidermy horses to a friends celebrating their wedding: “What’ll I send them? Think they’d like a couple of stuffed race-horses?” (Hemingway 2006, 81). And finally, when a horse-cab passes, Bill says to Jake: “See that horse-cab? Going to have that horse-cab stuffed for you for Christmas.” (Hemingway 2006, 79-80). Capturing an ostensibly jokey, flippant, good-natured conversation between Bill and Jake, this scene is nevertheless odd; the exchange seems to serve no real purpose in the novel, it is just casual dialogue that is centered, seemingly pointlessly, on turning dead animals into decorative, ornamental, background objects.

In addition to this strange, extended taxidermy scene that fixates on and makes light of animal death, *The Sun Also Rises* includes more seemingly gratuitous mentions of animal carcasses. There is a reference to a Count who always “wore an elk’s tooth on his watch-chain” (Hemingway 2006, 36). There is a reference to pictures of dead animals hanging on the wall of an inn. When Jake enters the inn, he sits “at one of the tables and looked at the pictures on the wall. There was one panel of rabbits, dead, one of pheasants,

also dead, and one panel of dead ducks. The panels were all dark and smoky looking” (Hemingway 2006, 116). Here, in a moment that serves to echo and amplify the taxidermy scene, dead animals are not the material of art, but now, its subject.

In the scene when Jake and Cohn are about to start fishing, Hemingway writes: “Just then an old man with long, sunburned hair and beard, and clothes that looked as though they were made of gunny-sacking, came striding up the bridge. He was carrying a long staff, and he had a kid slung on his back, tied by four legs, the head hanging down” (Hemingway 2006, 98). Here, the mention of the goat carcass, legs bound and “slung” over the old man’s back, is jarring and serves no real purpose in terms of the actual narrative. It is as though, for Hemingway, the goat’s dead body perhaps just enhances the scenery and is therefore worth including. Note that Hemingway uses similar language when describing how the old man carries the dead goat and how Jake carries his fishing equipment. The old man is described as having “a kid slung on his back,” and Jake “carried the rod-case and the landing-nets slung over [his] back” (Hemingway 2006, 121). The dead goat’s body carries with it no special status for having been a living thing before it died; it might as well be fishing equipment.

When live animals are referenced by Hemingway, he either disregards them or presents them as interrupting or cluttering human spaces. Though he references animals fairly often, the degree to which they are presented as non-meaningful is striking. Hemingway writes/Jake narrates: “We got into the cab, and the cabman put the bags up on the seat beside him and climbed up and cracked his whip, and we drove over the dark bridge and into the town” (Hemingway 2006, 95). Here, the cabman is mentioned – and so is the crack of his whip – but the horse that receives the whip is nowhere to be found.

Similarly, when Hemingway describes “horse-cabs clippety-clopping along at the edge of the solid taxi traffic,” he phrases it as though the cabs, rather than the horses, are “clippety-clopping” (Hemingway 2006, 22). The horses that pull the cabs are not actually given focus of any kind. We do not see the horses themselves move or act – the subject of these sentences is either the “horse-cab” or the driver. Recall that this is also true of Bill’s horse-cab reference in his musings about taxidermy. He jokes that he will have the “horse-cab stuffed for [Jake] for Christmas” – not the animal itself, but the horse-cab.

While he does not actually reference the horse-cab horses, Hemingway does refer, fleetingly, to other animals throughout the novel, including pigeons, donkeys, mules, and goats. But when these animals are mentioned, the emphasis is always on human spaces – and the fact that animals are either inhabiting or invading them. Hemingway writes: “There were pigeons out in square, and the houses were a yellow, sun-baked color, and I did not want to leave the café” (Hemingway 2006, 97). Here, the pigeons receive no descriptive attention, while the houses are described vividly as yellow and sun-baked. When Hemingway makes mention of a goat, he writes: “Outside under the window were some carts and an old diligence...A goat hopped up on one of the carts and then to the roof of the diligence” (Hemingway 2006, 116). Here, the goat, again receiving no descriptive attention, hops up onto human spaces – a cart and then a roof – where it presumably does not belong. And when Hemingway presents us with donkeys and mules, both are presented as obstructions, as being in the way. Hemingway writes that “the driver had to honk, and slow up, and turn out to avoid running into two donkeys that were sleeping in the road” (Hemingway 2006, 99). The donkeys, sleeping in the middle of the road, obstruct the path. Similarly, Hemingway writes: “We turned sharply out to the side

of the road to give room to pass to a long string of six mules, following one after the other, hauling a high-hooded wagon loaded with freight...Close behind was another string of mules and another wagon” (Hemingway 2006, 111). Although the mules themselves are mentioned here, they are presented as being in the way, invading and overtaking the human characters’ route; Jake and the others he is traveling with have to turn sharply out to the side of the road to let the mules pass. When live animals are mentioned in the novel, they are generally not afforded descriptive attention, and the emphasis is almost always on the human spaces they are interrupting or infesting.<sup>48</sup>

Hemingway pays little to no descriptive attention to live animals, systematically ignoring or disregarding them, or presenting them as overrunning human spaces. This, coupled with his striking fixation on animal corpses, creates a sense in which live animals do not hold Hemingway’s aesthetic interest. Instead, he finds animals most aesthetically interesting, most beautiful, as dead. We can see this from the bullfight scenes. The most beautiful moment for Hemingway is the death of the bull; we have seen that he focuses a great deal of descriptive energy on this moment in the novel. Also recall Hemingway’s description of the fish Jake catches, and the fact that they are presented as being beautiful in death. The dead fish are described as “beautifully colored and firm and hard from the cold water” and, their dead bodies packed up “looked nice in the ferns” (Hemingway 2006, 124). Accordingly, animals are the most aesthetically remarkable – and therefore receive the most descriptive attention – when dead.

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<sup>48</sup> Perhaps it is useful to point out that, when these animals are mentioned, it is virtually always part of a much larger description of a place – a scene, a landscape. Hemingway pays close attention to capturing and developing landscapes, and to the general wonder of nature, but does not consider animals as wonder or awe-inspiring. They are, at best, ornamental.



And, not surprisingly, the rare instances when live animals *do* receive legitimate descriptive attention are only those where the animals described are doomed to die. The trout are most beautiful in death, but they are depicted as, at least somewhat beautiful, in the process of being fished. Recall that Hemingway references one trout shooting up out of white water, while he describes another jumping into a waterfall, making a “lovely arc” and vanishing into thundering water. The trout – being fished – are doomed to die, and are therefore worthy of attention and beautiful to Hemingway. Similarly, the fighting bull is afforded descriptive attention. He is implicitly presented as performing beautifully in – as contributing to the beauty of -- the bullfight, and Brett explicitly expresses the fact that she is impressed by the bull’s beauty. She says: “My God, isn’t he beautiful” (Hemingway 2006, 144). It is crucial to note that this is the only moment in the novel when an animal is called “beautiful.” For Hemingway, animals are only beautiful and interesting, and only worthy of descriptive focus, when they are dead or going to be killed.<sup>49</sup> There is a sense in which death, or the imminence of death, transforms animals – otherwise aesthetically unremarkable – into objects deserving of observation and attention.

Animals are objectified – background ornaments that are worth mentioning as dead, but who are in no sense presented as though they were ever the subject of a life. In fact, Hemingway’s descriptions give us the sense that these dead bodies never lived at all

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<sup>49</sup> One more subtle example of this is shown in the moment when Hemingway writes about Jake spotting a cockroach at the inn: “While we were waiting I saw a cockroach on the parquet floor that must have been at least three inches long. I pointed him out to Bill and then put my shoe on him” (Hemingway 2006, 97). This cockroach – infesting a human space – is nevertheless worthy of some descriptive attention (it is “at least three inches long”) because it is doomed to die when Jake puts his “shoe on him.”

– that their lives did not matter, that they have always been dead. In a novel largely concerned with the human fantasy of immortality, as embodied by the bullfighter in particular, animals are presented as eternally dead as opposed to eternally alive. The bull in a bullfight is doomed; it is written into the formal narrative structure of the activity that he will die. Like the stuffed taxidermy animals, it is as if he has somehow always been dead. Hemingway gives us endless focus on the moment when the bull dies, but the bull was never really alive to begin with – he was dead all along. In *The Sun Also Rises*, animals are never alive and always dead; as does a bullfight, Hemingway denies animals a life, and therefore, denies them a death as well. If you never live, you can never die. Hemingway's dead animals are objects, not subjects of lives who are no longer alive. For his human characters, *The Sun Also Rises* again and again. For the animals in his novel, the sun never rose in the first place.

In a novel that is, technically speaking, very much about animals in the sense that it centers around the activity of bullfighting, Hemingway does not draw special attention to animal life, but conversely, focuses heavily on animal death – presenting it as beautiful. This denial of animal life – this fixation on and aestheticization of animal death – contributes to Hemingway's ethical mischaracterization of bullfighting. Because he is not interested in the animal life of the bull – the animal's living beauty, his subjectivity, his experience, and his suffering – he is able to ignore the fact that the grisly reality of bullfighting precludes it from being truly beautiful, even if it is an aesthetic activity. Hemingway is absolutely correct to characterize bullfighting as a highly aesthetic sport, and is also correct that, in its complexity, it demands a rigorous aesthetic analysis in a way that other sports might not. But when we look back at Hemingway's portrait of

bullfighting, we can see the degree to which his general life-denying attitude towards animals affects and infects his account. Because he is not interested in the animal life, Hemingway is more concerned with the placement of the pics than the resulting wounds on the animal. He sees the intricate cape-work of the bullfighter, but not the suffering of the exhausted, injured animal – who is manipulable for the bullfighter only due to the fact that he is behaving in part according to an instinct that he was bred by humans to possess. Hemingway sees the bullfighter as exquisite – the picture of beauty, strength, health and vivacity - but finds the bull more beautiful dead than alive. For Hemingway, the goring and deaths of the steers are not important –in fact, they are ignorable. He sees the playing out of the three acts of the bullfight as being necessary to the dramatic arc, but does not consider that this structure is horrifically cruel – designed to draw out the death of the bull, maximizing its slowness and painfulness. And the “disturbed feeling” that comes after a bullfight is one he associates with a frustration regarding the fact that the quality of the bullfight never reaches its full potential – rather than with the fact that a spectator of a bullfight has just witnessed the violent death of living creatures for entertainment.

As a result of denying the animal life, Hemingway misunderstands important elements of bullfighting that any comprehensive account of the activity must speak to. Clearly, Hemingway’s obsession with animal death precludes him from appreciating our preexisting aesthetic relationship to animals that we discussed at length in Chapter 1. While the relationship we defined in Chapter 1 – and which I argued Nathanael West’s account of cockfighting shows appreciation for in Chapter 2 – is all about the features of living animals that humans tend to derive aesthetic pleasure from, Hemingway finds animals most aesthetically interesting near or in death. Hemingway’s treatment of

animals in the novel highlights none of these qualities of animals that make them unique objects of aesthetic fascination -- vitality, wild autonomy, expressive power, reciprocity. For Hemingway, the aesthetic properties of living animals are no more remarkable – in fact, they are less remarkable – than the aesthetic properties of dead animals. Hemingway sees bullfighting as deeply aesthetic, but fails to see that part of what makes it such a complex aesthetic activity is the fact that it involves a living animal agent (more than one animal, in fact) – which brings to the table significant and distinctive aesthetic complexities.

Not surprisingly, because he denies the animal life, Hemingway’s picture also mischaracterizes the nature of the animal/human relationship in bullfighting. Because the animal does not have a meaningful point of view, he does no relating – and the “relationship,” so to speak, is therefore one way; it is not a reciprocal relationship. Therefore, the cooperation alluded to by Hemingway (recall: “It was as though [Romero] were rocking the bull to sleep...”) is of a specious sort. It is a sad cooperation, preying on the bull’s defensive instincts to lure it to its death. This “cooperation” is not genuine cooperation, as the bullfight is designed to exploit the bull so that he essentially commits suicide over the course of the fight. Every time he charges, he receives punishment; he is punished for the very behavior that is necessary for the activity to be successful.

Furthermore, recall to mind the “figure of oneness” that Hemingway takes to be the most fascinating, unique feature of the bullfight. While, aesthetically speaking, it may be true that the “figure of oneness” is a profound image, the “oneness” he claims to see is, of course, romanticized. Romero and the bull are not in any true sense of the word cooperating. They are not communicating, not relating, they cannot be said to have a

shared goal – in fact, Romero’s aggression is directed at the bull, while the bull’s aggression is directed at Romero. There is no sense in which the performance they “put on” is the result of rehearsal, or the result of a partnership they have formed. The bull appears to be cooperating due to exhaustion and injury. The bull appears to “cooperate” with Romero only in the sense that he charges at him – which clearly does not amount to being “at one.” After all, in this moment of “oneness,” the bull is losing his life, and his suffering is never acknowledged; and seconds later, when the figure is broken, his body will be dismembered, and his corpse will be discarded, dragged out of the ring by mules as the crowd roars. In fact, in describing the aftermath of this moment of supposed communion, Hemingway admits that even the notched off ear – the valuable souvenir taken from the bull’s carcass – is cast aside: the bull’s “ear [was] cut by popular acclamation and given to Pedro Romero, who, in turn, gave it to Brett, who wrapped it in a handkerchief belonging to [Jake], and left both ear and handkerchief, along with a number of Muratti cigarette-stubs, shoved far back in the drawer of the bed-table” (Hemingway 2006, 203). The fact that the bull’s final “burial” place is a drawer filled with trash confirms that, for Hemingway, the bull was never more than a disposable object.

While Hemingway’s account relies on the idea that cooperation and communion are present in the bullfight, he denies the bull the agency necessary to cooperate or commune. The bull lacks agential standing in any meaningful way – and, as we have seen, in the rare moments when Hemingway does refer to the bull acting, or experiencing, it is only in the service of his description of the bullfight. He is simply playing to inexperienced spectators – recall that Brett has an easier time making sense of

the bullfight in a way that allows her to enjoy it aesthetically when she ascribes some degree of intentionality to the bull, even though that in no way extends to real regard for the bull's experience. For Hemingway, the bull exists to be seen in a bullfight; he is afforded no inner life, no subjectivity – just a strong body moved by his instincts, a body more aesthetically noteworthy dead than alive.

Hemingway's account of bullfighting, though it seems to claim to cast the bull as tragic figure, really centers around the bullfighter. The bullfighter drives the action, the bullfighter's performance ultimately dictates the aesthetic quality of the bullfight, and the bullfighter's suffering or injury, as opposed to that of the bull, is what induces anxiety and fear in the audience. Though Hemingway aims to present bullfighting as a performance involving two actors – man and bull – of equal importance, his disregard for animal experience makes it impossible to take this seriously. An honest reading of Hemingway's presentation of bullfighting finds specious the constructs of cooperation and communion, and instead, sees bullfighting as entirely and exclusively concerned with the bullfighter. The bullfight is not a series of alternating moments of opposition and cooperation, and finally a moment of communion but, rather, it is a series of alternating moments of danger and safety for the bullfighter. During the bullfight, specifically during the passing, man almost succumbs to the brute strength of the animal, but resists as each pass finishes smoothly. And, in the end, when the bull dies and the man lives, it is the ultimate enactment of the man's defeat of death. The bullfight is about man's surviving his interaction with his opponent, but there is no cooperation or communion that exists between them solely because their bodies come into close contact.

On Hemingway's account, the bullfight is about man's tempting and resisting death, more so than it is about man's overcoming animal – after all, the animal is not particularly interesting or significant to Hemingway.<sup>50</sup> In other words, for Hemingway, the bullfight is about the bullfighter resisting death, but not specifically about the bullfighter resisting the *animal*. Hemingway confirms this explicitly in *Death In The Afternoon*. He writes:

“The essence of the greatest emotional appeal of bullfighting is the feeling of immortality that the bullfighter feels in the middle of a great faena and that he gives to his spectators. He is performing a work of art<sup>51</sup> and he is playing with death, bringing it closer, closer, closer to himself, a death that you know is the horns because you have the canvas-covered bodies of the horses on the sand to prove it. He gives the feeling of his immortality, and, as you watch it, it becomes yours. Then when it belongs to both of you, he proves it with the sword” (Hemingway 2003, 213).

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<sup>50</sup> In fact, we might think that there is a sense in which, on Hemingway's picture, the bull might not need be a bull, or even an animal, for that matter. Technically, because animality holds no real importance in Hemingway's account, we might be able to replace the bull with a very large, very strong human who, after years of systematic abuse, for example, tends to behaves aggressively.

<sup>51</sup> I should note that, while *The Sun Also Rises* presents bullfighting as deeply aesthetic, *Death In The Afternoon* makes the much bolder case that bullfighting is actually an art form. Even now, defenders of bullfighting appeal to the argument that bullfighting is an art, insisting that the practice should therefore be protected despite animal welfare concerns. While I do not offer a rigorous critical analysis of Hemingway's argument that bullfighting is art, I will say this: If we are employing David Best's account of art and sport mentioned in Chapter 1, we can see that bullfighting is not an art. This is because bullfighting violates the imagined object portion of Best's picture: the bull actually dies – he does not just die in the narrative – and the bullfighter, if he endures injuries, endures them in reality and not in imagination. Though this precludes bullfighting from artistic status, it is interesting to note that bullfighting might actually fulfill Best's second requirement for art: that, unlike sport, it has a subject. Hemingway and I do not agree on what this subject is (he takes it to be humanity's tempting of and avoiding death, while I take it to be humanity in contest with animality), but we share the view that bullfighting is distinct from other sports in part because it has a subject. In my view, all animal sports have a subject related to humanity and animality; it is not clear whether Hemingway would agree that animal sports other than bullfighting have subjects as well.

Here, Hemingway defines in no uncertain terms what he takes to be the greatest appeal – the most distinctive aesthetic offering – of the bullfight. In a bullfight, according to Hemingway, a bullfighter plays with death (symbolized by the bull), bringing it closer and closer to himself. Though the narrative of the bullfight is designed to virtually ensure that the bull will ultimately die – as it is structured in such a way that the outcome is set – the danger for the bullfighter throughout the fight is real. In tempting this real danger – this possibility of death – the bullfighter “gives the feeling of his immortality.” And because the spectators are identifying with the bullfighter, rather than with the bull, they project themselves onto the place of the bullfighter, and this feeling of immortality becomes theirs as well. For Hemingway, the bullfighter is immortal, while the bull is simply a symbol for death – which, in retrospect, is not at all surprising, as Hemingway’s interest in animals is all about death. The bull, a symbol of death – utterly lacking in vitality – is not regarded as a living being, but a metaphor, existing only to allow man to experience the ecstasy of feeling immortal.

For Hemingway, the bullfight’s ability to bring about such an intense emotional response in both its participants and its spectators is what elevates it above other sports – even other sports involving the deaths of animals. And the reason for this is that it has as its subject the bullfighter’s disregard for his own death. The subject of Hemingway’s bullfight centers exclusively around the bullfighter and his increasing disregard for death and ultimate invincibility; it is all about the human combatant – his vitality and his relationship to death – and has nothing to do with his relationship to the animal, or the animal’s vitality, for that matter. So while he does not explicitly liken bullfighting to boxing as Gumbrecht does, his picture nevertheless suffers from a similar analytical



neglect of the animal. His account, uninterested in or unwilling to speak to the special considerations introduced by the animal life presence, misses the real reason why bullfighting is so aesthetically distinctive: that it, literally, stages a contest between human life and animal life where animal life is fated to lose.

In his essay “The Bullfight as Mirror,” Michel Leiris shares my intuition that the bullfight is about much more than the bullfighter’s disregard for danger. Leiris writes: If “the attraction of the *corrida* lay entirely in the fact that men...are seen bringing off perilous maneuvers in strict conformity to exact rules, it is hard to see why it should stir up feelings in us deeper than those awakened by any other dangerous sport requiring skill, such as acrobatic feats or a car hurtling fearfully along the concrete rigidity of a racetrack” but “every *corrida* is serious in a way no other death-defying feat of daring can equal” (Leiris, 23). Leiris suggests that, to characterize the bullfight solely in relation to danger is to miss out on what makes the bullfight somehow more serious than, and distinct from, other “death-defying feat[s].” Notice that none of the activities mentioned here involve animals; perhaps the implication here, though Leiris does not explicitly state it, is that the presence of an animal is what lends bullfighting its “serious,” profound quality.

The fact that there is an animal present in the bullfight, and that the bullfighter defies death in the face of an animal adversary, is what lends bullfighting its distinctive character – as it creates an opportunity for humanity to assert itself over animality. It does this first by claiming to manufacture a “perfect” or equal opposition between man and bull by structuring a narrative in which man and bull are supposedly fairly matched. The bull, physically much stronger than the man, is bred to instinctually attack when

provoked – and this arms the man with the weapon of provocation. Whenever the man provokes the bull, inviting him to charge, the bull is constituted in such a way – due to his breeding – that he will usually fulfill the request. In this way, he is in a sense at the mercy of the man – just as the man is at his mercy by virtue of being smaller and weaker. The result is the appearance of an equal fight – man and animal face each other as equally matched duelers. And because of this “equal matching,” the bullfight claims to place into fair contest man and animal.

The implication is that, if man wins – or *when* man wins – he has won fairly. But, as we have seen, the bullfight stages an interplay between man and animal that is designed so that the man will always win. From the outset, then, the bullfight is always a fantasy about human strength and triumph in the face of animality. Leiris supports this when he asks that we consider the way bullfighters are conceived of. He writes: “the torero, with his calculated movements, his skill, his technique, ultimately represents a superhuman, geometric beauty; he is the archetype, the Platonic idea” (Leiris, 27). The bullfighter, a “superhuman,” represents the most ideal example of humanity – he fulfills a fantasy for humanity by embodying what a human should ideally be. The suggestion here is that the bullfight is about humanity’s fantasy of itself – and the arc of the bullfight is designed to validate that fantasy.

Therefore, the “communion” Hemingway claims to see is actually the moment when the bullfighter decisively affirms humanity over animality. Leiris writes that, in the end, “the bull, the animal victim, will be substituted for the man one thought would surely die...the man’s life still intact and death, after hovering for some time over the torero, having befallen the bull” (Leiris, 29). The bullfighter, for whom death seemed

reserved during the passes with the physically much stronger bull, kills the bull, and “order is reinstated” (Leiris, 35). The bullfight is the staging of a fantasy not simply of human immortality, but also of the triumph of human identity over animal identity.

We might think that, while there is no genuine communion present in bullfighting, there is a distinctive *tangential contact* between human and animal identities. Leiris writes that the pass “present[s] itself as a kind of tangency or convergence immediately followed by a divergence (the bull nears the torero, then man and beast are separated)” and that “everything about the whole operation [of the bullfight] conspires to suggest this tangency, but everything remains, finally, a touch shy of it” (Leiris, 27, 28). Here Leiris seems to have in mind a concept similar to what I named the Aesthetics of Proximity earlier in the chapter. The bull approaches the man and almost asserts his power over him, but each time, no contact is actually made. The bullfight is staged in such a way that the man is almost claimed by the bull over and over – but then, finally, the man claims the bull in the end. Hemingway would likely agree that there is a distinctive Aesthetics of Proximity at work in a bullfight. But because he reads the bull as a symbol of death – and the tangential contact made as one between man and death – his understanding of the Aesthetics of Proximity misses the centrality of the animal here; he misses the fact that the tangential contact is between human and animal agents, between human and animal identities. Perhaps a more appropriate name for this phenomenon is the “approaching of agencies.” The idea is that the design of the bullfight, with its distinctive approaching of agencies present, creates a situation in which humanity is almost lost to animality, but ultimately, the contact is only tangential, and humanity is safe from being overtaken. In the “danger zone,” the bullfighter comes close to “being an animal” due to proximity, but

then ultimately restores himself as human. The bullfighter is again and again almost overtaken and enveloped into the bull's animality, but evades this fate over and over, and, in the end, reaffirms in conquest himself as human when the final "figure of oneness" is broken. This tangential contact is unique to the bullfight; it creates a narrative that places human identity and animal identity in opposition, creating the opportunity for humanity to affirm itself in the face of animality, while simultaneously allowing humanity to maintain its autonomy. In the bullfight, humanity is ultimately presented as separate from, and invincible to, animality.

In his book *Bullfight*, Garry Marvin supports my view. In his chapter "On Being Human," he offers an anthropological reading of bullfighting that is sensitive to the importance of the interplay between human and animal identities. According to Marvin, the bullfight stages a confrontation between man and bull that is designed to assert specific traits that are thought to be unique to humans: intelligence, reason, and active agency. According to Marvin, the bullfight "is not a confrontation of force by force...the bull is obviously more powerful than the man. It is a confrontation of force by intelligence. The man employs his intelligence and his ability to control himself, to plan ahead, to react with logic rather than instinct, or more precisely with a logic which has become instinct, to deceive the bull and by the successful use of deceit to survive" (Marvin, 137). The bullfight provides an opportunity for man to assert his superiority, and his humanness, by using the uniquely "human" trait of rationality to outsmart the much stronger bull. The man must show himself to be "an active agent...capable of control" (Marvin, 141). Displays of agency, control, intelligence and rationality – all traditionally thought to be the unique attributes that distinguish us from animals – allow

the bullfighter to deny any trace of animality in his nature, and, at the same time, actively affirm his humanness.

Animality, then, is the quality that the bullfighter seeks to transcend with his performance. In fact, in addition to aiming to transcend animality by exercising rational control over the bull, there is a sense in which the bull's animality is systematically removed over the course of the bullfight. Marvin writes: "there is a change in the nature of the bull as it passes through the various acts of the event" – he is somehow "without wildness...no longer a true bull" (Marvin, 138-9, quoting Gines Serran Pagan 1979). The bull, over the course of the fight, undergoes the "process of taming,"<sup>52</sup> his animality diluted by the fact that a human is able to exercise control over him (Marvin, 139). Through this process of taming, the bullfighter chips away at the bull's animality, and affirms the superiority of humanity over animality, and of culture over nature.

In fact, the bullfight as a whole, not just the act of taming the bull, can be said to represent "a subordination and culturalization of nature" (Marvin, 130). As opposed to hunting, which involves killing a wild animal in its own *natural* habitat, the bullfight is a contrived invasion of human space by an aggressive wild animal. The activity "brings together, in the centre of human habitation, an uncontrolled wild bull, an item from the realm of nature, and a man who represents the epitome of culture in that, more than any ordinary man, he is able to exercise control over his 'natural' fear... an essential

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<sup>52</sup> The phrase used here, "process of taming," is taken from this quotation from Marvin's book, which, interestingly, locates the bullfight in the larger category of animal performance by comparing it to the circus: The [bullfight] is about the taming of a wild animal in the sense of bringing it under control. Once this state has been achieved the animal is killed; there is no second level of training and the animal certainly does not perform tricks. The audience at a *corrida* sees what the audience at a circus does not see; they see the *process* of taming" (Marvin, 139).

prerequisite if he is to control the wild animal” (Marvin, 131). By plucking an animal from the wild and placing him in a formal performative space, the bullfight, by definition, culturizes nature.<sup>53</sup> Marvin asserts that the bullfight “can be interpreted as a resolution of the culturally created anomalous situation of a wild animal in the centre of a city threatening humans and attempting to dominate an urban space. The starting point of the event is chaos and danger, and it is for the man to impose order progressively. By organizing the activity in the arena, by establishing regularity and patterns where there had been chaos, and by controlling the bull, the man publicly demonstrates his separation from and his domination of nature, and thus asserts his humanness” (Marvin, 136). The bullfight, which encircles and encloses the bull in a cultural space, is designed so that the wild bull, over the course of the fight, appears to be tamed and “civilized” by the bullfighter. In actuality, this “taming” takes place in large part because the bull’s power is limited by constraints – as we have seen, the deck is stacked against him.

But does this appearance of taming or “civilizing” the bull only affirm the bull’s inescapable animality through subjugation, or does it at the same time paradoxically lend the bull some degree of humanity? In other words, we might think that there is a sense in which the bullfighter, as he tames the bull, culturizes his wildness to the point of transfiguring him into being somehow more human-like. After all, in his tameness, the bull appears to perform alongside the bullfighter like a conscious partner. If this is the case, then the final blow exacted is not only an affirmation of humanity, but also a refusal to let live an animal that is “civilized” to the point of exhibiting “human” qualities. Bullfighting is a dramatic expression of the human/animal relationship, revealing the

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<sup>53</sup> This calls to mind Adorno’s discussion of culturizing nature. See Adorno 1975.

degree to which humans feel their identity threatened in the face of animality -- particularly in the face of animals claiming supposedly human traits as their own.

Regardless of where we might fall in analyzing the intricacies of bullfighting, and characterizing the exact nature of the animal/human interplay expressed, one thing is clear: Once we take the animal presence seriously, it is virtually impossible to overstate the degree to which animality is at the heart of the essence of bullfighting, and the degree to which it must be at the forefront of any successful account of the aesthetic character of bullfighting. Hemingway's entire project -- to distinguish bullfighting from other sports, and to explain why it presents such a rich opportunity for aesthetics -- shares with mine the aim of drawing a philosophical distinction between animal sports and non-animal sports. But, because Hemingway does not extend a sense of agency to animals, and denies animals life, he fundamentally misunderstands bullfighting. Had Hemingway taken the animal seriously, his aesthetic characterization -- and his ethical feelings about the activity -- would look very different.

A close reading of Hemingway's treatment of animals in *The Sun Also Rises* betrays Hemingway's overall goal of presenting the bullfight as beautiful. Hemingway's treatment of animals -- his obsession with dead animals, his objectification of animal bodies, and his lack of descriptive attention to live animals -- denies animals agency, and thereby, denies animals their lives. For Hemingway, living animals possess no aesthetic properties that dead animals do not. On my reading, in Hemingway's novel, animals -- even living ones -- are always treated as though already dead. By reading his bullfight with all this in mind, we see the bullfight in a very different way than Hemingway does. It becomes clear that, when we stage animals' deaths in sports, we are not saying anything profound about their lives, but only emphasizing the fact that to us, they were always already dead. Bullfighting is not a meditation on animal life, or even on animal death (as the bull was already dead to begin with); instead, its very structure is designed to emphasize the idea that animals are not agents, are not even living -- that they are dead to us. Though Hemingway's novel seeks to present the beauty of the bullfight -- it serves precisely the opposite purpose.

CHAPTER FOUR:  
Combination Paradigm: Steeplechase in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*

In the two preceding chapters, we have explored cockfighting and bullfighting through readings of West's *The Day of the Locust* and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*,



respectively. Through these readings, I have aimed to show that, when we are willing to extend agency to animals, it becomes clear that sports involving these animals have unique aesthetic properties that must be accounted for in any complete philosophy of sports. When we view animals as tools or equipment – as devoid of any agential capacities, and even as devoid of sentience – we are unable to appreciate the degree to which animal sports are aesthetically different from non-animal sports. Our third paradigm -- *combination* sports, in which human and animal compete together “as a team” – receives exemplary literary treatment in the well-known steeplechase<sup>54</sup> scene from Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*.

Hemingway, as we have seen, missed the degree to which aesthetic features related to an animal’s agential capacities – wild autonomy, expressiveness – require that we expand our concept of the aesthetic from the strictly formal to one that engages animals as bearers of ethical interest. Tolstoy’s portrait of steeplechase, on the other hand, is deeply sensitive to the idea that animals in sports are bearers of aesthetic and ethical interest. As a result, from his account of steeplechase emerges the distinctive hallmark of equestrian activity – joint agency – the identification of which requires that we attribute certain agential capacities to horses. Unlike in the cases of cockfighting and bullfighting where proxy-agency and approaching of agencies, respectively, can be said to be sources of aesthetic power, but not of genuine beauty, instances of harmonized horseback riding that result in moments of joint agency are a source of beauty, and one that is unique to animal sports. To identify joint agency, a spectator must be extending

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<sup>54</sup> Steeplechase derives its name from early races in which orientation of the course was by reference to a church steeple.

agency to the animal involved in some sense. Similarly, to identify proxy-agency or approaching of agencies, the same must be true. But the difference is that, in cockfighting and bullfighting, these distinctive features are only made possible by the animal participant's suffering. If we are to take seriously the human/nonhuman-animal ethical continuum discussed at length throughout this dissertation, we cannot identify beauty in animal suffering. A strictly formal aesthetic cannot apply to bearers of ethical interest as it can to pieces of inanimate equipment.

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Steeplechase is a form of horse racing in which horse/rider pairs race across the countryside, traversing obstacles such as high solid fences and ditches. It is generally considered the most dangerous form of equestrian sport, as it combines extreme speed, uneven terrain, solid and imposing obstacles, and a racing element that places horses in close proximity to one another. The steeplechase scene in *Anna Karenina* stands out to many readers as one of the novel's most memorable; indeed, many remember the scene well, even many years later, and recall being deeply emotionally affected by it.<sup>55</sup> In this scene, Anna's lover Vronsky competes on horseback against other soldiers in his regiment in front of a large crowd of spectators, which includes both Anna and her husband Karenin. The scene is detailed, vivid, fast-paced, and intense, filled with

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<sup>55</sup> It seems clear that Tolstoy means for this to be a highly memorable moment in the novel, as he places prominent emphasis on the event through the way he structures the narrative. Tolstoy creates a great deal of suspense for the race, detailing the events of Vronsky's day leading up to the race; he spans ten chapters following Vronsky through his day. In addition, he offers a double description of the actual events of the steeplechase: one chapter describes the event from Vronsky's point of view, and a second chapter describes the event from the point of view of the spectators. This double description presents the reader with the same event twice, thereby placing a double emphasis on it.

powerful, visual description and perspectival changes that serve as changing camera angles might in an action film. Tolstoy fills in every inch of the picture for us: the scenery and landscape, the competitors, their horses, and the audience members all receive dedicated descriptive attention. The result is a literary meditation on the steeplechase – from its aesthetic properties, to its ethical character, to an explicit presentation of participation and spectatorship as differing modes of engagement.

We might find it interesting and profoundly ahead of its time that Tolstoy's scene takes up the perspective of the horses – Vronsky's horse Frou-Frou in particular. We as readers get to know her; Tolstoy's descriptive attention to her appearance, particularly to the expressive qualities of her movement and eyes, attaches us to her aesthetically in a bond that goes beyond considering her formally beautiful. Furthermore, because Tolstoy takes care to offer us a portrait of Frou-Frou that presents her as a unique individual with personality and particular agential capacities, we are granted access to her inner life, and become bonded to her emotionally. It is because we are bonded to Frou-Frou that the scene is so emotionally intense as it unfolds. When Vronsky and Frou-Frou are nearing the finish with the lead, Frou-Frou completely exhausted, Vronsky pushes her to tap into her reserve of strength for the remaining five hundred yards of the race. Tolstoy writes:

“It was only by feeling himself nearer to the ground and by the smoothness of the pace that Vronsky knew how much the mare had increased her speed. She leapt the ditch as if she did not notice it, seeming to fly across it like a bird. But at that very moment Vronsky, to his horror, felt that something terrible had happened. He himself, without knowing it, had made the unpardonable mistake of dropping back in the saddle and pulling up on her head. . . Vronsky was touching the ground with one foot. He scarcely had time to free his leg before Frou-Frou fell on her side, and snorting heavily and with her delicate damp neck making vain efforts to ride, began struggling on the ground at his feet, like a wounded, fluttering bird. Owing to Vronsky's awkward movement she had dropped her hind legs and broken her back. But he only understood that much later. Now he

only saw that Makhotin was quickly galloping away, while he, reeling, stood alone on the muddy, stationary ground; before him, breathing heavily, lay Frou-Frou, who, bending her head toward him, gazed at him with her beautiful eyes. Still not understanding what had happened, Vronsky pulled at the reins. The mare again began to struggle like a fish, causing the flaps of the saddle to creak; she got her front legs free, but unable to lift her hind-quarters, struggled and immediately again fell on her side. His face distorted with passion, pale and with quivering jaw, Vronsky kicked her with his heel in the belly and again pulled at the reins. But she did not move and, nuzzling the ground, only looked at her master with eloquent eyes... The mare had broken her back, and it was decided to shoot her... the memory of that steeplechase long remained the most painful and distressing memory of [Vronsky's] life." (Tolstoy 1995, 182-3).

The scene is nothing short of traumatic. What begins as an exciting and suspenseful sporting event ends with Frou-Frou's violent and horrifying death, the memory of which remains the most painful of Vronsky's life. The scene is one of the most painful and striking of the novel for many readers. The violent nature of Frou-Frou's death – her fall, her broken back, her ultimate death by shooting – combined with the fact that her injury and death are caused by a mistake of her rider, make for a brutal, loaded, scene that retains its emotional power no matter how many times one reads it. Dealing in issues of human use of animals and animal death caused by human error, while simultaneously lending animal life and animal death a sense of profundity that they do not often receive, Tolstoy's scene is emotionally extremely powerful.

In this chapter, I intend to show that, because Tolstoy himself takes animals seriously, and extends a genuine sense of agency to animals, he is in a position to present animal sports accurately, as complex activities with unique aesthetic features that are a direct function of an animal life presence. Tolstoy's presentation of steeplechase extends agency to animals, and then, operating from within a framework in which animals are sentient individuals with agential properties and inner lives, shows us what makes

steeplechase aesthetically unique. Furthermore, Tolstoy's picture reveals how taking animals seriously as agents changes what it means to experience them as aesthetic objects. Extending agency to animals requires that we engage with the whole world of animality when we look at animals. Tolstoy illustrates, by virtue of the emotional reaction he inspires in his readers, that spectatorship automatically becomes a mode of moral participation. Looking at animals in sports is nothing like looking at equipment in sports. To look at animals is to automatically engage with animality: to try to understand what animals are, what it means to engage in interspecies relationships, and what we owe to animals.

It is important to note that, separate from Frou-Frou's heart-wrenching death, Tolstoy's steeplechase scene also represents an important, and brutal, moment in the overall narrative structure of the novel: it is the moment in the story when Karenin realizes that Anna is having an affair with Vronsky -- Karenin can tell from the nature of Anna's reaction to Vronsky's fall that she is in love with him. The steeplechase, then, is the site of two very different traumas: Frou-Frou's death, and the start of the dissolution of Anna and Karenin's marriage.

In addition to the parallel "deaths" of Frou-Frou and Karenin and Anna's marriage, Tolstoy creates a very strong, and perhaps even more readily apparent, parallel between Anna and Frou-Frou. Both Anna and Frou-Frou are extremely beautiful and fascinating to Vronsky, and each receives a long and detailed physical description upon first sight. The descriptions of both are similar: each is described as having a quality of spirit that erases her physical flaws. They are both presented as objects of enormous intrigue for Vronsky, and both are initially very nervous in his presence. In addition, and

perhaps most notably, each is also in some sense Vronsky's victim: Frou-Frou is most often read as a stand-in for Anna, who, by the novel's end, will also be recklessly worn down and used up by Vronsky. The steeplechase scene is therefore generally read as a foreshadowing of Anna's eventual death.

Tolstoy's steeplechase, then, is almost always understood symbolically, with Frou-Frou as a representation of Anna. However, Ursula Brumm (as quoted by Josephine Donovan in her 2009 essay "Tolstoy's Animals") suggests that, though "one might wish to interpret [Frou-Frou's death] symbolically, for the treatment of the horse prefigures in certain respects Vronsky's treatment of Anna... a symbolic interpretation is not necessary, nor is it clear that Tolstoy intended it" (Donovan, Note 3, p. 50). According to Brumm, "Unlike Henry James's golden bowl, which 'exists in the novel solely for the sake of its symbolic character... Tolstoy's symbol is a possible interpretation of a subordinate event which the reader can also take at its face value'; that is, the tragedy of the death of a mare" (Donovan, Note 3, p. 50). Though we *can* interpret the tragedy at the steeplechase figuratively, there is no reason to think that it *must* be understood in only this way.

But by suggesting that we read the steeplechase scene literally, I do not mean to oversimplify. What I am suggesting is that there is value in reading Frou-Frou's death as the tragic death of a horse, as opposed to a symbol that is included for the sole purpose of foreshadowing the eventual death of the novel's protagonist. By taking Frou-Frou seriously as an individual rather than understanding her only as a symbol of Anna, we adopt an animal-standpoint reading of the novel, putting ourselves in a position to unpack the concept of animality in *Anna Karenina*, and, more specifically, the concept of animality as it figures into an aesthetic account of steeplechase. By shifting the reading

from “symbolic” to “literal,” we can actually derive a great deal of complex meaning from the scene as it speaks to the animal in sports.

There is strong evidence to suggest that we, as readers, ought to give equal -- if not more -- weight to the literal animal-standpoint reading of this scene as we do to the symbolic interpretation. In the first place, Donovan points out that the depiction of Frou-Frou is a “rare instance” in Tolstoy’s work where a symbolic reading is appropriate (Donovan, Note 3, p. 50). Second, Tolstoy strongly features animals in many of his works -- “Esarhaddon, King of Assyria,” “Snow Storm,” “Three Deaths,” “Master and Man,” and “Strider: The Story of a Horse,” for example<sup>56</sup> – but does not have a pattern of using the animals he writes about as symbols for something other than themselves. He tends to take the animals he features seriously as characters – as individuals – as opposed to including them in order to be stand-ins for, or extensions of, human characters. His portrayal of animal characters seems to take animality seriously as a mode of life separate from, and in its way, as profound as, humanity. Third, and most important, Tolstoy was famously fascinated by, sensitive towards, and deeply emotionally connected to, animals. In his 1967 biography of Tolstoy, Henri Troyat shares a quote of Turgenev’s, reporting that he

“was amazed at Tolstoy’s...profound understanding of animals. There was more than a familiarity between them – something like an organic intimacy. He stood by a bony, mangy old nag, stroking its back and whispering gently into its ear, while the horse listened with evident interest. Then he translated the animal’s feelings to those around him. ‘I could have listened forever,’” Turgenev later said, ‘He had got inside the very soul of the poor beast and taken me with him. I could not refrain from remarking, ‘I say, Leo Nikolayevich, beyond any doubt, you must have been a horse once yourself’” (Donovan, 45-46).

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<sup>56</sup> For a detailed look into the role of animals in these works, see Donovan 2009.

Upon Tolstoy's conversion in the early 1880's to pacifist Christianity, which included vegetarianism, this interest in and affinity with animals grew into activism; he even wrote the preface for the Russian edition of Howard Williams' treatise on vegetarianism, *The ethics of diet: A catena of authorities deprecatory of the practice of flesh-eating* (Donovan, 44). According to Donovan, "in this preface, Tolstoy describes his observations in [a] slaughterhouse, delineating in novelesque detail the deaths of several individual animals – possibly the most vivid and horrifying descriptions of animal slaughter ever written" (Donovan, 44).<sup>57</sup>

When we consider the strong animal presence in Tolstoy's fiction, his personal relationship to animals, and most importantly his ethical beliefs regarding cruelty to and the humane treatment of animals, the steeplechase scene in *Anna Karenina* demands a more careful look from a perspective that focuses on the animal, literally, rather than as a symbol for a human character. It seems reasonable, if not imperative, to take seriously the literal reading of Frou-Frou's death at the steeplechase; the scene can be read as a portrait of an individual horse, her relationship to her rider, and, of course, the sporting event that leads to her death. A non-symbolic reading of Frou-Frou's death presents us with a meditation on the horse, the nature of equine/human interaction, and what it means for humans to make use of horses in sports such as steeplechase.

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<sup>57</sup> Donovan provides an example of the text: "[A] large sleek ox was brought in... Two men were dragging him... [After being hit 'above his neck' with a 'pole-axe' it was] as if his four legs had been suddenly mown down from under him, the ox fell heavily on his belly to the floor... and began to move his legs and his back convulsively... [After his throat is cut]... from out of the gaping would the black-red blood came spurting... Then another butcher... broke the leg and cut it off. And the belly and the remaining three legs continued to quiver convulsively" (Donovan, 44).



In fact, Tolstoy explicitly takes up the question of the ethical nature of steeplechase through the voices of the spectators of the race. From the beginning of the scene, the steeplechase is presented as a high-risk activity. Tolstoy writes: “because it was dangerous, because necks might be broken...at each obstacle there was a doctor in attendance, an ambulance wagon with a red cross sewn on it, and a nurse” and Karenin asserts that “the danger in steeplechases is an unavoidable element of the racing” and (Tolstoy 1995, 178, 190). When many of the onlookers are “disturbed” by the outcome of the steeplechase – in addition to Frou-Frou’s death, “more than half of the seventeen officers were thrown and hurt,” a conversation ensues regarding whether the dangerous nature of the activity makes it immoral (Tolstoy 1995, 191). Tolstoy writes that, at the end of the race, “Every one was loudly expressing disapproval and repeating the words some one had uttered: ‘They will have gladiators and lions next’” (Tolstoy 1995, 191). Because of the number of injuries caused by the race – both human and equine – audience members liken the steeplechase to a Roman gladiatorial match, characterizing it as a morally reprehensible blood sport rather than a horse ride through the countryside. According to Karenin, however, his fellow spectators must “not forget that it is military men who are racing, men who have chosen that career” (Tolstoy 1995, 190). Unlike the majority of the competitors in Roman gladiatorial matches, who were slaves, the soldiers competing in steeplechase are participating by their own choice, and are aware of the dangers involved in racing. Karenin goes on to draw what he sees as an important distinction between steeplechase and blood sports: “Monstrous” sports such as “the Spanish bull-fights, are indications of barbarism, but specialized sport is a sign of progress” (Tolstoy 1995, 190). Karenin’s point is that, although there is great potential

for injury in steeplechases, because the goal of steeplechase is not a violent one – the point is to win the race, not to disable or kill your opponents – it is not a barbaric practice.

By including this conversation in his text, specifically the explicit comparison between steeplechase and bullfighting, Tolstoy gives us reason to read his scene, at least in part, as an ethical commentary on the nature of steeplechase in particular, and perhaps animal sports more generally. We should note that the steeplechase scene is not the only instance in his literary canon in which Tolstoy draws on animals in sports. In 1872, he wrote a story entitled “The Bear-Hunt”; he also included a bear-baiting<sup>58</sup> scene in *War and Peace* (Donovan, Note 3, p. 50). We can see Tolstoy’s steeplechase scene, then, as part of a wider effort to wrestle with large-scale ethical questions: Do humans treat animals in sports in a way that is morally justifiable? Is it categorically wrong to use animals as a means to an end, i.e. entertainment? In other words, does the fact that animals cannot voluntarily sign up to compete in a sporting event make using them unjustifiable? Karenin defends the practice of steeplechase by pointing out that the soldiers are willing participants, but what about the horses? But while the scene raises these questions, Tolstoy does not explicitly answer them in any hard-lined or dogmatic way; instead, he presents the reader with a meditation on the steeplechase that proves to be a rich and multi-layered portrait of the activity that is not limited to its ethical characterization.

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<sup>58</sup> Bear-baiting refers to the blood sport in which a bear – usually chained to a tether – is tormented by hunting dogs or, in some cases, by humans.

Tolstoy's steeplechase scene illuminates many complexities that animals bring to the sporting arena. His treatment of the race draws our attention to the fundamentally aesthetic nature of steeplechase. As do Nathanael West and Ernest Hemingway with cockfighting and bullfighting, respectively, Tolstoy presents his sport as a show or theatrical spectacle and, like them, offers a detailed description of the course or "arena" that stands empty before the competitors enter the scene. He writes:

"The steeplechase, in which seventeen officers in all had entered, was to take place on the large four-verst elliptical course in front of the pavilion. On that course there were nine obstacles: the brook; a barrier nearly five feet high just in front of the pavilion; a dry ditch; a water-jump; an incline; an Irish bank (one of the most difficult obstacles), consisting of a bank with brushwood on top, beyond which there was another ditch which the horses could not see, so that they had to clear both obstacles or come to grief; then two more water jumps, and another dry ditch. The winning post was opposite the pavilion. But the start was not in the ellipse, but about 250 yards to one side of it, and the first obstacle, the dammed-up brook seven feet wide, was there. The riders could either ford or jump it at their discretion" (Tolstoy 1995, 179).

Tolstoy's description of the setting for the event is extremely visual, even pictorial. He is careful to set the scene before the event itself begins, not unlike a description of a stage set before the start of the play. What follows this is a colorful, fast-paced, suspenseful, and dramatic description of the actual race. It is as though Tolstoy paints a landscape to begin, and then releases the figures onto it in a dynamic, cinematic fashion. Without doubt, there is a dramatic quality to the scene, beginning with the detailed stage-setting quoted above, and ending with Vronsky and Frou-Frou's tragic downfall.

But this pictorial description of the course is bookended by horses behaving in unforeseen ways, intruding on the theater of the steeplechase. Directly prior to his stage-like description of the field, Tolstoy describes Frou-Frou becoming excited and behaving unpredictably: Frou-Frou "broke into a canter, gave two leaps, and, angry at the tightened

rein, changed back into a jerky trot, jolting her rider” (Tolstoy 1995, 179). Frou-Frou is sensitive, not wholly predictable, reactive, and feeling; she experiences anger and reacts by jolting her rider. And directly following the description of the course, “three times the riders drew up in line, but each time someone’s horse made a false start and they had to line up again” (Tolstoy 1995, 179). The excited state of individual horses make for multiple false starts; the horses are given their own perspectives, and these perspectives are emphasized here when they interrupt the performative structure of the steeplechase. From the very beginning of the scene, Tolstoy highlights the steeplechase as an aesthetic activity, while also highlighting the perspectives of the horses.

Another way that Tolstoy explicitly draws the reader’s attention to the fact that the steeplechase (or any spectator sport) is an aesthetic spectacle not unlike a dramatic performance is by pointing out through the words of a member of the audience that “there are two sides to it, that of the performers and that of the spectators” (Tolstoy 1995, 190). Tolstoy characterizes the steeplechase as a performative endeavor, and asks that we consider both sides of that performance, i.e. the perspective of the athletes as well as that of the members of the crowd. This idea (referenced in Note 3 of this Chapter) is also reflected in his narrative structure. He offers a double description of the events of the steeplechase: one chapter describes the event from the point of view of the competitors, a second from the point of view of the audience.

In addition to explicitly pointing out the fact that there are two<sup>59</sup> perspectives to be considered here, Tolstoy draws our attention to the difference between these two

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<sup>59</sup> We might think that there are technically three perspectives to be considered here. There is also the second spectatorial perspective, that of the reader. As readers, we are, in one sense, more removed from the action than is the actual crowd present at the

perspectives throughout the scene. The crowd, on one hand, enjoys a panoramic view of the action. Tolstoy writes that “All eyes and all glasses were turned on the bright group of riders while they were getting into line” and “At that moment the race began and all conversation ceased...everybody rose and turned their eyes toward the stream” (Tolstoy 1995, 179, 191). In addition, Tolstoy emphasizes the degree to which the rider feels the gaze of the crowd. He describes Vronsky first as “feeling that he and the other riders were the centre toward which all eyes were turned” and then, two pages later, reiterates that he “felt eyes directed toward him from all sides” (Tolstoy 1995, 178, 180). The crowd is referred to repeatedly (in all four of the quotations listed above, in fact) with reference to its members’ eyes, emphasizing its role as voyeur, as visual participant bearing witness to the race.

The competitors, while they are keenly aware of the spectators’ scrutiny, also naturally have a different view of the action. Before the race begins, Tolstoy writes, “Vronsky glanced round at his rivals for the last time. He knew that he would not see them during the race,” and indeed, during the race, Vronsky “saw nothing except the ears and neck of his mare, the ground racing toward him, and Gladiator’s<sup>60</sup> hind-quarters and

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steeplechase; after all, we do not have direct visual access to the event being described to us. In another sense, however, we have a far more privileged spectatorial view, as we are granted novelistic description of all that is occurring, particularly an account of the race from the point of view of the competitors. In addition, as has been mentioned, we as readers are ourselves spectators, but also have the opportunity to study the spectatorship of the fictional audience.

<sup>60</sup> It is important and interesting to consider the names that Tolstoy gives his equine characters: Gladiator and Frou-Frou. These names are not chosen by the horses, and are not particularly reflective of their personalities. Frou-Frou is an athletic, brave, substantive, deeply profound and poignant character in the novel – there is nothing hyper-feminine, frivolous, or silly about her. Gladiator is a good horse and competitor – but the “gladiatorial” attitude really belongs to his rider. The implication seems to be that horses’

while legs rapidly striding before him” (Tolstoy 1995, 178, 180). Vronsky’s visual experience of the event is limited; while he is in the action, he sees less of it. He does not have access to the full, panoramic view that the audience enjoys, and thereby has a very different aesthetic experience of the race. In fact, he is not even aware of the circumstances of the most dramatic turns that occur around him. The fall of a fellow rider, the “particulars [of which] Vronsky learned later,” are experienced by him during the race only as a potential complication for his own ride: “now he only saw that [another horse’s] head or legs might come just where Frou-Frou had to alight” (Tolstoy 1995, 180). Similarly, he is described as “only underst[anding] much later” the circumstances of his own fall (Tolstoy 1995, 182). At the same time, being inside the race in some ways allows for heightened awareness. While the spectators are unable to see small discrepancies in speed from the stands, the riders within the race are fully aware of them. Tolstoy writes, “It had looked to the public as if they had all started together, but the riders were aware of a difference of seconds which to them were of great importance” (Tolstoy 1995, 179). It is as though, for the competitors, time moves a little more slowly than for the audience. It seems clear, then, that a rider’s aesthetic experience of the race is significantly different from an audience member’s experience. Just as an actor is focused on his lines and scenes, unable to digest the full arc of the play, so Vronsky, in generating the action, relates to it in a more intimate, but less complete way. Here Tolstoy captures

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names have nothing to do with the horses themselves. They are stamped on by human projections of over-simplified human characteristics. The mare is called Frou-Frou, the stallion, Gladiator. A fellow person would never be named Gladiator or Frou-Frou; the names are a reflection of a perhaps subconscious human effort to distance ourselves from animals. We often refuse to give them “human” names, but instead give them names like these – nouns or adjectives that *describe something* rather than actually *name someone*.

an interesting element of the perspective of a competitor in sports. It is a strange case in that, in order to be a successful competitor, one must have extreme focus, while at the same time be able to keep track of the wider action. In other words, one must have blinders on and focus on his performance, but simultaneously has to be aware of his role and how it fits into the whole, as his contribution to the whole determines the overall performance for the crowd of spectators. This kind of double, somewhat paradoxical, perspective – blinders plus panorama – is not demanded of an actor in a play, because a play is a directed activity. In a play, there is a no need to navigate one's role in the whole – it is orchestrated.<sup>61</sup>

Tolstoy's narrative technique of double description, his depiction of the formal staging of the event, along with the pictorial presentation of the arena and the dramatic/cinematic depiction of the race, and his careful and repeated distinction between the competitor's perspective and the crowd's perspective, all contribute to a conception of the steeplechase as aesthetic activity. Tolstoy seems to be drawing an analogy between sports and dramatic performance, suggesting that there is valuable information to be gleaned from both the performative and spectatorial perspectives. By drawing his reader's attention to the performative nature of steeplechase. He implicitly presents the field as stage, the race as dramatic narrative, and the competing horse and rider pairs as performers.

Tolstoy is interested in emphasizing all the perspectives present here – the rider's, the spectator's, and the reader's. He highlights the perspectival nature of the race, and uses the multiple perspectives to illuminate multiple aspects of interaction. This explicit

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<sup>61</sup> Here I am speaking about traditional plays, not improvisational theater.

attention paid to different perspectives is particularly interesting when we notice that Tolstoy is primarily focused on a perspective that is likely peripheral to many of the spectators of the race, fictional as well as readers of the novel – the equine perspective. Tolstoy is concerned with the one perspective in the race that is usually peripheral – the animal’s perspective – which is extinguished upon the death of Frou-Frou. While everyone else in the scene, spectators and riders together, are concerned with competition and performance, Tolstoy asks the reader to look hard at Frou-Frou.

When we first meet Frou-Frou, Tolstoy provides us with a perceptive and highly visual meditation on Frou-Frou’s appearance and the intangible qualities that follow from it. Tolstoy writes:

“Frou-Frou was of medium size and by no means free from blemish. She was slenderly built. Her chest, though well arched, was narrow. Her hind quarters tapered rather too much, and her legs, especially her hind legs, were perceptibly bowed inwards. Neither fore nor hind legs were particularly muscular, but on the other hand she was extremely broad in the girth, now that she was lean from her strict training. Seen from the front, her canon bones were very fine and sharp, but unusually wide seen sideways. She appeared all the more narrow in build because so deep in the breadth. But she possessed in the highest degree a characteristic which made one forget all her defects. That was her thoroughbred quality - the kind of blood that *tells*, as they say in English. The muscles, clearly marked beneath the network of sinews, stretched in the fine, mobile skin, which was smooth as satin, seemed hard as bone. Her lean head with the prominent, bright, sparkling eyes, broadened out to her muzzle with its wide crimson nostrils. Her whole appearance, more especially about the head, was spirited yet gentle” (Tolstoy 1995, 165-6).

Tolstoy’s description of Frou-Frou is exact enough that a talented artist would have no trouble working up a convincing sketch of the horse using just this paragraph. Indeed, his fixation on the mare’s appearance is so focused that he could just as easily be describing a painting of a horse. In this sense, we might identify Tolstoy as using the rhetorical device of ekphrasis here. Ekphrasis is employed when one medium of art describes a



work of art in another medium: a painting of a sculpture, for example. The idea is that one work of art describes another work of art in its own terms; a painting of a sculpture provides a depiction of a sculpture in painting's terms. Tolstoy's description of Frou-Frou is ekphrastic, then, because it is written in such a way that it is as though Tolstoy is using literature to depict a painting, or rather, to present a painting in literary terms.

This is not the only instance in his work where Tolstoy makes use of an ekphrastic description of a horse. In his 1864 short story "Strider: The Story of a Horse," Tolstoy provides an ekphrastic description of a horse's physicality, similar to his description of Frou-Frou. He writes:

"The big bony head, with deep hollows over the eyes and a black hanging lip that had been torn at some time, hung low and heavily on his neck, which was so lean that it looked as though it were carved of wood. The pendant lip revealed a blackish, bitten tongue and yellow stumps of worn teeth. The ears, one of which was slit, hung low on either side, and only occasionally moved largely to drive away the pestering flies... The veins of his neck had grown knotty, and twitched and shuddered at every touch of a fly. The expression of his face was one of stern patience, thoughtfulness, and suffering... Yet in spite of the hideous old age of this horse one involuntarily paused to reflect when one saw him... Like a living ruin he stood alone in the midst of the dewy meadow" (Tolstoy 2009, Chapter 2).

Here, as in *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy's ekphrastic meditation on Strider is expressive of a fascination with the appearance of a horse. In both cases, Tolstoy presents the body of the horse as a visually fascinating object, and through the use of ekphrasis, elevates equine beauty. For Tolstoy, horses are objects of aesthetic intrigue in their own right, whether or not they are engaged in the "performative" practice of a sport like steeplechase. Indeed, Tolstoy explicitly refers to "the beautiful fascinating shape of the mare" and describes Vronsky as "tearing himself with difficulty from this sight" to go visit Anna (Tolstoy 1995, 176). Tolstoy also describes the "large, beautiful, perfectly regular shape of

[Gladiator], with his wonderful hind-quarters and his exceptionally short pasterns just above his hoofs” as “involuntarily arrest[ing] Vronsky’s attention” (Tolstoy 1995, 177).

By characterizing Tolstoy’s descriptions of Frou-Frou as ekphrastic, I do not mean to suggest that Tolstoy is identifying equine beauty as strictly formal. Though Frou-Frou takes the place of art object in Tolstoy’s ekphrastic construction, this is not to say that Tolstoy understands her only as an art object. More likely, Tolstoy aims to present equine beauty as profound – and employs this ekphrastic construction to lend the horse an artistic status. In other words, his ekphrastic presentation of Frou-Frou is not objectifying her; it is an effort to raise her beauty to the status of art. For Tolstoy, the image of a horse – even Strider, who is not traditionally beautiful – is aesthetically profound, and, as with any great work of art, can move us more the longer we look. What is more, Tolstoy’s description of Frou-Frou in particular evokes a sense of dynamism that results in anything but objectification. His description is tactile, inviting an interaction with her – we want to touch her muzzle, pet her. In addition, Frou-Frou is endowed with a readiness to move, and seems that she would be beautiful to watch move. There is a sense in which Tolstoy, by presenting her as touchable, dynamic, and nearly buzzing with a desire to move, brings Frou-Frou to life through his ekphrastic description of her. We might think that there is even a sense in which he brings Frou-Frou back to life<sup>62</sup> in this passage; as readers, we can find solace in her death by re-reading this passage, in which she strikes us as so alive that she might gallop right off the page.

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<sup>62</sup> In her 2010 paper “How to Do More with Words. Two Views of (Musical) Ekphrasis,” Lydia Goehr presents ekphrasis as “evocative description” which can “bring something to life or back from the past.” This definition of ekphrasis is the one I employ here (Goehr 2010, 394).

This idea of the horse as source of aesthetic intrigue is further emphasized by Tolstoy's constant comparison of Frou-Frou to other kinds of animals. In the space of only five pages, Frou-Frou is likened to a bat, a bird, a cat, and a fish. When Vronsky visits her in her stall, Tolstoy refers to her "dilated nostrils, delicate as a bat's wing" (Tolstoy 1995, 166). Before the start of the race, he describes Frou-Frou, along with the rest of the horses in the steeplechase, as "look[ing] like strange gigantic birds" in their "hooded coverings and with their tightly-girthed stomachs" (Tolstoy 1995, 177). During the race, the mare is again likened first to a winged creature -- "lightly as if on wings Frou-Frou rose up behind [her competitors]" and then "leapt the ditch as if she did not notice it, seeming to fly across it like a bird" -- and then to "a falling cat, [making] an effort with her legs and back while in the air" (Tolstoy 1995, 180, 182, 180). Finally, Frou-Frou is compared both to a bird and a fish in the description of her ultimately fatal fall. Recall from above that Tolstoy writes: "Frou-Frou fell on her side, and snorting heavily and with her delicate damp neck making vain efforts to rise, began struggling on the ground at his feet, like a wounded, fluttering bird" (Tolstoy 1995, 182). And shortly thereafter: "The mare again began to struggle like a fish, causing the flaps of the saddle to creak; she got her front legs free, but unable to lift her hind-quarters, struggled and immediately again fell on her side" (Tolstoy 1995, 182). Culminating in this description of Frou-Frou at her moment of death, the already "beautiful fascinating shape of the mare" is made more fascinating, and more exotic, by its comparison to several other species over the course of the steeplechase scene. The result is a reminder – lest we made the mistake of over-identifying Frou-Frou with Anna – of the animality of the horse, as well as a systematic defamiliarization of it. By this I mean to say that, Tolstoy, by

likening the horse to so many other creatures, makes us see the horse in an unfamiliar way.

But there is also an important sense in which the similes used to compare the horse to other animals serve a deeper purpose than simply to emphasize Frou-Frou's animality. In the first place, by virtue of comparing Frou-Frou to many different animals, Tolstoy emphasizes different dimensions of Frou-Frou, presenting her as a complex individualized being. At the same time, Frou-Frou is defamiliarized to stand for all animals; Tolstoy's comparison of Frou-Frou to many other creatures encourages us to think about the deep sameness of all life. He shows us that, particularly when life is struggling, all life looks the same. It is of course not the essence of a horse to move like a fish or a bird; but the fact that these similes are intelligible, and furthermore that they are emotionally powerful, speaks to the profundity of what Tolstoy channels with these comparative descriptions. Through these similes, Tolstoy taps into what it means to be a living, sentient, acting being with motor and sensory capacities; in other words, he taps into the nature of what it means to be an embodied being.<sup>63</sup>

Tolstoy's likening of the equine body to other animal bodies,<sup>64</sup> in combination with his inclusion of an ekphrastic description of Frou-Frou in the steeplechase scene,

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<sup>63</sup> Note that this is where our "literal" reading of Frou-Frou ends up offering a great deal of non-literal meaning. Only when we read her as a horse instead of exclusively as a stand-in for Anna can we see that Tolstoy is making a comment about animal life here, and the deep sameness of all life.

<sup>64</sup> Perhaps Tolstoy is also tapping into the idea that riding is a playing out of the fantasy of being other-than-human. We fantasize that we are horse, just as we might fantasize that we are fish, or birds flying. These fantasies represent a desire to access animal consciousness, but also to experience the natural world as these creatures do -- and to run faster, swim better, fly.

serves to draw our attention to an obvious, but important, particularity of animal sports: animal bodies. As we have seen, Gumbrecht's "bodies" fascination is limited to a focus on the *human* body, as opposed to the animal body (Gumbrecht, 153-7). Gumbrecht writes: "Spectators prefer to watch athletes as they test and push the absolute limits of *human* performance," and points out that in many sports today, it happens to be the case that the "top athletes have [in fact] reached a level close to the physical limit of *human* performance" (italics added, Gumbrecht, 148, 73). Gumbrecht's primary concern is with the *human* competitor – his body, his capacity, and his performance. Tolstoy, on the other hand, repeatedly draws our attention to the animal body, presenting it as a source of unique aesthetic intrigue that is worthy of his literary attention, and his reader's careful consideration.

Furthermore, in addition to focusing on the animal body as a source of aesthetic fascination, Tolstoy highlights animal movement as well; this is not surprising as animal movement is, of course, just the animal body in motion. Notice that the majority of the analogies he draws between Frou-Frou and other species are employed to describe the horse's movement. She gallops as if on wings, leaps like a flying bird, descends down from the top of her flight over a fence like a falling cat, and ultimately, following her fall, struggles and flutters like a wounded bird and flaps like a fish out of water. Equine movement, deeply dissimilar to human movement, is better described in terms of the movement of other species, with equally alien modes and styles of moving through space. The horse's body, beautiful and intriguing even at a standstill in her stall, is all the more exotic and fascinating in motion.

Tolstoy draws his reader's attention to aspects of Frou-Frou's body and movement by comparing her to other species – domestic, wild, land dwelling, marine, and airborne. In doing so, he highlights an exoticism in animals that fascinates us aesthetically, but also simultaneously emphasizes the deep sameness of all embodied existence. Tolstoy defamiliarizes the horse both by likening her to other species and by presenting her as having capacities that are often reserved for humans. And this, too, speaks to the sameness of all life; just as Frou-Frou is presented as cat, bird, fish, etc., she is also presented as human-like. As we have seen, Tolstoy accomplishes this, in part, of course, by creating an analogy between Frou-Frou and Anna. By virtue of being compared to Anna, Frou-Frou is automatically made more human in the mind of the reader. She is also described using the adjective "brave;" Frou-Frou's trainer says that, "Frou-Frou is the braver, but the other is the more powerful horse" (Tolstoy 1995, 165). We might think that bravery is a quality that is generally conceived of as human, as it is, at least in part, a moral attribute. We praise bravery because a brave individual is able to confront pain or danger gracefully, putting his or her own safety second to some other interest. Someone who is brave operates with interests that are not limited to instinctually preserving his or her own safety. The moment when Tolstoy most explicitly presents Frou-Frou as human-like comes when he writes: "She was one of those creatures who seem as if they would certainly speak only if the mechanisms of their mouths allowed them to" (Tolstoy 1995, 166).<sup>65</sup> Tolstoy is presenting Frou-Frou here as nearly able to speak; the only thing preventing her from speaking, not unlike a person who suffers from

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<sup>65</sup> Tolstoy presents an almost identical picture of the horse in his story "The Snow Storm." In this story, the protagonist Nikita says of his carriage horse: "The one thing he can't do is talk" (Donovan, 47).

muteness, is a physical fact about her speech mechanism. We are presented with a picture of the horse as a creature that has all the makings to communicate with others linguistically – the mental capacity, the social relatedness – but lacks the physical capability. Frou-Frou cannot communicate verbally in exactly the way that humans do because of the physical limits of her animality, but she is nevertheless highly communicative and expressive. Her expressions and movements, whether in her stall, or when she lies suffering on the ground after her fall, are perhaps as communicative as those of a human. In fact, recall that Tolstoy refers to her eyes as “eloquent.” There is perhaps even a sense in which, for Tolstoy, a horse’s expressions are more eloquent, more poignant, and more moving than a human’s.

Tolstoy’s defamiliarizing depiction of Frou-Frou in human terms serves to highlight equine communicative capacity. Frou-Frou has a point of view, a perspective, and an inner life, all of which she communicates – just not with human language. And while Tolstoy asks us to take a focused look at Frou-Frou’s body when he describes her ekphrastically and compares her to other animals, he is not exclusively, or even primarily, concerned with equine beauty. He is more interested in the inner life of a horse than her, albeit profound, outer beauty. Ultimately, in asking us to take a careful look at Frou-Frou’s body and appearance, Tolstoy asks that we consider her embodied existence, and her capacity to experience, and to suffer.

Tolstoy, then, defamiliarizes the horse in two ways: he makes the horse unfamiliar and exotic by presenting her as resembling other animals, and, conversely, he makes her unfamiliar by presenting her as having human qualities. On one hand, Tolstoy emphasizes the animal nature, or animality, of the horse. On the other hand, he negates

that animality, emphasizing qualities in the horse usually reserved for humans. Taken together, these approaches both defamiliarize the horse and present us with the classic psychological binary of animal versus human or animality versus humanity. Thus presented with an unfamiliar and contrasting picture of the horse, we are encouraged to think about and perhaps re-understand the nature of the horse, as well as to meditate on the animal/human dichotomy more generally. Tolstoy's portrayal of Frou-Frou as part animal, part human, or sometimes animal, sometimes human, presents the reader with the idea that negotiating what kind of creature a horse is represents an inherent part of interacting with, or being in the presence of, horses.

Tolstoy, through his use of defamiliarization, presents us with a complex and thought-provoking portrait of the horse. While he is not completely clear about where the horse falls on the scale of animality to humanity, or whether the horse, or any other creature, ought to be measured in this way at all, he presents one thing as nonnegotiable: the horse is a subject, a unique individual with a point of view and a capacity for suffering, satisfaction, and general feeling. Shortly following his ekphrastic physical description of Frou-Frou, Tolstoy includes what we might think of as an emotional description of her. He writes:

“The nearer [Vronsky] came the more nervous [Frou-Frou] grew. Only when he reached her head did she suddenly calm down, and the muscles under her fine, delicate coat vibrated. Vronsky stroked her firm neck, adjusted a lock of her mane that had got on the wrong side of her sharply-defined withers and brought his face close to her dilated nostrils, delicate as a bat's wing. Her extended nostrils loudly inhaled and exhaled her breath, and she set back one of her finely-pointed ears with a start, and stretched out her black firm lips toward Vronsky, as if wishing to catch hold of his sleeve. But remembering her muzzle she gave it a jerk, and again began stepping from one of her finely chiselled feet to the other” (Tolstoy 1995, 166).



In this touching description, Tolstoy creates a special moment between Vronsky and Frou-Frou. The two share a tender interaction, in which Frou-Frou, anxious at first, is calmed by Vronsky's touch. She responds to him, behaving as if she is communicating her changing emotional state. She transitions from nervous to trusting – indeed, she reaches out to touch Vronsky as he touches her – and back to nervous again upon “remembering her muzzle.” In addition to portraying her with a sense of remembering, or memory, Tolstoy describes her as growing nervous, calming down, and acting “as if wishing to catch hold of [Vronsky's] sleeve.” The horse is presented as having mental states; she seems to experience feelings of anxiety, calmness, and appears to have a capacity and perhaps even a desire to relate to other beings. Her actions are presented as belonging to her as much as Vronsky's actions belong to him; Tolstoy describes Frou-Frou setting back one ear, stretching out her lips, giving her muzzle a jerk, and stepping from side to side. She is a sentient being whose physical actions and reactions communicate her state of mind. Though she cannot speak, she is nevertheless an emotional, communicative being, capable of relating to others. In fact, Tolstoy explicitly presents Vronsky as sharing the view that a horse is a subject, capable of understanding and relating. He writes: “To Vronsky at any rate it seemed that she understood all he was feeling while looking at her” (Tolstoy 1995, 166).

We should immediately take notice of Tolstoy's caution here – he writes that “it seemed” that Frou-Frou understood all that Vronsky was feeling. Tolstoy is presenting Frou-Frou as a being to which it is appropriate to attribute a rich set of psychological characteristics – namely individualized subjective experience, emotional comfort and discomfort, the ability to respond to and bond with others, and expressiveness that makes

some level of cross-species communication possible. Having said that, while Tolstoy seems to take these attributions to be reasonable, his portrait of animal psychology is realistic as opposed to cartoonish. He does not present Frou-Frou as an anthropomorphized fantasy – as being able to think human thoughts and speak human language. He is instead open to the idea that she has some kind of psychological life, and presents her in such a way that is consistent with her experiencing physical and emotional pleasure and pain, having a perception/belief/desire architecture, interests that can be frustrated, and the capacity to respond to and relate to humans.

Based on our earlier discussion regarding Tolstoy’s beliefs about animals, it is by no means shocking that Frou-Frou is depicted in this way. In fact, according to Donovan, “Even [Tolstoy’s] minor references to animals include acknowledgment that what is involved is a living, feeling creature,” and that animals are “separate, active, living creatures worthy of attention in their own right” (Donovan, 46). Perhaps we can see evidence of Tolstoy’s commitment to presenting the horse as individual subject even just by comparing the descriptions of Frou-Frou and Strider that are quoted previously in our discussion of Tolstoy’s use of ekphrasis. Recall that Frou-Frou and Strider are extremely different in terms of their physical appearances: Frou-Frou is described in terms of her feminine yet athletic build and musculature, while Strider is described as an elderly equine body marked and scarred by past injury. What is perhaps even more interesting, however, is how differently the horses are presented in terms of demeanor. Tolstoy emphasizes Frou-Frou’s spiritedness: she is “spirited yet gentle,” with “bright, sparkling eyes” and an undeniable “thoroughbred quality – the kind of blood that *tells*.” Strider, in contrast, is described in terms not of spirit but rather in terms of poignancy: the

“expression of his face was one of stern patience, thoughtfulness, and suffering,” and he stands alone “like a living ruin.” And though the descriptions of these two horses are not presented side by side – indeed, they are not even in the same work – in both cases Tolstoy draws our attention to a certain ineffable quality present in each horse. He describes Frou-Frou as “possess[ing] in the highest degree a characteristic which made one forget all her defects” and explains how “one involuntarily paused to reflect when one saw [Strider].” Each of the two horses is an individual with not only his or her own set of physical characteristics but his or her own individual energy; and each elicits a different response from a human looking on. Just as he creates individual personalities for his human characters, Tolstoy presents us with individual animal subjects.

It is no surprise, then, that, in his steeplechase scene, Tolstoy provides us with ample material related to the relationship between human subject and equine subject in a horse and rider pair. In his depiction of the steeplechase from within the race (as opposed to his chapter dedicated to the crowd’s point of view), he repeatedly draws our attention to the way in which Vronsky and Frou-Frou relate to each other when they are competing together. For instance, there are multiple moments in the narrative when Tolstoy explicitly emphasizes the negotiation of power between horse and rider. Vronsky and Frou-Frou are engaged for some of the race in a kind of tug-of-war. Tolstoy describes Vronsky “with all his strength...holding back the mare that was tugging at the reins” (Tolstoy 1995, 180). There are some moments when Vronsky is in command of Frou-Frou, and other moments when Frou-Frou is in charge of Vronsky. At one point, “Vronsky had the mare quite under control, and held her in,” while at another point Frou-Frou “broke into a canter, gave two leaps, and, angry at the tightened rein, changed back

into a jerky trot, jolting her rider” (Tolstoy 1995, 180, 179). We are shown a lack of communication between horse and rider, when “In the first moments Vronsky was master neither of himself nor of his mare. Up to the first obstacle, the brook, he could not control her movements” (Tolstoy, 180). Tolstoy even provides us with an example of deceit between horse and rider, when he offers us this description of Frou-Frou: “the restive horse tugged at the reins, now to one side, now to the other, trying to deceive her rider, and Vronsky vainly sought by voice and hand to soothe her” (Tolstoy 1995, 179).

Recall that, on the face of it, a steeplechase looks like a representative of our third formal paradigm, a sport in which an animal and a human compete together in combination. At the same time, however, there seems to be an important sense in which, within a combination sport in which horse and rider work together “as a team,” there also exists a complicated opposition between horse and rider. As Tolstoy emphasizes in the text referenced above, riders and their horses are often in tension with each other; Vronsky and Frou-Frou, though technically on the same team in the race, fight with each other for control. A horse must be “broke” in order to be ridden at all, a difficult process in which a young horse is made to accept tack, the bit, and the weight of a rider on his back. At this point, the rider, though obviously much smaller and physically less strong than the horse, is in a position to contend with her. The mounted horsewoman and her horse compete with each other for control; due to sheer strength, a horse can always “run away with” her rider, but a rider can try to stop her horse by pulling on the reins and putting pressure on the horse’s mouth. A horse can always stop or shy at a fence, for example, but a rider can use her driving aids to urge her forward and over the obstacle. Because both horse and rider each have access to the “gas” and the “brakes,” so to speak,

the two are often at cross purposes.<sup>66</sup>

Riding, then, can in some sense be thought of as a debate between horse and rider. The rider communicates to her horse through the use of aids, natural and artificial. Natural aids include the rider's legs, seat, rein aids, and voice. Artificial aids include spurs and sticks/whips. The aids have three functions: to drive, to restrain, and to guide. The artificial aids, along with the legs and seat, generally act as driving aids, though the legs are also guiding aids. The rider's rein aids can act either as restraining aids or driving aids, while the rider's voice can serve either as a driving aid (cluck) or a restraining aid ("whoa"). A rider applies each of these aids, alone or in combination, and a horse accepts or resists the application, either granting the rider's request, ignoring the request, or rebelling against the request (as in the case of a buck or rear, for example). In correct and tactful riding, if a horse grants a rider's request, as communicated by her aid/s, the horse is answered and rewarded by a removal of that aid; for example, if a horse picks up speed when she feels her rider's leg apply pressure to her side, the rider subsequently removes leg pressure. The result is a conversation between horse and rider through the use of the rider's aids and the horse's reactions to those aids; and relaxation of aids follows an understanding on the part of the horse. When no driving and no restraining are necessary, a horse is "on the bit" and has achieved self-carriage. In moments like this, there is no longer a sense of debate between horse and rider; instead there is a compromise, a sense of agreement, a silence.

Tolstoy is very much in touch with this feeling, relaying to his reader moments

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<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to note that the way we use certain common expressions in English highlight this inherent agon between horse and rider in equestrian sport: we talk about "unbridled" emotion or passion, and of "reining in" overly strong reactions.

when Vronsky and Frou-Frou communicate effectively, and appear to be perfectly in sync with each other. I should note that, while I have chosen to use Vronsky and Frou-Frou's moments of successful communication as a model for harmonized horseback riding, this is not to say that I necessarily think Tolstoy means for us to read these moments this way. In fact, as we will see, Tolstoy gives us reason to disapprove of Vronsky's riding – he has not taken the time to get to know Frou-Frou, bonded with her in any meaningful sense or over any extended period of time, or trained with her in an effort to build a partnership and learn her personality and particularities. The moments of clear communication between Vronsky and Frou-Frou that Tolstoy presents us with are lucky moments, and should not be thought of as true examples of harmonized horseback riding. Having said that, for our purposes, we will use these moments to show the potential for aesthetic distinctness and unique athletic beauty offered by harmonized horseback riding. Tolstoy writes: “[Vronsky] and Frou-Frou both saw the bank while still some way off, and to both of them came a momentary doubt. He noticed the mare's hesitation by her ears and raised his whip, but immediately felt that his doubt was groundless: the mare knew what was wanted, and, as he expected, she increased her speed, took off exactly at the right moment, and gave a leap the force of which carried her far across the ditch” (Tolstoy 1995, 181). Vronsky and Frou-Frou are depicted here as each experiencing doubt regarding whether they will make it over an impending obstacle. The mare communicates her hesitancy by pinning her ears back, and Vronsky reacts by threatening the whip. The use of the whip, however, is unnecessary, as Frou-Frou, perhaps just by the sight of the raised whip, senses that Vronsky wants her to drive forward. The clear communication between horse and rider results in a perfect take-off

and clear, safe, jump.

At times, Frou-Frou even seems to anticipate what Vronsky wants with no cue from his aids. Tolstoy writes: “At the very moment that Vronsky thought it time to pass Makhotin, Frou-Frou, understanding what was in his mind, without any urging, considerably increased her speed and began to draw nearer to Makhotin” (Tolstoy 1995, 181). Responsive before the request is made, she seems to Vronsky so in tune with his wishes that she must be able to read his mind. At one moment during the race, “Vronsky had just time to think of coming up on the outside, when Frou-Frou changed her legs and started to do so” (Tolstoy 1995, 181). Frou-Frou, more than a mind reader, appears to Vronsky to generate and execute the same plan Vronsky thinks up before he has time to implement it. In these moments, then, there seems to be an effortless, anticipatory communication, a perfect understanding between horse and rider. There exists what Vronsky experiences as an almost telepathic connection between Frou-Frou and him during these moments: they are presented as seeing together, thinking together, and acting together. It is as though their two individual bodies are joined together, resulting in a shared body, sense of sight, and mind.

The communication between Vronsky and Frou-Frou is, of course, not telepathic. The point is that Frou-Frou has taken on the goal of clearing the obstacles herself. She has her own perspective, and the ability to form her own intentions. What feels like telepathic communication to Vronsky is actually a coordinated response to a situation, because he and Frou-Frou have a shared goal. In these moments, Vronsky and Frou-Frou represent a harmonized horse and rider pair. Each is a coordinated member of the same team; Frou-Frou is not an extension of Vronsky’s body. They are working together

cooperatively towards the same goal, relating to each other, competing together. There is an ethical overtone here – an ethical sensibility at work that Tolstoy admires. Again, this is not to say that he admires Vronsky’s ability to build a cooperative partnership with his horse; it is just to suggest that Tolstoy recognizes and admires moments of coordination and communication between horse and rider.

Tolstoy’s descriptions of Frou-Frou and Vronsky as a harmonized horse and rider pair call to mind Vicki Hearne’s discussion of Grand Prix showjumping in her book *Adam’s Task*.<sup>67</sup> A longtime horse and dog trainer, Hearne wrote her book in an effort to “find an accurate [philosophical] way of talking about our relationships with domestic animals” (Hearne, 5). In her chapter “Horses in Partnership with Time,” Hearne speaks to this moment when a horse has a goal in competition, and you can see him actively cooperating with his rider to achieve that goal. She writes:

“If it is the right horse, the right rider and the right training, this throws the horse powerfully onto his own mental resources, and you can see good jumpers, after the practice fence, prick up their ears, look around for the next fence and instead of trying to pull away from it, pull eagerly toward it. You can see an awesome moment of decision in horses coming down toward really big fences. First there is the discovery, the moment of “My God! That is a big sucker,” and then the deliberate gathering, in the horse, of all her power, all forward desire” (Hearne, 160).

This “moment of decision” can go either way. Of course, a horse could size up a fence and, rather than gathering himself in much the way a human athlete does before a

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<sup>67</sup> It should be noted that showjumping is a great deal less dangerous than steeplechase. Showjumping takes place in a stadium, where the terrain is even, the obstacles are non-solid/collapsible, and each horse jumps alone in a race against the clock as opposed to in an actual race that places horses in close proximity to each other. Many animal advocates have called for an end to steeplechase; and many of the same people admire showjumping and believe that the horses are well-treated and experience satisfaction through both training and competing.



particular moment in an athletic performance, might shy from it. Hearne points out that “unfortunately, sometimes [we see a horse] do the opposite, a desperate squirreling around, seeking any avenue of escape” (Hearne, 160). Hearne, like Tolstoy, recognizes in the horse a capacity for goal-setting, decision, and action. When the horse’s perspective lines up with the rider’s, we see a harmonized horse and rider pair who often appear to be communicating as though telepathically – and no moment of the ride is more profound or beautiful.

Hearne takes this a step further and claims that horses can sometimes possess a “strong sense of artistry” (Hearne, 160). When she refers to artistry she means that “the movements of a developed horse, the figures and leaps, mean something, and an artistic horse is one who is capable of wanting to mean the movements and jump perfectly” (Hearne, 160). For Hearne, it is this sense of artistry that makes horses want to perform their movements beautifully, and experience something like disappointment when they fail to. She quotes Stanley Cavell in defining a great horse with this sense of artistry: “[A great horse] is responsible for everything that happens in his work – and not just in the sense that it is done, but in the sense that it is meant” (Hearne, 162).

We should also point out that, particularly when there are obstacles involved, there is an important sense in which horses, like riders, are asked to improvise as they perform. In dressage, a horse and rider pair’s performance is rehearsed, much like a dance routine. Of course there might be unforeseen circumstances, and improvisation might be required, but the activity itself does not have an improvisation requirement built into its structure. Steeplechase, on the other hand – because it involves a range of obstacles, uneven and unpredictable terrain, and other horses travelling in close proximity and at high speeds who stand to complicate track and timing – inherently requires improvisation.

In her 2012 Paper “Improvising *Impromptu*, Or, What to Do with a Broken String,” Lydia Goehr captures the sense of improvisation I am referring to with her account of improvisation *impromptu*, which she defines as follows: “Improvisation

*impromptu*...refers to what we do in any sort of activity or performance of life when we're suddenly confronted with an obstacle which, to win, continue, or survive, we must overcome. But to overcome the obstacle, to get "out of a jam," offers no guarantees and no certainty that the world or our lives, social or individual, are improved thereby" (Goehr 2012, 5). Goehr thinks that improvisation *impromptu* "can be articulated independently of the agonistic background, [but that] the agonism brings to it a sharp relief, especially when the concept is used to mark a *winning (or losing) move*" (Goehr 2012, 2). Improvisation *impromptu* is a "a concept of wit and fit, of doing exactly the right thing or the wrong thing "in the moment"" (Goehr 2012, 2).

According to this definition of improvisation, it certainly seems to be the case that Frou-Frou – and Vronsky – are improvising. The steeplechase requires that Frou-Frou improvise, and in that sense can be understood as being structured such that the horse must exercise agential behavior – must make decisions. And sports that involve animals, it would seem, involve twice the improvising. In the case of steeplechase, the human participant and the animal participant must improvise together, and have the same idea for what to improvise, as well as harmonized execution. They must identify the same goal "in the moment" and execute the actions to achieve that goal in a harmonious way. Therefore, sports that require improvisation from human/animal teams double down on risk of failure – which also serves to make moments of successful improvisation twice as satisfying. But, as in Vronsky's case, his failure to improvise correctly, his failure to identify and execute the right move "in the moment" is not just a failure of performance – it means injury and death for the other half of his team. Frou-Frou has her own perspective all along, one that Vronsky reads correctly in moments – and this brings

about beautiful harmonized action and performance. But when Vronsky makes the wrong move “in the [final] moment,” dropping back in the saddle and pulling up on Frou-Frou’s head, his failure is not only an aesthetic one; Vronsky’s failure of improvisation *impromptu* is more than a failed performance. It ultimately means the discarding of the animal competitor who, by virtue of the structure of the activity, was being asked throughout to behave not like equipment, but like a fellow agent capable of decision and improvisation.

Tolstoy’s description of Vronsky and Frou-Frou, and the ultimate severing of their bodies in the fall, implicitly draws our attention to a crucial aesthetic feature of successful equestrian sport: the appearance of joint bodies. This idea of horse and rider moving as one body is, of course, consistent with Tolstoy’s preoccupation with animal bodies, which underlies the entire steeplechase scene. As we saw earlier, through his likening of the equine body to other animal bodies in combination with his inclusion of an ekphrastic description of Frou-Frou, Tolstoy presents animal bodies, and also animal movement, as aesthetically intriguing in their own right. To be sure, he complicates and enriches this focus on animal bodies when he intermittently presents Vronsky and Frou-Frou as appearing as though they are corporeally joined. Tolstoy presents a distinctive bodily fusing that takes place between horse and rider: the result is a hybrid body, half-rider, half-mount. Vronsky, upon mounting, gives up his footing. Frou-Frou, upon being mounted, must renegotiate her footing, which she now shares with Vronsky. Tolstoy writes that Vronsky, upon mounting, “having got his right foot also in its stirrup straightened out the double reins between his practised fingers...As if not knowing which foot to step on first, Frou-Frou stretched the reins with her long neck, and started as if on

springs, shaking her rider on her flexible back” (Tolstoy 1995, 178-9). Their bodies now connected, Frou-Frou must learn to walk with her new body; Vronsky must absorb the shock of another being’s step. The horse and rider create and experience this fusing; the spectators behold it. The audience of a steeplechase, or any equestrian competition, then, bears witness to the fascinating fusion of horse and rider, and the contest becomes one between newly formed, centaur-like creatures, rather than between pairs of humans and riders. The image of mounted rider transfigures the human body into part-animal, and the animal body into part-human. This corporeal relationship between horse and rider, a defining aesthetic feature of horseback riding,<sup>68</sup> is discussed by Ann Game in her essay “Riding: Embodying the Centaur.” For Game, corporeal fusion – or the “centaur effect” – is what constitutes high-level riding. She illustrates what she means by the “centaur effect” through a passage about the sitting trot, the position/gate combination that allows for the greatest feeling of bodily connection between rider and horse. She writes of the sitting trot: “Unless you allow for the connection, you cannot do it. If the body is not to bump, it needs to be relaxed, open and receptive to the rhythm. It feels as if you are soaking the movement up as you drop down into it, drop into the horse as the horse rises into you, rise and fall now contained within your body, within your horse-human body, the very connection generating the movement” (Game, 9). As a rider, you soak up and

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<sup>68</sup> We might think that horseback riding presents a particularly interesting case to be taken up in the field of somaesthetics. Somaesthetics, a philosophical sub-discipline devoted to the body and its experience, “can be provisionally defined as the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation and creative self-fashioning. It is therefore also devoted to the knowledge, discourses, practices, and bodily disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it” (Schusterman, 302). A somaesthetician working on horseback riding would have the challenge of articulating the experience of “having” and using a hybrid, human/equine, body.

drop into the horse's movement, joining the equine rhythm. At the same time, the horse absorbs your rhythm as well; the result is a corporeal hybridity that arises from horse and rider each being absorbed into the other's rhythm. This is why, for Game, there is a sense in which "a forgetting of our separate human self" is important "if we are to ride well" (Game, 9). Riding is a relational activity, in which two separate life forces join bodies to move as one. In order to make this connection, a rider must "learn to be carried along in the flow," which amounts to a kind of becoming-horse (Game, 3).<sup>69</sup> Game takes "connectings between human and animal [as] creative processes of coming to be," in which rider and horse abandon some degree of humanity or animality, respectively, joining bodies to create the centaur effect (Game, 1).

In her essay "Embodied Communication: The Poetics and Politics of Riding," Natalie Corinne Hansen presents us with an example of the highest degree of the centaur effect. To illustrate the "embodied communication" (to borrow from her title) that can take place between horse and rider as a function of corporeal fusion, she quotes Vinciane Despret's interview with Jean-Claude Barry, in which he describes *ixoprasis*, a phenomenon "whereby the rider's and horse's movements are synchronized at the level of involuntary coordination" (Hansen, 254):

"Unintentional movements of the rider occur...when the rider thinks about the movements the horse should perform. The horse feels them and,

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<sup>69</sup> Note that Game's presentation of riding is not unlike Connor's presentation of glissade sports, discussed in Chapter 1. Recall that glissade sports – surfing, windsurfing, hang-gliding – all require that the human body enter into an already "existing wave" or "column of rising air" (Connor, 209-210). Similarly, for Game, riding involves "learning to be carried along in the flow, learning to become in tune with or in the train of. For this to happen, one needs to get into these waves, to be receptive" (Game, 3). But while glissade sports and riding might share this feature, there is a crucial difference: natural elements like water and wind, though extremely powerful, are not agential.

simultaneously, *reproduces* them. A careful analysis of these unintentional movements made by the human body has shown that these movements, in fact, are exactly the same as the ones the horse performs. The human's right hand imitates (and anticipates) what the horse's right front leg will do, the bottom of the back of the rider makes a jerk which is exactly the movement the horse will do to begin to canter and so on. In other words...talented riders behave and move like horses...Human bodies have been transformed by and into a horse's body" (Hansen, 254-255).

The rider, having abandoned some of her own bodily habits and rhythms to successfully fuse with the horse, now behaves and moves like a horse. In this sense, her body is transformed into part-horse, her own movements communicable to the horse, and reproducible for the horse.

The centaur effect – or corporeal hybridity – is the mark of a harmonized horse and rider pair, and is, more than anything else, what makes a particular horse and rider pair beautiful to watch. We experience this as readers of *Anna Karenina*; the most gratifying moments are those brief moments when we feel that Vronsky and Frou-Frou are bonded, fused, acting as one body. But while there are moments of corporeal harmony between Vronsky and Frou-Frou, in the end, bodily disconnect – corporeal disharmony -- is responsible for the accident. Recall from above the description of the fall:

“Vronksy, to his horror, felt that something terrible had happened. He himself, without knowing it, had made the unpardonable mistake of dropping back in his saddle and pulling up her head...Vronsky was touching the ground with one foot. He scarcely had time to free his leg before Frou-Frou fell on her side...Owing to Vronksy's awkward movement she had dropped her hind legs and broken her back” (Tolstoy 1995, 182).

Vronsky interferes with his horse's rhythm and self-carriage; he pulls back and destroys their corporeal harmony, upsetting her balance. Horse and rider come apart: Frou-Frou breaks her back, while Vronsky, once again relying on his own two legs rather than Frou-

Frou's four, "stood alone on the muddy stationary ground" (Tolstoy 1995, 182). In shock and perhaps in denial about his mare's state, Vronsky "kicked her with his heel in the belly and again pulled at the reins" (Tolstoy 1995, 182). Not understanding what has happened, Vronsky continues to use his driving and guiding aids here, demanding a reaction from the broken horse, who, "did not move and, nuzzling the ground, only looked at her master with eloquent eyes" (Tolstoy 1995, 182). But more likely than denial, this moment when Vronsky kicks the broken Frou-Frou in the belly reveals that Vronsky's thinking about the horse does not at all mirror Tolstoy's. Vronsky's emotional shallowness prevents him from genuinely extending agency to Frou-Frou – here he treats her as a piece of malfunctioning sports equipment. His understanding of Frou-Frou is deeply limited, and is tied to his own aspirations for winning the competition. His moments of "union" with Frou-Frou are short-lived and not the function of an emotional bond, but the proper use of aids combined with the shared goal to overcome the obstacles they are faced with.

The converse of the corporeal connection we saw in particularly harmonious moments when Vronsky and Frou-Frou are on course together gives way here to disastrous disconnection. Instances of perfect, beautiful hybridity between horse and rider can give way to massive, violent severing. Because Tolstoy presents, and the reader experiences, the potential for moments of perfect fusing between horse and rider as the most beautiful and aesthetically satisfying moments of the race, Frou-Frou's fall is not only emotionally upsetting, but also an aesthetic disaster. We are faced with a failure of fusion between horse and rider; corporeal hybridity and harmonization are lost. Spectators are horrified by the fall (as well as the other falls that occur) not solely due to

worry about injury. A fall represents the ultimate aesthetic failure in horseback riding; it is, after all, the unintentional, unplanned, end of the performance itself. A fallen rider is no longer riding; a fallen horse, or a horse whose rider has fallen, is no longer being ridden. It is not part of the race, but an unexpected, aesthetically traumatic discontinuation of the race.

Tolstoy treats corporeal hybridity as a central feature of equestrian sports. It is, in fact, a distinctive aesthetic feature of horseback riding, definitive of the activity itself. The more fused the horse and rider pair is, and the more they appear to be moving as one body, the more beautiful the ride. This is what distinguishes horseback riding from other sports: the joining of animal and human bodies. It is responsible for the unique aesthetic experience of the rider, as well as the unique aesthetic experience of the spectator. The spectator witnesses the joining of human and animal bodies; the rider experiences it. And the more harmonious the joining, the more genuine the fusion, the more beautiful it is to watch – and the more satisfying it is to feel as a rider, and presumably as a horse.

Recall from Chapter 1 that Gumbrecht's account of athletic beauty does speak to the presence of a kind of a fusion of horse and rider – but it in a strange way. When Gumbrecht discusses equestrian sports, he draws a parallel between equestrian sports and racecar driving; specifically, he likens equestrian competitions to NASCAR and Formula One races. According to Gumbrecht, equestrian sports and racecar driving are importantly similar in that they both “require a pronounced involvement of the human body with an accessory or tool...the fascination of sports involving animals and machines relies on the sense that these nonhuman elements are somehow coupled to the human body” (Gumbrecht, 174). For Gumbrecht, horses and cars – and firearms -- fall into a



special class of “tools” because, unlike skis, for example, they do more than merely “demonstrate the strength and skill of the body that handles them” (Gumbrecht, 174). Though he does not explicitly name it, Gumbrecht seems to be referring to the issue of guidance here. While skis are incorporated into the way I move, cars, horses, and firearms all have to be guided. Guidance connotes cognition of something that is not me. And guidance is necessary when the “tool” in question has its own “animal or mechanical force” that is absent in mere athletic equipment like skis, for example (Gumbrecht, 179).

Gumbrecht is correct to point out that a horse is importantly different from athletic equipment like skis, and also correct to identify a “coupling” of horse and rider as a source of fascination in spectators of equestrian sport. But he undercuts his own insights because he offers these observations within a framework that characterizes animals as “tools,” and utters “animal or mechanical force” in one breath, without sufficiently differentiating between the two. Animal *life* is an entirely different thing from mechanical *force*, and to align them is to oversimplify and mischaracterize animal sports. In equestrian sports, horses are not “extensions or complexifications of the human body,” but separate bodies and separate lives (Gumbrecht, 174).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This is not to suggest that there is no sense at all in which a horse counts as equipmental. In his 2001 book, *A Philosophy of Sport*, Steven Connor offers us an account of equipment that defines it simply as anything that is indispensable to the activity. He writes: “If I decide to dispense with any kind of equipment affixed to, and substantially longer than my two feet, designed to allow me to slide over snow and ice, I am simply no longer skiing at all, but skating, snowboarding or just skidding. Skis are not optional or dispensable extras in the practice we know as skiing. Similar conditions attach to the ball in soccer, the mallet in croquet and the racket in tennis. Playing with these things needs to be understood as playing the sport through or by means of them, rather than merely playing along with them” (Connor, 121). This account of equipment, accurate but thin, provides an umbrella definition large enough to properly encompass horses and skis together. Horses, like skis in skiing, are not “optional or dispensable extras” in the practice we know as horseback riding. I ride by means of a horse; a horse is

To be sure, Tolstoy's conception of animals as subjects of experience, of animality as a different, but equally important, mode of life, and his appreciation for the complicated relationship, both physical and emotional, that exists between horse and rider, does not line up with Gumbrecht's account and his mechanization of the animal life. Tolstoy would object to conceiving of horses as "tools" or equipment at all – regardless of whether they are awarded a special status as they are in Gumbrecht's picture. We might think that Tolstoy makes this explicit when he refers to the fact that "the perspiring, exhausted horses which had raced were being led away by their grooms, and one by one the fresh ones for the next race were appearing" (Tolstoy 1995, 177). In this instance, sweating, overtired, overworked horses are replaced by "fresh ones." The horses that have finished performing are essentially discarded, and a set of new, clean horses takes their place. This image calls to mind the act of replacing old equipment, or even dirty sports gear or uniforms. The horses, nameless, anonymous, and fungible, are presented as athletic accessories – for Tolstoy, a reprehensible state of affairs.

In addition, Tolstoy presents Vronsky as, in some sense, guilty of treating Frou-Frou as equipment. He writes: "[Vronsky] had not yet been to look at [Frou-Frou].

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instrumental to my participating in the act of horseback riding. In this definitional sense, then, horses are equipmental. Connor, though he does not explicitly mention horses in this discussion, implicitly characterizes horses as equipment but, unlike Gumbrecht, he does not mischaracterize them as mechanical. Indeed, he leaves room for there to be a different account of the relationship between competitor and "equipment" for every equipmental sport. According to Connor, "For those sports in which equipment is essential to the very definition of the sport, there is a deep, purposive and complex relationship between the one who plays and what he or she uses to play with" (Connor, 121). For Connor, there exists a whole array of relationships between competitors and the equipment they employ in sport, and he suggests that it is up to athletes, sports fans, and philosophers of sport to explore and articulate these different complicated relationships.

During these last days he had not exercised her himself, but had entrusted it to the trainer, and therefore did not in the least know in what condition she had arrived or now was” (Tolstoy 1995, 164). In the days leading up to the race, Vronsky had neither visited nor ridden Frou-Frou. They have no relationship or rapport, as Vronsky had not committed time to getting acquainted with the mare, either on the ground or in the saddle; this, of course, explains why Frou-Frou is “nervous” in his presence. Frou-Frou’s trainer, in contrast, knows the horse well, and is sensitive to her temperament and needs. He advises that Vronsky not interrupt Frou-Frou while she is resting in her stall, but Vronsky does so anyway. He also offers Vronsky advice about jumping her in the steeplechase, urging that Vronsky remember to “let the mare have her way” with the obstacles (Tolstoy 1995, 165). As we know, however, Vronsky disastrously fails to follow that advice, and jerks back and interrupts Frou-Frou’s balance as she descends over a jump. Vronsky’s failure to cultivate a training relationship with Frou-Frou, and his failure to listen to the trainer who has done so, result in his mistreatment of her. Vronsky, treating Frou-Frou like equipment as opposed to an individual creature in these instances, misuses her and literally breaks her in the end. And Tolstoy, reproachful of Vronsky’s mistreatment of Frou-Frou, makes him the focus of the mare’s eloquent gaze at the moment of her death, - and saddles him with the “painful and distressing memory” of having ruined her. We might also think that Vronsky’s response following the fall amounts to treating Frou-Frou like equipment. When Frou-Frou falls, Vronsky’s first response is to pull at the reins. When she tries to stand, but is unable to lift her hind-end and falls again, he proceeds to kick her with his heel in the belly and pull at the reins a second time, in the hopes of somehow jumpstarting her.

But though this scene ends tragically, this is not to say that all equestrian sports are ethically untenable – or that Tolstoy wants us to think so. Steeplechase, for reasons we have mentioned, is a particularly dangerous mode of equestrian sport, but even in steeplechase we see the potential for moments of harmonized cooperative communication and movement. Unlike in the case of bullfighting -- which even the frenzied, generally insensitive steeplechase audience is presented as disapproving of -- Tolstoy identifies moments of beauty in the steeplechase. The beauty, however, comes from a harmonious connection between horse and rider that requires that the rider understand the horse as fellow being. We see flashes of it in Vronsky's ride – but they are fleeting, and lucky. He does not respect or know Frou-Frou, and he does not see his relationship with and communication with his horse as not only necessary for success, but also as the source of beauty, in riding. Unlike Hearne – and Tolstoy would likely agree – that “like the burden of teaching humans...the nature of riding is such that doing it at all entails meaning to do well by the horse,” Vronsky does not experience Frou-Frou as a fellow individual until the moment he realizes he has caused her death (Hearne, 156). Perhaps it is the poignant eloquence of Frou-Frou's gaze as she lies broken on the ground that prompts Vronsky to join Tolstoy and the reader in viewing her as a subject. When he sees her eloquent eyes, he extends agency to her -- and this is the reason why “the memory of that steeplechase long remained the most painful and distressing memory of his life” (Tolstoy 1995, 183).

Because Gumbrecht does not extend agency to animals, and is not interested in the human/animal relationship, he misses out on the reason why the appearance of joint bodies is such a profound and beautiful image: joint bodies imply joint action, which implies deep communication between horse and rider. This communication, these

moments of harmony between human and animal life, are what Tolstoy finds most beautiful. Frou-Frou is not a “complexification” of Vronsky’s body, but a separate individual agent who possesses cognitive, emotional, and social capacities that allow her to relate to others. Recall that in his descriptions of horse and rider, Tolstoy draws our attention not only to the pair appearing to share a body and to move as one, but also to the related observation that they seem to think together and to act together. The beauty derives from this communication, this harmonious relationship, joining of consciousnesses and of agencies.<sup>71</sup> Tolstoy’s picture is sensitive to the idea that the appearance of joint bodies implies joint action as well, which, in turn, implies joint minds. It is the possibility of this “joining” of action and minds that Gumbrecht’s account is blind to because it mechanizes the animal life. Gumbrecht’s account does identify the fact that there exists in equestrian sport a coupling of horse and rider that fascinates spectators, but he does not take into account the implications of this coupling.

Corporeal hybridity is a desirable aesthetic feature of riding that can only be achieved if horse and rider are communicating closely and effectively. The appearance of a joint body is a function of the presence of the bodily communication necessary to a harmonized partnership between horse and rider. Riding, because it involves the joining of bodies, allows for communication between two species that cannot communicate verbally. In her essay “A Language of Their Own: An Interactionist Approach to Human-Horse Communication,” Keri Brandt understands human-horse communication as a form of communication built through the expression of the body. She writes: “The language of

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<sup>71</sup> The appearance of joint agency is a source of aesthetic value in its own right. In other words, those lucky moments when Frou-Frou and Vronsky appear to join agencies is beautiful, though far less beautiful than moments with the same appearance but that are the function of a true lasting bond between horse and rider.

the horse operates through the body such that horses must use their bodies to communicate their subjective presence. Because humans cannot convey intentions to horses through spoken language, they too must use their bodies to generate a communication style to which the horse can respond” (Brandt, 301). Through riding, “humans and horses co-create a language system by way of the body to facilitate the creation of shared meaning” (Brandt, 299). For both horses and humans, the body is a means through which they can express feelings and desires; body communication creates a shared framework in which we can engage in a relationship with horses where we can not only communicate things *to* them, but also receive information *from* them. For language is not the only mechanism through which “a self emerges.” She emphasizes that, in fact, a horse’s self emerges through embodied communication. She asserts that “Horses, too, are thinking, emotional, decision-making beings who, like humans, develop ways to communicate their subjectivity to their human partners” (Brandt, 307). And the communication of this subjectivity in a shared, reciprocal mode of relating results in “rewarding interactions and successful partnerships” for both horse and rider (Brandt, 300).

Riders, then, often understand the act of riding as not only joining bodies with their horses, but joining agencies. By virtue of communicating clearly with them, riders feel deeply connected to their horses. In their essay “Riding up forested mountain sides, in wide open spaces, and with walls”: developing an ecology of horse-human relationships,” Dona Davis, Anita Maurstand, and Sarah Cowles collected and analyzed narratives from participants in different equestrian sports. Virtually across the board, the authors found that the equestrian athletes characterized their partnerships with their

horses as being marked by a sense of shared identity, interactive agency, and “reciprocal partnership both in terms of embodiment and shared task at hand” (Davis et. Al, 13). A close partnership, complete with an open line of communication between horse and rider, can result in moments of harmony when it feels – and looks -- as though horse and rider are operating with one mind. The most aesthetically satisfying horse and rider pairs are those that communicate invisibly, giving the impression that their actions are originating from the same place. The deepest, best communication is invisible to spectators; Brandt echoes this: “Well-developed riders and horses learn how to communicate and understand each other on such subtle levels that it can look as though no discussion is taking place between the two, just two united bodies moving together seemingly effortlessly and silent...this takes body discipline and a well-developed understanding of one’s body as a vehicle for receiving and communicating different signals” (Brandt, 312). The most exquisite horse and rider pairs are the ones that appear to be acting so interactively that they seem to have a shared body as well as a shared mind.

But near-seamless communication, the kind that marks a harmonized horse and rider pair, takes time and work. In the first place, a rider must get to know her horse, spend time with her and build trust between them. Brandt recommends working with a professional trainer; professional trainers are interpreters. They teach riders how to achieve proper bodily form and how to use their aids to communicate their intentions to the horse. Conversely, “the trainer helps the rider understand what the horse is communicating so that ultimately, when working together, the horse-rider combination can be united” (Brandt, 307). Trainers, or interpreters, play a large role in helping a horse and rider develop their mutual language; not human language, or horse language, but a

third language that enables the two to create a world of shared meaning and foster a deeper understanding of each other” (Brandt, 313). A rider must also develop “a greater physical awareness in order to become a more efficient communicator with horses” (Brandt, 305). And although there are moments when Vronsky and Frou-Frou appear to be synchronized in body and mind, it is all too clear that Vronsky has taken no time to build a relationship – to develop a shared language – with Frou-Frou. He met her shortly before the race, did not work with a trainer or take his trainer’s advice on how to ride Frou-Frou, and ultimately, his mistake that causes the fall is due to a lack of physical awareness. Vronsky’s mistake is “unpardonable” because it is a result of his failure to form a partnership with Frou-Frou. A partnership requires communication, mutual respect, trust, and a closeness that is built over time. A harmonized horse and rider pair have a rapport, while Vronsky and Frou-Frou are virtually strangers.

The notion of human-horse partnership is nicely captured by Audrey Wipper in her essay “The Partnership: The Horse-Rider Relationship In Eventing.” Wipper writes of interacting with an equine partner: “Successful partnerships have been shown to be built on a multifaceted flow of interaction. Interacting with a living being is not at all like ‘interacting’ with an inanimate object. Riders see horses as active participants with emotions, intelligence, and distinct personalities who engage in rudimentary minded behavior. This makes relationships with them very different from relationships with a beloved sports car” (Wipper, 67). In addition to offering what we might think of as a proactive response to Gumbrecht six years prior to his account of athletic beauty being published, Wipper gestures towards the main ingredient of a successful human-horse



partnership – which is also the central reason why relationships with horses are different from relationships with a beloved sports car: empathy.

The relational capacities of horses make them appropriate objects of empathy; though I cannot fully access animal consciousness (or any consciousness besides my own, for that matter), I can nevertheless put myself into the horse's shoes in a way that does not apply for a sports car. In the first place, as Shapiro suggests, the embodied experience of human-horse communication relies on kinesthetic empathy: "Empathic experience involves appropriating a second body that then becomes my auxiliary focus. Through my lived body, I accompany yours as it intends an object" (Shapiro, 192). Though I might be able to make a sports car, or a bowling ball, my auxiliary focus, the fact that these objects are not embodied and cannot experience pain means that genuine kinesthetic empathy is not present in these cases. Second, empathy – beyond the kinesthetic variety – is necessary for a sense of embodied intersubjectivity that marks successful horse/rider partnerships. Wipper emphasizes the importance of empathy – or attempts to "sympathetically understand a horse, to see the world through its eyes" – for human/horse relationships, and, relatedly, for performative success (Wipper, 52). Wipper points out that the best riders "form a mental connection with the horse" and "play at being a horse" (Wipper, 52). In fact, "an accolade bestowed on those who demonstrated a deep understanding of horses is '[So and so] is part horse'" (Wipper, 52). She quotes Charles de Kunffy, former rider for the Hungarian Olympic team, who echoes the necessity of empathy for success: "Riding, because it is based on communication between two living organisms, must include not only talking by the rider but even more important '*listening*'...The magic of perceptiveness, awareness, supplemented by

intelligence, compassion and *empathy* by the rider, can induce him to proper actions, aiding and communications towards the horse” (Wipper, 52). A horse is a subjective, intelligent, emotional, individual being with whom a rider *is able* to form a relationship – and with whom rider and spectator are able to empathize as well. And the stronger the partnership, the more consistently the pair will turn out a high-quality, relaxed, effortless, and beautiful performance. For Tolstoy, not only is an empathic stance necessary for a successful human-horse partnership, but it is the right stance to take up when interacting with animals generally. And this is why he implores us, as readers, to exercise the empathy for Frou-Frou that Vronsky fails to.

## CONCLUSION

In 1985, Tom Regan asserted in “The Case for Animal Rights” that animals are the “experiencing subjects of a life,” individuals whose lives matter to them (Singer 1985). He wrote:

“Animals, it is true, lack many of the abilities humans possess. They can't read, do higher mathematics, build a bookcase, or make *baba ghanoush*...It is the *similarities* between those human beings who most clearly, most noncontroversially have such value (the people reading this, for example), not our differences, that matter most. And the really crucial, the basic similarity is simply this: we are each of us the experiencing subject of a life, a conscious creature having an individual welfare that has importance to us whatever our usefulness to others. We want and prefer things, believe and feel things, recall and expect things. And all these dimensions of our life including our pleasure and pain, our enjoyment and suffering, our satisfaction and frustration, our continued existence or our untimely death -- all make a difference to the quality of our life as lived, as experienced, by us as individuals. As the same is true of...animals<sup>72</sup>...they too must be viewed as the experiencing subjects of a life, with inherent value of their own” (Singer 1985, 22).<sup>73</sup>

And over the last thirty years, the scientific community has validated, and continues to confirm, Regan's intuitions. Animals of many species are sentient individuals who can be said to have beliefs, feelings, preferences, expectations, memories, etc. They are not objects at our disposal, but subjects who experience physical and emotional pain and pleasure, and who possess rich cognitive, emotional, and social capacities. They are not

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<sup>72</sup> I should note that Regan's account technically covers mammals over one year of age. But in light of the scientific research that has revealed avian intelligence since 1985, it is fair to assume that he would extend his argument at least to some species of birds.

<sup>73</sup> In a 2004 interview “Giving Voice to Animal Rights” conducted by Kymberlie Adams Matthews, Regan restates this idea beautifully: “All animals are somebody – someone with a life of their own. Behind those eyes is a story, the story of their life in their world as they experience it.” (We should note that clearly all animals do not have eyes – having said that, this is presumably used loosely as an expression in this context. Furthermore, my focus is on a certain class of animals, all of which do have eyes.)

passive patients whose lives are governed exclusively by instinct; their actions originate from them as ours originate from us. They are fellow beings with individual viewpoints, who experience as well as act in the world – and, in this sense, it is appropriate, if not imperative, to talk about the extension of agency to animals.

Extending agency to animals of course requires that we revisit and revise philosophical work that has failed to take it into account; examples might include ethical systems of thought that regard animals as non-agents and therefore argue that they are not deserving of moral regard, or accounts that do not take seriously human/animal relationships or dismiss them as wishful thinking or pathological on the part of the human. My project has been to explore what bearing the extension of agency to animals has on the field of aesthetics; in other words, I have been interested in investigating how extending agency to animals makes us *see* (or hear) them differently. My contention is that we are not in a position to see animals correctly, and properly understand the complex nature of our aesthetic experience of animals, if we are not acknowledging them as agents.

I have been specifically concerned with investigating the extension of agency to animals as a way to revise some of the basic assumptions that have recently guided the philosophy of sport. In his account of athletic beauty, Gumbrecht does not extend agency to animals, and therefore presents a picture that misunderstands the aesthetic character of animal sports as opposed to non-animal sports. Gumbrecht's picture, placing animals in the same aesthetic category as inanimate "tools" like racecars and firearms, does not take into account the aesthetic complexities that an animal brings to sport. He treats animals as equipment and runs animal sports and non-animal sports together, thus mischaracterizing

and oversimplifying animal sports and our aesthetic experience of them. Gumbrecht denies animals agency, and therefore fails to articulate the complex nature of interspecies sports – complex in large part *because* of animal agency.

While there has not been a great deal of work done on the topic of our aesthetic experience of animals in general, the most interesting work to date has captured this idea that a large part of why we like to look at animals – a large part of why we find them aesthetically intriguing – is indeed *because* of their agential capacities. Recall from Chapter 1 our discussion of animals as sources of human aesthetic intrigue; as is the case with anything that moves us aesthetically, part of the reason we find animals aesthetically fascinating is because of their formal beauty. But the most compelling discussions of human aesthetic experience of animals focus not only the formal qualities of animals, but on the thing that distinguishes looking at a horse from looking at a sculpture of a horse: the animal life. Parsons points to vitality as a main reason why animals are aesthetically “valuable” to us. Rolston focuses on a two-part concept he calls “wild autonomy”: first, that animal motion originates from the animal himself, and second, that this motion appears to us spontaneous and unpredictable. Brady draws our attention to an animal’s expressive qualities – its eyes, facial expressions, gestures, calls – as significant sources of aesthetic value; in fact, she contends that our aesthetic interactions with animals are better understood as aesthetic-expressive interactions. And Berger identifies as a unique ingredient of looking at animals the notion of the reciprocal gaze – animals look back at us from within a consciousness that is inaccessible as well as alien, and this means that looking at animals will always be tied both to seeing animals as subjects, and as trying to make sense of that “other” subjectivity. We find animals fascinating to look at in large

part precisely *because* they are individual subjects of experience – and it is this notion that Gumbrecht’s picture fails to account for.

My project has had three related aims: to explore the notion of the extension of agency to animals through literature, to argue that extending agency to animals is necessary for correctly understanding the aesthetic character of sports that involve animals and our fascination with them, and to amend Gumbrecht’s account by “lay[ing] open how complex on many different layers individual [*ANIMAL*] sports are and how their function and effect depends on such complexity” (Gumbrecht, 36). I have offered my discussion through exemplary literary works – West’s *The Day of the Locust*, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, and Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. Each novel employed stages an athletic engagement with animals. Each sport featured represents one of the three paradigms in the three-part schema I offer: *Animal versus Animal* sports, *Animal versus Human* sports, and *Human/Animal Combination* Sports, in which human and animal compete together “as a team.” *The Day of the Locust* features cockfighting, which belongs to the *Animal versus Animal* paradigm; *The Sun Also Rises* has as one of its major themes bullfighting, which belongs to the *Animal versus Human* paradigm; and *Anna Karenina* takes on steeplechase, a representative of the *Combination* paradigm. Each of the three novels has served as a case study that has allowed me to show that each of these three paradigms is marked by distinct aesthetic features – and therefore that individual animal sports are importantly different from each other – and, furthermore, that animal sports in general are deserving of their own aesthetic treatment as separate from non-animal sports.

In my discussion of cockfighting in *The Day of the Locust*, I propose that the entire novel be read as preoccupied with animals. From the cockfighting scene and many other scenes centered around animals, to frequent references to human violence towards animals, and even to the repeated use of animal-centric word choices and analogies, West's text is covered in the "tracks of animals." This focus on animals allows the novel to emerge as an animal studies text, one that encourages the reader to take seriously the animal presence, both from an aesthetic as well as an ethical point of view. On my reading, West is committed to taking the animal's standpoint – his distress, his pain, his death – seriously, and is therefore in a position to capture the complexity that an animal brings to sport. He does this in the first place by presenting animals as sources of aesthetic value and intrigue for humans, emphasizing time and time again that, even outside of formal performance or sport, that we derive a sense of fascination from looking at animals. Implicit in his presentation of the cockfight, then, is a sense that we make use of animals in sports in part *because* they are aesthetically intriguing already – they don't only become aesthetically intriguing by virtue of being employed in sport as Gumbrecht contends is the case with equipment. The key distinctive feature that is unique to sports belonging to the *Animal versus Animal* paradigm, and which West's presentation is sensitive to, is proxy-agency. The cockfight has at its core an identification with bird by man, and a standing in for man by bird. The result is an activity whose aesthetic success is marked by the degree to which a bird represents man – by appearing to fight as though intentionally (with skill and style), and by exhibiting gameness. The best cocks are the ones that fight with expertise and individuality, and who embody a fighting spirit, heart, and gallantry. The "best" cockfights are the ones in

which the birds are transfigured into human-like adversaries, displaying strength and prowess, courage and composure – physical and moral attributes valued by human beings. The cockfight is set up in such a way that the birds are expected to exercise agency, and in this sense, they are entirely different from “tools.” But the agency they are expected to exhibit in the fight does not amount to a genuine extension of agency to the birds; it is a limited proxy-agency that puts performance before empathy. The birds are granted agency only in the pit, only for the benefit of the human crowd. It is as though audiences are meant to suspend disbelief and view the birds as temporary agents for the duration of the fight. West’s account, which takes seriously animal sentience and subjectivity, extends agency to animals inside and outside of the pit. It is for this reason that his presentation of the cockfight gestures towards proxy-agency as the distinctive aesthetic feature of cockfighting – and furthermore, affirms that this proxy-agency does not represent a genuine extension of agency.

Unlike West, Hemingway does not extend agency to animals in *The Sun Also Rises*. Though the novel is centered around bullfighting, Hemingway expresses little interest in animals in and of themselves. He ignores the bull’s suffering in the ring, and pays only cursory attention to the injuries sustained by the picador horses, regarding the pain they endure as an unfortunate, but best ignored, part of the bullfight. When animals are referenced in the novel outside of the bullfight, they are virtually always presented as overrunning, interrupting, or infesting human spaces and receive noticeably little descriptive attention. Animals are, however, objects of great interest to Hemingway when they are dead or doomed to die. *The Sun Also Rises* is filled with descriptions of animal carcasses, those featured in painting and taxidermy, or hunted, fished, or killed in the



bullring. For Hemingway, death, or the promise of death, serves to transform animals – otherwise aesthetically unremarkable – into objects that are fascinating and beautiful. Animals are worthy of descriptive focus only as dead; the implication is that their lives do not matter, and that the qualities of living animals that make us connect aesthetically to them -- vitality, wild autonomy, expressive power, and reciprocity – do not matter either. Because Hemingway does not extend agency to animals, he is not in a position to properly characterize bullfighting. Granted, his strictly formal characterization of the bullfight might be relatively sound; there is, as his portrayal suggests, an Aesthetics of Proximity at work – which is to say that the bullfighter comes almost to the point of death due to bodily proximity, but then resists death, first in repeated evasion, then ultimately in conquest when the “figure of oneness” emerges and the bull is killed. However, Hemingway’s denial of the animal life leads him to misread the “aboutness” of the bullfight; for him, the bull is not another being, but merely a symbol for death.

But once we extend agency to animals, the Aesthetics of Proximity that, for Hemingway, amounts to a tempting and avoidance of death, is more accurately understood as an approaching of agencies. The bullfight stages a scenario that places a human and an animal agent in opposition, requiring that the animal behave as an agent, then systematically punishes the bull for exhibiting the very agential capacities that are necessary for the fight’s formal “success.” The bullfight asks that the bull behave “as though human” – that the bull approach human agency – and asks that the bullfighter physically enter into the danger zone, placing his body at the mercy of animal strength and unpredictability, and his agency in contest with animal agency. *Animal versus Human* sports stage a distinctive tangential contact between human and animal agents

and are often – as in the case of bullfighting – structured such that humanity will always win. What is more, the more an animal participates, exhibits agential capacities, and acts “like a human,” the better the performance is thought to be. These sports are set up so that animals exhibit their agential capacities – performing in such a way that they approach the condition of “humanity” – and then are punished, and ultimately killed, for doing so. The importance of the animal presence in these activities cannot be overstated; these sports are about overcoming animality, and the threat of animal agency -- not overcoming death. The bullfight, though it requires that the bull behaves intentionally, is actually a staged, systematic denial of animal agency; Hemingway does not view animals as agents, and therefore does not identify the centrality of animal agency in bullfighting, which lends it its distinctive aesthetic character which is not profoundly beautiful, but profoundly twisted.

In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy offers a portrait of steeplechase that actively and explicitly extends agency to animals. In addition to Tolstoy’s personal relationship to animals, and his ethical beliefs regarding cruelty to animals and humane treatment of animals, there is a strong animal presence in Tolstoy’s fiction – he often gives descriptive focus to animals, treating them as characters rather than scenery. He offers descriptions of animals that are deeply empathetic, and is clearly committed to capturing and communicating to his reader the animals’ mental and emotional states. He portrays animals as feeling, thinking, acting beings, whose experiences and lives are important and valuable. This is especially true in the case of Frou-Frou who, though also a parallel for Anna, is presented as a unique individual with a distinctive personality who is capable of communicating and forming relationships -- a creature whose life matters, and whose

death is a tragedy. Because Tolstoy writes in such a way that he extends agency to animals, his presentation of the steeplechase is highly nuanced and sensitive to the complexities that an animal brings to sport. He emphasizes vitality, wild autonomy, expressiveness, and reciprocity of gaze as unique sources of animal beauty, captures the behavioral unpredictability present in steeplechase due to its being a sport that involves animals, and ultimately highlights as the distinctive feature of equestrian sport corporeal hybridity, which, in the case of a harmonized horse and rider pair, can amount to joint agency that is a function of successful communication. Corporeal hybridity -- and, relatedly, joint agency -- is the aesthetic ideal of horseback riding. Moments of deep communication, cooperation, and connection between horse and rider are the best moments of Vronsky's ride, and the most aesthetically satisfying moments of any ride. The horse/rider partnership is what makes for beautiful horseback riding -- and this partnership requires communication between horse and rider that implies that the horse is not, as Gumbrecht suggests, like a racecar or a firearm, but a communicative agent.

Failing to view animals as *participants* in sports amounts to failing to identify the hallmark aesthetic characteristics of animal sports -- characteristics that make them interestingly different from each other, and crucially different from non-animal sports. Animal sports are engagements with animals that stage narratives about humanity and animality, human agency and animal agency, and human/animal relationships. They are always complicated, loaded, and profound in this way -- and to liken them to sports that lack the animal presence is to oversimplify both aesthetically and ethically. Once an animal is introduced into a sport, he imbues the sport with all the complexities that come with looking at an animal outside of sport: the unique exotic beauty of the animal body

and its fitness to function, but also vitality, wild autonomy, expressiveness, and reciprocity of gaze. This means that, as Brady contends, our interactions with animals – even in the case of organized sport or performance – are never purely aesthetic but, rather, by definition aesthetic-expressive. Because animals are expressive, and because this expressiveness is fundamental to understanding our aesthetic experience of them, our aesthetic interactions with animals are better understood as being aesthetic-expressive. This captures the key idea that Gumbrecht fails to grasp: while our aesthetic experiences of racecars or firearms can be strictly aesthetic in a formal sense, our experiences of animals are always tied to an animal’s expressiveness. And these experiences are not purely aesthetic in a formal or artistic sense, but by virtue of being related to animal expressiveness, are themselves expressive as well. The “expressive” in “aesthetic-expressive” as a way of describing our interactions with animals should be understood as applying both to the expressiveness of the animals we are looking at, as well as to the character of our responses to animals. In other words, to interact aesthetically with animals is always also to interact with animals expressively – which carries with it a sense of communication as well as empathy. The tendency of formalism is to exhaust the aesthetic potential in the work of art or the artistic structure that constitutes the work of art. On this kind of account, aesthetic properties and artistic properties are the same. In the case of looking at animals perform, however, we must adopt a broader notion of the aesthetic whereby we can re-inject into the aesthetic the expressive, communicative, empathetic dimension that tends to get lost in formalism.

In *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, Gumbrecht refers to a “feeling of communion” he has with the athletes he watches perform in sports (Gumbrecht, 32). He writes:

“Watching sports allow us to be suddenly, somehow, one with those beautiful and beautifully transfigured bodies” (Gumbrecht, 32). Here Gumbrecht captures the times when we, as sports spectators, identify or empathize with an athlete – we share in his virtue or defeats, and we share in his embodiment. But while, on Gumbrecht’s account, we might root hard for Seabiscuit, there is no reference to empathy with animals in sports, whether kinesthetic or emotional. And this spectatorship without empathy, this spectatorship that does not take into account the interspecies communicative relationship between agents, is one that goes hand in hand with treating animals as tools or equipment. To correctly watch an animal perform in sport is to relate – to empathize. The sport of spectatorship is a dangerous one: To watch animals without adopting an empathic stance is to objectify animals, and puts oneself in a position to mischaracterize a sport both aesthetically, as we have shown, as well as ethically. And just as we are in danger of watching wrong if we do not extend agency and empathy to animals when we watch sports, we can be in danger of reading wrong too. When we are brought into novels that have animals as a central theme, or stage engagements between humans and animals, we should take seriously the animals as animals, as opposed to committing ourselves to a purely symbolic reading. When we do this, we are in a position to read animals as substantive characters with whom we can identify, empathize, and connect, and from whom we can learn.

The aesthetic of animal sports I have been interested in understanding in my dissertation is one that is based on a communicative model where the animal is a fellow agent that participates in the event. The model of spectatorship sees the animal not as an aesthetic object in a strictly formal artistic sense but also as an appropriate aesthetic

recipient of empathy. As opposed to a model of spectatorship we might see in the case of art in which a message to the spectator is communicated through the work, here the relationship between the spectator and the animal is an empathetic relationship between agents. The agency of the animal engages the spectator as an agent, contributing to an interspecies, inter-subjective aesthetic. The medium of the sporting event creates a certain bonding between the agents involved in the event – not just between spectators rooting for the same outcome, but between the spectators and the animals involved. Therefore, perhaps Gumbrecht's and Hemingway's failings are the result of a hyper-focus on the formal qualities of sports – which ultimately forgets the expressive capacities of animals, and therefore misses the degree to which an aesthetic of communication is at work in our spectatorship of animals. Future thinking on this subject might place spectatorship of animal sports, or of animals generally, within the larger framework of a pragmatist aesthetic – in which the aesthetic incorporates the moral notion of empathy, putting empathy at the center of the aesthetic concept as opposed to a purely formal property like beauty. This expanded notion of the aesthetic is one that incorporates the morality of empathy. The pragmatist approach to aesthetics – to which the names John Dewey, Benedetto Croce, R.G. Collingwood, as well as Tolstoy are attached – does not demand a hard and fast distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical. This kind of philosophical tradition might accommodate and further illuminate the aesthetic approach I have been interested in gesturing towards – one that argues that, because we have reason to extend agency to animals, spectating animals is not only an aesthetic but also a moral activity. To look at animals in sports is to participate in more than a solely formal way; it is to participate in an aesthetic scene in an ethical way. Engaging with animals aesthetically

means engaging with the whole world of animality -- a world that offers unique beauty, intrigue, and modes of relating, but also unique ethical considerations and problems.

In 1917, Dewey wrote in “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy” that “Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men” (Dewey, 8). But in an age -- a century later -- in which animals are being confirmed as sentient, subjective beings with agential capacities and cognitive, emotional, and social sophistication, philosophy – across its varied subfields – must become a device not only for dealing with the problems of men, but those of animals as well.

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