Fearful Symmetries: Pirandello's Tiger and the Resistance to Metaphor

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Evening spreads in my spirit and I keep thinking.
that the tiger I am calling up in my poem
is a tiger made of symbols and of shadows,
a series of literary tropes,
scraps remembered from encyclopedias,
and not the deadly tiger, the fateful jewel
that in the sun or the deceptive moonlight
follows its paths, in Bengal or Sumatra,
of love, of indolence, of dying.
—Jorge Luis Borges, "The Other Tiger" (1999, translation modified), 117

An Exorbitance of Tigers

Tigers, it seems, are difficult to frame. Since well before Blake, the tiger has been regarded as the most impressive and most ferocious of animals: a powerful symbol of sublime, unbridled Nature. Naturally, then, man has sought to contain this beast, be it in the steady rhythm of trochaic tetrameter or in the cages and enclosures of the zoo and the circus where

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D. Ohrem and R. Bartosch (eds.), *Beyond the Human-Animal Divide*, Palgrave Studies in Animals and Literature,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-349-93437-9_14

the beauty and magnificence of nature is displayed—framed, as it were, by the power and ingenuity of man. If, as John Berger claims, "each cage is a frame round the animal inside it" (1991, 23), it is because that frame transforms the animal into an aesthetic object that can be studied at a safe distance. At once the index and the guarantor of human sovereignty, this frame marks the physical boundary between the human and the animal. At the same time, it also points to the constant re-assertion of the symbolic boundary between nature and culture and hence to the production of nature *within* culture. This frame, in short, re-enacts the founding gesture of human sovereignty by means of what Giorgio Agamben famously calls the "inclusive exclusion" of bare, biological life (*zoē*) within qualified, political life (*bíos*) (1998, 7; cf. Massumi 2014, 66–67). Indeed, the zoo enclosure represents a literal "space of exception" (Agamben 2004, 37–38), in which what is "inside" is figured as belonging to "nature" and hence is properly excluded from culture as its "outside."

What interests me here is the extent to which the apparent difficulty of framing a tiger can be read as a form of *resistance* to this inclusive exclusion of animal life within cultural life, and, moreover, how this relates to the question of *writing*, or, more specifically, of zoopoetics. In this chapter, I will explore these questions through a reading of Luigi Pirandello's 1915 novel *Si gira* … (later republished as *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* in 1925), which, as we shall see, quite literally revolves around the difficulty of framing a tiger. The novel consists of seven notebooks written in the first person by Serafino Gubbio, a cameraman working for the fictional *Kosmograph* film studio in Rome, where he is involved in filming a big-budget exotic adventure film entitled *La donna e la tigre*. For this production, *Kosmograph* has procured a tiger from the Zoological Garden in Rome (which opened in 1911 and was designed by Carl Hagenbeck). The tiger, we learn, had tried repeatedly to jump across the moat separating her from the unsuspecting visitors until the zoo decided that the animal was a liability and sold her to the studio. Now, her ferocity is to be exploited for the purposes of this colonial melodrama: she is to be shot "live" on camera by the romantic leading man, Aldo Nuti, during the climactic scene.[1] Gubbio, who will be in the cage filming the scene, is appalled by the fate of this beautiful creature: "In the midst of a universal sham," he writes, "her death alone will be genuine" (Pirandello 2005, 60, henceforth *Shoot*). Thus, the stage is set for a meditation on the antinomies of reality and artifice,

"life" and "form" (*zoē* and *bíos*), such as dominate all of Pirandello's work. Nowhere in his *œuvre* is this tension more explicitly linked to the question of the animal than in *Si gira*, and yet this aspect of the text remains critically underexamined, not least because of the dominant role Walter Benjamin's discussion of the novel in his essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" has assumed in shaping its critical reception. Benjamin cites Pirandello as one of the first authors to have recognized the alienating effects of the cinematic apparatus and the concomitant disappearance of the aura (1968, 229), but his reading is exclusively focused on the relationship of man to technology, which, to be sure, occupies a prominent place in the novel. The man–machine binary, however, must be seen in relation to the binary man–animal with which Pirandello consistently juxtaposes it. It is this ternary structure or "cybernetic triangle" (Pettman 2011, 5) of animal, man, and machine, and the constant oscillation and cross-pollination of its constituent parts which produces the central tension of *Si gira*.

The novel's title means "We are turning"—or, more literally, "One/it turns"—and refers to the act of turning the handle of a movie camera. (The phrase, spoken at the beginning of a take, is roughly equivalent to the English "roll camera … action!") At the same time, it also refers to Serafino Gubbio himself, whose initials (S. G.) and occupation as a cameraman have earned him the nickname "Si Gira." This metonymic reduction is compounded by the impersonal pronoun "si," which effectively renders him a depersonalized, automatic function of the filmmaking process, a mere "hand that turns the handle" as he is fond of saying (6, 20, 38, etc.). C. K. Scott–Moncrieff's English translation renders this phrase as "Shoot!," thus adding a further layer of ambiguity not present in the original but which neatly prefigures the climactic scene in which the tiger is shot both literally and figuratively by two disembodied hands wielding a revolver and a movie camera, respectively. The semantic coupling of these two apparatuses is in turn reinforced by the text, which makes abundantly clear that the movie camera is no less deadly than the revolver—which is to say, both are antithetical to *life* as embodied by the tiger. Moreover, it is significant that both of these deadly apparatuses should function by way of a rotating motion, for, as the repeated insistence on the figure of turning (*girare*) indicates, *Si gira* is centrally concerned not only with framing but also with *tropes* and troping. Indeed, these two figures—framing and turning, *topos* and *trópos*—are inextricably linked because each framing is also an encircling,

a circumscription, just as the turn represents both the act of establishing the framework and the motion beyond those established boundaries.

The difficulty of framing explored in the novel is first and foremost a problem of language and representation, of metaphorical language in particular, culminating in the spectacular "tropical 'malfunction'" (Moses 1979, 46) in the final scene when the tiger's literal death violently interrupts not only the fictional logic of the film but also, as we will see, the multiple narrative and rhetorical layers of the novel, thus rendering the boundaries between reality and artifice, inside and outside, and, above all, the literal and the figurative temporarily inoperative. This "malfunction" is itself the product of the tension between two opposed "moments of force" acting on the narrative: on the one hand, the ordering, framing mechanisms of the movie camera and the narration, both of which—importantly—are operated by Gubbio, *versus*, on the other hand, the tiger whose tropical energy stands for contingency, spontaneity, and *élan vital*. As the embodiment of pure and artless Nature, of the irreducibly, inaccessibly Real, the tiger serves as a foil to the artificial "sham" of human existence, and hence her presence and significance in the text seems to reinforce the human–animal binary. At the same time, however, she also has the potential to trouble or even undermine the strict separation of reality and artifice, literal and figurative, which keeps that dualism in place. This speaks to a more general characteristic of the figure of the animal, which, in Jonathan Burt's (2011) phrase, is frequently endowed with an "exorbitant potential," which is not exhausted by—and more often than not escapes—the philosophical and conceptual gestures that accompany it. In other words, as Burt argues elsewhere, "the animal image is a form of rupture in the field of representation":

> Although the animal on screen can be burdened with multiple metaphorical significances, giving it an ambiguous status that derives from what might be described as a kind of semantic overload, the animal is also marked as a site where these symbolic associations collapse into each other. (Burt 2002, 11)

Because animals are perceived as lacking the necessary subjectivity and interiority to be said to "act" in any conventional sense, the status of the animal within a staged performance is always inherently double: the identity of the animal as part of a fictional diegesis *versus* the viewer's underlying awareness of the animal as an extra-diegetic presence that has

been "made" to participate in the artifice. That is to say, animals can be made to signify by way of a transferential economy of metaphorical epithets and attributes, but the meaning that emerges through this transaction is always ultimately irreconcilable with the animal itself. There is always at some level an irresolvable tension between what the animal *is* and what the animal *means*. In this irreconcilability lies the "exorbitance" of the animal—and, I might add, the core of zoopoetics.

Burt's argument hinges on the peculiar ontology of animals *in film*, but I posit that the exorbitant discrepancy between being and meaning is not limited to photographic or filmic depictions of "real" animals but rather points to a fundamental problem in representation, which, moreover, is of vital significance for the field of literary animal studies as my reading of *Si gira* will show. But first I will turn my attention to Jorge Luis Borges's poem "The Other Tiger," which offers perhaps the most concise articulation of the difficulty of framing a tiger and its implications for zoopoetics. The poem opens with the speaker imagining a tiger, "powerful, innocent, bloodstained, and new-made" (1999 [1959], 117), prowling through the jungle by the banks of the Ganges. By the beginning of the second stanza, however, he begins to suspect that this tiger he has framed in verse is not the one he was looking for. Instead of the "deadly tiger, the fateful jewel" that "follows its paths," Borges's tiger becomes nothing more than "a series of literary tropes," whose path is always already circumscribed by language (117). Against this "tiger of symbols," he posits the real, "hot-blooded" tiger, but in doing so, in describing and naming this "real" tiger, it, too, becomes "a fiction, not a living creature" (119). Thus, in the third and final stanza, the poet makes a further attempt at locating "the other tiger, the one not in this poem." Although he knows that this one too will be "a system, an arrangement of human language, / and not the flesh-and-bone tiger / that, out of reach of all mythologies, / paces the earth" (119), nevertheless something compels him to pursue this "ancient … foolish, and vague" adventure. Borges's other tiger is forever beyond the reach of his poem because the process of framing it transforms it into a metaphor, a placeholder that exists only by virtue of pointing beyond itself to something that it is not, in this case the "real" tiger but also the chimerical assemblage of associations and inferences adherent to it. The tiger is thus always a "paper tiger," an *animot*, to use Derrida's term, and the elusive "real" tiger that would be "outside the text" is itself a function of the discourse that enframes it.[2]

Let us recall here that "the exorbitant" is also the term Derrida uses in *Of Grammatology* when discussing the question of deconstructive method, and it is in this context that we find his (in)famous assertion that "there is nothing outside of the text" (1997, 158). From this perspective, the "exorbitant" seems to offer a space *within* the discourse—or rather, it holds out the promise that such a space could and must be *produced*—from which that discourse might be deconstructed, called into question. The exorbitant names a position within the discourse that resists its totalizing order whilst also avoiding the trap of presuming that there is a non-discursive or extra-textual position from which to pass judgement: the exorbitant, critical reading "cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent … outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language" (158). This is why Borges's search for the "other tiger" must end in failure; but it is precisely a *productive* failure in that it ceaselessly pursues the outer limit of the representable. As we shall see, in Pirandello's case, the *Kosmograph* tiger also seems to offer the possibility of such an exorbitant critique—the promise of an outside that cannot be attained but nevertheless exerts a certain pressure on the inside—and, indeed, provides the very impetus or energy for the production and reproduction of that inside. In this way, the "exorbitant" corresponds to the aforementioned duality of turning and framing that structures Pirandello's novel: it is precisely that which exceeds or occupies a position outside the *orbis*, which designates not only a track or path (*orbita*) but the rotation of the Earth and, by extension, the world as a whole (*orbis terrarum*).

Borges's elusive third tiger, like Burt's exorbitant screen animal, follows its own path, "out of reach of all mythologies." The only difference being that while in the poem the "real" tiger is perennially absent, in the cinematic image it is forever and troublingly present. And so, even though literary animals cannot be said to be "real" in the same sense as animals on stage and screen, they nevertheless cause (or can cause) a certain kind of "rupture" in the field of representation. In both instances, moreover, this rupture pertains to the fundamental zoopoetic relationship between animality and metaphoricity. This conjuncture of the visual and metaphorical production of the animal image has been, conceptually as well as historically, predicated on the reality of animal death. Thus, John Berger's powerful suggestion that "the first metaphor was animal" is prefaced by his observation that "[t]he first subject matter for

painting was animal" and that "[p]robably the first paint was animal blood" (1991, 7). The implication here is that artistic expression, and by extension human culture in general, is made possible by animal sacrifice. And although the animal, whose blood is used to paint its own likeness, serves as both the "medium" and the "message" of representation, this transaction comes at the cost of its unavoidable absence.

Akira Lippit, following Berger, insists that "the animal dies at the moment it is thrust into contact with abstraction, with language" (2000, 48). The animal, excluded from the domain of language, is nevertheless "carried over" into human discourse in the form of a metaphor, or, to use Lippit's term, an "animetaphor" (165), which "opens"—or, we might qualify, holds out the *promise* of opening—"a passage between worlds" (169), namely, the human world of language and representation and the a- or pre-linguistic animal world. Once the animal enters language—"the slaughterhouse of being" (48)—it becomes a trope wherein its death is endlessly repeated. Yet this reiterable, metaphorical death is starkly at odds with the animal's literal death, as becomes abundantly clear when the metaphorical slaughterhouse of language is juxtaposed with an actual slaughterhouse, as in Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925), in which the depiction of striking workers being brutally slaughtered "like cattle" by armed soldiers is supplemented by documentary footage of an actual cow being slaughtered. This visual metaphor, as Lippit observes, "lacerat[es] the diegesis" (2002, 13) of the film: "Eisenstein's animals are parergonal, never fully inside nor outside the diegesis but against, beside, and in addition to it, surrounding *Strike* with an animetaphorical frame" (14). He concludes that "the figure of the animal disturbs the rhetorical structures of film language. In particular, *animals resist metaphorization*" (13 [my emphasis]). The figure of the animal remains "exorbitant," pointing beyond itself toward an ineffable "outside," but this is in itself a fundamental characteristic of metaphor. In other words, the "resistance to metaphor" is an attribute of the tropological dimension of language and of the (in)ability of words to refer to things in the world—or, to paraphrase Paul de Man: Nothing can overcome the resistance to metaphor since metaphor *is* itself this resistance.

I am referring, of course, to de Man's essay, "The Resistance to Theory" (1968, 19). As Wlad Godzich explains in his foreword to the book of the same name, appropriately entitled "The Tiger on the Paper Mat," this "resistance" refers in the first instance to the physical properties of matter, namely, "its perceptibility to touch and inertial opposition

to muscular exertion" (xii). This resistance allows us to verify the existence of an external reality and to make that reality the object of our knowledge. In language, the problem of resistance is thus the problem of *deixis*, of the referential capacity of language. Once this capacity is called into question, and it becomes clear that the deictics (here, now, I, you, etc.) refer only to instances of discourse, the resistance that grounded language in external reality vanishes and is replaced by an intra-linguistic resistance, the capacity of language to refer to itself, as "*something that takes place and something that can be referred to*, and it is from this inaugural act of reference that all other forms of reference will flow. It is, in the terminology that de Man uses, the resistance of language to language that grounds all other forms of resistance" (xvi–xvii [italics in original]). Language, therefore, refers only to itself—there is no *hors-texte*, in other words—but this self-reference in turn constitutes a form of resistance in the sense that it established the ground against which all other utterances must push. As Godzich observes, one of the most prominent means by which language poses resistance to itself is through *troping* (xvii). This may help to explain how the animal's supposed resistance to metaphor—the difficulty of its framing, its *exorbitance*—gives rise to a *poetics* of animality: there is no "actual" tiger in this novel, or in any other text for that matter, but nor is this "paper tiger"—in the strongest and most affirmative sense of the term—entirely fungible or reducible to its metaphorical value. Therefore, although the inclusion of a tiger in the text is always already an exclusion of the "real" tiger, which is perceived to exist outside language, this exclusion is itself a function of the text. The irreducible discrepancy between the metaphorical tiger and the "real" tiger then begins to exert critical pressure on the sovereignty of language. This pressure or resistance is what I call "zoopoetics."

The Lady and the Tiger

Although the ontological status of the tiger is never called into question as explicitly in Pirandello's novel as in Borges's poem, by means of its *mise en abyme* conceit of the film within the novel, *Si gira* nevertheless succeeds in mobilizing *both* of the aforementioned "ruptures" (i.e., the intrusive presence and the elusive absence of the "real" tiger) at a formal and narrative level. This destabilizing or rupturing effect reaches its fullest iteration in the climactic scene when Aldo Nuti, playing the hunter, is supposed to shoot the tiger while Gubbio turns the handle of

his camera. What actually happens is that Nuti turns and shoots the leading lady, Varia Nestoroff, who is standing outside the cage, and is then himself promptly torn to pieces by the ferocious tiger. Finally, someone from outside thrusts their arm inside the cage and shoots the tiger at point-blank range while Gubbio is pulled from the cage to safety, still compulsively turning the handle of his camera.

Leading up to this moment is an extremely convoluted web of intrigue and betrayal. Nuti's apparently erratic act appears to be a carefully premeditated murder/suicide perpetrated to avenge the death of his friend Giorgio Mirelli, who had committed suicide after breaking off his engagement to Varia Nestoroff, with whom Nuti had fallen madly in love. Nuti thus blames himself and her for his friend's death and concocts a plan to set things right. The entire novel may be said to revolve around this love triangle, but its plot is significantly more complicated and brimming with extraneous details, digressions, and petty conflicts. In the interests of space, I will refrain from providing a more detailed outline of the plot and instead propose that its very complexity is itself a function of the opposition of reality and artifice with which the novel operates; in other words, the plot of the film, which Gubbio never tires of deriding as vulgar and melodramatic, is nothing compared with the hopelessly convoluted structure of "real life," which, after all, is also a construct.

The novel's plot is thus inherently *excessive*, full of superfluous details that threaten to overwhelm the narrative and force it to burst its boundaries. Like the metatheatrical plays Pirandello would go on to write immediately after completing this novel, *Si gira* is obsessed with the problematic of framing. There are several distinct levels at which the novel engages, challenges, and undermines established frames. First, there are the explicit reflections on the actors' discomfort *vis-à-vis* the image they see of themselves on the screen where, stripped of their "aura," they hardly recognize themselves. This dichotomy is further complicated by the discrepancy between individuals' self-perception and the identities they are forced to inhabit in their everyday lives. Thus, late in the novel, we discover that Varia Nestoroff is not in fact quite the "man-eater" she is reputed to be but is really more of a *femme fatale malgré elle*, as it were, unable to escape from the identity that others have constructed for her (cf. Ganeri 2001, 192–193). This realization highlights another facet of the novel, namely, its deliberate use of cliché and narrative commonplaces as a means of critiquing those very conventions.

As numerous critics have observed, the character of Varia Nestoroff appears to be a more or less overt nod to the dangerous and alluring heroines that populate the novels of Gabriele D'Annunzio (cf. Angelini 1990, 25). That is to say, Nestoroff has good reason to feel that her identity is an artificial construct imposed on her from outside: she is the unwitting star of a lurid melodrama, the conventions of which require that she play the part of the exotic and sexually voracious femme fatale.[3]

At the beginning of the novel, Gubbio explains in great detail what exactly his job as a cameraman involves. The first task, he says, is to mark out the ground [segnare il *campo*] in blue pencil, thus establishing the limits of the frame within which the action is to take place (*Shoot*, 5). The problem with Nestoroff is that in her performances she consistently transgresses these established limits ("she always moves out of the picture [esce dal *campo*]" 39), thus rupturing the frame and rendering the take unusable. Her irrepressible outward momentum—beyond herself [di là da se stessa], as Gubbio puts it (41)—constantly threatens to undermine the rigid "mechanical framework" (4) of the film medium. Moreover, this tendency of hers, Gubbio insists, is entirely unconscious and involuntary, which, on the one hand implies that it is simply "in her nature"; but, on the other, it is also a structural consequence of the semantic overload that determines her character. In other words, like the tiger, she too is "difficult to frame," and it is by no means coincidental that these two figures should be intimately linked at a number of distinct levels within the text. Indeed, it is the persistent semantic fluctuation at work between *la donna* and *la tigre* that allows for the spectacular collapse of the multiple literal and metaphorical valences attached to the two that transpires in the climactic triple death scene. As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly ambiguous whether "she" refers to "la Nestoroff" or "la tigre." The identical grammatical gender produces a discursive polyvalence within the text that the English translation cannot adequately reproduce. The one echoes the other, and each statement about the tiger can, on some level, potentially be read as referring to the lady and vice versa. This "fearful symmetry" is one of the ways in which the tiger may be said to cross the boundary of her cage at a linguistic level.

"There comes every day," writes Gubbio, "like myself, in front of your cage here, a lady intent on studying how you move, how you turn your head, how you look out of your eyes" (61). She does this, Gubbio notes, in preparation for the part she is to play in the film, namely, that

of the English lady, "more tigerish than the tiger [più tigre della tigre]" (61). As it happens, la Nestoroff is not actually meant to play the title role in the film, but, says Gubbio, "perhaps she does not yet know this, she thinks that the part is hers; and she comes here to study" (61). Once more the intimate connection between the *donna* and the *tigre* of the film's title is reinforced: to study for the part, to inhabit this role, she must be "more" than the tiger, but her performance is nevertheless grounded in the pure animal being of the tiger in her cage.

This gesture of excess stands in correlation to Gubbio's affirmation at the beginning of the novel that "there is *something more* ["un *oltre*," literally "a *beyond*"] in everything" (4). The structural principle underlying his conception of reality is thus at base metaphorical: everything points beyond itself and overflows its limits. This is also the source of humankind's separation from the animal world. Gubbio refers to this trait as "superfluity": the condition of having more in oneself than is necessary for one's survival. Whereas animals "have in themselves by nature only so much as suffices them," human beings "have in them a superfluity which constantly and vainly torments them, never making them satisfied with any conditions, and always leaving them uncertain of their destiny" (10). Superfluity sets man apart from nature and is thus at once the source of his superiority and of his perpetual dissatisfaction and misery. This superfluity affords "itself an outlet, creates in nature an artificial world, a world that has a meaning and value for [humans] alone" (10). This superfluity manifests as language.

It is fitting, then, that la Nestoroff should turn to the tiger when getting into character. The artificial world produced by human superfluity is both the symptom and the cause of the realization that animal being is impossible or unobtainable for humans. Faced with the inaccessibility of the animal, human superfluity initiates a chain reaction, thus creating artifice on artifice in an effort to reclaim what has been lost. Instead of looking into the cage, mankind now looks out at the elegant sufficiency of the animal. La Nestoroff's daily visits to the tiger thus become the vehicle for her becoming-animal, the site of a reciprocal exchange across the boundary marked by the cage. The tiger herself, in return, locked in her cage, is significantly diminished. "A captive like this, far from your savage haunts, powerless to tear anyone to pieces, or even to frighten him, what sort of tiger are you?" (202). The transaction whereby humans have become more tiger than a tiger [più tigre della tigre], has, in turn, rendered the actual tiger *less* tiger than a tiger. And thus, as with

Borges's shadowy series of literary tropes, for Gubbio the "real" tiger is always "out there" and forever out of reach.

Life and Form

A central tension in Pirandello's treatment of the tiger (and of nature in general) is the insistence on its being authentic, "real," genuine, and so forth (as opposed to the fictional, fake, constructed, and fragile nature of human identity and reality), whereas the "reality" of the natural is also constantly called into question. Pirandello seems to yearn for this authenticity even as he unmasks it as illusory. The tiger, in other words, *is* the real tiger, the epitome of tigerishness, raw, uncultivated, untameable, honest, "beyond good and evil" (62)—in short, the Nietzschean "unhistorical" animal, that "does not know how to dissimulate, it conceals nothing and at every instant appears wholly as what it is" (Nietzsche 1997, 61). But at the same time, this, too, is a construct, an illusion, a form of "rhetoric" that Gubbio-Pirandello so disparages (e.g., *Shoot*, 36, 58) but which comes up again and again with reference to animals and their relationship to (or rather, their place within) human reality.

This double gesture is characteristic of Pirandello's poetics of *umorismo*, a kind of (self-) ironic vitalism that simultaneously unmasks anthropocentric illusions and delusions and recognizes them as necessary and inescapable. In his treatise on *Umorismo*, Pirandello singles out Copernicus as "one of the greatest humorists, though himself unaware of it" (1974 [1908], 141) because of the profound blow his discoveries dealt to human self-satisfaction and anthropocentric thought. In this regard, the humoristic tradition runs parallel to the "three severe blows" to mankind's species narcissism identified by Freud: the cosmological, the biological, and the psychological (Freud 1955 [1917], 139–141). Nietzsche, too, would have to be considered a great humorist, given, for example, the starkly non-anthropocentric, anti-humanist history of the world with which his treatise "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" begins.[4] Yet whereas simply pointing out the discrepancy between the vast indifference of the universe and the relative insignificance of human striving might give rise to the *comic*, in Pirandello's terminology, *humor* goes one step further by moving from the "perception" [avvertimento] of a contradiction to a self-reflexive "sentiment of the opposite" (113), which colors the laughter aroused by the perceived discrepancy between reality and appearances with a compassionate

sense of the underlying reasons for this incongruity and of how we ourselves are not free of comforting illusions either. Indeed, the greatest delusion—and one exhibited, incidentally, by Serafino Gubbio himself (*Shoot*, 6)—would be to believe oneself entirely free of illusions about the world and one's place in it.

This process is clearly visible in the following passage from Pirandello's earlier novel, *The Late Mattia Pascal*, between the eponymous protagonist and the ageing librarian Don Eligio:

> Copernicus, my dear Don Eligio, Copernicus has ruined humanity forever. We have all gradually become used to the new idea of our infinite smallness, and we even consider ourselves less than nothing in the universe, despite all our fine discoveries and inventions. … Our stories are like the biographies of worms. (2007 [1904], 3)

To which Don Eligio responds that, "no matter how hard we try to uproot and cruelly destroy the illusions that Nature has generously provided for our own good, we never succeed. Luckily, man is easily distracted" (4). Pirandello's humoristic worldview thus both diagnoses and indulges in what Dominic Pettman calls the "hubristic melancholy" of anti-humanist anthropocentrism (or, rather, in Pirandello's case, though it amounts to the same thing, "humanist anti-anthropocentrism"): "The more it [anthropocentrism] exposes itself, and the more ironic distance we feel from its force field, the greater the stranglehold it has on us in terms of actual actions. Everybody knows that humans are froth on the ocean of eternity—but what sublime froth!" (2011, 21). Similarly, in Pirandello's last novel, *One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand*, the narrator speculates that perhaps "animals, plants, and all things have a meaning and a value for themselves which man cannot understand" (1992 [1926], 40–41) because he only ever sees the meanings he assigns to them, to which, moreover, nature is completely indifferent. But the realization that our reality is a human construct does not automatically allow us to see beyond it to the *Ding-an-sich*: "there is no other reality outside of this, the momentary form we manage to give to ourselves, to others, to things" (41). Here we have Pirandello's philosophy and poetics in a nutshell: our reality is nothing but a construct, but it's the only one we've got. Or rather, it is the only one of which we can have any direct knowledge, even though this knowledge comes at a price, namely, that any object of knowledge is necessarily an abstraction and hence no

longer part of "the flow of life," which subtends all of the "stable and determined forms" we humans construct in order to arrest it (1974, 137). But life cannot be studied or explained by reason: "Life is not explained; it is lived [La vita non si spiega; si vive]" (*Shoot*, 143). It follows that we cannot ever know ourselves either because in order to see ourselves in life, we must stop living, and hence, in an implicit indictment of the Delphic imperative, Pirandello's texts repeatedly insist that "to know yourself is to die" (1992, 148, cf. 1994, 121).

Gubbio's movie camera, which he refers to as a "spider" sitting on its "knock-kneed tripod," is a deadening and deadly apparatus precisely because it is antithetical to life; it exists only to devour and destroy the "live reality" embodied by the tiger and mechanically reproduce it as "an evanescent, momentary appearance" (*Shoot,* 68). For the actors, the experience of seeing their images on screen is unsettling and uncanny: reduced to a pure appearance, they suddenly are what they appear to be, namely artificial constructs. The tiger, by contrast, *is* always what she appears to be, and for this reason her encounter with the "spider" must prove fatal.

Yet because the tiger "is what it is," paradoxically it functions also as a metaphor for "the flow of life," which has been "arrested," fixed in a "stable and determined form" in the shape of a cage. Gubbio's disdain for the foolish rationalists who seek to capture life and transform it into an object of study translates directly into his mockery of the notion of placing a tiger in an enclosure to give the paying public "a 'living idea' of natural history" (58) —a triple idiocy because not only are "living idea" and "natural history" contradictions in terms, but a caged tiger is not a "real" tiger at all! What is more, this act of bracketing off, of creating a discrete space for the animal marked by a clear boundary separating it from the human spectators, mirrors the *internal* bracketing off (inclusive exclusion) of the animal within the human. During one of his visits to the tiger, Gubbio writes:

> I see your wild nature steaming from your whole body, like the heat from glowing embers; I see marked in the black stripes of your coat the elastic force of your irrepressible leaps. Whoever studies you closely is glad of the cage that imprisons you and checks in him also the savage instinct which the sight of you stirs irresistibly in his blood. (60, translation modified)

Here Gubbio effectively *reads* the tiger, interpreting the markings on her fur as external signs of the wildness within, which emanates from her

body in all directions. The cage, moreover, serves a double function: on the one hand, it literally contains the wild beast, protecting the cast and crew of the film studio until the time comes to unleash it in front of the camera. On the other hand, it acts as a metaphor for the artificial barrier dividing nature from culture, erected as a bulwark against the savage and uncivilized instincts within human beings themselves. That is to say, at any given moment, "man" is both inside and outside the cage.

"The forms," Pirandello specifies, "in which we seek to stop, to fix in ourselves this constant flux are the concepts, the ideals with which we would like consistently to comply, all the fictions we create for ourselves, the conditions, the state in which we tend to stabilize ourselves" (1974, 137). In Gubbio's terms, the stable form we call "our identity" is in actual fact nothing but a "metaphor of ourselves" (*Shoot*, 123, cf. Pirandello 2007, 249), one we seek to preserve at all costs even if it means destroying ourselves in the process. Gubbio yearns instead to abandon himself to his innermost being, giving up the futile pretense of maintaining the false exterior and surrendering to the infinite. These forms may have arrested the flow of life superficially, but "within ourselves"—which, in this context, also means inside the cage—"the flux continues, indistinct under the barriers and beyond the limits we impose as a means to fashion a consciousness and a personality for ourselves" (1974, 137). The condition of superfluity, which for Gubbio is the human condition *tout court*, is brought about by the inadequacy of the frames and forms we humans construct in an effort to contain the flow of life. If "animals resist metaphorization," as Lippit insists, it may be because they appear to lack the superfluity that transforms humans into metaphors of themselves. At the same time, however, a factor of this resistance is the way the tiger permeates the text *as a metaphor*, her influence flowing outward "under the barriers and beyond the limits" imposed on her by the cage until her presence is felt at every level.

Resistance to Metaphor

In his poem, Borges imagines his tiger, "powerful, innocent, bloodstained, and new-made," prowling through the jungle and leaving "his footprint on the muddy edge / of a river with a name unknown to him / (in his world, there are no names, nor past, nor future, / only the sureness of the present moment)." The speaker of the poem tries to isolate this moment, specifying that he means *this* tiger—"the real

one”—casting his shadow on the plain “today, the third of August, ’59.” But this *now* is of a different denomination than the tiger’s, and the poet must recognize that “the act of naming him, of guessing / what is his nature and his circumstance / creates a fiction, not a living creature” (1999, 117–119). In much the same way, the *Kosmograph* tiger, in her very wildness and purity, serves a symbolic function as a contrast to the stupidity of the human world of artifice and deception as epitomized by the film industry. But, seemingly in an attempt to strip away the myriad symbolic and metaphorical associations the tiger invokes, Gubbio again and again insists on the singularity of *this* tiger, *here* in *this* cage, *right now*. This is underlined by the way the tiger is introduced into the novel through a series of digressions. Thus, following another tirade against the stupidity and falsity of the movie industry, Gubbio begins the next section: “Excuse me a moment. I am going to pay a visit to the tiger” (*Shoot*, 57). Gubbio assures us that he will continue his story afterwards, but that right now he “must go and see the tiger.” The implication is that the tiger is not part of the story, and yet she exerts an imperative force which disrupts the flow of the narrative. Gubbio *must* go and see the tiger. This interruption also carries with it a shift to the present tense, as if the animal’s “eternal present” were suddenly mirrored in Gubbio’s narration. At a certain level, then, the tiger is presented as unassimilable to the surrounding narrative even though she is quite literally the centerpiece of that narrative.

“No animal has ever *spoken to me* like this tiger” (57, translation modified), says Gubbio, by way of explaining why he goes every day to stand in front of her cage. Although this encounter repeats itself daily, it nevertheless assumes the character of an interruption, a caesura. In this respect, it is analogous to the arresting encounter Jacques Derrida describes having with his cat in the bathroom one morning, which likewise is “a scene that is repeated every morning” (2008, 13). “I must immediately make it clear,” Derrida writes, interrupting himself with some urgency,

> the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn’t the *figure* of a cat. It doesn’t silently enter the bedroom as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse our myths and religions, literature and fables. (6)

But of course, as Derrida well knows, he is protesting too much. Such is the metaphorical force of the animal in language that it is all

but impossible to dissociate *this* cat from "Montaigne's cat" (6), or "Baudelaire's family of cats, or Rilke's, or Buber's" (7) and so on. All the insistent deictic specificity he can muster is not enough to isolate *this* cat from all the others. That is to say, this little cat is always, at one and the same time, one, specific, real cat *and* an "ambassador" of "the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race" (9). Derrida insists on this being a real cat "in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity" (9). Caught in the gaze of this animal, he recognizes in it, before any identification in terms of species or gender, a specific "irreplaceable living being." "Nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized [*rebelle à tout concept*]" (9).

This "refusal" or "rebellion—indeed, this "resistance"—is inherent in Derrida's coinage of the neologism *animot*, a chimerical portmanteau of animals (*animaux*) and the word (*mot*), an uneasy singular/plural hybrid that Derrida employs to trouble the traditionally self-evident capacity of language to d(en)ominate the living other. It performs the "fictionalization" effected by the act of naming, even as it leaves open a space that may be inhabited by the animal thus named without its having to conform to the strictures of human linguistic practice. This space or caesura, which we might imagine as existing somewhere between the two constituent parts of the word *animot*—between the animal and the word or, in Pirandellian terms, between *life* and *form*—means that this assemblage designates three things at once: (1) the specific animal named, (2) the multiplicity of other animals contained in that denomination, and (3) the unnamed, unnameable *real* living being that resists conceptualization and metaphorization. Thus, Derrida, too—like Borges and Pirandello before him—is driven to pursue that "ancient, foolish, and vague" quest for the *third*, exorbitant cat.

The Unspeakable Event

The final chapter of Gubbio's notebooks opens with an inflection of the verb "to turn" from the infinitive to the present perfect: "Girare, ho girato." This also marks a shift in narrative perspective. Whereas Gubbio has hitherto always narrated events more or less as they occur, now a month has passed since "the unspeakable event" (*Shoot*, 208, translation modified) that forms the climax of the novel. The perfect tense of "ho girato" also marks a shift from the way in which the tiger was always written about, namely in the present tense. Now that she has fulfilled

her function and been slaughtered in the name of entertainment, that present moment has receded into the past. More specifically, the tiger's "eternal present" has been replaced by the eternal recurrence of mechanical reproducibility. Her life has been sucked in by "the spider," and she now leads a ghostly existence on the cinema screen, reanimated again and again for the benefit of the paying public.

Throughout the novel, the bars of the tiger's cage have served as a reminder of the boundary separating "man" from "animal," but when Nuti and Gubbio enter the cage with the tiger, human and animal finally meet on equal ground, and the stable boundary between inside and outside, reality and artifice, nature and culture, *zoē* and *bíos* is suspended. While Gubbio is setting up his camera, he notices Nuti go over to the edge of the cage and thrust apart a section of the foliage serving as a backdrop before returning to his designated spot, but Gubbio thinks nothing of it. Once this partition has been punctured, the door linking the two cages is opened and the tiger appears. Gubbio begins turning the handle and narrates:

> I saw Nuti take his aim from the beast and slowly turn the muzzle of his rifle towards the spot where a moment earlier he had opened a loophole among the boughs, and fire, and the tiger immediately spring upon him and become merged with him [*con lui mescolarsi*], before my eyes, in a horrible writhing mass. Drowning the most deafening shouts that came from all the actors outside the cage as they ran instinctively towards la Nestoroff who had fallen at the shot, … I heard there in the cage the deep growl of the beast and the horrible gasp of the man as he lay helpless in her fangs, in her claws, which were tearing his throat and chest. (212, translation modified)

Several things are happening all at once here, but one way of describing them would be as a curious instance of "de-metaphorization" resulting in the vertiginous conflation of the literal and the figurative. Instead of shooting the "actual" tiger, Nuti shoots the metaphorical tiger, la Nestoroff, who, moreover, is standing outside the cage and hence outside the *campo* or diegesis of the scene. The plot of the novel becomes enmeshed in the plot of the film: the two narrative levels collapse into one, just as the two tigers, on and off camera, are symbolically and literally fused. At the same time, Nuti is caught up in his own

becoming-animal as he "become[s] merged with" the tiger. Man and beast united in a "horrible writhing mass," each issuing inarticulate sounds until the one is indistinguishable from the other.

This collapsing of layers also impacts the different types of "beast" and the different modes of "devouring" that inhabit the text. After the incident, Gubbio, unable to speak, tells the crew "first of all by signs, then in writing" to "take good care" of his camera, which "had in its maw the life of a man; I had given it that life to eat to the very last" (212). Gubbio, whose sudden muteness is less the symptom of a becoming-animal than a becoming-*machine* (or becoming-*camera*) has now "literally" (213) fed his camera the life of this man. Thus, the "spider" trades places with the tiger as the actual "man-eater." Given this thoroughgoing confusion of identity and species boundaries, the symbolic order would seem to have been rendered wholly inoperative. But let us return to Gubbio's narration of the incident, which continues without pause: "I heard, I heard, I kept on hearing above that growl, above that gasp, the continuous ticking of the camera, the handle of which my hand, alone, of its own accord, still kept on turning" (212). The sound of the camera drowns out the noise of the commotion outside the cage as well as the carnage inside it. This is the sound of the symbolic order re-establishing itself after this interruption. It is the sound, to borrow Mary Ann Doane's terminology, of the contingent being transformed into an event. "Death and the contingent have something in common," writes Doane, "insofar as both are often situated as that which is unassimilable to meaning. Death would seem to mark the insistence and intractability of the real in representation" (2002, 145). The planned death of the *Kosmograph* tiger was supposed to supply a *frisson* of dangerous authenticity to an otherwise contrived fiction. Unleashed on the field of representation, however, the tiger precipitates an explosion of contingency, which—as we have seen—disrupts the flow of the narrative and, moreover, collapses the distinctions between human and animal, male and female, as Nuti, Nestoroff, the tiger, and even Gubbio himself find themselves *exposed*—literally and, given the presence of the camera, figuratively—in their shared creaturely finitude. Once the strict binaries it was erected to enforce have been thus rendered inoperative, the interior of the cage reveals itself to be a true "zone of indeterminacy" (Agamben 2004, 37), a "space of exception" (38) that reduces all life, whether human or animal, to *bare life*.

Yet if the cage is at bottom a version of the anthropological machine, so is the camera, whose presence inside the cage ensures that the breakdown of the symbolic order is not total but rather contained in yet another representational frame. Even as established boundaries appear to become blurred, Gubbio's hand goes on turning the handle, and by doing so the contingent is transformed into an event, i.e., something delimited (of a specific duration) and that has a particular significance: "The contingent is, in effect, harnessed" (Doane 2002, 144). Recall Gubbio's definition of "superfluity" as that which "creates in nature an artificial world, a world that has a meaning and value for [humans] alone" (*Shoot*, 10). Earlier, we said that "this superfluity is language," or *différance*, a "dangerous supplement," but it is of course also an excess, a surplus, and thus the *value* it produces is a form of exchange value, antithetical to the "meaning and value" that exist for all living things, of *life* as it is lived, not observed (143). Within this economy, the fearful force of the contingent may indeed be framed and exhibited for profit. Which is precisely what happens with this scene, for, as Gubbio informs us, the film goes on to become a box-office hit, "what with the enormous publicity and the morbid curiosity which the sordid atrocity of the drama of that slaughtered couple would everywhere arouse" (212–213). The death of the couple (Nuti and Nestoroff) is now the main attraction. There is no mention of the tiger; her death has been eclipsed by that of the two lovers. The tiger fulfils her instinctual role by eating Nuti while Gubbio instinctively continues to turn the handle. It becomes clear that she could inhabit the text only as potential energy: from the first, she had threatened to cross the moat and savage the spectators at the zoo, and this irrepressible *élan vital* has generated much of the impetus of the plot. When she finally does cross the boundary, becoming "merged" with Nuti, she disappears, like a ghost, living on only as a troubling absence. The return of the symbolic order also eclipses the significance of the death of the animal: it had to die, indeed it must be sacrificed in order for sense, language, *logos*, etc. to come into being. The "event" of language excludes the animal; indeed, it depends on that exclusion for its very existence. But this is, of course, also an "inclusive exclusion," and language continues to bear the residual trace of that banished animality. And it is this trace, this absence, that leaves open the exorbitant space of zoopoetics.

Notes

1. The moated enclosures of the *Tierpark* were not the only facet of the radically new possibilities in the exhibition of live animals ushered in by the Hagenbeck Revolution. The growing film industry was also keen to offer its audiences an escape from their everyday urban environment, and zoos such as Hagenbeck's were only too happy to furnish the major studios with wild animals for the popular adventure and safari films. Owing to the prodigious costs and logistical problems involved, however, the "jungles" and "savannahs" of these films were for the most part artificially reconstructed on sets in Europe and North America. Ole Olsen's *Løvejagten* (*The Lion Hunt*, 1907), for instance, combined footage from Copenhagen Zoo with scenes filmed on a small island north of Roskilde, Denmark. Nevertheless, as Eric Ames observes, Olsen's film "made a strong and, on some level, undeniable claim to authenticity, that is, all of the animals that Olsen acquired from Hagenbeck were literally shot and killed before the camera" (2008, 200). The same is true of other films of the genre, such as William Selig's sensational *Hunting Big Game in Africa* (1909), which was filmed entirely in a Chicago studio, but likewise involved the real killing of "an elderly zoo lion" (Chris 2006, 11). In contrast to Cherry Kearton's documentary, *Roosevelt in Africa* (1910), which was shot entirely on location but flopped at the box office, Selig's film was a runaway success and helped pave the way for a slew of wildlife adventures and gaudy Hollywood romances set in exotic, far-flung locations, much like the *Kosmograph* feature that stands at the center of Pirandello's novel.
2. See also Rodolfo Piskorski's insightful essay on "zoogrammatology," in which he argues that Derrida's *il n'y a pas de hors-texte* "seems especially vulnerable in … discussions regarding the interface between textuality and animals, where the latter figures as the ultimate *hors-texte*. I propose that the animal *hors-texte* derives its compelling power entirely from the fact that the *hors* is shaped precisely as a space felt to be left empty by the *texte*, so that its boundaries actually figure as the shape of the animal *hors*" (2015, 233).
3. Nestoroff's identity is even more meta-textually overdetermined because the pervasive semantic association between her and the tiger, as well as the suicide of her former lover, also recall the Russian countess Nata from Giovanni Verga's 1875 novel *Tigre reale*, the title of which refers to the aforementioned countess, who is rumoured to have driven her lover to suicide. Verga himself later adapted the novel for the screen, and the film, directed by Giovanni Pastrone, was released in 1916 and starred Pina Menichelli as Nata. The film was conceived as the second part of Pastrone's "d'annunzian dyptich," the first being *Il Fuoco*, based on Gabriele

D'Annunzio's eponymous novel and also starring Menichelli in her first major role. As if to solidify these inter-textual references, when Pirandello approached Italian film pioneer Anton Giulio Bragaglia with the aim of producing a film version of *Si gira*, he suggested Menichelli for the role of la Nestoroff. The film, however, was never made (cf. Càllari 1991, 88).

4. The same can be said of Serafino Gubbio's willingness to adopt the tiger's perspective on the moat separating her from the zoogoers—"what other thought could arise more spontaneously in the mind of a tiger (if you object to the word mind, let us say the paws) than that the ditch in question was put there on purpose so that she might try to jump it[?]" (*Shoot*, 58)—which here, again, exposes the hypocrisy and self-delusion at work in the structure of human society.

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