

Antoine TRAISNEL — **Capture: American Pursuits and the Making of a New Animal Condition** (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020, 354 p., ISBN 9781517909642, \$27.00)

What happened to animals in the nineteenth-century United States? This is the fundamental question that Antoine Traisnel takes up in *Capture*, as he tracks the transition between two epistemological and biopolitical regimes of apprehension—or pursuit—of the animal: that of the hunt and that of capture. While the expansion of settler capitalism and the exploitation of animals on an industrial scale led to species extinction or near-extinction, as in the exemplary case of the bison, hunting became progressively obsolete and was replaced with capture as a way to “archive and encase animals” at the moment of their disappearance, “in order to preserve and study their likeness” (2). More exactly, Traisnel contends, capture does not only record the animal for preservation: it actually produces the animal as disappearing, which facilitates its biopolitical management. “The making of [this] new animal condition,” to cite the book’s subtitle, thus coincided with, and was even inextricable from, “the making of the new nation” (4). Yet the book’s argument is not only historical. It is also representational and ecological, as well as political, as Traisnel investigates the ways in which capture “motivated the invention of new aesthetic, literary, and medial genres and techniques”—from Audubon’s life-like paintings and Poe’s detective fiction to Muybridge’s moving images—even as it “contributed to naturalizing the wide-scale [...] erasure of animals” (6).

To advance these claims, the book draws exactly on the work of Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida, Donna Haraway, Akira Lippit, and Cary Wolfe, as well as Branka Arsić, Britt Rusert, and Kyla Schuller, among many other philosophers, theorists, and literary scholars. The more than eighty pages of endnotes at the back of the book set up a wonderful series of thoughtful conversations with Traisnel’s numerous interlocutors. Yet debate is not exclusively relegated to the notes; and the five chapters that make up *Capture* are brimming with scholarly arguments which help to frame the close readings which form the core of the book, and at which Traisnel excels. These five chapters are themselves divided into two parts: the first (chapters 1 and 2) investigates the “last vestiges of the hunt” in the early nineteenth century, while the second (chapters 3 to 5) showcases the “new genres of capture” that emerge between the 1840s and the end of the century. Each chapter then zooms in on one author, sometimes even one text, as its case study.

Chapter 1 thus explores John James Audubon’s ornithological project as a remnant of the regime of the hunt, “the continuation of the hunt by other means” (34), where “the act of representation [of the animal] is equal to the act of killing [it]” (50). Chapter 2 mobilizes the triptych of seeing, knowing, and killing that organizes chapter 1, as it attends to the work of another naturalist, albeit a fictional one: Dr. Obed Bat in J.F. Cooper’s *The Prairie* (1827). A myopic man of science, Bat replaces the “perspicacious hunter” Natty Bumppo (59), while the novel traces the ways in which blind (naturalist) speculations enable another form of speculation: the perception of objects and subjects “as potential investments” (64). Blindness is not lamented, then, so much as repurposed as “the margin of loss that is built

into the venture capital model of settler colonialism” (64). Even as Cooper ridicules the new order of things embodied by the laughable naturalist, he also queries its serious biopolitical consequences, as it ushers in a new regime of “conquest and management” of animals, as well as of Native and Black populations for whom animalization often worked as an instrument of subjugation (85).

Chapter 3 then moves “from the wilderness to the city” (92) and turns to Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) as a foundational probing of “biometric profiling and racial surveillance” (28), where “animality becomes weaponized by [capture’s] system of control” (87). Tracking the reciprocal animalization of crime and criminalization of animality, this chapter reads Poe’s detective fiction as a form of “decryption” (98) that brings to light the animal’s “aporetic position”: “always with us” yet “nowhere to be found” (107). This aporetic position, Traisnel argues, analogizes the “impossible ontology and legal status of the enslaved subject,” simultaneously “dead and alive,” “thing and person,” “captive and fugitive” (106), and helps to account for the racialization of both animality and crime that Poe’s story at once performs and enables us to critique.

If detective fiction seems particularly germane to the logic of capture, chapter 4 asks what “other genres” (120) might also allow for its deployment. To that end, Traisnel looks to Hawthorne’s last published romance, *The Marble Faun* (1860), as a self-avowedly failed attempt to “pen an elusive creature” (121)—the young Donatello who bears a striking resemblance with Praxiteles’ marble faun—while reckoning with the taxonomic work of Cuvier, as well as with emergent evolutionary discourses. In Poe’s fiction the question of the animal was a spatial conundrum wherefrom the animal emerged as encrypted, and thus unmappable and illocalizable. For Hawthorne, the question of the animal is one of time, as *The Marble Faun* stages “the unexpected persistence of an anomalous specimen after its presumed extinction” (145). With its calculated anachronism, the genre of the romance is therefore particularly attuned to such instances of “survival from an older time” (145).

Hawthorne’s “fabulous taxonomy” sets the stage for the question that animates the final chapter of the book. Because *The Marble Faun* seems to consign the animal to untimeliness and positions it at odds with modern time, “is it possible,” Traisnel asks, “to develop a positive image” of that lost animality (152)? Eadweard Muybridge’s moving images and “protocinematic experiments” (156), the object of chapter 5, provide the answer. Using a system of trip wire, Muybridge “designed the first contraption capable of recording a movement too rapid for the naked eye” (159). Effectively, the animal—here, a horse—took its own picture, a picture of something, life, that the human could not see, yet that suddenly became strangely knowable.

The conclusion takes up the book’s key terms, and modes, of relating to animality: seeing and knowing, and calls on its readers to imagine “a new ethics of care and knowledge” (196) predicated on distance rather than appropriation and exploitation. Doing so, Traisnel nods to his own epigraph at the start of the book: Jacques Prévert’s “To Make the Portrait of a Bird” in which writing does not make the bird disappear by capturing it, so much as it works to “erase all of the bars” of the cage that it painted in the first place.

*Capture* is an impressive accomplishment and the work of a keen and astute reader of both philosophy and nineteenth-century American literature. Impeccably researched, rigorously argued, and rife with illuminating close readings, it is bound to become a landmark in the field of animal studies, and more generally for any reader interested in the invention of life and the making and unmaking of human and nonhuman subjects in the nineteenth-century United States. — Thomas CONSTANTINESCO (Sorbonne Université)

Chloé THOMAS — **Les excentrés. Poètes modernistes américains** (Paris : CNRS Éditions, 2021, 265 p., 25 €)

L'ouvrage de Chloé Thomas constitue une introduction particulièrement bien documentée, à l'écriture souple, au ton alerte et à la clarté communicative. Le défi posé par une telle entreprise dans les limites de quelques deux cents pages était au moins triple. On sait d'une part que les synthèses de référence, autant que les enquêtes pointues, ne manquent pas dans le domaine moderniste anglo-américain, qu'il s'agisse d'ailleurs de littérature ou d'autres formes artistiques, mais ces travaux sont le plus souvent disponibles en langue anglaise uniquement. Il fallait donc traduire pour le public francophone tout un paysage critique, en plus de donner à lire et à entendre des textes représentatifs d'un mouvement si protéiforme que l'on hésite ici à juste titre entre « vague moderniste » et « modernisme vague » (10), forcé d'avoir recours à ce « concept à la fois imprécis et incontournable » (12), pris entre un étau constitué d'un côté par des singularités irréductibles et de l'autre par des manifestes s'efforçant à répétition de souder un collectif retors (43). C'est là une tâche dont Chloé Thomas s'acquitte avec beaucoup de finesse et de pédagogie ; tel est notamment l'objet de la première partie de l'ouvrage, consacrée à l'histoire et à la validité de la notion de modernité dans le champ des études poétiques américaines au xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, depuis la critique produite par ces modernistes eux-mêmes, en passant par le *New Criticism*, puis les relectures contradictoires des années 1970-80, et enfin les manuels conseillés aux étudiants aujourd'hui. Les pages de la section intitulée « La tradition moderniste : un héritage en dialogue » parviennent ainsi à faire dialoguer, avec un certain luxe de définition, des horizons critiques différents dont les lecteurs francophones ne seront pas nécessairement familiers, et qui trouveront là une excellente porte d'entrée. Le regard proposé opte donc pour une « histoire événementielle du modernisme » (63), loin d'une célébration des invariants de l'avant-garde éternelle. En pratique, cet historicisme est cependant partagé entre analyse diachronique et évolution synchronique du fait du choix de suivre, tout au long de l'ouvrage, la carrière de quelques grands noms ; ce déséquilibre n'en demeure pas moins moteur, et permet à diverses dissonances de se faire entendre, notamment du point de vue de la canonisation d'auteurs dont la position hiérarchique ultime dans la tradition entre en contradiction avec leur inventivité initiale supposée.

La seconde difficulté résidait, comme souvent pour ce type de panorama, dans le besoin d'articuler un propos introductif général à une écoute attentive de la lettre des textes retenus. Or, non seulement cet aspect exige un exercice de traduction original (traductions fournies ici très généreusement en accompagnement des textes en langue anglaise), mais il suppose d'aborder l'épineux sujet de l'art prosodique, du vers libre, et plus largement des formes