ANIMAL NATURE

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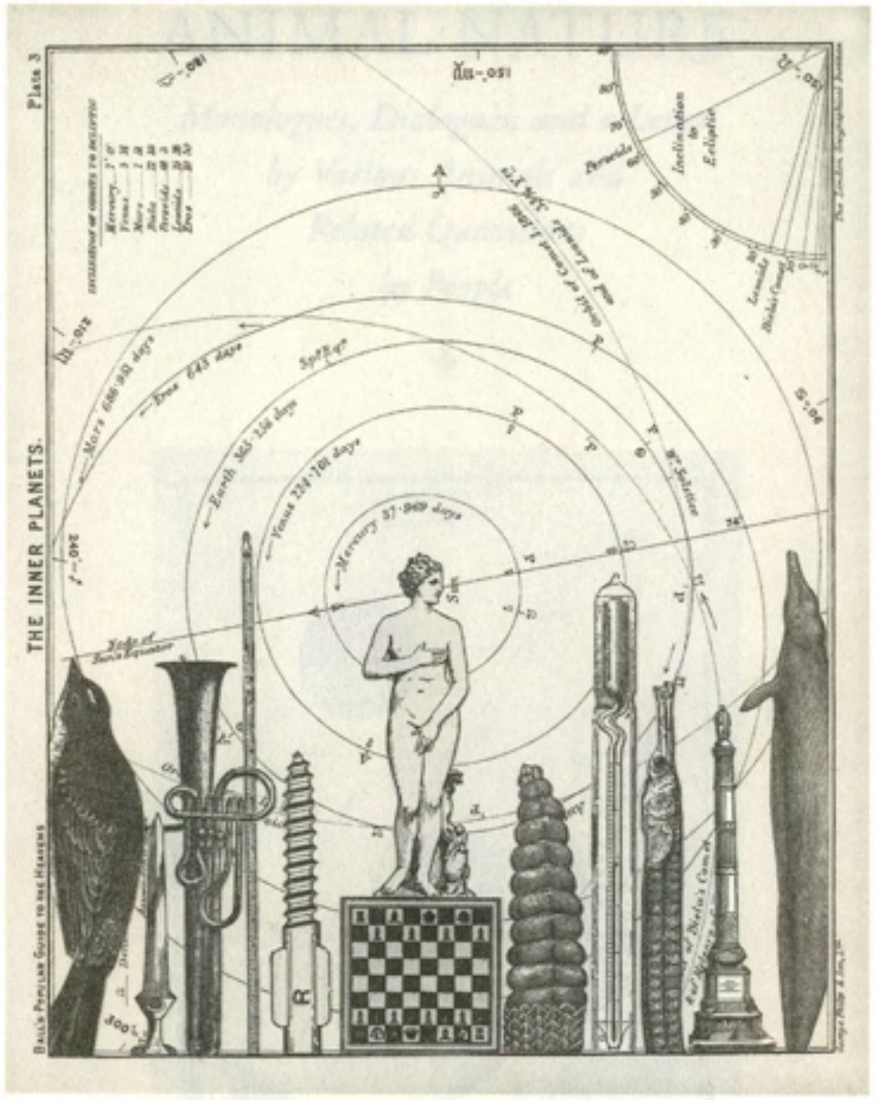
Plate 3
THE INNER PLANETS.
Mercury 87·969 days
Venus 224·701 days
Earth 365·256 days
Mars 686·980 days
Jupiter 4332·585 days
Saturn 10759·220 days
Uranus 30686·821 days
Neptune 60126·721 days
Mercury 3° 0'
Venus 3° 24'
Earth 0° 0'
Mars 1° 51'
Asteroids 10° 37'
Jupiter 1° 18'
Saturn 2° 29'
Uranus 0° 46'
Neptune 1° 46'
Inclination to Ecliptic
Asteroids
Halley's Comet
Orbit of Comet Halley
Orbit of Jupiter
Orbit of Saturn
Orbit of Uranus
Orbit of Neptune
Orbit of Asteroids
Orbit of Mercury
Orbit of Venus
Orbit of Earth
Orbit of Mars
Sun
Earth
Mercury
Venus
Mars
Jupiter
Saturn
Uranus
Neptune
Asteroids
Halley's Comet
Vernal Equinox
Summer Solstice
Autumnal Equinox
Winter Solstice
Plane of Ecliptic
Plane of Earth's Equator
Bailey's Perpetual Guide to the Heavens

ANIMAL NATURE

Monologues, Dialogues, and a Letter
by Various Animals and
Related Quotations
by People

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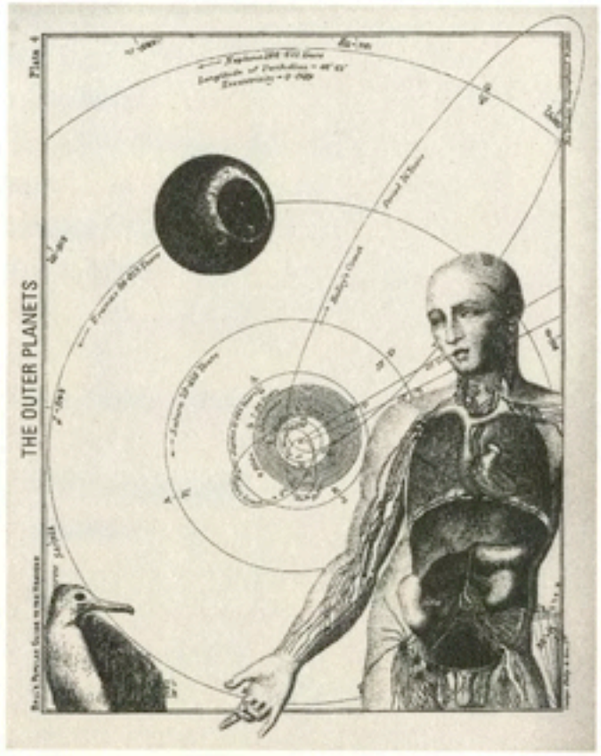

SARAH STENGLE
PRINCETON, 2004

To My Two True Loves

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Black Bear

Ursus Americanus

I have trouble coming to grips with my animal nature. Despite a good education and therapy, my ravenous hunger drives me, not my ambitions. Even worse are the long, cold months wasted on sleep.

I am truly in a dark wood, wandering.

Oyster

Ostrea

I have difficulty communicating—everything I say comes out in garbled little spurts. These propel me along but never as far as I want to go. I am delicious to eat and feminine in form. Being desirable in this manner is a burden at best. It's risky and I get no respect.

Submerged, I look at the sky and wish I were a red star, vast and powerful. I would be visible for miles. Sometimes, I imagine that I am Venus flying rings around the sun. Instead, I am nearly motionless, small, gray and wet. Only my thoughts are turbulent, and living underwater prevents me from expressing them. I live invisibly under sand and silt, and my dreams drift away unnoticed.

Bull

Bos Taurus

My name is Dante and I have fathered a thousand calves by now. I am strong and dependable, but my service is all long distance and somehow not polite. If I refused to cooperate, I expect the consequences would be fatal. My brothers have all been killed for veal.

The truth is, I've never spent any real time with a cow. I wish I could relax, just once, with one of them, instead of enduring this mechanical extraction.

I never knew my mother and often wonder what she was like. It was her prodigious lactation that saved me from the slaughterhouse, but I never tasted a drop. I was fed formula from birth.

I never found Beatrice either.

DANTE ALIGHIERI, 1293

Nine times already since my birth the heaven of light had circled back to almost the same point when the now glorious lady of my mind first appeared to my eyes. She was called Beatrice by many who could not have possibly called her by any other name. She had been in this life long enough to allow the starry heavens to move a twelfth of a degree to the east in her time; that is, she appeared to me almost in the beginning of her ninth year, and I first saw her near the end of my ninth year. She appeared dressed in the most noble of colors, a subdued and decorous crimson, girded and adorned in a style suitable to her years. At that moment, and what I say is true, the vital spirit, the one that dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that even the least pulses of my body were strangely affected; and trembling, it spoke these words: "Here is a god stronger than I, who shall come to rule over me." At that

point the animal spirit, the one abiding in the high chamber to which all the senses bring their perceptions, was stricken with amazement and, speaking directly to the spirits of sight, said these words: "Now your bliss has appeared."

CORKY BROWN, 2003

When breeding dairy cattle, less than one in a thousand males are selected; the rest are killed for veal. Of those few selected for breeding, less than ten percent survive the five year culling process used to determine elite bulls. Then, frozen semen from these elite bulls is shipped to herds nationwide where it is deposited, via a long glass pipette, directly into the cow's uterus. This procedure is more efficient than natural methods, and much safer for the farmer. A full grown bull is powerful and unpredictable, and can weigh over a ton.

Red-faced Love Birds

Agapornis Roseicollis

HANS: I am always happy to tell the story of how we met, how our music brought us together. This well-polished narrative is simply the public face we put on our love.

SOPHIE: In the jungle, ignorance and questionable motives abound. Prudence has taught us to keep the joy we find in each other private. Anything we say could get jabbered back at us. Neither of us likes facing warped reincarnations of our lives in all the voices around us.

HANS: Experience has taught me that my passions endure only when they are tempered by consideration and restraint. Sophie is my passion. Singing is my vocation. But singing with her is the deepest pleasure I know.

SOPHIE: We focus on our music. We practice for hours every day. When we are singing, we simply forget about ourselves. It's bliss. I never ask myself if he loves me. Our love is a rock; it never changes.

HANS: No one talks, or writes or sings about happily married couples; it's always the broken heart.

SOPHIE: No one would talk about the weather either, if it were constant.

UNMISTAKABLE FEELING

Among the emotions, birds show unmistakable feeling of affection and sympathy. The loves of birds, the pining for an absent mate, and the conjugal affection of doves, etc., prove that in them the simple sexual feelings are heightened and enhanced by the intellect. Their jealousy is proverbial, as seen in the singing birds; they also show emulation and resentment as well as vindictiveness; their curiosity

— the sign of a quick intellect — is highly developed; they have æsthetic emotions, love of bright-colored objects shown by the bower-bird, which builds its bowers at sporting places in which the sexes meet and where the males display their finery. Moreover, the singing birds, which stand at the head of the avian series, show a decided fondness for the music of their mates, aside from any utilitarian or sexual motives. Canaries, parrots, and doves are well known to take delight in human vocal or instrumental music.

Ewe

Ovis

I wish I were a better role model.

I don't care to bathe or spend my time cleaning. It's tedious and pointless. The dirt always comes right back. A little dirt never hurt anyone, anyway. I would much rather be daydreaming.

I have relatives in Iceland who pasture between volcanoes and the Greenland Sea. They have seen glaciers and hot springs, and walked over ancient lava flows. I have always wanted to visit, but my morbid fear of solitude prevents me from traveling.

I decided to stay in the fold and behave like the other sheep.

I love my lambs dearly, but I doubt they will ever admire me. I've forfeited my dreams out of fear and used them as my excuse.

ABOUT SHEEP BOT-FLIES

With the appearance often of a single fly within a flock of sheep the most intense excitement will prevail. The animals will hold their noses between their legs in close proximity to the dusty waysides, or they will crowd together in hot, barren, open places with their noses in the dust, in their endeavors to evade their tormentors. The flies, with quick motions, eject the young larva into the nasal orifice, whence the small, active maggots crawl backwards into the passages of the nostrils or throat, or usually into the frontal sinuses, where they remain feeding on the mucous membrane and serum until they have attained their full growth, requiring a period of about nine months. When numerous larvae develop within the nasal and frontal cavities, disease and often death ensue. At the beginning they produce a thin discharge from the nostrils, which afterwards becomes thick and purulent; at the same time there is a constant

sneezing. Later the animal continually shakes its head, rubs it nose upon the ground, fences or its own legs. Still later it goes about with a sunken head, with a staggering dizzy gait, with reddened and watery eyes and heavy breathing which may culminate in death.

Domestic Fowl

Gallus Domesticus

HENRY: In the beginning it was lovely. We didn't think ahead. Now I realize that our circumstances eclipse us. The simplest pleasures have been eroded by monotony. We spend each day scratching and squabbling for corn.

My daydreams have become re-runs of my former ambitions. Even sleep is no respite. My imagination is a broken record scratched into static.

JUNE: I agree. We once shared a boundless optimism. It was lovely to meet an educated, imaginative cock and our first chicks were darling. Now they are everywhere and there is never a blessed moment of peace. When spring arrives, I feel exempt from its freshness. Traveling is not an option and I lack the talent for poetry.

I don't mind the chicks, really I don't. It just strikes me as odd that they eat all my corn if I am not fast enough. I'm tired. Even so, when I see the world through their young eyes, I feel happy.

I simply can't stop laying eggs.

Catholic
24.5%

Baptist
16.3%

Methodist
6.8%

Lutheran
4.6%

Presbyterian
2.7%

Pentecostal
2.1%

Episcopalian
1.7%

Jewish
1.3%

Mormon
1.3%

Churches of Christ
1.2%

Congregational Churches of Christ
.7%

Jehovah's Witness
.6%

Egg

Ovum

Please don't pressure me.

My parents did a carnal thing, and I exist through their sin. Here, in my darkness, I can foster pleasant illusions of moral innocence and amazing possibilities, but an anxious malaise overtakes me when I even consider hatching.

I doubt that I will live up to my own expectations.

I may make my first mistakes within moments of hatching. I am not sure when accountability begins. Does it begin at birth or with mere cognition? If being conscious is a form of responsibility, then procrastination is a sin. I'm already in trouble; I've done nothing!

I often wonder if redemption is possible. If it were, I wouldn't mind my inevitable birth quite so much.

I dearly wish I had faith.

23RD PSALM, KING JAMES BIBLE

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Nematode

Nematoda

We have traditions that go back, far back beyond Plymouth Rock. We live a simple life with no need for controversy or conspicuous consumption. Our humility is a spiritual matter, part of God's plan. The absence of vice makes me proud to be a nematode. Most species can only aspire to our freedom from greed, deceit, violence or perversion.

Our thoughts, actions, and bodily form are determined by a concise sequence of genomes. We embody an eloquent, ancient codex of multi-cellular life in which only the necessary exists. Other species have extraneous features, aberrations and decorative qualities. Our beauty is that our form truly follows our function.

FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, 1914

If all the matter in the universe except the nematodes were swept away, our world would still be dimly recognizable, and if, as disembodied spirits, we could then investigate it, we should find its mountains, hills, vales, rivers, lakes and ocean represented by a film of nematodes. The location of towns would be decipherable, since for every massing of humans there would be a corresponding massing of certain nematodes. Trees would still stand in ghostly rows representing our streets and highways. The location of various plants and animals would still be decipherable, and, had we sufficient knowledge, in many cases even their species could be determined....

Polar Bear

Ursus Maritimus

Angels prefer winter and so do I. Nothing is cleaner or brighter than snow in the flat blue light of the North. Land is too dirty for angels, clotted with lichen, mud, and mosquitoes. Go far enough out onto the ice and the land vanishes. All reference to distance and direction disappear. The sea ice is a crystalline sphere illuminated by a starry firmament, a dance floor for angels. Once, in early winter, I heard them playing. A thousand miles of ice was chiming, tuned by perfect, invisible hands.

Grizzly Bear

Ursus Horribilis

My golden cub gets scratched by small thorns. Thorns are an incidental part of the high cost of consciousness. Watching her carelessly ambling towards the next blueberry with a face already quite sticky, no one would suspect that her quiet engines of reason run smoothly through the same bramble that scratches her, memorizing every rose.

A Letter of Admiration

From a Rabbit to a Greyhound

Dear Sid:

I heard you before I saw you, your feet drumming the ground. I was as silent as the surrounding clover. You raced by without taking notice, but I noticed you.

I noticed your effortless grace and all the details I could take in: the mist near your mouth, the focus in your eyes, the chiseled pattern of intercostals stretched taut along your chest and the transparency of your skin near the tendons of your legs. Your wonderful legs were a study in linear grace, more perfect than any vector analysis.

Someone called out your name; then you turned and were gone.

In my fractious consciousness there is a small part that is happy to know that, had you seen me, you would have given chase. I could have been your total focus, your temporary object of desire.

This excitement later turned to self-loathing. I'm a velvety bit of fluff best left unnoticed. Certainly we must never meet! But I am left to wonder how different life would be if you were on my side, if you would come when I called, roll over and play fetch.

Nancy

Moth

Lepidoptera

He pulled out his tools and got right to work. It was darker than I had ever imagined. I had anticipated a flutter, a floating softness. That delicate notion was pounded out of me in an instant. His sweetness had evaporated and it hurt me.

So I closed my eyes and flew away.

My wings were pinned to the sheet, but my vision drifted through the ceiling and hovered in the streetlight. A shuddering motion pushed me toward the brightness, so I closed my eyes more tightly.

My eyes shut out everything. Everything except the blue light within me, my own cobalt blue, which is wildly attractive.

Red-Tailed Hawk

Buteo Borealis

In dreams flying is effortless. In life, it's hunger that keeps me flying. My shoulders ache and my vision is fading. The sun marks the hours spent hunting.

Time is discouragingly linear. Changes in myself remind me that I am caught in an inexorable machine, filling my senses, but still grinding me into dirt. The day I am too weak to fly is the end of my predictable narrative. The closing sentence is already written: "gravity defeated him." This conclusion seems dirty, as profane as a deer carcass spray-painted orange on the side of a highway.

Sacred time exists when something invisible holds you aloft. On clear, hot days when the wind blows straight across the mountain ridges, I give up the hunt and search for lift. If I find a shaft of warm air rising, I cup it under my wings, banking gentle circles. In perfect conditions, I gently drift higher and higher without sensing or making the slightest motion. Then I am no longer flying; I am simply aloft. The earth recedes below me and my linear narrative evaporates. Evening brings cool descent, and the sun resumes its role as the hand of a clock ticking straight on down towards night.

Garden Spider

Epeira Vulgaris

Camille liked numbers better than she liked me. I met her in a meadow pacing out the proportions of her next web. Symmetry, she explained, was static, as was any simple repetition. The key to beauty lay in the irrational numbers and the intervals they defined. As I watched her map out the golden mean in silk thread, I gave her my heart.

Indifferent to my heart, she gladly accepted the help I offered. I wanted to be near her, to breathe the same air. Her focus was total, and together we spun intricate webs to her exacting specifications. One day I had an idea about the square root of two. Taken aback by my suggestion, she asked me to stop visiting, citing distractions and disruptions.

She threatened to eat me.

So it ended. I walked away, carrying my disappointment shrouded in velvet relief.

Leech

Hirudo

Being a hermaphrodite is less exciting than you might imagine. To begin with, I hardly find myself appealing. During adolescence I flirted with suicide. Now, when it comes to reproduction, I don't see the point, but I do it anyway.

My friends tell me I am too focused on appearances. I would do anything to change mine. I have these ridges in my skin, but the worst part is the softness. I swim everyday and never seem to firm up.

I try to live in the present, to take one day at a time and all that. It doesn't help. I'm prone to rumination. If I could, I would crawl through salt.

LEECH PLANTATIONS:

They [the French] have leech plantations, large swampy areas which are carefully freed from all animals that might destroy the leeches, such as large frogs and certain fishes. To nourish them, worn out horses and cattle are purchased and driven into the leech enclosures in which they are left to perish, death coming soon from loss of blood and preceded probably by very little pain.

Dog

Canis Familiaris

You were always busy, always in charge and so sweet smelling. Never mind that your heart was in two places at once, I loved you. I even dreamed of levitating before your confused eyes. I dreamed of you holding up broken beams and making my floors level again.

Your heart was in two places at once. Here, I refer to history and geography, not jealousy. I would lie, thinking of you, while you flew back and forth over the ocean, a migratory bird that nests on one continent and feeds on another. I would wait, weeks and months, and you would always return with a gift and a quick peck on the cheek to tell stories of distant conflicts.

Once, after you had left, I looked in the mirror. Your feathers had tousled my fur, and my eyes were embarrassingly bright. Then I saw things too clearly; I would do almost anything for you but you were just a visitor, designed to fly away. You were always careful never to promise me anything.

Besides, I'm a different species—territorial, not migratory. I love my stationary world with two raucous pups and the smell of dirt in the garden. My world is too small to contain trans-continental orbits, but I wish your smell would just linger on the couch cushions long past any good-byes.

How to Tame a Bear

Advice from the Author

• Approach the bear slowly, with honey dripping from your hand. When the bear eats the honey, he may also swallow a bit of you. If so, he will have accepted the offer of your hand. From that day forward, part of you, no matter how small, will always be with him.

• Forgetting or denying any natural law you ever learned, rush into the woods with your heart full of expectations. When you meet a bear, give him your complete and unconditional love. Then declare him tamed, regardless of his behavior.

• In early winter, find an appropriate cave and quietly arrange yourself next to the sleeping bear. Hold very still until spring. He will wake up unpleasantly surprised to find you there. Although you will have spent many nights together, this is no time to ask for promises. Go straight home and wait for the next winter to come.

• Entice the bear with delicious tidbits, offered with forbearance and affection. Be patient, because bears associate tameness with many intolerable restrictions. They are quite right to feel this way. This is why, after the bear has eaten out of your hand, he will lumber off again. He may never come back, but if you try to stop him, he will probably destroy you.

• Bring a jar of honey and a slab of bacon into the woods. Cover the bacon with honey and use it as your pillow at night. Dream of the excitement that may ensue. If a bear arrives, stroke him gently while he eats whatever he likes. This may cause you terrible pain, but it is well worth it in the end to have a bear of your very own.

• Without a trace of doubt or fear in your heart, apply the correct perfume liberally to your entire body. Wander around the woods to acclimate yourself, while waiting for the necessary thick hair to grow over your skin.

• Become a bear. Always use any violence necessary. Then, let them try and tame you. Never forget what you have become. Honey is delicious, provided you have your own dark wood to wander in.

THE END

✣

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ENDNOTES

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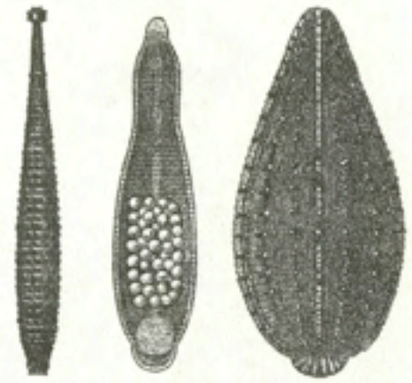

COLOPHON

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