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Editors

Life After Literature

Perspectives on Biopoetics in Literature
and Theory

 Springer

Editors

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ISSN 2510-442X ISSN 2510-4438 (electronic)
Numanities - Arts and Humanities in Progress
ISBN 978-3-030-33737-7 ISBN 978-3-030-33738-4 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33738-4>

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This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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Chapter 10

The Theriomorphic Face



Georg Witte

Abstract The face is a privileged site for the human subject since it is a location of signification—with its emotive and cognitive depth, its expressiveness, and its symbolic power that ranges from the peering eye to the speaking mouth. The paper outlines some positions in the philosophical literature that address this topos focusing in particular on the ape’s face as an analytical tool employed by the “anthropological machine” (Agamben). Furthermore, the paper revises two competing strategies of the fusion between human and animal faces. On the one hand, it deals with the facialization of animals (“giving animals a face”), namely the comparisons between human and animal facial expressions (from Le Brun to Darwin). On the other hand, it addresses the “bestialization” of humans by analyzing the movements of metamorphosis that escape the symbolic order (from Ovid to Mayakovsky).

10.1 The Face as an Anthropological Privilege

The face—with its emotive and cognitive depth, its expressiveness ranging from the gazing eye to the speaking mouth—is the privileged location where the human subject becomes an agent of signification. It is, at the same time, a privileging site. It characterises the species that—on account of the above capabilities—rises above all others: the human being. According to Georg Simmel, the face constitutes the highest level of the “unity of meaning” into which the parts of this most elaborate language merge. It is in the face that “the ideal of human cooperation”, i.e. “uttermost individualisation” merging into “uttermost unity,” has “achieved the most perfect reality in what is visible” (Simmel 1995: 35).

The most radical critique of this topos was provided by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Not only did they challenge the semiotics of subjectification that culminates in the face, they also showed that such a semiotics is precariously prone to collapsing. The “machine” they invented to create the face—“the white wall/black

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© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2020
Z. Kulcsár-Szabó et al. (eds.), *Life After Literature*,
Numanities - Arts and Humanities in Progress 12,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33738-4_10

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hole system”—is ambivalent. It is close to a mask, which in turn is a gateway letting in the “inhuman” element of the face (Deleuze–Guattari 1987: 169–170). When the Russian avant-garde artists Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov took to the streets with their painted faces in 1912, they probably were aware of the power of this “machine” (Fig. 10.1).

The “inhuman” face confronts us particularly with its obtrusive frontality, for example, as a close-up in a film (Deleuze–Guattari 1987: 189).

But we can expand on this critique. The face can be challenged for being an instrument of the “anthropological machine.” With this concept, Giorgio Agamben refers to a persistent component of our knowledge about the human being that establishes what is human on the basis of a constitutive difference (a “caesura”) from what belongs exclusively to the animal. These tools of knowledge include, among other things, the concepts of life in the biological classifications of the seventeenth

Fig. 10.1 Natalia Goncharova: Face painting (1912)



and eighteenth centuries as well as the evolutionary models of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Agamben 2004). But in his work, Agamben examines the role of the face only marginally—if at all. It would be worthwhile to create an iconography of the face as a highly significant but also highly precarious place of hybridisations, divisions, and distorted mirrorings between the human being and the animal.

In this context, we may look at the anthropological constructs of human-like animals by Edward Tyson (with the orangutan as “*Homo sylvestris*”, 1699) or the various levels of classification applied to “anthropomorphous beings” in the work of Carl von Linné and others (Fig. 10.2).

All these beings have faces, and it is often the mirroring of these faces in human faces that makes the difference between human and non-human faces visible: they are *not yet human* or *no longer human faces* (Fig. 10.3).

A famous example of this mirroring is that of the “wolf children,” who fascinated the human sciences in the age of classifications (such as Linné’s “*homo ferus*”). According to Agamben, they are “messengers of man’s inhumanity” who have the power to start the anthropological machine by providing us images in which the human beings recognise themselves and let themselves be “humanize[d]” (Agamben 2004: 30).

However, these mirrorings are dangerous: The *off*-mirroring or *away*-mirroring of the inhuman can easily turn into a metamorphosis. The ape’s face becomes the location of the anthropological caesura. If, as Linné argues, the only criterion to distinguish the human being from other anthropomorphous beings is to recognise oneself as different from the others, then this creates a paradox: the human being is an animal “who must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human.” The

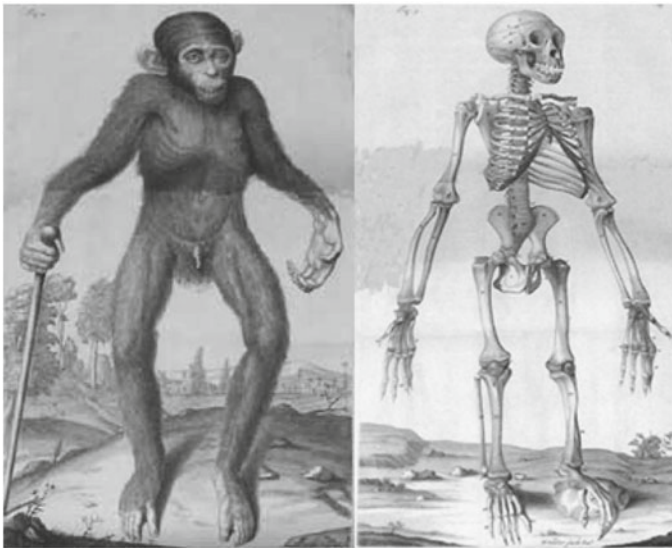


Fig. 10.2 Edward Tyson: *The Anatomy of a Pygmie* (2nd Edition, 1751)

Fig. 10.3 “Wolf Man”
 Petrus Gonsalvus (16th
 century)



human being must recognise himself as an animal that is human. That is, in order to recognise himself as a human, man must simultaneously recognise himself as a non-human. This concept implies visual conditions and consequences. Agamben refers to an “optical machine constructed as a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed in the features of an ape” (Agamben 2004: 26–27).

I think, this problem is clearly illustrated by a number of images from Ernst Haeckel’s *Anthropogenie* (1874) and *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* [Natural history of genesis] (1868) (Figs. 10.4 and 10.5).

Haeckel’s “Pithecanthropus alalus,” the speechless “apeman,” was regarded as the long searched-for intermediate stage, the missing link between great apes (“anthropomorphous beings”) and human beings. In *Anthropogenie*, there is an illustration of Pithecanthropus, made by Gabriel von Max, the Munich painter, ape researcher, and spiritualist (Fig. 10.6).

The human being sees him- or herself in the ape and, at the same time, from the perspective of the ape. This mirroring also appears in numerous satirical ape pictures painted by the same Gabriel von Max (Fig. 10.7).



Fig. 10.4 Ernst Haeckel: Anthropogenie (1874)

Here, he takes up the old topos of the ape as mirroring the vices of humans. What is so comical about the ape faces is that they are so *anthropomorphous*. Or, more precisely, that they are *not* theriomorphic. These pictures attribute to the unvanquished animal in us everything that the human being does against his or her own—specifically and exclusively human—catalogue of virtues, from alcohol consumption to intellectual hubris. Considering a different possible use of the comic element here (for example, if we look at pictures of apes that do research or read), we might also conclude that the object is to render the incompatibility of the cognitive privileges of human beings and the invariably stupid-looking ape face a skandalon.

If we now look at literary and pictorial representations to examine the fundamental and dangerous role of the face for the self-definition of the human being, and if we show how the celebration and crisis of this self-distinction manifests itself again and again in the face, we do not do so in order to deny the necessity of anthropological distinction. Challenging and qualifying this distinction in its historical-epistemological relativity, as has been done by Agamben, does not amount to jettisoning the fundamental necessity of this distinction for a concept of the human being. Above all, it does not mean that we simply equate a search for anthropological distinction with a “discrimination” against the animal based on human supremacy, as is often done in

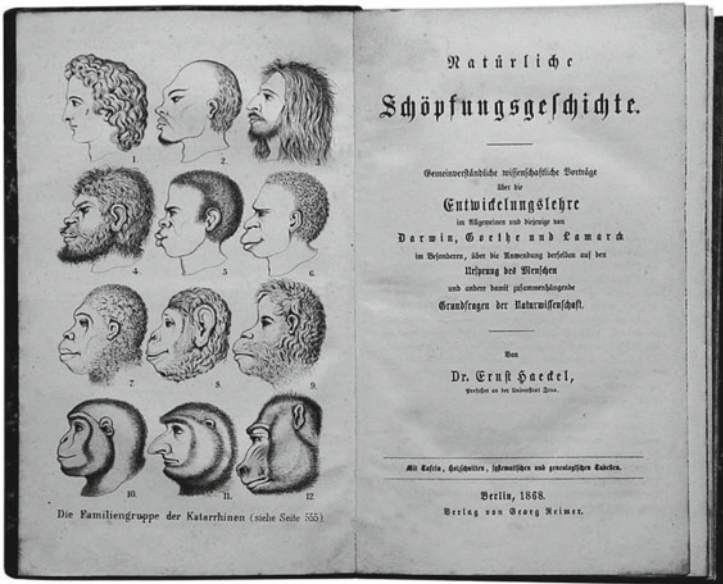


Fig. 10.5 Ernst Haeckel: Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte (1868)

Fig. 10.6 Gabriel von Max: Pithecanthropus alalus



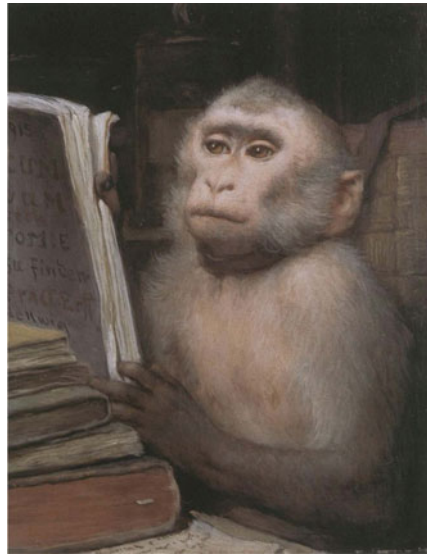


Fig. 10.7 Gabriel von Max: Apes (since ca. 1880)

Animal Studies and Posthuman Studies and as is also insinuated by a Deleuzianism that has degenerated into mere fashion.

One of the most important premises of this paper is the following: the animal face is a *projection* of the human face. Such a projection can go in two directions. It may be an attribution of the exclusively human element, faciality, *to* the animal—in discourses on pathognomy and expressive behaviour. Animals appear, then, as mimetically gifted beings. This projection usually involves the anthropomorphisation of the animal face. By contrast, the animalic element may also be allocated to the human face. The fascinating power inherent in such counter-projections manifests itself in animal masks, in the powerful effect of fictional metamorphoses from antiquity to the horror film, and in the grimace. Here, the animal face may, but does not have to, detach itself so completely from anthropological encodings that it becomes theriomorphic.

10.2 Giving a Face to Animals

Let us look at the first of the two directions of this projection that is predominant in the discourses of physiognomy and pathognomy. In these discourses, physiognomic signs of the virtuous, the cunning, the clever, and the stupid, the parsimonious, the irascible, etc., or pathognomic signs of emotions are examined using analogies. These analogies are visually presented as facial juxtapositions of animals and humans. We are indebted to Charles Le Brun for a major iconographic reservoir (Fig. 10.8).



Fig. 10.8 Le Brun: Conférence sur l'expression des différents Caractères des Passions, 1667; Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière, 1698

These visual analogies are also present in the work of Charles Bell (*The anatomy and philosophy of expression*, 1806, 1824, 1844). Despite his emphatic references to Bell in his introduction to *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Charles Darwin objected to Bell's hypothesis that the human being had been exclusively provided with a specific arsenal of facial muscles by the creator god "for him or her to be able to show other human beings his or her emotions" (Letter of Charles Darwin to Alfred Russel Wallace from March 1867, quoted by Paul Ekman, Darwin 2000: 8). He disagrees with Bell's exclusive reduction of animalic facial expressions to instinctive movements (rage, fear). His counterargument draws on the observation that dogs show affection (Darwin, revealingly, refers to the example of the dog interacting with his or her human master, see Darwin 1874: 10).

Darwin's book was provocative inasmuch as it did not only allow animals to have "emotions"—something deemed to be exclusively human—but also interpreted human emotions as the evolutionary legacy of the basic affects of animals. Still, Darwin is reluctant to attribute expressive faces to animals. Many of the animalic forms of expression he describes relate to postures (postures of the tail, arched backs, etc.), reactions of the dermal appendages (erection of hairs or feathers), and sounds (gnarling, barking, hissing). The facial expressions in the narrower sense that he mentions are the following: drawing back of the ears (as a preparation for fighting and as an expression of anger) and erection of the ears (as a sign of attention), and teeth baring (Fig. 10.9).



Fig. 14. Head of snarling Dog. From life, by Mr. Wood.

Fig. 10.9 Charles Darwin: *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872)

Only the apes are given rather elaborate facial expressions: grinning reflexes (corners of the mouth drawn backwards, fangs becoming visible, lower eyelids becoming wrinkled, chuckling sounds); raised corners of the mouth expressing satisfaction; in rare cases (rather considered to be exceptions), what might be referred to as weeping (eyes filled with tears); and intimations of mimetic expression for astonishment and attention (short slight raising of the eyebrows but without opening of the mouth); “gaze with a fixed and savage glare” (Darwin 1874: 136) when irritated; display of teeth to show anger; and protrusion of lips to show disappointment.

Other characterisations are more general such as “listless movements, fallen countenances, dull eyes, and changed complexion” showing “dejection” (Darwin 1874: 134) and similar emotions.

The mimetically gifted face of the animal becomes the ideal surface for the projection of empathy. Yet, even this narcissistic identification with the animal face (Deleuze–Guattari 1987: 240) has its transgressive consequences. As a trigger of sensorimotor excitation, the animal face can break the boundaries of cognitive empathy. Film scholars speak of somatic empathy, triggered not least by the frontal presence of excited animal faces that renders the flexing of muscles imitable (Brinckmann 1997). Things are becoming truly eerie, when the ape wears the human mask, when the ideal and sublime *imago* of a human face brings about a change to monstrosity, as Pierre Huyghe demonstrates in his breathtaking video *Human Mask* (2014) (Fig. 10.10).



Fig. 10.10 Pierre Huyghe: Human Mask (2014)

10.3 Giving Faces the Beast

In most cases, nevertheless, the mask represents an animal—the animal with which the human being covers the eyes and the mouth or that he or she puts over his or her head. With this, we will now focus on the second of the two possible directions of projection.

First, however, we will have to make a distinction. Again, there are two different ways in which the mask qualifies the human being. On the one hand, it can be regarded as a particularly strong manifestation of the facial privilege of the human being—if understood as mimetic disguise, as the ability of humans to behave in an artificial manner. Here, the human intellect manifests its own exclusiveness, beyond the conflicting anthropological or ethical values of the “masked” human being, whether as a resentment against the “false face,” the “larva” (instead of the “persona”), or as a celebration of artificiality (from Machiavelli via Plessner to literary deconstructivism). Those who *can even disguise* their face give proof of their facial competence.

In our context, however, we are not dealing with this kind of mimetic disguise, but rather with the mask as a tool used to assimilate the animal—the totem animal, the war animal, the heraldic animal, the decoy animal, and the animal used in advertising. The situation is harmless as long as this masquerade remains under allegorical control (emblems, crests, advertisements). That is, as long as we carry the animal on the war shield safely before us, with its fangs bared towards the enemy. The situation becomes

dangerous, however, when self-bestialisation begins, driven by the suggestive power of the mask.

The Gorgo Medusa may be regarded as an archetype of the bestialisation of the face. Jean-Pierre Vernant described how the distortion of the face into a grimace becomes the manifestation of a radical other (not just “an other person,” but “the other of the person”, Vernant 1991). The face of the Medusa is the place where the boundary between what is human and what is inhuman dissolves. Here, too, the frontal view is the worst. One has to face the Medusa directly, look into her eyes. As a result, a look that objectivises the object of the look (the other) is no longer possible. One relinquishes the awareness of one’s own subjectivity: “To stare at Gorgo is to lose one’s sight in her eyes and to be transformed into stone, an unseeing, opaque object” (Vernant 1991: 137). It is from this perspective that Vernant explains the appeal of the mask. In the mask, one stops being oneself; one doubles one’s face. According to Vernant, the face of Gorgo is also a mask. Albeit, it is one that is not put on but that has “parted from our face... only to be fixed facing you” (Vernant 1991: 138). It also stands in close relation to the lower body, threatening the hegemony of the head. The comically grotesque version of this bestialization can be found in the Baubo myth. Here, the face and the sexual organ become one (Fig. 10.11).

A more recent version of facial self-bestialisation is the surgical transformation of the artist Dennis Avner into a big cat. In order to become a “Stalking Cat,” following the totem animal cults of the Wyandot Indians from whom he descends, Avner reversed the direction of facial plastic surgery, using it not as a means of refinement but as a means of imbrutement (Fig. 10.12).

This morphing into a big cat involves the following:

- Extensive tattooing, including facial tattooing
- Facial subdermal implants to change the shape of his brow, forehead, and the bridge of his nose
- Flattening the nose via septum relocation
- Silicone injection in the lips, cheeks, chin, and other parts of the face
- Bifurcating (splitting) the upper lip
- Filing and capping the teeth
- Surgically shaping the ears, making them pointed and the earlobes elongated
- Surgical hairline modification
- Piercing the upper lip and inserting transdermal implants on the forehead, to facilitate wearing whiskers
- Wearing green contact lenses with slit irises
- Wearing a robotic tail.

Fig. 10.11 Terracotta sculpture of the goddess Baubo



10.4 Wavering Allocations: Metamorphoses

Let us consider a few dissolves from Sergei Eisenstein's film *Strike* (1924) (Fig. 10.13).

This picture renders the human face bestial for a short moment. It shows the face of a police spy who schemes against the striking workers. This bestiality, though, remains part of the allegorical order. It is to be understood as an allegory of vices or, at best, as a pathognomic analogy. The animal face is domesticated as a mimetic sign. It is true that the face of the human, the spy, becomes animalic, but this animalism



Fig. 10.12 “Stalking Cat” Daniel Avner



Fig. 10.13 Sergej Eisenstein: Strike (1924)

resembles the apes of Gabriel von Max. It represents a defective specimen of the human species that degenerated into an animal.

These pictures are part of an old and powerful tradition depicting such ambiguous figures: the tradition of metamorphosis. The metamorphosis of Lycaon in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is one example. Lycaon, the tyrant of Arcadia notorious for his bestial cruelty, was turned into a wolf. The shape of the wolf is based on metaphoric grounds. The wolf is *as* murderous *as* the tyrant. The text reads: "He [...] kept some vestige of his former shape" ("fit lupus et veteris servat vestigia formae", Ovid 2000: 40), and: "There were the same grey hairs, the same violent face, the same glittering eyes, the same savage image" ("eadem feritatis imago est", Ovid 2000: 239). It is a metamorphosis that finds its final form in the stable, recognisable image. The savageness ("feritas") is captured in the fixed form of the image.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are interesting in another respect as well. They participate in the anthropological machine, which, in this case, works on the basis of the immemorial hierarchical triad of *gods–humans–animals*. This is the basic configuration of the world in which the metamorphoses depicted by Ovid can take place. Just as the gods can become animals, so can humans. It is precisely this aspect of metamorphosis that joins gods and humans (as "mutatae formae") in one "class" as opposed to the animals into which they turn (as "nova corpora", Ovid 2000: 26)—regardless of the fact that the metamorphoses of humans by gods often appear to be punishments. In a more fundamental sense, the two groups—competing, as they constantly do, at the diegetic level—move into one and the same category.

At the same time, we should note that the motif of metamorphosis reproduces and reinforces the difference between humans and gods. The differences between these *two* groups, on the one hand, and the animal, on the other, are always marked (and sometimes even more strongly than the former difference). The punitive metamorphoses, too, certainly imply the exclusion from the exclusive community of anthropomorphous beings—gods as well as humans—as opposed to animal beings. The metamorphosis attests to an ostentatious loss of human dignity. It manifests the catastrophic end of an original membership in the club of anthropomorphous beings. For example, we could refer here to the Lycian farmers turned into frogs:

[...] and stretching her palms to the heavens, she said 'Live in that swamp for ever!' It happened as the goddess wished: It is their delight to be under the water, now to submerge their bodies completely in the deep pool, now to show their heads, now to swim on the surface. Often they squat on the edges of the marsh, often retreat to the cool lake, but now as before they employ their ugly voices in quarrelling, and shamefully, even though they are under the water, from under the water they try out their abuse. *Now their voices are also hoarse, their inflated throats are swollen, and their croaking distends their wide mouths. Their shoulders and heads meet, and their necks appear to have vanished.* Their backs are green; their bellies, the largest part of their body, are white, and, as newly made frogs, they leap in their muddy pool. (Ovid 2000: 295–296, emphasis GW)

Here, the focus is not on the experience of the shock caused by the dehumanisation of the voice. Rather, it is on aligning the already low and ugly form of human speech (the hate speech of the farmers) with an inferior form of animal speech (croaking). The situation is similar to the metamorphosis of Midas' ears into donkey ears. Midas

cannot distinguish good music from bad. In the competition between Pan, playing the syrinx, and Apollo, playing the cithara, he was the only one to side with Pan. His ears are, thus, so dumb as those of a donkey (Ovid 2000: 536ff). The lesson is clear: Human beings who, *as human beings*, do not behave in accordance with the exclusivity of their species will get what they deserve by being put on par with the animals even with regard to their shapes. These metamorphoses, too, maintain then—*ex negativo*—the exclusivity of the human being.

However, from the very beginning, metamorphoses constitute the intrinsically endangered undertaking of marking the difference between what is theriomorphic and what is anthropomorphic. Once you let yourself be transformed, the precarious divide separating you from the unrestrained animalisation that can no longer be allegorically controlled may easily be transgressed. In performing this experiment and experiencing the power of fascination derived from the images as they gush forth and jump towards us, we are reminded of the effect produced by the sorcerer's apprentice who cannot control the process that he instigated. This happens already in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (to which I will come back later). First, I will focus on an example from the Russian avant-garde: Vladimir Mayakovsky's *So This Is How I Turned Into A Dog* (1915).

For the time being, I will put aside the nevertheless important intertextual horizon of the kind of fiction that features dogs in this way—including, in a chronological order, texts like Miguel de Cervantes' *The Colloquy of the Dogs*, E.T.A. Hoffmann's *A Report on the Latest Adventures of the Dog Berganza*, Nikolai Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*, and Franz Kafka's *Investigations of a Dog*. In this context, it would be an interesting exercise to trace more closely the development of the dog from a speaking to a writing character. Furthermore, we could also mention here briefly an additional literary tradition featuring dogs in which the figure of the dog functions as a surface for projecting empathy—Ivan Turgenev's *Mumu*, Anton Chekhov's *Kashtanka*, and Georgi Vladimov's *Faithful Ruslan*. And, finally, as a third example, there is the literal demystification of the transformation narrative in Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* (1925). Here, the metamorphosis is not affected through a verdict of the gods but through the operating knife of the brain surgeon. This was the period in which Ivan Pavlov did his experiments. It was also the period in which Vladimir Mayakovsky's metamorphosis was written:

Ну, это совершенно невыносимо!
 Весь как есть искусан злобой.
 Злюсь не так, как могли бы вы:
 как собака лицо луны гололобой —
 взял бы
 и все обвыл.
 Нервы, должно быть...
 Выйду,
 погуляю.
 И на улице не успокоился ни на ком я.

Какая-то прокричала про добрый вечер.

Надо ответить:

она — знакомая.

Хочу.

Чувствую —

не могу по-человечьи.

Что это за безобразие!

Сплю я, что ли?

Ощупал себя:

такой же, как был,

лицо такое же, к какому привык.

Тронул губу,

а у меня из-под губы —

клык.

Скорее закрыл лицо, как будто сморкаюсь.

Бросился к дому, шаги удвоив.

Бережно огибаю полицейский пост,

вдруг оглушительное:

«Городовой!

Хвост!»

Провел рукой и остолбенел.

Этого-то,

всяких клыков почище,

я и не заметил в бешеном скаке:

у меня из-под пиджака

развеерился хвостище

и вьется сзади,

большой, собачий.

Что теперь?

Один заорал, толпу растя.

Второму прибавился третий, четвертый.

Смяли старушонку.

Она, крестясь, что-то кричала про чорта.

И когда, ошетинив в лицо усища-веники,

толпа навалилась,

огромная,

злая,

я стал на четвереньки

и залаял:

Гав! гав! гав!

This is entirely unbearable!
As though bitten all over by malice.
I rage not like anyone could possibly,
Like a hound at the bareheaded moon –
in its face
then howl at everything.

Nerves, it must be...
Go outside,
take a stroll.
And in the street didn't calm down at anyone.
Somebody shouted about the good evening.
I have to answer her:
she's an acquaintance.
I want to.
I feel –
but can't like a human being.

What is this barbarity?
Am I asleep, what gives?
Squeeze myself:
the same as I've been,
the same face I've grown accustomed to.
Touch my lips,
and out from under my lip –
a fang.

Quickly I cover my face as though blowing my nose.
Rush homeward, redoubling my stride.
Carefully rounding the policeman's post,
suddenly thundering:
"Policeman!
He's got a tail!"

I trace it with my hand and freeze like a post.
What the hell,
better than all the fangs in the world,
I hadn't noticed in my mad pace:
from under my jacket
fanning behind me a giant tail,
huge and canine.

What to do now?
One hollered and a crowd grew.

A second merged, then a third, and a fourth.
 They trampled an old woman.
 She, crossing herself, shouted something about the devil.

And when my face stiffened with broom-like mustaches,
 a mob piled up,
 tremendous,
 furious,
 I got down on all fours
 and began to bark.

(Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale, Mayakovsky 1978: 114–115; English version:
<https://timesflowstemmed.com/2013/10/19/so-this-is-how-i-turned-into-a-dog>)

This metamorphosis is dangerous from the beginning because it steps outside the normal rhetorical order. What starts as a mere comparison (“as though” bitten by malice, rage at the moon “like” a hound) finishes with a real transformation. The metamorphosis is, from a poetic perspective, a comparison put into practice. In poetry, such putting into practice has an important effect: it is transgressive.

In our context, it is particularly interesting to see that the metamorphosis starts in the face. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, too, the shocking experience of the monstrous often originates in the disfigured face, the emerging *hideous face* of the animal. In Mayakovsky’s poem, however, this does not happen in the form of a visual process (mirroring), but in a tactile manner. The face is *touched* and the fang is *felt*.

The teeth could be discussed in a separate paper. Here, Kafka’s facial descriptions in his Diaries would take pride of place: “Man in a box opened his mouth when he laughed until a gold molar became visible, then kept it open like that for a while.”—“In Pipes, because I felt oppressed by him, I saw first of all the jagged and darkly spotted tips of his teeth.” (Kafka 1948: 141, 1949: 256) The teeth are individual components of completely disassembled faces—components that invariably attract attention. Kafka’s gazes get lost in the facial components; they do the opposite of what the eyes of Georg Simmel do, which, in the face, celebrate the feast of synthesis. Teeth can become momentary attractors and focal flashes for the gazes that wander over faces. They are “startled” gazes that run “up and down” faces (Kafka 1948: 188), glances that go “zigzagging” “along” noses and other parts of the face (Kafka 1948: 106), and that suddenly, for a few seconds, move into oral cavities and pierce the surface of the face, a surface reserved for meanings. At the same time, the teeth protrude *from* the face—which is also reminiscent of Darwin’s dogs baring their teeth. Sergei Eisenstein, a specialist in using mimetic “expressive movements” in his films, is aware of this *fascinating* potential of teeth. In *Montage of Film Attractions* (1924), the baring of teeth is “not a parting of the lips but a pushing on the part of the head which, as the ‘leading’ part of the body, is striving to break through the inert restraints of the surface of the face.” It is “a gesture towards an opponent, constrained by consciousness for one reason or another” (Eisenstein 1988: 53–54).

Now back to Mayakovsky. The next step in the metamorphosis after the passing of the policeman’s post is experienced in a tactile manner: the growing of the tail.

The tail is a theriomorphic standard attribute: the devil's tail, the tails of satyrs. Mayakovsky promotes the futuristic actualisation of the metamorphosis motif. In this context, we should not forget the above-mentioned fascination of the Russian futurists with masks and facial grimaces as is shown in their illustrations.

The street becomes the new setting for the metamorphoses and for the theatricality connected with them: the distribution of points of view, the direction of gazes and glances. The new distribution of points of view is guided by a configuration that fits the image of the ostracised poet: the crowd and the leper. In this configuration, the animal sound acquires a new function. The poet's barking becomes the highest manifestation of *another* language, a language not understood by the bourgeois crowd (with regard to the "mythopoetic" implications of the poem: Smirnov 1978). While the animals of Cervantes, Hoffmann, and Gogol adopt an exclusively human feature by acquiring language (and, in this way, break through the anthropological caesura), Mayakovsky's poem shows a reverse pattern. It reveals the bestial alterity of the animal, in particular, through a replacement of human language with the bad language of the animal. Yet, this movement is again captured rhetorically at a more abstract level of reflection from a poetics perspective. I understand the image as an *allegory of the second order*: an allegory of the other, the allegorical language of the poet.

Other versions of this turning of the metamorphosis into animalisation can be found in the Jekyll & Hyde complex. In the iconography of this motif, the facial transformation is highly fascinating. There is a remarkable double-exposure photograph from 1895, in which the lower body becomes the place where the face is turning into an animal.

Film classics of the monstrous animalisation such as Kurt Neumann's "The Fly" (1958) reveal the climax of the horror in the face (Fig. 10.14).



Fig. 10.14 Kurt Neumann: The Fly (1958)

10.5 Inversions: Mirror Scenes Between Animal and Human Being

In addition to metamorphosis (although sometimes also coinciding with it), we can also cite here examples of scenes in which the human being and animal mirror each other as their respective glances meet. These scenes trigger a momentary rather than, in the case of the metamorphosis, irreversible shift from the anthropomorphisation of the animal face to the theriomorphisation of the human face. Iconographic highlights of such scenes can be found in Hitchcock's *Birds* (1963) or, as Willard's gaze meets that of the white rat, in Daniel Mann's *Willard* (1971) (Fig. 10.15).

A comical version of this paradigm is presented by Harpo Marx and the lion (Marx Brothers, "At the Circus", 1939) (Fig. 10.16).

Fig. 10.15 Daniel Mann:
"Willard" (1971)



Fig. 10.16 Marx Brothers: At the Circus (1939)

Similar mirrorings can be found in literary scenes featuring eye contact between human beings and animals. For example, Charles Baudelaire's cat poetry presents us with scenes in which the speaker glances into the eye of the animal. However, the cat will first have to retract her claws, debestialise herself, for an anthropomorphously projecting glance to become possible at all (*Le Chat*, in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1857).

Le Chat

Viens, mon beau chat, sur mon coeur amoureux;
Retiens les griffes de ta patte,
Et laisse-moi plonger dans tes beaux yeux,
Mêlés de métal et d'agate.

Lorsque mes doigts caressent à loisir
Ta tête et ton dos élastique,
Et que ma main s'enivre du plaisir
De palper ton corps électrique,
Je vois ma femme en esprit. Son regard,
Comme le tien, aimable bête
Profond et froid, coupe et fend comme un dard,
Et, des pieds jusques à la tête,
Un air subtil, un dangereux parfum
Nagent autour de son corps brun.

The Cat

My lovely cat, come, sheathe your claws;
on my enamored heart lie prone
and let me plumb your gorgeous eyes,
where metal's sheen meets agate's stone.

While my fingers leisurely
caress your head and supple back,
sensing your body's energy
with each intoxicated stroke,

I see my mistress in my heart.
Like yours, my charming beast, her gaze,
profound and cold, cuts like a dart,

and from her, head to foot, there strays
a faint perfume, a subtle hint
of her dark body's dangerous scent.

(Baudelaire 1997: 42–44; English version: McLean 2013)

In the course of this glance, however, the scenario of a literally “desharpened” encounter sublimated into the visual is thwarted. The glance of the animal becomes

cutting, acquires the tactile qualities of hardness and sharpness—the qualities of the claws. In the end, the sensuous dimension of the encounter shifts completely from the visual to the tactile and olfactory, i.e., the base, animalic dimensions of the senses.

In a similar fashion, Rainer Maria Rilke's *Panther*, apparently viewed from a safe distance through the bars of a cage, meets the poetic observer with a glance that destroys precisely this visual regime of contemplation:

Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehn der Stäbe
so müd geworden, dass er nichts mehr hält.
Ihm ist, als ob es tausend Stäbe gäbe
und hinter tausend Stäben keine Welt.

Der weiche Gang geschmeidig starker Schritte,
der sich im allerkleinsten Kreise dreht,
ist wie ein Tanz von Kraft um eine Mitte,
in der betäubt ein großer Wille steht.

Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille
sich lautlos auf — Dann geht ein Bild hinein,
geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille —
und hört im Herzen auf zu sein.

His gaze against the sweeping of the bars
has grown so weary, it can hold no more.
To him, there seem to be a thousand bars
and back behind those thousand bars no world.

The soft the supple step and sturdy pace,
that in the smallest of all circles turns,
moves like a dance of strength around a core
in which a mighty will is standing stunned.

Only at times the pupil's curtain slides
up soundlessly —. An image enters then,
goes through the tensioned stillness of the limbs —
and in the heart ceases to be.

(Rilke 1980: 33–34; English version by Stanley Appelbaum, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Panther_\(poem\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Panther_(poem)))

“An image enters then.” The scene that started so theatrically and, as it were, fully illuminated, featuring the “curtain” of the pupil, a regime of gazes that worked perfectly in line with the model of a stage perception from a central perspective—that scene changes into a dangerous darkness. If it is not the image of the observer, *what* is this image that—considering the direct and piercing gaze of the observer—“enters” the eye of the animal? At the same time, however, the completely “dumb” or “blind” eye (blind not in the sense of the unseeing eye, but of the eye that imparts nothing)

does not reveal anything of that which it sees. Thus, the poem ends with a crisis of the very capacity for projection from which it has started. The subject of projection gets lost in its object, in the darkness and emptiness of a place that is no longer a stage.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, too, there are remarkable connections to the situation of facial reflection. By way of conclusion, let us look at a few scenes from this enormous reservoir of motifs. The Pierides are turned into magpies (another punitive metamorphosis due to inappropriate behavior for a human being):

[...] but as they tried to speak, and, attack us with insolent hands, making a great clamour, they saw feathers spring from under their nails, and plumage cover their arms. *Each one saw the next one's mouth harden to a solid beak*, and a new bird enter the trees. (Ovid 2000: 270, emphasis GW)

Io becomes a cow (hidden from Juno by Jupiter):

When she came to Inachus's riverbanks where she often used to play and *saw her gaping mouth and her new horns in the water; she grew frightened and fled terrified of herself*. (Ovid 2000: 64, emphasis GW)

Actaeon is turned into a stag as a punishment for glimpsing Diana naked:

But when he sees his head and horns reflected for certain in the water, he tries to say 'Oh, look at me!' but no voice follows. He groans: that is his voice, and tears run down his altered face. Only his mind remains unchanged. (ingemuit: vox illa fuit, lacrimaeque per ora / non sua fluxerunt; mens tantum pristina mansit.) (Ovid 2000: 141, emphasis GW)

Ovid's mirrorings disturb a mimetic stability. As the case of Lycaon has shown, even the most monstrous mutations can be founded in structures of similarity. Yet, in the above quotations, the protagonists do not recognise themselves in their new animal forms when they look at the reflecting surface of the water.

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