Monsters in Eden: Darwin and Derrida

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> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?
> —W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

> I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper.
> —Mary Shelley, Preface to *Frankenstein*

I. Hideous Progeny

Monsters, denizens of the borderland, have always represented the extremities of transgression and the limits of the order of things. In the work of Jacques Derrida, the figure of the monster embodies a means of thinking otherwise—a means of passing "beyond man and humanism" and reaching for other posthuman futures—that has traveled under the name of deconstruction. The "event" of the Derridean text, signaling a "rupture" with the discourses in which it gestated, terrifies with its unprecedented deformation of the normal and its threat to the boundaries of conventional thought. And there are many who will "turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet

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unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity."[1]

This startling metaphor describes the violent appearance of poststructuralism through the language of evolutionary biology: the monstrous birth is a speciation event. The monster represents "the species of the nonspecies," the nascent germ of a species about-to-become. An unprecedented mutation, the monster is "yet unnamable," but perhaps heralds an entire population of hopeful monsters whose aberration remains to be classified. The very possibility of this symbolic "infant" and "terrifying" species, deviating from the humanist tradition which sees it as an enemy, depends here upon the rhetoric of evolution and the relevance of monstrosity to evolutionary thought that owes more than a cursory debt to Charles Darwin. Not only does the metaphor of the Derridean monster arise from a discourse authorized by Darwin, but the Darwinian attack on essentialism and humanism forms the preface to Derrida's terrifying project. Derrida has never claimed Darwin for an intellectual ancestor, but I suggest that certain family resemblances nevertheless exist.[2] My purpose is to enable a theoretical discourse drawing equally from the deconstructive imagination of Derrida and the evolutionary imagination of Darwin, reading Darwin and Derrida through each other. Together, Darwin and Derrida enact a critique of artifactual constructions of nature that disrespects boundaries and emphasizes the deviances, the perversions, the mutations, and the monstrosities of the world.

Monsters disrupt totalizing conceptions of nature and destroy taxonomic logics, at once defining and challenging the limits of the natural.[3] Spliced together—already a monstrous combination of

[1] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in idem, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1978), 278–293, 280, 292, 293; hereafter cited as "SSP."

[2] An affinity between Darwin and Derrida has been previously suggested by Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-century Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2000), 90, and by George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1988), 86.

[3] See Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books 1998); Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge 1992).

texts—Darwin and Derrida advance a teratology that recognizes the importance of monstrosity as an object of scientific inquiry and as a semiotics of radical alterity itself. Derrida often describes his texts as threats to humanist metaphysics, signaling the advent of thinking otherwise and the monstrous transformation of the world. Derrida's question of a grammatological science of writing, for example, represents "the wanderings of a way of thinking that is faithful and attentive to the ineluctable world of the future which . . . can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity."[4] Grammatology induces the future as monster, or rather, this horrible creature can only be glimpsed by the "way of thinking" explored by Derrida, a textual process that "produces a language of its own, in itself, which, while continuing to work through translation, emerges at a given moment as a *monster*, a monstrous mutation without tradition or normative precedent."[5] As an event, the production of deconstructive discourse takes "the form of the unacceptable, or even of the intolerable, of the incomprehensible, that is, of a certain monstrosity."[6]

Derrida writes monstrous texts to challenge hegemony, stressing that "one must produce what in fact looks like a discursive monster so that the analysis [of norms] will be a *practical* effect, so that people will be forced to become aware of the history of normality" (*P* 386). But the monstrosity of Derridean discourse is not limited to its *own* aberration, for monsters inhabit the darker spaces *within* Derrida's texts. At once outside nature and inside nature, the monster is a perfect deconstructive icon, collapsing distinctions with impunity. And Derrida has identified this contaminating construct not only with his own writing but with writing in general, the writing that he makes the subject of his discourse: "The perversion of artifice engenders monsters. Writing, like all artificial languages one would wish to fix and remove from the living history of the natural language, participates in the monstrosity. It is a deviation from nature" (*OG* 38).

[4] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1974) 4–5; hereafter cited as *OG*.

[5] Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other" *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*: *The Phenomenological Heritage*, ed. Richard Kearney (Manchester: Manchester UP 1984), 123.

[6] Derrida, *Points . . . : Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf and others (Stanford: Stanford UP 1995), 387; hereafter cited as *P*.

Derrida exhaustively shows how Western metaphysics has always depended upon the banishment of monstrous writing, "wanting to fix and remove it from the living history of natural language," but Derrida regenerates writing, resurrects it from the land of the undead beyond living history as an agent of affirmative deconstruction, becoming in his own metanarrative the Frankenstein-esque creator of a generalized science of monstrosity.

Derrida's monsters are material *and* semiotic actors, flesh and writing at the same time, for in addition to symbolizing deconstruction and challenging the "history of normality," Derrida writes that "A monster is always alive, let us not forget. Monsters are living beings. . . . A monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name . . . it frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure" (*P* 386). Slipping between the monsters of deconstruction and the monsters of nature, which are perhaps the same thing, Derrida again employs the evolutionary image of the monster as incipient species and thereby reveals a deep connection to the monsters of Darwinism.

For there is a similar saturation of monsters in Darwin's writing. Monsters as biological objects are major agents in Darwin's demonstration of species transmutation and the principles of natural selection. In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin displays monsters as startling deviations from type proving the instability of species boundaries, since "monstrosities cannot be separated by any clear line of distinction from mere variations."[7] Monsters appear within a single generation as notably different from their kin, but once stabilized in the breeding population of organisms, "monstrosities . . . graduate into varieties" (*OS* 38). Darwin uses the visible example of monsters to show that the normal form of a species can be dramatically altered through the process of selection. In the "artificial selection" humans perform on domestic stock to produce varieties of breeds, a breeder "often begins his selection by some half-monstrous form" (*OS* 70). Through the ministrations of the breeder, this little monstrosity comes to proliferate in the population, and eventually a new breed may be produced out of that single strange birth. Darwin draws an analogy between this artificial selection and the "natural selection"

[7] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (2nd ed., 1859), ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP 1996) 9; hereafter cited as *OS*.

occurring within wild populations of organisms, and he suggests that monsters and other "sports of nature" are not only remarkable evidence that variations do occur naturally, but that these variations may, in certain cases, be inherited to such an extent that new species evolve.

Darwin finds that the breeding of monsters is evidence for the selectability of traits and the directionality of evolution—namely, that variations can be cumulative—for "When any character has suddenly appeared in a race or species as the result of a single act of variation, as is general with monstrosities, and this race is crossed with another not thus characterized, the characters in question do not commonly appear in a blended condition in the young, but are transmitted to them either perfectly developed or not at all."[8] Monstrosities are not swamped in successive generations through blending inheritance, but rather reveal that traits are inherited in their entirety, and accordingly, may be specifically selected to survive in a population. And monsters can be quite successful, for "the most monstrous form has a tendency to propagate."[9] Darwin's main concern is ultimately not with radical variations like monsters, but rather with the small and gradual differences that accumulate over generations and by which he understands evolution to have been accomplished historically. But his argument needs the monster as evidence observable in time, as a phenomenon of extreme transmissible difference not requiring the imagination of millennia to suggest the movements of evolution: it supplies a sort of freak-show vividness and tangibility to his argument. Darwin even sees monsters as proof that the fundamental processes of variation are the same among humans and other organisms, writing that "variability appear[s] to be induced in man and the lower animals by the same general causes . . . Monstrosities, which graduate into slight variations, are likewise so similar in man and the lower animals, that the same classification and the same terms can be used for both" (*DM* 112–3). Darwin thereby links the human to the rest of the natural world through his contemplation of monstrosity. But by establishing this blasphemous link, Darwin fears

[8] Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (Princeton: Princeton UP 1981), 224; hereafter cited as *DM*.

[9] Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836–1844: Geology, Transmutation of Species, Metaphysical Inquiries*, transc. and ed. Paul H. Barrett et al. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 1987) 199.

his *own text* to be a monstrous abomination unleashed upon an unsuspecting Victorian world.[10]

These monstrous relations between Darwin and Derrida are in some ways anticipated by the intellectual genealogy that Derrida has drawn for deconstruction, his suggestion that the hereditary materials informing the "monstrous birth" derive partly from the texts of Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Marx.[11] But Derrida's textual forbears are themselves already haunted by an undead influence, by the ghost, the trace, the specter of Darwin.[12] Derrida places himself in a lineage of dismantling ontotheology and logocentrism, a lineage of paternal figures lined up and pitted against Western metaphysics, engendering the monstrous birthing event that signals the imminent end of structure, being-as-presence, and the humanist tradition. And although Derrida has obscured Darwin's place in this lineage, the legacy of deconstructive thought nevertheless still bears the stamp of its Darwinian inheritance.

I will show that Darwin and Derrida employ homologous textual strategies. Both attempt to deconstruct metaphysics and undermine humanism by stripping structure of its center and boundaries. Both engage the concept of a generalized writing for a violent reversal of natural orders. And both invoke the myth of the Garden of Eden so as to deconstruct the metaphysical "fall narrative," to break its stranglehold on Western culture. The Darwinian discourse of evolution through natural selection is antithetical to Eden and the Creation story and therefore struggles to supplant them. Equally hostile, Derridean discourse sees the walled Garden as the very bastion of logocentrism. The embodiment of originary, lost, and now nostalgic innocence, Eden is arguably the central structure of Western metaphysics, and the narrative of the fall acts as the defining

[10] On Darwin's fears about his own transmutation theory, which led him to delay publication for fifteen years, see Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin* (New York: Norton 1991), 316–7.

[11] See "SSP" 280; Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge 1994), 75.

[12] See Keith Ansel Pierson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (London: Routledge 1997); Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1992); Lucille Ritvo, *Darwin's Influence on Freud: A Tale of Two Sciences* (New Haven: Yale UP 1990); C.U.M. Smith, "*Homo sapiens* and Human Being" in *Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems* 17 (1994), 413–434; Paul Heyer, *Nature, Human Nature, and Society: Marx, Darwin, Biology and the Human Sciences* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1982).

architectonics of this tradition. The dichotomies Derrida has come to associate with logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence—good versus evil, truth versus falsehood, speech versus writing, presence versus absence—of which the latter term is considered the corrupted and negative version of the former, are each structural repetitions of the fall. The foundational dichotomy of Western metaphysics, the reference binarism, is thus the prelapsarian versus the lapsarian; or, alternatively, Eden before the fall versus Eden after paradise is lost.

By collapsing Eden and unwriting the fall, Darwin and Derrida create the epistemological space necessary for implantation of their texts. Their revisionary logic, however, becomes a mythmaking of its own, a mythopoeisis deeply entangled with the imagery of monstrosity. For Darwin and Derrida deconstruct Eden through Satanic invasion, releasing their hideous progeny into the garden gates, and as progenitors of a teratological discourse centralizing deviance and empowering the alien, Darwin and Derrida themselves become the monsters in Eden.

II. Species at Play (Biology as *Différance*)

Evolution through natural selection can occur when an organismal variation both is heritable and confers differential reproductive success. Thus the primary criterion of Darwinian evolution is that variation is a given of nature. The innumerable possibilities of variation produce an infinite field of organic difference, a spectrum that Darwin cites as evidence for evolution: "Certainly no clear line of demarcation has as yet been drawn between species and sub-species . . . or, again, between sub-species and well-marked varieties, or between lesser varieties and individual differences. These differences blend into each other in an insensible series; and a series impresses the mind with the idea of an actual passage" (*OS* 44).

Adherence to the fixity, the immutability, or the natural essence of species is challenged by the variety and dispersion at play in the Darwinian world. Individual diversity and evolution through natural selection necessarily put essentialist thinking into question, for Darwin destabilizes the concepts of species and type—and in so doing also challenges the ontotheology supporting these concepts: "On the view that species are only strongly-marked varieties, and that each species first existed as a variety, we can see why no line of demarcation can be drawn between species, commonly supposed to have been

produced by special acts of creation, and varieties which are acknowledged to have been produced by secondary laws" (*OS* 379). Boundaries dissolve, never having existed, and "acts of creation" are not creation, are not original: that which was supposed "secondary"—the law of nature—is in fact more primary than the fantasized theological origin of a biological typology that the transmutation of species proves to have always already been an artifact. Darwin writes, "I look at the term species, as one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms. The term variety, again, in comparison with mere individual differences, is also applied arbitrarily, and for mere convenience' sake" (*OS* 45).

And later: "In short, we shall have to treat species as those naturalists treat genera, who admit that genera are merely artificial combinations made for convenience. This may not be a cheering prospect; but we shall at last be freed from the vain search for the undiscovered and undiscoverable essence of the term species" (*OS* 392). Darwin deconstructs this structure of species and substitutes instead the concepts of "difference" and "fluctuation," the constant play of variation with an endless deferral of species being: Darwinian nature operates as *différance* as such, what Derrida describes as "the production of differing/deferring" (*OG* 23). By replacing essence with *différance*—substituting "typological thinking" with "population thinking"[13]—and thereby challenging the ontotheology complicit with the essential structure of species, Darwin strikes a blow to Western metaphysics—a harbinger to Derrida's monstrous "event."

Without essence, without creation, species has no natural origin, and Darwin's book on "the origin of species" ultimately reveals the constructedness of species, the shattering of origin:

> But, in fact, a breed . . . can hardly be said to have had a definite origin. A man preserves and breeds from an individual with some slight deviation of structure, or takes more care than usual in matching his best animals and thus improves them, and the improved individuals slowly spread in the immediate neighborhood. But as yet they will hardly have a distinct name,

[13] Ernst Mayr, "Typological Versus Population Thinking," in idem, *Evolution and the Diversity of Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1976), 26–29. See also Stephen Jay Gould, *Full House: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin* (New York: Three Rivers Press 1996), 41.

> and from being only slightly valued, their history will be disregarded. . . . But the chance will be infinitely small of any record having been preserved of such slow, varying, and insensible changes. (*OS* 34–5)

Through this consideration of breeds, Darwin indicates that it is impossible to pinpoint an origin because a breed must have already been *constituted as a breed* before its origin can even have been considered. Breed comes about in a sudden immediateness: before breed is only non-breed. This is Derrida's "species of the non-species," the mutant before its naming. The search for species origin, its genealogy, rather than documenting an incipient essence, will instead document its non-presence, the arbitrariness of an origin that exists only as trace difference. As Derrida writes, "The trace is not only the disappearance of origin—within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin" (*OG* 61). There is no origin of a breed except as reciprocally implanted after the fact, as that trace of many accumulated variations culminating in the breed. But the "origin" is only a trace, not an origin, according to both Darwin and Derrida; a gradation, not an event. The origin of breed is displaced, and considering Darwin's demonstration that breed blends into variety blends into species, by the same logic, the origin of species is annihilated.

III. Nature, Text, and Supplement (Prefacing the Book of Nature)

The metaphor of nature as a book, a true text written by God, is both ancient and powerful, exerting a strong influence on natural history for centuries.[14] Derrida writes, "Nature, God's book, appeared to the medieval mind to be a written form consonant with divine thought and speech, true to God's attentive understanding as Logos, the truth that speaks and that hears itself speak . . . A writing that was representative and true . . . the volume of a book weighty with

[14] See James J. Bono, *The Word of God and the Languages of Man: Interpreting Nature in Early Modern Science and Medicine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1995), and Lily E. Kay, *Who Wrote the Book of Life?: A History of the Genetic Code* (Stanford: Stanford UP 2000).

meaning, giving itself to the reader."[15] The natural theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, exemplified by the Bridgewater Treatises and the work of William Paley, takes this metaphor of the book of nature to heart to demonstrate that a scientific reading of nature reveals the authorial hand of God. Natural theology finds in the book of nature—particularly in the geological record—evidence for the special creation of organisms, where whole groups of organisms suddenly appear in certain formations, and evidence of catastrophe, where whole groups suddenly disappear. The geological record as read by natural theology is a transparent face faithfully recording the history of nature, inscribed with the Word of God. The immediacy of the evidence appears complete and whole, and a mere surface reading of nature is adequate for precise signification: the book is indexical. Darwin, however, rejects the indexicality of natural theology, abandoning faith in the surface and the sign, replacing the legible book of nature with a corrupt text—still written, but not by God—whose signifiers change and only reveal absence.

Darwin critiques the presupposition of natural theology that a catastrophic and creationist history of life can be read accurately in the book of nature.[16] Indeed, Darwin denies any presence in this writing, denies the immediacy of a signified behind the natural signifier, and proposes, like Derrida, that writing is characterized by *différance*, where signifiers lead only to other shifting signifiers, where meaning becomes deferred, obscured, disseminated, elsewhere:

> I look at the natural geological record, as a history of the world imperfectly kept, and written in a changing dialect; of this history we possess the last volume alone . . . Of this volume, only here and there a short chapter has been preserved; and of each page, only here and there a few lines. Each word of the slowly-changing language, in which history is supposed to be written, being more or less different in the interrupted succession of chapters, may represent the apparently abruptly changed forms of life, entombed in our consecutive, but widely separated, formations. (*OS* 251)

[15] Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1981), 44; hereafter cited as *D*.

[16] Darwin's relationship to natural theology and his religious beliefs in general have been the subject of much debate; see Silvan S. Schweber, "The Origin of the *Origin* Revisted" in *Journal of the History of Biology* 10 (1977), 229–316; and Dov Ospovat, "God and Natural Selection: The Darwinian Idea of Design" in *Journal of the History of Biology* 13 (1980), 169–194.

Darwin's book of nature is corrupt. The "imperfections" of the geological record give false evidence that organisms have abruptly appeared or disappeared in fell swoops. The surface is misleading; the writing of nature is not a faithful writing. The chaotic inscriptions of the geological record—these signs "entombed" within a book whose grammar shifts erratically and continuously, altering context and meaning—mark not the stabilizing presence of the authorial hand of God, nor the full "history of the natural world," but instead their absence. The "words" in which "history is supposed to be written" mutate or vanish within the gaps, the gaps themselves becoming signs not for history but for its disappearance, signifiers of other absent signifiers. What Darwin reads as the "face of nature" (*OS* 61) has emerged from the erasure of other stories, stories of vast expanses of time, of innumerable small gradations, of species transmutations and transitional forms, stories of an ever-changing world.

Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species*, imagines itself as the behind-text to the corrupted book of nature. But as a history, it is also a preface to the book of nature, a preface to the present face. Behind and before, and yet taking the place *of* the book of nature, Darwin's text acts with all the force of the *supplement*.

Derrida has made much of the supplement, the outside that adds itself to the inside, or, alternatively, substitutes itself for the inside: "the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*" (*OG* 145). Western metaphysics sees writing as fallen but also dangerous, because it corrupts natural language. Writing is a dangerous supplement. But its status as a supplement outside of language paradoxically reveals that writing was never outside of language, for something that was indeed outside could not corrupt the inside, and thus, as Derrida concludes, language *is* writing. The preface functions in this same supplementary way: both outside of the text and part of the text, the preface comes to replace the text, until "there is nothing but text, there is nothing but extratext, in sum an 'unceasing preface' that undoes the philosophical representation of a text, the received opposition between text and what exceeds it" (*D* 43). The Darwinian preface to the book of nature, *The Origin of Species*, is precisely this extratextual supplement to the book of nature, adding to and supplanting until there is nothing but Darwinian extratext, the unceasing prefacing of an unceasing evolution.

Derrida discusses the possibility of the encyclopedic endeavor, the possibility of a book, modeled on God's Book, the Book of Nature,

that precisely and accurately represents knowledge and nature, the possibility of a true mimesis: "Thenceforth all finite books would become opuscules modeled after the great divine opus, so many arrested speculations, so many tiny mirrors catching a single grand image. The ideal form of this would be a book of total science, a book of absolute knowledge that digested, recited, and substantially ordered all books" (*D* 46). But the very idea of an encyclopedic book undoes the boundary between nature and text:

> The book is nature . . . a total overlap between nature and the volume . . . the whole of being with the encyclopedic text. . . . But this identity is not *given*: nature without the book is somehow incomplete. If the whole of what is were really one with the whole of the inscription, it would be hard to see how they would make two: nature *and* the Bible, being *and* the book. . . . That the sense of this coupling . . . comes not to repeat but to complete nature through writing, would mean that nature is somewhere incomplete, that it lacks something needed for it to be what it is, that it has to be supplemented. Which can be done by nature alone, since nature is all. The book comes to add itself to nature . . . but through this addition it must also complete nature, fulfill its essence. (*D* 52–3)

While Darwin is not attempting encyclopedicity, his book still acts as that dangerous supplement, indicating "nature is somehow incomplete" and that the book must "complete nature, fulfill its essence." Darwin's description of the book of nature as hopelessly corrupt suggests that nature *is* incomplete, and the Darwinian narrative fulfills that which nature lacks, the holes in the whole of nature. The Darwinian pre-face to the present face of nature, the behind-text of the book of nature, supplants the world itself in its perceptibility, for what is readable in nature is not understandable without Darwin's supplement of the untold story, of the mute history of the world, of the silent textuality (re)covered within the gaps of recorded nature.

Darwin sees nature as a book and his reference to the organic world as a "slowly-changing language" captures his belief that the mechanism driving linguistic evolution parallels the mechanism of biological evolution, that the "slowly changing dialects" (*OS* 342) of etymology are real homologies of species transmutation.[17] Darwin's metaphors and similes are marked by strong literariness—world as book, species as language—a conviction that nature and writing are

[17] Stephen G. Alter, *Darwinism and the Linguistic Image* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1999).

tightly woven. But Darwin's textualization of the world releases nature from its imprisonment within the dominating concept of the book, for Darwinian textuality, like Derridean textuality, is about transformation, dispersion, and play. The signs of Darwinian nature are written in an always "changing dialect"—the Darwinian book of nature is never closed, never complete, never locked between two covers. It continues to write itself, spilling beyond the page, enfolding its own surface, effacing its own history, signifying the absence of some stories and resurfacing others. The Darwinian book of nature is not a book: it is a *text*. Text nested within text, preface within preface, the Darwinian and Derridean texts graft with the text of nature, and thus we say: "There is nothing outside of the text" (*OG* 158).

IV. Rewriting Eden (There Are No Limits)

Genesis speaks of Eden: "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put man whom he had formed. / And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:8–9). Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, describes Eden as an impregnable fortress protected by solid walls extending well above the tallest trees: "Yet higher than their tops / The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung."[18] Inside this edifice of arboreal splendor, one finds only goodness, love, and sublime joy—violence and death do not yet exist—and God has placed man within as the center of Creation. The fall is but to come.

The fall, according to Milton, is the story "Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit / Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste / Brought death into the World, and all our woe, / With loss of Eden" (1.1–4). Adam and Eve, tasting the forbidden fruit of knowledge, become abject and are removed beyond the garden walls. This fall from center to outside, establishing both origin and dichotomy, is the foundational narrative eternally replayed through the history of metaphysics. To undermine the legacy of this narrative, the sedimented thinking of Western culture, the writing of Darwin and Derrida dismantles the fortress architecture of Eden, erases the walls and, like

[18] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), in idem, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin 1998), 4.142–3; hereafter cited as *PL*.

dispersing an illusion, convinces they were never there: never a structure, never an inside separated from an outside, never a Paradise from which to fall.

Unveiling the tension in the notion of centered structure and questioning the existence of a center that claims to be its defining point, Derrida challenges the metaphysics of man, "the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, through the history of all his history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game" ("SSP" 264). Derrida's grammatology, "because it asks first, as its characteristic question, the question of the *name of man*" (*OG* 83), undermines the very essence of man, the very possibility of an entity called man, and consequently the possibility of a structure—such as Eden—that has man as its center.

Darwin, like Derrida, both displaces man as the center of reference and also displaces man from himself. The Darwinian text establishes itself as anterior to the book of nature, and as an origin-of-origin narrative *The Origin of Species* supplants Genesis. But where man is the center of Genesis, the center of Eden, in Darwin's narrative man is strikingly absent, showing that history can be written without humanity as its point of relevance.[19] The center is not the center. *Homo sapiens* is resituated within evolving nature, a system without origin, without center, boundaries or fixity, in eternal and conjugal freeplay.

Darwin employs the image of the Edenic "Tree of Life" as metaphor for evolutionary history to suggest his total revision of Genesis and, at the same time, to replace the barriers and solidity of Eden with a figure that has no walls, that is ever-changing, expanding, enfolding, and exfolding; the tree that outgrows its garden. Darwin's Tree of Life, originally *within* the walls of Eden, within that structure built for man, now encompasses Eden, for man becomes a mere twig on this tree, and the possibility of Eden, as one origin story that the human species tells itself, becomes a mere contingency of that twig, a contingency of the historical accident of humanity. The inside of structure grows outside of structure and assimilates it. Darwin writes:

> The affinities of all the beings of the same class have sometimes been represented by a great tree. I believe this simile largely speaks the truth. The green and budding twigs may represent existing species; and those

[19] See Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 44–70.

> produced during each former year may represent the long succession of extinct species. . . . As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications. (*OS* 106–7)

This burgeoning, changing, growing tree as the history of life is no longer one of the landscape characteristics of Eden but replaces Eden as the organismal breeding ground. Man is unseated from a position of equality with the tree (the tree as physical center of Eden, man as determining center) to become a minor insignificance, a bud in the history of life. Thwarting teleology and human arrogance, Darwin emphasizes the possibility for any branch to die and for any species—including humans—to go extinct, simply to be replaced by another. Darwin overturns Eden with what had been inside Eden, the whole with the part, the walled garden with the expanding tree; Eden had never contained the Tree of Life—the Tree of Life had always contained Eden.

Lest his Tree of Life be considered an alternate, even hierarchical, version of Edenic centeredness, Darwin enfolds this arboreal model of evolution itself within a more convoluted network. Proclaiming, "There is grandeur in this view of life" (*OS* 396), Darwin envisions the evolving world as an "entangled bank": "It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us" (*OS* 395). A structure without structure, of endless connections, intertwinings and ecological profusions, where plants and animals, trees and humans, "depend on each other in a complex manner," the entangled bank enmeshes the Tree of Life and substitutes the ordered garden of originary peace with a twisted wilderness of originary violence, of a fall before the fall, of the primal "Struggle for Existence," the "law of battle," the "war of nature" (*OS* 73, 66). The entangled bank denatures the myth of a central paradise and the fallenness of beyond, for the entangled bank eschews inside and outside—indeed, there is no outside the entangled bank, any more than there is outside the text.

❦

In this discussion of the fall, we must not neglect Satan.

Satan was the instigator of original sin, the Tempter, the fiend who infiltrated Eden and convinced Eve to eat the fruit. Milton reminds us that Satan, already himself fallen from Heaven, was responsible for the fall of humanity, for even though Adam and Eve were free to choose and chose to fall, Satan's culpability in their transgression was utter. Penetrating Eden's defenses, Satan jumps over the barriers of the Garden: "At one slight bound high overleaped all bound / Of hill or highest wall" (*PL* 4.181–2). Satan, an outside evil coming over the walls, sets the fall in motion. Derrida's extensive examination of the way in which writing has been characterized by Western metaphysics as an outside and already fallen thing, creeping back in to corrupt the unfallen, demonstrates a structural analogy between writing and the monstrous, the demonic. Writing is identified as "a garment of perversion and debauchery, a dress of corruption and disguise" (*OG* 35), a fallen tempter: writing, thus, is Satan.

Hence Derrida's championing of writing, of deconstructing these fall narratives to show that language is writing, that language was always already a fallen writing, amounts to a championing of Satan. Derrida's Satanism proclaims itself in his demonstrations of the originary violence of monstrous writing, in his deconstructions revealing that Eden was always already fallen.[20] Even Derrida's pleasure in monsters evinces a membership in the Devil's party, for if the connection between Satan and monster did not exist before, it is certainly inescapable after Milton and Mary Shelley. Monsters are at once both outside and inside nature; and Satan, at once angelic and fallen, supposedly barred from Eden and yet still able to corrupt its sanctity (like writing as the dangerous supplement), is the epitome of monstrosity.

Darwin likes monsters for the same reasons Derrida does. The freaks of biology, extreme variations proving the instability of species borders, have the potential to speciate and perhaps even to dominate, displacing the parent "natural" species, like a dangerous supplement to nature. But this is a potential for the monsters of nature and for the monstrousness of Darwin's own theory. Darwin was profoundly aware of how dangerous his ideas were, how destructive to traditional

[20] Derrida's deconstruction of the Edenic narrative in Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (wherein the innocent Nambikwara are supposedly corrupted by writing) is exemplary; see *OG*, 101–140.

thought; as a deviant reading of nature and necessitating a revised fall—a fall before the fall—Darwin's ideas appear suspiciously Satanic. Darwin was haunted throughout his life by the image of the "Devil's Chaplain," a label he originally heard applied to the Reverend Robert Taylor, who earned the title in the 1830s for his outspoken anti-Christianity and the circulation of his sermons in *The Devil's Rag*. Darwin adopted this label himself, remarking to Joseph Hooker (in reference to a quip by T.H. Huxley regarding the indecent sexual behavior of jellyfish), "What a book a Devil's Chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blunderingly low & horridly cruel works of nature."[21] Such a book, indeed, is *The Origin of Species*. Darwin comprehended the Satanic nature of his rewriting of the fall, of his attack on humanism, of his championing of a writing of nature that becomes supplementary to the book of nature. Perhaps abetted by his enduring love for Milton[22]—whose heroic and radical portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost* led William Blake to say that Milton "was a true Poet, and of the Devil's party without knowing it"—Darwin, whose version of the fall was infinitely more radical than Milton's, came to envision himself not only in the Devil's party but as the Devil's Chaplain.

But Darwin saw himself in the Devil's party well before riding the monster of evolution into the Victorian world. Even in his youthful *Voyage of the Beagle*, Darwin depicts landing on the Galapagos Islands as a demonic invasion of Eden. For Darwin, the archipelago is a verdurous enclosure where tame native animals live in harmonious seclusion from the violence of the human world. Darwin is particularly interested in the birds, who have so little fear of men that members of the Beagle's crew find them ridiculously easy to kill: "There is not one [bird] which will not approach sufficiently near to be killed with a switch, and sometimes, as I have myself tried, with a cap or a hat. A gun here is almost superfluous; for with the muzzle of one I pushed a hawk off the branch of a tree."[23] Darwin expresses a

[21] Desmond and Moore, *Darwin*, 85, 73, 317, 677, 449.

[22] Darwin writes, "Milton's *Paradise Lost* had been my chief favourite, and in my excursions during the voyage of the *Beagle*, when I could take only a single small volume, I always chose Milton"; Darwin, *Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, ed. Nora Barlow (New York: Norton 1969), 85. For extensive examination of Darwin's Miltonic influence, see Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 25–43.

[23] Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839), eds. Janet Browne and Michael Neve (London: Penguin 1989), 288; hereafter cited as *VB*.

mixture of fascination and sorrow for the innocent birds who learn too late the cruelties of human beings. He discovers that only with the passing of many generations have Galapagos birds even begun to distrust the presence of men, finding it "surprising that the change [in tameness] has not been greater; for these islands during the last 150 years, have been frequently visited by buccaneers and whalers; and the sailors, wandering through the woods in search of tortoises, always take delight in knocking down the little birds" (*VB* 288). The inability of the birds to learn terror leads Darwin to impute that fear of man is an innate and heritable quality, and that the presence or absence of this quality has visible consequences for the survival rate of a bird population invaded by humans. One of many clues Darwin later assimilates into his evolutionary theory, this natural innocence of birds transformed into natural terror is also a fall narrative—a fall of the birds—with Darwin and his fellow shipmates perversely cast in the role of Satanic corruptors:

> [W]e may, I think conclude; first, that the wildness of birds with regard to man, is a particular instinct directed against *him*, and not dependant on any general degree of caution arising from other sources of danger; secondly, that it is not acquired by them in a short time, even when much persecuted; but that in the course of successive generations it becomes hereditary. . . . In regard to the wildness of birds towards men, there is no other way of accounting for it. Few young birds in England have been injured by man, yet all are afraid of him: many individuals, on the other hand, both at the Galapagos and at the Falklands, have been injured, but yet have not learned that salutary dread. We may infer from these facts, what havoc the introduction of any new beast of prey must cause in a country, before the instincts of the aborigines become adapted to the stranger's craft or power. (*VB* 290)

The new "beast of prey," the hideous creature entering the peaceful sanctum of the island and forcing the "aborigines" (a.k.a. the "little birds") to know fear, to know death—essentially to taste the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge—is Darwin himself. As a participant in the wanton destruction of little birds, Darwin narrates himself into the same symbolic position he later adopts as the Devil's Chaplain. Even in this moment, where the rudiments of his evolutionary theory have hardly been glimpsed, Darwin sees himself as the enemy of blind innocence and the overthrower of false paradise. Darwin is always already the monster in Eden.

But monsters are not safe, and demonic creatures cannot be trusted. I want to end the hybridizing of Darwin and Derrida at this

moment of pathos where Darwin in tropical paradise murders little birds—a moment he eventually understands within the evolutionary theory that is itself compared to a "murder"[24]—because it illustrates the danger that monsters embody at every moment of their existence. Monsters are violent, even as metaphors. While the teratology I have been extracting from the writings of Darwin and Derrida celebrates monstrosity for its violation of the order of things, its threat to humanism, and its terrorism of the normal, we must remember that monsters have their horrific side as well. Darwin's equivocation about his diabolical role, and the note of sorrow he voices about the molested little birds, testify to the uncertain functioning of monsters. Equally, while Derrida advances the monster as icon of deconstruction, engineers a science of monstrous writing, and gives birth to monstrous texts, he also observes that monsters, because of their violences, must be continually subjected to deconstruction by their own monstrosities. Derrida has described Nazism with the language of monstrosity, suggesting that "this abysmal monstrosity should not be classified according to well-known and finally reassuring schemas" (*P* 186) because such interpretations domesticate monstrosity, tame it, make it less threatening, less monstrous. Monsters as such must never be allowed to lose their monstrousness lest we forget the horrors they bring with them. Horror is a weapon, and while sometimes it may be used for affirmative purposes, such as the implantation of a deconstructive or an evolutionary discourse, there exist horrors and monstrosities that can never be accepted.

Perhaps Eden needed to be destroyed in order for a discourse of difference to emerge. But monsters, once unleashed, have a terrible life of their own, and caution must be exercised in their creation. Monsters have enormous promise, but be watchful . . .

They bite.

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[24] In 1844, Darwin writes, "I am almost convinced (quite contrary to opinion I started with) that species are not (it is like confessing a murder) immutable"; see Ralph Colp, Jr., "'Confessing a Murder': Darwin's First Revelations about Transmutation" in *Isis* 77 (1986), 8–32. The killing of Galapagos birds is significant for Darwin's theory because: 1) The birds are transported to England and catalogued by Darwin as samples of evolutionary variation (see Frank J. Sulloway, "Darwin and His Finches: The Evolution of a Legend," *Journal of the History of Biology* 15 (1982), 1–53); and 2) Fear becomes recognized as a heritable adaptive trait (see Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray 1872), chs. 12–14).