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CHAPTER 1 **Birds of a Feather**
Avians, Indigenes, Animal Rights, and Ecology

Pictures of animals & other productions of nature as seen in conservatories, menageries, museums, etc.—would do little for the national mind, nay they would be injurious to it, if the imagination were excluded by the presence of the object, more or less out of a state of nature. If it were not that we learn to talk and think of the lion and the eagle . . . from the impassioned introduction of them so frequently into Holy Scripture and by great poets . . . the spiritual part of our nature . . . would derive no benefit from such intercourse with such subjects.

☞ WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, *Fenwick note to “Suggested by a Picture of the Bird of Paradise,” in Poetical Works*

I'd rather understand how to sing from a crow
who was never good at singing or much of anything
but finding gold in the trash of humans.

☞ JOY HARJO, “*The Path to the Milky Way Leads through Los Angeles*,” in *A Map to the Next World*

Like the eagles in his several sonnets on Dunolly Castle, Wordsworth's eagle in this epigraph suffers its own “imprisonment,” enchained at last in a dominant discourse of use value that Wordsworth spells out baldly and unapologetically. The first full clause implies that the sheer unadorned reality of an animal itself is pedagogically useless, if not downright dangerous. The second half of the passage is abundantly clear in its import: a picture of an eagle needs the “spiritual” coloring of the Western cultural tradition to render it beneficial; that benefit, moreover, is predominantly a religious and moral one. Harjo's crow, in contrast, is evidently more free, a discordant (and Native) voice that would yet “sing,” and even be a better judge of true value than its human neighbors. But even this passage recycles, seriously or not, an anthropocentric aesthetic of sound, in which the crow's

caw is sheer cacophony compared to, say, the voice of the meadowlark, and the corvid's general outsider-with-greater-vision status still issues, above all, from Harjo's political perception of her own status as a *human* poet of indigenous otherness and outrage.

And yet, although such literary anthropomorphisms of the bird would appear to be ubiquitous, perhaps even inescapable, Harjo's crow at least, and much avian imagery in contemporary Native American literature, has a far different feel than most comparable imagery from the British and American literary canon, issuing, I claim, from a new poetic world in which the bird itself is more frequently given the right, as it were, to be an autonomous, integral being, and is able, one might even say, to speak back, dialogically, to both human poet and audience. By examining the various imagistic and tropic *uses* (a telling word) of the avian from British Romanticism to recent Native American literature,¹ one might ask if and why and how, in the grand scheme of the past two hundred years of literary history, such a no doubt laudable evolution has occurred. The ultimate questions, then: Is the traditional, seemingly inevitable, othering of the avian symptomatic of a human worldview that is fundamentally inimical to an ecotherapeutic relationship with the rest of the planet? Conversely, is this recent positive change in literary portrayals of the bird concurrent with an evolution of consciousness in which other species are becoming less other? And what of the agency of poetry and imaginative nature writing—past, present, and future—in such a change in interspecies awareness? With such concerns in mind, one might be able to consider the textual eagle and dove, lark and crow, as microcosmic types and symbols of how Western civilization has addressed the nonhuman ecosphere.

ARCHETYPAL AVIANS

Birds are thoughts and the flight of thought.

☞ C. G. JUNG, *Collected Works*

The birds were among the *numina* longest to survive. Many qualities touch them with such powerful magic—flight, migration, song, eggs and nests, seasonality—that even the ideologies of transcendence retained them as angels. Bird life is a highly visible, poetic analogy to human life. . . . Yet they are kin to the earthbound, cold-blooded reptiles, egg-layers with scaly legs and toothless mouths.

☞ PAUL SHEPARD, *The Others*

As an interpretation of bird imagery in dreams, Jung's dictum is circular, defining the symbol by retaining the metaphor, that of birds in flight. It is as if one cannot even discuss the avian as trope without the vehicle corrupting the tenor. To this day, poetic fancy, too, is a flight, as it is throughout nineteenth-century British poetry, most notably, perhaps, in the works of Keats, Shelley, and Swinburne. In such poets, too, both Love and Fancy are forever "winged"; as for Love, it must be one of the most lamentable accidents in the English language that "love" and "dove" just happen to rhyme. And as for religion, the dove is also requisite to any Catholic who attempts to picture the *image* of the ethereal Holy Spirit in his or her mind. Between the Christian deity and humankind are the angels, blessed with wings, of course, as if through some strange act of theo-alchemico-bestiality. (Indeed, "angels are really birds," after all [Jung, *cw* 5: §368n].)² The eagle, especially, is a vehicle inevitably loaded with human cultural baggage, as Christopher Manes reminds us: "According to medieval commentators, eagles soar higher than any other kind of bird and could gaze upon the sun, undazzled, because they were put on Earth to be a symbol of St. John and his apocalyptic vision, not the other way around. From this hermeneutical perspective, it was inconceivable that eagles should be autonomous, self-willed subjects, flying high for their own purposes without reference to some celestial intention" (19). At last, the sociocultural fact that birds—and the ornithic synecdoches of wings, flight, songs, and nests—have long been crucial projective surrogates for so much that humankind adores and admires and desires, or mourns and fears and feels oh so anxious about, needs little support. But why they have been so is no small matter of interest.

As one editor of a bird poetry anthology has claimed, "After Love and Flowers, as many poems have been written on the theme of Birds as on any single subject" (S. Carr 11). Leonard Lutwack, in *Birds in Literature*, also chimes in: as neighbor species of both "familiarity and transcendence," birds have "a wider range of meaning and symbol in literature than any other animal" (xi).³ Indeed, not only are poems and belles-lettres essays about birds rampant, but so are natural histories about birds, field guides to the birds, and, yes, even studies *about* literature about birds, like this one. Almost a hundred years ago, W. H. Hudson was already lamenting the situation of those who would still write about such a common, apparently overdone subject. Calling the first chapter of his *Adventures among Birds* an "Apology," he has a hypothetical friend ask, "What, another book about birds?" (2). A

more detailed rationale for my own effort is forthcoming, but the very existence of such a plethora of studies begs for initial commentary.

In terms of literary scholarship in particular, many such studies have examined a particular bird image in a particular work, sometimes from a concerted theoretical point of view (often psychoanalytical),⁴ but more often not. Some earlier efforts even attempt a proto-structuralist assignation of the bird images in question, in what might very loosely be called an archetypal approach. Such a bent is epitomized in Beryl Rowland's *Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism* (1978). The very title is telling in its acknowledgment that these birds of poetry and myth are anthropomorphized versions of the avian and symbols, after all, of a human soul in need of surrogate support. Western humankind's psychic strivings have resulted in a great number of avian tropic conventions, of course: the turtledove as emblem of faithful love (46); the nightingale's nocturnal song as representative of a lover's grief (110); the magpie's "evil reputation" (102)⁵—a negative ascription, by the way, common to most corvids, including the raven's association with prophecy and death (147–48). Rowland can also unthinkingly render such anthropocentrism as the truth itself; for instance, cormorants are "sinister, predatory creatures" (30), and the domestic rock pigeon actually has "hard, mean-looking eyes," its gaze "cold, shrewd, and secretive as that of a CIA agent." The old poets' versions of the lovey dove weren't drawn from "looking at nature": "They were thinking of the bird's symbolism," of course (41). But Rowland is projecting something, too, perhaps reflecting some cold war paranoia, into the eyes of *Columba livia*.

For Rowland, the dominant trope is that of birds' flight as representative of spirituality and transcendence, and she invokes the Jungians Joseph L. Henderson and Joseph Campbell to help her find such a connection to be archetypal, that is, "universal" (xiv), an essentialism, as I will argue, that is ultimately untenable. In her defense, Rowland does go out of her way at times to note how the "real bird" is nothing like its usual literary emblemizations, and she even laments the "vanishing" of various species in her introduction. But at last, her "concern is not, of course, with birds as they are in nature but as they exist in the mind" (vii–viii)—in sum, Jung's birds as "thoughts and the flight of thought."⁶ Unfortunately, Rowland's relative lack of concern for the "real" bird may be symptomatic of an attitude implicated in the avians' very vanishing.

The most recent full-blown study in this particular room (or aviary) of

my own is Leonard Lutwack's *Birds in Literature* (1994), yet another still rather traditional and thematic treatment of bird symbolism. Again, the songs of various passerines are "preeminent symbols[s] of poetic inspiration"; blackbirds and crows (especially if in a tree in winter) seem "to appeal to many poets as an image of forlornness," even death and evil (48, 29, 108–112);⁷ sparrows are "lecherous" (and therefore numerous) little fellows (193); and, following Rowland, the human soul is most commonly conceived of as a "winged creature" (119). In the tradition of Jung and Northrop Frye, Lutwack even offers a psycho-anthropological origin for the ubiquity of ornithic tropes in general: these species' "unfailing rhythms of migration, song" and "nesting . . . have supplied poets with easily comprehended symbols of the cycle of life and death" and "of moral and philosophical values" (24, 38). As evidenced by a chapter subhead, "From Fact to Symbol," Lutwack is quite aware that the literary bird is ultimately an imaginary construct, for better or worse.

Lutwack emphasizes the better. More so than Rowland, he presents a definite ecopolitical agenda, a plea for those real birds drowned in the sea of symbols that make up the rest of his book. Indeed, Lutwack's concluding chapter is an eloquent defense of literature's valuable role in "restoring to the animal the significance it once had for humans" (250), and this seminal direction will be dealt with more concertedly in my own concluding chapter. However—and regarding my own "bird and Indian" dual thesis—although Lutwack's treatise refers to various recent literary texts, none are Native American. His sole reference to the indigenous and birds is insulting: the "worship" of "bird-gods" by such "primitive peoples" speaks of a superstitious and "childlike identification with animals" (82–83).⁸ My own argument's main gist will include a resignification of such a "childlike identification" as actually more redeeming and ultimately more conducive to psycho- and ecological health than the mentality that could utter such a facile and ultimately speciesist and culturally demeaning statement.

As I've indicated, this tendency to assign bird tropes to various all-too-human categories easily allows for a structuralist approach to the bird, since the avian Other has been, throughout history, a most attractive object for anthropocentric projection, fit bearer, at last, of the Jungian archetype. In his most extended discussion of the archetypal and poetry, Jung defines the archetypal image as a figure (or process) "that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed. . . . In

each of these images there is a little piece of human psychology and human fate, a remnant of the joys and sorrows that have been repeated countless times in our ancestral history” (CW 15: §127). And so the skylark sings our joys, the nightingale our sorrows. We have soared, and still soar, as proud children of the sun and sky, with the eagle, but we all have a dark and private shadow side—all ravens, too, if you will.

The stereotypical import of many common bird species and genera can be fit into such an intrapsychic schema. For instance, the more positively regarded birds of prey such as the eagle and falcon—traditionally, birds of patriarchal majesty—are the ego or *I* itself, or the ego in the state of inflation. Ego alienation, conversely, might be figured as the proud, loner birds such as the raven, owl or, again, the lone eagle in flight. The vanity and loquaciousness attributed to the peacock, magpie, jay, and various parrot species fit well Jung’s concept of the persona, the public, ultimately false mask of the ego. For many reasons, birds have also been traditionally figured as feminine; the *anima* and mother archetypes are well represented by the maternal bird, passive, nesting, and nurturing, soft and warmly feathered, loving and frail: the dove, the swan, and the more homebody passerines such as the robin and wren. In contrast, the inspirational propensity of such songbirds as the skylark, oriole, and various thrushes for vocal outburst, often in the morning and in the spring, render them fit as emblems for the archetypal process of psychic rebirth. This is related to their common association with the soul, as is bird flight itself, of course, epitomized in such winged paragons as the swallow and the swift and various waterfowl. Thus the Jungian archetypal journey, too, finds a fine symbolic analogue in bird migration, epitomized in the swallow, just as the flight of birds in general commonly connotes human psychic growth and change.

Then we have the archetypal shadow side of darkness and night; if these birds are thoughts, they are dark thoughts indeed. Because of their weird, *unhuman* setting (i.e., night: the owl, the whip-poor-will) or eerie song (the cuckoo, the owl) or foreboding color (the raven, crow, and blackbird), these birds bear associations of the mysterious, the occult, and evil. The crow and blackbird, in particular, have often been contrasted with the more ethereal songsters as compensatory mundane, earthly foils to the flights and songs of (human) fancy. And then various seabirds—magnificent migrant geese, mocking gulls, Coleridge’s albatross, the holy kingfisher, the loon with its otherworldly laugh—all beckon toward that border region between con-

sciousness and the unconscious (land or air versus water) and to the collective unconscious itself as the sea.⁹ Finally, the unconscious Self's *coniunctio oppositorum*, or reconciliation of opposites, is sometimes figured as a union of eagle and dove or eagle and vulture.¹⁰ Indeed, like the truest symbols, in the Jungian sense, the avian is a veritable *coniunctio*, a yin-yang of male activity and female passivity, of gregariousness and privacy, of day and night, of sky and water, of heavenly voice and mundane squawk. The crow and its ilk, especially, are birds of built-in contraries. In one of his long lists of archetypal binaries, Jung juxtaposes (chthonic) blackness with the (ethereal) bird (CW 13: §462). But the raven and the crow, finally, are creatures of both categories, border figures par excellence.¹¹

The schema above is offered as a tentative, “as if” exercise, at best. Such a dualistic approach reduces the real animal and bird to an either/or conceptualization, to the detriment of both other species and their literary representation; as Gerald Vizenor protests, such a “generic animal is structural, a binary beast in a prosaic simile” (“Literary Animals” 140). As cross-culturally conscious scholars such as Frantz Fanon have warned us, such a methodology, relying as it does on a supposedly innate and culturally monolithic “collective unconscious,” is fraught with the ideological dangers of essentialism, reductionism, and a tendency to whitewash both cultural differences and the chance permutations of literary history—a universalizing *langue*, as it were, without the local and historical *parole*.¹² Thus we have Jung claiming that birds have “*always* symbolized spirits or thoughts” (CW 13: §321; emphasis added), and we have Rowland and Lutwack speaking of the association between bird flight and spirituality as universal and inevitable, and of particular species as having a certain archetypal or pan-human meaning that just isn't the case. For instance, Harjo's crow is more than a mere minority resignification of an essential avian evil and otherness, an evil universal only to Western civilization; indeed, crows, ravens, and even vultures have commonly had anything but sinister connotations in many Native American cultures.¹³ For a dominant white culture to other the crow (in part) for being *black* may be just as culturally biased as to discriminate against humans of the same color. From racism to sexism, now: the Western portrayal of raptors, for instance, as patriarchal majesty and egohood (in Jung, the *I* is implicitly male) is especially indefensible, given the ornithological fact that the female bird of prey is usually larger (and therefore more majestic) than the male. Finally, the greatest problem with the whole archetypal approach

is the reductionist (and Romantic Idealist) othering of the avian as an image and object for the workings of the human psyche in some grand marriage of Mind and Nature.¹⁴ As even the sometime Jungian Paul Shepard remonstrates (with Joseph Campbell in mind), the birds and animals of myth are not entirely “about the psychic life of humans” (93).

One can reject a rigid archetypalism and yet still posit the image of the bird as a central trope, or complex of tropes, in what might be called the natural Imaginary. Following Houston Baker’s conception of a “blues matrix” as *the* central heuristic metaphor for African American discourse, even “the *All of American culture*” (3, 13), I propose an avian matrix, a crucial subset of many cultures’ discursive representations, including Western and Native. How each culture’s nest (if you will) of tropes and iconography relates to the real bird, to avian alterity, could be a major focus of any analysis of cultural discourse, and would, I think, be more revelatory of a culture’s environmental values system than previous topic studies of birds and literature could have imagined. Extended to animal representation in general, I might dub such an approach *zoöcriticism*; applied to birds specifically, the (admittedly more ungainly) term *ornithocriticism* will have to do for now.

To approach humankind’s infatuation with birds from another angle: imagine for a moment Lewis and Clark’s, or even Willa Cather’s, first audition of the meadowlark’s primordial prairie song. Indeed, indigenous bird species in general can be veritably viewed as unconquered Native tribes that have escaped, by and large, the imposed borders of Western colonization, and that serve as seminal reminders of our frontier—and animal—heritage. The calls today of migrating Canada honkers and sandhill cranes *should* evoke from us that jolt of electricity up the spine that speaks of a time before Western rationalism turned us into cogitating primates out of touch with important parts of our primal selves, or bodies. Here I point to the close evolutionary relationship between avians and reptiles, naturalist Loren Eiseley’s claim that we can “see the singing reptile in the bird” (*Firmament* 57), and then propose the continued existence of both *within* the human psyche, via physiology, in the older regions of the brain. Certainly, from the Serpent in the Garden to *Jurassic Park*, humankind has had nearly as great a fascination with reptiles as it has had with birds. Perhaps that’s why I’ve always been haunted by an early childhood memory of an artist’s rendition of Archaeopteryx, the first species making the crossing from reptile to bird, like some young mutant pterodactyl dressed in a new and crazy

evolutionary garb called feathers, making its way tentatively up the side of a tree, an evolutionary ladder incarnate. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard offers a more startling equation between the feathered and the scaled: to revive her ability to see a bird with fresh vision, she “reverse[s] its evolution and imagine[s] it as a lizard,” a leap facilitated by the bird’s “scaled legs and that naked ring around a shiny eye” (106). Here is the intersection of reptilian and avian and the intersection of so much of humankind’s own dualities, a mixing of the chthonic and spinal with the aerial and ethereal, of archetypal human fears and fascination.¹⁵ One might argue that both halves of this chthonic/ethereal dual deity may owe much of their psychological resonance to their relation to what brain neurologists have identified as the reptilian brain: primitive, instinctual, and eerily arational.¹⁶ That haunting that I’ve felt at the image of Archaeopteryx is inevitably accompanied, fittingly, by a shiver of the spine. This shiver may be what Jung champions, however homocentrically, as “the *animal in us*” (CW 10: §32), that long past and yet still present kinship with feather and scale, the unasked for raw emotion erupting at the base of the brain.¹⁷ From this, perhaps, issues even our yearning and need to sing, and a racial memory of flying and wings that has now become the symbolic basis of our very spirituality. Whether these archetypal resonances evoked by the avian are evolutionary and genetic, or learned and transmitted within the social collective, as Fanon has it (188), there still seems to be some uncanny trace of Archaeopteryx within us all.

In partial support of my argument, the scientist and naturalist Paul Shepard’s *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* offers an eccentrically welcome reading of cultural anthropology that convincingly traces the coevolutionary importance of other species in the psychosocial development of humankind, at times gesturing toward an archetypal basis, à la Jung. Because the human psyche, Shepard contends, “is the result of a long series of interactions with other animals,” other species have long been “the most powerful metaphoric source of our self-consciousness” (15, 284). Through the aeons, human “categories of the self and society were shaped by the traits of animals observed, the dangerous, competitive, beautiful, tasty, scrounging Others” (24), to the point that, now, “a whole fauna is in us still, tacitly” (119). Not only is Shepard’s privileging of instincts acquired in earlier periods of our evolution as still crucial to our species and in need of exercise even today akin to Jung’s primitivism, but his psychology seems a very literal, genetic take on Jungian archetypes, for even our very self-identity is

really a multiplicity, a “diverse zoology of the self” made up, apparently, of the various species encountered in our evolution, who still return in dreams as the “dispersed elements of the unknown self” — that is, Jung’s unconscious Self (Shepard 80, 75).¹⁸ Animals in fairy tales and myths — and even in poems? — reflect a similar vital function, such characters serving as “surrogates in the collective unconscious of humanity” (90). How this surrogation works in British Romanticism and Native American literature is the subject of this study. But next I turn to another, human surrogate closely linked to the avian.

“GENUINE LITTLE SAVAGES”

My bird is a genuine little savage, doubtless, but I value him as a neighbor. . . .
 [Nature] is an Indian maiden, dark, subtle, dreaming, with glances now and then that thrill the wild blood in one’s veins.

☞ JOHN BURROUGHS, *The Birds of John Burroughs*

“Mating birds and mating Indians are the same,” says a white friend as we watch the handsome fancydancers in their red, yellow, orange, and blue feathers. “It’s the men who wear the brightest colors.”

☞ SHERMAN ALEXIE, “Powwow Love Songs,” in *One Stick Song*

If civilized humankind still bears the birds and beasts within, we also carry within us (as Jung and Shepard would claim) the “natural man,” fresh from the cave and the hunt. But just as the raven and wolf have been co-opted and demonized in Western discourse as shadow figures, so have the human primitive and indigenous Native — “genuine savages” all. We have already seen, in Rowland, Lutwack, and Jung, the intimation, at least, that earlier cultures’ “superstitious” awe of the avian and the animal positions such people firmly in the same “bestial” realm. For Walt Whitman, Native Americans are veritable animals themselves, and thus the fit prey of Manifest Destiny and biblical rule by fiat: they are “close to nature, and like natural objects such as trees and animals subject to . . . removal in the face of the progressive march westward” (Killingsworth, *Walt Whitman* 87). In Charles Darwin’s *The Voyage of the Beagle*, the biologist’s ethnological observations of the Natives of South America and Australia make up almost as much of the book as his natural history notes; but then, these creatures are so much “like

animals” that they apparently qualify as subjects of natural history themselves (229). Dr. Johnson, epitome of so many prejudices, makes a comparable identification upon meeting an officer from the “wilds of America,” who waxes effusively about being “amidst the rude magnificence of Nature, with this Indian woman by [his] side.” Johnson later speaks of the man’s happiness as a “gross absurdity. It is sad stuff; it is brutish. If a bull could speak, he might well exclaim,—Here am I with this cow and this grass; what being can enjoy greater felicity?” (Boswell 209–10). The satire on the romanticization of the wild is all well and good, but the Native woman seems to have been glibly transformed into a cow in the process.

To invoke Jungian psychology again, images of other species, because of their supposed instinctual arationalism and sheer alien difference, most often represent the unconscious—more specifically, the “dark” side of the unconscious, that is, the shadow.¹⁹ Furthermore, to the Western white ego, the other main generic shadow figure entails another, usually more primitive, human race, whether black or yellow or red.²⁰ For the Anglo-American, especially, the shadow is often “represented by a Negro or an [American] Indian” (Jung, *cw* 5: §267). If not ostracized as animal, both bird and Native are conversely idealized as spiritual, as abundantly evidenced in the imagery and metaphors of the Western literary canon. The bird is incorrigibly either some etherealized skylark or oriole or some chthonic owl or raven; so, too, the Western imagination can only see the Indian as a heathen savage id, a Jungian shadow figure, or, in typical bipolar fashion, as a nostalgically redemptive Noble Savage.

This is one of the dominant themes of Frantz Fanon, who finds a Western conflation of shadow figures that include “the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, [and] the Savage” (146). The raven and crow, those “winged devils” (to paraphrase Jung again),²¹ can easily be added to this abbreviated list of villains, as infernal confreres of the devil, savage, and wolf. In North America in particular the wolf and raven are—or should I say, were?—often partners, in both myth and reality. In her magnificent essay “Deify the Wolf,” the Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan also acknowledges “the psychological fact that wolves carry much of the human shadow” (*Dwellings* 71). In describing her animal subject, she notes that the wolves she is watching are accompanied by a group of “gypsy ravens,” who “direct the wolves to their prey” to partake in the leftovers; sometimes “a person happens across a coal black raven standing inside the wide arch of those ribs like a soul in a body”

(65). This dark avian spirit of death in Hogan's essay is yet another shadow image, although, as a Native American and champion of eco-awareness, Hogan refuses to vilify either wolf or raven: they are simply there, fulfilling their roles in nature, and the truly fearful things are humankind's untoward projections regarding them. It is fitting, too, that Hogan, as Native American, would defend and resignify these alter-species shadows; like the wolf, raven, and human of Fanon's *Black Skin*, the Native American has long been an unwilling bearer of the Western collective shadow.

This Western shadowing of the American indigenous immediately calls to mind Edward Said's formulation of the discourse of Orientalism (*Orientalism*, e.g., 1–4). It is readily apparent that Said's general ideology of othering inherent in the very concept of Orientalism is equally applicable to the central ideological framing device of the New World, the Euro-American imperialism and colonialism regarding the natives here, both human and nonhuman. The correlative New World version of Said's Foucauldian notion might readily be dubbed *Indianism*, all the more happily, given the Orientalism still ironically implicit in the very origins of the word.²² The general discourse of othering nonhumans as lower life forms fit for exploitation has already been aptly defined as *speciesism*,²³ and my own contribution to this line of thought is to emphasize how crucial, and yet largely ignored, this lamentable Orientalizing of other species has been to the ecology and biodiversity of the planet.

In one of the first books by a Lakota, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933), Luther Standing Bear's titular homeland is appropriately dubbed that of the Spotted Eagle, not that of his human Oglala band, to reflect, no doubt, "the Lakota belief that man did not occupy a special place in the eyes of Wakan Tanka, the Grandfather of us all," that both humans and birds were *oyate*, or "people." Standing Bear later finds another parallel between Native Americans and other species in terms of the European settlers' attitude toward both: "Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people" (22, 38). Such infestations needed to be removed: "I know of no species of plant, bird, or animal that were [*sic*] exterminated until the coming of the white man. . . . The white man considered natural animal life just as he did the natural man life upon this continent, as 'pests.' Plants which the Indian found beneficial were also 'pests.' There is no word in the Lakota vocabulary with the English meaning of this word" (165). Standing Bear's Lakota

contemporary, Black Elk, notes another avian-Native similarity, with similar tragic ramifications: “Our tepees were round like the nests of birds,” which are set “in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. . . . But the Washicus [whites] have put us in these square boxes,” and so “the power is not in us any more” (Neihardt 150–51). In U.S. history, the colonizer’s treatment of both animal and Native has been one of abuse, even betrayal, according to Hogan; not only have we, both white and nonwhite Americans, “strayed from the *treaties* we once had with the land and with the animals,” but “we have created a world for ourselves where all of our actions have dire consequences in a way reminiscent of federal Indian policies” (*Dwellings* 11, 69; emphasis added).

In sum, both feathered beings and feather wearers have long been othered as comparable objects in Western colonial imperialist discourse. Historically, the English language itself offers further lamentable correlatives. Both Others, for example, have been deemed close kin, as tribes fit for reservations; by both poets and ornithologists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, birds were often referred to as the “(feathered) tribes,”²⁴ and in the early twentieth century bird reserves were also called “reservations” (Pearson 1.xiv). In much of the literature that is my purview, the Native is “nature”: wild, and in the raw. To refer to the bird as comparably native, as in Burroughs’s “genuine little savage,” is hardly a great leap, given its intrinsic *animal* relationship to the very land and (above all, for my purposes) the long Western cultural conflation of Indians and birds, epitomized in the eagle feather of popular iconography and in the words of Black Elk himself: “The life of an Indian is just like the wings of the air. . . . The hawk swoops down on its prey; so does the Indian. . . . The coyote is sly; so is the Indian. The eagle is the same. This is why the Indian is always feathered up; he is a relative to the wings of the air” (DeMallie 317).

My readings in subsequent chapters will often be two-pronged takes on the passages in question, in which the othering of both bird and Native are at least implicit. Indeed, as we’ll see in so much nineteenth-century Anglo literature, Wordsworth’s words in this chapter’s opening epigraph, on filtering the lion and the eagle through a moral, “imaginative” framework, could just as well apply to the Native American, who could be dealt with only by a Western imagination that could only see the Indian as either an irredeemable savage or a Romanticized ecosaint. At last, in Western discourse, the animal, the bird, is framed through the literary bars of the zoo; the Indian,

through the literary borders of the reservation.²⁵ The Harjo epigraph on the crow, in contrast, exemplifies the Native reaction that writes back against this very Western imagining, resignifying both Indian and avian. I maintain that Harjo's various images of crows and eagles and redwings have an intrinsic importance in her corpus, not only as living parts of that natural world that she would champion and mythically reinvigorate, but as real and individual Others like her, repressed and belittled afterthoughts in the psyche of Western civilization. However unfortunate the historico-political rationale for this connection between Indian and bird, it at least provides an immediate vital link between human and animal; it may well be through this motif of the othered-as-animal Indian that a closer connection between human and animal, words and birds, can be at last perceived.

The Anishinaabe poet, novelist, and theorist Gerald Vizenor has also attempted a reinvigoration of both Others, but his adoption of Baudrillard's poststructuralist theory of simulation has led him to deconstruct the identity of the Indian itself as, after all, a Western cultural projection; in text after text, in popular representation after popular representation, Vizenor concludes, "This portrait is not an Indian."²⁶ (I could rightfully conclude many of my own subsequent readings of the avian in literature likewise: "This portrait is not a bird.") As for the Indian and animal, Vizenor recognizes that the stereotypical connection of other species and Native Americans is another "nostalgic" mistranslation, like "Indian" itself; underlying this association, nonetheless, is "the insinuation of a creature presence," through which "nativism, animism, and naturalism" are privileged "over theories of evolution and modernism" ("Literary Animals" 131–32). In this seminal essay (1998), Vizenor continually links Native and animal as possibilities for "native survivance" against a dominant worldview that would assimilate both via inauthentic simulations (122). Crucially, this "native" insurgency can take place in literature, especially (though not exclusively) in the literature of Natives themselves, whose metaphoric animals can, at times, "create a sense of creature presence" and even contain "traces of animal consciousness" (125, 135). In my later chapters part of my task is to argue that, in terms of the avian, Vizenor is right.

Again, the Native Other and the alter-species Other have much in common, as two "birds of a feather," as icons of Nature and the primitive and the wild. One is almost amused, then, to note the totemic aspect of various professional sports team names in the United States, as if the combatants

were in need of the spirits of Bear, Lion, Falcon, Eagle, and of Redskin and Brave (wielding a “tomahawk chop”), totemic figures all, of brute force and mindless courage: a further symptom of the conflation of the animal and the indigene ubiquitous in Western ideology. The Native writer is perhaps left little choice but to (re)invoke his or her fraternity with the eagle, crow, loon, et al., and to “sing back” (however dissonantly) as that avian Other, as Harjo does:

I'd rather understand how to sing from a crow
who was never good at singing or much of anything
but finding gold in the trash of humans.

Harjo and her crow are still rummaging together through the trash.

THE TROUBLE WITH ECOCRITICISM; OR,
DR. DOOLITTLE IN THE POSTMODERN WILDERNESS

A long-winded gloss on *ecocritic* might run as follows: “a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action.”

☞ WILLIAM HOWARTH, “Some Principles of Ecocriticism”

Having found wanting an outdated archetypalism in representing the “natural” Other, I turn now to a more promising tack through which to defend the avian. How exciting it was to discover a recent critical approach that does attempt a merger of literary and naturalist concerns similar to my own. Indeed, because birds *are* part of nature, my general argument could well be said to fall within the scope of what has come to be called ecocriticism, and so a close examination of this school of thought deserves a place here. Although I may seem to be wandering at times from my avian subject, a look at current literary scholarship’s relationship to “Nature” in general is very much in order.

However, it is still not entirely clear what ecocriticism *is*. It could simply be writing *about* nature writing, or exploring the themes and uses of nature in literature, or, most commonly, critiquing literature from a purely political stance, as Marxists and feminists have done. However, the vast preponderance of such ecocritical readings has centered on such generalities as the