

Gendered Ecologies in Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds*

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Abstract

Considering the impact of Darwinian evolutionary discourse on Anthony Trollope's The Eustace Diamonds, this essay examines the construction of the main character, Lizzie, through shifting cultural understandings of gender roles and human/animal identities. Looking at the impact of Darwinian theory on ecology from multiple perspectives elucidates the novel's concerns with social structures that shape and constrain individual agency in women's lives particularly. The Descent of Man's complicating of the human/animal divide demonstrates the complexities of Lizzie's reptilian characterisation while Victorian considerations of domestic animals highlight the importance of her portrayal as a cat. Her feline behaviour is a means of violating domestic norms and defining herself outside of traditional dichotomies. The legal ecology of the novel shows the inseparability of human and object materiality, a cultural concern to which Darwin's work contributed. The animals and gemstones contribute to the novel's larger argument about women's ownership of their bodies and sexuality. Thus, relationships between the human, animal, and material challenge Victorian norms while fitting into the Palliser series' interest in the limits and potential of women's agency.

Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) has been called 'the first decent ecology text' largely because it constructs its argument through ecological examples.¹ By looking at animals' and plants' interactions in small, anecdotal ways, Darwin builds to patterns and then to systems in order to support his crucial interlocking theories of natural selection and sexual selection. In his *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin continues to look at the dynamism of ecological interactions, seeing how animals operate in their environmental contexts and in turn operate on them, with the conclusions always leading toward humans' own evolutionary histories. His work, though building on science that had come before, nonetheless '[made] an epoch', to quote from George Eliot's

¹ John Kricher, *The Balance of Nature: Ecology's Enduring Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 63.

correspondence.² It had profound implications not only in scientific arenas but also in literary ones, as much for what it explored and implied as for what it did not.

Moreover, there is no ecology, as we understand it in the modern sense, without Darwin's influence. Darwin's work, after all, inspired Ernst Haeckel to coin the term 'ecology' in 1866, defining it as 'the science of the mutual relationships of organisms to one another'.³ Darwin studies have been flourishing in Victorianist scholarship for decades, thanks in large part to the influence of Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* (1983) and George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists* (1988).⁴ A Darwinian ecology, as defined by Anna Feuerstein, emphasises inclusivity, breaks down hierarchy, and focuses on the freedom that is enabled by embracing human/animal interconnectedness.⁵ This essay weaves together multiple related strands in scholarship – Darwinian narrative, gender studies, ecological perspectives, and animal studies – to elucidate an often-dismissed novel that in fact provides a fascinating study of the complexities of Victorian social ecological thinking: Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* (1871-73).⁶

The Eustace Diamonds teems with animal imagery. Although Trollope often likens men's treatment of horses to their treatment of women, in no other

² George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, Volume III, ed. By Gordon S. Haight (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954-56, 1978), p. 227.

³ Ernst Haeckel, quoted in Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 144. Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

⁴ Such monographs were by no means the first academic considerations of Darwin's influence on Victorian literature, of course; see, for example, John C. Greene, *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1959) and Leo J. Henkin, *Darwinism in the English Novel, 1860-1910* (New York, NY: Russell and Russell, 1963).

⁵ Anna Feuerstein, *The Political Lives of Victorian Animals: Liberal Creatures in Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 167. Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

⁶ There is a startling trend in scholarship to caricature Lizzie and the novel in such article titles as 'Trollope's Trollop', 'Trollope's Book of Odd Women', or 'Trollope's Material Girl.' While such article titles are attention grabbing and do not necessarily reflect the nuance of criticism contained in the body of each essay itself, they nonetheless point to a troubling tendency to flatten Trollope's narrative style, which other critics have long labored to show is in fact deceptive in its depth and layering. See, for example, Deborah Deneholz Morse, *Women in Trollope's Palliser Novels* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Research Press, 1987); Jane Nardin, *He Knew She Was Right: The Independent Woman in the Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); and Frank O'Connor, 'Trollope the Realist' in *The Mirror in the Roadway: A Study of the Modern Novel* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1959).

Palliser novel does he focus so much on the porousness and artificiality of the human/animal divide. Drawing on different animal analogies throughout the novel, Trollope portrays the main character, Lizzie, as having an identity constructed by herself and others based on her shifting circumstances and environments. Her negotiated and dynamic characterisation does not fall neatly into traditional dichotomies of feminine/masculine, animal/human, natural/civilised, and private/public, however. The personal, or domestic, is undoubtedly political, as Carol Hanisch pointed out fifty years ago, just as the scientific is inevitably political and gendered as well. This essay considers the impact of Darwinian evolutionary discourse on the novel's construction of Lizzie through shifting cultural understandings of gender roles and human/animal identities, emphasizing the novel's concerns with social structures that shape and constrain individual agency in women's lives particularly.

The Darwinian Context

The Palliser novels constitute Trollope's only series entirely undertaken after the publication of *Origin* in 1859 and concurrent with Charles Darwin's rise to prominence as the cultural touchstone for evolutionary theory. These books appeared between 1864 and 1879. The first novel in the series, *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864-65), introduces many of the characters, patterns, and concerns that appeared in later Palliser novels: a primary courtship plot involving the choice between a proper and an unsuitable partner, a secondary courtship plot that often mirrors the primary one but in a lower-stakes or degraded form, political conflicts that are widely discussed in drawing rooms by women who wish to influence public life, and of course the centrality of the Palliser family. If we think of ecology as presenting 'a vision of shared life', the Palliser novels likewise represent a Darwinian ecological vision spanning thousands of pages and multiple fictional generations to convey the social and natural worlds' dynamic and radical inclusiveness.⁷

Throughout the Palliser novels, Trollope explores the complex intertwining of individual, familial, political, and societal histories. I have argued in previous work that the Palliser series incorporates an examination of Darwinian narrative that was gripping public attention and intellectual imaginations in the

⁷ Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, 'Ecology', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46 (2018), 653-6 (p. 655).

years following the publication of *Origin*.⁸ Many critics have noted that the Palliser series is a careful study of character evolution that frequently deprioritises plot for the sake of exploring contingency, adaptation, gradualism, and entanglement over generations⁹, but the ways in which these themes can be understood as Darwinian have been largely overlooked by scholarship. Moreover, Darwin's arguably more topical *Descent* was published February 1871; *The Eustace Diamonds* was serialised beginning in July 1871 and was published in book form in 1872. This timing makes it difficult for us to read the novel without taking into account the substantial cultural impact of Darwin's work, as Trollope's contemporaneous audience would inevitably have done.

Descent details Darwin's theory of sexual selection, which was the focus of a single chapter in *Origin* despite being a crucial form of natural selection. Darwin first defined sexual selection in *Origin* as the 'struggle between the males for the possession of the females' with the results being successful reproduction or 'few to no offspring'.¹⁰ One of the most significant outcomes of sexual selection, particularly for Darwin's explorations of human evolution in *Descent*, is sexual dimorphism, defined in *Origin* as natural selection's ability 'to modify one sex in relation to wholly different habits of life in the two sexes' (p. 87). Thus, a tension emerges as Darwinian theory challenges traditional divides between dichotomies such as animal and human but strives to uphold firm gender distinctions within species, including humans. The phrase 'sexual selection' appears nineteen times in *Origin*, and 286 in *Descent*, if the preface and table of contents are excluded. Cultural attention to this concept was therefore heightened after the publication of *Descent*, as the book intensified debate around the subject. Most significantly, Darwin applied the topic of sexual selection to humans at length in *Descent*, a controversial move that he had avoided in his earlier treatise. Beginning with 'evidence of the descent of man from some lower form', Darwin builds to topics such as how a belief in God, racial differences, and women's lack of a beard can all be explained under his joint, interlocking theories of sexual and

⁸ Lauren Cameron, 'Trollope and Darwin', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Anthony Trollope*, ed. By Deborah Denenholz Morse, Margaret Markwick, and Mark Turner (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), pp. 201-9 (p. 203-4).

⁹ See, for example, George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 200-5.

¹⁰ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Charles Darwin: A Facsimile of the First Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 88. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

natural selection.¹¹ To illustrate the title's subject, the descent of man, Darwin discusses analogous behaviours, histories, and structures in animals ranging from beetles to reptiles to birds. Thus, *Descent* breaks down the traditional human/animal and culture/nature divides that *The Eustace Diamonds* likewise complicates.

As a member of multiple London clubs and literary circles where Darwin's ideas were discussed with interest, and as a market-savvy author and editor, Trollope could not remain unaware of the ways in which common themes such as courtship, reproductive success, lineage, and inheritance were perceived through a Darwinian filter in his *milieu* and by his readers. Darwin's work, as Beer has argued, became a 'determining fiction' regardless of the extent to which an individual author was aware of testing its narrative value: she asserts that 'everyone found themselves living in a Darwinian world'.¹² It is noteworthy, then, that animal references abound in *The Eustace Diamonds*, far beyond Trollope's tendency to include colloquialisms such as 'pig-headed' or 'a bird in the hand', or even his passion for describing fox hunts. The term 'creature' is used in reference to human characters thirty-nine times in *The Eustace Diamonds*; to contextualise, that is the same number as *Phineas Finn* (1869), *Phineas Redux* (1874), and *The Duke's Children* (1879) combined, or thirty-one percent of the usage of the word in all of the Palliser series. 'Creature' is a charged term, as multiple critics have pointed out: Eric Santner argues that creatures mark a 'threshold' in which life's materiality and politics blend,¹³ while Tobias Menely claims that creatures break open human/animal divisions.¹⁴ In *The Eustace*

¹¹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: J. Murray, 1871; repr. New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 21. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹² Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 2, p. 3.

¹³ Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 12. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁴ Tobias Menely, *The Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015) p. 14. The term 'creature' has captured extensive scholarly interest, beyond the two scholars noted. For example, Anat Pick sees creatureliness as opening up culture to 'contexts that are not exclusively human', while Kreilkamp sees creatures as occupying 'indeterminate zones' that grant them partial and negotiable humanity. Christine Roth argues that Darwin's theories made species differentiation unclear, leading Hardy to adopt the word 'creature' to mark this indeterminacy. Anat Pick, *Creaturely Politics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 10; Ivan Kreilkamp, *Minor Creatures: Persons, Animals, and the Victorian Novel* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 15. Further references are given after quotations in the

Diamonds, such blurring arises consistently. Women are cats and vultures; men are bears and sharks. Among the cast of characters appear a lawyer nicknamed Turtle Dove, a peer named Lord Fawn, a suitor named Sir Griffin, and a maid named Crabstick. Most importantly, there is a protagonist/‘villain’ named Lizzie.¹⁵

Lizzie’s first name is not incidental, nor is its resonance with ‘lizard’. Trollope’s narrator comments that she is widely referred to as ‘Lizzie’ – not ‘Lady Eustace’ or ‘Elizabeth Eustace’ – even ‘by people who had hardly ever seen her’, as her diamond scandals increase her notoriety (p. 127). She is portrayed as reptilian multiple times throughout the novel. In the initial description of her appearance, the narrator comments that ‘There were some who said that she was almost snake-like in her rapid bendings and the almost too easy gestures of her body’ (p. 19). Despite her prettiness, which is commented on by other characters, Trollope takes care to emphasise that Lizzie cannot be trusted to uphold societal norms because of her reptilian gaze (p. 20, p. 93, p. 261). When trying to entice her cousin Frank Greystock to propose to her, for example, she ‘scrambles’ and ‘clanders’ across rocks by the seaside (p. 180). The narrator describes her as ‘quick as a lizard in turning hither and thither’ and she attempts to win Frank’s hand with snake-like, pleading movements, ‘sitting almost upright now, though her feet were still on the sofa, and [...] leaning over towards him, as though imploring him for his aid’ (p. 77, p. 145). In this position, we are told, ‘She was very lovely, very attractive, almost invincible’ (p. 145). In fact, Trollope casts Lizzie in this serpentine mode in masculine Darwinian terms, as she uses ‘arms’ and wages ‘battle’ ‘against which [some men] can raise no shield,—from which they can retire into no fortress,—in which they can parry no blow [...] even the poor chance of running is often cut off from [them]’ (p. 145). Much of Lizzie’s unromantic fighting in this novel, with female rivals for a possible second husband, or with male lawyers who are trying to make her return the family diamonds once she is widowed, occurs in animalistic terms: she snaps, snarls, and growls (9, 468, 476), again taking on a more aggressive role, and therefore a masculine one in Darwin’s gendered evolutionary terms. For Darwin, ‘the

text; and Christine Roth, ‘The Zoocentric Ecology of Hardy’s Poetic Consciousness’, in *Victorian Writers and the Environment: Ecocritical Perspectives*, ed. by Laurence W. Mazzeno and Ronald D. Morrison (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), pp. 79-96. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁵ Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1862; ed. by Helen Small, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 530. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

severest rivalry' occurs between males, who have 'special weapons, confined to the male sex' whereas female agency is located in selecting the victorious male (*Descent*, p. 89, p. 88). Lizzie challenges such roles.

In *Descent*, Darwin dedicates most of his section on reptiles to snakes and lizards. Although the overarching theme of the section is sexual dimorphism, Darwin expresses fascination with snakes' breeding patterns, commenting 'Their intellectual powers are higher than might have been anticipated', going on to comment that snakes clearly possess 'some reasoning power, strong passions, and mutual affection' (p. 400-1). Nonetheless, uncertainty remains for him about whether snakes have 'sufficient taste' to appreciate bright colours and therefore engage in the same kinds of sexual selection as birds, as well as which sex might attract the other with mating displays such as rattling (p. 401-2). Lizards, on the other hand, fold perfectly into his theory of sexual selection, displaying marked male aggression and sexual dimorphism, and so he elucidates their examples with enthusiasm (pp. 402-7). Darwin's 1871 narrative thus highlights lizards while elevating snakes, which might surprise readers of *Origin* who associate his interests so closely with pigeons. Moreover, *Descent's* expansive embrace of species, including the reptilian, opens up new narrative possibilities that we can see Trollope utilising in *The Eustace Diamonds*.

An easy reading of Trollope's reptilian imagery would equate Lizzie with the tempting biblical snake and cast the novel as a stereotypical depiction of gendered literary tropes. Lizzie is obviously a villain in this mode: lizards and snakes have not typically been positive figures in literature. Darwin's cultural influence substantially complicated such presentations, however, as well as the gendering of sexual agency. As Darwin decreased the amount of agency that he attributed to females in sexual selection over the course of his publications, he was implicitly commenting on broader cultural issues, projecting Victorian patriarchal norms onto the animal world.¹⁶ In so doing, he also muddied any clear distinction that would take the human out of nature or vice-versa. What is labelled as 'natural' or 'unnatural' is largely a matter of power relations and the definitions provided by the dominant cultural perspective.

Like Gwendolen Harleth, then, whose serpentine appearance attracts comments at the beginning of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Lizzie's

¹⁶ See Susan David Bernstein, 'Designs after Nature: Evolutionary Fashions, Animals and Gender', in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Deborah Deneholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 65-79 (p. 66) and Rosemary Jann, 'Darwin and the Anthropologists: Sexual Selection and Its Discontents', *Victorian Studies*, 37 (1994), 287-306 (p. 290).

reptilian features and movements in *The Eustace Diamonds* mark a woman vying for sexual agency in a complicated Darwinian culture, wherein the traditional boundaries between human and animal lack clear meanings.¹⁷ Such a breakdown means that a reptilian woman is no longer inherently an embodiment of evil, an oversimplified symbol plucked from Genesis, but rather a vibrant hybrid who is exploring and testing her cultural limitations to see if she can write herself a new script. While snakes have long been phallic symbols and such Lamia figures could be seen as sexual threats as a consequence, that both Eliot and Trollope portray their characters as snakes is less a reflection of the authors' condemnation of such behaviour than an exploration of how to make new symbolic space for agentic women. We see both Gwendolen and Lizzie as snakes mostly through the eyes of other characters or through the narrator's free indirect discourse, such as when Lizzie's fiancé Lord Fawn ponders whether 'she [would] not ever be as an adder to him, – as an adder whom it would be impossible that he should admit into his bosom' (p. 492). Thus, to many characters in the novel, Lizzie is a wild creature, a dangerous biting animal such as a minx (p. 574) or a vixen (p. 70, p. 72, p. 73). In each of these cases, the animal imagery emphasises Lizzie's unpredictability. Her agency can only be categorised as dangerous by characters who are frustrated by their inability to thwart or control what they perceive as her undesirable behaviour. As with Eliot, Trollope's complex gender negotiation was influenced by Darwin's writing, which troubled the human/animal divide more substantially than any previous evolutionary theory of the modern era and made 'the human more animal and the animal more human, destabilizing boundaries in both directions'.¹⁸ This dissolution of traditional divisions demonstrates that the novel's ambiguities are not equivocation but rather an exploration of a world 'in which two or more possible ways of being and ways of meaning exist at the same time' continuously.¹⁹

Violating the Domestic: A Household Cat

¹⁷ See George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Edinburgh: Wm. Blackwood & Sons, 1876; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 3.

¹⁸ Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1-12 (p. 2). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁹ Danielle Barkley, 'Interpreting Sympathy in *The Eustace Diamonds*', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, 129 (2016), 66-79 (p. 67).

Along with Darwin's evolutionary theories, a radical shift in the way that humans and non-human animals lived and related to one another also shaped the Victorian view of animals: the emergence of the household pet as a cultural phenomenon. Under the influences of urbanisation and industrialisation, the pet became one of the most substantial developments in Victorian domestic ecology.²⁰ Not wild animals with little use value for the middle class, nor beasts of burden, nor yet sources of food and clothing, the pet dog, cat, and bird offered potent new cultural roles and, by extension, literary symbols. Though not much scholarship has been dedicated to Darwin's perspective on pets specifically, Natalie McKnight has persuasively demonstrated an overlap in Darwinian and literary presentations of pets, particularly that of Charles Dickens: pets blur the human/animal divide for the Victorians and throw into question notions of human superiority.²¹ Ivan Kreilkamp notes that *Descent* presented domesticated animals as characters, deserving of sympathy and capable of agency (p. 4, p. 10). Pets are hardly straightforward literary symbols, however, and are frequently politically charged. For the Victorian man intimidated by cultural changes, pets could provide a comforting image of domesticated nature that was entirely integrable into the home, thereby reducing perceived threats posed by gender or class conflict.²² Any hint of violence posed to the Victorian imperialistic, patriarchal, middle-class order could be countered with 'the more cheering picture' of 'the kitten toying with its ball of yarn', as James Turner puts it; he goes on to argue that by 'creating the modern pet [...] animal lovers manufactured an animal designed to quell savage nature with the balm of love'.²³ Similarly, Monica Flegel has argued that the pet is a figure that reinforces patriarchal control over the home space and the broader world beyond it.²⁴ It is this indifferently violent vision of nature that Darwin's work brought to cultural attention, and this commitment to patriarchy that he upholds in his discussion of sexual selection across species, as discussed

²⁰ Mario Ortiz-Robles, *Literature and Animal Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), p. 5. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

²¹ Natalie McKnight, 'Dickens and Darwin: A Rhetoric of Pets', *The Dickensian*, 102 (2006), 131-143 (p. 142). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

²² Martin A. Danahay, 'Nature Red in Hoof and Paw: Domestic Animals and Violence in Victorian Art', in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 97-119 (pp. 99-100). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

²³ James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 76.

²⁴ Monica Flegel, *Pets and Domesticity in Victorian Literature and Culture: Animality, Queer Relations, and the Victorian Family* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), pp. 97-8.

earlier. Martin A. Danahay points out the inverse of Turner's and Flegel's perspectives: that there is little more threatening to the era's notion of masculinity than the claws on a pet cat—the ability to cause damage and pain otherwise hidden in a seemingly sweet creature—because 'the image then transgresses both norms of femininity and the domestic' that otherwise comforted the Victorians in the idealisation of pets (p. 103).

Even a playful kitten is therefore a vexed cultural symbol. Thomas Hardy celebrates the inability to assimilate cats to human consciousness in multiple poems (Roth, pp. 90-1). Lewis Carroll's cats resist domesticity and tyranny, as in the case of the Cheshire Cat, or motivate a break from patriarchal power, as in the case of Dinah (Feuerstein, p. 151, p. 157). Traditionally, cats' contradictions stand as what Mario Ortiz-Robles describes as 'a living reminder of the strangeness inherent in our domestication of a species that, at times, seems to have domesticated us' (p. 117). This tug across the simple human/animal, owner/pet divide is very different from literary portrayals of dogs, which represent a more 'benign tale of recognition and domestication' than felines (Ortiz-Robles, p. 70). Darwin idealised the emotional capacities of dogs but had little interest in cats; for Dickens, cats are feminised opposites to dogs, faithless, fierce, and sneaky (McKnight, p. 141). Kreilkamp's few examples of pet cats in Victorian novels are also problematic, either too benign or too violent (p. 43, p. 54). Cats are rarely reducible to the convenient loyalty of dogs and are often associated with nonconforming women.²⁵

Perhaps more clearly than Lizzie the reptile, then, Lizzie the cat captures the ambivalence and difficulty of Victorian domestic ecologies. Lizzie Eustace is not only portrayed as a biting wild creature by those men who are frustrated by her, as explored in the previous section, but also as a scratching domesticated one by people who are attached to her. Those two characters who know her best, Frank and Lucy, have the following exchange:

'She looks like a beautiful animal that you are afraid to caress for fear it should bite you;—an animal that would be beautiful if its eyes were not so restless, and its teeth so sharp and so white.'

'How very odd.'

'Why odd, Mr. Greystock?'

²⁵ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 22-3.

‘Because I feel exactly in the same way about her. I am not in the least afraid that she'll bite me; and as for caressing the animal,—that kind of caressing which you mean,—it seems to me to be just what she's made for. But, I do feel sometimes, that she is like a cat.’

‘Something not quite so tame as a cat’, said Lucy. (p. 93)

The cat is most easily integrated into Victorian art when asleep, evoking ‘associations of fidelity, peace and companionship strongly linked to the ideal of the family and the domestic sphere as [Ruskin’s] “place of Peace”’ (Danahay, p. 99). Lizzie outright rejects this reduction, proclaiming, ‘It does not suit me to be tame. It is not my plan to be tame’ (p. 116). Other women are cats that purr over each other and sleep contentedly in front of the family hearth (p. 52, p. 116, p. 195), but Lizzie spurns such comfortable domestic integration. Another woman, Lucy, is able to recognise that Lizzie is nothing like an ideal pet cat when the men around her cannot. Nonetheless, even Lizzie’s primary champion and occasional suitor Frank acknowledges to himself, when alone, that her ‘claws would scratch’ (p. 97). The comforting domestic and feminine cat on the hearth can in fact have its own mind and violent intentions that counter social norms and patriarchal preferences, as Lizzie does for each man who attempts to confine or control her throughout her widowhood. Lizzie takes advantage of the opportunities for self-redefinition provided by the post-*Descent* blurring of the human/animal divide, even as such a cultural shift upends other characters’ more traditional gendered notions.

The Legal Complexities of Ownership

No discussion of *The Eustace Diamonds* could responsibly overlook the titular gemstones. The novel’s legal discourse over jewellery is not separate from the novel’s ecological vision, despite the seeming distance between a diamond and a non-human animal. Returning to Santner’s understanding of ‘creature’, the ambiguity enabled by such a term brings together living organisms, the material world, and the politics that make meaning out of them (p. 12). Carey Wolfe famously argues that biopolitics show us how the line between the human and the nonhuman is not ‘given by nature’, but rather ‘about rules and laws’.²⁶ The legal concerns about gemstone ownership in *Eustace Diamonds* reinforce this larger

²⁶ Carey Wolfe, *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 10.

Darwinian breakdown of societal norms and divisions discussed in the preceding sections. Moreover, the legal ecology of the novel demonstrates the inseparability of ‘our material world of people and things’, a cultural concern to which Darwin’s work contributed.²⁷

In *Descent*, Darwin discusses women’s tendency to wear jewellery, a behaviour that he says is common to ‘our women, both civilised and savage’, and reminiscent of the colouring of birds, although he claims that ‘Judging from the hideous ornaments, and the equally hideous music admired by most savages, it might be urged that their aesthetic faculty was not so highly developed [...] as in birds’ (p. 408, p. 116). Here we have a gendered crossing, where male birds’ and female humans’ behaviour are equated although not with the self-awareness that might consider the inappropriateness of projecting Victorian patriarchal norms onto non-human animals or non-western cultures. Similarly, Darwin’s aesthetics are tinged with his cultural privilege. What he terms ‘high tastes’ are, he argues, ‘acquired through culture, and depend on complex associations; they are not enjoyed by barbarians or by uneducated persons’ (p. 116). Lizzie Eustace’s stunning ‘circle of stones [...] with a Maltese cross appended to it [...] constituted of real diamonds’, beautiful enough to make peers recognise their value at first glance, therefore fall into a Darwinian loophole: her diamonds are clearly markers of western cultural value and yet are continuous with the pleasures of those so low on the Victorian evolutionary hierarchy as birds and indigenous peoples (p. 79).

Although Lizzie’s ‘diamonds’, the refined if old-fashioned jewellery that impresses even unknowledgeable men with their beauty and evident cost, are most often referred to as such, they are also interchangeably called ‘stones’, a total of twenty-one times in the novel. This casual description emphasises their elemental nature, their continuity with the natural world, and the artificiality of the value that is placed on them. The artificial nature of the diamonds’ importance and worth is emphasised by the complexities of the legal and social norms surrounding the eponymous objects. Whether laws or customs can dictate Lizzie’s possession and disposal of the stones, for example, is contentious for much of the novel. The complexities of the law on something as simple as a necklace take over four pages of dense text to hash out, only to reach the

²⁷ Kevin Curran, *Shakespeare’s Legal Ecologies: Law and Distributed Selfhood* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), p. 48. Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

conclusion that the diamonds have looser regulations and precedents attached to them than even pots and pans, or nonhuman animals (pp. 123-4, pp. 185-6).

Paul Waldau comments that ‘the basic principles of property law as they apply to nonhuman animals have not changed essentially’ since the nineteenth century.²⁸ The many animal protection laws that were passed in the Victorian era were overwhelmingly focused on animals with clear economic value: cattle, horses, and dogs that were being used by humans for their bodies’ contribution to the capitalist market.²⁹ Wild animals were of concern to the law primarily so that humans could have a system for gaining ownership over them, not as having a protected status in nature. Domestic animals, on the other hand, were and still are categorised legally as personal property and pets have had ‘almost no visibility in the legal system, as the noneconomic values of companionship were not of importance’ (Favre, p. 65). Legal restrictions are built on constructed systems of value: what can be done with a herd of cattle will likely be defined more clearly and extensively than what can be done with a litter of puppies. Likewise, what can be done with a collection of diamonds will be codified in a way that what can be done with a handful of more common stones is not, even if the former is ‘hardly so useful’ (Trollope, *Eustace Diamonds*, p. 574).

Moreover, Darwin’s interest in jewels and ornamentation among women and animals stems from a concern with reproductive success: women adorn their bodies to make themselves more attractive to potential mates, in his logic (*Descent*, p. 116). Because female sexuality was constructed as a form of property

²⁸ Paul Waldau, ‘Animals as Legal Subjects’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, ed. by Linda Kalof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 167-88 (p. 171). As the 1870s saw the growth of cultural concerns over vivisection, scientific works such as Darwin’s *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), literary works such as Anna Sewall’s *Black Beauty* (1877), and innumerable accounts in the British press of animals’ experiences made ‘the physiological and emotional barriers between species harder to maintain’ for Victorian readers. See Jed Mayer, ‘The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Laboratory Animals’, *Victorian Studies*, 50 (2008), 399-417 (p. 406). This cultural zeitgeist drove the enactment of the last major piece of nineteenth-century legislation to protect animals: the 1876 version of the Cruelty to Animals Act, developed from the final report of the 1876 Royal Commission on the Practice of Subjecting Live Animals to Experiments for Scientific Purposes. Prior to this, legal form had been granted ‘to the growing political demand among Britons to face humans’ ethical responsibility towards animals [in] the Act to Prevent the Cruel and Improper Treatment of Cattle of 1822 (also known as Martin’s Act); [and] the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1835, which was repealed and replaced in 1849, 1850, 1854, and 1876’ (Ortiz-Robles, p. 11).

²⁹ David Favre, ‘Animals as Living Property’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, ed. by Linda Kalof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 65-80 (p. 65). Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

in the Victorian era, with women's bodies belonging to their fathers or husbands, depending on their marital status, other property such as diamonds, or pets, can stand in for women's sexuality.³⁰ Thus, as Kathy A. Psomiades has explored through the conjunction of contemporaneous anthropologies and *The Eustace Diamonds*, the legal concerns of the novel impact sexuality in so far as property is 'connected to the logic of reproduction and blood that organizes' social structures (p. 102). Trollope is demonstrating the overlap between the civilised and the primitive, exploring the thin veneers that his culture put on marriage and property law in order to maintain the illusion of evolutionary distance.

Darwin's theories tie 'discourse on animal rights inevitably [...] [to] human rights, especially in connection with women' (Morse and Danahay, p. 5). Like Lizzie's diamonds, then, animals' and women's legal rights existed in a contradictory and complicated legal ecology. Lizzie herself is 'absolutely, alarmingly ignorant, not only of the laws, but of custom in such matters' but she counters the obfuscating, masculinist intellectual exercises of the lawyers with a simpler language of personal and bodily 'rights' (p. 39, p. 195). She uses her diamonds primarily as a tool to assert her agency and independence from masculine domination. As Frederik Van Dam points out, 'she is not interested in whether the law is true or false: what matters is that it is there and that it can be used'.³¹ Throughout much of the narrative, we see Lizzie lying about being ill, infirm, or outright dying to keep male police officers, doctors, and court clerks away from her property. Although her motives are shown to be complex and shifting over the course of the novel, she comes to declare, 'After all, a necklace is only a necklace. I cared nothing for it,—except that I could not bear the idea that that man should dictate to me' (p. 388). She hopes that in whatever second marriage she contracts, she will be 'the rare case in which the woman can make herself the dictator' rather than 'playing the tunes that men dictate' (p. 555). This is her main criterion for a potential husband. To her suitor, Lord Fawn, she proclaims, 'If you, my lord, intend to take an attorney's word against mine [...] then you are not fit to be my husband' (p. 150). After all of the threats that Lizzie

³⁰ William A. Cohen, 'Trollope's Trollop', *Novel: A Forum in Fiction*, 28 (1995), 235-56 (p. 238). Further references are given after the quotations in the text. Kathy Alexis Psomiades, 'Heterosexual Exchange and Other Victorian Fictions: *The Eustace Diamonds* and Victorian Anthropology', *Novel: A Forum in Fiction*, 33 (1999), 93-118 (p. 97). Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

³¹ Frederik Van Dam, 'Victorian Instincts: Anthony Trollope and the Philosophy of Law', *Literature Compass*, 9.11 (2012), 801-12 (p. 804). Further references are given after the quotations in the text.

faces and all of the trouble that she puts others to, her brother-in-law concludes, ‘She is a very great woman [...] and, if the sex could have its rights, would make an excellent lawyer’ (p. 531), a recognition of her paramount intelligence in navigating the complex situations into which legal regulations force her.

Kevin Curran defines legal ecology as promoting ‘communal, collaborative, and distributive’ notions of selfhood, notions that were opening up to redefinition thanks in part to *Descent*’s tracing of human evolutionary history (p. 8). Lizzie understands all boundaries as in flux and moves across them as needed to achieve her ends, a Darwinian sign of the times. Women, jewellery, and animals were all seen as circulating in exchanges between men, but Trollope complicates such reductive narratives in his novels. Lizzie trying to maintain ownership of her jewels is a woman trying to maintain control of her body and its uses (Cohen, p. 238), which is in turn an animal trying to control her own reproductive autonomy – regardless of the laws regulating it. The intersecting implications of family jewels as inherited property, resources of great immediate value, and male genitalia are particularly noteworthy in this context.³² Trollope problematises the overlap among the cultural categories of women, animals, and jewels by showing how they can be manipulated for an individual’s gain. Lizzie, who is associated as much with jewels as with biting teeth and scratching claws, uses instinct and appeals to natural law in order to promote her own interests (Van Dam, p. 804).³³

Complicating the Politics: Conclusion

Trollope’s achievement at tapping into this cultural matrix of concerns over the scientific, cultural, and legal status of women and animals can be measured by his own perception that *The Eustace Diamonds* was his most successful novel in

³² See ‘family jewels, n.’, in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, December 2020) www.oed.com/view/Entry/256886. Accessed 28 December 2020.

³³ From her childhood on, and despite her father’s impecuniousness, she ‘went everywhere with jewels on her fingers, and red gems hanging round her neck, and yellow gems pendent from her ears, and white gems shining in her black hair’ (p. 7). The titular diamonds, which Lizzie repeatedly claims to be her own, were placed into her hands by Sir Florian (p. 39) but at various points, she asserts that he ‘threw them round [her] neck’ (p. 42, p. 316). She even once says that she plans to usurp her son’s husbandly role by placing them around his bride’s neck herself (p. 150). The intimacy of placing the jewels in their proper bodily display is for Lizzie proof of transfer of ownership – they belong to her body as they cannot belong to a storage vault or a man’s legal claim. Until she can transfer them to another woman’s body and her ownership, Lizzie reinforces her claim to them by wearing ‘her diamonds again and then again’ (p. 142).

almost a decade.³⁴ Although this novel has often been excluded from the Palliser series based on its lack of political content, this essay helps us to see that the animal imagery that intersects with legal, scientific, and gender concerns through the figure of Lizzie makes this a deeply political novel. Despite Harriet Ritvo's argument that post-Darwin, cultural consensus would not have deemed humans to be animals,³⁵ nonetheless Trollope's social ecological vision captures how troublingly and enticingly malleable the categories of human/animal, man/woman, culture/nature, refined/savage, family/personal, legal/ethical, and science/culture were in the early 1870s, all through the figure of Lizzie Eustace. Each belongs in and with the other, and all are mutually constitutive.

It might be tempting to reduce Lizzie to a Becky Sharp figure, with her social climbing, mendacity, and conscious use of sexual appeal for her own ends. Lizzie's scheming, however, serves a very different function in this narrative than Becky's does in *Vanity Fair* (1848) (see Psomiades, p. 98). Importantly, in *The Eustace Diamonds*, the same censure and punishments are not applied to Lizzie's methods of breaking open cultural institutions, family traditions, and social restrictions. As various scholars have pointed out, then, this novel presents us with a vision of a constructed rather than natural society in 'an essentially unproductive world' and of how easily determining fictions such as personal and family history, class structure, and intergenerational stability can become undone.³⁶ By controlling the Eustace men's family jewels and her metonymic sexuality, even by telling whatever story suits at a given moment, Lizzie purchases a stressful and short-lived freedom that she makes the most of.

Other female characters in the novel notice this opportunity for change and are enthused by Lizzie's trajectory. This is the most significant thematic connection between *The Eustace Diamonds* and the rest of the Palliser series: women's struggle for personal and political agency in a time of flux. Glencora Palliser fights this battle from the first novel until *The Prime Minister* (1876), the last one in which she appears alive. Cora visits Lizzie twice in *The Eustace Diamonds* to offer sympathy with her plight. Fascinated by Lizzie's defiance of

³⁴ John N. Hall, *Trollope: A Biography* (London: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 377.

³⁵ Harriet Ritvo, 'Animal Dreams and Animal Reflections', in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 272-75 (p. 272).

³⁶ See Zubair S. Amir, "'So Delightful a Plot": Lies, Gossip, and the Narration of Social Advancement in *The Eustace Diamonds*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36 (2008), 187-204 (p. 188, pp. 187-91); and James R. Kincaid, *The Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), pp. 172-3.

patriarchal expectations for women's interactions with the legal system, she comments publicly, 'It is so delightful to think that a woman has stolen her own property, and put all the police into a state of ferment' (p. 352). Throughout the series, Lizzie is one of the only female characters to take on the public sphere and succeed, if in small and compromising ways. Although the Eustace family lawyers want to take away what Lizzie sees as her property rights, since as a widow she can produce no more Eustace heirs, Lizzie's manoeuvrings position her as both the 'villain' – an Althusserian bad subject who does not consent to her own subjection³⁷ – and a very modern protagonist who takes advantage of the changes in her Darwinian world to reposition herself within a malleable 'multispecies social and political community' (Feuerstein, p. 5). Kreilkamp argues that animal figures in the Victorian novel contributed to creating cultural categories of who and what 'can count as a protagonist or even as a character'; to be more animal than human is to become dispensable or mere matter to be used by others (p. 3, p. 32). Not so with Trollope's Lizzie. She embraces the freedom in animal identities in order to adjust to new threats and demands, using them as necessary to work toward her own goals.

To return to Haeckel's definition of ecology as 'the science of the mutual relationships of organisms to one another', we can see how *The Eustace Diamonds* presents a challenging vision of such human, animal, and material relationships through Lizzie's trajectory (qtd. in Richards, p. 144). Darwin's work led to an uncomfortable reckoning for Victorians about their understandings of non-human animals as well as humans that had been coded as animal-like (Feuerstein, pp. 22-23). The destabilisation of traditional categories resulted in 'more expansive representational strategies' that privileged animal qualities, even seemingly negative ones like instinct, wildness, and viciousness (Feuerstein, p. 2, pp. 3-4). Consequently, post-*Descent* novels like *The Eustace Diamonds* offer broader, less anthropocentric visions of community and agency. Lizzie's agentic animal identities and legal acrobatics convey Trollope's insights about the problems of a social system trying to adhere to divisions that no longer hold in a Darwinian context.

³⁷ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 29.

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