‘Animals under Man’?: Margaret Gatty’s ‘Parables from Nature’

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Margaret Gatty’s Parables from Nature (1855-71) use the form of the moral tale for children to conduct a polemic against Tennysonian doubt, cleverly deploying the voices of talking animals and plants. The perspectives of animals, plants and children are valorised above those of arrogant male doubters. When this happens, the ironies Gatty uses can escape control, and lead to more subversive readings than the overt message, overturning the conventional hierarchies she has set up. The voices of the marginalised take over the centre, and comic inversion privileges the unprivileged, in a carnivalesque celebration of possibilities that terrify Tennyson, rather than the orthodox rebuttal of doubt called for by the feminine role. The article revalues Gatty’s 'feminine' and ‘animal’s-eye’ take on the problems about the natural world that exercise Tennyson and other canonical male writers, including Darwin and Hardy.

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In considering Margaret Gatty’s Parables from Nature (1855-71), a series of moral tales for children, I want to apply Mitzi Myers' question, 'Why have women writers so often been drawn to writing for the young, and how have they used children's literature . . . for their own public and private purposes?'.[1] Gatty’s position as a woman naturalist writing for children gives her rhetorical advantages that she does not fail to exploit, in a polemic against scientific naturalism and attendant doubt. It is, however, also important to realise the contradictions involved in her position as a woman who adopts the perspectives of children and small animals, who attacks misguided male philosophers, but who nevertheless subscribes to a rigid hierarchy and an ultimate male authority. These contradictions give the best of her stories a - perhaps unintended - carnivalesque quality, as the voices of the marginalised take over the centre, and comic inversion privileges the unprivileged.

On first reading, Gatty appears to conform to a feminine stereotype, well described by Tennyson in verse XCVI of In Memoriam. The male speaker turns to address a female interlocuter, who has been reproaching him for his doubts:

> You say, but with no touch of scorn
>
> Sweet-hearted, you, whose light blue eyes
>
> Are tender over drowning flies,
>
> You tell me, doubt is devil-born.

'You' is usually identified as Emily Sellwood, later Tennyson's wife,[2] but is also emblematic of the positioning of Victorian femininity in the discourse of faith and doubt. The more emotional, empathetic woman keeps unproblematically to her simple faith, untouched by the intellectual doubts of the man. For her, Nature is not an evolutionary battlefield, 'red in tooth and claw', but full of small creatures to be pitied and saved. This contrast mirrors the economic division of home and work, in the 'separate spheres' ideal: the man participating in the rough competitive world of work, the woman as guardian of the hearth and the moral and emotional aspects of life. The

woman fulfils the role of conscience-keeper for the man. The 'you' of In Memoriam also fits into another important role given to women in the late 18th and 19th Centuries: as Barbara Gates says, ‘women were called upon to aid children in developing respect and sympathy for nonhuman species’.[3]

Several of Gatty’s Parables are prefaced by epigraphs from Tennyson, and in some of them a Tennysonian doubter figure appears, whose doubts are disputed by the story.[4] The story of Gatty's that Tennyson admired 'as much as anything he has ever read' was 'The Unknown Land', an unexceptional and unexceptionable parable about the hope for a future life, delivered in the sweet voice of a mother sedge-warbler. There is no evidence that he read anything else in the copy of Parables that Gatty sent him: he writes that he will give it to his boys when they are old enough to read.[5] It is in keeping with his stereotype of the sweet-hearted, childish female guardian of faith that this is the story he would have liked. Similarly, the introduction to the 1907 Everyman edition of Parables recommends the book for its

> . . . love for all the small helpless pretty things of nature, an imagination deeply coloured, if rather strictly defined, by Christian doctrine, an unfailing candour, and lastly a spirit of affection that fills the whole book, binding it together and making it possible for the reader to sympathise warmly in the small conversations of bees, crickets, kittens, raindrops and vegetables.[6]

'Drowning flies' would certainly fit in here too. Gatty appears to match the Tennysonian stereotype perfectly: unquestioning simple faith, sympathy for all small living things, child-like innocence and love

I would argue, however, that Gatty, in the Parables, far exceeds this stereotype, though she may be using it as part of an acceptable feminine self-presentation. Her debate with Tennysonian doubt is informed by scientific understanding, and her attitude to the natural world is tough-minded and brisk. Instead of merely ‘sympathising’ in the problems of small creatures, she cleverly deploys their voices to aid her polemic. In so far as she is orthodox, what comes over is not a sweet-hearted acceptance, but a rigid insistence on hierarchy, authority and

obedience, which we can read as an attempt to come to terms with the limitations imposed on her as a woman, and/or the short-hand solution of a harassed mother of ten spirited children. But in many of her stories, the ironies she uses threaten to escape control, and, coupled with the animal's-eye view she takes, can lead to more subversive readings than the overt message, overturning the hierarchies she has set up.[7] The perspectives of animals, plants and children are valorised above those of arrogant male doubters. What comes over in these stories, is a carnivalesque celebration of the possibilities that terrify Tennyson, rather than the orthodox rebuttal called for by the feminine role.[8] I want, then to revalue her 'feminine' take on the problems about the natural world that exercise Tennyson in In Memoriam, and other canonical male writers, including Darwin and Hardy.

In Tennyson's representations of the feminine conscience-keeper, her authority is somewhat undercut by the implication of ignorance. The male doubter knows more than she does, and must protect her from this dangerous knowledge; but he can also reach a higher, firmer faith than she can, by working through his doubts.[9] Gatty, however, was an accomplished naturalist, author of the authoritative British Sea-Weeds (1862). Botany was a particularly feminine scientific pursuit for a Victorian lady, but Gatty used it to escape at least some of her constraints.[10] As she wrote:

> The sea-weed collector who has to pick her way to save her boots will never be a loving disciple as long as she lives! Any one, therefore, really intending to work in the matter, must lay aside for a time all thought of conventional appearances. . . . Next to boots comes the question of petticoats; . . . to make the best of a bad matter, let woollen be in the ascendent as much as possible; and let the petticoats never come below the ankle.[11]

She read Darwin, though she rejected his ideas fiercely.[12] True to the type of the female guardian of faith, she stays ostensibly within a Natural Theological frame for science - she is not like her contemporary, Kingsley, who tries to attach moral and theological meanings to the processes of evolution, nor is she like later writers, such

as Arabella Buckley, who rethink Darwinism with a 'feminine' slant, emphasising caring and co-operation as essential to the evolutionary process. Gatty's Natural Theological approach is not, however, out of line with other (male and female) popularisers of Victorian science, who

> . . . remained enthralled by the traditional moral, aesthetic, teleological, and divine qualities of the natural world. . . . Their alteration of the story told by scientific naturalists was not the result of ignorance or simplification - it was an intentional re-fashioning of recent scientific discovery into a form full of meaning for their audience.[13]

In Gatty's case, she also conducts a polemic against scientific naturalism and its attendant disbelief.[14]

Gatty's Parables from Nature are usually read as directed at children. She was also the editor of Aunt Judy's Magazine for children, and Kipling acknowledged her influence on his animal stories.[15] But much of the material in the Parables is, to twenty-first-century eyes, of little interest to children, and the address is often to an adult reader.[16] Gatty's address in most of her stories veers about unpredictably. For instance, 'Kicking', about a rebellious colt, is clearly at times directed at children: the colts are told that the breaking-in is 'to prepare them for being taught a thousand nice things which they would never be able to do if they were not taught, and which it was immensely jolly to be able to do, when the teaching was once over'.[17] The hierarchical moral of the story is, however, applicable to all ages, and in a quite different tone of voice: 'Animals under man - servants under masters - children under parents - wives under husbands - men under authorities - nations under rulers - all under God'.[18] The story of the colt is by analogy applicable to children; but the story to the child also contains messages for the adult, especially the adult doubter. For instance, 'judgements formed by the lesser intelligence concerning a greater which it cannot comprehend - what rebellion and ruin have they not caused!'.[19]

We could see here a covert address to an adult doubter, hidden behind an overt address to children, but in other stories the address to adults is quite overt, and

the doubts are given expression. For instance, 'Inferior Animals' addresses itself to adult readers, inviting them to recover their childhood: 'Reader . . . shall you and I become children in heart once more? Come! own with me how hateful were the lessons which undeceived us from our earlier instincts of faith and sweet companionship with all created things; and let us go forth together and for a while forget such teaching'.[20] The story which follows is a comic parody of evolution, using the child-like device of talking animals to mock a very adult debate. What I find in all these stories, is that the notions of the child and the child-like are cleverly deployed to aid the polemic against the adult doubter. Using both childlike vision and adult wisdom, Gatty can come at her targets from several directions. Moreover, her understanding of nature involves both childlike sympathy and adult scientific knowledge, leaving no room for contrary opinions.

I would like to begin with a story called 'A Lesson of Hope' (1855)[21] which is a fairly straightforward rebuttal of Tennysonian doubt, using the device of talking animals. It carries an epigraph from In Memoriam: 'Oh yet we trust that, somehow, good/ Will be the final goal of ill!' (LIV) The 'yet', implying preceding contrary evidence, and the 'somehow', implying desperation, undercut the hopeful message. Gatty's story is designed to confirm the trust, by seeing things through to a 'final goal'. While in In Memoriam the speaker's voice moves to and fro between doubt and faith, Gatty's dramatic technique gives voices - trees, birds - to the different positions Tennyson fluctuates between, and right from the start her speaker's doubts are countered by a strong voice from nature itself. This speaker, we find out at the end of the story, is male, when he tells us of 'the children of my love, and the sweet mother who has borne them'.[22] The voice of the human doubter in Gatty is always male, while she enthusiastically takes on the position of the female guardian of faith.

The safe and happy haven, with wife and children, that the narrator reaches at the end of the story, only arrives after a time of solitary doubt and despair, following his parents' death: 'Father and mother lost, swept suddenly away, and I, with straitened means, left alone to struggle through the world!' The story, then,

recapitulates in a simple form the trajectory of In Memoriam itself, from the death of the beloved (Hallam) to new life (Tennyson's sister's wedding). In between, nature, as in the poem, seems to sympathise with the mourner's dark mood. But in Gatty's story, the trees, the owl and the raven all speak, debating hope and despair with the human narrator, who in this story is able to understand the voices of nature (this convention varies in different stories). The main action of the story takes place on one significant night, 'when, having wandered out one gloomy autumn night to muse on nature and her laws, I found myself contemplating, in the deep recesses of the wood, the progress of a violent storm'.[23] The trees lament their destruction, and the Raven preaches his gloomy message: 'destruction is the law of life'.[24] But this is countered by the authoritative voice of the Owl, who draws attention to the reappearances of the Moon, the 'Moon that shone in Paradise'.[25] The doubter voices his despair: 'order and peace seem meant, but death and ruin come to pass'; the Owl replies, 'Oh, miserable doubter, do you ask? Must the brute beasts and mute creation rise to give an answer to your fears? Look in the heaven above, and in the earth below, and in the water deep beneath the earth. One only law is given - the law of order, harmony, and joy'.[26]

The Owl it seems has looked forward to In Memoriam stanza XCV, where Tennyson has a vision of deep universal order:

> The deep pulsations of the world
>
> Aeonian music measuring out
>
> The steps of Time - the shocks of Chance -
>
> The blows of death . . .

But, instead of this vision being attained through long struggle, it is here from the first page. The doubter's recovery is paralleled by the return of spring: 'And to me also came a spring! From me, too, passed away the winter and its chill!'.[27] Though, at the end of the story, the narrator tells us how he now brings his children into the woods, and tells them of the Owl's message and the moon's promise, the tale is addressed to an adult, male consciousness, someone who 'muses on Nature and her laws'. The children are in the story as the means to this adult's recovery, as is the child-like

device of talking trees and birds. But the authoritative voice that contradicts the doubter is also grown-up and male, the wise old Owl. The female moon, the sign of hope, is predictably silent and 'patient': 'the patient moon is never weary of her task of shedding rays of hope and promise on the world'[28]. Gatty, as female story-teller, keeps silent, dramatising her argument through male speakers. The stories where she does speak out as a female narrator are those more obviously addressed to children.

This is not to say, however, that children and childishness are irrelevant to the story. The narrator's despair is occasioned by the loss of his parents. In the all-knowing Owl and the patient moon, he could be said to have recovered them, in Nature. In a sense, he is infantilised, as the Tennyson of In Memoriam also is, casting himself as 'An infant crying in the night:/ An infant crying for the light . . .' and 'a child that cries,/ But, crying knows his father near' (CXXIV, LIV). The child, for Tennyson, figures his lack of knowledge, helplessness, and innocent trustfulness. Gatty builds on this reduction of male authority to cast adult males as children, in the face of an all-knowing, all-providing parental Nature. Just as much as children are they in need of moral tales like this one to keep them on the right track. The hidden authority behind the voices of the story is of course the female story-teller herself.

These effects are both intensified and undercut in the story 'Whereunto'[29], where comedy and irony threaten to destabilise the order and hierarchy Gatty is ostensibly committed to. Here, there is no male narrator. Instead, the perspective is that of the small creatures of the sea, who speak back in answer to a figure of Tennysonian doubt. He is reduced to an ignorant 'creature', unable to understand their complex relationships to their environment. At the same time, their perspectives are ironised, and put in a larger context by the voice of the sea. By setting this story on the sea-shore, Gatty puts it into her territory - sea-life is what she has studied and published on. The centre of the story is in fact a knot of seaweed.

The story carries another tentatively hopeful epigraph from In Memoriam: 'I see in part/ How all, as in some piece of art/ Is toil co-operant to an end' (CXXVIII). When juxtaposed with the epigraph, the story's project seems to be to firm up this

tentative insight. It begins with a starfish and a crab speaking. As the tide recedes, the crab scuttles to shelter in the rocks, but the starfish, unable to move, lies suffering in the sun; 'as for the jellyfish, who had shared a similar fate, they had died almost at once from the shock, as the wave cast them ashore'.[30] Gatty is brisk and unsentimental about suffering in Nature, and does not shield a potential child audience from death. However, though the talking animals and plants are comic and childlike, the moral is not primarily directed at children, but at the adult figure who now appears on the shore. He and his companion are only referred to as 'two creatures': 'what the creatures were who came up to this place and stopped to observe it, I shall not say'.[31] This way of describing them serves to keep us in the animals' point of view, and also reduces their human pretentions. The idea of man as only an animal is comic in Gatty's story, while the same idea causes despair in In Memoriam:

> Be near me when my faith is dry
>
> And men the flies of latter spring,
>
> That lay their eggs, and sting and sing
>
> And weave their petty cells and die. (L)

Gatty's lack of either sentimentality or melodramatic despair over the deaths of the jellyfish in her story, together with her comic equation of human and animal, positions her differently from both Tennyson here, and the stereotypical female guardian of the faith with her tears over 'drowning flies'.

One of the human 'creatures' is holding forth about the wastefulness and uselessness of Nature: '"Here again, you see; the same old story as before. Wasted life and wasted death, and all within a few inches of each other! Useless, lumbering plants, not seen half-a-dozen times in the year; and helpless, miserable sea-creatures, dying in health and strength, one doesn't know why"'.[32] The 'creature' then turns the scene into a simile for human life: '"And so we go up, and so we go down, ourselves . . . with no more end in life, and of no more use, than these vile useless seaweeds"'.[33] Nature, as for Tennyson, is a scene of purposeless destruction and waste, a gloomy type of all life. The 'creature's' state of mind is hardly one likely in children: the

story's polemic is directed against this adult doubter. But it is the child-like voices of the small creatures that answer him back, though he does not hear them. Their message combines science and religion, as they rejoice in the perfect adaptations of their environment. The doubter's inability to hear suggests his limitations and ignorance, and also the superior wisdom of a childlike perspective.

Comically, the doubter, poking about in the seaweed with his stick, has managed to 'chuck the unhappy starfish into the air, who, tumbling by a lucky accident under the shelter of the tangle, was hid for a time from sight'. This is just as the doubter is saying despairingly 'so we go up, and so we go down . . . '.[34] He is unaware of this ironic juxtaposition, which undercuts his words. For, from the starfish's point of view, purposeful intervention has occurred: '"Why, he said he was as useless as these vile useless sea-weeds, and had come into the world, like them, for nothing; whereas, don't you see, he was born to save me"'.[35] The sea-weed tangle, too, is there for the purpose of sheltering her. Other sea-creatures dispute this: '

> "If the tangle had come into the world for nothing but to shelter you, there would have been a fuss to very little purpose, indeed! Can't your advantages tell you there are other creatures in the world quite as important as yourself, if not more so, you poor helpless Lilac-legs? Do you know who is speaking? It is the blue-eyed limpet, I beg to say - the Patella pellucida, if you please".[36]

The limpet goes on to give a short natural history lesson, in the same comic style, informing us of its appearance and habits, and the importance of the tangle to its race as home and food. Other creatures join in the argument, urging their own claims: '"Oh, the narrow-mindedness of people who live under a shell! . . . Talk of the useless tangle indeed! Yes, the creature was ignorant indeed who said so. Little he knew that it was the basis of the lives of millions"'.[37]

Lessons on the interdependence of sea-life are being conveyed, from an expert on the subject. The narrator can see from the perspectives of sea-creatures not just because she is a woman talking to children, but because she is a marine scientist, and in possession of superior knowledge. A natural theological message about the perfect

adaptations of Nature is also being conveyed. But at the same time, the creatures' voices are heavily ironised. Gatty elsewhere declares herself a believer in hierarchy: if these voices were not undercut, a carnivalesque inversion might get out of hand. Gatty is always very keen to emphasise the limitations of everyone's perspective, and to urge that there may be larger explanations and forces at work which we are not capable of understanding. This has the effect of making fun of those men who pretend to philosophical certainty, like the doubter, and elevating the perspectives of 'creatures' lower down the hierarchy (animals, plants, women, children).[38] She must emphasise that these are not authoritative voices.

But, by doing this, she makes possible yet another reading: the perspectives of the sea-creatures, narrowly self-centred, could be all entirely mistaken. The human creature's stick was obviously not created to save the starfish. Could the sea-creatures' views be a parody of human self-centredness in believing in divine care? A radical relativism, rather than the natural theological acceptance Gatty usually urges, would then be a possible effect of the text (though surely not intended by Gatty). It is tempting here to make further intertextual comparisons, and read this story together with Browning's poem (also set on a seashore) 'Caliban Upon Setebos', and Darwin's famous closing image in The Origin of Species of Nature as an 'entangled bank'. In Browning's poem, Caliban is theorising about the nature of his god, Setebos, who turns out to be remarkably similar in character to Caliban himself, in his arbitrary savagery. Caliban's blinkered perspective invents a god in his own image.[39] The poem has often been read as a satire on natural theology. The nature Caliban describes is cruel and destructive, like him. Gatty's is benevolent and well-designed, but only from the self-centred perspectives of her shellfish. Her story too could be read as a satire on the complacency and circular argumentation of natural theology. I do not think that such a reading was her intention, but it is an effect, or indicator, of the unwitting instabilities of her position, speaking as woman/scientist, child/adult, animal/human.

Darwin's 'entangled bank' image works differently, without irony, to convey a scientific delight in Nature's self-evolving complexity and inter-relatedness:

> 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 on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.[40]

Gatty's story could also be, perversely, read as an analogue to Darwin: the Divine is nowhere mentioned, but is left to be inferred (or not), by both writers. Her tangle of seaweed echoes his entangled bank as an image of self-sustaining symbiosis. Despite her opposition to Darwin, an unintentional Darwinian meaning could be read into her image[41].

There is a sense in this story, as in some of her others, that things are getting out of control, and the narrative must be shut down quickly. The sea-creatures' voices are cut off in mid-sentence by the returning tide, and two authoritative voices from higher up the hierarchy close the matter. The doubter's companion gets to speak, praising the seaweed as a type of human goodness: '"there is not one of them but what gives shelter to the helpless, food to the hungry, a happy home to as many as desire it"'. At the same time, the sea water transforms the weeds, in a sensuous descriptive passage: 'the huge fronds surged up like struggling giants, as the waves rushed in below; . . . as the tide rose higher and higher, their curved stems unbent, so that they resumed their natural position, till at last they were bending and bowing in graceful undulations to the swell of the water'.[42] This suggests at first a masculine, phallic reassertion of power, but the graceful undulations are more stereotypically feminine. The orgasmic return of the tide changes the picture from the barren dryness that gave rise to the doubter's remarks: the hidden implication is that the doubter is not only intellectually wrong, but sexually deprived. The study of sea-life puts the woman writer in touch not only with scientific knowledge, but also sexual power. We could

contrast this with Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach', another masculine rehearsal of doubt, where the receding tide becomes a metaphor for the loss of faith.[43] Sexual meanings have also been read into Arnold's image, Norman Holland noting that the poem was written on Arnold's honeymoon, but figures him turning away from his wife and his bed to look out onto the desolate, drying shore.[44]

Once the human creatures have gone, the sea itself speaks up, berating the other creatures: '"poor little worms and wretches, who have been talking your small talk together, as if it were in your power to form the least idea of anything an inch beyond your own noses"' The real purpose of the seaweed is to keep the sea '"pure, sweet and healthy"'.[45] Predictably, the sea is male, and the story ends by making fun of the female starfish, Lilac-legs, who still insists on seeing everything as centred on her experience and her providential escape from the sun. The return of the sea acts like the end of carnival, as proper authority is restored. But the subversive possibilities of the carnivalesque remain: readers could ask, why should the sea be right? Or they could remember the feminine implications of the sea's power.

The two stories we have looked at so far, both confront suffering in nature, but neither tackles the issue of struggle and competition. This is something that exercises Tennyson, with his images of 'Nature red in tooth and claw', and the wastefulness of seed-production: 'But finding that of fifty seeds,/ She often brings but one to bear' (LV). It was Darwin and Wallace who saw in this wastefulness a mechanism which would lead to 'the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life' (the subtitle to The Origin of Species). Subsequent writers homed in on the image of nature as a site of ruthless struggle. Huxley, writing on 'Evolution and Ethics', differentiates the pitiless 'cosmic process' of struggle from the artifical 'ethical process' of culture.[46] Hardy, in The Woodlanders, sees the woods as a battlefield, where the trees rub against each other and 'the ivy slowly strangled the promising sapling'.[47] Gatty's competitive woodland is, however, rather different, in her story 'The Law of the Wood'[48]. We might expect her, as in 'Whereunto', to give us images of interdependence and benevolent adaptation, but the story is about conflict. Yet the

competitive woodland is used to give an ethical message about human behaviour in society.

This story, as will be clear from the ending, is directed mainly at children, as a warning against quarrelsome and selfish behaviour. It would be easy to dismiss it as a naive or ignorant interpretation of nature, or simply irrelevant to the concerns of Tennyson, Hardy and Huxley, but I want to make a case for its contribution to their debate, despite its pre-dating the second two writers. The story concerns a group of fir trees in a wood, who refuse to listen to the complaints of other trees, and insist on shooting out their branches 'in such a very stiff manner on all sides'. They refuse to give way to the neighbours. Gatty takes the opportunity to preach against independence and selfishness: 'obstinacy and selfishness are very bad qualities to possess . . . they thought it quite a fine thing to answer the Birch-tree's mild suggestion in such a saucy manner. Indeed, they actually gave themselves credit for the display of a firm, independent spirit'.[49] The implied audience for these remarks is surely a child, a bad child being scolded, or a good child congratulating itself for not being like this.

The fir trees' obstinacy brings its own nemesis. The crowding of their branches cuts out their own air and light. After a while, they begin to die. The owner of the wood chops them down, all but one, whom he reserves for a Christmas tree. At Christmas, the poor tree observes the moral of his story in the bad behaviour of the children: 'they all rushed forward, tumbling one over another, in their struggles to reach his branches, each one going his own way, regardless of his neighbour's wishes or comfort'. The parents restrain the children, 'bidding them one give place to another . . . considering public comfort, rather than individual gratification'.[50] The tree realises 'the object and rules of social life', and that 'Mutual accommodation is certainly the law of the wood'.[51] Anyone who has had to do with a children's party, will sympathise with Gatty in the moral of her story. She has quite blatantly read her own ethical meanings into nature, in order to get the children under control. Her message of accommodation may also hold special meanings for women: while the stiff and

straight fir trees die out, the beech tree '"bends away her graceful branches to allow room for the friend at her side to flourish. Look how magnificently she grows, stretching protectingly, as it were, among other trees; and yet, who is so accomodating and yielding in their habits as she is?"' The fir answers, '"It is her nature to be subservient, it is ours to be firm!"'.[52]

Here a different way of survival, by accommodation, not by self-assertion is suggested. The fir trees do quite naturally die out, through their overcrowding and unyielding shape. If Gatty is wrongly attributing volition to these trees, so is Hardy with his malevolent ivy. The process of selection is, in Gatty's story, hastened by the human owner of the wood, but it is not so easy to separate Huxley's cosmic and social processes, and to find any part of nature which is not affected by human intervention. Moreover, it has been argued that Darwin's theory involves the transposition of an economic metaphor - the competitive struggle for survival - from society to nature. Social Darwinists then took this metaphor back to society, as if it had nature's approval. Gatty's children's party metaphor has the same validity. To see nature and society as a children's party that needs regulation, is perhaps more useful than to see them as necessarily unregulated fields of competition.

Of course, Gatty is not using her metaphor to prove a theory of evolution. As I said, she was an anti-Darwinian. Tennyson in In Memoriam does flirt with some pre-Darwinian evolutionary theories, providing himself with a hopeful image of natural progress to higher species (CXVIII). But Gatty subjects evolutionary thought to complex mockery in her story 'Inferior Animals'[53], which is about a debate among a gathering of rooks.[54] Man's characteristics, as observed by the rooks, are interpreted as a degeneration from his original rook-like form - his arms are vestigial wings, his clothes the remains of feathers. Man, they argue, is attempting to become a rook again, as evidenced for instance by his predilection for black:

> "Black also the usual colour of the coverings with which men protect their heads from the outer air. Black even the clumsy boots which cover their feet. Black pretty nearly everything, everywhere, Mr Ravenwing positively declared.

> "And on another occasion, in some parts of the country, he came upon whole races of men who left their homes every morning at an early hour, white, but returned to them every evening black, having accomplished this transformation during the course of the day."[55]

The rook-evolutionist is talking about coal-mines, as soon becomes clear.

All through the rooks' debate, the narrator as observer interjects. She makes authoritative comments designed to put the rooks in their place and point the moral: '- But I - the transcriber of this arrant nonsense - am ready, as I listen to their senseless caws, to throw down my tablets in despair. Oh! to think of finding the false glozings of philosophical conceit among the birds of the air';[56] or, later, 'Am I then half-convinced? - Yet for an imperfect being to hope to fathom the higher nature? Bah! what balderdash of folly!'.[57] This is a recurring moral in many of Gatty's parables: that the 'lower' (animals, children, or man in relation to God) do not possess the faculties to understand the 'higher' nature, and must submit to the authority of those wiser and better endowed. While the rooks are being mocked as 'inferior', because they label man as 'inferior', at the same time they are acting as a parody of human scientific behaviour and pretensions; so, in a further twist, the story is also about human 'inferiority'. Some words the narrator used in the opening frame of the story, mocking human language, are now spoken by the rooks: 'There is, in fact, "neither sweetness nor sublimity, neither melody nor majesty, in the shouting, and piping, and whistling, and hissing, and barking of closely intermixed human voices and laughter"'. Hearing them, the narrator becomes quite giddy: ' - Where am I? - where am I? - what am I about? Is some mocking echo repeating my former words?'[58] Her pretension of adult, and human, authority is undercut. She finally extricates herself from the situation by turning it all into a dream.

The convolutions of this story are quite daunting. What seems to be happening is that on the one hand a hierarchy of inferior and superior animals, rooks and men, is being asserted, but on the other, man is being debased from his 'superior' status, and a rook's eye view of him is given a degree of truth. At the same time, the child's eye

view, which delights in an improbable fable, is given priority over the prideful grown-up evolutionists who do not know all the answers, though the adult voice of the narrator is needed to point the moral for us. Carnivalesque propensities are once more emerging: the narrator seems all too aware of the need to frame and restrict carnival to a special period of licence, belonging here to the child and to the dream. Once again, the contradictions in Gatty's position, between woman and naturalist, sympathy with animals and the enforcement of hierarchy, child and adult perspectives, produce a productive confusion, very far from the sweet-hearted feminine educator portrayed by Tennyson and the editor of the Everyman edition of her Parables.

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[1] Myers, Mitzi, (1992) 'Little Girls Lost: Rewriting Romantic Childhoods, Righting Gender and Genre', in Glenn Edward Sadlier (ed) Teaching Children's Literature: Issues, Pedagogy, Resources (New York: Modern Language Association of America) p. 133

[2] Ricks, Christopher (ed), (1969) The Poems of Tennyson (London: Longmans) pp. 440 fn. Emily Sellwood fits the role of conscience-keeper, described below, postponing her marriage to Tennyson because of her doubts about his faith, until finally convinced by the completed In Memoriam. We could also think of Charles Darwin's wife, fear of whose reaction in some accounts led Darwin to postpone publication of the unorthodox Origin of Species.

[3] Barbara T. Gates, (1997) 'Revisioning Darwin with Sympathy: Arabella Buckley', in Barbara T. Gates and Ann B. Shteir (eds), Natural Eloquence: Women Reinscribe Science (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press).

[4] In 1857, a mutual friend wrote to Gatty with a message from Tennyson, saying how much he admired one of her Parables (Christabel Maxwell [1949], Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing [London: Constable], pp. 126-7). Gatty then sent Tennyson the complete volume, and a friendship developed between the Gattys and the Tennysons, with frequent letters and a number of visits. Alfred Gatty lectured and wrote on Tennyson's poetry (Alfred Tennyson [1982, 1987, 1990] Letters, ed Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon Jr., [Oxford: Clarendon Press] Vol II pp. 193n, 255n.).

[5] Tennyson, Letters, Vol II p. 193.

[6] Margaret Gatty (1907) Parables from Nature (London: J. M. Dent and Co.) pp.ix-x.

[7] For the contrast between Gatty's 'objective aims' and her 'deconstructive' practice, in a different text, see Wendy Katz (1993) The Emblems of Margaret Gatty: A Study of Allegory in Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature (New York: AMS Press) pp. 244-5.

[8] For a useful discussion of the carnivalesque in relation to children's literature, see John Stephens (1992) Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction (London: Longmans) pp. 120-57.

[9] See for instance In Memoriam, stanza XXXVI.

[10] Ann B. Shteir (1996) Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England 1760-1860 (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press) pp. 173-178, 184-186.

[11] Shteir, Cultivating Women, p. 171, quoting Gatty, Seaweeds.

[12] Gillian Beer (1985) Darwin's Plots (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) pp. 140-1; Maxwell, Mrs Gatty, pp. 114, 125; Alan Rauch (1997) 'Parables and Parodies: Margaret Gatty's Audiences in the "Parables from Nature"', Children's Literature, 25, pp. 140-7.

[13] Bernard Lightman (1997) '"The Voices of Nature": Popularizing Victorian Science', in Bernard Lightman (ed), Victorian Science in Context (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press) pp.188, 206.

[14] Rauch, 'Parables and Parodies', pp. 140-7.

[15] Rudyard Kipling (1964) Something of Myself (London: Macmillan) p. 32; J.M.S.Tompkins (1959) The Art of Rudyard Kipling (London: Methuen) pp.59-60.

[16] Recent critics of children's literature work with a model of progress, in which an earlier literature of confused or mixed address is gradually superceded by an address exclusively to children (Barbara Wall [1991] The Narrator's Voice

[Basingstoke: Macmillan]). U. C. Knoepflmacher has written persuasively on Gatty's Parables as an important milestone in this process, as she works towards a voice that balances the claims of childhood and adulthood, innocence and experience (U. C. Knoepflmacher [1983] 'The Balancing of Child and Adult: An Approach to Victorian Fantasies for Children', Nineteenth Century Literature, 37: 4, pp. 497-530). But Mitzi Myers, writing on eighteenth-century children's literature, disputes this model, and its separation of 'child' and 'adult'. The works she is interested in 'were read by a mixed audience of child and adult, like Scott, like Dickens' (Myers, 'Little Girls Lost', p. 134)

[17] Gatty, Parables, p. 257.

[18] ibid. p. 268.

[19] ibid. p. 260.

[20] ibid. p. 196.

[21] Gatty's Parables are difficult to date. As Rauch explains, 'There were five 'series', each of which included additional stories, although each individual series was reprinted. The stories themselves had often appeared in separate publications such as The Monthly Packet'. (Rauch, 'Parables and Parodies', p. 150, note 2). The position is complicated by the paucity of first editions of any of the series. 'A Lesson of Hope', however, belongs to the first series, so can reasonably be dated to 1855.

[22] Gatty, Parables, p. 60.

[23] ibid. p. 55.

[24] ibid. p. 57.

[25] Is this perhaps an echo of In Memoriam CXXX1, where the eyes of Tennyson's sister on her wedding day 'brighten like the star that shook/ Betwixt the palms of paradise'?

[26] ibid. p. 58.

[27] ibid. p. 60.

[28] ibid.

[29] This story appears in the third series, the third edition of which is dated 1864. See note 3 above for the difficulties of dating Gatty's stories.

[30] Gatty, Parables, p. 155.

[31] ibid.

[32] ibid.

[33] ibid. p. 156.

[34] ibid.

[35] ibid. p. 157.

[36] ibid. p. 158.

[37] ibid. p. 159.

[38] For a similar technique deployed by another woman naturalist, see Stephen Jay Gould (1997) 'The Invisible Woman', in Gates and Shteir, Natural Eloquence, p.37.

[39] Robert Browning (1981) Complete Works, ed. John Pettigrew (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

[40] Charles Darwin (1982) The Origin of Species (1859) (Harmondsworth: Penguin) pp. 459.

[41] It is reasonably certain that this story was written after the Origin was published in 1859 (see notes 3 and 5 above), especially as 'Inferior Animals', which both Beer and Rauch take to be a satire on Darwin, was also published in the third series. In this case Gatty may be intentionally alluding to Darwin's tangle. But the allusion seems to backfire, if she means to oppose Darwin.

[42] Gatty, Parables, p. 162.

[43] MatthewArnold (1969) Poetical Works, ed. C.B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry (London: Oxford University Press).

[44] Norman Holland (1964-5) 'Psychological Depths and "Dover Beach"', Victorian Studies, Supplement to Vol. IX, pp. 5-28.

[45] Gatty, Parables, p. 162.

[46] Thomas Henry Huxley (1906) Evolution and Ethics and other essays (London: Macmillan).

[47] Thomas Hardy (1985) The Woodlanders (Oxford: OUP).

[48] This was published in the second series, the second edition of which is dated 1858. It is therefore pre-Darwinian.

[49] Gatty, Parables, p. 75.

[50] ibid. p. 82.

[51] ibid. p. 83.

[52] ibid. p. 79.

[53] For tentative date, see note 7 above.

[54] For fuller discussions of this story, see Beer, Darwin's Plots, pp. 140-1, and Tess Cosslett, (forthcoming) 'Child's Place in Nature: Talking Animals in Victorian Children's Literature', Nineteenth Century Contexts.

[55] Gatty, Parables, p. 208.

[56] ibid. p. 199

[57] ibid. p. 207

[58] ibid. p. 211